

Breaking Barriers to Transformation of the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria: A Human Development Paradigm

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Abstract

The paper is aimed at addressing the formidable challenges to sustainable human development in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria. The delta's human development dilemma raises the question of why abundant human and natural resources have had so little impact on poverty in the area particularly, when compared with other oil producing regions in the world. This conundrum serves as the driving force for this study. The paper revealed that the conditions of rural communities where crude oil is produced are deplorable, with severe environmental degradation and no access to safe drinking water, electricity and roads. It however recommended a new development paradigm which is people-centered, to address these concerns and proposed a nine-point development agenda for the region. The imperatives of a new development agenda rises from the fact that past development planning efforts have failed to adequately address the region's needs.

Keywords: challenges, people-centered, oil-boom, interventions, environmental, sustainable livelihood, access, development, etc.

INTRODUCTION

When the first helicopters landed in Oloibiri in 1956 near St. Michael's Church to the astonishment of local residents, few could have predicted what was to follow. A camp was quickly built for the workers; prefabricated houses, electricity, water and a new road followed. Shell-BP (as it then was) sunk 17 more wells in Oloibiri and the field yielded during its lifetime, over 20 million barrels of crude oil before oil operations came to a close, 20 years after the first discovery (Kashi and Watts, 2008).

In the decade that followed, the Nigerian oil industry grew quickly in scale and complexity. A giant field was quickly discovered at Bomu in Ogoniland, west of Port-Harcourt in 1958 and shell-BP which had acquired 46 oil mining leases covering 15,000 square miles, rapidly expanded its operations across the oil basin of the Niger Delta. Ten years of activity, saw the opening of the Bonny tanker terminal in April, 1961; the extension of the pipe-line system including the completion of the Trans-Niger pipeline in 1965, connection of fields in the Western Delta near Ughelli to the Bonny export terminal and the coming-on-stream of "twelve giant" oil fields including the first offshore discovery at Okan near Escravos in 1964. By 1967, 300 miles of pipe lines had been constructed and one and half million feet of wells sunk; output had ballooned to 275,000 barrels per-day (b/d). By the first oil boom in 1973, Nigeria oil crude production was comparable to the present day (2.4 million b/d), accounting for more than 3.5 percent of the world output. Despite the slide into a bloody civil war-the Biafra war 1967-1970-fought on and around the oil fields, the Niger Delta has come of age (Kashi and Walts, 2008).

According to the UNDP (2006), the Niger Delta produces the oil wealth that accounts for the bulk of Nigeria's foreign earnings. Paradoxically, however, these vast revenues from an international industry have barely touched the Niger Delta's pervasive poverty. This has spurred formidable challenges to sustainable human development in the region, particularly as conflicts over resources tighten their often vicious grip. Ordinarily, the Niger Delta should be a gigantic economic reservoir of national and international importance. Its rich endowments of oil and gas resources feed methodically into the international system, in exchange for massive revenues that carry the promise of rapid socio-economic transformation within the delta itself. But in reality, the Niger Delta is a region suffering from administrative neglect, crumbling social infrastructure and services, high unemployment, social deprivation, abject poverty, filth and squalor and endemic conflict.

As Jonathan (2004) rightly noted, enormous possibilities for industrial development abound in terms of the abundance of raw materials in the region but these remain unrealized. Beyond the vast oil and gas deposits, the

delta is blessed with good agricultural land, extensive forests, excellent fisheries and a large labour force. But juxtaposed against the potential for economic growth and sustainable development, are deteriorating economic and social conditions that have been largely ignored by contemporary policies and actions. With local inhabitants subjected to abject poverty and suffering in the midst of plenty, some view the oil and gas endowments as a curse and a double-edged sword.

UNDP (2006) asserted that life expectancy is falling in an age of block buster oil prices. Energy availability is poor in a region that provides one fifth of the energy needs of the United States of America. The delta needs to import fuel despite producing over two million barrels of crude oil per day. There is also an almost total lack of roads in the region whose wealth is funding gigantic infrastructural development in other parts of Nigeria and expensive peace keeping activities in other parts of Africa.

Development experts and policy makers have engaged in many debates about the delta's human development dilemma, questioning why abundant human and natural resources have had little impact on poverty in the region. Why do conflict and youth restiveness simmer despite years of development interventions? What should be done to calm the situation in the region? How can environmental sustainability and poverty reduction be achieved, given continued extraction of oil and gas resources? What path leads towards sustainable human development in the region?

These questions, among others, constitute the driving force for this paper. It analyses the various dimensions of the human development challenges in the region with emphasis on women and youth and proposes a people-centered development agenda grounded in the region's natural and human capital. The imperatives for a new development agenda rises from the fact that past development planning efforts have failed to adequately address the region's needs. The result has been disillusionment and frustration among the people about their increasing deprivation. In addition, the paper analyses the various dimensions of the dismal human development situation in the Niger Delta with a view to fostering a people-centered development agenda that can unleash the region's enormous natural and human capacities.

THE REGION AND PAST INTERVENTIONS

In political terms, the Niger Delta consists of nine of the 36 states within the Nigerian Federation and 185 Local Government Councils (LGAs), occupying a surface area of about 112, 110sq.km-12 percent of Nigeria's territory. In 2007, the population of this region was estimated to be 28 million, the overwhelming proportion of which is rural and poor. The core states of the Niger Delta are Bayelsa, Rivers, Delta and Akwa Ibom and cover 45,000sq.km, accounting for half of the regional population and for more than three-quarters of onshore oil production (Kashi and Watts, 2006). Settlement patterns across the delta have been shaped by the terrain, hydrology and flooding patterns within the massive deltaic basin. Cities like Warri, Port-Harcourt, Sapele and Ughelli have developed on islands of drier terrain at the heads of navigable estuaries but in general, the population is predominantly rural. According to the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC), the population continues to grow very rapidly-3.1 percent per year-and is projected to be over 45 million by 2020. As Kashi and Watts (2006) rightly observed, sustained population growth is partly responsible for driving one of the highest rates of rural-urban migration in the world, a huge and relentless movement of humanity to the vast slum worlds of Port-Harcourt and Warri-modern oil cities whose infrastructures resemble eighteenth-century Naples.

