THE NIGER DELTA DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION AND THE UNDERDEVELOPMENT OF THE NIGER DELTA REGION OF NIGERIA, 1959-2023

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Keywords

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Abstract

The Niger Delta Development Commission was established by the Federal government of Nigeria in year 2000 to address the socioeconomic and infrastructural problems and foster development as well as address the several agitations by the people of the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. Despite its mandate, the area still faces significant underdevelopment. The efforts by successive governments to tackle most of the problems have had limited impact and the Niger Delta Development Commission is still struggling to reduce poverty and improve the system in over several years of its existence. The indigenous people of the oil rich region are asking for the provision of basic amenities, portable water, roads, safe water transportation, healthcare services, schools for their children, employment opportunities and the mitigation and remediation of the ecological degradation of the region among other needs. Despite the enormous allocations of money running into trillions of naira given to the Commission by the Federal Government of Nigeria, the region continues to grapple with underdevelopment and poverty. Factors such as lack of accountability, transparency, financial recklessness and an all-pervading corruption have made the Commission unable to meet its mandate. This study used primary and secondary sources to research this problem and concludes that the impact of the Niger Delta Development Commission in

the region has been abysmal. The paper therefore recommends a total overhauling of the Commission with the appointment of a management team and board that are competent with records of accomplishment of achievements and accountability and devoid of ethnic coloration.

Research problems: *The Niger Delta region of Nigeria is paradoxically of the richest in the world, yet is remained underdeveloped. Despite its natural rich resources of oil and gas, the region suffers poverty, socio-economic meltdown, environmental degradation, marginalisation and lacks infrastructural development. Over the years the Federal government of Nigeria has established agencies such as the Niger Delta Development Board (NDDB) 1959, The Oil Mineral Producing Area Development Commission, (OMPADEC), IN 1992, The Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC), in 2000. All these commissions were primarily to address the challenges of the people, yet the Niger Delta continue to grapple in abject poverty with environmental degradation. The NDDC who was meant to proffer solutions to all these problems have serval allegation on corruption and with abundant projects. The persistent underdevelopment in the region despite the various interventions by government is deeply worrisome. Despite the hug allocations of funds and the initiative it has remain the same. This unwarranted situation has arisen some fundamental problems such as why has NDDC not fulfilled it mandate to the address the persistent underdevelopment and poverty. The research problem lies on why the Niger Delta has remains underdeveloped.*

Methodology*: The study adopted a qualitative and historical-descriptive research. It examines the Niger Delta Development Commission and its activities in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria with a wider context of the underdevelopment in the Niger Delta region. the design allows for a critical look on the failures and achievements of NDDC. The research adopted two sources primary and secondary sources. The primary sources deal with oral interviews with stakeholders, leaders and NDDC officials among others and the secondary sources deal with books, journals, newspapers and online publications.*

Results*: It is pertinent to noted that the result of the study reveals a paradox between the Niger delta Development commission and the underdevelopment of the region as a result of corruption and lack of managerial ability. The failure of the NDDC has resulted to lack of infrastructure delivery, environmental neglect and degradation, social unrest, criminality and poverty among others. While NDDC was mandated to bridge the development gap in the region. Its failed performance to achieve since 1959-2023 has been largely undermined b weak governance, transparency, corruption, environmental degradation, lack of infrastructural delivery and poverty among others.*

Conclusion: *NDDC as a commission assigned to facilitate development in the oil rich region of Nigeria over the years has not lived up to its mandate.*

Some roads, hospitals, bridges, schools among other amenities have been built and delivered to the appropriate authorities, but these cannot be compared to the huge amounts of funds released to the commission over the years. The core mandate of the commission has not been realized across the entire Niger Delta area because the people are still aggrieved and disgruntled because their standard of living has not improved. The recent inquiries into the commission's activities by the government and security agencies point to the failure of the commission. The problem with the NDDC remains deep-rooted corruption leading to poor performance that has further underdeveloped and impoverished the region. Corruption is therefore the greatest obstacle preventing the Niger Delta people from realizing the development of their area despite its enormous potentials. It is unfortunate and regrettable that the commission over the years has been given trbillions of naira for the development of the Niger Delta region but this money found its way to the private pockets of corrupt politicians, government officials and community leaders in the region. Nigerians and the people of the Niger Delta have no confidence even in the so-called forensic audit of the commission, because they believe that the findings of the forensic audit will not see the light of day. The Federal government of Nigeria should as a matter of urgency reorganize the commission as well as appoint credible and competent Nigerians with a record of accomplishment of excellent performance to pilot its affairs.

