

Petroleum, the Environment, and the Economics of Nationalism in the Niger Delta

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Abstract

The Niger Delta conflict has come into global limelight for some time. The peoples have been agitated over the sordid acts of ecocide by the oil multinationals, resulting from oil explorations without expected economic vantages and physical development in turn. The recent occurrences of militia formations, their attacks of oil installations and kidnap of expatriates working in the oil wells, have added an interesting but dangerous twist to the crisis in the region. This paper curiously questions the failure of government to tackle the environmental issues that have culminated in the dangerous twist of nationalism, and counts the economic costs of this on Nigeria. The major recommendations in this study include- the consideration of people-based interests in the conduct of Nigeria's foreign policy, and the shifting of presidential power to the oil-producing states, which have never produced Nigeria's president.

1.0 Introduction

The Niger Delta crisis has, in very recent times, taken a much more dangerous dimension, underscoring the degeneration of the issue due to the failure of governments at all levels and other non-state actors, including the multinational companies (MNCs), to bring the crisis to an end. The emergence of militia and cult groups among the communities in the last three years points to the aggravation and deterioration, rather than resolution of the conflicts. Government's seeming complicity and protection of the MNCs, using instruments of state force to protect the foreign companies, has multiplied illegal means and instruments to fight the cause of "economic and social emancipation", as some militants claimed in February 2007 in an interview by Jeff Koniange of the American Cable News Network(CNN). This study examines the protracted Niger Delta crisis, exacerbated by oil, ecological and socio-ethnic factors, and its implication for Nigeria's external relations. It does this by revisiting the many unresolved issues, including the Ogoni crisis, which explain the escalation of the crisis.

While social and relative deprivation is considered primary and environmental issues are looked at as the secondary causes of the problem in some studies (in some, it is reduced to political and some ethnic or communal), the impact of the Niger Delta problem on Nigeria's relationship with the international community is the only consideration in some others; efforts to situate the environmental issues in the eventual world attention are infinitesimal and insignificant, or almost non-existent. This paper attempts to correct that by re-examining the activities of the oil companies which have created enormous ecological problems in the region, in addition to the abjection of the people, thereby leading to internal strife.

This study therefore considers the role of environmental issues in the Niger Delta crisis. The link between the environmental issues and conflict in the Niger Delta is established, while the role of government in the crisis, its protection of the Multinational Oil Companies at the expense of its own people, and elimination of environmental activists including Ken Saro-Wiwa in mid 1990s, are discussed. However, the emergence of vicious militant groups, such as the Niger Delta Peoples Volunteer Force (NDPVF), Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), and their many incursions on the economic and resource base of the region which constitute a setback to Nigeria's economic development, coupled with the huge environmental crisis in the region,

represent the economic cost of the phenomenon and also explain the international dimension of the crisis.

2.0 Backgrounds to the Niger Delta Crisis

The Niger Delta region covers an estimated area of 20,000 km² within wetlands of 70,000 km² formed primarily by sediment deposition. It is located on the south-south geographical region of Nigeria and has a population of about 20 million people made up of many ethnic nationalities. The region comprise nine states which include; Abia, Akwa-Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo, Imo, Ondo, and Rivers. However, the core Niger Delta region include the three states of Bayelsa, Delta, and Rivers. The vegetation of the Nigerian coastal area is characterized by mangrove forests, brackish swamp forests and rain forests. The country's extensive mangrove ecosystem, a great proportion of which lies within the Niger Delta and found mainly in the Rivers, Delta, Cross River, Akwa Ibom, Lagos and Ondo states, is estimated to cover between 500,000 and 885,000 hectares. Freshwaters start at the northern limit of the mangrove ecosystems and extend to the Sahelian region (Kuruk, 2004). The Delta environment is made up of four major ecological zones which include: mangrove swamp forests, fresh water swamps, coaster barrier islands, and lowland rainforests. Thus, the well-endowed ecosystem of the Delta is simply incredible as it naturally, can sustain more species of fresh water fish, economic trees, and a wide variety of crops than any other ecosystem in West Africa.