Kashi and Watts (2008) also noted that there are at least 40 different ethnic groups occupying the Nigeria Delta and speaking perhaps 250 languages and dialects. The riverine Ijaw are the most numerous-by some estimation, 14 million strong-but the general picture is one of extra ordinary ethnic diversity, a mosaic of heterogeneous and often fractious communities held together by a robust sense of being "Delta people". To say that the delta is composed of ethnic communities with robust local cultural identities-Ijaw, Ogoni, Ikwerre, Itsekiri, Urhobo, Andoni, Efik, Ibibio, Ukwani, Ika and so on-begs the very important question of what ethnicity means, its shifting political significance and why the languages of the 1950s- "ethnic minorities"- has now been replaced by a new lexicon: "ethnic nationalities" and "oil minorities".

The Niger Delta remains of course a great paradox: why an oil-rich region and at the same time, a space of such unrelenting misery? For the vast majority, oil has brought only misery, violence and a dying ecosystem. Development planning in Nigeria, in the modern sense, dates back to the formative 10 year national development plan for 1946-1955 prepared by the colonial administration. After political independence in 1960, successive post-colonial governments initially prepared mostly, medium-term development plans, namely 1962-1968, 1970-1974, 1975-1980 and 1981-1985. A series of two-year rolling plans followed between 1990 and 1998. UNDP (2006) asserted however, that these efforts were often associated with the income-centered development

paradigm. Short term and based on official convictions and lacked essential civil society and grass-roots inputs or participation. They also failed to be sufficiently far-reaching, longitudinal or symmetrical enough in scope and coverage to pursue the inclusive goals of human development. In most cases, traditional planning efforts amounted to ends in themselves. They ended up either not being implemented or at best, largely unimplemented.

Since the colonial era, some policies and programmes within national development plans have been formulated to address the peculiarities of the region; minority status, agitations and perceived marginalization of the people of the delta. But the recurring feeling in the region is that, it is often pushed aside within the Nigerian Federation. This is particularly true for minority ethnic groups. The first major attempt to address these grievances was in 1957, when the colonial administration set up the Willink's Commission of Inquiry to recommend the best strategies for the development of the region which has the most difficult terrain in the country. According to the Daily Times (2008), the Willink's Commission recommended that owing to the fragile ecology and peculiar development challenges facing the Niger Delta region, special focus and considerations should be given to facilitate the development of the areas. Perhaps more importantly, the commission concluded that "a feeling of neglect and a lack of understanding was widespread ... a case has been made out for special treatment of the area. This is a matter that requires special effort because the region is poor, back-ward and neglected". That conclusion is as true in the Niger Delta today as it was in 1957 (UNDP, 2006).

Be that as it may, the immediate post-independence government eventually responded to the Willink's Report by setting up the Niger Delta Development Board (NDDDB) in 1960. The Federal Government established the Niger Delta Development Board to manage the developmental needs and challenges of the region. The achievements of the board were marginal. Following mounting agitation for a renewed focus on the development of the region, the President Shehu Shagari Administration set up a Presidential Task Force Account (popularly known as the 15 percent committee) in 1980 and 15 percent of the Federation Account was isolated to the Commission to tackle the developmental problems of the region. The committee like the boards was ineffective. It was eventually emasculated and collapsed under the crosscurrent of military and partisan politics (Daily Times, 2008).

Subsequent bodies included the Niger Delta Basin Development Authority (NDBDA) set up in 1976 and the Oil Mineral Producing Areas Development Commission (OMPADEC) in 1992. More than its predecessors, OMPADEC appeared better equipped to make some impact on the development of the region. But was to suffer from a number of problems including lack of a master plan, that would define its development objectives and strategies, inadequate funding and unfavourable political interference and so on (Daily Times, 2008:182). In the case of NDBDA, organizational problems bedeviled it from inception. None of the board members appointed by the Federal Government to run the Authority came from the Niger Delta. During the civilian administration of Shehu Shagari, 11 River Basin Development Authorities were created; several of them, now have jurisdiction in the delta including the Niger River Basin Development Authority, Anambra-Imo River Basin Development Authority, Benin-Owena River Basin Development Authority and Cross River Basin Development Authority. These authorities also had very little impacts; for one thing, their board members often comprised politicians who regarded their tenures as opportunities to reap the 'dividends of democracy' through corruption.

The long years of neglect and deprivation coupled with the shortcomings of the oil companies as well as the failures of previous development interventions had created by the late 1990, a volatile atmosphere characterized by protests, agitations and communal conflicts. By 1990, the Niger Delta region had become a volatile zone, where youths disrupted oil production activities and communities frequently engaged with little provocation in destructive inter and intra community strife as well as the emergences of ethnic militias.

When President Obasanjo came to power in 1999, he constituted a new body, the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) to take over from OMPADEC. At the inauguration of its pioneer board, in December 2000, the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria noted that the NDDC has the potentials to offer a lasting solution to the socio-economic difficulties of the Niger Delta, which successive governments have grappled with even before independence. To achieve its mandate, the NDDC board identified areas of focus including;

- Development of social and physical infrastructures.
- Technology
- Economic/environmental remediation and stability.
- Human development.
- Pursuit of a peaceful environment that allows tourism to thrive and supports a buoyant culture.

