



# **INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF RESEARCH IN SOCIAL SCIENCE AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT**

Volume 4. Number 2. 2012

PAN-AFRICAN BOOK COMPANY

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# INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF RESEARCH IN SOCIAL SCIENCE AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

Volume 4, Number 2, 2012

ISSN: 2276 - 853X

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This Journal is an academic Journal published quarterly. Subscription rate for individuals is US\$25 per issue (Foreign Price) and €25 (Domestic). Per annum cost is US\$100 (Foreign) and €100 (Domestic).

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# INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF RESEARCH IN SOCIAL SCIENCE AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

*Volume 4, Number 2, 2012*

Published by Pan-African Book Company in association with JIMST, Medina New Road, Accra, Ghana.

First Published 2009

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International Journal of Research in Social Science and Human Development is a quarterly Journal published by the Pan-African Journal Series. Papers for publication should be sent to our *E-mail* [centrejournal@yahoo.com](mailto:centrejournal@yahoo.com). *If you have additional question, please feel free to contact the Managing Editor at the addresses below: The Managing Editor, Centre Journals, JIMST, Medina New Road, Accra, Ghana.. E-mail: centrejournal@yahoo.com, JOURNAL WEBSITE: [www.panafricanjournal.org](http://www.panafricanjournal.org)*

# INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF RESEARCH IN SOCIAL SCIENCE AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

ISSN: 2276-853X

Volume 4, Number 2, 2012

S/No.	Contents	Authors	Pages
1.	Some Communication Breakdown Effects on Healthcare in Cameroon.	Donatus B. Ngala	1-14
2.	Effects of Government Social Expenditure on Poverty Alleviation in Nigeria.	Mustapha, A. B.	15-22
3.	Transformational Leadership: Epitomizing Shaka the Great.	Fasanmi Samuel Sunday	23-27
4.	The 2011 Elections: The Consolidation and Sustenance of democracy in Nigeria.	Erunke. Canice Esidene and Kigbu Hafsat	28-40
5.	Influence of Self-Esteem and Gender on Assertiveness of Undergraduates in Federal and State Universities in Lagos State.	Adewuyi, Temitayo Deborah Olufemi and Fagbohungebe, Oni Bankole	41-50
6.	Challenges to Sustainable Peace and Security Beyond the Amnesty in the Niger Delta.	Crosdel Emuedo	51-63
7.	Local Elite and Corruption: Revisiting Marginalization of the Niger Delta.	Jegede, Ajibade Ebenezer; Joshua, Segun and Olorunyomi. Bankole Robert.	64-74
8.	Office Technology and Management Student Skills Acquisition through a Goal Oriented Students Industrial Work Experience Scheme (SIWES) in Nigeria.	Enyekit, E.O.: Ubulom, W.J.; Onuekwa. F.A. and Vinazor, J.E.	75-81
9.	Secondary Schools' Teachers' Perception of Factors Affecting Job Satisfaction in Patani & Isoko North Local Government Areas of Delta State, Nigeria-Implications for Counseling.	A. Onoyase	82-89
10.	The Threat of one Party State in Nigeria's Fourth Republic: Dialectic of Pluralistic Society.	Adeola Gabriel Lanre	90-97
11.	Psychology of Power and the Development of Trade Unionism: The Nigerian Perspective.	Egwu U. Egwu and J.O. Okojie	98-102
12.	The Influence of Provocative Dressing Styles on Sexual Harassment: Obafemi Awolowo University (OAU) Ile-Ife as a Case Study.	Muhibat Ayoni Oladimeji and Sadiat Iyabode Alliu	103-113
13.	Traditional Methodologies in Social Research: The Challenges in Modern Social Science.	Lawrence L. Orkuugh	114-122
14.	Counseling for Social and Behavioural Change in Nigeria: (Imperative for the Post Amnesty Niger-Delta).	Obodoegbulam, Agi Otto; Egesimba, Nkechi Mercy; Dimkpa, ThankGod Ndudi and Agi, C.	123-128
15.	Social-Cultural Constraints to Law Enforcement in the Nigeria's Local Government Services: The Case of the Family System.	Oyeniran Adediji	129-136
16.	Achieving the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in Nigeria: An Appraisal of the Poverty Reduction Programmed in Rural Cross River State, Nigeria.	Festus Nkopyen and Bassey, Glory Eteng	137-143
17.	The Terrorism Act of Nigeria 2011: A Critical of its Operability.	Etuere-Diene, Meni C. and Awai Daniel	144-149
18.	Multi-Partism and Democratic Sustainability in Nigeria.	Adisa O. Peniel	150-156
19.	Technocrats in the Service of the State: Implications for Public Policy in Nigeria.	Ologunowa, Christopher Sunday and Olowe, Orimoloye Oyekanmi	157-163
20.	Education Law and the Colapse of Discipline in Nigeria Schools: A way Forward.	Izuagba Ngozi J. and Ihekwe Stan C.	164-167
21.	Globalization and Employment Creation: A Panacea for an Uncertain Future.	Endurance Gabriel Udo	168-174
22.	The Influence of Provocative Dressing Styles on Sexually Harassment: Obafemi Awolowo University (OAU) Ile-Ife as a Case Study.	Muhibat Ayoni Oladimeji and Sadiat Iyabode Alliu	175-185
23.	Six Years Single Tenure and Good Governance in Nigeria: A Critical Study.	Aluko, J.O; Michael A.Oni; Ajilore Kolade, Ireunmi Banwo; Chibuzor A. Nwaodike	186-195