In 1956, Shell British Petroleum (now Royal Dutch Shell) discovered crude oil at Oloibiri, a village in the Niger Delta, and commercial production began in 1958. Today, there are 606 oil fields in the Niger Delta, of which 360 are on-shore and 246 off-shore (Nigeria Country Analysis Brief, 2005). Nigeria is now the largest oil producer in Africa and the sixth largest in the world, averaging 2.7 million barrels per day (bbl/d) in 2006. Nigeria's economy is heavily dependent on earnings from the oil sector, which provides 20% of GDP, 95% of foreign exchange earnings, and about 65% of budgetary revenues (CIA World Fact Book, 2005) cited in (Nwilo and Badejo, 2006).

The Niger Delta Crisis is unarguably related to environmental problems in the area which surprisingly is closely linked to the activities of its oil industry. It is ironic that while the region holds some of the world's richest and finest deposits of crude oil, the people living in the area are poorer than ever. While oil companies including Shell, ExxonMobil and

TotalFinaElf, have profited from over forty five years of oil exploration in the region, local communities in the oil rich but conflict-ridden areas live with the daily pollution caused by non-stop gas flaring – where the gas associated with oil extraction is burnt off into the atmosphere. More gas is flared in Nigeria than anywhere else in the world – in Western Europe 99 per cent of associated gas is used or re-injected into the ground. But in Nigeria, despite regulations introduced more than 20 years ago to outlaw the practice, most associated gas is flared, causing local pollution and contributing to climate change.

Besides, the problem of oil spills, deliberate destruction of the mangrove to pave way for pipelines, disappearance of the aqua-life again due to oil spills and frequent movements of heavy ships, etc are common occurrences in the Niger Delta. With the rate of degradation, the region could suffer a loss of some very significant percentage of its inhabitable terrain in the foreseeable future if nothing urgent is done to salvage the ugly situation. In fact, the experiences of the people of this region over the years can accurately be described as the tragedy of exploitation.

Niger Delta communities had expressed discontent and ventilated their grievances through political and constitutional means against the marginalization and environmental abuses of their soils and waters from independence (The News, 2006). In more recent times, particularly from the 1990s, they had become more restive and violent in their protests against the activities of foreign oil companies, notably Royal-Dutch Shell (Shell Petroleum Development Company). Their grievances have focused on the deteriorating conditions of life brought about by air and water pollution, land degradation and the socioeconomic impacts of oil exploration on the local communities. The 1990s witnessed the outburst of violence against transnational oil corporations and seeming government's conspiracy with them, and the use of one ethnic group against another or infiltration by TNCs/government of ethnic groups with black-sheep, which bred grave intra and inter ethnic hostilities (Agbese, 2002).

Government's complicity in the crisis found manifestation in the deployment of heavily armed military personnel to guard oil facilities, operations and expatriates and the MNCs (Ikpat, 2001). In addition, oil companies have had to recruit jobless local youths to watch over oil interests, thus setting local people against themselves. The official reason given however was that the presence of heavy security would act as deterrence to aggressive

communities from destroying oil installations. The rationale behind this was controversial as it also showed insensitivity to the fundamental causation of persistent conflict, namely abjection and denials.

3.0 Impact of Oil Industry on the Environment in the Niger Delta

Some of the major environmental concerns of the negative exploratory activities of oil companies in the Niger Delta include **oil spillage** and **gas flaring** in the area. The net effects of these shortcomings have expectedly made life extremely difficult in the region. Nwilo and Badejo, (2006) in support of the foregoing pointed out that “since the discovery of oil in Nigeria in the 1950s, the country has been suffering the negative environmental consequences of oil development. The growth of the country's oil industry, combined with a population explosion and a lack of enforcement of environmental regulations has led to substantial damage to Nigeria's environment, especially in the Niger Delta region.” Akpofure et al, (2000) cited in Nwilo and Badejo, (2006), clarifies that “when there is an oil spill on water, spreading immediately takes place. The gaseous and liquid components evaporate. Some get dissolved in water and even oxidize, and yet some undergo bacterial changes and eventually sink to the bottom by gravitational action. The soil is then contaminated with a gross effect upon the terrestrial life. As the evaporation of the volatile lower molecular weight components affects aerial life, so the dissolution of the less volatile components with the resulting emulsified water, affects aquatic life.”

