Youth Restiveness in the Niger Delta: A Critical Discourse

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Abstract
One of the many-sided effects of environmental injustice in the Niger Delta is “Youth Restiveness” which metamorphosed into proliferation of arms and the emergence of militias that is arguably a threat to the macro-Nigerian environment. This article, which relied on secondary sources of data, critically examines youth restiveness in the Niger Delta and contends that the root cause is the legal environmental laws that provided the basis for the operational hazards of the oil conglomerates that have collaborated with the Nigerian state whose intervention agencies have largely failed to close the developmental gaps in the region. The article posits that in the face of sundry efforts by the Nigerian state, particularly the infinitesimal 13% derivation element of the current revenue sharing formula, the failed land use reform attempt, the partially successful short-run post-amnesty program, and the controversial petroleum industry bill, the central developmental concerns of the Niger Delta region have not been addressed. The article concludes with some useful recommendations including the exigency of the modification of the obnoxious and eco-environmentally disadvantageous laws and a holistic developmental approach and action-based programs by the Nigerian government and oil conglomerates that will provide sustainable windows of opportunity and safety nets for the socio-economically dislocated youths.

Keywords
youth restiveness, Niger Delta, holistic developmental approach

Introduction
Youth Restiveness, one of the many-sided effects of the seemingly unending Niger Delta crisis, relates to matters of agitation by youths over issues of deprivation, neglect, marginalization, and feelings of dissatisfaction. The engagement by youths in agitation for the restoration of their rights and dignity or self-seeking and criminal activities, that can be either constructive (positive) or destructive (negative), is undoubtedly a hydra-headed socio-economic problem in Nigeria’s Niger Delta. The root cause of the youth restiveness in the region is the broad spectrum of laws that have both colonial inspiration and feudal inclination and the accompanying actions of the Nigerian state on the country’s oil industry and the age-long regime of environmental degradation due to the mindless operational threats arising from the oil exploration and production activities of the oil conglomerates. The legal/environmental laws that provided the constitutional foundation did not only create the environment which is up till today plaguing the Niger Delta region but also set the stage for the operational menace in which the region has been engulfed. A deeper insight into the nature of the collaboration by the three partners in the unholy alliance can largely be provided, taking cognizance of the fact that the Nigerian state (pre- and post-colonial) formulates the policies that create and determine the political and business environment that are clement for the capitalist development of the oil industry and the exploitation and underdevelopment of the Niger Delta region. In the face of the far from legal/environmentally benign laws and the devastating operational activities of the oil majors and minors, the cosmetic institutional interventionist efforts of the Nigerian state supposedly meant to close the developmental gaps in the paradoxically rich-oil treasure-based, but poverty-ridden and underdeveloped, region failed to achieve any tangible results. The patently stark environmental injustice that has been the lot of the Niger Delta region has provided a fertile ground for the deep-seated youth restiveness that had assumed frightening militant and anti-developmental dimensions. This study therefore critically examines the youth restiveness problematic in Nigeria’s Niger Delta.

Environment and Youth Restiveness: Conceptual Explanation
Environment literally connotes the surrounding. It is the total planetary inheritance and the totality of all resources of the oil industry and the exploitation and underdevelopment of the Niger Delta region. In the face of the far from legal/environmentally benign laws and the devastating operational activities of the oil majors and minors, the cosmetic institutional interventionist efforts of the Nigerian state supposedly meant to close the developmental gaps in the paradoxically rich-oil treasure-based, but poverty-ridden and underdeveloped, region failed to achieve any tangible results. The patently stark environmental injustice that has been the lot of the Niger Delta region has provided a fertile ground for the deep-seated youth restiveness that had assumed frightening militant and anti-developmental dimensions. This study therefore critically examines the youth restiveness problematic in Nigeria’s Niger Delta.

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Youth restiveness, however, is a situation of the inability of youths to be still or quiet and difficult to control, especially when they are unsatisfied with something. It relates to matters of agitation by youths over issues of deprivation, neglect, marginalization, and other feelings of dissatisfaction. It can also be viewed as the engagement by youths in agitation for the restoration of their rights and dignity or self-seeking and criminal activities. In a similar vein, youth restiveness refers to the reactions by youths, both constructive (positive) and destructive (negative) to the “use and dump” mentality and attitude of those considered to be involved in acts of oppression and repression against their interests. It is equally a deliberate instrument of organized response to perceived grievances that has an increasing potency and capability for destruction. Essentially too, youth restiveness is a manifestation of anxiety that encompasses the dysfunctional effects of anxiety on human body and the description of the psychological activities of the body that give vent to anxiety. It is, in fact, a sustained protestation embarked upon with an eye to enforcing a desired outcome from a constituted authority by an organized body of youths. It is thus an excess behavior attribute that is commonly marked by violence and disruption of lawful activities.

The usage of the word “youth restiveness” became ubiquitous in Nigeria since the wake of the activities of youths in the oil-bearing communities of the Niger Delta. The phenomenon is usually associated with adolescents because of the fact that they confront a host of new, varied, and difficult problems of adjustment that make the search for identity and a place in society imperative. Ogbeifun (2007) categorized youth restiveness into three categories—namely, genuine agitation, self-seeking and criminal activities, and youth on vengeance mission. Although the term has gained notoriety in usage, particularly in the Nigerian parlance, it has gradually assumed a global configuration, despite the fact that a standard and generally acceptable definition is yet to evolve.

Theoretical Framework

Although there are several theories for explaining facts generated in research endeavors, for purpose of this study, the “Strain Theory of Deviance and the Frustration Theory” were adopted. This became expedient because all the factors that are commonly advanced as an explanation for youth restiveness can be located in the above context due to the fact that they all relate to the bottom line, which is dissatisfaction and unrealized goals.