Introduction

The Niger Delta is an integral part of the Southern lowlands, which extends over 70,000 kilometers and constitutes about 60% of the Nigerian coastline, and it is more than 800 kilometers long. The Niger Delta stretches for [44]almost 150 miles (240 km) from North to south. It is a narrow lowland of sandy beaches, mangrove, swamps, lagoons and interconnected rivers (Asanebi, 2016, PP 57-61). The Niger Delta is also one of the largest Delta systems in the world. It is important to note that the Niger Delta has numerous tributaries that enter the Gulf of Guinea through the Cross-River estuary. The Niger Delta region is made up of Akwa-Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo and Rivers States (Nigeria at 50, 2010).

The Niger Delta region of Nigeria is endowed with numerous potentials and is a petroleum rich region. The region is known as the World's ten most important wetlands and coastal marine ecosystem. It is also rich with diverse mosaic of ecological area with other different ecological zones such as fresh water swamp forest, lowland rain forest, Savannah, mangrove forest and coastal vegetation (Ajodo-Adebanjoko,2017). It is important to note that the economic history of the Niger Delta region is fascinating because of its enormous potentials especially with varied agricultural produce. Since 1956 when oil was discovered in Oloibiri in the present day

[44] Asanebi, daupamowei Henry. A Concise View of Niger Delta Region of Nigeria: An Interpretation of Nigeria Historian. International Research Journal of Interdisciplinary & Multidisciplinary Studies (IRJIMS), Vol.11, issue X, 2016, PP 57-61

Bayelsa state, Nigeria's economy has regrettably been solely dependent on oil resources (Nigeria at 50). The discovery of oil that would have improved the livelihood of the citizens has invariably become a curse. Within the region approximately 95 per-cent of the total export of Nigeria's income is mainly generated through oil exploration and agriculture (Okafor, 187-192). In spite of the revenue generation, the indigenous people have remained in perpetual poverty and marginalized. The resultant systematic failure has led to lack of basic amenities in the region. The oil exploration activities have also led to water pollution, death of aquatic life, ecological degradation and destruction of the mangrove forests among others (Agbeze, 2020). The federal government of Nigeria is responsible for resource allocation and control even though there is a demand for more resource allocation to the Niger Delta states. The Federal government of Nigeria has not acceded to this request and agitations of the states for resource control as well as solving the problem of an agreeable revenue sharing among the states in the Niger Delta region. The government's approach to resolving some of the conflicts in the region has not been far reaching and the neglect of the people has remained unabated. In resolving the problem in the region even before now, many commissions had existed without reasonable impact such as the Willink Commission, the Niger Delta Board, the Niger Delta River Basin Authority, Oil Mineral Producing Areas Development Commission, and the Niger Delta Environmental Survey. All these commissions failed to achieve their mandates in ensuring development in the region, due to profligacy and massive corruption. These were supposedly some of the factors that the government considered before reaching a decision on the creation of the Niger Delta Development Commission (Ajodo-Adebanjoko).

The Niger Delta Development Commission is an agency established by the Federal government of Nigeria during the presidency of General Olusegun Obasanjo in the year 2000. The main aim of the establishment of the Commission in the Niger Delta region was specifically for the development of the region. It is also important to note that in 2008, the Ministry of Niger Delta Affairs was established as a parastatal in the Federal civil service of Nigeria specifically to also address the peculiar problems of the oil rich Niger Delta of Nigeria. One of the mandates of the Niger Delta Development Commission is to train and educate the restless youths of the region and remove them from the streets. The formation of the Commission was because of the hostilities of the indigenous people towards the Multi-national oil companies in the region as well as their neglect by the federal government of Nigeria, as evidenced by the lack of adequate compensation for the people and slow pace of establishment of basic infrastructure in the region. This resulted in the problems of militancy, banditry, general insecurity, kidnapping and conflicts in the region as a way of the youths expressing their grievances over their perceived marginalization (Eduok, 2024).

