

Challenges Facing Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) Projects in Imo State and Niger Delta Region in Nigeria

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Abstract

The Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) as an interventionist Commission mandated to pull the Niger Delta Region (NDR) out of the socio-economic, environmental and political problems that have engulfed the region prior to Nigeria's independence has not been able to perform the expected miracle over the past fifteen years of its establishment, despite the huge amount budgeted and allocated to it yearly by the Federal Government of Nigeria. This assertion has in reality threatened the relevance of the Commission and there have been suggestions for reorganizing and redefining the mission and vision of NDDC so as to reposition it to be more proactive. This paper tried to understand the numerous challenges that have advertently affected the satisfactory performance of the commission and its projects in Ohaji/Egbema, Obowo and Oguta communities in Imo State in particular, and the Niger Delta Region in general since the commission was inaugurated in the year 2000. The sociocultural structure and problems of the region in itself has adversely affected the performance of these project and vice versa. The qualitative data used for this study was extracted from a data collection process involving twenty five randomly selected participants including Chiefs, men leaders, women leaders, youth leaders and some other elites on a face to face interview and nine telephone interviews. The findings shows that the major problems facing the commission's projects and the region were more on managerial than financial. Corruption, use of incompetent contractors, environmental problems, youth militancy and violence, lack of adequate monitoring and evaluation coupled with misappropriation and mismanagement of funds has been prominent. The paper then suggest complete overhaul of the Commission by appointing Board members and management personnel that are competent and have good track records of achievements and accountability.

Keyword: Niger Delta Development Commission, Niger Delta Region, poverty, corruption, Environmental pollution, militancy and conflict

Introduction

The Niger Delta Region is characterized by poverty, corruption, environmental degradation, economic hoax, environmental problems and neglect coupled with instability and militarization due to youths restiveness which have made the region highly volatile and problematic not only to Nigerian Government but to the world as these problems affects other economies through the production and pricing of crude oil. The ineffective management of the Nigerian economy is reflected in the scarcity of petrol despite the fact that the country is one of the greatest exporters of crude. In the words of Abigboa (2012) "The Niger delta needs to import fuel despite producing over two million barrels of crude oil per day! There is an almost total lack of paved roads in a region whose wealth is funding huge infrastructural development in other parts of Nigeria and expensive peacekeeping activities in other parts of Africa". The problems of the region could be expressly explained as characterized with water and land pollution as a result of spills and drilling activities, destruction of vegetation, deforestation, displacement of human settlements as a result of installation and location of exploration facilities such as crude oil and gas carrying pipes that crisscrossed most communities in the regions, loss of bio-diversity such as fauna and flora habitat, destruction of mangrove swamps and salt marsh, air polluting and acid vain from oil and gas processing evaporation and flaring, industrial solid waste disposal and several others (Paki 2011).

The underdevelopment of the Niger Delta is as a result of the corrupt political and governmental personnel and bureaucrats who have continued to mispend the huge revenue from oil coupled with the neglect of the region by the oil companies operating in the region who most times claimed that their obligations were much on paying their taxes and royalties to the Nigerian Government rather than developing the region. The arguments of the multinational oil companies holds water as their legal responsibilities and obligations may be to the Government and not to the communities but due to the failures of the state in ensuring adequate and equitable distribution of resources, rapid and sustainable development of the regions and provision of effective security of lives and property, the oil companies has to go extra miles in appeasing the communities where they operate so as to ensure smooth operation and security of their staff and properties. Inquiries from other countries in Asia like Malaysia where crude oil is mined shows that the operating oil companies are only liable to the state and not to the communities, though this study is not making case for the oil companies operating in the region, but highlighting the inadequate state security and the problems associated with it.