As a development agency, the NDDC quickly identified the need for a master plan as part of its overall strategy which has been completed and put into use. The NDDC like previous boards and commissions does not seem to have made any positive impression on the peoples of the Niger Delta resulting in the creation of the present Federal Ministry of Niger Delta Development, headed by a Minister, under the supervision of the President. It is probably premature to assess the achievements of this Federal Ministry under President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan.

INFRASTRUCTURE AND SOCIAL SERVICES IN THE NIGER DELTA

The Niger Delta Region has been attractive to major international oil companies including Shell, Chevron, Mobil, Elf, Agip and Texaco among others that have been involved in joint ventures with the Federal Government in connection with oil exploration, exploitation and production in the area. Links between their operations and human deprivation in the region, has raised expectations that the oil companies should contribute to the physical and human development in affected communities. Other expectations include the monitoring and promotion of respect for human rights, compliance with environmental standards for exploration and exploitation and where necessary, restitution for damages. Rather the oil companies, particularly shell petroleum, have operated for over 30 years without appreciable control or environmental regulation to guide their activities.

In general, the available social development indicators in the Niger Delta region point to the dearth of infrastructure and social services, from water to telecommunications. The historical neglect of the region's development poses a steep barrier to attaining socio-economic transformation and poverty alleviation in the area (UNDP, 2006). Data from the Federal Office of Statistics, now the National Bureau of Statistics, revealed that water in the majority of the Niger Delta States, come from unsafe supply facilities including; rivers, lakes or ponds, unprotected wells and bore holes. The Bureau classifies available sources of portable water for household consumption as; pipe borne, untreated pipe borehole, protected well, river/lake/pond, vendor trucks and other categories. In five of the nine states in the region; Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Ondo and Imo-water problems are very acute and result in supply of unsafe water in more than 50 percent of the cases (chart 1, appendix).

An NDES Report (2000), covering the states of the Niger Delta region, except Cross River State, also found that most settlements depend on untreated surface water and wells, which lead to health problems from waterborne diseases. Poor access to adequate drinking water has had serious implications for the general health, environment, economic activity and sustainable livelihoods in the Niger Delta region. The lack of portable water in the rural areas, as well as severe shortages of pipe-borne water in urban centers, necessitates new policies that favour community involvement and participation in devising and managing water supply systems in a sustainable fashion.

Roads in the region are mostly bad and impassable during the rainy season. Efforts to repair the roads have worsened them and left the local people with more hardship. Although urban road transportation development has recently been accorded some priority attention, less regard has been shown for rural transportation, especially water transport, which majority of the rural populace depends on (chart 2, appendix).

The dearth of telecommunication infrastructure in the Niger Delta region has stifled the advancement of information technology and development as well as technical empowerment of the populace. Most rural communities are largely unconnected and completely unable to take advantage of modern trends in telecommunications and technology as tools for accelerated rural development (Akpomovie, 2010). Available data according to UNDP (2006) showed that the number of telephone lines in the region, work out at about 38 per 1,000 people. Growth in the number of land lines has stalled in the last few years due to the introduction of the Global System of Mobile Communication (GSM). Housing, Power and Fuel, waste management and education sectors in the region have not fared better thus revealing the immense challenges to development and provision of social amenities for sustainable livelihood in the area (chart 3 and 4, appendix). This section of the paper has clearly shown that an income centered development paradigm would be grossly inadequate in dealing with the varied and complex development challenges facing the peoples of the Niger Delta.

The peoples of the Niger Delta have seen one government sponsored development agency after another, without any significant changes in their lives or in the quality of their delicate physical environment. There is clearly the need for a new development approach that makes people the centre of all development goals and actions in the area. A people centered or participatory approach to development, planning and management involves peoples' active participation in decision-making on issues that pertain to their livelihoods and interest. This helps people to realize their potentials and play active role in the social and economic transformation of their communities. A people-centered development paradigm would help not only to achieve the goals of physical and socio-economic

development but also to empower the local people who are undoubtedly the most important factor in the development process in the Niger Delta.

RATIONALE FOR A HUMAN DEVELOPMENT PARADIGM FOR THE NIGER DELTA

In recent years according to UNDP (2006), development programming has been focused on the overriding issues of equity and equality in the distribution of the gains from development efforts. A lot of concern has also been expressed about the predicament of the rural poor and the imperatives of several base line requirements for human development. These include access to land and water resources; agricultural inputs and services, including extension and research facilities, participatory development strategies to tackle rural poverty with social equity and civil participation, viewed as essential to well-rounded socio-economic development.

Chinsman (1995), contended that this relatively new orientation has produced concepts such as people-centered development, 'participatory development' and 'sustainable human development'. The concept of people-centered development states that meaningful development must be people-based or human-centered, since development entails the full utilization of a nation's human and material resources for the satisfaction of various (human) needs. In more specific terms, a development programme that is people-centered is expected to achieve the following objectives:

- Enable people to realize their potential, build self-confidence and lead lives of dignity and fulfillment;
- Free people from poverty, ignorance, filth, squalor, deprivation and exploitation, recognizing that underdevelopment has wider social consequences and.
- Correct existing economic, social or political injustices and oppression.