## LOCAL ELITE AND CORRUPTION: REVISITING MARGINALIZATION OF THE NIGER DELTA

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### ABSTRACT

*The prevalence of contradictions generated by Nigeria's past colonial experience severally explains major intra and inter-ethnic bickering that followed the nation's political independence. The centerpiece of these contradictions lie in the themes of credible agitations represented in the quest for self-autonomy, resource control, spatial exploitation and a host of others which do not only pitch several ethnic nationalities against the state but also threatens the corporate existence among major stake-holders. At post-independence, the nation's environment witnessed the growth of a particular segment of her population that became the custodian of power structure, the group that overtly manipulates same to further their interest. Consequently, the actions of this group appear diametrically opposed to the collective good of the mass, which are continually displaced through scheming engendered by corruption. When evaluated from an institutional perspective, the successful encapsulation of the indigenous elite into the network of world capitalist system by its nature created a lacuna explicable in the duality of allegiance. This dual allegiance, to a large extent, is tailored towards satisfying the interest of the elite class on one hand and at the other extreme glossing over the interest of the ever rampaging marginalized locales or segment. The Niger-Delta predicament represents one of such contradictions nurtured by corruption and sustained by allegiance to the hegemonic power of the state, which create the needed interconnectivity between the ruling elite at the national, state and local government levels. This interconnectivity intensifies the continued neglect of the Niger-Delta. It is within this framework that this paper examines the impact of state and local sponsored corruption on the well-being of the peoples in the Niger-Delta. It also locates the root of corruption in the philosophical leaning of oil curse paradigm and concludes by proffering solution to the problems that beset the Niger-Delta Region.*

**Keywords:** *Corruption Elitism Colonialism Resource Control Restiveness Marginalization*

### INTRODUCTION

Different forms of conflict in the global community exhibit unique defining characteristics often closely tied to recurring or aggravating factors initiating crisis in any given society. In the case of Niger-Delta region of Nigeria, the recurring decimal lies in crude exploration and the question of control which have continued to induce strife. In establishing correlation between oil resource exploration and conflict, it has been observed that in many parts of the world, regions endowed with mineral resources often witnessed prolonged conflicts and civil wars. This situation is mostly brought to the fore by both conflicting local, national and international interests and mainly revolving around the exploitation of resources, management of the impacts of exploration, and the distribution of the benefits of mineral exploitation (Alemika, 2008). Collier and Hoeffler (2003) have equally argued that the more the percentage of shares of natural resources in the export component of a country the higher the risk of conflict. Similarly, it has been observed that "where a region sees what it considers its resources stolen by corrupt national elite concentrated in capital, the prospect of gaining control over the natural resources revenues and using them to the benefit of the local ethnic majority can be a powerful driver of conflict" (Bannon and Collier, 2003). The Niger-Delta region is the store of Nigeria's crude oil, which account for approximately 90 percent of Nigeria's total exports providing more than 90 percent of total exports (Akpan, 2010). Despite the volume of crude oil deposit, the region has not much to show for it in terms of development. Here lies the crux of the unabated conflict unsettling the region for a long time. In establishing the basis of conflict in the Niger-Delta area therefore, efforts must be geared towards the evaluation of the government environment as it shapes the legal requirement for oil business and the quest

## Local Elite and Corruption: Revisiting Marginalization of the Niger Delta

resource control. It must also involve the appraisal of the prevailing culture driving the sense of social responsibility closely underpinning governing philosophy and the value placed on natural environments.

The combined effects produced by crude exploration and the resultant events deducible in environmental degradation, constitute the source of tension between major stake holders jointly represented in the state, oil multi-nationals and the oil producing communities. Unfolding developments in the region cannot be extricated from the persistent structural contradictions affecting Nigeria. Relatively, the submerging factors responsible for current conflict are located in the events endemic in Nigeria's historical past. It should be realized that the phenomenon of colonialism represents the single most disruptive factor in African history (Fukuyama, 1992) and remains the curse of nation state (Davidson, 1991). It is necessary to state that colonialism prepared the ground for the integration of Nigeria into the world capitalist system (Ake 1981). The capitalist principle espoused Nigeria at independence, constitutes the background upon which subsequent annihilation of Nigerian masses is closely rooted and perfected. As a junior partner in world capitalist order after political independence, the economic growth needed to enhance people's welfare suffered setbacks as a result of Nigeria being a primary producer on one hand and also as a result of induced corruption by the political elites on the other hand (Babawale, 2006).

