Oil Politics and Related Conflict in Nigeria’s Niger-Delta; Cause and Impact on Ogoni Land and People

**Abstract:** The agenda behind unending oil related conflicts in the Nigeria’s Niger Delta are multi-purpose in objective. Some target resource control, others championed the protection of ethnic interest while some were directed toward environmental control and management of harms arising from oil exploration in the region. It is apparent that oil related conflicts in the Niger Delta are induced by oil politics among the ruling elites at the central authority and their agents at the regional level in which oil bearing communities exist. The paper used exploratory analysis. It explored oil politics and related conflicts in the Niger Delta, debates on causes of oil related conflicts in the Niger Delta, causes of the conflicts in Ogoni land as well as the impacts of the conflicts on Ogoni land and people. It found that oil related conflicts in the Niger Delta are not rebellion but struggles for social, economic and political emancipation of people of the oil bearing communities in the region. Unjust distributive revenue allocation formula from oil earnings is part of the major causes of oil related conflicts in the region. Economic sabotage, sexual violence, insecurity, loss of lives and destruction of properties are not only the indicators of oil related conflicts in the Niger Delta but were also discovered as the impacts of the conflicts on the region, Ogoni land and people in particular. Equity and fair revenue allocation formula which recognized increased derivational principle to oil bearing communities in revenue allocation formula as found out will go a long way in ameliorating the problem of oil related conflicts in the Niger Delta.

**Keywords:** Conflicts, Delta, Derivation, Oil, Niger, Politics.

**INTRODUCTION**

The discovery and subsequent exploration of oil gave Nigeria the potential to develop at steady velocity. Although, huge oil wealth has culminated in immense struggle for resources control among the ruling class and over reliance on national earnings on returns from oil. Minority struggle for resource space has also become active in the country’s oil producing communities. Struggle for power at the centre with ethnic colouration is seriously intertwined with the desire to control wealth generated through oil revenue. Consequently, national and regional development question remains largely unanswered in the face of intriguing oil politics that made power competitive at the center with minimal attention to communities which produce the oil. 1. Instead of making efforts to improve living standard in oil bearing communities, dwarfing efforts made by successive administration resulted in grievances from the part of the people in oil producing communities. Governments reaction of deploying troops to make producing areas secure for oil exploration was greeted with severe resistance to hurting of individual rights and liberties in oil bearing communities in the region.

Nigeria’s Niger Delta is a region with fragile ecosystem. It is a sensitive territory because of its natural resource endowment. Wealth of huge oil resource the region is blessed with contributes largely to the overall development of Nigeria. Potential for socio-economic growth is very high in the region. Social tension, environmental degradation and economic deterioration are visible in oil bearing communities in the region. And, these situations have worsened over the years 2. This development affected Ogoni land severely. The perception of local people living in the oil communities on Ogoni soil is that the government is reacting reluctantly in ameliorating the dangers oil exploration is causing on Ogoni soil. The valuable ecosystems on which Ogoni people depend for their livelihood are devastated by oil extraction. As a
result, the situation degenerates into violence and this draws a disproportionate reaction from the government, deepening the people’s resentment and sense of alienation.

Oil related conflicts have been exacerbated by the politics of oil incubated and hatched by oil related activities in oil bearing communities in the Niger Delta. Conflicts induced by oil have assumed multiple dimension in the region. Communal conflicts have taken the form of disputes within a community. They have in some other cases assumed the form of conflict between two or more oil producing communities. Oil related conflicts have also assumed the form of disputes between host communities and oil companies. Though, the forms conflicts assumed in the region varies but then, both intra and inter-communal conflicts in the region are mostly induced by oil. Political disputes over land and other rights in Niger Delta are exacerbated by the presence of oil. Land disputes exist in the region before oil was discovered. The Ugbo and Mahin-Ilafe dispute during the era of British colonial rule which led to the deportation of Ugbo-Ilafe traditional ruler by the British imperial ruler is an example of conflicts before the discovering of oil in the region. Conflicts springing up after the discovering of oil and its commercial exploitation in the region are oil induced and related in nature. The bloody conflict between the Arogbog-Ijaw and the Ugbo-Ilafe in 1998 was caused by the presence of oil in a boundary town between the two ethnic groups. In areas where they operate in Niger Delta, oil industries have been blamed for a number of ills especially of not doing enough to improve the living condition of people in communities where they engaged in oil exploration. There are potential gains in having oil pipelines traveling through land. Communities through which pipelines have traveled are much aware of these benefits. The presence of oil flow station in a community even means much a benefit than pipeline traveling through it. Oil pipeline and flow station presence in a community create opportunities for payment of compensation and contracts. Though, compensation sometimes only gets to few. And, grievances from majority not considered for compensation have stirred up conflict between communities in the region. In other cases, oil installation has been challenged by host communities as attempt to damaged environment through oil pollution by oil industries.

In global political economy, oil as natural resource does not only have great economic value but also, captures significant attention among countries as the commodity is highly relied on as a means of economic survival. The control of oil resource attracts political manipulation found in political system of oil producing and exporting countries. Such manipulation is more physical in oil rich and dependent countries. Oil and political power are intertwined in Nigeria. The control of oil in the country is perceived as the ultimate control of political power by leaders. This perception has made the control of political power and the nation’s oil resources a tough contested affair. The issue of oil and politics in Nigeria is a vexatious matter. The discovering of oil in commercial quantity and its subsequent exploitation cum export resulted in huge flow of foreign earnings leading to a new dimension of political behaviors and characters in the country especially on the part of the ruling elites. Struggle to capture power became very tense and fierce among political class with minimal recognition to the significant of citizens outside the political and ruling class. This wave of economic blessing translated in glorified criminals dominating Nigerian political scene and arena. Poor development planning and where there is a good one, lack of political will to implement it forms the lot of post oil discovering era ruling elites in Nigeria. The country since attainment of political independent from British in 1960 till date has been unable to implement to latter, all development policies it has adopted thus, making the country a grapevine for public policy formulation and implementation.