The Federal Government of Nigeria has allocated over 1.534 trillion Naira to the Niger Delta Development Commission to foster development in the region and to enable the commission address the huge infrastructural deficit in the area because of successive government neglect of the region. But since the Commission's inception major economic and environmental changes which should derive their impetus and momentum from government have not been tangible (Ode, 2022). Transformation or development has not

been remarkable compared to the huge allocation of financial resources to the Commission. The commission has had several problems such as lack of accountability, transparency, massive corruption, financial recklessness, institutional weaknesses, poor governance structure and lack of proper synergy on the part of government and the Commission (Onuegbu, 2021). [45]

The Reasons for the formation of the Niger Delta Development Commission

The Niger Delta region of Nigeria is comprised of multi-ethnic groups with different dialects and cultural attributes but these groups are self-reliant and economically vibrant and they have lived in harmony over a long period. Historically the people of the Niger Delta region were vibrant in trade and agriculture and these were the dominant occupations of the indigenous people. However, since the discovery of crude oil in 1956, the region has remained in poverty with lack of basic infrastructure, such as access roads, health care services, high rate of unemployment and no portable water among others. The region has also witnessed an increase in conflicts, general insecurity, banditry among several other vices (Nwabuikwu, 2924).[46]

The Multinational oil Companies in the region due to their lip service to corporate social responsibility and neglect of the inhabitants of their operational base have increased the tension and lack of trust in their relationship resulting in many problems metamorphosing into youth restiveness and oil theft among others. The deprivation, marginalization, youth unemployment, neglect and the environmental degradation were the factors that provided a fertile ground for the several conflicts in the Niger Delta region. The eco-environmental disadvantageous laws operated by successive Nigerian governments in collusion with the oil producing companies provided the avenue for the economic dislocation of the region that has affected mostly the large population of youths. The oil conglomerates in the region pay taxes and royalty to the Nigerian government and are supposed to engage in corporate social responsibility in the region, but not much has been achieved in this regard (Olusoji, 2012).[47] The multinational corporations have not been able to transit into the development of even a local skill that would have helped meaningfully to engage the youths. The scenario in the Niger Delta remains for now as that of "Poverty in the Midst of Plenty". The conflicts in different communities have also resulted to several deaths and destruction of property. For instance on the 4th of January, 1999, hundreds of soldiers attacked two communities, Opia and Ikiyan in

[45] Onuegbu Chioma Akpabio. Blames Setback in NDDC on Corruption, others, 2021. https://www.vanguardngr.com. Accessed 28th July, 2023

[46] Oral interview with Nwabuikwu Peter. Age 79+ years, occupation trader, place of Interview Issele-Uku, Delta State, held on 23th March, 2024

[47] Olusoji James George, Owolabi Kuye and Uchechi Chioma Onokala, Corporate Social Irresponsibility (CSI) a Catalyst to the Niger Delta Crisis: The Case of Nigeria Oil Multinational Companies versus the Militants of Niger Delta Region of Nigeria, 2012, https://www.researchgate.net>31.

Delta state and several young people were shot, some fatally while several others left their communities and became internally displaced persons in other neighbouring communities. Some of the communities were set ablaze with many fishing equipment destroyed and several livestock were killed (Odeigah,, 191-211).[48]

The Federal government of Nigeria reacted to these incidents by drafting the soldiers to man roadblocks to maintain peace and in the process the soldiers used excessive force and terrorized the people in some instances. A state of emergency was declared during one of these conflicts in Bayelsa state and a curfew was imposed disrupting social, political and economic activities in the area for several months. Over the years, the Federal Government of Nigeria had relied heavily on the income generated from the rich Niger Delta region for its operations. However, in spite of all the revenue generated from the rich oil region, the people are still living in abject poverty. The resistance by the youths in particular had metamorphosed into different militant groups such as the Niger Delta Volunteer Force, and the Niger Delta Vigilantes among several other splinter groups (Odeiagh, 92-200).[49]

Because of the neglect of the region, most of the youths went into oil bunkering which has resulted in massive oil theft and vandalization of oil pipelines. The epicentre of the violence in the Niger Delta region was Warri in Delta State, but violence broke out frequently in the different communities agitating for the development of the region. The several conflicts between the oil industry managers and their host communities became a major problem affecting their productivity in the industry to the extent that the companies moved out of Warri which today is a shadow of its former self (Isidiho, & Sabran, 2015, p37-45). [50]

The Niger Delta Development Commission was established by the Federal of Nigeria to facilitate the rapid growth and sustainable development in the Niger Delta region. One of the major mandates of the Niger Delta Development Commission is to tackle ecological and environmental problems arising from the exploration of oil minerals in the region and to train, educate and empower the youths as well as to promote the diversification of the economy (Page, 2018).[51]

The Niger Delta Development Commission was also established for the purpose of environmental relief to the people to

[48] Odeigah, T. N. "Poverty in the Midst of Plenty" A Study of Poverty and Development in the Niger Delta of Nigeria" (ed) Munyaradzi Mawere, in, *Underdevelopment, Development and the Future of Africa", 2017.*Cameroon: Langaa RPCIG, pp 191-211