Ironically, the availability of capital fails to translate into social and physical development due to the existence of white collar corruption and local sycophancy (Akinwumi 2004) (emphasis ours). Consequently, one contradiction that appears so central to the problem in the Niger-Delta region involve both state and indigenous dimensions of corruption consistently propelled by dirt of patriotic leadership. This constitutes a negative development closely birthing other forms of debilitating consequences for human and material progress in the region. Corruption within this context is understandable since according to Adewuyi (2007) Nigeria can be said to be a fraud personified, the white leaders originally planted the nation as a seed of corruption. It exists in multi-dimensional form and it is a product of Nigeria's political elite (coordinating class), with its trickling effect measurable and visible among the general population.

Corruption around government circle involves the interconnectivity or alliances between government bodies (ranging from Federal, State to local government levels) and closely supported by both international and a section of indigenous interests. There exists a clearly defined sharing principle benefiting the parties in alliance. This practice creates a polar between what the affected communities are expected to have towards the amelioration of the plight of the suffering masses on one hand and that which is needed for the development of their degraded environment on the other. Politically, corrupt syndicate consists of state political elites mainly public office holders and their acolytes represented within the indigenous communities. It is worth noting that the phenomenon of corruption is not limited to politicians or executives alone but also of relevance are locales in the affected area (Enweremadu 2009). There exists a semblance of substantial efforts in the intensification of corrupt practices resulting in mass annihilation and poverty. The pervasiveness of corruption in the Niger-Delta's environment is incontrovertible. Practically, corruption in this context perfectly aligned with Awolowo's painted scenario where everyone strives by hook or by crook to be rich even in the face of sacrificing the destinies of others (Awolowo, 1981) (emphasis ours). The most pathetic consist of collaboration of the locales in corrupt practices, actions noticeably detrimental to the overall interest of the majority. Corruption among the locales in the Niger-Delta region consists of the initiation and collection of settlements from oil multi-national corporations and the diversion of funds earmarked for community development periodically channeled through other state subsidiaries by the people's representatives. Similarly, the symbolic expression of get rich quickly is quite endemic among the youths in the area. Apart, they equally thrive on insatiable appetite for settlements which once received and lavished propels another round of request from those they believed must give under compulsion. Thus, the presence of oil has exacerbated corruption not only among the youths but also among the elites.

The elitist nature of corruption in Nigeria generally and in the Niger-Delta in particular can only be explained within the context of cycle of access and consumption of state resources by few influential and opportunistic elites represented in the politico-economic class; the activities of who carries magnitude of implication for the group's well being. In the region, the indigenous elites aggravating or worsening the situation of the masses are bent at short circuiting the resources intermittently allocated to reduce the dastard effects of oil exploration. This group (the elite) has no regard for the plight of other class or underprivileged constituting the bulk of people in the region. Their fraudulent potentials have been reported by Maier (2000) who states that Nigerian leaders, in their various nomenclature functions to divert billions of dollars to private uses at the expense of those requiring socio-material intervention. Niger-Delta predicament is rooted in leadership corruption and its debilitating impact on vast majority of people in the region remains the centerpiece of restiveness. It is within this purview that this paper attempts the re-evaluation of the Niger-Delta marginalization question with the view of situating current problem within an institutional framework of the state that is concertedly supported by oil multi-nationals and the indigenous elites in

the oil producing area. The theoretical basis of Niger-Delta neglect and continued deprivation finds clear expression in oil curse paradigm which best explains the untold hardship ravaging majority of Nigerians. Finally, the delved extensively on the effects of corruption on Niger-Delta development and proffered solutions to the crisis.

### Situating Niger-Delta Problem in the Nigeria's Structural Context

In its historical context, Nigeria consists of fragmented nation states with varied account of socio-political developments. It consists of autonomous and semi-autonomous tribal states with diverse socio-cultural dislocated by colonialism. Just like other Third World countries that experienced colonialism, foreign domination commenced in Nigeria with the British annexation of Lagos as Crown colony in 1861. This was later followed by the proclamation of southern Nigeria as protectorate in 1900 and further culminated in merging together of several entities under a unified system of administration in 1914. At independence in 1960, Nigeria became an aggregation of several nationalities "co-opted" to co-exist as one nation under a federal structure of administrative cooperation (Babawale, 2003). This Federal experiment was not without its cost since events preceding independence clearly showed that the unholy alliance binding diverse nationalities later paved way for grave consequences in the mutual co-existence and group continuity (Mundt and Aborisade, 2004).

Just immediately after independence, the consequences of these contradictory factors inhibited the development of oneness among Nigerian people. The absence of the unifying factors birthed negative effects which became manifest in varied levels of conflicts continually recorded across diverse ethno-religious boundaries of Nigeria. This resulted in a measurable relational dislocation. The fundamental issue responsible for relational dislocation involve the socio-cultural division inherent among the segments of Nigeria's population, disparities and the hegemonic tendencies endemic in resource endowment and allocation across major boundaries and the absence of unifying consensus (Lijphart, 1977). Much of the strain that became evident at post-independence era include the question of autonomy among diverse nationalities, ethnic cleavages and rivalries, religious fanaticism, challenges central to control of federal unit or the center, problem relating to equitable share of revenues generated from natural resources and more in its recent time the agitation for resource control raised by communities where oil resources sustain Nigeria is most endemic (Suberu 2001).

