

Youth Restiveness and Industrial Disruption in the Niger Delta

Oboreh J. Snapps
Donald I. Hamilton

Delta State University
Rivers State University of Science and Technology

Abstract

We examine the incidence of youth restiveness in the Niger Delta and how this restiveness has affected industrial productivity. It is our opinion that the high rate of unemployment, environmental degradation, dislocation of the traditional economy and unfair revenue allocation are some of the factors that have given rise to youth restiveness in the Niger Delta. Government needs to pay special attention to the developmental needs of the Niger Delta through job creation and the enactment of environmentally friendly policies that will preserve its fragile ecology.

Key Words: Youth Restiveness, Industrial Disruption, Niger Delta

JEL Codes: 051, 052

INTRODUCTION

Development, as a process of growth and expansion, requires an enabling socio-economic environment to guarantee the safety of personnel and materials and the unmitigated cordiality between host communities and corporate bodies operating within them. Development would certainly not take place without a harmonious interchange and co-existence among stakeholders. This can be seen in a popular slogan “peace and progress” which is one of the most commonly used amongst communities and social organizations aimed at community development. A look at that motto shows profound appreciation of the fact peace is a fundamental pre-requisite for progress. It therefore follows just as peace precedes progress in the motto, so also must peace be achieved in a community before development can take place.

Third world nations have recently become more wary of the nature and role of capital investment in their societies. Since the publication of Walter Rodney’s (1982) classic contribution on how Europe underdeveloped Africa, developing

nations particularly in Africa, are responding to the challenges of economic dominance by evolving various programs.

The concept of sustainable development has become the cornerstone of worldwide socio-economic and environmental movements. In Nigeria, there has been incessant demand to evolve comprehensive rural development plans which bring about general welfare and instigate lasting national development.

Sustainable development is a concept that attempts to harmonize the benefits of development with minimal destabilization of the environment. This is done by harnessing and mobilizing natural resources and human skills to produce goods and services to satisfy man's needs. Sustainable development can be described as a prolonged gradual unfolding of overall growth and the environment.

Multinationals and other industrial establishments play a significant role in the development of the society and host communities. They require a peaceful and conducive environment for industrial harmony, which rests with national disposition and psycho-physiological temperament of their host communities.

The case of the Niger Delta is a case of injustice and neglect by multinationals which repatriate natural resources of the region with their allies to the detriment of the environment and its people. This development has produced significant and far-reaching consequences in which industrial establishments and their assets have become the targets of youths. The oil and gas industry is the most vulnerable. This paper examines the causes of youth restiveness in the Niger Delta, and how this affects industrial productivity in the oil and gas Industry.

THE NIGER DELTA

The Niger Delta has been of historic significance. It was the hub of the trans-Atlantic slave trade. In 1956, crude oil was struck in commercial quantity at Oloibiri, in Bayelsa State, and in 1960, in Obagi in Rivers State. Today, crude oil contributes about 90 percent of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and national income of Nigeria. The Niger Delta is the center of crude oil production, which sustains the Nigerian nation (Alagoa, 1999). The Niger Delta covers a total area of 70,000 square kilometers comprising a mix of swamp and luxuriant rain forest

with lush vegetation. The Niger Delta lies between latitude 4° 14' and 5° 33' North, longitude 5° 48' and 7° 4' East. The location extends to the Atlantic coastline from Benin River West of River Niger to Bonny River East of the River Niger, all in the southern geographical zone of Nigeria.

The northern fringes begin from the Orashi River springs off the Niger River, subsequently augmenting waters from Lake Oguta (Ogbuide) and flows south through the Sombreiro Valley to the tidal seawater of the Degema River. The Niger Delta flows southwards and breaks up into the Forcados and Num Rivers and to the Atlantic coast precisely at the northern extremity of the present Bayelsa State (Ossai, 2002). The Niger Delta sub-region is subdivided into four typical and broad identifiable physical and vegetation characteristics. The fresh water swamp with rain forest vegetation is found at the extreme north, the salt water swamp with predominantly mangrove vegetation, the coastal sand beach ridges with rain forest vegetation and the off-shore zone (Scott, 1966). The area is very rich in natural endowments: marine resources such as fish from coastal waters of the Atlantic Ocean as well as petroleum and natural gas. The geomorphology comprises the coastal belt of consolidated sedimentary rocks while the soils are sandy loam and day loam, which facilitate drainage. Average monthly temperatures are constantly high, between 24°C and 32°C. (Ossai, 2002).