Challenges of NDDC Projects and the Niger Delta Region

Corruption

Corruption is one of the greatest problems of the Nigerian society and it also finds its ugly and devastating effects in all sectors of the polity including the Niger Delta Development Commission. The Governors of the Delta region has contributed negatively to the development of the region. Despite the federally allocated revenue to all the 36 states of the federation, the states that make up the Niger Delta enjoys special allocation of 13% as specified in the revenue sharing formulae based on derivation as fixed by section 162 (2) of the 1999 Constitution (Akinola 2011). Section 308 of the Nigerian Constitution grants state governors and their deputies' immunity against prosecution and these have protected the state governors and encouraged them to steal and syphon the state treasury. Babalola (2014) explained that the "former governors Diepreye Alamieyeseigha, James Ibori and Peter Odili of the Bayelsa, Delta and Rivers states respectively were deeply involved in grand corruption that took place in these states were enough to render the states bankrupt. It was discovered that Mr. Alamieyeseigha, who was arrested in London in September 2005 and subsequently impeached in December 2005 for a host of corrupt practices, had allegedly stashed away £1m in his London home, in addition to the sums of £420,000 and £470,000 found in different accounts belonging to him, as well as assets worth £10m (Vanguard, 3 February 2006: 1; 15). Moreover, the ex-governor was also accused by Nigeria's Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC) of approving several dubious contracts and payments totaling 1.7 billion naira in favour of eight fictitious companies', in addition to other contracts totaling 667,258 million naira awarded to fictitious companies, also EFCC discovered 100 billion naira was diverted into private bank accounts during Odili's administration".

The looting of the treasury was also mentioned in the London case against the former Delta State Governor Mr. James Ibori and huge sum of money were stolen including purchasing a house in Hampstead, North London, for £2.2m; a property in Shaftesbury, Dorset, for £311,000; a £3.2m mansion in Sandton, near Johannesburg, South Africa; a fleet of armoured Range Rovers valued at £600,000; a £120,000 Bentley; and a Mercedes Maybach for 407,000 euros that was shipped to his mansion in South Africa (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-17739388>). United Kingdom (UK) jury at the Southwark Crown Court, London, in June 2010, convicted Christine Ibori-Ibie, the sister of the former Governor of Delta state, James Ibori, on charges of money laundering and mortgage fraud. She helped her brother embezzle an estimated \$101.5 million from Nigeria's Delta state into the governor's UK bank accounts. Nigeria's anti-graft agency, EFCC, comments that Ibori stole as much as \$292 million while he was the governor in the oil-rich state in the Niger Delta (Agbibo, 2012). All these governors mentioned were Governors of the part of the Niger Delta Region and all others were involved in the looting of their state treasury. The corruption was enormous and these also transcends into the activities of NDDC and hence most of the funds for the contracts were corruptly embezzled and misappropriated hence the lots of cases of abandoned projects in the communities.

This corruption hence emerged as one of the major problems challenging the activities of the Commission in the region under study and the data and amount corruptly engulfed by the Commission's staff were shielded as such records were not made to the public. "One of the major problems of the Niger Delta area is corruption. Most of the political leadership in the region are corrupt and this has serious implications for development.

The impact of the 13% special allocation to the Niger Delta area is not so felt by the people because of problems of corruption” (Omotoso 2010). In 2002 the Speaker of the House of Representatives in Nigeria, Alhaji Ghali Na’abba, told a conference that “The problems highlighted by the military taking over and replacing each military regime through coups d’état in 1966, 1975, 1983, and 1993 were never solved, rather, corruption became more pervasive, ethnicity more pronounced, and the economy ruined (Coventry 2009). To explain the level of corruption in the Niger Delta Region, the Commander of the Joint Task Force (JTF) Operation Restore Hope was removed because of accusation that he and his soldiers were involved in bunkering and illegal collection of money from the oil companies so as to protect them from the militants. Likewise communities were fighting each other in the Niger Delta on accusations of one community playing sharp practices against the other.

So the level of corruption engulfed all the sectors including government, parastatals, ministries, government officials and community leaders even the youth leaders and NDDC was not left out in the act. It was also estimated by EFCC that the sum of N3.3 trillion allocated to local government councils as part of an overall expenditure by federal, state and local governments of N16 trillion (US\$136.5 billion) in the period 1999 to 2007 was corruptly utilized leaving most of the local governments with no water, electricity, paved roads, no good schools nor health centers (Coventry 2009). A citizen of the Niger Delta from Ohaji/Egbema during the oral interview said. “the problem faced with the project is corruption and use of non-competent contractors”. The awards of contracts are highly politicized and this makes some communities aggrieved and tends to hate the staff of the commission. Another participant said “Most of the jobs are not well done because of the incompetency of some contractors. Giving borehole contract to a contractor who has no idea about water drilling or giving a road contract to a man that studied political science just because he is a friend to the commission members does not help matters”. President Olusegun Obasanjo in his inauguration speech in the year 2000 knew the problem of corruption in Nigerian society and he said in part “Let me reiterate here that NDDC will not be a honey pot to serve the personal greed of anyone. I will personally make sure of that and I have the Anti – Corruption Commission to support me” (Capitol 2010). Unfortunately, the corruption is still hampering the achievements of the set goals of the NDDC and this is why most of their projects are either abandoned, or continue to manifest in their records as ongoing.

