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# The Political Ecology of the Niger Delta Crisis and the Prospects of Lasting Peace in the Post- Amnesty Period

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*Keywords :* *political ecology; crisis; niger delta; niger delta crisis; amnesty programme.*

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## I. Introduction

The situation in the Niger Delta which has engaged the attention of this paper is veritably a typical instance of political crisis. A crisis is an "occurrence that sufficiently seizes the attention of an individual, community, nation, organization, and international system at large, and which must elicit (urgent) responses" (Sessay, 2009:9). It is characterized by uncertainty, fear, tension, suspense and danger (Aji, 2009:4).

From the point of view of conflict studies, crisis is a function of unresolved conflict and social tension. As a social phenomenon, crisis is not spontaneous in occurrence. According to Roux-Dufort and Metais (in Sessay, 2009:11), "crises are not accidental phenomena but are the ultimate result of a long gestation period". In effect, crisis begins, becomes and breeds. This has been the case in respect of the Niger Delta crisis.

Indeed, the Niger Delta crisis has come a long way. In its dynamics of unfolding, it has represented the most critical threat to national security in contemporary Nigeria. From a somewhat negligible internal security concern, the crisis gravitated to a national emergency with far-reaching international implications (Okoli, 2007). The tragedy of this crisis was that, at a point, it tended to have defied every remedy in its continuum and dynamics of degeneration. The proclamation of state amnesty for the militants of the Niger Delta has largely attenuated the crisis; yet it still subsists in new patterns and dimensions. There have been cases of oil theft, popularly known in Nigerian parlance as oil bunkering; sporadic assaults on law enforcement agents by the dissident militant; as well as high incident of piracy on the shores of the Niger Delta.

A conceptual analogy has been alluded to between the Niger Delta problematic and HIV/AIDS pandemic. The deadly virus penetrates the human system unnoticed. Over time, it breeds and multiplies, thereby rendering the human immune system weak and vulnerable to sundry opportunistic diseases. The consequence of this malaise is AIDS, a pandemic that has so far defied all known cure (Okoli, 2008; Atelhe and Okoli, 2007).

In effect, the Niger Delta crisis has had the character and effects of a pandemic since the beginning of its occurrence; and indeed, the crisis has appeared to have defied all efforts at remedying it, the apparent gains of the Amnesty Programme notwithstanding. What are the factors that have precipitated and sustained this crisis? What is the objective socio-political and ecological circumstances underlying its occurrence and dynamics? And what could be done to ensure an enduring solution to the crisis? These questions define the salient issues which this paper seeks to address.

For convenience of organization and presentation, this paper is arranged into six parts in addition to the foregoing introduction, which constitutes the part one. Part two highlights the conceptual framework whereby the analytical scheme of the study is cast; while part three presents some historical insights into the subject matter. Part four analyzes the socio-political and ecological contexts and underpinnings of the Niger Delta crisis while part five considers the way forward, given the problem under review. Part six is the conclusion.

## II. Analytical Framework: Political Ecology cum Philosophical Existentialism

A theoretical framework is germane in this study. This is to situate the discourse in proper theoretical perspective and analytical premise. The

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study therefore, subscribes to the theory of political ecology. This is juxtaposed to a perspective of philosophical existentialism, which considers the restive survival-driven dispositions of man in an unfriendly environment.

Political ecology is the study of the relationship between political, economic and social factors with environmental issues and changes (Wikipedia online, 2013). It seeks to interrogate ecological social sciences with political economy (Peet and Watts, 169:6) in an attempt to evolve a disciplinary synthesis.

As a theoretical tradition, political ecology was influenced by the scholarly contributions of development geography and cultural ecology in the 1970s and 1980s (Bryant, 1998:80). Since its fertilization as a theoretical tradition, political ecology has sought primarily to understand the political dynamics surrounding material and discursive struggles over the environment in the third world (Bryant, 1998:89).

The focus of political ecology revolving questions pertaining to "access to and control over resources'' (Human et al 2004:203). In this regard, Sutton (2004:311) sees political ecology as an inquiry into:

…the day-to-day conflicts, alliances, and negotiations that ultimately result in some sort of definitive behavours; how politics affects or structures resource use.

At its core, political ecology makes great strides in attempting to contextualize political and ecological implications of human behavior (Wikipedia online, 2013). In addition, it attempts to provide critiques as well as alternatives in the interplay of the environment and political, economic and social factors (Wikipedia online, 2013).