The “Strain” theory as propounded by Merton (1968) contends that deviant behavior results not from pathological personalities; rather, it is a consequence of the culture and structure of society itself. He reasoned that because all members of the society are placed in different strata of the social structure, they do not have the same access to the realization of their shared values and goals. The shared values and goals translate into cultural goals which could be material possession, educational attainment, and significant others. Merton further noted that people feel strained when they are incapable of meeting the cultural goals to which they are exposed owing to inaccessibility to the culturally approved and acceptable means of realizing the goals. The tendency therefore is to resort to deviant and unacceptable means.

In the same vein, the “Frustration” theory presupposes that a continuing or unresolved motivational conflict is a source of frustration (Atkinson & Atkinson, 1975). This theory argues that when a person’s progress toward a desired goal is blocked, delayed, or otherwise interfered with, he or she encounters frustration. Blocked goal seeking therefore produces confusion, bewilderment, and annoyance. Frustration, by implication, connotes an event rather than an emotional state; thwarting circumstances rather than their consequences. Apart from the various types of conflict that provide a major source of human frustration, there are other barriers to the satisfaction of drives (Atkinson & Atkinson, 1975). Frustration, whether it is the result of obstacles, deficiencies, or conflict, has both immediate and remote consequences. This viewpoint is premised on the reasoning that when blocked in goal seeking, the individual or youth may react immediately or develop attitudes toward uncertainty or risk taking that has more enduring consequences. Restlessness and tensions are usually associated with many actions indicating unhappiness, dissatisfaction, and frustration and closely related to increased tensions; and restless movements are the rage states that lead to destructiveness and hostile attacks that have become commonplace in the Niger Delta environment. Although aggression is often the result of frustrating circumstances, an explanation of aggression based
solely on environmental influences is incomplete. Because of the problems inherent in the original version of the frustration–aggression hypothesis, Berkowitz (1965) suggested three alterations to the theory. He opined that emotional reaction does not compulsorily cause aggression, but it creates a predisposition for aggressive acts.

The above reality is typical of the Niger Delta youths who have little or no access to the environmental opportunities of their region due to the insensitivity and neglect that characterize or underpin the activities and roles of the Nigerian state in an unholy alliance with the oil multi-nationals and the local bourgeoisie. Thus, the inability of the youths to actualize their goals through the institutionalized means in the face of the opportunities that abound in their environment has produced strains and frustrations culminating in all shapes of social problems and deviant practices that consequently pose serious threats to the same micro (Niger Delta) environment and the macro (Nigerian state) environment. The strain theory of deviance and the frustration theory therefore have the utilitarian explanatory value for the youth restiveness and the attendant militancy activities in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria.

**Root Cause and Legal Environment of Youth Restiveness**

Nigerian legislation on petroleum predated exploration activities or efforts in Nigeria. The first piece of legislation was the Petroleum Ordinance of 1889 that was followed by the Mineral Regulation (Oil) Ordinance of 1907, both of which provided the basic legal framework for the development of petroleum and its natural resources (Omorogbe, 2001). To a very significant degree, the nature of the colonial and post-colonial Nigerian state is largely structurally the same, for the broad spectrum of laws and accompanying actions of the Nigerian state on the country’s oil industry have been no less an extension of the 1914 Mineral Act that vested all powers over resources (solid and liquid) on the state as Omoweh (2006) rightly articulated. For instance, the post-colonial state like its predecessor has the exclusive right to issue mineral prospecting and mining licenses and the sole power to collect royalties, rents, and fees from the oil companies. Both the Petroleum Act of 1969 and the Land Use Decree of 1978 are complementary and designed to strengthen the instrument of oppression, suppression, marginalization, dispossession, deprivation, and disempowerment of the Niger Delta people by the state in collaboration with its allies, the multi-national oil corporations, and the local bourgeoisie.

The origin of the law in Nigeria is traceable to a similar law enacted by the British in Northern Nigeria, inspired by English tradition that vested all land on the English Crown (Constitutional Rights Project [CRP], 1999). The law can therefore be described as one of colonial inspiration and feudal inclination. Arguably, no where else in Nigeria has the impact of the Land Use Decree manifested in all its ramifications and inequities as in the Niger Delta, Nigeria’s main oil-producing region. The Land Use Decree also sought accommodation for the oil companies who need land for virtually all its operations. In fact, the oil giants need land for exploration, production, transportation of crude oil by pipeline, construction of oil terminal stations, flare sites, airstrips, offices, and staff quarters. This partly explains the logic behind the content of the Land Use Decree that also provided a buffer for the oil giants to be more reckless in their operations. This may also be a part explanation for why Shell, for instance, can afford to flare gas on a daily basis since 1956 when it discovered oil in the Niger Delta and yet be shielded by the state over litigations on land where oil is explored or produced (Omoweh, 2006). Land protection in the light of sustainability was, as a result, and is still not of any interest to the state that gradually rendered the Niger Delta people into paupers through successive legislation including the Petroleum and Land Use and squatters in their own land. Thus, the entire structure of the macroecological climate in which the Niger Delta is embedded and that has seriously stifled its development or facilitated its underdevelopment is predicated and premised on the legal environment that is the root cause and foundation of youth restiveness in the region.

**Operational Activities of Oil Conglomerates as Accentuation of the Legal Environment of Youth Restiveness in the Niger Delta Region**

Since 1956, when the then Shell–British Petroleum (BP) struck oil in commercial quantities at Oloibiri in the Niger Delta after an investment of more than N30 million in 1950, crude oil exploration, production, and transportation activities have been on in the region with the first export of Nigeria’s crude oil in 1957 (Ejumudo, 2005). Within 10 years, which is on the eve of the Nigerian civil war, production had reached about 500,000 barrels a day, thus establishing Nigeria as a significant oil producer (Owoeye & Ojakorotu, 2002). The post-1956 era saw the emergence of several other multi-national operators in Nigeria, including Mobil (now Mobil Exxon) in 1955, Tenneco in 1960, and Gulf (which later became Chevron and Texaco, which are now merged and today known as Chevron–Texaco) in 1965 (Aturu, 1989; Ejumudo, 2005). With the full-blown oil exploration and production activities of the oil giants in the oil-bearing communities of Nigeria, several issues including environmental degradation, poverty, marginalization, resource control, and outright underdevelopment of the Niger Delta region have surfaced and constituted unending sources of conflict including youth restiveness.