These environmental features have had great implications for its economic, social and political history. While the predominant occupation is farming for the fresh water swamp inhabitant, fishing and trading is for salt-water dwellers; the latter group relies on fresh water and hinterland neighbors for vegetable and staple foods (Atee, 1993).

According to Saro-Wiwa (1989), many ethnic groups inhabit the Niger Delta. The majority are sub-groups of the Ijaw stock. He outlined the people of the Niger Delta as follows: Ijaws of western Brass and Degema Divisions, Ogonis and Elemes of Ogoni Division, Ikwerre and other tribes in Port Harcourt Division, Etches, Ekpayas, Ogbas, Egbemas, and Abuas of Ahoada Division and Obow and Opobians of Opobo Division.

Tare-Out (1992), in his revolutionary and prophetic book “Waking up the Sleeping Giants”, draws the map of the Niger Delta to include more of the above fatherland. The Niger Delta is an aggregation of hitherto independent nation states, whose leadership had developed international relationships long before British imperialists were in the nation named Nigeria.

A linguistic map of the region indicates various communities of the Niger Delta can be grouped into several ethnic nationalities and language groups or tribes. These are the Ijaw dominated tribes (Nembe-Akassa, Kalabari, Wakirike, Ibani, Nkoro, Obod, Isoko, Kwale, Ishekhiri) and the Ibo influenced languages (Ogba, Etche, Ikwerre, etc.). There are obvious relationships in the economic and socio-political institutions and organizations, partly due to cultural similarity.

Apart from their geographical contiguity, the communities share similar environmental problems such as flood and erosion, scarcity of dry and variable land and reliance on external sources for vegetables (Atei, 1993). The Niger Delta historiography is very responsive to the needs and aspirations of the time and people. Franz Fanon (1986) says, each generation must, out of relative obscurity discover its mission, fulfill it or betray it!

The Niger Delta has largely become a cynosure because of widespread social unrest generated by neglect, environmental degradation and mindless spoliation among others. Alagoa (1993), Saro Wiwa (1990) and Idumange (1999), all agreed social unrest and pervasive youth restiveness in the area is the result of criminal neglect, inequity in resource allocation and deliberate underdevelopment spanning over three decades. The grim picture of injustice has been aggravated by the role of multinational companies whose primary aim is to exploit resources of host communities, meddle in domestic or local politics, degrade the environment and precipitate crises which sometimes leads to the death of prominent indigenes. Today the Niger Delta is characterized by almost complete absence of socio-economic and educational infrastructure, a physical environment rendered hostile by industrial activities, seismic genocide, widespread poverty and unemployment. Other features are absolute neglect of the environment, a lack of communication network, an absence of well-

articulated development plans, and pervasive youth restiveness. These negative manifestations have often resulted in disruption of industrial activities in the area.

Youth constitute about 40 percent of the Nigerian population and are burdened with social responsibilities of our fast developing world. They live under the burden of material impoverishment. The Willink Commission (1958) stated the Niger Delta requires special attention because of fragile ecology and monumental development challenges. Although several cosmetic attempts had been made in the past to develop the Niger Delta, the area has remained the most undeveloped part of Nigeria. Paradoxically, it produces more than 90 percent of the national income accruing to the country through oil and gas.

Activities of multinational companies have impaired and attenuated the value of aquatic resources for recreation, fishing and transportation. The continuous discharge of domestic sewage, industrial effluents, petroleum hydrocarbons, dredge materials and garbage has aggravated problems of the Niger Delta. The indigenes have reacted to neglect in various ways ranging from disruption of industrial activities, violent demonstrations, hostage taking, and vandalism of assets and communal clashes. Companies operating in the Niger Delta are extremely vulnerable to youth irredentism, violence and restiveness. This phenomenon has reached an alarming proportion, placing the society and economy at risk. Youths are denied social amenities, infrastructure, job opportunities and the opportunity to develop; hence, they are aggrieved. The manifestation of the frustration is youth restiveness and other aggressive behavior. Youth restiveness is the only means by which they extract short-term concessions and benefits from a majority-dominated federal state like Nigeria.