The political ecology theory is premised on a number of assumptions, viz:

- Costs and benefits associated with environmental change are distributed unequally.
- Changes in the environment do not affect society, in a homogenous way: political, social and economic differences account for uneven distribution it costs and benefits.
- The unequal distribution of costs and benefits inevitably reinforces or reduces existing social and economic inequalities.
- Any change in environmental conditions must affect the political and economic status –quo.
- The unequal distribution of lost and benefits and the reinforcing or reducing of pre-existing inequalities holds political implications in terms of the attired power relationship that now result (Bryant and Bailey, 1997:28; Wikipedia online, 2013).

Applied to the purpose of the study, it is to be pointed out that the Niger Delta crisis is a manifestation of the struggle of a people who are desperate to overcome the survival and livelihood crisis imposed on the through environmental despoliation and abuse arising from the activities of oil exploration and production in the region. This observation will be made sharper when considered against the shadow of the theory of existentialism.

The theory of existentialism was originally propounded by the Danish Pilosopher, Kierkegaard (1913 – 1955) to depict the natural tendency of man to freedom self determination and responsibility in a perceptibly unfriendly environment. Over the years, the theory has come to assume diverse cognate interpretations and applications based on scholarly extrapolations.

In its simplest understanding, however, the theory of existentialism is based on the postulate that man is a unique and isolated individual in an indifferent or hostile universe, responsible for his own actions and free to choose his destiny (cf 'existentialism' at http://www.google.ca). In its more contemporary understanding, the theory has been applied to explaining the objective attitude of man in an environment where his survival and subsistence are threatened. It is in the light of this that this study sees the Niger Delta crisis as a product of struggle for survival and self determination by the Niger Delta people in an environment that is perceptibly averse to their purposes.

The application of the existentialist theory to the present analysis may be problematic in view of its apparent conceptual and epistemological vagueness. Yet the theory, properly contextualized, would prove plausible in providing insights into the correlation between the perceived socio-political and ecological abuses of the Niger Delta and the rising restiveness, criminality and violence of the people of the area. When considered against the propositions of political ecology, the analytical utility of philosophical existentialism becomes clearer particularly in the context of the ongoing study.

With reference to the theoretical positions considered above, what could be gleaned in the foregoing is that the Niger Delta crisis has been motivates d sired by factors relating to the survival and existential conditions of the people of the region. This marks a major departure from the majority of the prevailing perspectives on the Niger Delta problematique, most of which have over-emphasized the inter-face of political (federalist) and economic conditions.

## III. Study Area: The Niger Delta Region

*The Niger Delta* is a large region of the River Niger. The region is sometimes called the *Oil Rivers* in view of the fact that it was once a major producer of palm oil. The region was the British Oil Rivers Protectorate from 1885 until 1893, when it was

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expanded and became the Niger Coast Protectorate (Mifflin, 2000).

As currently defined officially by the Nigerian government, Niger Delta encompasses about 70,000 km$^2$ and makes up 7.5% of Nigeria's land mass. Historically and cartographically, it consists of present day Bayelsa, Delta, and Rivers States. However, in 2000 Obansanjo's regime included Abia, Akwa-Ibom, Cross River State, Edo, Imo and Ondo States as parts of the Niger Delta region, thus redefining the region. This development has led to controversy regarding the actual delimitation of Niger Delta. Today, it is fashionable to speak in terms of the 'core' and 'peripheral' in an attempt to resolve this controversy.

In effect, the core Niger Delta States would include Bayelsa, Delta and Rivers. On the other hand, peripheral Niger Delta States include the rest of the State in the above list, namely Abia, Akwa-Ibom, Cross River, Edo, Imo, and Ondo. The conception of Niger Delta in the light of the above categorization has been criticized as an exercise in politicization. Hence, it has been maintained by analysts that inclusion of the second set of States as members of the Niger Delta is simply political. The argument holds that the fact that a State is oil-producing does not qualify it as a component of the Niger Delta both historically and cartographically. Nonetheless, this paper sees Niger Delta in terms of the nine-state extraction, indicated above; although there is a need to recognize the differentiation between the inner (core) and outer (peripheral) categories of the region.

Niger Delta is a home for some 31 million people (CRS, 2008). Ethnographically, over forty (40) ethnic groups prominent among which is the Bini, Efik, Ibibio, Annang, Oron, Ijaw, Itsekiri, Isoko, Urhobo, Ukwuani, and Kalabari, are among the inhabitants in the Niger Delta. There are about two hundred and fifty (250) different dialects spoken by the people of the region.