Other studies have also shown that oil on water surface also interferes with gaseous interchange at the sea surface and dissolved oxygen levels will thereby be lowered. This will no doubt reduce the life span of marine animals. Micro-organisms also degrade petroleum hydrocarbons after spillage (Atlas, 1981; Leahy and Colwell, 1990; Atlas and Bartha, 1992). Oil spill incidents have occurred in various parts and at different times along the country's coast. Some major spills in the coastal zone are the GOCON's Escravos spill in 1978 of about 300,000 barrels, SPDC's Forcados Terminal tank failure in 1978 of about 580,000 barrels and Texaco Funiwa-5 blow out in 1980 of about 400,000 barrels. Other oil spill incidents are those of the Abudu pipe line in 1982 of about 18,818 barrels, The Jesse Fire Incident which claimed about a thousand lives and the Idoho Oil Spill of January 1998, of about 40,000 barrels. The most publicized of all oil spills in Nigeria occurred on January 17, 1980 when a total of 37.0 million litres of

crude oil got spilled into the environment. This spill occurred as a result of a blow out at Funiwa 5 offshore station. Nigeria's largest spill was an offshore well-blow out in January 1980 when an estimated 200,000 barrels of oil (8.4million US gallons) spilled into the Atlantic Ocean from an oil industry facility and that damaged 340 hectares of mangrove (Nwilo and Badejo, 2005). Table 1.0 below provides a summary of oil spill incidences in Nigeria between the period 1976 and 1998. These figures are official figures which in most cases may not adequately report all cases of oil spillage.

Table 1.0: Oil Spill Data for Nigeria

S/NO	Year	Number of Spill Incidents	Quantity spilled (barrels)
1	1976	128	26,157.00
2	1977	104	32,879.25
3	1978	154	489,294.75
4	1979	157	694,117.13
5	1980	241	600,511.02
6	1981	238	42,722.50
7	1982	257	42,841.00
8	1983	173	48,351.30
9	1984	151	40,209.00
10	1985	187	11,876.60
11	1986	155	12,905.00
12	1987	129	31,866.00
13	1988	208	9,172.00
14	1989	195	7,628.161
15	1990	160	14,940.816
16	1991	201	106,827.98
17	1992	367	51,131.91
18	1993	428	9,752.22
19	1994	515	30,282.67
20	1995	417	63,677.17
21	1996	430	46,353.12
22	1997	339	59,272.30
23	1998	390	98345.00
	Total	5724	2,571,113.90

Source: The Department of Petroleum Resources, cited in Nwilo and Badejo (2001)

It is important to note here that spilled oil is most of the time lost to the environment. For example, Nwilo and Badejo, (2006) pointed out that “Available records for the period of 1976 to 1996 indicate that approximately 6%, 25%, and 69% respectively, of total oil spilled in the Niger Delta area, were in land, swamp and offshore environments. Also, between 1997 and 2001, Nigeria recorded a total number of 2,097 oil spill incidents.” The other major negative consequence of oil exploration and exploitation is the incidents of gas flaring. This is a practice whereby the associated gas accompanying the production of crude oil is burnt off so as to maximize the production of crude oil. However, the prevailing consensus worldwide regarding gas flaring is that it is wasteful economically and environmentally. The burning of gas by flaring leads to the emission of carbon dioxide, the main greenhouse gas.

Venting of the gas without burning, a practice for which flaring seems often to be treated as a synonym, releases methane, the second main greenhouse gas. It is therefore very disturbing to note that associated gas flaring continues unabated in Nigeria. For instance, a report by Friends of the Earth (2005) shows that, “More gas is flared in Nigeria than anywhere else in the world. Estimates are notoriously unreliable, but roughly 2.5 billion cubic feet of gas associated with crude oil is wasted in this way everyday. This is equal to 40% of all Africa's natural gas consumption in 2001. The same report further disclosed that “The flaring of associated gas (AG) in the Niger Delta is a human rights, environmental and economic monstrosity. Nowhere else in the world have communities been subjected to it on such a scale. It is estimated to cost Nigeria US \$2.5 billion annually, whilst the roaring, toxic flares affect the health and livelihoods of Delta inhabitants.”

In terms of how much is flared, the Friends of the Earth (2005) report estimated that “For the first 20 years or so of the industry, almost all the AG was flared: 2.1 billion cubic feet per day (bcf/d) or 92% in 1981 for example. This percentage barely declined during the 1980s, standing at about 88% in 1989. It seems to have reached about 2.6 bcf/d in the late 1990s, including venting, though by then this was about 75% of all gas production. Whilst OPEC has suggested that flaring has since dropped below 2 bcf/d, and whilst both OPEC and the Nigerian Department of Petroleum Resources have suggested that gas flared as a percentage of all gas production has dropped below 50%, this is not universally accepted.” Whatever is the situation, the figures are still alarming particularly

when a comparative analysis of the situation is undertaken. The table below provides a summary of estimated volume of flared gas in some selected countries.