CAUSES OF YOUTH RESTIVENESS IN THE NIGER DELTA

Development scholars have advanced several reasons for youth restiveness in the Niger Delta. Some of the causes of youth restiveness are discussed below.

Economic Causes

The Niger Delta, the oil rich region of Nigeria, is like the proverbial goose that lays the golden egg when it comes to the economic well-being of the nation. In recent years, however, the area has witnessed so much crises that people are beginning to express concern about the effect on the country's economy. A disturbing aspect is the involvement of youths. The Million-Man March of 1998 that tried to woo the late General Sani Abacha into transforming himself into a civilian president is partly responsible for sparking the flame of youth restiveness. The March offered many youths an opportunity to come to Abuja where they saw what the federal government was doing with the revenue generated from their area. The youths felt that areas that were not contributing as much as the Niger Delta to the national economy enjoyed better facilities in the country. When compared with the poor state of roads, poor communication, education, and health facilities as well as lack of potable water and even arable land, the youths of the Niger Delta felt that they had suffered a lot of deprivation over the years.

Oil spillages, which pollutes water and destroys marine life in such a way as to affect the economic well-being of the people, is of serious consequence. Oil companies operating in the area are often held responsible for the plight of the people of the Niger Delta and therefore suffer attacks, which results in abduction of staff and vandalization of facilities. The sharp contrast in the standard of living between the indigenes and staff of oil companies is a source of envy.

Since oil was discovered in the Niger Delta decades ago, the people of Bayelsa, Delta, Edo, Rivers, and Cross Rivers have not known peace. Traditional occupations of the people of the Niger Delta are fishing, farming and petty trading. With the advent of multinational oil companies, land, which people hitherto used for subsistence farming has been acquired by government parastatals, multinationals companies, and other big industrial establishments thus dispossessing the people of their farmlands – their means of livelihood. In 1970, the federal government promulgated Decree No 13 to appropriate all federally allocated revenue. Decree No 9 of 1971, gave the federal government

all rights to offshore rents and royalties. In 1978, the Land Use Act of Nigeria vested ownership of all lands on the federal government. The result was land of the Niger Deltans was acquired with little or no compensation. A good example is the land Elf Petroleum Nig. Ltd acquired for the gas cluster popularly known as IBEWA cluster, where about 2,500m² was taken without compensating the owners of the land (Anikpo, 1998). Several other examples abound in the Niger Delta.

Land left for the people has also been polluted by activities of multinational companies and the marine ecology has been degraded. Pollution of the rivers, streams and creeks has severally debased the fishing occupation, which is the economic live wire of more that 70 percent of rural dwellers in the Niger Delta (Yomere, 2006). A sad example is where more than one million assorted fishes were seen dead in the swamp near the flow station of Elf Petroleum (Nig) Limited recently (Idumu, 2004, P. 8). With the economic livelihood of the people snuffed out, multinational companies prefer to pay youths paltry sums of money on standby or stay-at-home program, rather than train them to acquire relevant skills for self-reliance. Although multinationals repatriate fantastic profits, they do not reinvest surplus capital and do not create job opportunities for youths. Most of the time, they do not implement MOUs (memorandum of understandings). This was graphically illustrated by Idumange (2001, p. 17) who argued

Allegations abound that some senior staff in the Management cadre [of oil companies] collaborates with the youths in oil-bearing communities to either vandalize pipelines or deliberately cause delays in the implementations of MOU's [sic].

While government is not doing enough to create job opportunities for youths, the companies most often employ a handful of youths on casual basis. These casual employees are subjected to the worst form of dehumanization and servitude. Since they could not steal or engage in robbery, they sometimes protest violently against both government and companies operating in their communities. A good example as cited by Anikpo (1998) is the destruction and loot of properties of Elf Petroleum Nigeria Ltd by the Eg youths Federation (E.Y.F.) in Ogbogu and Obagi in October 4, 1994. On December 11, 1998, the

Ijaw youth council (I.Y.C.) made the case for resource control. This has become known as “Kiama Declaration”, which states *inter alia* first, that the quality of life of the Ijaw people is deteriorating as a result of utter neglect (Idumu, 2004). Suppression and marginalization has been visited on the Ijaws by an alliance of Nigerian state and transnational oil companies.