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It is to be noted that the Niger Delta, and the "South South Zone", which includes Akwa Ibom State, Bayelsa State, Cross River State, Delta State, Edo State and Rivers State are two different entities; even though they are apparently synonymous. While the Niger Delta is the oil producing region the South-South Zone is a geo-political zone in contemporary Nigeria parlance. The Niger Delta has been geographically sub-divided into Western/Northern, Central, and Eastern regions. Below is a brief highlight on these specific sub-divisions.

1. Western (or Northern) Niger Delta: This is the western arm of the coastal South-South Nigeria which includes Delta, and the southernmost parts of Edo, and Ondo States. It is a heterogeneous society with several ethnic groups including the Urhobo, Igbo, Isoko, Itsekiri, Ijaw (or Ezon) and Ukwuani (Igbo) groups in Delta State, along with Yoruba (Ilaje) in Ondo State. The major occupations of the people of this area are fishing and farming. It has been observed by historians that the Western Niger was controlled by chiefs of the five primary ethnic groups the Itsekiri, Isoko, Ukwuani, Ijaw and Urhobo with whom the British government had to sign separate "Treaties of Protection" in their formation of "Protectorates" that later became southern Nigeria.
2. Central Niger Delta: This covers of the central section of the coastal South-South Nigeria which includes Bayelsa and Rivers States. The Central Niger Delta region predominantly inhabited by the Ijaws, with significant representations of the Ogoni and other groups which consist of the Igbo groups, viz: Ekpeye, Ndoni, Etche, Ikwerre and Ndoki in Rivers State.
3. Eastern Niger Delta: Eastern Niger Delta Section consists of the Eastern (or Atlantic) section of the coastal South-South Nigeria which includes Akwa Ibom and Cross River States. The Eastern Niger Delta region has the Efik, Ibibio, Annang, Oron, Ogoja (including Ekoi and Bekwara) people (Wikipedia online, 2013).

## IV. The Niger Delta Crisis: Some Historical Insights

What is today known as the Niger Delta crisis has its roots in the age-long struggle of the Niger Delta people to 'rule' their destiny through self-determination and 'resource control' (Okoli, 2007:4). This has manifested in various forms and colorations over the years.

In the colonial era, the struggle was championed by some traditional rulers, prominent among whom were Kings Nana of Itsekiri, Jaja of Opobo and Koko of Nembe. These traditional rulers vehemently resisted the undue exploitation and subjugation by the British colonialists, and therefore, precipitated crisis in their domains. The 1895 Akasa Raid in Brass (now Bayelsa) was a veritable case in point (Ilagha, 2007).

Another important instance of the Niger Delta struggle was the radical activism that culminated in the declaration of the Niger Delta Republic in the mid 1960s by Isaac Adaka Boro. Boro, a former student leader and an ex-policeman, organized a rebellion which lasted for twelve days against the Nigerian state. His action was informed by the perceived marginalization and deprivations suffered by the Niger Delta people in the wake of oil exploration and exploitation in the region (cf. Sagay, 2001; Nwagbara, 2007).



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In the early 1990s the Niger Delta struggle assumed a rather critical dimension with the advent of the Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP), led by Ken Saro-Wiwa. This movement, in its agitations for ethnic and environmental rights, threatened to disrupt the operations of the oil companies if they failed to come to terms with their demands. The Ogoni activism was met with stiff state repression, which introduced great measure of violence and militarization to the Niger Delta crisis (cf. Okpe, 2004).

Since the 1990s, the situation in the Niger Delta has been most critically volatile. There have been serious occurrences of bloody conflict as exemplified in the Ijaw unrest of 1998 – 99, as well as the rising trends of militia activities that have been a dominant feature of the Niger Delta since the early 2000.

In retrospect, the Niger Delta crisis appears to be going through a decisive continuum of degeneration. From the level of civil activism characterized by legitimate agitations, the crisis has today metamorphosed into a full-brown insurrection featuring the most sophisticated patterns of arms bearing, hostage-taking, sabotage and subversion as well as brigandage. In the face of these, security and stability of Nigeria have been at stake.

