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CRUDE OIL AND THE SOCIAL LIFE OF THE NIGER DELTA PEOPLE.

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Abstract

This study examines the impacts of the crude oil on the lives and livelihood of the Niger Delta people of Nigeria. The region is Africa's largest crude oil producer, eighth in the world and sixth-largest gas reserve on the planet. The despicable effects of the oil industry activities in the Niger Delta is a chief cause of apprehension to the people as their lives and livelihoods are disappearing by the minutes with very little or no dedicated plan to ameliorate their sufferings. This makes the Niger Delta one of the poorest deltas on earth and the most tortuous, tormented and turbulent region in Nigeria. This work scrutinizes current penury of oil activities and the recurrent half-spirited mitigating measures with the aim of proffering workable solutions to enhance the contributions of the oil sector to sustainable development and better environmental stewardship in the region. Historical and qualitative data used, revealed that the environment, health and livelihood of the people are negatively impacted by oil spills and gas flares; that the oil industry employs very few youths resulting in restiveness, kidnapping, pipeline vandalism, oil bunkering and criminality. Furthermore, the poverty, environmental degradation, lack of access to clean water, decline in income, rural landlessness, food insecurity, conflicts and deaths experienced in the Niger Delta are largely attributed to oil activities which is supposed to be a blessing. This has internationalized the crisis in oil-producing communities and contributed to volatility in oil prices internationally. Conclusively, this work further revealed that since these challenges are man-made, they are equally surmountable, if government regulations and multi-national companies'

policies concerning oil-producing and importing are reviewed in line with international best practices. Based on the above findings, it is recommended that proactive measures such as the provision of state-of-the-arts technological solutions, genuine community engagement and partnership-building by all stake-holders in the oil sector, international development assistance and principally the political will by the Nigerian State to ensure proper resource governance for the common good will end agitations and thereby giving way to genuine development in the Niger Delta.

Key Words: crude oil, lives, livelihood, political will, development.

Introduction

The Niger Delta is one of the largest wetlands on earth and the first in Africa. It is 20,000 square kilometers of which 6000 square kilometers is mangrove swamps and forest. Hydro carbon exploration and exploitation has wreaked havoc on the Niger Delta region and its people. Though in official parlance the area comprises nine states, which includes Abia, Akwa Ibom, Cross River, Edo, Imo and Ondo, however, in the notion of the South-South geopolitical zone, the Niger Delta is made up of three core states of Delta State, Rivers State and Bayelsa State.¹ Anambra State is being considered of late to belong to the Niger Delta region. The region hosts about 25% of Nigeria's population approximately 31 million people, 40 ethnic groups, and 185 Local Governments Councils settled in about 13,000 small communities with about 250 languages. The delta of the Niger River covers a land area of approximately 75,000 km², making up 12% of Nigeria's landmass. There are around 600 oil fields producing from around 5,000 wells, and although production is focused in limited areas, the region is crisscrossed by approximately 10,000 km of pipelines.²

The Niger Delta region is not the only oil-gas rich region in Africa but can be described as probably the most shameful for oil production and oil company-related problems in oil mining areas in Africa because most of the negative reports on oil and gas industry activities are fixated on the Niger

Delta.³ The marginalization and neglect of the region is historical predating independent Nigeria and the Niger Delta people never took this lying low and according to Ogwu⁴ with many benefits derived by the Nigerian state from the Niger Delta. It is surprising that the oil-rich region suffers neglect from the direct impact of exploration and exploitation of crude oil resulting in the loss of lives, death of flora and fauna, unemployment, and drawbacks in socio-economic and infrastructural development.