The beginning point of any fruitful assessment of the alliance between the state, its local bourgeoisie, and the oil
multi-nationals is to see the state as a contested terrain where there is group interest and power play. The alliance of the three actors, namely, the state, oil giants, and the domestic bourgeoisie also determines the dependence of the Nigerian state on the oil surpluses and integration into global oil relations. The alliance of the trio and the dependency elements, exploitative structural basis, and the constraining underdevelopment effects is understood taking cognizance of the historical circumstances of the Niger Delta that conspired to produce a domestic bourgeoisie (elite group) that has no sense of identify, integrity, and confidence (Ake, 1992, 2005; Ejumudo, 2005).

That the alliance of the Nigerian state with the oil giants and the domestic bourgeoisie has played a dominant role in the underdevelopment of the Niger Delta is indubitable. The choice of the word “underdevelopment” is predicated on the understanding that the region has prospects for development but not potentialities for same due to the laws, policies, actions, and operations of the trio (three actors) in the alliance that has produced stagnation and regression in the region (Jhingan, 2009). The role of the oil giants (transnational corporations) as agents of underdevelopment in the developing world has for long been acknowledged and highlighted (Omoweh, 2006; Rodney, 1986). The legal/constitutional foundation did not only create the environment that is up till today plaguing the Niger Delta region but also set the stage for the operational menace in which the region has been engulfed. A deeper insight into the nature of the collaboration by the three partners in the unholy alliance can largely be provided, taking cognizance of the fact that the Nigerian state (pre- and post-colonial) formulates the policies that create and determine the political and business environment that are element for the capitalist development of the oil industry and the exploitation and underdevelopment of the Niger Delta region. The effects of the exploration, exploitation, production, and transportation activities of the oil companies including gas flaring have been devastating to the rich-oil region called the “Niger Delta.” The mass of the people of the region are therefore pauperized through rural poverty that is foisted on them.

**A Critical Discourse of Youth Restiveness as Agitation and Response to the Operational Environment in the Niger Delta**

In the early days of the oil industry in Nigeria, exploration and production activities of transnational companies (TNCs) were at a relatively low level, less visible and intrusive than they are presently. Oil-bearing communities were thriving on their traditional vocations of farming and artisanal fishing for which they depended essentially on land, watershed, and natural resources that were fertile, unpolluted, and highly productive. Industrial and population pressures on land and water resource were yet unknown in most of the communities (Onosode, 2006). Today, as a result of the increasing profile of exploration and production activities owing to the involvement of many oil majors and minors, the Niger Delta region has been a victim of environmental pollution and degradation. The same land that was productive has given way to the deteriorating effects of the operations of the oil conglomerates. Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC), the oil conglomerate on behalf of the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC)/Shell/Elf/Agip Joint Venture as at 1996, operated oil mining licenses covering an area of more than 31,000 sq km. The company operated an extensive network of about 900 producing oil wells, 100 flow stations/gas plants, 4,500 m of oil and gas flow lines, and more than 1,500 km of trunk lines through which oil flows from the aggregates of overlapping and superimposed pools of accumulations of petroleum located in the geological structures of the oil region to the two major terminals at Bonny and Forcados (Ejumudo, 2005).

Arguably, the proportion of land take is far more significant than it seems, considering the fact that the Niger Delta constitutes one of Nigeria’s most difficult geographical terrain and a significant proportional (of about two thirds) is made up of water or at best is riverine. There is therefore a limited, usable land. The accompanying effect is that in many areas of the region, there is land hunger, especially as oil companies cut up and confiscate farmlands with the legal backing of the state. As land is farmed into oil concessions, degrading of natural resources on the land commonly results in death of the land that is marked by declining productivity and rural–urban migration is intensified. In fact, valuable portions of farmland, lowland, fresh water swamp forest, and mangrove resources have been degraded and such loss of habitat and resources in the oil communities that depend on natural resources is devastated, leaving the people in a vicious cycle of poverty (Onosode, 2006). The trail of natural resource degradation in places such as Oloibiri, Kokori, Sangama, Boma, and other oil-bearing communities are testimonial.

Associated implications of the operations of the oil conglomerates in the Niger Delta region are oil spillage, gas flaring, and pipeline vandalism. While oil spillages occur at various stages of product handling, from exploration to production through refining to distribution and marketing, no less than 96% of the spills are associated with the exploration and production and therefore localized in the producing areas (Roberts, 2005). Over the years, oil companies have spilt much oil in the region. Between 1976 and 2006, there were 9,005 reported cases of oil spills with a spillage of about 10.1 million barrels of which only 2.4 barrels were recovered, while the rest were retained in the environment. About 6,500 m barrels of oil were spilled in 700 separate incidences each year in Rivers, Delta, Bayelsa, and Akwa Ibom states (World Bank, 2008). In January 1998 alone, about 40,000 barrels of light crude leaked from a Mobil Producing Unlimited
pipeline at Eket in Akwa Ibom state. The incidences of spills and their impact are varied across the ecological zones, with more spillages in land than swamp and offshore operations. This impact of spills on the Niger Delta environment is more revealing in view of the fact that Nigerian crude is very toxic and chemical dispersants often used to clean up spills tend to aggravate the damage on the aquatic environment. In addition, dispersants merely make spills more soluble and relatively invisible to the eye, but they do not remove the toxicity (Ayonote, 2005). The long-term effects of oil spills can be very enduring largely because the devastation of plants and farmlands continue insofar as spilled oil blocks oxygen supply and destroys essential nutrients in the soil such as magnesium and nitrogen.