Apart from the afore-mentioned contradictions, one of the major problems that helped to sustain several crises in Nigeria lies in the quality of political elite that emerged at independence and thereafter. They did not only strive ardently to manipulate the existing contradictions to score political goals but also relentlessly institutionalized corruption as a way of life. Gavin (1980) locates the form of government that survived the colonial onslaught as a patrimonial system with vertical ties of domination and dependence with subordinate masses left at the mercy of those in power. When the indigenous elite took over the mantle of control from the colonialist, political office became an avenue for siphoning public funds for private use and this unwholesome practice is mostly done with justifying slogan which states that government money does not belong to anyone and by necessity must be shared with no regard to accountability (Orewa, 2002).

With an increase commitment to this negative value by the emergent elite, myriad of government business became fraught with one form of corruption or the other and the suffering of the people became intensified. This scene was best captured by Goffredo (1993) when he states that, not only does stealing go on in the state institutions, the state itself is the apparatus for stealing. In Nigeria, not only do officials steal, but stealing is official. It is the principle of Nigerian elitist rule. This position was later supported by Bayart, (1993) who heaps Nigeria's problems on the elites, describing them as non-developmental oriented and a self reproducing thieving ruling class. It is important to know that the burden of corruption lies on the citizenry since capital needed for development is expropriated by the ruling elites. In the case of Niger-Delta, it is not only the resources needed for development that is consistently mopped, but also the environment is left degraded and the people severely impoverished because of lack of avenue for economic pursuit. The affected people are only left with the option of wresting the state and multinational in order to secure their physiological requirements.

Just as corruption became endemic after Nigeria's independence, its development triggered the first military coup that ousted the country's first democratic leadership/republic in the year 1966 (Iroanusi, 2006: Nwankwo, 1997). After the bloody removal of the first set of democratic elite, subsequent political developments reveal that corruption has come to retain its existence as the defining feature of Nigeria's polity/governance especially when viewed in the light of different democratic experiments so far conducted in the country. The situation perfectly aligned with Pareto's dictum which states that, the history of Nigeria is a never ending circulation of corrupt elites whose actions reflect a non-changing decimal in monumental impoverishment of the citizenry with measurable perpetuity in the undermining of socio-economic development of Nigeria (Pareto, 1963).



## Local Elite and Corruption: Revisiting Marginalization of the Niger Delta

Apart from the fact that the challenge of corruption is taking its toll on Nigeria's political institution; in terms of stability and social responsibility, it is equally generating adverse consequences for human and material progress. The tremendous growth in corrupt related practices is located in the existing interconnectivity between local, state and national political actors both of who not only combined to guard their various interests jealously but also concerted to increase the impoverishment of the masses. The state under the control of Nigeria's political elite remains totally distant from the plight of her citizenry and invariably became an instrument of oppression and a binger of hopelessness. Many Nigerians relate with the state as an alien institution that needed to be eradicated. When evaluated from Ake's position, most Nigerians confront the state not as a public force but as an alien and hostile coercive power. This is so because the Nigerian state, lacking progressive leadership, is immersed in class struggle and is conspicuously a state of the few against the many (Ake, 1990).

The resultant effect of non-cordial relationship between the state and its citizenry is mostly recorded in overt conflict often implicated in variety of causes. Though, one may not be interested in myriads of causes fueling innumerable conflicts in Nigeria, it must be noted that the most central among these notable causes which directly impinged on the current state of development along Niger-Delta axis remains corruption, (a phenomenon nurturing socio-economic neglect and deprivation). Corruption in this context is perpetuated by three formidable forces and conducted in a gangster fashion. The element of "gangsterism" is located in the collusion between the States (represented in corrupt politicians at all levels of authority), oil multinationals (genuinely committed to the furtherance of western imperialism) and opportunistic local elite whose activities appear combative and who work assiduously to inhibit any headway in the resolution of Niger-Delta crisis (Saro-Wiwa 1989) (emphasis ours). Without much contention, the gains accruable from the nurturing of conflict may after all be substantial since such systemic effort tends to assist stakeholders in fighting corruption to maintain their grip on Niger-Delta oil. Consequently, there is existence of collaboration among the local private capital, state capital and transnational capital to milk the Niger Delta people (Evans, 1979). Niger-Delta inhabitants are victims of local and international capitals. It is within this framework of collaborative adversarial posture consistently exhibited by these three capitals that the predicament of the Niger-Delta can be situated.

### LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE ON NIGER DELTA CRISIS

Corruption has been defined by several scholars in the social sciences and other disciplines. Attempts have equally been made to distinguish it from other forms of crime. For instance, Transparency international defines corruption as the abuse of entrusted power for private gain. Adeyemi (1988) defines corruption as an offence which aims mainly at the conduct of public officials who take advantage of their positions within public administrations for the purpose of private gains. The definition of corruption that best capture the view in this paper is that given by Freidrich (1989) who argues that corruption is a type of behavior which deviates from the norm actually prevalent or believed to prevail in a given context, such as a political system. It is a deviant behavior associated with a particular motivation, mainly that of private gain at public expense. Apart from the definition of Freidrich, corruption within the purview of this paper will also assume the rigorous calculative reasoning involving political leadership, foreign capital and opportunistic predators whose actions are predicated on the necessity of sustaining the exploitation of Niger-Delta oil on a fraudulent term and the repression of dissension from the locales in the interest of foreign capital and other corrupt elements. It is within this limit that the paper attempts the exploration of all shades of corruption perpetuated by the earlier identified capitals. One thing that appears unique or common among all the definitions is the emphasis on the ontology of trust pertaining to public property or resources.

It is clear from the introductory and the preambles earlier presented that the current problem in the Niger-Delta area is grounded in the elitist class interest. This often occasions the impoverishment and repression of the locales that bear's the consequences of oil exploration. Before we continue, it is quite pertinent to determine the defining feature of Nigeria's political elite so as to place current argument in a clearer perspective. Weidenbaum (1999) conceives political elites as the existence of small group who- by virtue of wealth or power, control the nation and act in concert to defraud the mass of people. The political elites consist of the locals groomed by foreign power or reproduced within the chain of elite recycling process and those who become fixated with neo-colonialist agenda, a script handed over at political independence; custodian of British interest and the overseers of continued subjugation of local economy in a neo-colonial dimension (Babawale, 2006). The political elite as their name implies, are the custodian of power. Mills states that since national events are decided, the power elite are those who decide them (Mills, 1969). In essence, they decide the segment of the populace to favor and those to deprive. The most crucial factor that brings this group into focus is what Mussa-Nda (1988) describes as root of Africa's tragedy. This involves the excessive concentration of power and management of national resources in a lopsided structures mostly found in most Third World countries. (Galeano 2001) describes this possession as 'Powerocracy'.

Viewing this from Nigeria's context, the federal structure creates avenue for those controlling various segments of the institutional hierarchy to largely monopolize not only power, but also the decisions on how to allocate and control scarce national resources. The occupation of these pivotal political positions at federal, state and local levels confer on the occupant the power to control the operations of indigenous and international corporations; help retain the prerogative on the determination of sizes of national resources to be allocated to who, when and how and; enable the ruling class to determine or initiate the right climate for the use of military options in the context of major disagreements or perceived insurgency resulting from mass impoverishment and induced poverty. Added to these as in the case of the Niger-Delta, is the problems generated by oil spillages, environmental degradations and several other problems (Mills, 1969). The interconnectedness of the power elite necessitates the combination of political, economic and military power often employed for the suppression of antagonistic interests directed at the furtherance of collaborative group interest.

Establishing this as in case of Nigeria, it must be noted that the Nigeria's power elite legitimize and sustain the activities of oil multinationals. It equally controls the resources accruing from oil exploration and often exercises governmental power when the need arises to quell all form of agitations capable of disrupting oil exploration. Without any reservation, the activities of oil multinational on the shores of Niger-Delta region is collectively supported by not only the federal government but the state and local governments of the affected region. The nature of the whole setup is that, major decisions on the modalities guiding the healthy and safe operations of the oil multinationals are at best reached by those who bore little or no consequence of oil exploration. In effect, the negative fallout generated by oil exploration is viewed as less in impact or in most cases reduced to occurrences that are admissible in oil trade (Mills, 1969). The elitist acquiescence by its nature confers on the multinational's power to dominate the exploration, refining, pricing, processing, marketing and exportation mostly done on a defrauding basis. The fraudulent alliances in the oil sector is shrouded in secrecy and often disguised from the masses in major oil producing areas. Borrowing from Onimode (1983) the masses are denied the comprehensive knowledge of the workings and the system completely fenced out the citizenry from grasping the nature of corruption perpetuated under the guise of global trade.

Reflecting on this collaboration, Anise (1980) views Nigeria's political elites as 'parasitic class' exploiting the nation's wealth and the labour of its dispossessed masses in alliance with foreign capitalist interests. Democratic leaders irrespective of the regime occupy the position of lieutenants of foreign oil multinational with mutual gain at the expense of the locales. The gains of the multinationals involve unimpeded siphoning of crude oil with or without proper accountability in its volumes transported outside the shores of Niger-Delta region on daily basis. Locally, Nigeria's political leadership often records their net benefits from unrestricted diversion of crude earnings into their private coffers and through other corner cuttings. It is uncontested that the culture of corruption exists and without one form of corruption or the other state actors cannot survive. Put succinctly, corruption begets, nurtures and sustains government in Nigeria (Atoyebi and Mobolaji 2004) (emphasis ours).

The institution of corruption also accommodates the role of influential locales that severally facilitate the commission of corruption. As in the case of Niger-Delta, most influential locales are not left out in the hierarchy of oil corruption since they serve as errand boys for the elite and in the process perfecting the chain of corruption. The local leadership includes those who are at the vanguard of various agitations and help in the co-ordination of the masses towards the actualization of the "people's interests." In the same vein, the masses are bribed with little amount of money and their existence constitutes a force in the hand of their local elite who manipulates their strength in bargaining for concessions from the oil multinational companies. Under this arrangement, concessionary releases are often diverted to private use by those who possess strong link or access to cash flows from either the state or foreign oil companies (Ikelegbe 2005).