Table 2.0: Best Estimate of Gas-Flaring Trends in Selected Countries (2000)

Country	Flared Gas	Share of World total (%)	Ratio of Gas Flared to Total Produced	
			1990	2000
Algeria	6.8	6	79	101
Angola	4.3	4	n/a**	118
China	3.2	3	n/a**	74
Egypt	0.9	1	37	23
Indonesia	4.5	4	66	66
Iran	10.5	10	70	56
Nigeria	17.2	16	250	166
Mexico	5.6	5	n/a	33
North sea*	2.7	3	18	9
Russia	11.5	11	n/a	77
Venezuela	4.5	4	30	27
United states	2.8	3	10	22
Other countries	33.0	30	-	-
World	107.5	100	-	-

Source: Cedigaz, USEIA, OPEC, IEA, World Bank, HIS Energy Group

***North Sea**-Denmark, Norway and the United Kingdom.

Germany and Netherlands do not flare gas, (Cedigaz, 2000)

****n/a**- Not available

A careful consideration of the above table shows that Nigeria comes out as the world's number one flarer and Venter on both absolute and proportionate bases whether based on OPEC figures for Nigeria for 2001 which is 16.8 bcm/y, or on Cedigaz data, in which case, Nigeria accounted for 19.79% of the global amount estimated to be a total world flaring volume of 84.87 bcm, in 2001. This amount surprisingly is more than those of the second and third countries combined, and four times higher than the nearest African country, Algeria, which is recorded as having flared and vented 4 bcm. European flaring is put at 2.54 bcm, or 0.76% of gross production; US flaring at 2.97 bcm, or 0.43% of gross production, while world total gross production in 2001 was 3150.13 bcm, with 84.87 bcm or 2.69% flared and vented.

Gas flaring contributes significantly to climate change. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, IPCC (2001) in its report stated that “the global average surface temperature increased by about 0.6°C over the 20th century, that it was 66-90% confident that most of the observed warming over the second half of the century was due to the increase in greenhouse gas concentrations, and projected that the temperature would increase from 1990-2100 by 1.4 to 5.8°C. It also stated that global mean sea level is

projected to rise by 0.09 to 0.88 metres between 1990 and 2100, due primarily to thermal expansion and loss of mass from glaciers and ice caps.” This has serious implication for northern Nigeria where the problem of desertification has become very disturbing. According to UNEP (1997), “Desertification in Africa has already reduced by 25% the potential vegetative productivity of more than 7 million km², or one-quarter of the continent's land area. It will lead to more people being unable to live in the countryside and to an increase pressure on urban areas.” Flaring in Nigeria is widely believed to have contributed more emissions of greenhouse gases than all other sources in sub-Saharan Africa combined. The World Bank (2002) sums up the scale of Nigerian flaring as follows; "The most striking example of environmental neglect has been in the oil sector, where natural gas flaring has contributed more emissions of greenhouse gases than all other sources in sub-Saharan Africa combined.”

Within the Niger Delta, there is a common but firm belief that gas flaring is damaging the health of the local people. This stems from the fact that flaring of AG from oil production facilities is like setting a match to a large container of petrol. The enormous heat they emit simply would not permit any life (plant and animal) around them to survive. Exposure to these pollutants impact human health adversely. According to the United States Environmental Protection Agency (U.S. EPA): "Many scientific studies have linked breathing particulate matter to a series of significant health problems, including: aggravated asthma, increases in respiratory symptoms like coughing and difficult or painful breathing, chronic bronchitis, decreased lung function, and premature death." Also, according to the U.S. EPA: "It has been clearly established and accepted that exposure to benzene and its metabolites causes acute nonlymphocytic leukemia and a variety of other blood-related disorders in humans." (Cited in; Friends of the Earth, 2005). Gas Flaring is thus considered to be a likely cause of premature deaths and cases of leukemia in the Niger Delta.