As far as gas flaring is concerned, across the Niger Delta, oil conglomerates burn off gas from hundreds of oil wells in huge fires. The disposal of associated gas has been a major challenge to the region and the Nigerian state. On the average, roughly 1,000 standard cubic feet (scf) of gas is produced in Nigeria with every barrel of oil. With oil production of about 2.0 billion scf of associated gas is produced every day. Nigeria flares more gas than any other country in the world, for the country is estimated as being responsible for a quarter of global flares (Onosode, 2006). World Bank (2009) estimated that Nigeria flares about 75% of the gas it produces due to lack of a local market and infrastructure. Apart from the fact that gas flares constitute a massive and monumental waste of a valuable national financial and energy resource, they cause significant environmental damage, principally because they kill vegetation, suppress the growth of some plants, and diminish agricultural production. The dysfunctional effects of the exploration and production activities of the oil conglomerates and operators in Nigeria since the close of the 1950s have not only become a hydra-headed social problem but also raised many concerns and attracted the attention of environmental and human rights activists, development scholars, and research experts, as well as multi-layered levels of government.

In respect of pipeline vandalization, the Niger Delta has a hotbed of crisis. This is because the youth commonly resort to cutting of flow lines and destruction of oil facilities belonging to oil companies or the NNPC. In 1998, for instance, agitated youth vandalized NNPC’s pipelines at Jesse in Ethiope Local Government Area of Delta State in Nigeria. Later, about 1,000 people went there to siphon petroleum products from the man-ruptured pipelines and they were killed in the inferno (Okecha, 2011). Also, in March 2000, more than 50 persons including children died in a raging inferno at the site of a vandalized NNPC pipeline at Nneji and Umuegbede, both in Ngwa Local Government Area of Abia State. Later in July 2000, 300 persons including youth were killed following an explosion on a vandalized oil pipeline at Egborode village in Okpe Local Government Area of Delta State. The fire did not spare the fauna and flora as hundreds of hectares of farmlands were reduced to ashes. In fact, statistics on pipeline vandalism in Niger Delta show a total of 3,200 cases between 1993 and 2007 (“Pipeline Vandalization in the Niger Delta,” 2009).

Cognizant of the above operational dysfunctionality of the oil exploration and production activities of the oil conglomerates in the oil-rich Niger Delta region stimulated by the legalconstitutional environmental laws that empowered the Nigerian state, emboldened the oil companies and simultaneously disempowered the oil-bearing communities and the peripherally superficial, but failed, state institutionalized interventionist efforts to close the development gaps of the region, it is incumbent upon this study to locate and contextualize youth restiveness in the explanatory field of the strain conception of deviance and the frustration perspective of Merton and Atkinson, respectively. It is instructively sequential to add that it is the blocked or delayed access to socio-economic developmental opportunities and the consequential failure by the youths of the region to realize their shared values and goals that produced confusion, bewilderment, and annoyance. One of the many-sided effects of the environmental injustice in the Niger Delta is therefore “Youth Restiveness.”

The frustrated and agitated youth of the Niger Delta first responded to the prevailing unacceptable and detestable environmental and socio-economic situation through pleas and demands, but eventually with sundry forms of political contestation, including violence to life and property (Okafor-Oifiebor, 1997). A more eloquent and sophisticated response was the pioneering struggle for the Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP) championed by Saro-Wiwa and his Ogoni kinsmen. The movement launched a vigorous local and international campaign for the ownership of the oil in the area. The campaign was guided by the Ogoni Bill of Rights issued in 1990 that demanded for the political control of Ogoni affairs by Ogoni people, control and use of a fair proportion of Ogoni economic resources for Ogoni development, and the right to protect the Ogoni environment and economy from further development. Beyond the fact that other Niger Delta groups have the same agenda was the demand by the Ogoni people for the abrogation of the Land Use Decree and the Petroleum Decree.

The non-violent approach was like a dialogue with the deaf, for neither the state nor the oil conglomerates paid sufficient attention. The Niger Delta youth thereafter opted for threats and protests during which time oil companies were warned to discontinue their operations in the region. On August 17, 1997, more than 10,000 youths from across the Niger Delta converged Aleibiri in Bayelsa state to protest the environmental degradation caused by SPDC. A retired navy lieutenant from Aleibiri was quoted to have said that the Niger Delta people would fight until there is freedom in the Niger Delta because they have been exploited for so long (Osaghae, 1995). The agitated youths more often than not direct their violent protests at oil conglomerates because the latter are perceived not just as the direct culprits in their
plight but also as the most proximate government agents. Such protests took the form of blockade of and sabotage to oil installations (Mabro, 1997). The Niger Delta youths eventually went beyond the sabotage of oil installations to an attack of the personnel of oil companies. In 1997, for instance, a gang of armed youths attacked and closed down six flow stations in Delta state, taking 127 personnel hostage and shutting in 10,000 bpd of oil. It took 6 days of negotiations to get the hostages released. Subsequently, 15 contract staff on board a supply convoy were kidnapped and detained for more than 3 weeks (Anderson, 1996).

Notably, it was the increased anger in the oil-bearing communities with the crude and exploitative activities of the oil companies and the growing perception of federal government’s tacit endorsement of same that resulted in youth restiveness and the formation of activist youth organizations and militia groups in the Niger Delta. Between 1990 and 1999, at least 24 of such groups were formed that intensified struggles, often with violent outcomes, against the companies and federal (state) agents and agencies such as the police and the armed forces (Jega, 2007). Many of these groups have made declarations that emphasize self-assertion and autonomy in the control of resources and management of the affairs of the communities in the Niger Delta. The groups include the Ogoni Bill of Rights, the Kaima Declaration, the Akụkụ Declaration of the Egbir people, the Oron Bill of Rights; the Warri Accord, and the Resolutions of the First Urhobo summit. In May 2006, for instance, the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) said, “there will be no rest for the Nigerian government and collaborating oil companies until all the stolen oil is returned to its rightful owners with compensation for all the years of theft and slavery” and the group had vigorously sponsored several violent protests and instigated many kidnapping in the region (International Crisis Group, 2006, p. 20).