Guided by the provocative action theory, the paper is guided by the hypothesis that oil related conflicts in Nigeria’s Niger Delta region are actions provoked by oil politics. And, it is based on this assumption that the paper in pursuance of its objectives examine oil politics in Nigeria’s Niger Delta. The paper discussed oil related conflicts in the Niger Delta. It examined debates on the causes of oil related conflicts in Nigeria’s Niger Delta. It also, identified the causes of oil related conflicts in Ogoni land. The paper further addressed the impacts of oil related conflicts on Ogoni land and people. It examined efforts toward ameliorating oil related conflicts in Nigeria’s Niger Delta and finally concluded justifying the hypothesis that oil related conflict in Nigeria’s Niger Delta are induced by oil politics which have marginalized people of the region and distanced them from assess to infrastructural development required for living a good and decent life compare with people from other regions of the country and non-oil producing communities.

Oil Politics in Nigeria’s Niger Delta

Oil politics in Nigeria manifests in the processes that show how oil revenue is shared among federating unions in the country’s federal system. Oil revenue sharing is married with competitive politics of struggling between and among largely dominated ethnic groups and interests in the country. Regional cleavages have often dominated the struggle for control of the nation’s resources. Six geo-political zones exist in Nigeria with the three dominant ethnic groups in the north-west (Hausa-Fulani), south-west (Yoruba) and south-east (Igbo) while the north-central, north-east and the south-south where Niger Delta falls in are flourished.
with numerous minority groups. Each of the regions is represented by an ethnic group and this has made the political struggle for oil wealth produced in the Niger Delta seriously tense. This political struggle is made known through benefits allocated from generated revenue. The revenue sharing formula itself is a political instrument designed to favor the dominant ethnic groups against the minority especially from the Niger Delta from where more than ninety percent of the revenue shared is generated.

Revenue sharing formula political designed to favor major ethnic groups against minorities became actively respected and used in the country following the discovery of oil and its exploration in commercial quantities in the 1953s. Revenue formula with derivational principle which paid regions where resources were sourced 50% of total revenue generated was dramatically reviewed with the discovering of oil. Derivation principle was retained even with the discovering of oil but applicable percentage to region from where resources were sourced kept dropping from the initially stipulated 50%. The principle changed from 50% to 25% between 1968-1980 and miserable 1.5% between 1980-1989 10. These reductions started shortly after when oil was discovered and it export began. The politics that followed and later came to be known as the politics of revenue sharing formula was quickly identified as a direct political war between majority tribes and the minority tribes for the soul of the Nigerian oil. This to a very large extent amplifies what has come to be seen as oil politics in Nigeria.

Regions moves to have fairer share in the revenue sharing formula and the twist adopted by majority ethnic groups to subjugate the minority to disadvantage in the revenue sharing formula which became very visible in the polity translated in people came to defined as politics of oil in Nigeria 11. Nigerian federalism has been conceived as a flaw designed to further the marginalization of minor ethnic groups by the majority. This conception readily comes to mind when oil politics as an issue comes up for analysis. Critically viewed from distributive justice perspective, distribution of Nigeria oil resources is an issue that will last longer than expected until and unless the derivational principle is considered with sincerity as it was before oil was discovered and it export started 12. Severally, minority groups in Nigeria, have advanced with calls connected with revenue sharing in the country especially on the cry that unfavorable revenue sharing formula from the center government dominated largely by the majority tribes of Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo seems not to be favoring them especially the region from where bulk of the country’s revenue is generated. These calls were thwarted by majority groups who saw them as attempts by minority to outdo them from the revenue sharing formula which they stand greater advantage 13. Effort at amending the nation’s constitution recently, exposed the regional dimension of the angling for the soul of oil money. While governors of the oil rich South-South region wanted increased allocation, those of the North, wanted the status quo of 13% the South-South presently enjoys, to remain 14. Several efforts toward amendment of revenue sharing formula and especially, upward review of derivational principle by people from the Niger Delta region have been frustrated by the major ethnic groups especially the north using its majority and popularity in the parliament and government.

Nigeria was plunged into rent-seeking by the discovery of oil and establishment of oil industry as well as the politics that accompanied these developments. Shortly afterward, the country joined the resource curse phenomenon that earlier oil producing countries before it was suffering from. Oil resources ought to serve as an instrument for economic growth through proper investment of the revenue accruing from its export. Unfortunately, revenue from the commodity rather serve as fortune that create heavy struggle for power among the political class thus, leading to minimal attention in utilizing oil fortune for the purpose of national development. The resultant political economy of rent manufactured by growing oil wealth exposed the character of the Nigerian ruling elites which promoted rent-seeking at the expense of development 15. Hence, corruption fueled the culture of rent-seeking and did away with the desire for development.

Developmental needs became unachievable at the national and regional levels because fortune from oil becomes inadequate to cater for Nigeria’s developmental targets. This situation emerged contrary to what was obtained in the 1960s before oil became the main source of foreign earning to the country. Agriculture sustained the economy because it was not attached with fierce politics at the center like oil. Politics of oil came with the discovery of oil in the country. And, revenue allocation using fortune generated through oil export became the hot bite of national politics at the center. This brand of politics left oil bearing communities struggling to get reasonable share of allocation from resources found and explore on their soils. Corruption rose to its peak among ruling elites at the center and regions plunging the nation into rent-seeking. State ability to plan and implement appropriately became frustrated and state machinery became hijacked by clique of political criminals 16. In terms of developmental needs, huge fortune from oil earnings has failed in yielding dividend. Instead, it created an atmosphere that promotes conflicts as a result of grievances inequality in sharing of oil resources has introduced. Injustice in revenue sharing formula of oil wealth in which oil bearing communities are at disadvantage single handedly has contributed as the main cause of conflicts in Nigeria’s Niger Delta 17. The end result is the disruptive effect of oil and politics dynamics that has led to the seeming failure of oil
wealth to positively impact the development process in Nigeria.