OECD (1995:8) stressed that the notion of 'participatory development' bridges the interrelated goals of development and the empowerment of the people. Development has to be designed to capture what the people themselves perceive to be their interests and needs. Participatory development, sometimes interchangeably called popular participation, is "a process by which people take an active and influential part in shaping decisions that affect their lives. People or communities that enjoy active participation in decision-making over issues that concern their livelihood and interests should be able to realize their human potential, build self-confidence and lead lives of dignity and fulfillment. Participatory development builds civil society and the economy by empowering social groups, communities and organizations to influence public policy and demand accountability. The process links democratic institutions with human development motivations (OECD, 1995; Bass, 1972:212-216).

More recently, the United Nations has popularized the multidimensional term 'sustainable human development'. This is defined as: "Development that not only generates economic growth but distributes its benefits equitably; that regenerates the environment rather than destroys it; that empowers people rather than marginalizing them. It gives priority to the poor, enlarging their choices and opportunities and provides for their participation in decisions affecting them" (James Speth, former UNDP Administrator). Speth stressed that "sustainable human development is development that is pro-poor, pro-nature, pro-jobs and pro-women. It stresses growth but growth with employment, growth with environmental friendliness, growth with empowerment and growth with equity".

Mahbub (2006) however, contended that the discovery of human development is not a new invention. That it is a tribute to the early leaders of political and economic thought. The idea that social arrangements must be judged by the extent to which they promote "human good" dates at least to Aristotle (384-322 B.C.). Mahbub argued that "wealth is evidently not the good we are seeking, for it is merely useful and for the sake of something else". He distinguished a good political arrangement from a bad one by its successes and failures in enabling people to lead "flourishing lives".

Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) continued the tradition of treating human beings as the real end of all activities when he observed: "so act as to treat humanity whether in their own person or in that of any other, in every case as an end withal, never as means only". And when Adam Smith (1723-1790), that apostle of free enterprise and private initiative, showed his concern that economic development should enable a person to mix freely with others without being "ashamed to appear in public, was expressing a concept of poverty that went beyond counting calories- a concept that integrated the poor into the mainstream of the community. A similar strain was reflected in the writings of the other founders of modern economic thought, including Robert Malthus, Karl Marx and John Stuart Mill. After the belated rediscovery of human development, it is necessary to give this paradigm some firmer conceptual, quantitative and policy moorings-here and in the next sections of this paper as it takes a human development approach to the situation in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. This approach

questions the presumption of an automatic link between expanding income and expanding human choices and places people at the centre of development.

A people-oriented approach correspondingly shifts the emphasis for example, from how much a nation or region is producing economically and in the aggregate, to how its peoples are faring in terms of quality of life and general social well-being. This means venturing beyond the calculus of economic growth and considering how to enlarge human choices across all economic, social cultural and political dimensions.

The Niger Delta which has been variously described as the heart-beat of the nation's economy has known little peace as the area has remained prone to conflicts with vociferous agitation against the Federal Government for the control of its abundant resources. As Ukoha (2003) observed, the relatively backward communities that fall within the informal administrative zones of the south-west, south-south and south-east of Nigeria have complained excessively about the pains of exploitation and neglect in their long struggle with glaring and hazardous ecological problems. These problems Ukoha noted have risen out of the intensive oil prospecting activities of various multinational oil companies. The development dilemma of the region is that the state and Federal Governments have not been able to create resistant institutional structures to promote economic growth and address the quest of the masses in the area for food, water, light, shelter and bridging the gap of inequality between the rich and the poor. The problems of youth restiveness and rebelliousness are a clear response to a national development agenda that is clearly skewed in disfavour of the Niger Delta people. Although the region contributes about 80 percent to the country's foreign exchange earnings, the basic infrastructures to stimulate economic and human development, are virtually none existent. The Niger Delta has a mass of unemployed graduates and vast stretches of farmlands that have been intermittently degraded by oil spillages, thus truncating the life-support, systems of the people.

The potentially adverse impacts of the Niger Delta crises on Nigeria and Africa as a whole make the focus of this paper on the delta, imperative and timely. It serves as an instrument for the review of the multi-dimensional nature of the problem and its history as well as the consequences on the income, education and life expectancy of the people who live in the delta and particularly on environmental sustainability.

HUMAN DEVELOPMENT SITUATION IN THE NIGER DELTA

The defining difference between the economic growth and the human development schools, is that the first focuses exclusively on the expansion of only one choice-income-while the second embraces the enlargement of all human choices-whether economic social, cultural or political. It might well be argued that the expansion of income can enlarge all other choices as well but that is not necessarily so, for a variety of reasons.

Many human choices extend far beyond economic well-being. Knowledge, health, a clean physical environment, political freedom and simple pleasures of life are not exclusively, or largely, dependent on income. Unless societies recognize that their real wealth is their people, an excessive obsession with creating material wealth can obscure the goal of enriching human lives (Mahbub, 2006).

In the Niger Delta, the situation is similar to that at the national level. Except for Rivers and Bayelsa States, where poverty incidence seems to have stabilized at around 44 percent after an initial jump from 7 percent, poverty incidence declined between 1996 and 2004 (UNDP, 2006) (see table 1, appendix). The critical issue in the Niger Delta is not only the increasing incidence of poverty but also the intense feeling among the people that they ought to have done far better. This is based on the considerable level of resources in their midst and the brazen display and celebration of ill-gotten wealth in Nigeria, most of which derive from crude oil wealth. This to a large extent explains why there is so much frustration and indignation in the region.

Poverty has become a way of life due to economic stagnation; agricultural underdevelopment from soil infertility; unemployment; poor quality of life due to shortages of essential goods, facilities and money; isolation and poor communication; government insensitivity; unhealthy environment and malnutrition. Such conditions influence most members of the affected communities because it is not only income poverty that is the problem but also lack of access to social and physical infrastructure. A critical and realistic assessment of poverty in the Niger Delta region takes into cognizance key considerations such as access to health care, education, water, transportation and other basic amenities of life, as well as the extent to which people are involved in decisions that affect them.