## V. The Dialectical Contexts of the Niger Delta Crisis

The roots of crisis in the Niger Delta are not far-fetched from the prevailing social, political, economic and ecological dialectics of the region. This has to do with state predation and terrorism, corporate buccaneerism and irresponsibility, environmental degradation and abuse, socio-economic and political deprivations and marginalization as well as mass impoverishment for which the Nigerian State and the oil multinationals are mutually culpable. A highlight of these issues is instructive in order to predicate the focus of this paper

*a) State Predation and Terrorism*

This comes in form of state repression of legitimate agitations as well as military invasion and occupation of host communities given the pretext of civil unrest. Cases in point in this respect include the invasion and occupation of Ogoniland by the Nigerian military forces in 1994; the murder of the 'Ogoni Nine' in 1995 by the Military Junta led by General Sani Abacha; the emergency rule and intensive military surveillance imposed on Bayelsa State in December 1998; the raiding of Opia and Ikiyam communities in Delta State in January, 1999 by Nigerian soldiers; the 'Odi massacre' of 1999, among others (Okonta, 2006; Wilkipedia, 2007; Omadjohwoefe, 2007, etc.)

*b) Corporate Buccaneerism and Irresponsibility*

This refers to the willful damage done to the ecosystem by the activities of oil multinationals, which include gas flaring, oil spillage, land expropriation and displacement of the peasants, intimidation of the local population, etc. (Epelle, 2004). This also refers to the gross neglect, dereliction and abdication by oil multinationals of their moral obligation to providing basic socio-economic amenities like gainful employment, good roads, electricity, portable water and schools to communities affected by their business activities (Epelle, 2004). The implication of this is economic exploitation without recompense, a situation that finds expression in acute infrastructural deficit as well as pervasive environmental deterioration in the Niger Delta.

*c) Environmental Degradation and Abuse*

The Niger Delta is apparently the most degraded environment in Africa (Sumenitari, 2003). This is as a result of gas flaring, oil spillage, deforestation, loss of bio-diversity and water pollution, all of which are associated with oil exploration and exploitation in the region. The impact of environmental degradation on the vegetation and population of the Niger Delta has been devastating (Aboribo, 2007; Ikenga, 2007). According to Akindele et al:

*Oil exploration affects people living in oil producing areas negatively. Most farmers face the problem of displacement without resettlement during oil spills. Apart from loss of farms, oil spills have led to extensive deforestation with no adequate replanting practices. This in effect has shortened fallow periods, compounded land degradation and led to loss of soil fertility and consequently erosion of the top soil (in Aboriobo, 2007:10).*

The incidence of oil spillage, gas flaring and industrial pollution in the Niger Delta contaminates the air and waters within the region thereby making them to be hazardous to public health.

*d) Socio-economic Deprivation and Mass Impoverishment*

Socio-economic conditions of the Nigeria Delta are particularly disheartening. A World Bank Report of 1995 captured the scenario thus:

*Despite its vast resources, the (Niger Delta) region remains poor. GNP per capita is below the national average of US$280. Unemployment in Port-Harcourt, the Capital of Rivers State, is 30 percent and is believed to be equally high in the rural areas. The rural population commonly fish or practice subsistence agriculture, and supplement their diet and income with a wide variety of forest products. Educational levels are below national average and are particularly low for women. While 76 percent of Nigerian children attend primary school, this level drops to 30 – 40 percent in some parts of the Niger Delta. The poverty level on the Niger Delta is exacerbated by the high cost of living. In*

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*the urban areas of Rivers State, the cost of living index is the highest in Nigeria (World Bank, 1995 in Ilagha, 2007. 135).*

The above trend has more or less subsisted over time. In effect, more recent facts tend to suggest some measure of degeneration in socio-economic conditions of the Niger delta people. The table below provides valuable insights in this respect.

*Table 1 :* The Niger Delta Human Poverty Index for 2005

| S. No | State | Probability Birth of Not Surviving to age 40 | Adult Literacy Rate | Unweighed Average | HP1 – 1 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | Abia | 26 | 26 | 34 | 29.169 |
| 2. | Akwa-Ibom | 27 | 28 | 35.5 | 30.649 |
| 3. | Bayelsa | 30 | 31 | 39 | 33.826 |
| 4. | Cross River | 26 | 28 | 33 | 29.3 |
| 5. | Delta | 20 | 18 | 27 | 22.355 |
| 6. | Edo | 2 | 18 | 28 | 23.399 |
| 7. | Imo | 25 | 29 | 32 | 28.949 |
| 8. | Ondo | 30 | 31 | 42.5 | 35.442 |
| 9. | Rivers | 24 | 24 | 30.5 | 26.53 |
| 10. | Niger Delta | 25.556 | 25.889 | 33.4 | 28.847 |