[49] Odeigah, T. N. "Poverty in the Midst of Plenty" A Study of Poverty and Development in the Niger Delta of Nigeria" (ed) Munyaradzi Mawere, in, *Underdevelopment, Development and the Future of Africa",* pp 92-200

[50] Isidiho Alphonsus, Mohammed Shatar B. Sabran. Challenges Facing Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) Projects in Imo State and Niger Delta Region in Nigeria, International Journal of Humanities and Social Science, 2015, p37-45

[51] Page Matthew. A New Taxonomy for Corruption in Nigeria, 2018. https://www.carnegieedowment.org. Ezozie Victor, Umo Iniabasi, Bassey Willie, Usman A. 4) Bello, (2020), Uncompleted NDDC Projects Dot Niger Delta, https://www.dailytrust.com.uncompleted-nddc-project. Accessed 28th Feb, 2024

help in preventing environmental pollution and advancing development of communities in the Niger Delta area (Bello, 2020). The commission is to also develop education, transportation, roads, health services; waterways, employment, agriculture, communication, electricity, urban development, housing and industrialization among others. The commission is to also address issues promoting socio-economic development and tackling the ecological degradation in the region.[52] The Niger Delta Development commission present a budget every year to the federal government of Nigeria (Sahara-reporters, 2020). The budget most times includes the trainings, empowering of the youths, healthcare, and roads constructions among others that will afford equal opportunity to the people. Implementation of the budget has always led to exploitation that led to detriment of the people. The travails and the misappropriation of the commission has also led to lack of transparency and accountability despite the huge amount budgeted every year. The people are curious on how issues surrounding the NDDC misappropriation will be resolved. With the ongoing investigations especially with the shortfall of 143 billion in its 2019 budget and subsequently once, most of these issues have thrown the NDDC in bad light. Some of the allegations plaguing the NDDC are non-payment of scholarships fees to foreign students, uncompleted projects and disbursement of funds to the staff of the commission during Covid-19 period. The NDDC is characterised as a commission lacking transparency, impropriety and discrepancies (Page).[53]

NIGER DELTA DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION YEARLY BUDGET AS PASSED BY THE NIGERIAN NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

2021	**N485.7 BILLION**
2022	N928 BILLION
2023	N876 BILLION
2024	N1.911 TRILLION

Source: https://www.nabro.gov.ng/budget-documents/2023-budget/.

National Assembly Budget & Research Office

The Niger Delta Development Commission and The Underdevelopment of the Niger Delta region

Endemic poverty of multidimensional has encoded the people of the Niger Delta as a result of corruption. It is pertinent to note that corruption is an all-pervading phenomenon that runs through every segment of the Nigeria society and government. According to Isidiho "the underdevelopment of the Niger Delta is as

[52] Sahara-reporters, (2020): Nigerian Government Approves N722.3M for Forensic Audit of NDDC, 2020. www.saharareporters.com>2020/08/26nige. Accessed 16th Oct, 2023

[53] Page Matthew, (2018): A New Taxonomy for Corruption in Nigeria, carnegieedowment.org, Ezozie Victor, Umo Iniabasi, Bassey Willie, Usman A. Bello, (2020), Uncompleted NDDC Projects Dot Niger Delta, https://dailytrust.com.uncompleted-nddc-project. https://www.Placing.crg, Accessed 28th Feb, 2024

a result of corruption by political office holders, government officials and a few indigenous major stake holders who have mismanaged the huge revenue from the region" (Isidiho, 38-39).. Corruption is the greatest obstacle hindering the growth and the development of the Niger Delta region. This can manifest through money laundering, contract fraud and abandoned projects in the region. Billions of Naira had been remitted to the Niger Delta Development Commission, yet not much of commensurate achievements have been recorded since its inception (Iroanusi, 202).[54] The NDDC receives taxes from oil companies operating in the region, for instance, in 2019 Shell Nigeria Development Limited paid the NDDC the sum of $136.6 million as fees and taxes, in 2018 it was $79.6 million, while $79.6 million was paid in 2017, and all these payments was made by one company among several others (https://www.sinessday-ng-cdn_ampproject.org).[55]