Essentially, MEND criticized the piecemeal and divide-and-rule approach to the development of the Niger Delta region and described the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) as a channel for further looting of the meager sums allocated to developing the Niger Delta (International Crisis Group, 2006). In protesting the approach of the Nigerian government and oil multi-nationals to the development of the Niger Delta region, the organized groups, with their sophisticated weaponry, have since December 2005, adopted the strategy of hostage taking that targets foreign oil workers and prominent Nigerian citizens. In fact, violent crimes, including politically and financially motivated contract killings, cult wars, hostage taking, kidnapping, arson, pipeline, and oil installation vandalism did not only worsen the precarious security situation in the Niger Delta (Ikporukpo, 2007) but also equally threatened the daily existence of the citizens and the corporate integrity of Nigeria, especially with the proliferation of arms that is arguably a threat to the macro-Nigerian environment and its sustainable development.

The implications of youth restiveness that are manifold include colossal damage to oil installations; loss of human lives; global warming; loss of rare plants and animals; thermal pollution of air, water, and land; loss of sources of livelihood; respiratory diseases; and destruction of social services. Others include downturn in oil production capacity and revenue generation in the Nigerian state; disempowerment and socio-economic dislocation of the Niger Delta youth who cannot reproduce themselves in the face of the poverty-inflicting and pauperizing environment, apart from the ultimate deprivation of the region and its youth from contributing to the enhancement of the productivity indicators that are critically needed for national development initiatives, aspirations, and attainments; and the unprecedented peace-time security challenges that constitute a potential threat to the corporate existence of the Nigerian state. For instance, according to a former vice president of Nigeria, Atiku Abubakar, the country lost N4.4 billion due to 400 pipeline damages in the oil region between January and August, 2000 (“Nigeria Loses to Pipeline Damages in the Niger Delta,” 2000).

More importantly, the serious implication of the human dimension of youth restiveness in the Niger Delta is evident in the fact that the youth are the energetic segment whose energy could be galvanized to productive work for individual, community, and national development. The marginalization of the youth in the region and their engagement in destructive and unproductive acts have not only resulted in socio-economic unprogressive order but also denied the country the services of a core group of people who must invariably form the backbone of the future. Involving the youth in development therefore requires a conscious process of voluntary participation and it encapsulates three phases of unfreezing, change, and refreezing as Lewin (1948) rightly articulated. After all, a state with inbuilt socio-economic deprivation or marginalization outcomes cannot but lead to socio-economic and political exclusion.

The Failed Piecemeal Institutional Measures of the Nigerian State to the Niger Delta Crisis and Youth Restiveness

The challenges of development; that is to say the underdevelopment of the Niger Delta region of Nigeria is as old as the colonial dispensation. These challenges range from the absence of basic social amenities and infrastructure to shortage of skilled manpower and socio-economic dislocations caused principally by blocked access to wealth. This anomalous state of affairs was admitted by the Willinks Commission of 1958 in its recommendations to the then Colonial Government, shortly before Nigeria attained independence in 1960. The only remedy that the Commission proffered to assuage the agitated people of the Niger Delta region was the
creation of the Niger Delta Basin Development Authority (NDBDA) in 1959 to cater for the developmental needs and aspirations of the region. However, the impact of the NDBDA, which was supposedly an interventionist agency, was so infinitesimal and inconsequential that it can at best be described as an abysmal failure.

In 1992, the Babangida regime created the Oil Mineral Producing Areas Development Commission (OMPADEC) to replace the Presidential Task Force established by his administration in 1988, which was an abysmal failure. Although the Commission was originally construed as a developmental strategy to cater for the needs of the oil-bearing communities, it became overtly clear that it was political machinery designed to serve the purpose of the self-seeking military junta through the erection of a clientele of political supporters in the Niger Delta. The OMPADEC essentially deepened the misery of the people of the region given the political motive behind its creation and operations as mostly evident in the kind of projects that it embarked upon in the oil region and the manner it awarded the contracts (Omoweh, 2006). OMPADEC was therefore to any critical and discerning mind, a fraudulent venture, a financial jamboree or spree, and a state institutional framework to further the exploitation of the already pauperized and devastated Niger Delta people (Jega, 2007).

The major policy instrument by which the Obasanjo administration pretended to use to intervene in the Niger Delta crisis is the NDDC. This Commission was expected to be an improvement on the woeful performance of the defunct NDBDA, OMPADEC, and the ill-fated Petroleum Trust Fund (PTF) that was established by the Abacha administration supposedly to improve infrastructure in the entire country, but which neglected the Niger Delta region. The NDDC was, however, not significantly different from the previous deliberately designed failed efforts of the ill-fated state so-called interventionist-development agencies because the thinking of the state and its allies in the exploitation and underdevelopment of the Niger Delta has not altered.

The Yar’adua administration with its sincerity and commitment posturing has promised a holistic approach to the Niger Delta crisis and intends to actualize a Niger Delta Development Plan, yet he clearly stated that the Federal Government’s contributory share to the NDDC’s funds in the sum of 224 Billion Naira (N224b) that was not paid by the Obasanjo’s administration had expired. The level of indebtedness currently stands at more than 360 Billion Naira (N360b). The administration also created the ministry of Niger Delta affairs and put in place an amnesty program. While the former was supposedly meant to facilitate the development of the region, the later was probably designed to stop the menace of militancy and the accompanying dastardly acts of the armed Niger Delta youths whose reactions and responses had steadily and stoutly been against the unending regime of neglect, oppression, marginalization, and pauperization by the Nigerian state in collaboration with the oil conglomerates and the local bourgeoisie. The Niger Delta ministry initiative has turned out to be a mockery because it has not achieved anything as far as the development of the region is concerned and the amnesty program has only succeeded in selectively getting some of the militant youths to accept pardon and participate in training programs that will enable them to acquire skills that will enhance their living standards. All the same, neither the over 1 year 3 months administration of President Goodluck Jonathan nor the Niger Delta ministry has been able initiate and execute infrastructural development projects to tangibly address the hydra-headed nature of underdevelopment that the oil-rich region had been enmeshed in and rehabilitate the teeming youths who are desperately in need of safety nets.