Imasuen and Omorogieva, opined that crude oil is a major environmental pollutant with spills resulting in environmental degradation, soil depletion, water contamination, pollution of farm lands, atmosphere and aquatic lives.⁵ These adversely affect the inhabitants and habitat in the Niger Delta. Human Rights Watch pointedly decried the long-term effects of oil-led development and hydrocarbon pollution on the Delta which has resulted to serious damages on the environment and livelihood of the majority of the inhabitants in the oil producing communities.⁶

The Niger Delta people depend on the soil and rivers for agriculture and fishing as means of their livelihood, and destruction of land and drinking water supplies translates to poverty and hunger which has increased with the discovery of oil in 1956. While examining the political economy of natural resource struggles in the Niger Delta and its negative effects on the people Omoweh argued that:

the crisis is political in nature and that, it stems from the resources rights struggles engendered by the states' undemocratic governance of natural resources not least land and oil and gas ... suggest the need to democratize the governance of natural resources as a potent alternative strategy to help actualize the resource rights of the people; mitigate the bloody resource conflicts; reverse the underdevelopment of the Niger Delta and

enthroned democracy and development in Nigeria.⁷

The improper resource governance in Nigeria is the bane of the crisis and agitations in the Niger Delta affecting the lives and livelihood of the people. Abolition of the Land Use Act, 2004 and the practice of true federalism will better the lot of the Niger Delta people and bring people-centred and participatory development in the area. Deep at the heart of the poverty and crisis in the region is the total failure of equity, justice and fairness by the oil actors to improve the wellbeing of the people.

The work problematizes the origin of neglect and marginalization of the region, the effects of crude oil on the lives and livelihood of the Niger Delta people and the way forward for a more viable and sustainable deltaic environment for habitation. The work lays emphasis on the historical foundations of what has now become the Niger Delta question as a creation of insistent government neglect and marginalization of the area for over five decades. The lack of corporate social responsibility by transnational oil companies operating in the Niger Delta and acute paucity of social amenities have negatively impacted the lives and livelihood of the people. This has made the region insecure and underdeveloped in an ocean of plenty.

History of Neglect and Marginalization

By 1900, the kings in the Niger Delta city-states have all been deposed and banished from their states for either shipping oil directly to Liverpool, monopolizing trade in palm oil, refusing foreign encroachment and trade monopoly into their states or false accusations of perpetrating the slave trade. Those affected included:- king Jaja of Opobo, Nana of Itsekiri, King Obi Ossai of Aboh, King Ibanichuka of Okrika, and King Fredrick Koko of Nembe. In 1914, Nigeria a British creation came into existence with the Niger Delta finding itself as a minority among the ethnic majors of the Hausa-Fulani,

Yoruba and Igbo. Found within the Eastern Regional Government dominated by the Igbo, it was alleged by their spokespersons that they were segregated upon in terms of political appointments. For instance, as at 1957 an Igbo man was the chairman of Port Harcourt Town Council⁸ with most of the developments in the region concentrated in the capital which was Enugu.

In 1947, Chief Dappa Biriye and his Niger Delta colleagues founded the Niger Delta Congress (NDC) essentially to attract the attention of the world to the plight of the people in the region pertaining to the political and economic marginalization by the ethnic majors in Nigeria. The outcome of this protest was the creation of Rivers Province in 1948.

In June 1956 crude oil was struck in Oloibiri in commercial quantity and the Niger Delta peoples started facing far worst challenges that compounded those already faced from the peculiar nature of their environment which is mangrove swamps, innumerable creeks and rivers.⁹ The environment therefore posed considerable developmental challenges explaining in part the reasons for the dire deficiency of infrastructure such as road networks, portable pipe-borne water, hospitals, adequate water transportation facilities, and real economic development. Irrespective of these challenges, the abandonment and relegation of the people never resulted in hostile or violent relations against the Federal or Regional governments as through dialogues, exchange of ideas, ideals and values the people pursued to address their dilemma by peaceful and legal means. In 1956, at the eve of Nigeria's independence Sir Willink Commission was set up to look into the 'fears of minorities' whether well or ill founded with the aim of alleviating them. The commission did not accept the creation of a separate state rather; its recommendations were incorporated into the constituent document of the Niger Delta Development Board as a 'special area'.¹⁰ As the exploitation of crude oil in the Niger Delta intensified, in 1966, there was a twelve days arms insurrection led by Isaac Adaka Boro against the neglect and marginalization of the Niger Delta and the need for the region to

control their resources. The rebellion was crushed by the FG because the rebellion was probably premature and the people had not been sufficiently sensitized. Before 1970, the people started facing deforestation of the area, environmental degradation following first oils spills in Bomu in Ogoni land of 1970, gas flaring and excess heating of the environment, and low productivity in the food supply.