*Source: Grinding Poverty and Deprivation in the Niger Delta. Vanguard, August 26, 2007, in Agah and Ikenga, 2007:4*

*e) Political Marginalization*

This has to do with the perceived short-changing of the Niger Delta in terms of political representation, resource allocation and resource control within the context of the Nigerian Federation. The peculiarities of Nigeria's federalism tend to encourage some sorts of inequities and imbalances in the processes of power and fiscal relations in the Nigerian Federation. The apparent peripheralization (Aboribo, 2007) and alienation of the Niger Delta vis-à-vis Nigeria's federalist relations is a crucial issue in the Niger Delta crisis (Ilagha, 2007; Nwagbara, 2007).

It can be inferred from the above discussion that the prevailing socio-political and ecological atmosphere of the Niger Delta has been bad enough to precipitate and fuel crisis. As people's life and wellbeing are continually jeopardized, usually with reckless abandon, they are forced to resort to desperate 'tactics' to redress the situation. As Omadjohwoefe (2007:2) rightly observes:

*Several decades of reckless multinational oil companies operations and the attendant incessant degradation of the environment breed frustrated expectations and foster widespread agitations. The host communities have decidedly adopted strategies, such as sabotage of oil installations, hostage taking, in drawing the attention of the multinational oil companies to the devastating impacts of their activities especially on their livelihood and the near inability of the environment to sustain life (corroborating Ogege, 2006).*

It is against the backdrop of the above that one can meaningfully appreciate the spate of civil unrest in the Niger Delta region. It must be noted, however, that the activism in the Niger Delta has gone beyond the level of legitimate or objective cause. Over time, the 'struggle' has been overtaken by crass adventurism and opportunism driven by materialism, mischief and criminality.

## VI. Situating the Political Ecology of Oil Production on Niger Delta

The activities of corporations in the Niger Delta constitute a veritable threat to the region's environmental security, ecological balance, and sustainable development (Uwuigbe and Ranti, 2008). This touches on survival and livelihood conditions of the people of the region. In effect, the people of the Niger Delta region tend to perceive these corporations and 'enemies of progress' whose operations at all levels are associated with untoward consequences on the land and people of the area. The table below highlights the actual and potential impact of the activities of oil corporations on the Niger Delta.



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*Table 3 :* Oil Activities and Their Impact on the Environment of Niger Delta

| S/n | Activities/Event | Actual and Potential Impact on Environment |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | Exploration including geological survey, and geophysical investigations | - Destruction of forest land, vegetation and farm land as well as human settlement.<br>- Noise pollution and vibration from seismic shooting.<br>-Adverse effects on animals and human population (on shore) and on fisheries (near/offshore).<br>–Disturbances/destruction of flora and fauna habitats.<br>- Dislocation of economic activity.<br>- Tension on social environment as a result of disagreement arising from compensation. |
| 2 | Product/Process | - Water pollution from long term effects of produced water (with high salinity).<br>- Air pollution from gas and processing evaporation and flaring.<br>- Production of heat that kills vegetation of the area, suppresses the growth and flowering of plans and reduces agricultural productivities and wildlife concentration in the area. |
| 3. | Drilling | - Accumulation of toxic materials, oil pollution in the sea, beaches or land.<br>- Destruction of fisheries production.<br>- Destruction of breeding ground for marine fisheries.<br>- Alteration of the taste of fish.<br>- Killing of bottom dwellers.<br>- Pollution of underground water (waste pots).<br>- Adverse health effects on humans.<br>- Social tension arising from compensation disagreements, etc. |
| 4. | Refining | - Air pollution and waste water impacting negatively on human health and ecosystem. |
| 5. | Oil spillage | - Destruction of farmland, fishery, and aquatic resources and mangrove ecosystem.<br>- Water pollution.<br>- Social tension as a result of disagreements over compensation. |
| 6. | Tanker loading location | - Water pollution from ballast and tank washing.<br>- Deck drainage, spillage during loading operation. |
| 7. | Storage depot | - Land pollution from effluent water and solid waste of chemical cans, drums, etc.<br>- Destruction of farmland for the establishment of storage depots.<br>- Water pollution from effluent water.<br>- Air pollution from gaseous fumes during loading. |
| 8. | Transportation | - Disruption of sea-bed by dredging for pipeline installation.<br>- Sedimentation along pipeline routes.<br>- Water pollution from consequences of leaks from fracturing or breaking pipes.<br>- Air pollution by transport tankers.<br>- Destruction of environmentally sensitive area.<br>- Erosion and flooding of the area exposed to activity. |
| 9. | Marketing | - Pollution of immediate environments from retail routes.<br>- High hazard potential where located near residential building. |