One other well established health damaging consequence of gas flaring includes high incidences of acid rain which the Delta residents have long complained about particularly how their corrugated roofs have been corroded by the composition of the rain that falls as a result of flaring. The primary causes of acid rain are emissions of sulphur dioxide (SO₂) and nitrogen oxides (NO_x), which combine with atmospheric moisture to form sulfuric acid and nitric acid, respectively. Acid rain acidifies lakes and streams and damages

vegetation. In addition, acid rain accelerates the decay of building materials and paints. Prior to falling to the earth, SO₂ and NO_x gases and their particulate matter derivatives, sulfates and nitrates, contribute to visibility degradation and harm public health. In the Delta, an oily hue is often observed on collected rain water, (Friends of the Earth, 2005)

The report further added that the observation that gas flaring in the Niger Delta is causing acid rain is also backed by the U.S government's Energy Information Administration, which states: "The continued process of gas flaring has not only meant that a potential energy source - and source of revenue - has gone up in smoke, but it is also a major contributor to air pollution and acid rain."

4.0 Niger Delta Conflicts, Global Response and Nigeria's External Relations

By 1970, about 300,000 barrels of crude oil had been spilled in the Niger Delta area (Earth Action, 1994). According to Shell, the spillage was an act of sabotage by the Biafran army as they were losing to in the civil war (Shell, 1995). Shell figures also show that from 1985 to early 1993, 5,352 barrels of oil were spilled in 87 incidents in Ogoniland after their staff had been withdrawn. The tendency had been for state officials and oil companies to blame the problems on sabotage by local communities. For instance, Shell claimed that out of 87 instances of oil spillage in Ogoniland between 1985 and 1993, 60 (about 70%) were sabotage acts. The figure tallied with government claims that out of 11 incidents in Ogoniland in 1990, that eight or 73% were due to sabotage (cited in Okerenta, 2006).

Damages to the environment in Ogoniland went along with deprivation. Consequently, local leaders protested these injustices. The regime of the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) reduced public spending, subsidies to goods such as petrol, which led to the rise of pump price of petroleum products from N 0.75/litre in 1986 to N 11/litre in 1996. These severely affected standards of living and hardship everywhere, which were more pronounced in the oil-producing areas.. Evidence of conflicts began to show before 1980, but the situation worsened in the second half of the 1980s and 1990s.

However, because oil exploration by multi-national oil corporations had increased with the expanding space of squalor the Niger Delta people began to hold oil companies and the government responsible for their deprivation. They lamented, for instance the failure

of the two institutions to construct new or at least rehabilitate existing roads, schools, hospitals, and provide opportunities for employment, support for farming, and indeed do everything to improve their livelihood. Oil companies and government insisted that these claims were exaggerated as they were sometimes outrageous and indecorously demanded (Rowell and Kretzmann, 1999). In response, Shell, government and seven other neighboring oil-producing communities like Asa-Ndoki, dismissed these claims (Shell, 1995); (Daily Champion, 1994); (The News, 1995). However, it was relative deprivation, the gap between expectation and actualization, like the one in the foregoing claims that explain why men rebel (Gurr, 1974), and more importantly, that explicates the Niger Delta conflicts.

Osaghae (1995) argues that the approach of minorities in their demand for better living hitherto were passive, namely by delegation and petitions to the state and oil firms. The failure of these means to engender meaningful changes may explain why the Ogonis decided on a different line of action in the early 1990s. Precisely in 1990, a non political organization comprising Ogoni elite and traditional rulers, known as *KAGOTE* whose origin dates back to the 1970s, drew up and presented to the state, the Ogoni Bill of Rights. Among other things earlier highlighted, they demanded political autonomy within Nigeria and a fair access to and use of oil revenue derived from Ogoniland to develop their homeland and language, as well as protection from Shell. As an instrument to pursue the actualization of the demands in the Bill of Rights, the Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP) was set up in 1990.

MOSOP followed the Bill of Rights up with intense campaigns at both the national and international levels with a view to publicizing the Ogoni predicament. In that effort, the Bill was presented to the United Nations Sub-Committee on Human Rights on the Prevention from Discrimination and Protection of Minorities, the African Human Rights and several other non-state actors such as the General Assembly of the Unrepresented Nations and Peoples' Organization at the Hague in 1993 (Okonta, 2000). Government and Shell initially responded to the Bill with indifference. However, as MOSOP began to secure public and international support, the state reacted by banning ethnic organizations and others such as MOSOP and the Ethnic Minority Rights Organization of Africa (EMIROAF), both led by Saro-Wiwa. These two organizations and the National Youth

Council of Ogoni People were the three main organizations, which spearheaded the Ogoni insurrection.