From 1970-1990, the Niger Delta peoples, sought to find solutions to the environmental degradation, poverty, and hunger caused by transnational oil companies explorations through negotiations and pacific settlement with the oil companies by compensations even though they were miserable and inadequate. However, each time parleys failed the Niger Delta people in the interest of peace, security and equity resorted to legal channels through the courts, whose verdicts always went in favor of the oil companies and the Government. By the 1990s, the deleterious effects of environmental degradation became more apparent with excruciating devastation on the delicate environment coupled with lack of social amenities. These were now compounded by environmental pollution threatening their lives, means of livelihood, with farmlands, fishponds, rivers and streams desolate owing to pollution from oil leaks, ineffective maintenance culture, old and overused oil infrastructures and accidental discharges. Confronted with grave threats to their lives and livelihood and having suffered neglect for over two decades with vicious lack of corporate social responsibility and intervention by government to alleviate their sufferings, the once peaceful Niger Delta peoples resorted to successive protests first against oil companies in the late 1980s. These companies instead of engaging the people to think-tank on how to alleviate their sufferings and giving a human face to the plight of their hosts, sought protection from the Federal Government (FG) to combat the peaceful protesting Niger Delta people. The FG often immediately mobilize the national security agencies (Paramilitary Mobile Police and Army) code-named

Operation Flush in Rivers State and Operation Salvage in Bayelsa State, to brutally clamp down on the people, beating, detaining, killing, shooting, arresting and injuring men, women, children and youths protesters. This made the FG and the Oil companies and the host communities to be 'stake holders at war'.¹¹ These marked the beginning a turbulent relationship between the Federal Government and the host oil communities which transformed into emergent civil disturbances and confrontational relationship. The 1980s saw the host communities better structured ethnically with Charters, bill of rights, declarations, accords and conferences held by these ethnic group aimed at saving their lives and environment. The period saw a remarkable increase in youth participation and leadership in the struggle, it became more visible and louder having recognized the unholy alliance and coalition between the federal government and the transnational oil companies to extinct their ethnic group due to their 'minority status' in a distorted Nigerian Federation. The Niger Delta people in their great desires for environmental justice, developmental aspirations to protect their lives and livelihood started demanding adequate compensation and total control of their resources. Being a minority, the Niger Delta is rich in oil wealth but was politically disadvantaged and toothless in the agitation to control their lives and livelihood in a decent manner.

In the 1990s, having been pushed to the wall, the agitations ballooned into requests for increase in the percentage allotted to the derivation principle, strict adherence to the practice of fiscal federalism, revenue allocation formulae and the political restructuring of the Nigerian State.¹² These demands brought them in unswerving confrontation with the Federal Government, starting with the Umechem tragedy in Etche and the Ogoni uprising, both in Rivers State. The military repressive response to the conflicts in the 1990s radicalized their demands for self-determination. Ethnic nationalities in the Niger Delta made declarations that are tantamount to issuance of a bill of rights and charter of demands such as, the Ogoni Bill of Rights (1999), the Kaiyama Declaration

(1998), Oron Bill of Rights (1999), Orhobo Economic Summit (1998), Ikwerre Rescue Charter (1998), Warri Accord (1999), and Niger Delta Peoples Compact (2008). These protesting groups, communities and ethnic nationalities demanded for the control of their resource and for the development of the region to better their lives and livelihood. The outcome of the above is that in the 1990s violence became the main tool by the people to drive home their grievances following unrelenting military violence and repression. The militarization of the Niger Delta region started during this period and the Niger Delta was never to remain the same again.

By 1995, when the first phase of violent uprisings had been forcefully crushed, the people resorted to other more subterranean strategies to achieve their aim. The incidence of kidnapping of oil workers, sabotage of oil wells, and pipeline vandalism became the custom. The youths sought to make the region insecure for oil workers and oil companies to operate, a stratagem which succeeded in keeping Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC) out of Ogoni land since 1993 to-date.

There are five identifiable stages of agitations in the Niger Delta. Firstly between 1885 –1956 the incorporation of the Niger Delta states under colonial rule and the attendant resistance of the people in the form of petitions to the British Colonial Administration for the creation of independent administrative political units that would enable them tackle their peculiar environmental challenges and not to be subsumed in any political schedules dominated by other groups within Nigeria. The Willink Commission noted in 1956 that, there is no other area in the whole of West Africa with a physical configuration like that of the Rivers area.