The Niger Delta Development Commission it appears views the region as a place to enrich its members corporately and individually ((Olisah, 2020).[56] The complexity of corruption in the Niger Delta Development Commission is intriguing because of the collusion between the politicians and some of the indigenous people of the region (Okonjo-Iweala, 2018, 50).[57] Most Politicians across the Niger Delta region lobby for appointments or for them or their cronies to have oversight functions in NDDC. The Niger Delta Development Commission's non-performance is rife in different sectors such as roads, infrastructure and ecological degradation among other sectors seeking for urgent attention and development (Tyokumbur, 2014, 77-80).[58]

The endemic and massive corruption in the Niger Delta Development Commission which has underdeveloped the Niger Delta region cannot be over emphasized. Historically, since the formation of the Niger Delta Development Commission some roads were constructed, hospitals and skill acquisition centres among others were also constructed, but these cannot justify the huge amounts of funds released by the NDDC for these projects. There have been more agitations and infrastructures are still

[54] Iroanusi Queen-Esther. Senate Approves NDDC Budget with Over N50 Billion Cut. 2020. https://www.Premiumtimesng.com. 12th April, 2024

[55] https://www.sinessday-ng-cdn_ampproject.org.

[56] Olisah Chike. Corruption Probe: NDDC Claims to have Spent N81.5 billion in 7 months, 2020. https://www.nairametrics.com. Accessed 4th May, 2023

[57] Okonjo-Iweala Ngozi, Fighting Corruption is Dangerous, the Story Behind the Headlines.2018. P50

[58] Tyokumbur Emmanuel Teryila. Review of Ecological Effects of Oil Exploration in the Niger Delta, Nigeria, 2014. Pp77-80, https://www.researchgate.net>2847. Accessed 28th Feb, 2024 and A Disturbing Corruption Alarm, The Guardian Nigeria-Nigeria and https://www.m.guardian.ng>opinion>nddc-a-d, 28th Feb, 2024

lacking in the region (Iwok , 2020)[59] The truth about the NDDC corruption came into limelight when a group called the "Restore Initiative" petitioned the United Nations over the massive corruption in the Niger Delta Development Commission and asking that justice should prevail and government should prosecute the people associated with the criminal acts in the commission (Yusuf , 2020)[60] One Gloria Okolugbo who was the leader of the group signed the petition. The petition emanated from the fact that despite the abundance of resources in the region, the people are still wallowing in abject poverty. This group became bothered when it was noticed that the interim management of the Niger Delta Development Commission was engaged in the use of fictitious means in acquiring contracts that was leading to failure and abandonment of NDDC projects. More worrisome is fact that the Niger Delta region has remained very poor in the midst of abundance (Odeigah, 191-200).[61] The action of this group was a revelation to the people and the government of Nigeria. The Niger Delta Development Commission had derailed from its aim and objectives and found itself with several allegations of massive corruption preventing it from addressing issues of environmental degradation, developing the much-needed infrastructure across the region and freeing the region from poverty (https://www.m.guardian.ng>opinion>nddc-a-d).[62]

It is important to note that the major actors in the Niger Delta Development Commission also hail from the Niger Delta region. The question then is "How can the indigenous people of the Niger Delta region exploit and under-develop its region". Nigeria as a major oil producing country in the world has experienced widespread exploitation that has aided corruption in the region. The level of corruption in the Niger Delta Commission is so pervasive that it has continued to render the people poor. Corruption has become a routine in the region, in spite of all the efforts at curbing the menace (https://www.m.guardian.ng>opinion).[63]

Conflicts and instability in the region have been another major factor, as there continue to fuel the struggle over the issue of resource control creating tension and unrest among the various ethnic groups. These conflicts disrupt economic activities and deter investments in the region, leading to more conflicts and some oil producing companies relocating to safer areas or even leaving Nigeria. Weak governance structure in the NDDC that has a typical civil service structure remains a major challenge to its efficient and smooth operation (https://www.m.guardian.ng>opinion>ndd

[59] Iwok Iniobong. Niger Delta Group Petitions UN over Corruption in NDDC. 2020. https://businessday.ng>news. Accessed 18th Dec, 2023

[60] Yusuf Akinpelu. What NDDC's Abandoned 70 USD million can do for the Niger Delta, 2020. https://www.premumtimesng.com, Accessed 5th Nov, 2023

[61] Odeigah, T. N. "Poverty in the Midst of Plenty" A Study of Poverty and Development in the Niger Delta of Nigeria" (ed) Munyaradzi Mawere, in, *Underdevelopment, Development and the Future of Africa", 2017.* pp 191-200

[62] NDDC: A Disturbing Corruption Alarm, The Guardian Nigeria- Nigeria and https://www.m.guardian.ng>opinion>nddc-a-d, Accessed 28th Feb, 2024