Oil politics has impacted negatively on the Nigerian state. Key sectors of the economy capable of leading the country into an aspired stage of development have been neglected. Induced struggle for oil wealth among political elites escorted by primordial interest has made it possible for political leaders to deviate attention from other sectors to oil thereby, endangering the country’s prospect for economic growth and stability. Agriculture became the worst and severe hit victim by oil politics. It once sustained the economy before oil was discovered. Manifestation in oil wealth management of self-interest with regional and ethnic coloration became practicable soon after the discovery and exploration of oil in the country. Oil politics which appeared in the sharing of oil revenue among regions in the country impacted adversely on the economy resulting in planning environment which has made it difficult for the country to achieve its needed development. Dependent on oil became very high and serious in the country to the neglect of other sectors especially agriculture which once sustained the economy. Agricultural based economy before oil was discovered saw healthy competition for revenue generation among the regions in Nigeria. The West established cocoa house at Ibadan, Ahmadu Bello University was established by the North at Zaria and in the East, development was concentrated at Enugu as the region’s model of development. This competition for development created by agricultural economy among regions was killed by the discovery of oil and the politics that followed such discovery. Oil economy has made regions lazy in Nigeria in terms of internal revenue generation. And, with further discovery and exploration of oil in more communities in the Niger Delta region, revenue from oil export grew. And, with increase in foreign earning from oil export, oil politics dwindled into gradual alteration of the revenue allocation formulae to the detriment of oil bearing region and eventual abandonment of the lands, crippled regional efforts at developing. Planning was not spared as it was politicized.

Corruption in a new dimension among political elites and ruling class was brought about by oil politics in Nigeria and, this affected national development efforts. Availability of oil and the struggle for its control led to the emergence of new class of state actors. This new class of actors have emerged with the intention to loot oil wealth at the detriment of the state. The desire to loot oil wealth by this new class of actors made national interest secondary and regional interest primordial in state leadership. Nigeria became a victim of resource curse paradigm closely linked with corruption oil politics has fueled among the new class of political elites who have captured state initiative and amassing lavishly from oil wealth. With corruption highly endemic among ruling elites in the country, the Nigerian oil industry is vulnerable to political manipulation. Corruption in the oil sector in Nigeria manifest in the award of oil licenses, avoidable bottlenecks in the oil industry, shabby process of crude oil sale and import of refined products and that associated with accounting for accruable revenue from the sale of oil in Nigeria. These tend to accentuate and fuel corrupting tendency amongst public officials as they see corrupt enrichment of selves at the expense of the state, as their opportunity to partake of the ‘national cake’. Such thinking, receives impetus from strong primordial attachment that thrives on ethnic sentiment. This is the story of oil politics in Nigeria especially when oil wealth, fuels corruption and patronage politics that have negative impacts on national development.

Oil and politics have been mixed up in Nigeria. This union has made oil politics successful in decaying infrastructures developed to improve citizens standard of living. Elites have adopted the mentality of ‘smash and grab’ to oil revenue which has also distanced the ordinary citizens from having access to oil wealth. Citizens in Nigeria rejoiced with the discovery of oil in the country hoping that revenue to be earned from the commodity export will result in improved infrastructural facilities at the community level but unfortunately, this hope was proven to be contrary by oil politics. This can be seen from the manifest neglect of infrastructural facilities where they exist. Roads in the oil bearing region of the Niger Delta are reportedly in bad shape as it is the case in several parts of the nation despite the huge amount budgeted yearly for their construction and repairs. Where they exist, there is manifest failure of the state to maintain such infrastructural facilities, leading to inevitable decay. From poorly maintained roads, poor health facilities, near non-functional social services, epileptic power supplies, comatose industrial base and manufacturing sector and so much more, the Nigerian state is marked by dearth of infrastructure worsened by poor maintenance culture. Misplaced priority of the ruling elites who are often drawn into the struggle for oil wealth that leaves them engrossed with what they can grab from the national cake which the oil wealth represents and not how to develop the nation, make this so. The willful neglect of infrastructural facilities in Nigeria represents the flip-side of oil politics in the country and has contributed in triggering oil related conflicts in Nigeria’s Niger Delta.

Oil Related Conflicts in Nigeria’s Niger Delta

Oil related conflicts in the Niger Delta are induced not only oil politics but also by environmental dislocation in the region. These have eroded traditional ways of life and contributed to conflicts within communities, among communities and between communities and oil companies operating in the region. Conflicts in the Niger Delta are multidimensional and are ignited by serious contamination of water and land by activities of oil industries operating in the region.
region. Inability to develop the region by government couple with grow in rate of poverty among members of oil bearing communities have caused conflicts in most cases. Compensation to oil producing areas is inadequate, violent actions from both security forces and militant groups are high and these have also lead to conflicts in the region on several occasions. Marginalized and alienated youth groups in the region have served as the main instruments of conflicts 22. Aggrieved youth violent activities have in most cases provoked counter-violence with more destructive tendency from the part of security forces in the region 23. These conflicts have undermined both human security and development as well as posing serious challenge to national security and economic development in Nigeria. Conflicts in Nigeria’s Niger Delta are not rebellion against the state. They are struggle for economic emancipation and against political exclusion of people of oil bearing communities by the central authority.