The report of Newsom (2011) explained that the Annual budgets in the four main oil producing states of Bayelsa, Rivers, Akwa-Ibom, and Delta total \$7 billion, was roughly Ghana’s Federal budget. However, though statistics are unreliable, there is consensus that around 51 percent of the Niger Delta’s people still live on \$2 or less a day, only 49 percent have access to safe drinking water, there is one secondary school for every 14,679 children, and one child in five dies before his/her fifth birthday which is an indication of high infant mortality. Conflict in Niger Delta Region are based largely on resource issues, such as local control over a share of oil and gas income; corruption and institutionalized patronage that effectively block development gains; multiple political drivers, including the use of violence by political actors; the established political economy of violence as well as criminal economies, primarily crude oil theft; environmental damage from industry and oil spills; failure or neglect of local economies and infrastructure; a culture of impunity, particularly for political and militant actors; lack of representative and accountable government; and poor government service delivery. In 2004, clashes between militant leader Asari Dokubo and the Rivers State government or proxy militias spanned communities south of Port Harcourt. Groups of five to twenty people armed with AK-47s, dynamite, and small arms carried out the attacks, with spectacular effect on confidence in the region but limited effect on overall day-to-day production. Most attacks deferred less than 25,000 barrels a day of oil production. In 2005, assaults on oil pipelines intensified. The effect on production again was limited, but the shock factor added several dollars to the global price of oil. Oil companies scaled up security and withdrew non-essential staff as the number of kidnappings grew. In 2007, post-election raids on Port Harcourt by competing militias were repelled by security forces using helicopter gunships inside the city. Regular oil production fell by 500,000 barrels per day or more. In 2008, fresh clashes across Delta, Rivers, and Bayelsa states slashed production to 1.2 million barrels per day from an average of about 2.2 million barrels in the months before the conflict. According to UNDP report (2006), specifying the concerns of the residents on the major problems of the region “UN-commissioned survey asked residents what they most disliked about the region; poor leadership, poor governance, and corruption were the top answers”.

A participants from Oguta, an unemployed youth said “ NDDC, and the government are all the same, the NDDC learn from the government “their oga” on how to chop money, they just managed to do these little work for us on our roads, water and electricity, we thank them but they are chopping too much. We are not saying they should

not chop my brother, make dem chop and remain for us as they know that we are suffering here and poverty is too much. Please tell them like that”.

This statement has some “pigin or broken” English as “the oga” means “the Boss” “chop” is a local way of saying eat or consume.

Poverty in the Niger Delta Region

Poverty in the Niger delta region has persisted over the years because of the governmental and stake holders approach in tackling it and the stakeholders here includes the multinational oil companies, the various commissions and parastatals, the NGOs and the communities themselves. There has not been a well-articulated poverty alleviation programme that carried the communities along in its planning and implementation and even when there is better designed programmes, the corruption and implementation lapses makes the programmes ineffective. There has not been provision of alternative means of livelihood for the citizens of the region since the farms and waters for farming and fishing which is the main occupation of the communities has been destroyed by the activities of oil exploration. Hence in the Niger Delta there should be provision of social infrastructures to serve as alternative empowerment for the citizenry as that would encourage them into new productive activities so as to reduce poverty and increase growth and development. Even when the stakeholders especially the oil companies and government try to provide these social capital, the politicization and non-equitable distribution of such facilities in terms of priority makes the provisions unjustifiable. There has been cases of over concentration of such infrastructures in a particular community just because they have a strong and influential politician or top government official, hence the provisions do not follow the ethical and equitable provisions based on urgent need. This is in line with the assertions of Idemudia (2008) as he emphasized that the provision of roads, electricity in the communities without good drinking water and habitat possess problems to the communities. What is the relevance of electricity and roads when there is no house to shelter the people? Efforts should be geared towards providing low income housing units for the poor farmers and fishermen than for them to live in slums and shanties. The need for social capital as a motivation and empowerment to the communities would in no small means reduce the poverty in the region. An organized and customized micro credit scheme or facility could be organized for the local dwellers so that they can borrow with little or no interest to start a new life outside the non-existing and profitable farming and fishing. As stated by Idemudia (2008), the danger in this is most of the local people are fearful of loans based on their little knowledge about it and the procedures.