[63] https://www.m.guardian.ng>opinion. Accessed 13h Feb, 2024

c-a-d) [64]. Other factors include insufficient government presence; infective policies, poor audit and lack of the political will to look critically into the affairs of NDDC have hindered its progress. Lack of equity in the distribution of the national wealth has also increased the underdevelopment of the Niger Delta region. The oil wealth has not translated into good living conditions for the people. Oil exploration and the resultant environmental degradation, without planned remediation strategy encourages the neglect of agriculture in the Niger Delta region (Nwabuikwu , 2024)[65]

Abandoned NDDC Projects

Sustaining the NDDC projects in the region has been a major challenge because of poor monitoring, and lack of coordination among the various stakeholders. There have been several abandoned projects by the Niger Delta Development Commission scattered all over the region. Contracts for such projects were awarded and mobilization funds were also released to the contractors. Projects such as important bridges in Cross River and Delta states, hostel accommodation in Universities and Colleges of Education in Cross River, Ondo and Akwa-Ibom states among others were abandoned. According to the reports from the Nigerian Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative which is a watch dog in the industry, revenues, deductions, disbursement and application of funds by the NDDC, amounting to the tune of $59.8 billion were awarded in contracts in Delta state between 2007-2011 and several of these projects were not completed (Chinwe, 2020.[66] Contracts were often awarded to contractors who most of the time, were fronting for very influential politicians and these contracts were eventually not executed. The Ministry of Finance and National Planning released N832.93 billion to the Niger Delta Development Commission for the construction of roads, provision of electricity, rehabilitation and construction of schools, hospitals and bridges that were abandoned or very badly constructed. The same contractors were mobilized by the NDDC with a large percentage of the contract sum released to them. Eventually the contact is abandoned and this accounts for the several projects that were abandoned over the years in the Niger Delta region. Some of the abandoned projects include the Chokocho/Umuayagu road and Ejekwu Wike close of Aba George road, Port Harcourt (Dayo, Eboh, Oyadongha, Yafugborhi, Aliu, Onueggbu, Alaribe and Una, 2020).[67]

This illicit financial practice has lent credence to the speculation that there is a high-profile collusion between the NDDC officials

[64] NDDC: A Disturbing Corruption Alarm, The Guardian Nigeria- Nigeria and https://www.m.guardian.ng>opinion>nddc-a-d, Accessed 28th Feb, 2024

[65] Oral interview with Nwabuikwu Peter. Age 79+ years, occupation trader, place of Interview Issele-Uku, Delta State, held on 23th March, 2024

[66] Chinwe Agbeze. Investigation: NDDC paid Millions for non-existent, abandoned Delta water projects 2020. (1), https://www.premiumtimesng.com. Accessed16 Dec, 2023

[67] Dayo Johnson, Michael Eboh, Samuel Oyadongha, Egufe Yafugborhi, Ozioruva Aliu, Chioma Onueggbu, Ugochukwu Alaribe and Emma Una, NDDC: N833 billion in 19 years as failed Projects litter Niger Delta, 2020. www.vanguardngr.com-deliver. Accessed 18th Dec, 2023

and the contractors resulting in the perpetuation of poverty in the region. These phoney contracts have been the bane of development in the region (Ejumudo, 2014).[68] Apart from very influential politicians in the country as well as some powerful indigenes of the Niger Delta region, former top public office holders in the Niger Delta states were implicated by the officials of the NDDC in the irregularities in the award of contacts. The NDDC also revealed by one of its former Managing Directors that its 2019 budget was inflated with over 500 non-existing projects (https://www.thenewsnigeria.com.ng-d, 2020).

[69]

The Niger Delta Development Commission officials because of their over bearing influence it was alleged, also attracted contracts only to certain prominent indigenes, companies or contractors who were fronting for them. This undue interference with the due diligence process of awarding contracts has worsened the poverty level in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. The legislative arm of government has not played its over-site functions over the NDDC effectively, because some legislators were allegedly involved in contracts with the NDDC instead of being fully engaged with their legislative duties (Nwabughiogu, 2020).[70]

The Niger Delta Development Commission over the years has been offering scholarship to some indigenous postgraduate students to study in foreign countries; this is to help equip the students with relevant skills that can be deployed for the development of the region (Chinwo, 2020).[71] However, recently because of the systemic corruption in the commission, the students' tuition fees were not been paid regularly. The students on scholarship abroad who were financed by the NDDC from the nine oil producing states in Nigeria staged protests in London, New York and France over the non-payment of their unpaid allowances spanning over two years for some of the students (Ukpong, 202).[72] Some relatives of the students in Nigeria had struggled to keep the students in school by sending them money, but only a few of the students could get such assistance from their relatives (Iroanusi, 2020).[73] Some of the students were disallowed from writing their