Government at the center has treated arrogantly and deprived oil bearing communities access to the control and management of oil resources found and produced on their soils. These have resulted in feelings of marginalization among them. They feel disinherit and excluded from managing the resources their communities are endowed with. The efforts to fight these perceived injustice and exploitation led to the formation of ethic groups such as the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP), the Association of Mineral Producing Areas of River States (AMPARS), the Association of Minority Oil States (AMOS), the Ethnic Minority Rights Organization of Nigeria (EMIRON), the Ethnic Rights Organization of Africa (EMIROAF), the Movement for Reparation to Ogbia or Oloibiri (MORETO) and, recently, the Niger Delta Peoples Volunteer Force (NDPVF), Niger Delta Vigilante Service (NDVS), Movement for the Emancipation of Niger Delta (MEND) amongst others 24. Restructuring the Nigeria federalism in a way that more autonomy be given to state but not the central government in control and management of oil resources is one of the major demands of these groups 25. This demand to them, is a sort of self determination acceptable by the United Nations charter to which Nigeria is a signatory. Additional demands include the request that oil companies operating in Niger Delta contribute to the creation and expansion of infrastructural facilities such as basic amenities, community development projects and employment of indigenes among others. The intensity of their demands translated in vandalization of pipelines, oil bunkering, kidnapping and hostage taking of oil workers, as well as children and other people who are not associated with the oil industry. Hostage-taking in the Niger Delta has become an alternative to robbery considered as sheer banditry and brigandage. Recently, small arms and sophisticated weapons are smuggled into the region from regional and international markets, which has led to increased arming of militias. Undoubtedly, the government has responded to the restiveness with a military solution, an action perceived by a majority of the people across the country as evidence of a failed state. Instead of regular police to deal with the militant youths, a military Joint Task Force (JTF) presently operates in the region.

Oil companies have established projects that have assisted in ameliorating the severity agonies of neglect and deprivation suffered by people in Nigeria’s Niger Delta but still, their insensitivities have served as another dimension in the lingering oil related conflicts in the region. Oil companies are expected to be agents of development n their host communities. Therefore, their activities are not accepted to transcend beyond certain limit because acquiring profits for themselves still remains their primary responsibility. Environmental problems such as gas flaring and oil spill have not been adequately addressed by oil companies operating in the region 26. The current state of affairs in Nigeria’s Niger Delta symbolized the destructive capability of capitalism. Oil related conflicts are on the rise in the region. Local people are protesting over the destruction of their land and forest, their source of livelihood and the pollution of their environment. The protest of the Ogoni people leading to the hanging of Ken Saro Wiwa is a reflection of the destructive tendency of capitalism (self-interest) and transnational practice 27. The region’s economies are ruined by pollution, there can hardly be any meaningful development. This is visible through environmental devastation, which has distorted socio-economic development without provision of commensurate developmental infrastructure. Implications of this are that the oil companies have no legal obligations towards their local host communities, while the host communities have no say in how and what happens to oil revenue.

The provocative action perspective which provided the basis for consolidating this paper confirmed that oil relate conflicts in Nigeria’s Niger Delta is understood both as an inter-class struggle and intra-class rivalry emanated from the backwardness and neglect the region is suffering from. The federal government has resorted to elite manipulation in the form of recruitment and appointment of local and active individuals from the area against the entire population. Oil related conflicts in the region are struggle between liberal elites (traditional rulers, politicians, top government officials, oil company executives and businessperson) and radical groups (human rights activists, journalists, youths, students, workers, women and the peasantry). These groups have strong justifications for their various positions. Hence, in every community the leadership and, in fact, the entire population are divided along these lines. It is no longer a secret to note privileged members of the region working for peace, which is perceived as tolerance of
the unjust system. Oil related conflicts in Nigeria’s Niger Delta have opened up a Pandora’s box of ideological conflict as diverse perspectives formed the debate which accounts for the causes of oil induced conflicts in the region.

Debates on Causes of Oil Related Conflicts in Nigeria’s Niger Delta

The line of confrontation often drawn in Africa is based on issues of exclusion, identity, frustration and denial of basic needs to certain communities by those who control power and main forces of coercion. Global economic system keeps Africa locked in a vicious circle of poverty and domination. This lock has promoted conflicts on the continent for ages. Poverty and domination amounting from the lock have also aggravated local conflicts for power and wealth 28. This view holds water tight in Nigeria’s Niger Delta. Nigerian state lacks autonomy and its government does not enjoy full legitimacy from the citizens in most cases. Lack of recognition from the side of the people left the government with no alternative than to adopt the use of coercive instruments in sustaining its dominance and legitimacy in the Niger Delta region of the country. Sustaining dominance through the use of coercive elements has lead to penury, acute environmental degradation and severe underdevelopment in oil bearing communities in Nigeria’s Niger Delta. Protest against perceived injustice has been the cause of confrontation between oil bearing communities in one hand with oil companies and on the other with government. Environmental degradation and displeasure with successive government policies on oil companies’ programs and operation in the region are considered unjust, inadequate and repressive. These have provoked people into intensified struggle for survival at individual and group level as their economic future is at stake. Nigeria’s social conflict profile later bears the consequences that accompanied oil related conflicts in the Niger Delta.

Destabilization of security and political dislocation in Nigeria’s Niger Delta region are aftermath of oil industries activities and operations in the area. Values and systems are fast collapsing in the region 28. Oil companies operating in the area played significant role in such paralysis. Local political landscape has been reshaped, corrupt and divisive community relation policies equivalent to the divide and rule principle in colonial Nigeria have been adopted by oil companies in the region as alternatives to further the exploitation of oil bearing communities in the region 30. Local environment has been devastated by oil companies’ activities in the region, unemployment among the youth of oil bearing communities in the region grew with time, traditional livelihood has been eroded and generalized poverty became clearly pronounced among people in oil bearing communities. Provoked by these situations, youth in Nigeria’s Niger Delta became restive 31. Since 1950s that oil was discovered and its exploration started in Nigeria, the nine states that constitute Nigeria’s Niger Delta have continued to remain the sites of fierce oil related conflicts in the country 32. Some of these conflicts are among communities while others are between them and oil companies operating in the region. Suspicousness dominates the relationship between oil companies and bearing communities. Lack of trust amounting from such suspiciousness led to lack of trust ending up in break out of hostility and violence 33. Compensation for oil pollution by multinational oil companies does not only lack transparency but also insufficient if measured with the level of damage caused 34. Hostage-taking, kidnapping of oil personnel, piracy, inter-community hostilities and illegal oil bunkering became available tactics and measures adopted by the youth to exert more money as payment for compensation for oil pollution from oil companies operating in the region 35. Both the government and oil companies operating in the Niger Delta are perceived conspirators and collaborators in the neglect of oil bearing communities in Nigeria’s Niger Delta region. In cases where government has been distanced from the people in oil producing communities through removal of government offices and departments from the communities, oil companies operating there become objects of attack as communities vent their grievances and provocations on them.