Political Factors

The Nigerian political superstructure has inadvertently contributed to youth restiveness. The Nigeria economy was severely plundered for about two and a half decades by public office holders. Most sectors of the economy collapsed as a result of cumulative mismanagement, unbridled corruption and opulence on the part of public office holders. Anam-Ndu (1990) has decried a situation where political power holders and the bureaucratic elite see their position as leverage to wealth at the expense of the masses. Even the present civilian administration has perpetuated the balkanization of the economy. Commenting on the unacceptable situation Idumange (2001, p. 8) has said:

It is sad to note that most of the problems we inherited from the military are still persistent. Some are even magnified. The problems of inflation, unemployment and poverty have continued unabated. Corruption and ostentatious living of elected representatives have exacerbated this.

Politicians impose candidates on the people against the will of the majority. Therefore, politicians go into office and engage in embezzlement and corrupt enrichment in order to pacify their political godfathers. Another dimension is, once in power, they use the machinery of the state to coerce and intimidate perceived political opposition. Because of the unemployment rate, youths take to thuggery as a means of livelihood. Some youths support candidates who promise to create jobs for them, so during electioneering campaigns, such youths are prepared to fight to ensure success of favored candidates. Issues concerning the development of the Niger Delta are usually politicized, such as the principles used for revenue allocation, the onshore offshore dichotomy, and the Petroleum

Act of 1969. These issues have brought to the limelight the marginalization of the Niger Delta, which in turn has affected the living standards of the youths.

Socio-cultural Factors

Generally, the technological wave and rapid industrialization have combined to change the value orientation of Nigerians. Today, the value system is skewed in favor of materialism. The get-rich-quick mania has been accentuated by the opulence and splendor displayed by public office holders. The value flux has negatively affected orientation of the youths that want to be rich at all costs. Okowa (1989) has subscribed to the view that government officials systematically loot the Nigerian national treasury. He also contended that politics is the primary source of capital accumulated in Nigeria. This materialistic orientation has made some youths resort to violence and intimidation to acquire wealth.

Another major socio-cultural factor that has accentuated the tempo of youth restiveness is chieftaincy squabbles and incessant internecine wars. The Niger Delta is replete with causes of chieftaincy wranglings especially in oil bearing communities. People struggle to be made chiefs (no matter how unpopular) in order to corner oil royalties of their communities. This has enthroned factional fighting, bloodletting, and crises in which youths play a significant role under the rubrics of Community Development Committees (CDCs). Because of the divide-and-rule policy adopted by the multinational corporations, chiefs and CDC chairmen are given recognition. They hijack community development contracts and cause confusion. They even instigate youths to disrupt industrial operations and precipitate communal clashes, which lead to wanton destruction of lives and property. Idumange (2000) asserted even when oil spillage occurs, domestic politics and the rush for materialism have always precipitated chaos. The youths in Nigeria are also victims of cultural clash. They have been sandwiched between the ideational and sensate permissive culture which, for lack of a suitable euphemism, is often referred to as the western culture. Meads (1970) believed the culture confusion occasioned by the generation gap could only be resolved within the matrix of post-figuration, configuration and pre-figuration. Post-

figuration occurs when children learn from elders, while in a configurative culture, both adults and children learn from their peers. Pre-figurative culture, on the other hand, is one in which the adults and the youths must be willing to learn from one another. Where this is not possible, youths will tend to rebel against antiquated dogma, beliefs and traditions, making youth restiveness an inevitable corollary.

Youth restiveness can also result from blatant refusal on the part of companies to obey traditions and customs of host communities. For example, if a company acquires a parcel of land where there is a deity, the community may insist on the performance of certain rituals to appease the deity. But if such demands are not met, it may result in violent protests, demonstrations and youth restiveness.

SELECTED INCIDENTS OF YOUTH RESTIVENESS IN NIGER DELTA

The Niger Delta is a flash point of youth restiveness and industrial disharmony. Most reported incidents are between oil companies and host communities.