[68] Elly Bryan Ovie Ejumudo. Youth Restiveness in Niger Delta: A Critical Discourse, 2014. www.journals.sagepub.com. 23th May, 2023

[69] https://www.thenewsnigeria.com.ng-d, 2020

[70] Nwabughiogu Levinus. Probe: We are not responsible for Delay of NDDC'S 2020 Budget Presentation-Rep, 2020. https://www.vanguuardngr.com>probe. Accessed 28th Feb, 2024

[71] Chinwo Ernest. Nigeria: NDDC-A Disturbing Cesspool of Corruption, 2020. https://allafrica.com, Accessed 16 Dec, 2023

[72]Ukpong Cletus. Nigeria NDDC– Nigerian Embassy in London Embarrassed' by students' Protests, 2020.https://allafrica.com. Accessed 10th May, 2023

[73] Iroanusi Queen-Esther. Senate Approves NDDC Budget with Over N50 Billion Cut .2020. Premiumtimesng.com. Accessed 12th April, 2024

examinations over failure to pay their school fees. This unfortunate situation of non-payment of school fees of students on scholarship abroad is in the backdrop of the huge budgetary allocations on yearly basis by the Niger Delta Development Commission for these students. In 2016 the appropriation act showed that N28 billion was approved for some NDDC projects in 2015 and N25 billion in 2016, yet majority of these projects were not executed (.Nwabughiogu , 2020).[74] Ifiekporo was one of the villages that benefited from water projects awarded by NDDC, but following audit verification and monitoring it turned out that the projects were not executed and were therefore subsequently abandoned (Agbeze, 2020).[75]

It is surprising to note that the NDDC headquarters in Port-Harcourt has just been completed after 24 years of construction. It is important to note that the project has become an emblem of failure of the commission. It is regrettable and embarrassing that the Commission that is being managed by the indigenous people of the region has become a conduit pipe to siphon billions of naira of our national wealth (Dayo, et-al).[76]

It is a fact that some of the Niger Delta Development Commission projects have remained abandoned and many of these projects are uncompleted and are located all over the Niger Delta region. These abandoned projects are schools, health care centres and roads among others. The major reason for an unproductive NDDC is the endemic corruption since inception (Yusuf, 2020). [77] Over the years the Commission had waited for contractors for the completion of different projects such as blocks of classrooms and toilets, and most of these projects of over the fifteen years are yet to be completed. It is important to noted that because of the failure of the NDDC to execute some of these projects, the former Nigerian President Muhammadu Buhari ordered for a forensic audit of the NDDC, more so the impact of the Commission was not felt by the communities in the region. The money allocated to the commission did not reflect the resources invested since the inception of the Niger Delta Development Commission (Agbeze).[78] Below is an NDDC uncompleted

[74] Nwabughiogu Levinus (2020): Probe: We are not responsible for Delay of NDDC'S 2020 Budget Presentation-Rep, www.vanguuardngr.com>probe. 28th Feb, 2024

[75]Agbeze Chinwe. Investigation: NDDC paid millions for non-existent, abandoned Niger Delta projects2020. www.permiumtimesng.com, accessed 4th Oct, 2023

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[78] Agbeze Chinwe. Investigation: NDDC paid millions for non-existent, abandoned Niger Delta projects 2020.

building in Bayelsa state and such uncompleted projects litter the Niger Delta states of Nigeria.



Source: https://www.premiumtimesng.com/regional/south-south-regional/409184-abandoned-non-functional-nddc-projects-litter-bayelsa-1.html

The core mandate of the NDDC is defeated because there are many such abandoned projects all over the region. For example, road projects in Abak Federal Housing Estate, Oron road, Aka road, and classrooms blocks, among others were abandoned in Akwa-Ibom, Delta and Bayelsa states. Abandoned NDDC school projects are littered all over the communities. Most communities such as Ifa-Ikot, Okpong-Ifa have bad roads that have even affected negatively their economic activities. It was alleged that some of the contracts awarded were abandoned as soon as the National elections were over because their cronies who would not audit the projects were voted into office (Agbeze).[79]