Oil companies operating in the Niger Delta have reacted on several occasions to allegations of neglecting oil bearing communities claiming that their activities are done with regard to the highest environmental standards. Officials of oil companies in the region claimed they have been granting scholarships to the youth and providing infrastructure such as classroom blocks, healthcare facilities, and water boreholes and landing jetties. In Ilaaje oil producing community, oil companies have been operating with utter neglect of their corporate social responsibility to their host communities. Oil multinationals take advantage of weak law and tax enforcement in Nigeria to avoid responsibility for the environmental damage caused by their operation 36. Marginalization and exclusion from the ownership of resources and lack of access to social amenities in the Niger Delta define the framework of poverty. It is only when development strategies address these factors holistically that the vulnerability of the poor may be ameliorated. Issues of environmental sustainability and poverty reduction must be tackled in the Niger Delta. There should be a people-centered development agenda grounded in the region’s natural and human capital.

Radical youth’s killings of the Ogoni four popularly known as ‘Vultures’ led to the arrest, prosecution and killing of Ken Saro Wiwa along with eight others by the federal government of Nigeria. The vultures massacre is an example of intra-class struggle with the region 37. Oil bearing communities perceived
the killings of Wiwa and eight others as an injustice mated on oil producing areas by the central authority in the country. The intra-class struggle inherent in the clash leading to the death of the vultures was viewed as a struggle between new comers trying to take over initiatives of the struggle for emancipation in the Niger Delta from the old strugglers. New comers accused old strugglers of playing a double standard of conspiring and romancing with the federal government on the struggle thus making the struggle impossible to achieved anticipated success. New comers may have their own corrupt tendencies but they have accused old strugglers as corrupt representatives hindering success from been achieved in the struggle for emancipation. It was believed that any attempt to succeed in the struggle is doomed to fail if romance and conspiracy with the federal government continue.

Oil related conflicts in the Niger Delta are promoted not only by injustice mated on the region by the central government through unjust distribution of resources. Though, the Niger Delta conflicts in relation to revenue allocation have risen from bad to worst. In the early 1990s, conflicts in the region assumed a horrified nature. Emerged social and militant groups became aggressive and started to adopt a more criticized stand against Nigerian state and its policies and attitudes on the Niger Delta. Multinational oil companies operating in the region got their own share of the aggression. Nigerian government adopted revenue allocation formula does not reflect the interest of the Niger Delta people. The formula has attracted criticism and rejection from various scholars and people of the region where 80 percent of the national resources is generated.

Oil related conflicts in the Niger Delta are premised on the view that laws regulation oil exploration and land ownership do not represent the interest of the people of the host communities. Militant groups in the region requested for abrogation of such laws and adoption of those which represent their interests. It has been argued that the question of resource control and self determination is at the heart of the struggle for participatory democracy in the Niger Delta. The Nigerian state and various ethnic groups have given separate interpretations to oil related conflicts in the Niger Delta. Beside these interpretations on the conflicts, Niger Delta people are highly attracted by the issue of resource control which the Nigerian state is reluctant in addressing. Over the years at different forums, the Niger Delta people have argued that the basis of the problems in their region is resource control. The sine qua non for endurable peace and development in the Niger Delta as the people of the region suggest is resource control. Although, it has been argued that revenue sharing formula adopted by Nigeria disadvantaged oil producing areas in the allocation of resources earned from oil and this, is the genesis of conflicts in the region. How well the Nigerian state resolve this unjust distribution of earnings from oil resources will determine the entrenchment of sustainable conflict free situation and development in the Niger Delta. Unending agitation for resource control portrayed largely, the structural deformities of the Nigerian state.

Workable institutional and financial mechanisms to address the issue of ecological damage and compensate the people of oil bearing communities in the Niger Delta over environmental damage caused by oil exploration led to provocation which has provided the basis for militancy and oil related conflicts in the region. Accumulated grievances over persistent environmental damage and incomparable compensation with unjust revenue allocation formula of the Nigerian state prompted the peaceful struggle for the emancipation of Ogoni people from state-imposed poverty championed by Ken Saro Wiwa a popular environmental activist who later paid the cause of the struggle he led with his life. After a critical evaluation of their condition, the Ogoni people arrived at the conclusion that huge oil and gas wealth in their land that feeds the entire nation has not been able to alleviate them from the abject poverty they are suffering from 44. Reckless oil exploitation has affected the Niger Delta environment. This bear the picture of ecological warfare being sponsored against the people by multinational oil corporations operating in the region. Unemployment and underemployment grew higher on daily basis that people in the region affirmed that rather than development, oil production activities has bedeviled their area with oppression, mass poverty, environmental degradation and human rights violation by government security agents camped in the area under the guise of maintaining peace.

Huge amount of foreign earning through oil export has not been able to alleviate poverty in oil bearing communities. It has also failed in improving access to basic social amenities especially good water, electricity, hospital and road in the Niger Delta region. Majority of the Niger Delta people reside in creeks watching daily, oil exploration activities on their soil and wealth made by oil companies from oil deposit in their region promised. Paradigmatically, it can be argued that state-imposed poverty has contributed tremendously to oil related conflicts in Nigeria’s Niger Delta. As far as the Nigerian economy is concerned, the region is the engine house of foreign earnings and revenue generation to the country. Since 1956 that oil was first discovered and its export started, billions of dollars have been flowing into government coffer as revenue. As a member of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), Nigeria is the sixth largest producer of oil in the world with a daily production target of over 2 million barrels. Paradoxically, the failure of the federal government to re-invest the proceeds accruable from petroleum into other sectors of the economy and especially in the area...
of basic social amenities development in the Niger Delta may have accounted for the ongoing conflicts in the region and many parts of the country today.