In August 1990, the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP) adopted the Ogoni Bill of Rights, - listed the grievances and demanded “ political autonomy to participate in the affairs of the Nigerian State as a distinct and separate unit, including the right to the control and use of a fair proportion of Ogoni economic resources for Ogoni development. MOSOP’s political demands were targeted at the Nigerian federal government, but it also accused SPDC of “full responsibility for the genocide in Ogoni land” (Guardian, August, 6th 2000, P. 11). In October 1990, MOSOP sent the Ogoni Bill of Rights to the then head of state, Gen. I.B. Babangida, but received no response. The same demand was sent to Shell, Chevron and NNPC (the joint venture partners) in December 1992 with an ultimatum to pay back royalties and compensation within thirty days or quit Ogoni land.

On January 4, 1993, MOSOP held a mass rally which was attended by hundreds of thousands of people –one half or more of the total Ogoni population.(Oru, 199) This demonstration of organized political opposition to both government and oil companies resulted in a military crackdown in Ogoni

and led to the arrest and detention of Ken Saro-Wiwa and other MOSOP leaders several times in the same year. In May 1994, following the brutal murder by a mob of youths of four prominent Ogoni leaders who were regarded as government collaborators, repression of MOSOP activities intensified. Sixteen members of the MOSOP leadership were put on trial in May 1994, and nine, including Ken Saro-Wiwa, were eventually convicted and sentenced to death by a special tribunal established for the case.

Without the right to appeal, the "Ogoni Nine" were executed on November 10, 1995. On October 30 and 31, 1990 a protest took place at Shell's facility at Umuechem, east of Port Harcourt, Rivers state, that led to the police killing some eighty unarmed demonstrators and destroying or badly damaging 495 houses (Guardian, April 8, 2000). This incident was the first to bring the situation in the Niger Delta to international attention, and remain the most serious loss of life directly involving oil company activities. Youths from Umuechem community demanded provision of electricity, water, roads, and other compensation for oil pollution of lands and water supplies. On October 29, 1990 the divisional manager of SPDC'S eastern division had written to the Rivers state commissioner of police to request security protection with a preference for the paramilitary mobile police in anticipation of an impending attack' on SPDC'S facilities in Umuechem allegedly planned for the following morning. Following peaceful protest by village youths on SPDC'S premises on October 30, SPDC again made a written request to the governor of Rivers state, a copy of which was sent to the commissioner of police. On October 31, mobile police attacked peaceful demonstrators with teargas and gunfire. They returned at 5 am the next day shooting indiscriminately, in a purported attempt to locate three of their members who had not returned the previous evening. A judicial commission of inquiring established by the government found no evidence of a threat by the villagers and concluded that the Mobile Police had displayed a reckless disregard for life and property. No compensation was awarded for the attack to those whose relatives were killed or homes destroyed; nor have the perpetrators been brought to justice (Guardian, April 8, 2000).

The Choba Macabre, which led to the shameful raping of women by Nigerian soldiers, can hardly be forgotten in the annals of the history of that community (Guardian, April 8, 2000). Wilbros (Nig). Limited is a transnational oil service company that started operation in the late 1960's. Regrettably, from 1970 to 1999, the company did not respond to the employment needs of youths or provide any popular assistance program. This is despite the fact the company occupies the fertile and strategic land of the community. The youth protest led to a serious reprisal from the state. Military tanks backing stern looking soldiers raided the community and occupied it for days. More than two people were killed and thrown into the Choba River. The women who constituted the soft target were raped and maltreated. Today, Choba is wailing and weeping like the Umuechem and Ogoni people.

All over the Niger Delta, youth induced crises have become a common phenomenon. The Warri-Ilaja war was sustained by youths. It led to the deaths of more than two thousand five hundred Ilajes. In 1993, the youths of Egi raided the premises of Elf Petroleum (Nig) Limited (The Nigerian Observer August 18 1999 p. 7). The clash between youths of Ikebiri Southern Ijaw local government area and Agip Oil led to the deaths of eight people (Guardian, July 11 p. 6, 2002). The same gruesome treatment took place in January 1999 in Opia and Ikenya communities in Warri North local government area where sixty-one people died in a clash with security operatives of Chevron Nig. Limited.

In April 2001, eight youths were shot in Bayelsa state for attempting to close down an Agip flow station in Brass. Recently, some women in Bayelsa State embarked on a peaceful demonstration and laid siege of the terminal of Chevron (Nig) Limited and disrupted operations for ten days (Guardian, July 11 p. 6, 2002). Umu-uboh women stopped Saipem (Nig) Limited from drilling at 1B2B for eleven days. (Guardian, July 11 p. 6, 2002).