On the whole, the failed piecemeal institutional measures of the Nigerian state, despite the creation of the Niger Delta Ministry by the Yar’adua/Jonathan administration, are such that one can safely summarize that there has been a superficial tinkering with the burning issues that concern the collective destiny of the Niger Delta people. The bottom line of this deliberate approach that reveals the insincerity, negligence, and lack of commitment on the part of the state and its elite is the demonstration of the hollowness of the mission and the deceit of the vision behind the cosmetic and dubious so-called development-based state intervention agencies. Therefore, the various factors ranging from social, political to environmental and economic factors commonly adduced as responsible for youth restiveness in the Niger Delta environment can, in actuality, be situated in and explained by both the “Strain and Frustration” theories.

**Efforts at Addressing the Youth Restiveness Palaver in Nigeria’s Niger Delta**

Sundry attempts have been made by different governments in Nigeria to tackle the Niger Delta crisis and its youth restiveness dimension. Some of such attempts include the application of the derivation principle in revenue allocation arithmetic, the unsuccessful land use reform of the Yar’adua administration, the short-run partially successful amnesty program, and the petroleum industry bill that is still under the legislative process at the National Assembly. Below is an expository critical discussion of the different efforts.

In respect of the derivation principle element of the revenue allocation regimes in Nigeria, the genesis of revenue allocation in Nigeria was in 1946 when the Colonial Government established the Phillipson fiscal commission. From that time till today, several commissions had been established and section 162 (2) of the 1999 constitution specified some revenue sharing or distribution principles or criteria. They include derivation, even development, needs, national interest, fiscal autonomy, equality of states, population, expenditure capacity, land mass, internal revenue
generation, terrain, primary school enrollment, and the like. The controversy over an acceptable federal arrangement and the basis for fiscal federalism in Nigeria has been a raging and troubulous one. The fact that the matter still remains problematic after 53 years of independent status sounds paradoxical (Ejumudo, 2010). In the face of the numerous revenue allocation commissions and plethora of formulas, the contentious and political nature of fiscal federalism and the concomitant revenue sharing palaver exhibits the hollowness and inefficacy of the many failed efforts at redressing the fiscal imbalance or inequity and the pseudo as well as the quasi nature of Nigeria’s federal arrangement where the central government is too powerful, domineering, and high-handed to the extent that the Obasanjo-led government seized the funds meant for Lagos state councils because of the local government development authorities that were created by the immediate past Tinubu-led administration of Lagos state. Thus, the concern about the mismatch between expenditure levels and revenue bases is central to and, as a consequence, it is not strange to federal systems or arrangements. The structural and foundational defect of the Nigerian federal union and experiment does not only have the potency of making fiscal issues prone to crisis but also has actually largely made the Nigerian federal arrangement a laughing stock.

Of all the burning issues in Nigeria’s fiscal federalism, the most controversial and apparent locus or terrain of contest is the derivation principle palaver. This principle is the only one in the revenue sharing system that allows money to be appropriately returned back to the state or source and base of natural resources. No wonder, derivation principle has come to be equated with the consciousness and efforts at the actualization of resource control in the Nigerian political terrain. Over the years, the controversy over the use of derivation principle center on the infinitesimal and inconsequential value in the weighting system of the various revenue allocation efforts and formula. With the exception of the Nigerian first republic and the post-1999 democratic experience, derivation principle had attracted as little as 1% of the federation account. In fact, while the various minority groups in the Niger Delta have continually pressed for a fair and better deal or compensation in the revenue sharing arithmetic of Nigeria given the centrality of their states in the revenue calculation of the country, the Nigerian leadership, especially the military cabal have coercively employed the apparatus of the state to effectively contain the opposition of the minorities to government’s imposition. They have also cosmetically and superficially tinkered with the issue that concerns the collective destiny of the mineral-bearing communities and states as evident in the slow and tortuous journey that culminated in the progression from 1% to the present 13% derivation formula.

Against the background of the 50% derivation arrangement that favored other regions in the entity called Nigeria before the current petro-dollar mono-cultural economic environment, it is not hyperbolic to describe the gap as fiscal injustice. This injustice problem is further compounded by the general failure of most governments in the Niger Delta to judiciously utilize their revenue for genuine developmental purposes. This may be a fruitful point to state, possibly in all certitude, that the fiscal federalism endless problematic has a devastating political economy underlying force. It is thus instructive to note that the superimposition of the military’s unitary command structure on the pre-military federal system and the growth and centrality of oil revenue engendered a confused form of intergovernmental fiscal relations and substantial changes in the fiscal landscape. Regrettably, the decades of military governance in Nigeria did not only entrench authoritarianism and autocracy in Nigeria’s federal arrangement but also accentuated the ideology of centralization of power and resources at the center and engendered the neglect of the Niger Delta in terms of infrastructure development. This made Nigeria’s federalism with all its elements of unitarism to be pseudo and quasi in nature.