It is pertinent to note that the oil and gas industry has damaged farmlands and fishing grounds, which has harmed traditional occupations such as fishing, farming, lumbering, crafts and small-scale agro-based activities. According to the UNDP (2006) report on the Niger Delta, these livelihoods have also become unattractive because of weak earning relative to the oil sector. There is need not only to revive the traditional forms of work

given the transient nature of the oil industry, but also to give a wider spectrum of opportunities to the people for survival through a more diverse economy.

Given the social, economic and environmental conditions highlighted above, it is of considerable interest to see how the Niger Delta region fares on the human development indices. It is vital to note that the human development situation in Nigeria as a whole is deplorable. The use of relative terms-better, higher, worse and lower-should not be misconstrued. The mere fact that a region, state or local government has a higher score on an index than another does not necessarily mean that the human development situation in that region, state or locality is good. It is crucial here to state clearly, that the HDI for the Niger Delta region as a whole is unacceptable considering that it has produced the wealth responsible for the development in other parts of the country.

In 1996, UNDP computed the first HDI for Nigerian States, for the year 1992. As table 2(appendix) showed, the Niger Delta States of Bendel (now Delta and Edo States), Rivers (now Bayelsa and Rivers) and Cross River (now Akwa Ibom and Cross Rivers) obtained the highest HDI scores in Nigeria, outperforming even Lagos State. The HDI scores were 0.631 for Bendel, 0.539 for Rivers and 0.513 for Cross River. UNDP (1996) argued that, on the basis of their HDI scores, these three states “would easily have qualified in 1990 as middle human development countries occupying, positions 79th, 91st and 96th respectively in the world.

The relative positions of the states seem to have been maintained in 1996, when UNDP again calculated the index and concluded: “a ranking of the Nigerian State by HDI puts for example, Edo and Delta States (formerly Bendel States) on top, with an HDI of 0.666. Were Edo and Delta States constituted into a separate sovereign country, their ‘nation’ would rank 90th in the world-relatively high among the medium-level human development countries”. Even now, the situation has not changed. The main concern is the significance of the achievement relative to what has been accomplished in other oil-producing regions. There are sometimes wide variations among the various local governments in the Niger Delta. In Cross River State for example, the Bakassi Local Government, despite oil drilling, has the poorest HDI in Calabar, the state capital. Life expectancy and education indices have followed this pattern. The situation in Ilaje an oil-producing area in Ondo state is similar.

In Bayelsa State, one of the major oil-producing states, the HDI ranged between 0.255 and 0.422. This is extremely low compared to neighbouring Rivers and Delta States. It is a clear indication of unequal development, often because local governments are not using resources generated from oil to improve the lives of local inhabitants. Table 2 (appendix) may not convey the entire picture on the ground. A number of the Niger Delta State including Bendel, Rivers and Cross Rivers has higher (sometimes significantly) levels of adult literacy than some western states, such as Oyo, Ondo and Ogun. Historically, the western states had earlier access to education because the then Action Group governments emphasized free education in the 1950s and 1960s. As a result of low educational ratings, the three Niger Delta States are classified as ‘educationally disadvantaged’. Therefore, the gulf between the HDI of 0.539 for Rivers State and 0.126 for Ogun State, not appear to reflect the actual quality of human development in the two states over time.

For 2005, (Table 3, appendix) showed the average HDI for the Niger Delta States as 0.564. The average in 1992 was 0.472 with Bendel (now Delta and Edo States), the highest performing at 0.631. In table 2 the highest performing state Delta, has HDI of 0.615 which represents a slight drop. In the 2002 global HDI ranking of countries, Delta would have ranked in the 125th position with Morocco, a big drop from the position of 90th in 1996. Clearly, the relative human development situation in the Niger Delta has declined. Evidence from (Chart 5,appendix), revealed that while some states made appreciable progress between 1992 and 2005, most states from the Niger Delta region, especially the south-south geo-political zone performed poorly. Edo, Delta and Bayelsa showed some retrogressive trends while Ondo, Abia, Akwa Ibom, Cross River, Rivers and Imo States achieved some progress.

CONCLUSION/RECOMMENDATION

The Delta today is a place of frustrated expectations and deep-rooted mistrust where unprecedented restiveness at times erupts in violence. Long years of neglect and conflict have fostered a siege mentality, especially among the youths who feel they are condemned to a future without hope and see conflict as a strategy to escape deprivation. Persistent conflict while in part, a response to poor human development has also entrenched it, thereby serving as a consistent drag on the region’s economic performance and expectations for advancement.

Behind the Delta’s poor performance on human development, is a complex brew of economic, social, political and environmental factors. Social instability, poor local government, competition for economic resources and environmental degradation has taken a toll. The general neglect of infrastructure often rationalized by the

difficulty of the delta's terrain, has worsened the peoples access to fundamental services such as electricity, safe drinking water, roads and health facilities that are taken for granted in many others parts of Nigeria.

Addressing the region's development challenges begins with using its vast oil wealth to create an environment in which the people can flourish. The inhabitants of the area should be able to live valued and dignified lives, overcome poverty, enjoy a peaceful atmosphere and expect a sustainable environment. For development to be meaningful here, people centered and sustainable, this paper proposes a seven-point human development agenda: promotion of peace as the foundation for development, make local governance effective and responsive to the needs of the people, improve and diversify the economy of the region from oil, promote social inclusion and improve access to social services, promote environmental sustainability as well as the means of sustainable livelihoods and build sustainable partnerships for the advancement of human development in the region.