It was unfair that such an area should not have its own separate government to harness the energies of the rivers and develop its unique resources in the interest of the people who lived there. The Rivers Chiefs and Peoples

Conference in the 1950s upheld the aim of actualizing this dream.

The second period between 1956-1980 saw petitions and law suits to restore the harmful consequences of crude oil exploration and exploitation. The petitions sought compensations from the oil companies for the acquisition of their land, but the 1978 Land Use Act vested all lands to the Federal Government thereby making the oil companies reluctant to pay compensation though litigations in the courts increased with no tangible result. Third phase was 1980-1990, which was marked by mass protests, rallies, and demonstrations against oil multinationals by host communities with relative non-violent protests through boycotts, obstruction of oil workers from having access to their installations and offices within the territory of the protesting community. More often than not, negotiated settlements and promises by the oil companies to address their demands were reached but never implemented in all honesty.

Fourthly, 1990 -1998 saw well organized agitations with youths bringing their intellect to bear on the rallies with ethnic coloration. Coalitions between the oil bearing communities and civil society environmental rights groups were forged to present a united front against the government and the oil companies. At this point the protest and agitations received international recognition and confronted by massive government repression and crack down in the Niger Delta. The environmental and human rights problems during the period culminated in the death of author and activist Ken Saro-Wiwa in 1995. This brought Nigeria (the Abacha regime) and the international oil companies (SHELL) in the region to international disrepute as Nigeria was suspended from the Common Wealth of Nations and corresponding economic sanctions imposed on Nigeria by the international community. By 1998 at the eve of the new democratic dispensation there arose wide spread insurgency in Niger Delta against the Federal Government marked by outright confrontation and armed resistance against the military and transnational oil companies. This era

saw the emergence of local militia groups in the region; like the Egbesu war boys and Asari Dokubo's Niger Delta People Volunteer Force (NDPVF), Icelanders, Greenlanders, Martyrs Brigade, Outlaws, Bush Boys, De Bam among others all operating under the umbrella of the Joint Revolutionary Council (JRC).

In 1999, Nigeria returned to democracy ushering in the fifth phase of agitation from 2000-2007. During this phase, agitations turned from violent protest, militancy to criminality. In no period in the history of agitations in the Niger Delta had the oil companies, the Federal Government and the international community been visibly threatened like during this period, 2000-2007. In January 2006, four SHELL expatriate staff was kidnapped in Bayelsa from a flow station. In Rivers and Bayelsa States, kidnapping of oil company workers for ransom was rife and many oil companies shut down and relocated to Lagos. During this period illegal oil bunkering flourished, Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) led by Henry Okah, launched fierce attacks on oil installations and daily oil output fell from 1.5 million barrel per day to 500,000 bpd from 2006-2007 and the Joint Task Force (JTF) headquarters was relocated from Warri to Bayelsa to contain militancy from agitating groups like the NDPVF, MEND, Niger Delta Vigilante (NDV), led by Ateke Tom, De Gbam, Icelanders and leaders like Government Epemupolo (Tom Polo), Boy Loaf and others. Hostage taking of oil workers, SPDC declaration of *force majeure* and inability to supply oil to the international clients, bursting of oil pipes to siphon crude, impacted negatively on oil supply in the global market. These incidences prompted the Yar'Adua Administration to grant Amnesty to all warring groups and criminals in the region on the 4th October, 2009. This programme saw most of the militant groups surrendering their arms to the Government and the Government in return agreed to sponsor them in skills acquisition and university education within and outside Nigeria with monthly stipends

attached. Since the Amnesty Programme in 2009, the Niger Delta has been relatively peaceful, but the agitations have not stopped as the lives and livelihood of the people are still impacted negatively. The people had expected that more should have been done to address the root cause of agitation, poverty and underdevelopment in the Niger Delta in a regional scope and not just rehabilitating and re-integrating a few.

Impact of on the lives and livelihoods of the Niger Delta people.