In addition to the foregoings, public calls directed toward compensating the people of Niger Delta region as a result of damages inflicted on their soil by oil production were ignored by the federal government of Nigeria. The region has seriously been affected by oil spillage, reduction of arable land, destruction of wildlife and fish reserves. Several unfulfilled promises of tackling damages caused by oil exploration in the region have been made by the government which probably have resulted in hostage-taking and kidnapping by some suspected youths in the region. The youths break oil pipe lines in order to siphon crude oil 46. Government retaliation to these activities was witnessed with disproportionate use of force as many oil producing communities were rendered homeless. Women were assaulted and others killed as in the case of Odi, Choba, Umuechem and Ogoni land in particular. Ironically, the idea of corporate social responsibility (CSR) expected from oil companies operating in the region has also been abandoned. This negligence amounting to inadequate basic social amenities in the region contributed in fueling oil related conflicts in Nigeria’s Niger Delta region. The federal government of Nigeria and oil companies operating in the region are collaborators indirectly involved in promoting oil related conflicts in the Niger Delta through their activities 47. Oil companies pay little attention to corporate social responsibility (CSR) while the government extracts oil resources through enabling laws and decrees which exclude oil bearing communities from claims to royalties. The land use decree in existence in the country vested land ownership on state but with mineral resources on it and its waters belonging to the federal government. This dimension of modern domination made the Niger Delta case is a sympathetic one. Host communities are stripped off of the ownership of resources found on their soil. They exist as landlords without power over the resources of their land. Thus, oil companies negotiate with government but not with the people of the oil bearing communities. What is apportioned to oil producing areas in the deal between government and oil companies is what the government feels is due for the communities. This unfair pattern of trade which exclude oil producing communities from bargaining on resources of their area impoverish host communities and enriches the ruling class with their agents. Exclusion emanating from such unjust arrangement culminated in provocation which threw Ogoni land and people into severe state of oil related conflicts in the Niger Delta.

**Identified Causes of Oil Related Conflicts in Ogoni Land**

The lack of respond to call for justice by the Ogoni people on the part of government and multinational corporations to environmental degradation led to the believe by the people that their existence is threatened as a people. Ogoni people are subjected to slavery, political marginalization and economic strangulation. Unprecedented respond to the state of affairs of Ogoni people in the Niger Delta region led to the emergence of environmental rights activism by civil society groups 48. The Pan-Niger Delta Resistance Movement, the Environmental Rights Action (ERA), the Ijaw Youth Council (IYC); the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP), the Movement for Reparation to Ogbia (MORETO) and the Movement for the Survival of the Ijo in the Niger Delta (MOSIEND) are some of the organizations established to struggle for economic liberation of the Niger Delta people. Each of these groups was formed with the objective of promoting ethnic nationalism aimed at liberating people in the Niger Delta region.

The gradual process of struggling for liberation in the Niger Delta region was necessitated by the evolution of oil politics in the Niger Delta. Ethnic identity metamorphosed into a mobilizing element to contest access to state and oil power. Beside these, it was designed to stand solidly as an organizing social force capable of turning into alliance for resisting alienation, extraction and exclusion of Niger Delta people from having a saying in the resources meant to alleviate the suffering of the region’s people from deprivation of the use of their land and water to make a living 49. Although, several people disguising to be struggling for economic emancipation of the Niger Delta people have extorted both the federal government and oil companies by requesting for money that never gets to the reach of the ordinary people of the Niger Delta region. This has faulted ethnic nationalism as one of the problems connected with oil related conflicts in Ogoni land.

Government reluctant efforts toward environmental management and oil companies’ negligence in the delivery of corporate social responsibility (CSR) projects in oil bearing communities justified the beginning of hostilities and demand for self-determination in Ogoni land. oil related conflicts in Ogoni land. In 1990 alone, oil revenue contribution to Nigeria government from Ogoni land amounted to $30 billion with nothing in return to the land from the government. Lack of return for such contribution triggered the call for self-determination thus independence by the Ogoni people. And, Ken Saro Wiwa’s led protest that was repressed with massive human rights violation ever recorded in the history of Nigeria was ignited by multinational corporations’ failure in corporate social responsibility (CSR) involvement in Ogoni land 50. Though, oil companies believe that the cause of oil related conflicts in Ogoni land is the Ogoni people retrogressive and antagonistic behaviors toward oil corporations. Such attitude has
fermented the relationship between Ogoni people and Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC). Ogoni people aggressive relationship to oil companies and their radical approach to demanding justice have resulted in violent leading to over 2000 deaths 51. The Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP) constant remarked and called that oil royalties and rents are the property of landlords and the federal government must return them to oil bearing communities have led to protest by the group in which government forces to dispersed mob have often been greeted with resistant stand taken by the group leading to several losses of lives and properties in Ogoni land 52. The Nigerian Renter State is perceived as an “unconsonable usurper and landlord”, and the oil companies as exploitative illegal tenants. A major problem here is that the laws that govern the oil industry merely addresses operational issues, which serve the interests of oil companies and the federal government, instead of the interests of the oil communities 53. This will make the return of royalties and rents collected by federal government from oil companies difficult to be returned to Ogoni land and people.