Attaching it to the Bill of Rights, MOSOP wrote to Shell, Chevron and the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) in December 1992, asking for a favourable disposition to Ogoni demands or evacuation from the land. Other demands included the payment of \$6 billion in accumulated rents and royalties for oil exploited in Ogoni fields from 1958; reparation of \$4 billion for soil, water, and air pollution; cessation of gas flaring; and commencement of negotiation with Ogoni people. According to Osaghae(1995) the significance of the letter to the companies was that it showed the people's loss of confidence in the state. According to them, it was time for 'the Ogoni to fight for their own salvation because there is no government to deliver us.'"(ibid).

It is pertinent to note that in contemporary global politics, human rights and the environment are no longer issues of domestic concern. Because such issues may explode the international system, world leaders and states intervene positively and swiftly to put it asunder. This explains the limits of sovereignty in international organizations, particularly when states are contracting parties to some conventions on human and environmental issues. The defence by the then Nigerian Minister of External Affairs (Tom Ikimi) that the world had no business in the happenings in Nigeria and the government handling of the Ogoni crisis was, as such, a ruse. Among other diplomatic blunders, Tom Ikimi, accused the United States of arrogating to itself the role of global policeman of democracy and lampooned the South African President, Nelson Mandela, for advocating sanctions against Nigeria in the aftermath of the hanging of Saro-Wiwa and eight others. In one of his characteristic unguarded remarks, Ikimi retorted,

We in Nigeria have held President Nelson Mandela in high esteem. Nevertheless, our experience as a people and a nation in world affairs, tells us that the successful struggle for liberation does not automatically endow a newcomer to the international arena with all the miances to perform creditably. And also, whoever gave the South African the song sheet to read has not done him honour (Fawole, 2004).

This was coming on the heels of Abacha's uncomplimentary remark on Mandela when he said: "I don't blame Mandela because, having spent 27 years in detention, he has lost touch with the socio-political trend in the world"(*The News*, 1995). Instead of tactful diplomatic fence-mending with Nigeria's traditional friends and allies in the

Commonwealth, an unguided propaganda was mounted to launder the regime's soiled image and condemn perceived and imagined enemies. This did not do much good as the regime was unable to regain the confidence and support of the international community (Fawole, 2004). The two-year suspension by the Commonwealth was not reversed in spite of all entreaties by the junta, leading a frustrated Ikimi to decry the Commonwealth as "not a serious Organization. They have done nothing for Nigeria. They have only come out with declarations or statements which they cannot carry out." (Fawole, 2004).

As earlier noted, it was on the account of Nigeria's violation of the Harare Declaration on Human Rights in 1991, to which Nigeria was a contracting party that compelled the Commonwealth to suspend Nigeria in 1995. The 1991 Harare Commonwealth Declarations also included the resolve of member-states of the organization to promote democracy and good governance. Also, as a member of the UN, Nigeria was aware of existing treaties and conventions on fundamental human rights and freedoms to which it was bound by being a signatory. These include the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (December 10, 1948) which is a general but yet comprehensive document dealing with Human Rights and whose provisions were breached in the Ogoni case. Articles 5 and 9 specifically provide for safeguards against subjecting human beings "to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment" and against "arbitrary arrest, detention or exile" (UNDR, 1948).

Perhaps the Ogoni issue might not have elicited much passion and concern if not for the fact that the problem of environmental pollution and degradation had become a global concern. The world had come to terms with the fact that the environment was the common heritage of mankind and that environmental degradation in any country could not be overlooked because it carried trans-bounder harm across nations. The focus on the environment thus brought the global searchlight on the activities of multinational oil corporations, whose relentless drive for oil exploration and the attendant unscrupulous drive for profit often culminated in environment abuse and unconcern for their host communities, especially in the developing countries. In the Niger Delta, the ruthless activities of the Royal Dutch Shell oil company had to come into sharp focus because it was the main culprit in Ogoniland (Okerenta, 2006).