There has been cases people become poorer due to some mishaps in investments and non-proper utilizations of loans which may lead to their selling off all they have to pay off or go to jail in some cases. Therefore government should fashion out an attractive micro finance scheme to encourage the local farmers getting out of poverty in the region. Poverty gap in Nigeria is widening, with a greater proportion of the nation's wealth being concentrated in the hands of the wealthiest 20 percent of the population and the elite in the society has not made enduring efforts to enhance the conversion of the socioeconomic and political situation in the Niger Delta Region to reduce poverty in the communities (Joel 2008). Asikhia (2013) in their study tried to find out the relationship between poverty alleviation and income distribution and rural development and they discovered that “a direct relationship exists between poverty alleviation, income redistribution and rural development. When poverty is alleviated, individuals develop capacity to create wealth which redistributes income and facilitates development” though the level of relationship varies depending on countries and the variables.

A participant from Obowo said “poverty in this our country is too much and increases every day. Each day many people join the poverty number as many lose their jobs and nothing comes from government to support us. NDDC is part of the government in power. Government appoints the board members to compensate politicians and relations so they embezzle money and government don't care. It is all the same corruption everywhere and poverty everywhere. I have been teaching for over twenty five years and I cannot even have a good house nor buy a car. I only manage to train my children”.

A community leader in her early fifty said : “we are very poor here and women are bearing the brunt of the bad government, we sale all we have to train our children hoping they would get job and take care of us but the reverse is the case. They graduate to become more burden to us.

Government always go on air promising all and saying poverty alleviation programme and we don't see the alleviation. We are not getting support and projects here not done, we don't know whom to hold, NDDC and government are the same.

See our roads they are now worst, they would have left it for us as it were before than coming here to spoil them more in the name of projects” tell them since your mouth can reach them that we are very angry on the abandoned projects here. It is increasing hardship, poverty and erosion will soon clear our village”.

A high Chief from Ohaji/Egbema said “Corruption and stealing is killing this commission and government, they have good programmes but the people at the head are so bad that they steal the money, they don’t use the money well and even, they give the contract to small school leavers who don’t know anything about contract just because they are their relatives. How can they do good contract? That is why most contracts are poorly done and nobody talks, I told them that they are thieves and not helping the region, they came here that they want to check our destroyed economic crops for compensation, they moved around for few days and went and never came again and nobody was compensated. That is corruption on its own as they must have shared the budgeted money for comeprnsation”

Militancy and Leadership Structure

Militancy and leadership structure of the Niger Delta region has been a challenge to both NDDC projects and the region in general. The level of violence, kidnapping, hostage taking and other activities of the militants has delayed and in some cases hampered the smooth operations of the contracting staff as well as the stakeholder’s participation in the implementation of projects in the region. It was explained that one of the major road construction companies in Nigeria Julius Berger had to abandon some of their projects within the Niger Delta Region because of high rate of kidnapping of their staff (Paki 2011). One of the biggest security challenges in contemporary Nigerian State is the activities of ethnic militias in the Niger Delta as this led to the deployment of military by the Federal Government to control and subdue the violence and the response by the federal government so as to secure the life of expatriate oil workers and safe guard the continued oil production so as to maintain the foreign revenue generation and this led to the increasing level of insecurity and violence rather than addressing the challenges of the region. (Okumagba 2012). In June 2008, the militants were able to move into the deep-sea-operation area to attack Nigeria’s largest offshore oil platform, the Bonga Oil Platform that produces 225,000 barrels of crude oil per day, which lies 120 kilometers off the coast of the Nigeria and this action gave a very serious signal to the Government that if nothing serious was done the militants would cripple the economy by blocking all the oil locations, “report of the Ledum Mitee led Technical Committee on the Niger Delta estimated that Nigeria lost about 8.84 trillion naira or 61.6 billion dollars to oil theft and sabotage in the volatile Niger Delta region between 2006 and 2008” (Paki 2011, Olusola 2013). This militancy made Nigerian Government to lose millions of barrels of oil daily and the short fall affected the global oil supply and the prices went up. The Amnesty granted by the President Yar’Adua in June 2009 helped to reduce the activities of the militants and President God-luck Jonathan’s administration continued on this amnesty and were able to bring reasonable peace in the Niger Delta.