Key issues must first be identified and addressed to manage the current conflict and security situation. Priority would be the disarmament and demobilization of the militia groups which is on-going and rather selective. Programmes could be initiated to foster a climate of peace while cross-cultural awareness campaigns could orient people towards human coexistence, harmony and mutual partnerships. Rehabilitation efforts should reach out to youths who have become largely unemployed or unwilling to develop themselves.

Overall, the region should embark on a realistic and mutually agreed long-term development agenda that can be rigorously monitored by stakeholders. Strategies to improve the quality of governance should focus on enhanced service delivery, checks on corruption and the engagement of people in shaping policies for their well-being. In addition, existing compensation to communities for oil production and pollution needs to be examined.

Similarly, one major contemporary challenge facing the region's economy may be how to revamp the rural economy by optimizing and modernizing agriculture as well as fishing. Oil wealth can be put to good use in this regard. The people of the Niger Delta region would feel that they have gained something substantial to make up for all the miseries associated with past neglect.

The application of the human development approach in the Niger Delta could provide new insights into development planning for that region. Among other things, by recognizing that the real wealth of the Niger Delta is its people, the right environment must be created for policies that go beyond sheer economic preoccupations and gains in order to enrich people's lives.

The development of the region cannot be the responsibility of any one level of government alone. While the Federal Government can take the lead on overarching issues influencing development in the region, it has to work with many stakeholders and partners if change is going to be sustainable and meaningful.

The different levels and branches of government should form partnerships around plans for sustainable development and the attainment of the MDGs; accountability and transparency in the use of available resources; creation and sustenance of the right environment for meaningful development; promotion of investment; social inclusion and popular participation in decision-making; broad-based consultations for peace building; deliberate empowerment of women and youth groups and resource mobilization for development.

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APPENDIX

Table 1. Incidence of Poverty in the Niger Delta, 1980-2004

	1980	1985	1992	1996	2004
Nigeria	28.1	46.3	42.7	65.6	54.4
Edo/Delta	19.8	52.4	33.9	56.1	Delta 45.35 Edo 33.09
Cross River	10.2	41.9	45.5	66.9	41.61
Imo/Abia	14.4	33.1	49.9	56.2	Imo 27.39 Abia 22.27
Ondo	24.9	47.3	46.6	71.6	42.15
Rivers/Bayelsa	7.2	44.4	43.4	44.3	Rivers 29.09 Bayelsa 19.98

Source: National Bureau of Statistics 2004.

Table 2. Components of the HDI for Nigeria (1992)

State	Life expectancy at birth (years)	Adult literacy (%)	Mean years of schooling	Educational attainment (%)	Real GDP per capita (PPP\$)	Adjusted Real GDP per capita (PPP\$)	HDI
Bendel	53.7	65.6	4.00	45.07	5,003.4	5,003.3	0.631
Rivers	50.2	51.9	3.84	35.88	4,860.7	4,860.7	0.539
Cross River	57.8	69.4	3.27	47.36	2,626.0	2,626.0	0.513
Lagos	61.4	65.0	3.92	44.64	2,034.7	2,034.7	0.489
Imo	60.0	75.6	3.80	51.67	1,341.1	1,341.1	0.466
Gongola	57.8	26.0	2.15	18.05	665.1	665.1	0.214
Ondo	49.4	50.6	3.29	34.83	422.9	422.9	0.212
Oyo	51.3	40.4	3.11	27.97	678.1	678.1	0.210
Niger	54.9	16.0	1.04	11.01	1,262.0	1,262.0	0.191
Benue	53.5	27.0	1.91	18.64	809.5	809.5	0.188
Kwara	45.9	40.0	3.00	27.67	1,020.1	1,020.1	0.183
Anambra	44.9	43.1	2.91	29.70	860.1	860.1	0.174
Kano	57.1	12.1	0.73	8.31	692.6	692.6	0.161
Plateau	39.5	36.7	2.18	25.19	1,224.1	1,224.1	0.149
Sokoto	49.2	2.7	0.43	1.94	1,246.2	1,246.2	0.128
Bauchi	36.7	39.8	2.03	27.21	762.2	762.2	0.127
Ogun	37.4	41.8	2.81	28.80	619.3	619.3	0.126
Kaduna	36.6	30.8	1.52	21.04	876.4	876.4	0.101
Borno	37.0	10.0	0.55	6.85	957.8	957.8	0.042
HDI of 1993	51.5	50.7	1.22	34.20	1,215.0	1,215.0	0.246