Environment in the Niger Delta has been severely affected by widespread oil contamination as a result of oil exploration by Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC). The aftermath of this environmental degradation is that Ogoni land has been seriously polluted with its people made to live with polluted air and water contaminated with benzene at levels of 900 time which is above the World Health Organization guideline 54. In addition to the view that Ogoni land suffers severe environmental degradation owing to oil exploration by oil companies, the people of Ogoni land do not get full return of what they contribute to national earning. And, this has resulted in open feeling of marginalization 55. Though, Ogoni people suffers marginalization on their soil partly as a result of their traditional taboo. Ogoni women in rural areas are for instance is forbidden to do any work to cater for themselves if the as only fishing and farming are accorded to them as work by tradition 56. Nigerian government is famous in controlling conflicts using military reprisal. This measure has been adopted as a strategy in approaching issues relating to Ogoni land. Resistant to such approach by Ogoni people has often translated in conflicts between oil bearing communities of Ogoni land and the federal government forces deployed to ensure peace in Ogoni land 57. Repressive measure was taken against MOSOP by the federal military government in Ogoni land. Ken Saro Wiwa the leader of the movement and eight others were charged with treason and found guilty by a military tribunal. They were sentenced to death by hanging in 1995 for the role they played in the violence that led to the death of four Ogoni leaders. And, also for inciting the people against the activities of Chevron and Shell oil companies. This action catapulted Ogoni land and the entire Niger Delta region into chaos and violence conflicts which translated in lost of many lives and destruction of properties in the Niger Delta especially Ogoni land 58. Complicity and greed on the part of the youths contributed to the conflict and also prolonged it. Oil companies such as Chevron employ youths to guide oil pipelines and installations in their community, but the young people use the money they earn for drugs, prostitution, violence and purchasing firearms to engage in clashes with other communities related to money, lands and oil wells. In some cases, these people turn to attack the same installations they were paid to guard. This they do to cause oil spillages and then make a case for compensation. If compensation is denied, they team up with those affected by such spillages to protest against the oil companies. This is a vicious circle which further entrenches suffering among the people of Ogoni 59. However, it is apparent that environmental degradation, marginalization, militarization and greed have contributed seriously as some of the causes of oil related conflicts in Ogoni land.

Impacts of Oil Related Conflicts on Ogoni Land and People

Oil related conflicts have affected Ogoni land and people in several ways and forms. The conflicts have resulted in economic sabotage in Ogoni land. Oil company workers have been kidnapped by militant groups in different attack. Oil installations have also been attacked and pipelines vandalized in oil bearing communities in Ogoni land. Insecurity situation amounting from such economic sabotage has resulted in the closure of activities by oil companies operating on Ogoni soil. Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC) was forced out of Ogoni land and its stoppage of exploration led to decline in economic standard of Ogoni land, the Niger Delta and Nigeria 60. The standard of living of the whole nation was affected by oil related conflict in the Niger Delta. Foreign earnings reduced as daily production targets declined due to attacks on oil companies, installations and pipelines in Ogoni land. This equally means reduction in attention to infrastructural development through Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in Ogoni land by oil companies operating in the area. Immediate impact of oil related conflicts was the disruption of main source of revenue which has a serious negative impact on Nigeria’s economy since the main source of the nation is from oil exploration which is in abundance in Ogoni land in Nigeria’s Niger Delta. Ogoni people complain of not benefiting from fortune accruing from the degradation of their environment by oil exploration therefore, they thought that they might as well stop its production.

Oil related conflicts over the years have made Ogoni land and people ungovernable. The land became insecure owing to continuous protest and violence by the Ogoni people. Repeated protest and violence have proven to have negative impact on the progress of communities in Ogoni land. Although, unending oil
related conflicts in Ogoni land may have impacted negatively on the lives of the people and the general development of the land, but they have contributed in persuading the federal government of Nigeria to consider some of the developmental needs of Ogoni land and people. Thus, in 1992, the Oil Mineral Producing Areas Development Commission (OPMADEC) and in 1999, the Niger Development Commission (NDDC) were established and charged with a number of responsibilities basic among which include responding to ecological problem and developmental demands of oil bearing communities and people in the Niger Delta.

The impacts of oil related conflicts on Ogoni land and people were not only negative but also huge and traumatize. The establishment of the commissions also encouraged intra-communal clashes as communities began to fight among themselves over ownership of oil wells while the local residents jostled for posts in the commissions. The loss of lives and destruction of properties experienced in the conflicts are sad to remember. Sexual violation of females by the Nigerian military drafted to the region during the conflicts period amounted to a serious violation of human rights and dignity of Ogoni people especially women. And, above all, the activists and elites, who were meant to be acting on behalf of the people, used the commissions to enrich themselves thereby undermining the reasons for the creation of the commissions. Insecurity and sexual violence have added to the pictures of how negative oil related conflicts impacted on Ogoni land and people.

Efforts toward ameliorating Oil Related Conflicts in the Niger Delta

Though, accused of not willing to addressed the situation in the Niger Delta region as oil bearing communities and people are yet to see their demands fulfilled, the federal government of Nigeria over the years has made a number to efforts toward ameliorating oil related conflicts in the Niger Delta region. Efforts by the federal government to solve the problem of marginalization which is one of the loudly reason for arm struggle in the region manifested in the establishment of the Minorities Commission in 1958. The commission handled a number of duties aimed at addressing the complain of marginalization often put forward by minor ethnic groups in the Niger Delta and other regions of the country. The minority commission recommended a special board to be established to oversee developments needs in the Niger Delta. Also, in 1992, OMPADEC was established to further respond to the challenges of marginalisation and tackle ecological issues and developmental demands of oil bearing communities and their people. However, the creation of OMPADEC only served to provide electricity and water to communities for a while, with a larger part of the funding for OMPADEC going into private hands. This was loudly considered by the people as another from of corruption hence, youth became provoked and resorted to restiveness seriously aggravating oil related conflicts in the region.

Additional efforts considered as a recent move towards ending oil related conflicts in Nigeria’s Niger Delta is the amnesty program initiated by the federal government of Nigeria. Under the program, the government of Nigeria offered to train, compensate and give jobs in exchange for the renunciation of militant activities. The militants had to go to designated screening point to hand in their arms. The amnesty programme saw the surrendering of about 287,445 weapons, while 20,192 former militants and non-militants surrendered in October, 2009. The amnesty programme in Nigeria was initiated to tackle the restivenes of the youths in the Niger Delta. The implementation of the disarmament exercise through the amnesty programme was to have an effect on the rehabilitation of youths involved in armed struggle in the Niger Delta. Though, arms were surrendered but then, it can hardly be accepted that some other stock piles of weapons are not hidden elsewhere. Supply routes of arms into the region are not hidden. Efforts to halt supply are minimal or have not been taken. And, this equally means that though arms have been surrendered, new ones can also be obtained when the need to do so aroused.