This high insecurity affected a lot of economic and developmental activities in the region as the activities of militia groups were declared as criminal and therefore a threat to national security and accordingly the federal government declared war against the militants and the communities where they are located. As a result, it became a big challenge to the leaders of such Niger Delta Regions as Government now see the communities as collaborators in the conflict which now raised the issue of the roles of national, regional and communal leaders in these crises. The conflict in the region can be grouped into three levels ; the conflict between government and communities where government is using force to suppress and subdue the communities and unions agitating for ownership and benefits from the oil, conflicts between the oil companies and communities as communities confront oil companies asking for adequate compensations for the environmental and economic problems caused by the oil drilling activities while the oil companies themselves deny causing any negative environmental issues and later claimed that since they pay royalties and taxes to government that they were no more under obligation to compensate the communities and conflict among the communities for control of benefits that accrue from having oil on one’s land or territory (Osaghae 2007).

The active participation of leaders in community activities and decision making in Nigeria is very important and researches has mentioned the key roles they play in their various communities and the society at large (Kuponiyi 2008, Ali 2013, Udensi et al 2012, Essoh 2014), and the Niger Delta Region is not an exception in this regard .Also the qualities of good leadership as highlighted in the works of Sabran (2003, 2010) is of importance in consideration of the role of community leaders in the crisis resolution in the Niger Delta Region.

The environmental problems of the Niger Delta and women role in the struggle and protest against the challenges of socio economic and environmental problems of the Niger delta and NDDC projects have been mentioned in lots of literature (Ikelegbe 2005, Anugwom 2008, and Onyenechere2010). Women have formed organized groups to agitate and make useful presentations to the authorities on how to face and reduce the challenges they are facing as a result of the Niger delta situations and the Niger Delta Development Commission's projects. Women in the region have not kept quite in the face of the problems caused by oil exploration which have drastically affected their means of livelihood and also that of their families.

The women of the Niger Delta summarized their problems during a protest and explained that the Oil pollution and gas flaring has killed all the fishes, farmers who farm the land cannot get anything from their land anymore because of gross environmental degradation, Oil spillages have destroyed their lands leading to much hunger in the land that used to be full of food, community members are suffering and the gas they are flaring is causing so many people to die pre-maturely due to suffocation and other hazardous effects (Jike, 2010).

“we are all women here. We are angry and grieved that is why we have come together, we cannot rely on our husbands anymore for this fight because they are not giving us the desired result-my only occupation is fishing. But nowadays when I go to the riverine areas, there is no fish any more to kill. Oil pollution and gas flaring has killed all the fishes. Farmers who farm the land cannot get anything from their land anymore because of gross environmental degradation. Oil spillages have destroyed their lands. As a result of these, we are hungry. Our children are suffering” (Jike 2010 P. 209).

Women in Nigeria and in the Niger Delta are known to be peaceful but it does not mean they are cowards as when they try peaceful settlement and it fails, they resolve to action and confront any person, group or government. The cases of Aba Women's riots in 1832 and Abeokuta's women's riot of 1948 where women protested against the Colonial masters, the imposition of taxes and their system of governance comes to mind. About 58 protests have been organized by women in the region to fight neglect, isolation, hunger, poverty, unemployment, and mismanagement of oil- resources (Olankunle 2010). Women in the region has engaged in strong unions and leadership that has affected the lives of the communities. Various towns have women organizations who elect their leaders and run their organizations and likewise the men folks. In the words of Olankunle (2010) in his article, he quoted “we have organized cooperative and thrift society to address poverty among women. We have also given out soft loans to women. Our organization has given alternative business opportunities to women in replacement of their sources of subsistence that have been destroyed by the exploration. Our organization has also provided scholarships and grants to young school girls in secondary and tertiary institutions. Vocational training has been organized for women. Women mind is flexible and soft. We cannot wage war, carry arms like men” (Women Professional Organization, Rivers State”).

Sustainability – Monitoring and Evaluation

Sustaining the projects in the Niger Delta Region has been a challenge to NDDC and these has be traced to their non-having a properly articulated and coordinated monitoring and evaluation layout and team for the projects. Majority of the participants stated that the communities were not involved in the design and implementation of the projects hence, they knew a little about them but since they were developmental projects, they willingly released their lands and other required materials to the commission. The importance of people's participation, monitoring and evaluation in projects and programmes has a wider support from literatures (Isidihoand Sabran2015, Hassan 2013, Aliverdi et al 2013, Mahaney and Ledere 2010, Vanhoucke 2012).

A participant and community leader in Ohaji/Egbemaduring an interview in January 2015 said: “The projects are 100% funded by NDDC, One major problem outside corruption is the issue of monitoring, evaluation and sustainability is out of the place. Once they manage to complete a project, that is the end of it and this is why some of the water and electricity projects here are not functioning. No monitoring and evaluation. They do not sustain the projects”. “Corruption in the commission and the society at large is a very big problem affecting the projects”. Also affecting the project is the climatic condition of the communities.