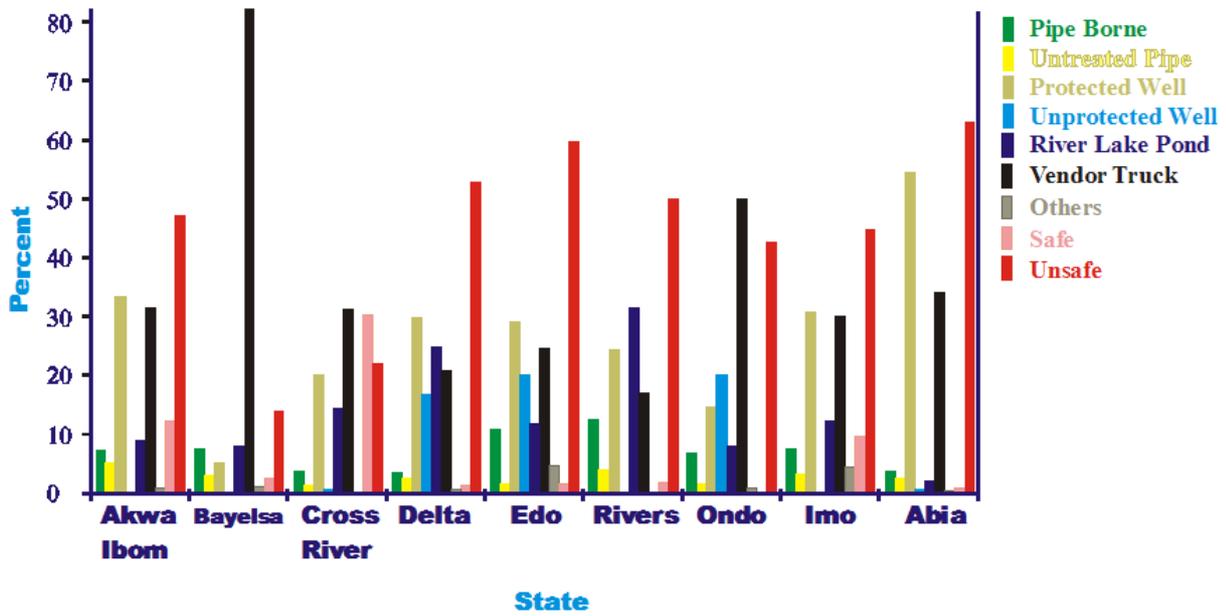
Source: UNDP 1996: 29

Table 3. HDI for the Niger Delta States, 2005

State	Life expectancy	Education index	GDP index	HDI
Abia	0.492	0.578	0.560	0.543
Akwa Ibom	0.506	0.683	0.540	0.576
Bayelsa	0.455	0.523	0.520	0.499
Cross River	0.556	0.630	0.565	0.584
Delta	0.587	0.636	0.621	0.615
Edo	0.579	0.602	0.600	0.594
Imo	0.503	0.546	0.591	0.547
Ondo	0.501	0.575	0.512	0.529
Rivers	0.563	0.590	0.620	0.591
Niger Delta	0.527	0.596	0.570	0.564

Source: EMRL fieldsurvey 2005

Chart 1. Sources of Portable Water



Source: National Bureau of Statistics 2005.