Rather than take the necessary measures to assuage the wounded feelings of the Ogoni people, the Abacha regime embarked on a ruthless military pacification by establishing and deploying the notorious Rivers State Internal Security Task Force in Ogoniland. The regime took steps that further made it lose credibility in the international system. For instance, it set up in November 1995 a 50-man National Committee of Traditional Rulers and Leaders of Thought, to advise it on sensitive diplomatic problem. Made up of traditional rulers, old politicians from the First and Second Republics and other apologists of the regime, it was headed by General Jeremiah Useni, Abacha's personal friend. The *ad hoc* body did more damage than good because its real purpose was to shore up the junta's sagging legitimacy, organizing huge rallies in all the state capitals and Abuja where rented crowds on television, were impelled to openly condemn the Commonwealth and other international organizations.

The recourse to state propaganda as well as violence to crush internal rebellion was considered uncivilized by the international community, and had, in the past, even been instrumental in the interventions in Cambodia, Panama, Uganda, South Africa during apartheid and more recently Iraq. The global community condemned the regime and called for sanctions against it. The timing of the execution of the Ogoni Nine which coincided with the Commonwealth Summit in Auckland, New Zealand in 1995, was embarrassing to a global community that had pleaded for clemency so much and had been assured even by Ikimi at the Summit that the Abacha regime was redressing the issue. Nelson Mandela had even staked his personal integrity to persuade the Summit not to take a hard-line action against Nigeria, having been assured by General Abacha that all would end well (Fawole, 2004).

It was even more ridiculous that just when Ikimi had finished addressing the Summit and granted interview to the world press that the Nigerian government was not and had not hanged the Ogoni leaders, he was confounded when news reached him that they had been hanged. Unable to secure any concession to ease its international isolation, the regime, using Ikimi, other sycophants, including former members of the June 12 winning team, and high profile emissaries, embarked on the search for new allies in and out of Africa. In Africa, fellow dictators and states isolated in the international system like Nigeria gave their endorsement to the regime. However, with the European Union countries maintaining their sanctions and the Commonwealth unrelenting in its criticism, and with

the breaking of diplomatic relations with Canada, the international isolation became compounded (Fawole, 2004).

Further, the UN Commission on Human Rights at its 52nd session in Geneva in April 1996 condemned the regime for continued violation of human rights; the Commonwealth through its Commonwealth Ministerial Action Committee proposed the freezing of the personal assets of Nigerian rulers, imposition of a comprehensive ban on sporting activities, severance of air ties unless the regime took urgent measures towards speedy restoration of democratic rule and showed respect for human rights. The report of the Fact-Finding Mission of the UN Secretary General to Nigeria also severely indicted the regime for gross violation of Human Rights and the rule of law and recommended a quick return to democracy, among other things (Fawole, 1999).

The Abacha regime, in short, simply sacrificed Nigeria's age-long hard-earned international respect and goodwill on the altar of incompetence and inordinate ambition to crush all local and external challenges in his quest to consolidate his powers. He might have wanted to arrest a repeat of the 1994 Rwanda ethnic violence and genocide, which came after and soon occurred side by side with the Niger Delta communal skirmishes in 1993-1994 which probably explains his highhandedness in Ogoniland; but the acts earned his regime and Nigeria a place in the pantheons of infamy.

5.0 The Economics of the Niger Delta Conflicts

The cost of the Niger Delta struggle/conflicts in economic terms may never really be adequately estimated. Every party in the conflicts (the oil MNCs, the Nigerian state, the people of the Niger Delta, and of course, the international community) appears to be mostly concerned with immediate benefits to interests represented. However, the overall adverse consequence of the situation is rarely considered by any. The people who have been in the struggle over the claim to a decent living as well as a decent environment have been abused, oppressed, and suppressed by the elite using the instrument of the state. The reason for this is quite obvious; the people are of little or no economic relevance to the government. This is because the government needs not depend on them for raising any significant revenue needed to run the state. The state thus over the years has misplaced its primary responsibility of protecting lives and property to that of protecting the multinationals at the very expense of the people it is meant to govern. The

masses of the Niger Delta people have gradually become an undesirable “liability” to the government instead of an asset. The people have in turn made the region much more expensive to govern and to do business through the activities of militant groups in the area. This in any case, is completely avoidable in the first instance.