The Niger Delta is characterized by a lack of needed socio-economic and educational infrastructure; environments rendered hostile by seismic and oil exploratory activities; and insensitivity on the part of government.

STRATEGIES FOR CURBING YOUTH RESTIVENESS

The phenomenon of youth restiveness has attracted tremendous interest and attention especially as it affects industrial harmony and peace in the Niger Delta. Allagoa (2000) contended since crude oil is the sustainer of the Nigerian economy, the people of the Niger Delta would be best served by the multinationals who should lay the foundation for development of self-reliant communities and a sustainable environment, Restoration of community land, and environment-friendly policies are some of the things that can stem the tide of frustration, youth restiveness and violence.

Idumange (2001) identified neglect as the main cause of youth restiveness and the cardinal issue is the uneven distribution of revenues accruing from crude oil. He suggested oil-bearing communities should not only be entitled to compensation arising from ecological genocide, but also a depletion allowance because oil is a non-renewable resource. Furthermore, oil companies should train youths in skills relevant to operations, as this will enhance employability.

Another effective way of curbing youth restiveness is to evolve dialogue as an efficient paradigm for conflict resolution. Any potential conflict-prone situation should be nipped in the bud through collaborative efforts and involvement of all segments of the population: opinion leaders, chiefs, youth, women, etc.

Government should also embark on youth empowerment programs to enable youths to engage in meaningful activities. Job creation for youths is essential while skills acquisition programs are a *sine qua non*. Skills acquisition programs should emphasize the non-formal factor. Youths should be trained as vulcanizers, welders, carpenters, mechanics, etc. to be self-employed. School-to-land and poverty eradication programs should be vigorously pursued to enable youths to advance their chosen career for survival and self-actualization.

Fubara (2000) has provided guidelines for developing youth projects which include a clear understanding of the constraints impairing the development and success of youths in the region, developing industry-specific guidelines for improving and strengthening managerial skills of youths, and providing financial grants for youths to establish small-scale industries.

This research also advocates ethical re-orientation, as it is necessary to realign the value system, which has made most of our youths go astray. Measures could be added by the award of scholarships and bursary allowances, sports development and other creative activities that would engage youths.

There can be no solution to the simmering conflict in the oil producing areas of the Delta until its people gain the right to participate in their own governance and until the protection of the rule of law is extended to their communities. The injustices facing the people of the Delta are in many ways the same as those facing all Nigerians after decades of misrule by oligarchs. In the oil producing regions, suppression of political activities, lack of legal redress for damages to the environment and the resulting loss of livelihood, and sheer ubiquity of human rights abuses by regional security forces have generated unnecessary tension.

The first responsibility for resolving these injustices lies with the Nigerian government. Yet multinational oil companies operating in Nigeria cannot avoid their own share of responsibility. While the political environment in Nigeria is as difficult for the oil companies as it is for anyone else, and that the oil industry does not have the power to alter government policy towards the oil regions, oil companies in many respects contribute towards discontent in the Niger Delta and to the conflict within and between communities that results in repressive government responses. Oil companies must take steps to ensure oil production does not continue at a cost to host communities. There is an ever-growing likelihood, unless corrective actions are taken, protest in the Niger Delta will become violent in an organized and concerted way, with consequent reprisals and worsening of the security situation that will harm all those with interests in the Delta region, whether residents or companies.

CONCLUSION

The federal government must pay special attention to development needs and challenges of the Niger Delta. This could be through job creation, initiation of schemes aimed at improving the lot of the people in the oil bearing communities, the introduction of environmentally friendly measures to preserve the fragile

ecology, and making it possible for Niger Delta states to control their own resources.

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CONTACT INFORMATION: *Oboreh J. S. is a lecturer in the Department of Business Administration, Delta State University Abraka, Nigeria. Phone: +2348066190011: Email: snapps2008@yahoo.com While Hamilton D. I. is a lecturer in the. Department of Business Administration, Rivers State University of Science and Technology Port Harcourt, Nigeria: Phone +2348033400853: Email : Urokad@yahoo.com*