*Source: Adapted from Orubu and Ehwarieme (2004).*

Apart from the issue of environmental abuse, the activities of oil multinationals have brought untold degree of improvements and livelihood crisis to the people of Niger Delta. In effect, far from bringing prosperity to the region, "oil exploration and production (have)) caused large scale environmental degradation, destroyed rural livelihoods, and aggravated poverty" (Ibeanu and Luckham, 2006:36).

There has been glaring immiseration judging from all social indicators in the Niger Deta region. As at early 2000, only about 27 percent of households in the Niger Delta had access to safe drinking water and 30 percent to electricity (Ibeanu, 2002: 153) Similarly, while 70 percent of Nigerian children attended primary school, only 30-40 percent attended in some parts of the Niger Delta (Ibeanu and Luckham, 2006: 37).

The impoverishment of the people of the Niger Delta has been worsened by social and political deprivation and marginalization. There was the issue of state neglect of the concerns of the Niger Delta, which was compounded by the skewed distribution of oil revenues, often diverted into development and elite accumulation elsewhere in Nigeria (Ibeanu and Luckham, 2006:37).

In addition to the above, there has been high incidence of state violence, kleptocracy, and corporate irresponsibility on the part of the Nigerian state and her unholy allies, the oil multinationals. All these have gone with far-reaching consequences on the land and people of the Niger Delta.

The point that we are vigorously seeking to establish in the foregoing writing is that the Niger Delta crisis has been motivated and sustained by the dialectics of environment-politics inter-face. In this regard, the crisis is to be understood as a reactionary movement by which the people of Niger Delta seeking



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to liberate themselves from the shackles of ecolo-political injustice perpetrated by the petro-state and oil multinationals. In the direction, Ibeanu and Luckham (2006:36) succinctly observe:

Protest movements developed new forms of popular mobilization, based on a political discourse of self-determination. They not only sought compensation for lost oil revenues and environmental damage. They also demanded local control of petroleum resources, corporate responsibility of oil firms and re-negotiation of the political contact between the state and its citizens ('true federalism').

So far in this section, an attempt is being made to situate the political ecology of the Niger Delta crisis. This perspective emphasizes the ecological and existential foundations of the Niger Delta crisis. The approach focuses on the political reactions to environmental harm in the Niger Delta with an eye on the socio-economic and political implications of this environmental harm (cf. Vayda and Walters, 0199).

Hence, the political ecology of the Niger Delta crisis vigorously seeks to interrogate the correlational interface between oil and conflict in the Niger Delta within the analytical scheme of what could be referred to as 'environmental determinism'. This is predicated on the assumption to the effect that "any change in environmental conditions must affect the political and economic status quo" (Bryant and Bailey, 1997:28)

## VII. The Strategic Importance and Efficacy of the Amnesty Programme

The proclamation of state Amnesty on the Niger Delta militant in 2009 marked a water-shed in the search for a lasting resolution of the Niger Delta crisis. The Amnesty Programme was a well thought out policy designed to bring about cessation of active hostility in the Niger Delta region as well as disarming and reintegration of the militants into the society.

The Amnesty Programme essentially derived from the policy focus of the late Yaradua's administration. In his maiden Presidential address to the nation, President Yaradua devoted ample space and time to dwell on the Niger Delta challenge. According to him:

The crisis in the Niger Delta commands our urgent attention. Ending it is a matter of strategic importance to our country. I will use every resource available to me, with your help, to address this crisis in the spirit of fairness, justice, and cooperation. We have a good starting point because our predecessor already launched a master plan that can serve as a basis for a comprehensive examination of all the issues. We will involve all stakeholders in working out a solution. As part of this effort, we will quickly move to ensure security of life and property, and to make investments safe. In the meantime, we appeal to all aggrieved communities, groups, and individuals to immediately suspend all violent activities and respect law. Let us allow the impending dialogue to take place in a conducive atmosphere. We are all in this together, and we will find a way to achieve peace and justice (quoted in Ngare, 2012:107)

It was the above policy direction that inspired the amnesty project. The proclamation of the Amnesty was greeted with public skepticism and ambivalence. Only a few Nigerians saw hope in the mechanism, and so there was a general atmosphere of pessimism and ambivalence on its efficacy.