The rainy season July through November affects the speed of the projects; hence some of them are abandoned due to the heavy rain and swampy nature of the region but our annoyance is they don't resume work on some of them as soon as the dry season sets in. Most favourable time for construction work in the study area is the dry season which starts from November through June.

The third participant stated; “I am not sure they monitor their projects, see the poor jobs done by the contractors, see the narrow roads and poor drainages, if they have competent staff that monitor, they would have seen that these works were poorly done”. “They brought in some projects but they are not doing well with the projects. Like the school they gave contract here, the contractor a small boy who has no knowledge of building was molding 9 inches blocks for the upstairs and molding 45 blocks with one bag of cement, just a trap to kill our children as the building would collapse after a short period”.

A participant from Obowo Community in Imo State stated: “There is nothing like good people in the commission and there is much projects abandoned and even when finished, done badly and no monitoring and evaluation. This is a big problem and giving the commission bad image. Most cases the Board members are changed because of corruption, still nobody is tried nor found guilty and new members follow the same trend of embezzlement and misappropriation of funds. No monitoring and if there is, then these projects would not be like these, erosion is about pulling down people’s houses along the Umuekwele – Alike Umuosochie road and nothing is done. The communities now try to organize communal labour to redirect the flood. The abandoned umulogho-Okwuohia road is not passable because the contractor abandoned the bridge and the road, so where is NDDC monitoring team”?

Environmental Factors

The nature and topography of the Niger delta possess a serious problems to both the inhabitants and all developmental projects in the locations. The two seasons of Niger delta are of April to October for the rainy season and from November to March is the dry season. In the words of former president of Nigeria Olusegun Obasanjo the problems of the Niger delta includes the environmental situation “Another challenge is the serious problem of environmental degradation and pollution” Niger Delta Development Commission Publication (“The Capitol; 10 years of NDDC (Capitol 2010). The Niger Delta Region of Nigeria consists of freshwater swamp, mangrove swamp, beach ridges, sand bars, lagoons marshes and tidal channels. Nigeria has a total land mass of 923,768sq/km; 918,768sq/km being terrestrial land and 13000 sq. /km being aquatic (Ayuba 2012). In the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria, some of the environmental problems associated with oil exploration and production include oil spills, gas flaring and venting, discharges of petroleum-derived chemical wastes, contamination of controlled water sources, contamination of soil and sediments, the destruction of the farmland and the marine environment, discharges from abandoned oil well that were not filled or properly covered and the discharges from illegally installed oil plugs done by oil bunkers (Aniefiok et al 2013, Adelana 2011, Oshwofasa et al 2012).

More than three-quarters of the people living in Niger Delta areas, lack access to potable or safe drinking water in spite of a vast network of natural freshwater and groundwater resources as these natural water have been polluted by the activities of the oil companies operating in the area, leading to pervasive water-borne diseases (Iledare&Suberu 2010). Baghebo et al (2012), pollution from gas flaring is enormous especially the “Open pipe flare” which most companies adopt in Nigeria unlike the “ground open flare”. Scientists have observed that the open pipe type contains elements derived from the products of incomplete combustion, including soot and various sizes of carbon particles which are both hazardous. Also, Steiner (2010), UNDP (2006) and United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP 2011)), explained the environmental situation in the Niger Delta region in the report highlighting the enormous oil spills occurring in riverine areas in the Niger Delta Region have also done great damage to the aquatic ecosystem, particularly in the mangrove swamp forest zone. Steiner (2010) stated thus that in the Niger Delta, “drinking water is polluted, fishing and farming are significantly impacted and ecosystems are degraded”. This swampy nature and environmental problems affected the NDDC projects as most of the road construction works could not be done once rainy season starts and the swampy nature of the soil makes construction works there more difficult and expensive.

Inadequate Funding

The issue of inadequate funding as a challenge to NDDC projects and the Niger Delta Region has generated lots of argument and counter arguments. Most times the Commission has hinged their inadequate performance and lots of abandoned projects to lack of funds to execute these projects. On the other hand the communities and government has indicated that the level of corruption and misappropriation of funds annually budgeted and allocated to NDDC has caused their poor performance.