Concerning the land use reform initiative of the President Umaru Musa Yar’adua administration, a committee was set up to address relevant issues, particularly the need to restrict the requirement for a governor’s consent in land transactions to assignments only. Following the presentation of the Report of the Committee on land use reforms, President Yar’adua forwarded a bill to the National Assembly for some amendments to Land Use Act to be known as the Land Use (Amendment) Act 2009. The bill sought to score off seven sections of the existing act, which was originally enacted on March 29, 1978. The act did not pass through the crucible of any parliamentary debate from which one could have discerned the objectives of the legislators. However, from its preamble, the inalienable right of every Nigerian to partake of land, a major factor of production, was deducible. That explains why not a few Nigerians initially rejoiced at the promulgation of the Decree (now an Act, entrenched in the 1999 Constitution by virtue of Section 315 thereof). The Land Use Act, except for a few of its provisions, is based, almost verbatim, on the 1962 Land Tenure Law of the defunct Northern Region, which, in turn, derived its existence from the report of the Perry Girard Committee. That Committee had recommended that

a declaratory Proclamation should be passed to the effect that the land of the Protectorate should be under the control and dominion of the Government, and that no title to the occupation, use, or enjoyment of any land is valid without the assent of the Government.

This colonial report-turned-law, however, did not omit a recommendation that “the control and dominion of Government should be exercised in any particular case with due regard to lawful customs proved to exist at present in the province or district where the land is situated.” The latter recommendation was comprehensibly ignored both by the Land
Tenure Law of 1962 and by its successor, the Land Use Act, 1978.

Section 5 of the Act makes it lawful for a Governor to grant statutory rights of occupancy “in respect of land, whether or not in an urban area, to any person for all purposes and to demand rentals for any such land granted to any person,” while Sections 21 and 22 make it unlawful to alienate by assignment, mortgage, transfer of possession, sublease, or otherwise however a customary or statutory right of occupancy without the consent of the appropriate Local Government Area or Governor, respectively. Section 26 renders null and void any instrument that purports to confer on or vest in any person any interest or right over land other than in accordance with the provisions of the act. Other offensive sections include 34 (8) and 35 (7) relating to the transfer of undeveloped land in an urban area without the prior consent (in writing) of the Governor. By subjecting to consent all transactions in the land, including alienation by assignment, mortgage to banks, transfer of possession, and sublease, the act has created a dead set against rapid socio-economic development, over the years.

For the Niger Delta region, the land use reform initiated by President Yar’adua should have checked the high-handedness of the oil companies that are aware of the overlordship of the Nigerian state and the near squatters’ status of the oil-bearing communities. This understanding by the oil conglomerates may be a part explanation for why Shell, for instance, can afford to flare gas on a daily basis since 1956 when it discovered oil in the Niger Delta and yet be shielded by the state over litigations on land where oil is explored or produced (Omoweh, 2006). Land protection in the light of sustainability was, as a result, and is still not of any interest to the state that gradually rendered the Niger Delta people into paupers and squatters in their own land through successive legislation including the Petroleum and Land Use Acts. Apart from the fact that the Land Use Act reform would have made land available and accessible to the people so as to increase home-ownership levels (Yar’adua, 2007), other economic activities such as agriculture, industries, and tourism would have benefited from the review or amendment of the Act. Worthy of note is the United Arab Emirate (UAE) that is today a world tourism destination simply because of the changes it made in its land rules. Specifically, in 2002, UAE liberalized its land rules, which gave foreigners freedom to acquire land and develop the same. Today, the story is what we see as Masdar City in Abu Dhabi; Burj Dubai and Burj Al-Arab, both in Dubai; all these attract millions of dollar revenue to the emirate. Regrettably, however, it beats every genuine imagination that several years after, nothing has been heard in respect of its reading, not to talk of its debate.

As a step toward resolving the protracted insecurity in the Niger Delta, the Federal Government of Nigeria on June 25, 2009, proclaimed unconditional amnesty for agitators in the oil-bearing communities of the Niger Delta region. The terms of the amnesty included the willingness and readiness of the agitators to surrender their arms, unconditionally renounce militancy, and sign an undertaking in this direction. In return, the government pledged its commitment to institute programs to assist the disarmament, demobilization, rehabilitation, and reintegration of repentant ex-agitators. The key objective of the Amnesty Program is to address the insecurity conditions in the Niger Delta as a prerequisite for promoting economic development in the region in particularly and in the country as a whole. Since the proclamation of amnesty for the agitators, relative peace and fragile security have returned to the once volatile Niger Delta. From a paltry 700 barrels per day in the first week in January 2009, the relative peace that now prevails in the Niger Delta has aided the remarkable growth of Nigeria’s oil production to between 2.4 and 2.6 million barrels per day.

Pursuant to the core objectives of demobilizing, rehabilitating, and reintegrating the former agitators into the Nigerian society, all the 26,358 persons enrolled in the first and second phases of the program have successfully gone through non-violence training at a demobilization camp in Obubra, a community in Cross River State. For the demobilization exercise, the Federal Government engaged experts from Nigeria, South Africa, and the United States. Following the completion of their non-violence training and career classification in the camp, the Federal Government successfully placed a total of 10,395 former combatants in skills acquisition/training centers as well as in formal education within the country and offshore. Similarly, 12,000 ex-agitators were sent to their reintegration centers to pursue either formal education or vocational training. In all, the beneficiaries of the amnesty program are as at today in 36 local training centers in 12 States of the Federation; while the ex-agitators placed in offshore educational and skill acquisition centers are in the United States, Italy, Russia, South Africa, Malaysia, United Kingdom, Israel, Sri Lanka, India, Benin Republic, Cyprus, Poland, Ghana, Belarus, UAE, the Philippines, Trinidad and Tobago, Greece, Germany, and Canada.