The implications of corruption for Niger-Delta Development involve physical, human and material backwardness. The systemic reversal of progress through incapacitation of majority of Niger-Delta socio-economically, poses a long term negative effect on the economic potentials of the people and equally call to question the basis for their existence. In this regard, the masses constitute the overall loser since they suffer the three consequences of oil exploration vis-à-vis environmental degradation occasioning loss of economic man hour cum deplorable living standard; victimization caused by treacherous trusted ethnic relations who facilitates unimpeded marginalization of the state and multinational alliance occasioning local and international stealing of crude and resources emanating thereof (Alemika 2008) (emphasis ours).

This study uses the "oil curse paradigm" a derivative of dependency theory as a framework for analysis. The paradigm examines how resource wealth influences both economic growth and the living condition of the citizenry in resource dependent nations. The early work of Wheeler (1984) in search of "resource curse" reported substantial economic stagnation in the economic growth of resource dependent nations and viewed the situation as a curse. Karl (2008)

## Local Elite and Corruption: Revisiting Marginalization of the Niger Delta

define "oil curse" as the inverse relationship between high natural resources (oil) dependence and economic growth rate. In this context, it was observed that using economic growth related variables there has been no commensurate growth across various sectors of the economy in major oil producing nations. The attendant effect of this is registerable in the dwindling condition of living for most citizens of the affected states. Consequently, oil resources rather than producing or promoting qualitative standard of living among citizens of oil producing nations, has consistently nurtured acrimonies in the affected states. Corroborating this position, Schubert (2005) succinctly argues that oil revenue has the potential of deepening inequality among the populace of oil dependent nations. The resultant effects of such inequality often manifest in insurrections, uprisings and civil wars. This is true to a large extent as in the case with Niger-Delta.

Examining the situation in Nigeria therefore, the character that economic and political instability, religious conflict, ethnic militia activities, insensibility to the plight of the masses by the political elites, massive corruption, and insecurity of life and property assume reflects an inverse trend in the oil economy. These situations are brought about by the vicious cycle of corruption and patronage occasioned by the existence oil wealth (Schubert, 2006). Judging from this environment of corruption, Nigeria's problem is more of political and elitist predicaments located in unabated cycle of corruption. The presence of corruption across all facets of human relationship explains to a large extent the genesis of the Niger-Delta crisis. Resources (crude oil and other primary products) are transformed into foreign earnings and such income are been expropriated by the political class and their supportive local elites. This singular disservice to humanity carries significant detrimental effect on both the economic growth and equally on the wellbeing of the citizens. This detrimental effect signaled a remarkable impoverishment of the Nigerian masses in general and the Niger-Delta people in particular. It is tandem with this argument that the overt crisis observable in the Niger-Delta accentuates the manifestation of the plight of the people.

### REVISITING THE NIGER DELTA MARGINALIZATION THESIS

There exist avalanche of scholarly works that tries to grapple with the problem of the Niger Delta. In the literature, environmental degradation, rising socio-economic inequality in the midst of plenty, unethical practices of transnational oil companies operating in the region, lack of basic infrastructural facilities, political neglect among others have been amplified as causal factors of conflict in the region (Okoh, Egbon 1999; Ikporukpo 2004; Ikelegbe 2005). However, the challenge currently faced by Niger Delta indigenes can be situated within the purview of "modern Nigeria poor" located in corruption. Suffice to say that one thing that appears constant irrespective of the angle one might be evaluating the plight of Nigeria poor, involves the uniqueness of the state of neglect and deprivation currently suffered by Niger-Delta people which remains unparalleled when measured on a continuum of abject or absolute deprivation. The magnitude of health hazard and risks involved in living within the vicinity of oil exploration is quite appreciable and will of necessity require unflinching sympathy for the affected group.