Forensic Audit and the National Assembly

Since the exploration of crude oil in the Niger Delta region in 1956 there has been no

www.permiumtimesng.com, accessed 4th Oct, 2023

[79] Yusuf Akinpelu. What NDDC's Abandoned 70 USD million can do for the Niger Delta, 2020. https://www.premumtimesng.com, Accessed 5th Nov, 2023

appreciable development in the industrial, infrastructural and agricultural sectors as a result of corruption and abandonment of projects. This resulted to the Federal Government of Nigeria and President Muhammadu Buhari's initiative to institute a forensic audit of the commission (Ojougboh, 2020).[80] The Federal Government approved N722.3 million for the forensic audit of the NDDC and there was a massive public outcry because of the huge amount of money involved. The forensic audit was to investigate the 12,000 abandoned projects in the region (Agbakwuru, 2020).[81] The forensic audit was meant to cover the period from 2001 to 2019 to enable the auditors look at the activities of the NDDC and the earlier investigations by the National Assembly that revealed that most of the projects were uncompleted and abandoned. The ugly saga of counter accusations on the floor of the National Assembly by the former Acting Managing Director of the NDDC and the Minister of the Niger Delta Affairs whose Ministry oversees the NDDC is a pointer to the endemic corruption in the commission (Ojougboh, 2020). The huge amount allocated for the forensic audit is a common phenomenon in our polity and at times the ordinary citizens would prefer that such money is saved because few of such investigations are ever concluded and people are never punished or sentenced for such serious criminal acts.

The Niger Delta region that has both human and natural resources that would have made it become one of the richest regions in the world has remained in poverty. Oil exploration in the region has destroyed the eco- system of the area causing difficulties among the predominantly fishing communities. The environmental degradation has created harmful effects in the water, soil and air affecting the prosperity of the region. These have reduced the construction, commercial activities, agriculture and other income generating activities of the indigenous people (Tyokumbur).[82]. The incredibly well-endowed ecosystem of the Niger Delta region has been destroyed by regular oil spillage.

Recommendations

The Federal government of Nigeria should pay a closer attention to the Niger Delta region where it spends a substantial amount of its resources without much to show for such spending. The Federal government should revisit the act establishing the NDDC to ensure that the Commission's mandate and functions are limited to what it can deliver. The memorandum of understanding between the Federal government and the multinational oil

[80] Cairo Ojougboh. NDDC: A Disturbing Corruption Alarm, 2020. https://www.m.guardia.ng, Accessed 20th Oct, 2023

[81] Agbakwuru Johnbosco, Presidency to pay Forensic Auditors for 12,000 NDDC Projects, 2020. www.vanguardngr.com, accessed 2nd Nov, 2023

[82] Tyokumbur Emmanuel Teryila. Review of Ecological Effects of Oil Exploration in the Niger Delta, Nigeria, 2014. Pp77-80, https://www.researchgate.net>2847. Accessed 28th Feb, 2024 and Tombari Bobo, Botombari Gbidum Gimah. The Pollution and Distribution of the Niger Delta Ecosystem in Nigeria: Who is to be Blamed? 2026, 161-173.. European Scientific Journal 16(5)

companies should be more community friendly. The multinational oil companies should be responsible for the remediation of the environment following their oil exploration activities. They should as much as possible provide employment opportunities for the youths in the area so that the youths will develop a sense of ownership of the oil projects and then protect these assets. It is important for the Federal government of Nigeria to set up management boards and agencies to address issues of infrastructure and poverty in the Niger Delta region. The federal government should also implement the land use Act and the National Assembly should pass the Petroleum Industry bill and abrogate all other alienating laws causing conflicts in the Niger Delta region.

The issues of the Niger Delta region are seriously complex, because is deeply rooted the environment, Nigerian government should address the issue of youth's restiveness to avoid militancy in the area. Long and should term solutions should also be addresses. The government should focus its attention into job creation for the youths, by creating local industries and companies. All these will reduce unemployment and youth's restiveness. Skills workshops and training should be emphasised to encouraged the indigenous people. Stabilisation and mobility of the youths should be conducted for the youth to know the usefulness of the training and also acquiring of the skills.

Another recommendation is for the government to address the issue of insecurity. Community policing and government enforcement agencies should work together to provide adequate security for the people, government facilities and even the oil companies' facilities in the Niger Delta Region. This will set fear in the hearts of this government official that corrupted. In trying to apply these recommendations with genuine and realistic measures in the Niger Delta region, corruption, exploitation, ubjugation and oppression from all quarters will surely give way for more a better and vibrant development that will better the communities in the area.

Conclusion

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