Arguably, the amnesty offer was President Yar’adua’s last ditch solution to the age-long multi-dimensional crisis in the Niger Delta region. The crisis in the region had reached a crescendo with militant activities ranging from kidnapping of expatriates (and even Nigerian) workers in the oil sector to blowing up of flow stations and outright criminality. The amnesty was a political solution to a problem that seemed to have defied other solutions. Before the granting of amnesty, President Yar’adua had tried other solutions such as drawing up the Niger Delta Master Plan and establishment of a Niger Delta Ministry (Omotola, 2010). It would seem that it was the president’s frustrations with the failure of these solutions that culminated in the experimentations with the amnesty option. Although, the amnesty program can be adjudged to have successfully reversed the serious security challenge that had plagued the Niger Delta, nothing has been significantly achieved by either the Yar’adua/Jonathan administration or the present Jonathan/Sambo administration to massively
develop the glaringly marginalized and neglected region, a precondi-
tion that is needed for the much-desired sustainable peace,
security, and socio-economic development of the Niger Delta. Even the road leading to President Jonathan’s
hometown (Otueki) in Bayelsa state, almost 2 years into his
full-blown 4-year tenure, is in a state of disrepair. This is
apart from the multi-million naira contracts awarded and the
surveillance jobs given to key ex-Niger Delta militants,
expectedly to pacify the so-called militant leaders whose
repentance is still doubtful and the level of illegal oil bunk-
king going on in the same region among the youths.

In respect of the petroleum industry bill that mainly seeks
to utilize 10% of the profit from the oil companies for the
development of the oil-bearing communities in the Niger
Delta region, it is worrisome that apart from the opposition
from the senators from the northern part of Nigeria who are
clamoring for the inclusion of states that have oil pipelines
and installations, the inconsequential fund may not be real-
able. Moreover, full royalties from oil and gas companies are
supposed to be paid to the state, local government, and com-
unities where the oil and gas are extracted at a rate similar
to what it was before the 1969 Petroleum Act.

On the whole, in the face of sundry efforts by the Nigerian
state, particularly the infinitesimal 13% derivation element
of the current revenue sharing formula, the failed land use
reform attempt, the partially successful short-run post-
amnesty program, and the controversial petroleum industry
bill, the central developmental concerns of the Niger Delta
region have not been addressed. Thus, the need for the modi-
fication of the obnoxious and eco-environmentally disadvan-
tageous laws and a holistic developmental approach and
action-based programs by the Nigerian government and oil
conglomerates that will provide sustainable windows of
opportunity and safety nets for the socio-economically dislo-
cated youths cannot be over-emphasized.

**Conclusive Remarks and Recommendations**

Every environment is endowed with opportunities and con-
fronted with threats. While the opportunities may be poten-
tial (dormant) or actualized (activated), the threats are more
often than not man-made. This position derives from the fact
that environmental resources in their natural state do not
pose any threats to man; rather, it is the utilization of the
resources through their use or misuse that generates threats.
In the case of the Niger Delta environment, it is the treasure
base of the entity called Nigeria. This is because the Nigerian
economy is largely dependent on the petroleum sector that
accounts for approximately 80% of government revenues,
90% of foreign exchange earnings, and 95% of export
receipts. The Niger Delta environment from which the petro-
leum natural resource is extracted is therefore the mainspring
of the economy and the energizing force of the sustainability
of the Nigerian state. This same environmental resource has
also created significant empowerment. The petroleum
resource has engineered the process of limited access to the
social amenities that today exist in parts of the Niger Delta
environment, particularly the urban towns and cities.
Although the opportunities accruable from the business envi-
ronment of the region are enough to transform the environ-
ment, the degradation, neglect, marginalization, repression,
and deliberate underdevelopment of the environment and the
pauperization of its people remain a paradoxical puzzle.

In actuality, it is the use and misuse of the environmental
resources of the Niger Delta and the concomitant devastation
of the productive capacity of their land, careless pollution of
their waters, and the degradation of their atmosphere in the
face of the patent inequity in the distribution of the revenue
derivable from the petroleum resources of the region that has
generated threats that is arguably the basis of the restiveness
among the Niger Delta youths. The restiveness is, in fact,
the major explanation for the negative social activities such as
pipeline vandalism, kidnapping, thuggery, armed robbery,
and sea piracy that have engaged the attention and energy of
the youths and also become a commonplace in the environ-
ment of the region. This is because the Niger Delta youths
are caught in a web between a devastated traditional occupa-
tional/economic mainstay and a blocked access to the oppor-
tunities of a petro-dollar business environment. Thus, the
widespread relative and near-absolute poverty in which the
Niger Delta youths are enmeshed has precipitated environ-
mental crisis in the region with youth restiveness as one of
the multi-faceted dimensions.

There is therefore the exigency of achieving an accom-
modation between the level of costs and threats as well as the
benefits and opportunities in the Niger Delta. This is essen-
tially due to the fact that environmental costs and benefits
cannot be progressing separately at arithmetic and geometric
directions. And the equitable distribution of environmental
costs and benefits is not only the hallmark of environmental
justice but also the standard for measuring deviation in prac-
tice (Tietenberg, 2005). The juxtaposition of the two words
“costs and benefits” is very important given the environmen-
tal crisis situation of the Niger Delta region. Cost–benefit
criterion therefore presupposes that for every cost, there
should be not only a corresponding but also an exceeding
benefit. This is a gap that must be filled in an integrated and
a holistic approach to the environmental opportunities and
threats relationship as far as the macro-Niger Delta palaver
and the accompanying hydra-headed youth restiveness prob-
lematic are concerned. And with the little or no access of the
region’s youth to the benefits derivable from oil exploration
and production activities that should expectedly mitigate the
negative effects and costs of the environmental degradation
to which they have been perpetually subjected, environmen-
tal justice is thus a desideratum. This environmental justice
will permeate the legal/constitutional, operational, and insti-
tutional aspects of the Niger Delta crisis through the
amendment or abrogation of the environmentally obnoxious laws, the genuine massive compensational infrastructural development of the devastated and neglected region, and the socio-economic empowerment of the pauperized, unproductive, and agitated youth such that they can contribute to the national development process. To this end, holistic efforts to analyze and overcome the power structures that thwart and militate against the principles of fairness and equity and seek to redress the imbalances in the distribution of environmental benefits and costs in the form of skill acquisition, job creation, health care, and educational assistance schemes and other pro-poor life-enhancing programs are desirable and appropriate.

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