There are several ethnic minorities in Nigeria especially in the Niger Delta, north central and north eastern regions of the country. They are also part of the Nigerian federation therefore, they should be accorded full status of being part of the federating union. In fact, ethnic minorities in the Niger Delta are part of the most sensitive area that form the back bone of the Nigerian economy. It is necessary that they be considered in the allocation of power and resources. The issue of derivational principle which centred around revenue sharing and allocation signalled a great deal of marginalization of the Niger Delta people. Oil related conflicts in the region have largely been attributed to this unjust distribution of resources. Government efforts though minimal have been witnessed over the years in ameliorating the complain of revenue allocation. It was argued that, when agriculture powered the Nigerian economy, higher percent of earning from agriculture is returned under derivational principle to the producing regions. Deviation from the initial derivational principle with the discovery and exploration of oil in the Niger Delta portrayed a new politics of marginalization of the people of the Niger Delta from where earning that sustained the national economy is generated.

Effort at ameliorating oil related conflicts in the Niger Delta through review of existing revenue allocation formula has also been Witnessed from the part of the federal government of Nigeria. Though, OMPADEC’s establishment led to the investment of billions of Nigerian Naira on development projects in
Oil bearing communities to demonstrate its commitment to addressing the complaints of neglect put forward by the Niger Delta people. But like other efforts before it, corruption encroached into the efforts and rendered OMPADEC incapable of meeting the developmental needs of the Niger Delta region. And, on the issue of unjust distribution of resources perceived in revenue allocation formula, the federal government increased the derivation fund to the Niger from 1.5 to 3.0%, later to 15% and currently to 13% signifying its willingness towards fair revenue allocation formula against the complain of the Niger Delta people. The agitation for more than 13% derivation to area where more than 80% of national earning is generated still rises with time in the Niger Delta. The federal government sluggish respond to such agitation has led to call for resource control and self determination accompanied by oil related conflicts in the region.

**CONCLUSION**

Oil related conflicts in Nigeria’s Niger Delta are promoted by the central oil politics which has marginalized the people of the Niger Delta politically and economically. They are results of provoke entrenchment by ecological damaged of oil bearing communities by oil companies’ activities in the Niger Delta. Government policy on oil exploration in the region paid more attention to returns from oil production than damages inflicted on environment by multinationals oil corporations operating in the region. And, minimal efforts through corporate social responsibility to develop infrastructures and improve living condition from oil corporations in the region have also set the people against oil companies. Revenue allocation formula which seems to favour majority ethnic groups which do not produced a single gallon of crude oil than minority ethnic groups from whose soil over 2 million barrels of crude oil which account for the largest part of national income is produced on daily basis also contributed in provocation that often-ignited oil related conflicts in the Niger Delta.

Many believe that oil related conflicts in the Niger Delta are rebellions against the Nigerian state and government. They are not but merely struggle for emancipation of the Niger Delta people whose land has been polluted by oil companies’ activities. Farm lands have been destroyed living the people with no source of income to rely on. Aquatic creatures have been killed by oil spillage and gas flare in the region. Level of infrastructural development has continued to remain discouraging. Though, government claim the geographical terrain of the region is proven difficult for the development of infrastructures while same terrain has not made infrastructural development difficult in Lagos and other non-oil bearing communities in coastal areas of South Western Nigeria. Poverty, joblessness and frustration which added to the impacts of oil politics which have deprived the people from enjoying the wealth of resources produced in their region help in the provocations which often ended in arms struggles considered as oil related conflicts in the region.

In Ogoni land, several protests and demonstration staged by the people were against political, social and economic marginalization of Ogoni people caused by oil politics, environmental degradation as well as divide and rule tactics often adopted by oil companies in setting communities against each other’s. Economic sabotage, insecurity, loss of lives and destruction of properties have emerged from oil related conflicts as part of the impacts of such conflicts on Ogoni people. Tension can be subdued by government efforts in ameliorating oil related conflicts in the Niger Delta. But, until and unless adopted efforts are well implemented, they will also serve as catalysts in promoting further conflicts. Subdue tension can again rise as state efforts have not yet addressed the identified causes of oil related conflicts in the region. The Niger Delta questions are basically among other demands, resource control and self-determination. These questions have not been answered and pointed out in several efforts adopted by the Nigerian state. Increased derivational principle to the region may douse tension and reduced the outbreak of oil related conflicts in the region to a reasonable level. Niger Delta efforts toward increase derivational principle have also suffered frustration in the national parliament as majority ethnic groups whose regions do not produced oil view such efforts as attempt to by the Niger Delta people to stripped them naked and to a disadvantage status in revenue sharing formula in which they are at advantage.

The Nigerian state and its economy are surviving at limbo. At slighted provocation, conflicts are ignited. Emerged vandalization of oil facilities have translated in low daily production of oil below the 2 million barrels production target on daily basis. This equally implies shrink in foreign earning. Repressive measures often adopted in some cases by the federal government will not solve the conflicts. They will only trigger more as resistant stands by youth groups in the region often accompanied government repressive measures. For instance, the government military action and operation code named “Operation Crocodile Smile” was welcomed with a resistant militant operation code named “Operation Crocodile Tears” by youth militant in the region. Addressing the actual question of the Niger Delta people may be too hot for major ethnic groups to accept as they fear of losing greater share of revenue allocation to the Niger Delta. But then, increase derivational formula, political, social and economic inclusion as well as improve environmental management policies with active corporate social responsibility service to the Niger Delta and its people will go a long way in quenching the frequently experienced oil related conflicts in the region.
REFERENCES