However, considering the expanse of projects and programmed associated with NDDC in their master plan, there is justification for continuous increase in their allocation but the danger and problem is that no adequate and satisfactory account has been given for the funds allocated and this has made many people in Nigeria see the commission as a settlement avenue for political supporters. That is why most committee reports probing on the Board of Directors has never left the office of the president nor the national assembly. The reports of the various probe panels and committees ends up on the pages of newspapers. It then shows that the commission is just an extension of the corruption that goes on at the larger sector of the economy.

All of the participants contacted on telephone were of the view that corruption, mismanagement and award of contracts to incompetent contractors are some of the problems of the commission and the region. They also commented on the environmental problems of the region and said the commission and government are working but not enough to effectively transform the region and make it attractive and comfortable to live in. They were optimistic that once a good management is in place, the challenges of the region would receive admirable attention and the communities would be happier and the illegal activities would drastically drop to the barest minimum.

Methodology

A qualitative research method was adopted in the study involving face to face interviews conducted on twenty five randomly selected people in the area under study comprising Chiefs, youth leaders, women leaders and other elites, telephone interviews were conducted on nine participants some of them residing outside the communities but indigenes of these study area. The communities under study were visited by the researcher and observations were made on the socio economic and environmental situations and the contracts completed, ongoing and abandoned by NDDC in the localities. The oral interviews were conducted between 24th January and 2nd February 2014 while the telephone interviews were between 5th and 6th February 2014. Secondary data were retrieved from journals and published articles and other publications as dully referenced in the study.

Findings

This study discovered that the problems facing Niger Delta Development Commission projects and the Niger Delta Region are multi-disciplinary and would require a comprehensive policy and serious dedication by all stakeholders. Majority of the participants indicated that corruption is the center point of the problems as its multiplier effects engulfs all sectors of the projects and the region and a replica of the National corruption that has greatly hampered meaningful development and growth in the nation. The embezzlement of funds was the major problem that strangled projects and led to the much abandonment of these projects. The corruption is also the cause of awarding contracts to contractors that were not competent and such acts led to the construction of projects that does not meet the minimally acceptable standard. The participants explained that some contracts were just awarded to friends, political agents or family members who just don't have any idea of the job. They would in turn sub- let the contract to other companies who would now handle them and since the Companies were not the original recipient of the contracts, they tend to do it haphazardly without following the regulations and procedures as they have nothing at stake if the job were poorly done. The level of corruption in the study area was a continuation of the corruption at the larger society and one beautiful thing about the inhabitants of the region is that despite the socioeconomic and environmental problems, they still maintain their friendly and undoubted loyalty to the Government and neighbours. Even when they were reasons to disobey the law, they still get back to reunite and amend issues and plead their loyalty. The participants explained that most of the Governors of the states under the study area looted the state treasure, hence denied the citizens the amenities and comfort derivable from the Federally Allocated revenue in the states as indicated in the cases of arrested corrupt Governors some of whom are still serving jail terms. This agrees with the findings of Coventry (2009) and Babalola (2014).

The findings also shows that the poverty level of the region has not decreased as at the time of the fields investigation, though few projects on roads, water, electricity, health centers and schools have been executed but the number of projects is not consummate with the population of the communities. NDDC projects on water, electricity and roads have really helped in reducing incidences of poverty as artisans and community members could now engage in some subsistence jobs since the activities of oil exploration has destroyed their farmlands, polluted the water and they could no longer do their fishing, the gas flaring has also caused a lot of environmental and socio economic problems in the region. This findings also supports previous findings by Afinotan 2009, Oshwofasa 2012, Babalola 2014, Agbibo 2012, Isidiho 2015.

The problem of militancy and leadership in the region has been lingering over the years since the nineteen fifties when AdakaBoro declared the self-Government for the Ogonis and this has continued to change style and momentum to date. The impact of this on the NDDC projects were very glaring as some of the projects were abandoned due to the risk of staff and threat of being killed or kidnapped by the militants. The highly equipped militants in the region forced the oil companies and other stake holders to pull out of the region and this had serious effects on the localities and much on the Government revenues. The findings also strengthened the views that the leaders of the localities had a role to play in the actions of the youths considering their bitterness in the non-compensation of their economic crops and other inconveniences by the commission, the oil companies and government. The recent amnesty granted by the federal government of Nigeria has not actually done much to appease the agitations in the region. The participants claimed that the government approaches in resolving the issues were selective and the key leaders of the militants like AsariDokibo, Atekeetc were being pampered by the government and big contracts to safe guide the oil pipelines and maintain peace in the creeks given to them. As they swim in millions of dollars, the youths in the communities still suffer from unemployment and other social ills and show some bitterness on the actions of the government. Hence there has been sporadic incidences of kidnapping and bunkering in the region. Armed robbery, kidnapping, bunkering and other illegal activities are still going on in the region.