The oil companies operating in Nigeria have argued that their activities are conducted to the highest environmental standards and that the impact of oil on the environment of the delta is minimal. Shell has stated that 'Shell Nigeria believes that most of the environmental problems are not the result of oil operations'¹³ Ken Saro Wiwa, maintained that the environment of Ogoni and by extension the Niger Delta has been 'completely devastated by three decades of reckless oil exploration or ecological warfare by Shell...an ecological warfare is highly lethal, more so it is unconventional. It is omnicidal in effect. Human life, flora, fauna, the air fall at its feet and

finally the land itself dies'.¹⁴ In the Niger Delta, the oil industry activities by omission or commission have caused environmental degradation and health hazard in terms of diseases due to oil spills and gas flaring leading to the collapse of local fishing and farming, the loss of habitat and biodiversity, acid rain damage and health impacts of air, noise and light pollution.¹⁵ Riverine downstream communities and neighboring states which depend on the migratory fish from the Niger Delta suffer lack because of the erosion of aquatic and marine lives and economic trees. The Niger Delta Natural Resource Damage Assessment and Restoration Project (the 'Niger Delta scoping report'), a team of experts from Nigeria, the United Kingdom and the United States convened by the Nigerian Conservation Foundation concluded that:

The damage from oil and gas operations
is chronic and cumulative, and has acted

synergistically with other sources of environmental stress to result in a severely impaired coastal ecosystem and compromised livelihoods and health of the region's impoverished residents.¹⁶

Oil spilled in the Niger Delta triggered by accidents, waste dumping, and bombings during the Biafra war, equipment malfunction, sabotage, small-scale theft for local refining and illegal bunkering in the burgeoning oil industry is estimated at 100,000 barrels per day.¹⁷ Report estimates that between 9 and 13million barrels of oil have been spilled in the last 50 years, 'representing about 50 times the estimated volume spilled in the Exxon Valdez Oil Spill in Alaska in 1989'.¹⁸

Oil spills and industry activities pose direct risks to the environment and human health while also undermining fishing and farming livelihoods. Gas flaring, is particularly problematic and a common practice in the Niger Delta contributing dangerously to greenhouse gas emissions, with negative impacts on the health and livelihoods of local communities. Gases flaring in the Niger Delta ranges from 20% to 76% compared with a worldwide average of 4.8%. Many communities have reported illnesses like gastrointestinal problems, skin diseases, cancers and respiratory ailments especially in Rivers and Bayelsa States. In River State there is the constant pollution of the environment by sooth caused by the incomplete combustion of petroleum products. This sooth has been responsible for heart and lung diseases without air quality indexes in the region.

Oil companies cause conflicts and social unrest in host communities who vent their anger concerning limited employment opportunities of the people in the oil industry. Inequitable sharing of oil revenues and Oil Corporation's penchant to engage with local communities through their chiefs and local leaders, who often do not remit to the people money given to the communities by the companies, caused inter-community conflicts between communities

participating in such projects and those that do not in the Niger Delta. Rivalry amongst youth leaders about sharing of money from the oil companies is a major source of conflict in the region resulting in widespread poverty.

International oil companies invest large amounts of money in community development projects which are expected to be sustainable with local community's partnerships to end poverty, without ignoring the underlying development challenges. Most of these development projects have very short life spans and not sustainable in the long run and barely make any meaningful impact in the lives of the people. The above, in the end result in the inability of the oil companies to fulfill their CSR obligations to the host communities given that these projects do meet up with requisite sustainable lives and livelihood. Community projects, issues of decision making and negotiations with the government should take into strict priority the most pressing and longtime needs of communities.

The environmental and human rights problems relating to protests in the early 1990s culminated in the death of author and activist Ken Saro-Wiwa and other Ogoni people in 1995, and brought Nigeria and the international oil companies especially (SHELL) that operates in the region into international disrepute. Since Nigeria's return to democracy in 1999, the situation in its oil-producing region of the Niger Delta has degenerated from social protest into violent protest, militancy and criminality. This has made the region very volatile and insecure for any meaningful development. It is important to note that there are many layers of interest in the Niger Delta, making it difficult to find objective efforts to diagnose or treat problems arising from oil companies activities. In addition to the interplay of ethnic identity, land tenure issues and competition for resources at the community level, there are also bigger forces at play such as those involved in large-scale illegal oil 'bunkering' (theft), which is a multi-million dollar industry in which the Nigeria state security forces and staff of the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) have

been fingered as collaborators with suspicious international actors involved in the region.