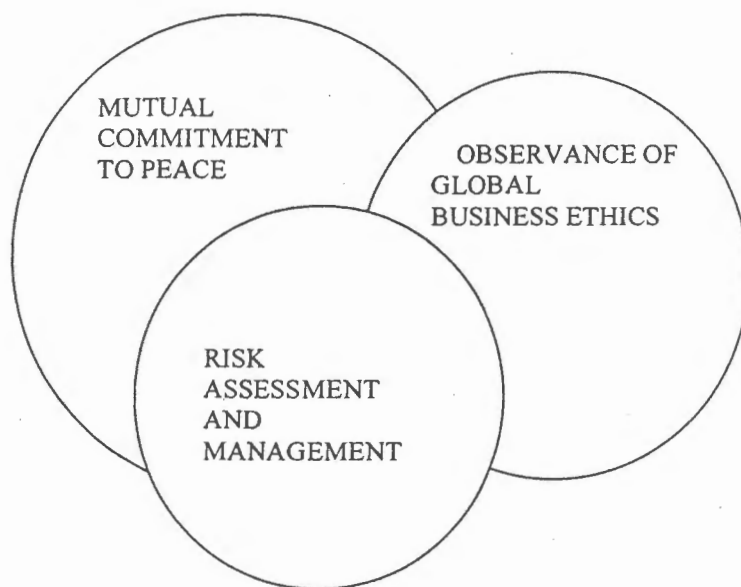
At this juncture, it is necessary to stress that since 1999, states in the Niger-Delta region have had their statutory allocation multiplied severally. It is chagrin to discover that, in spite of the monumental increase in allocation to the region, there is no reflection of such increase as far as development is concerned (Enweremadu 2009). Oil seems to have weaved the web of corruption and predatory activities that now permeate the region. The contention of this paper is that marginalization thesis – that the Federal Government is marginalizing the Niger-Delta in resource allocation and that oil companies are not doing much for their host communities as far as development is concerned is not sufficient to explain underdevelopment status of the Niger-Delta, rather it is the local elite that are now marginalizing their people by not allowing the statutory allocation to trickle down to the people, thereby, stifling development in the region.

Enweremadu (2009) argue that, although there is a volume of literature on oil and violence in the Niger-Delta, there is paucity of studies highlighting the role and nexus of corruption in all these conflicts. Yet the persistence, the increasing frequency and the intensification of corrupt acts among political actors, community leaders and private oil companies operating in the Niger-Delta have for some time been the hallmark of politics in the region. It is necessary to note that out of the four immediate past governors of Nigeria's major oil producing states (Bayelsa, Akwa Ibom, Delta and Rivers) three have either been accused or convicted of large scale corruption. One has been convicted and jailed for plundering the resources of his state on a massive scale (Alamieyeseigh Bayelsa state). Ibori was equally arrested and charged on 105 counts for looting up to 10 billion naira from his state- Niger-Delta. Odili has also been investigated on corrupt charges as well. Ironically, instead of rapid socio-economic development in the region, it is characterized by widespread of poverty induced by misallocation of resources and corruption to a large extent. Oil wealth appears to have sharpened the greedy appetite of the local power elite while facilitating the abandonment of public welfare.

In fact, Wantcheken and Asadurian (2002:2) found out that in general: "The states that are the highest recipients of transfers have experienced increased income inequality and poor economic indicators, suggesting that there is no accountability. Surprisingly, states that have benefited the least from oil rents have fared much better". Bayelsa state hardly shows any advantage in the area of socio-economic development over states with far smaller resources or budgetary allocations such as Zamfara. Federal Government and oil companies operating in the region are often held responsible for the widespread of poverty and underdevelopment in the region, which explains why they and their facilities have been the principal target of militant violence. Local officials have been spared recently, notwithstanding their complicity in perpetuating poverty and underdevelopment in the Niger Delta Region. Majority of Niger-Delta people are victims of deception. Their current problem is generated and sustained by deceptions continually perpetuated by their revered political leaders and local or traditional articulators of their interests (title holder and educated elite). The contradiction inherent in class conflict that appears non-overt to the average Nigerian working class is the non-recognition of their common enemy represented in modern political leadership backed by their accomplices residing across several ethnic boundaries. The plurality of conflicts directed by this group at substitutes rather than the substantive source of frustration across Nigeria society signifies the masses non-articulation of nexus of suffering and invariably causing a digression from the substance of meaningful agitations. It is a misplacement to vent the outburst of socio-economic vexations on people with common socio-economic predicament. The submission here is that Nigerian masses irrespective of socio-economic creeds are under siege and threat of extinction as long as bad leadership, deception and corruption thrives. The drove at which human lives is been dispatched to heaven due to the consequences of corruption appears not pathetic but also distressful. It is until that period an average Nigerian recognizes the corrupt activities of politicians and other compradors as a major source of annihilation and initiates a constructive engagement of the problem that collective condition can be bettered. It is on this basis that one need consider the importance of a holistic approach in the resolution of Niger-Delta crisis.

### MANAGING NIGER-DELTA CRISIS

An efficient management of Niger-Delta crisis may be approached holistically through the adoption of the three rings strategy presented in figure 1:1 below. The strategy involves the combination of mutual commitment to peace by major stakeholders; future risk assessment and commitment to its management and; observance of business ethics in oil trade.



Model Designed by authors

Figure 1:1—Three Rings Strategy for Conflict Resolution Mutual Commitment to Peace

The mutual or collaborative commitment to peace in the Niger-Delta area can only be attainable under an atmosphere of rebirth that must be created by all stakeholders. The need to embrace stakeholders' model of conflict resolution remains crucial to the resolution of current imbroglio. This will involve the rallying together of beneficiaries and the burdened that are existent in the theater of oil exploration. The primary stakeholders crucial

crisis resolution include the state, oil multinational, and other institutions. Basically, the secondary group consists of the less powerful (Niger-Delta indigenes), environmentalists, media and several others who do not possess the requisite power to compel the astonishingly powerful state actors and the western backed multinationals to address the plight of the suffering masses (Alemika 2008).