The findings of this study also shows that the level of people participation, monitoring and evaluation of NDDC projects in the study area were very low and hence the participants complained that the projects were imposed on them and due to the urgent need for these projects the communities accepted them and gave their co-operation to ensure successful implementation. The community leaders interviewed said they were never contacted to discuss the projects. Also there were indications of inadequate monitoring as the unsatisfactory nature of some of the projects especially on roads, electricity, school buildings etc were identified. Most of the roads were low quality without pedestrian walk way, no gutters and no adequate thickness in places where paved roads were constructed. Many of the projects abandoned were said to have been paid by the commission as the village head indicated, and this raised the question of who certified the projects completed and satisfactory before the payments were made to the contractors ? This is where the issues of corruption and low project monitoring and evaluation comes in, hence the monitoring and evaluation team of the commission needs to be active. A case of a project listed in the commission's publication as awarded but there was no indication on visit to the site that such project was awarded, not even contract award sign board not to talk of grading nor construction of culvert along the said road contract.

The findings on the environmental impact of the commission's contract and the regional environmental problems were observed during the data collection. There is serious environmental problems in the region and urgent and sincere efforts should be made by all concerned to alleviate them This supports the findings of various literatures (Adelana et al 2011, Oshwofasa et al2012, Aniefiok 2013, Ayuba 2012 and steiner2010). The abandoned road projects by the commission in parts of Obowo are causing serious environmental problem. Gully erosion is developing in most areas and farmlands and residential areas are at high risk as high velocity floods are ravaging the roads due to the abandonments. The issue of insufficient funding by the government on the commission could not be verified as neither records of budgetary allocation nor disbursements could be gotten from the Commission. There were high secrecy on the financial engagements of the commission which was a bid to cover up the corruption and misappropriations going on there. If the commission is transparent, they would have made their financial records of received and spent funds open for interested parties and researchers. However, looking at the high number of abandoned projects and the low development and lack of the basic infrastructural facilities in the region, one does not need a soothsaying to say that there is need to increase the funding and allocations to the commission and the region.

Conclusion and Recommendation

This study therefore concludes that the issue of NDDC activities must be carefully evaluated and the commission overhauled to reposition it into achieving the set objectives in line with their master plan. This cannot be successfully done if the level of corruption in the commission and the Nigerian polity is not checkmated. Based on the findings the researchers conclude that there should be a strong and result oriented monitoring and evaluation team to be institutionalized and also suggest a combination of a team comprising the members of the commission, the representatives of each community where the projects are ongoing and an independent monitoring and evaluation team from the Federal Government as a counter balance in the assessment of the

projects and disbursement of funds to the contractors. This must not be misconstrued as taking over the functions of the Commission but strengthening the monitoring and evaluation for effective result.

Moreover, researchers recommend that government should look at the issues and challenges of the region and find a more active and pragmatic approaches to solving them and the activities of NDDC and the Ministry of the Niger Delta should be harmonized for effective operation. In some countries, contractors are required to sign an after completion and commission pack to monitor the project for some specific duration after which their final contract payment balance are released to them. If this is adopted in Nigeria, it would go a long way to ensuring good jobs done by contractors since part of their contract sum is held by the authorities pending the expiration of their monitoring time. There is also need to restructure the Board of Directors of the commission with aristocrats, technocrats and people of proven records of achievements and organizational skills with core financial discipline and developmental zeal. The new Board should be mandated to ensure the successful completion and commissioning of all abandoned projects using qualified contractors before awarding contracts for new ones. All together, the very wide range of project coverage areas of the commission needs to be reduced in scope so as to have a good control of their projects instead of being jack of all trade and master of none. The paper also calls for a joint project monitoring and evaluation group involving all stakeholders, (Government, the Commission, the donor oil companies/agencies, and the communities where these projects are sited). This is necessary to avoid over manipulation of the reports by the staff of the Commission who may be biased in their reporting of the status of some projects just to cover up inadequacies when in actual facts such projects have been abandoned or unsatisfactorily done and still the payments have been made to the contractors. However, the Niger Delta Region is playing a very active role in the revenue generation of the country, hence each government should ensure adequate peace and tranquility in the region and these could only be achieved with rapid development and restructuring of the region to achieve the required growth and development as specified in the NDDC master plan.

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