Chart 2. Types of Household Toilet Facilities

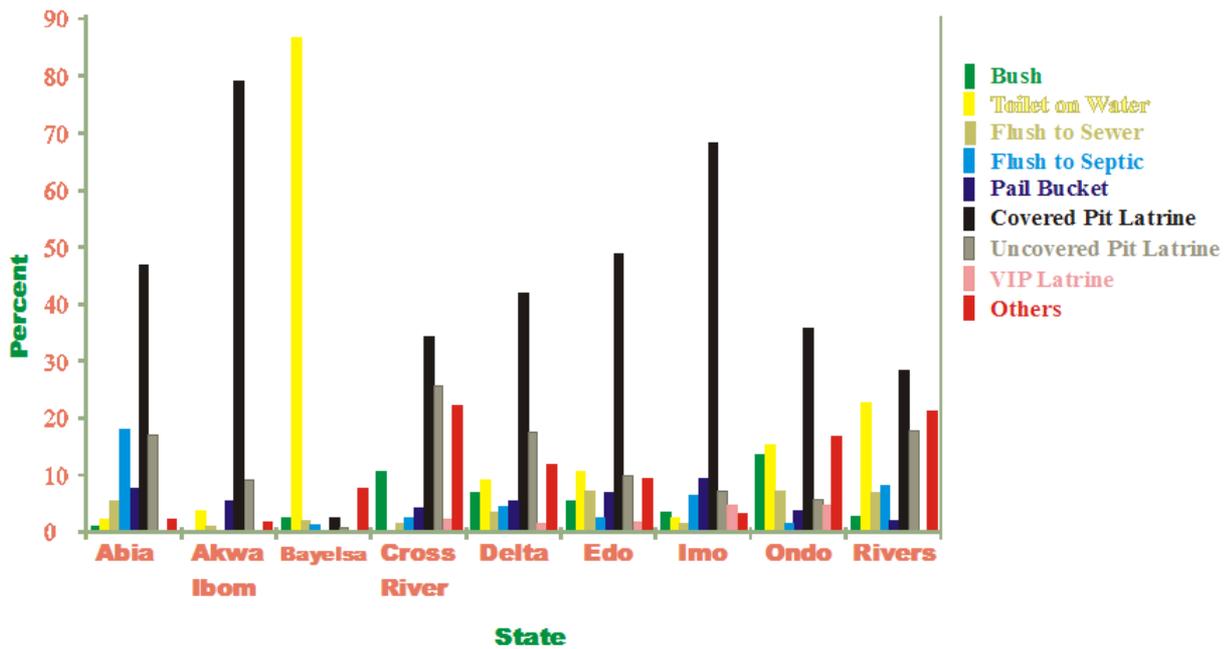
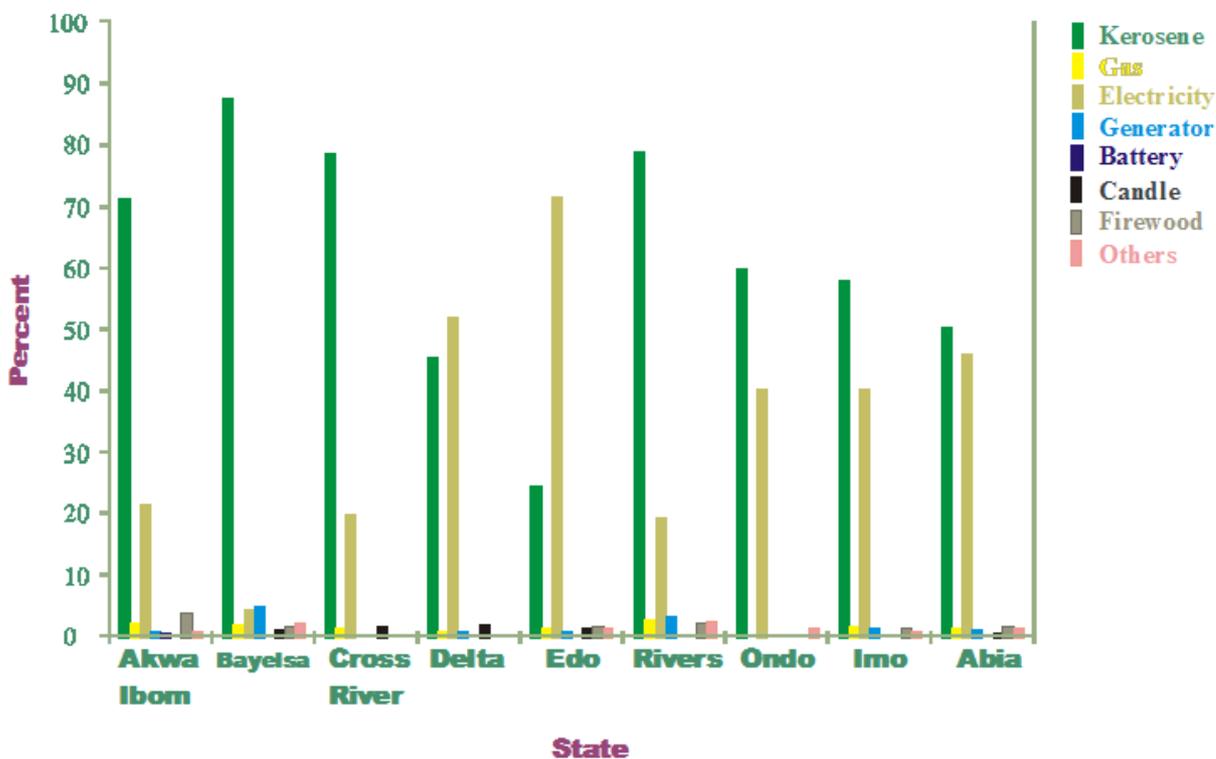
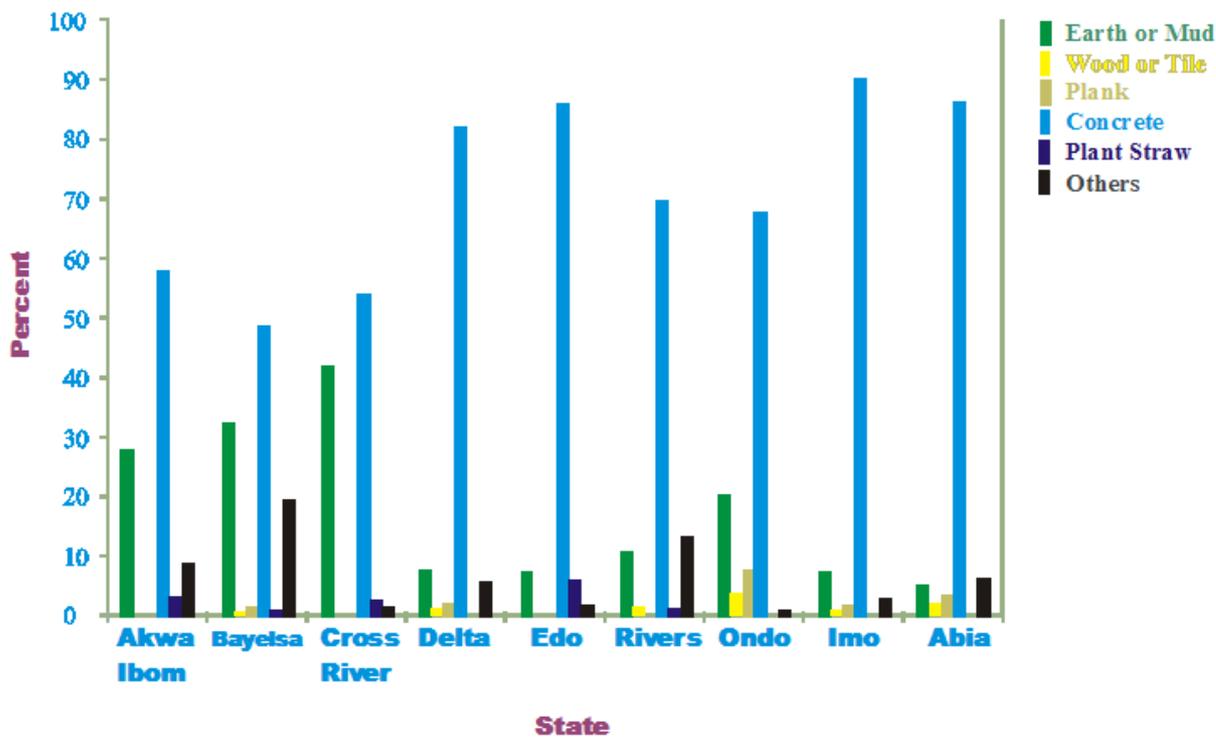


Chart 3. Sources of Fuel (Energy)



Source: National Bureau of Statistics 2005.

Chart 4. Types of Housing in the Niger Delta Region



Source: National Bureau of Statistics 2005.

Chart 5. Progress on HDI in the Niger Delta