Water pollution (ground and surface water), results in water scarcity, declined fisheries, high cost of providing water in urban areas and poor domestic hygiene and total lack of portable water for the Niger Delta people. These cause diseases even deaths. Lack of water retards the growth of vegetation and crops resulting to over dryness. Wild bush fires further complicate the vegetation and environmental problems of the region.

The issue of monetary compensation by companies to communities have taken a dangerous dimension in the Niger Delta as it has come to dominate the oil spills discourse to the extent that clean-up, reclamation and remediation have become less of a priority than establishing who is responsible for the spill, and how compensation could be maximized. There is in some cases perverse incentives created by the inordinate love for monetary compensation whereby some fishermen, farmers and communities find it more lucrative to allow oil spills to endure for days and weeks before reporting to the authorities, with the intention to make more money from compensation claims than from their primary economic activities. This dangerous practice is not sustainable to the lives and livelihood of the present and future generations. Similarly, local contractors employed for the clean-up process and unemployed youths stand to benefit financially from oil spills. The consequence of this is the general lack of development and employment opportunities in the Niger Delta with direct negative impact on the environment. Scientists have observed that an offshore gas flare in the Niger Delta is visible from space and has remained problematic. Furthermore, the 'open pipe flare' method in Nigeria, which is adjudged almost obsolete in other climes outside the country, aggravates the problem. As Clarke, opines, 'Many flares have run 24 hours a day and some have been active for 40 years with over 8 million cubic feet per day (MMCFD) burnt'.¹⁹

Emissions from gas flaring include dangerous substances like: carbon

dioxide, methane, sulphur dioxide, nitrogen dioxides, carcinogenic substances such as benz[a]pyrene and dioxin, and unburned fuel components, including benzene, toluene, xylene, and hydrogen sulphide.²⁰ Gas flared in Nigeria is unclear, with estimates ranging from 20% (according to the Nigerian Department of Petroleum Resources) to 76% (according to UNDP) of produced associated gas, compared with a worldwide average of 4.8%.²¹ This practice is not in line with best practices and must stop because Nigerian lives and livelihoods matter.

A 2001 scientific study of the adverse health effects of gas flaring in Canada lists various cancers, respiratory disease, heart disease, rheumatic disorders and eye problems.²² EJP/ERA²³ has warned that gas flaring in Nigeria can cause leukemia among populations living close to the flares, citing supporting evidence from the US Environmental Protection Agency. They estimate that around 35,000 people live within a 1.3 km radius and 330,000 people within a 5 km radius of a flow station. Another study carried out in southeastern Nigeria showed evidence of acid rain due to gas flaring, which can contaminate water bodies and the soil.²⁴ The NGOs such as Climate Justice Programme and Environmental Rights Action claim that 'the flares have contributed more greenhouse gases than all of sub-Saharan Africa combined'.²⁵

In Nigeria, efforts to address gas flaring is hampered by a lack of political will and disagreements about who should shoulder the financial cost of infrastructural upgrade and harnessing the gas which will improve the lives and livelihood of the people through the use of domestic gas and saving income for the people to invest in other areas.

Oil companies have been responsible for the rising conflicts and social unrest in their areas of operation, environmental degradation and threats to local farming and fishing livelihoods.²⁶ Chevron Texaco is estimated to have lost around \$750 million as a result of community strife.²⁷ Oil corporation development projects have been a singular cause of inter-community conflicts

in the delta between communities participating in such projects and those that do not. Such tensions are thought to have contributed to the Nembe war in 2005 and the conflict between the Emuoha and Ogbakiri communities in Rivers State. In 2004, Emmanuel Etomi, Shell's community development manager in Nigeria acknowledged that the company at times fed 'conflict by the way we award contracts, gain access to land, and deal with community representatives'²⁸ although cash payments to community leaders to avoid disruption, or to local (usually armed) individuals for security. This practice nurtures conflict and crime, the increase in hostage taking of both foreign oil workers and more recently of prominent Nigerians and their family members. The level of unemployment in the gas-surplus Niger Delta is high irrespective of the oil potentials and wealth. Employment potentials of the local communities owing to shortages in technical skills and training mostly provided by companies remain small. This makes the people poor and lack income to meet their needs. In Nigeria in April 2010, the Nigerian Oil and Gas Industry Local Content Bill was signed into law. It places obligations on international and local oil companies to actively engage in capacity-building and use of Nigerian services and personnel. This was intended to bring more jobs and employment to the people so as to alleviate poverty but this local content bill is yet to achieve its purpose.

The Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) was established in 2000 to carry out development projects in the region and end poverty as the oil companies must contribute 3% of their annual operating budget to the Commission. There is broad consensus that despite a budget of billions of naira, the NDDC has not to date fulfilled its mandate with hundreds of abandoned projects that have no impact on the lives and livelihood of the people, not even with the recent establishment of Ministry of Niger Delta Affairs to improve on the wellbeing of the Niger Delta people. Oil theft (or oil bunkering) in Nigeria, has ranged from 20,000 to 300,000 barrels per day by

the federal government. This oil bunkering happens on different scales from small-to medium scale crude theft for local refining and use. This method of theft involves boring holes in the thousands of miles of pipelines that crisscross the delta and inserting valves – a highly risky practice that often results in explosions and death of people. Large-scale oil bunkering is a highly profitable business (or form of organized crime), in which crude is also stolen directly from the wellhead and mixed with legitimate oil or refined regionally en route to international markets. The small-scale stolen oil is crudely refined resulting in significant environmental pollution which impacts negatively the health of the people and breeding a sense of injustice in the Delta area.²⁹

Recommendations and Way forward

While oil companies are implementing certain measures to address the negative impacts of their activities in the Niger Delta, corporate social responsibility activities largely remain piecemeal and short-term, community engagement is inadequate and requirements for accountability and transparency are either insufficient or not enforced. Company must stand up to keep agreements entered with host communities and community development projects must have positive long term impact on the lives and livelihood of the people.

In oil-producing countries, the main challenges relate to the lack of political will and capacity to implement and enforce national regulations, highlighting underlying governance challenges that need to be addressed. The government should stop playing politics with oil communities and implement a holistic development of the region, end the gas flaring, implement resource control policies and increased revenue derivation for the development of the region.

The European Union (EU), as a major importer of oil from Sub-Saharan Africa and host of international oil companies, must take the responsibility and

the opportunity to promote greater sustainability and equity in the oil sector, in particular through engagement with governments and oil companies to make sure they develop the regions they work in, especially the Niger Delta. The EU members should promote greater revenue transparency, restrict and refuse to buy

illegal oil in the international market. This will reduce illegal oil sales from bunkering, pipeline vandalism or Gbo fire (illegal artisanal refining) in the region which cause the spills that affect the lives and livelihood of the people in the negative.

There must be concerted cooperation and coordination to mitigate negative impacts of oil industry activity among all stakeholders: Governments, oil companies, civil society and communities in dealing with the oil spills problem, as it requires that facilities be upgraded, compensation of affected communities, reclamation and remediation of affected communities. Financial transparency in oil revenues will make it easy to hold governments to account and communities to fully understand the potential economic benefits of the sector for national economies and what is reserved for the development of the communities. This will bring peace and security for development to thrive in the region.

Then oil companies and government must provide constant power in the Niger Delta to help the growth of small and medium scale enterprises. It is estimated that successful local gas-to-power projects, in the Niger Delta will save 30% of income of the people to invest in other areas. This will end gas flares and significantly change communities' perceptions of oil companies and government and improve their operating environment – as the flares are such visible negative markers of the incidence of oil companies.

Conclusion.

The Nigeria state must be accountable, responsive and transparent and promote people-centered development by actualizing the resource rights of the

Niger Delta people. This will positively impact on the lives and livelihood of the people. There must be the democratization of resource, governance by repealing of the Land Acts, 2004, Mineral Mining Act, 2004, Petroleum Act, 2004, and the Oil Pipelines Act, 1990 and create institutions that will enable stake holders in the oil sector to develop the region in particular, and Nigeria at large according to international best practices.

ENDNOTES

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