From the above one can gleaned the need for political elite re-orientation (that must need address the eradication of culture of corruption) on the necessity to engage in a reflexive re-evaluation of Niger-Delta peculiarity and the generation of total and genuine commitment to the resolution of current problem becomes important. In the interest of peace the deliberate sustenance of conflict for private gains and other pecuniary reasons should be discontinued forthwith. There must be a point of common interest and human valuation, adoption of sacrificial concessions and the expansion of Niger-Delta resource base to accommodate diverse conditions often generated by oil exploration. This becomes necessary as the sufferings engendered by oil exploration, sale and its revenue usage regressively excludes those at the receiving end of oil business. The gap and the displacement that characterizes the handling of Niger-Delta deprivation and neglect must be revisited and righted. Policy of inclusiveness must be adopted without delay by Nigerian government.

It should be noted that the existence of impoverished masses calls for the existence of conflict jobbers and the elongation of the lives of both must of necessity be blamed on state corruption. Within this context there must be what can be described as national rebirth that will usher in an atmosphere of state responsibility to its citizens and leadership sincerity in handling state resources and concerted effort leading towards the cushioning of effects often triggered by predatory challenges battling Nigeria masses of which Niger-Delta section is a part. Government strategic policy on Niger-Delta is expected to generate change of attitude in the people of the region and invariably their observance and commitment to peace (Omadjohwoefe 2008) (emphasis ours).

### RISK ASSESSMENT AND MANAGEMENT

The need to examine the negative effects of oil exploration on the host communities become highly important in the reduction of the future impact of oil exploration on the people of the Niger-Delta region (Ishola 2008). The quantitative measure of the risks posed by oil spillage, gas flaring, and drilling must be embarked upon by major stakeholders in the oil sector of Nigerian economy. The total package in this regard will involve hazard identification, dose response assessment, exposure assessment, risk characterization and risk management. On hazard identification, efforts should be geared towards establishing a link between gases emitted and human diseases among the population. Significantly, medical research should by necessity focus on the rate of exposure to deadly gases through experimental studies on diet and water consumed quality of oxygen inhaled by risk group, effect of atmospheric weather on human structure and such other steps (Steiner and Steiner, 2003).

Considering the dose response assessment intervention, medical experts should be engaged to perform the quantitative estimate of toxic generated by oil and its related by-products. The step will help ascertain the levels of exposure and the potency of gases or spillages on environment and human population and as well recommend areas with low doses of deadly chemicals. Exposure assessment should be geared towards the detection of quantity of gases absorbed as a result of inhalation, injection or skin absorption cause by indigenous people exposure to water when used as means of transportation; air consumed to cool off the body system and perspired for live sustenance and; land upon which settlements are constructed and economic interests pursued (Steiner and Steiner, 2003).

### OBSERVANCE OF BUSINESS ETHIC IN OIL TRADE

The consideration of what constitutes good and evil in oil trade remains crucial to the final resolution of current conflict. The symbiotic nature of current crisis assumes perfection when one look at the degrading effects of businesses conducted by the oil multinationals along Niger-Delta axis which unambiguously finds expression in government lackadaisical handling of the plight of her citizenry in Nigeria's political environment. Commensurately, it fitted the dominant culture of "inconsequential existence of citizenry" upon which capitalism thrives. It reflects both the domination of resources and the destinies of the relentless masses. Oil Multinational Corporation lies within the capitalist orientation of profit first, and service to society less consequential. In spite of local and international expectations on the ethical duty of the oil multinationals in their operating environments, it is clearly evident that the operations of major oil companies are been conducted with no regard to the plights of their host. It becomes enlightened self-interest of oil companies to improve the society (Bowen, 1953).

This re-echoes the defect and the inefficiency of capitalism as a weapon that insulates the oil multinationals from the pressures that promote social responsibility to the oil communities. It is evident that the absence of clearly defined laws guiding the operations of the oil companies constitutes the bedrock upon which degradation and inhuman treatment often meted on common people in the Niger-Delta region is based. The laissez-faire attitude of the political

elite raise ethical question on the appropriateness of their responsibilities to their subjects. One of the fundamental duty of oil multinational is the obedience to laws that protects the stakeholders, but what happens if such law is not in existence or when the enforcer remains silent even in face of provocation or slap?

Laws governing oil exploration should be put in place and enforced in accordance with the international standards.

## CONCLUSION

This paper has attempted a revisit of the Niger Delta marginalization thesis. Our efforts started with a background of the problem, thereafter, we made attempt to situate Niger Delta problem in the Nigeria's structural context. This was followed by a review of relevant literature and theoretical framework. It was after this we proceeded to revisit the Niger Delta marginalization thesis. Our discussion reviewed that, the Niger Delta people directed their grievances to substitutes rather than the substantive source which is local elite corruption that perpetuate underdevelopment in the oil-rich region. We suggested a holistic approach through mutual or collaborative commitment to peace in the Niger Delta area by all stakeholders, reorientation of political elite among others as panacea to bringing lasting peace in the area.

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## Local Elite and Corruption: Revisiting Marginalization of the Niger Delta

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