The Multinationals who seek more profits at the expense of the region have over the years opted for the cheaper but immoral and criminal alternative of flaring and venting gas and have in the process messed up the environment and wasted so much resources even in the midst of hunger in the faces of so many around them. As earlier stated, it is on record that a financial loss to Nigeria of about US \$2.5 billion annually is traceable to gas flaring. Besides, the associated loss of lives and failing health can never be sufficiently evaluated. The international community at large is also paying heavily as these MNCs contribute their unsolicited fair share of toxic emissions to the environment thereby increasing the problem of global warming and rising sea level all over. Moreover, every disruption in the supply of crude from the Niger Delta has consistently had its adverse impact on the world prices of crude oil. What this means is that everybody all over has had to pay more for petroleum products. The international community has not done enough to stem the ugly tide. For example, the World Bank has been widely criticized over its inability to require the use of AG before approving its credit guarantees for the financing of the West African Gas Pipeline Project. Yet, the bank has since November 2004, approved US\$125 million in guarantees supporting the construction of a 678 km gas pipeline to transport natural gas from Nigeria to Benin, Ghana and Togo - the West African Gas Pipeline (WAGP).

6.0 Conclusion

This study has been able to review environmental issues central in the Niger Delta crisis. It relocated the issues and subsequent conflicts within the uncommon perspective of the effective impact of domestic policies on foreign policies or external relations of a state. More importantly, the study has looked at the different costs of the emergent militant nationalism in the delta on national development and international relations of Nigeria. The study also discovered the fact that the successive regimes in Nigeria considered the oil TNCs with which they had personal businesses, paramount in Nigeria’ national interest ranking, and that probably explains the disposition of their foreign policies to protecting their business interests and securing their stakes in the Niger Delta.

The Abacha approach seemed to have reared its ugly head again in the President Obasanjo era. The continued neglect of the Delta areas despite increased exploration activities of many new foreign oil companies, a development prodded by an aggressive campaign by the Obasanjo administration for foreign investment, exacerbated the Delta crisis. Several other militia movements has emerged in reaction to the government over-protection of the exploitative oil companies, growing impoverishment, emergence of more slum settlements, and above all, increased environmental degradation. The NDPVF under Alhaji Asari Dokubo, among others in the struggle, has been abducting expatriates, holding MNCs and their home government to ransom and sometimes asking for ransom fee and have been asking the same old question namely, good living for Deltans, social responsibility on the part of the oil companies and government's attention by way of physical and economic development, meaningful allocation from the huge revenues coming from the oil-producing areas, as well as the control of activities capable of destroying the eco-system in the Delta region. It is hoped that the Yaradua-Jonathan initiative to dialogue with all stake holders and deploy resources to the Delta for social rehabilitation and structural development would be faithfully implemented and yield some dividends.

It is pertinent he oil companies need to be more perceptive of the plight of the people and be more socially responsible by contributing to their welfare, provide jobs for them, construct good roads, build decent low-cost housing for them, increase academic scholarship awards to their children, build schools and hospitals, provide water and electricity to the communities, etc. Put differently, the problem would be lessened when oil companies get more committed to their agreement with the government and the host communities of ensuring that they carry out their Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) to their host communities and avoid indulging in unethical activities.

Talking about Corporate Social Responsibility, companies and government should pay much attention to the problem of infrastructure (including: roads, bridges, schools, hospitals, drinkable water, electricity, etc) in the Niger Delta , which is long overdue for national emergency. There is the need for both the governments at the various levels and the multinational oil companies to invest massively in infrastructure in this region just as

it has been done in Lagos and Abuja. This will ensure that the environment is tidied up, made much more comfortable to live in, and the economically idle but restive youths in the area are engaged in the mean time and of course provided some profitable means of livelihood. Further, the youth can be more profitably engaged if they are encouraged to go school. This can be engendered by a policy of provision of scholarships (compulsory and free and qualitative education up to tertiary level) to the children from this area so as to empower them economically and make them much more useful to the state in the future.

Moreover, the question of who controls the natural resources located in a given region can be answered by the convocation of a national conference whose recommendations should first be subjected to a referendum. This will allow for a consensus by all stakeholders and a more enduring arrangement for the smooth operation of the oil industry which is urgently needed for the stability of the world market and the Nigerian economy. On the political frontier, there is the need to shift presidential power to the region so as to complete the cycle among all the geo-political regions in the country. This will allow for equity in the polity, give the people a sense of belonging, and douse some tension that is already mounting. This expectation has been partially satisfied now since the incumbent Vice President of the country is from the region. However, it must be emphasized here that nothing short of the position of the President of Nigeria will adequately pacify the Niger Delta people in their quest for a taste of political office in the country.

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