In the course of its implementation however, it became obvious that the Amnesty has some prospects at all. Contrary to the prevailing misgivings concerning the feasibility of the programme, scores of Niger Delta militant embraced the deal. They came out en masse to denounce violence and to surrender their instruments of aggression. According to Oluwaniyi:

By the end of the amnesty period in October 2009,20 192 ex-militants (and non-militants) had surrendered their weapons – consisting of 2 760 arms of different classes and calibre, 287 445 ammunitions, 3 155 magazines, 1 090 dynamite caps, 763 explosives and sticks of dynamite, and 18 gun boats – to the Presidential Amnesty Committee.11 With the closure of the amnesty window, other ex-militants – who were reluctant to participate in the amnesty programme but later realised the benefits accruing to those who disarmed – joined, increasing the total number by 6 166.12 (n.d:51).

In the immediate aftermath of the amnesty declaration, appreciable peace and stability which had hitherto eluded the Niger Delta, returned to the region. Consequently, oil production by Nigeria shot up from the low of about 700 barrels per day to more than 2,500 barrels in the early 2010. By the end of year 2010, activities of oil production in Niger Delta had almost normalized.

However, recent events tend to suggest that the peace process in respect of the Niger Delta debacle is yet to materialize. There appears to be a backlash leading to recrudescence of violence and criminality in the region. These acts have been largely orchestrated by dissident and criminal elements in the ranks of the erstwhile militant formations that are hell bent on sabotaging the state in view of self- regarding or political concerns.

In effect, there have been rising cases at organized crime, piracacy, oil theft (oil bunkering), kidnapping and the likes in the Niger Delta region over the recent months. The implication of this is that the peace process in the Niger Delta is yet to be actualized. This raises anxiety to the effect that the seeming gains of the amnesty project are being persistently jeopardized. The government must explore and further



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opportunities towards ensuring lasting peace and stability to the region.

Overall, the prospects of the amnesty project have been threatened in the following Instances:

1. The rise of dissident militants and criminal element who are currently sabotaging the amnesty initiative
2. Rising incidence of offshore criminality, such as piracy and oil theft
3. Renewed cases of anti-government hostility as exemplified in the abduction and killing of twelve (12) men of the Nigerian Police in April, 2013
4. Continued despoliation of land and environment of Niger Delta through oil spills and gas flaring
5. Bastardization of the Amnesty implementation through politicization and corruption
6. Sense of alienation and marginalization by a section of the Niger Delta youth who feel that they have been unjustly excluded or short-charged in the amnesty process
7. The seeming lethargy of the government in addressing the fundamental development concerns of the Niger Delta through affirmative policies and actions, etc

In addition to the above, there are some nagging outstanding issues which ought to be addressed too. According to Oluwaniyi:

Major critical issues such as the roots of alienation, marginalization, exploitation, corruption, unemployment, poverty, youth and women's issues are still not dealt with, and the y jeopardize the possibility of future peace, security and development in the Niger Delta region Moreover, no practical development has taken place, apart from the few developments handled by the NDDC and the Ministry of the Niger Delta – basically the construction and reconstruction of roads (n.d 53-54).

In the light of these setbacks, what is the prospect of the Amnesty deal? The position of this paper is that the answer lies with the steadfast of the government and relevant stakeholders in making the Amnesty work. The paper, however, makes a number of suggestions on the way forward. This is our concern in the following section.

## VIII. The Way Forward

The Niger Delta crisis has degenerated to a level where its permanent resolution is problematic, the amnesty deal notwithstanding. While this paper entertains the pessimism that lasting resolution of the Niger Delta crisis is far-fetched, it nonetheless believes that something can be done to solve the crisis. To this end, the paper makes a case for the institution of an alternative development strategy for the Niger Delta region. This strategy should emphasize extensive grass-root participation. Under it, the States of the Niger Delta should be divided into special development areas, with each development area coinciding with a major oil producing community. The management of the development areas should be drawn from relevant community-based groups including the youths, the traditional rulers, religious groups as well as village or town associations. The management would be led by a credible philanthropist or community leader appointed by the Federal Government from within the jurisdiction of own development area

The development areas should be funded by the Federal Government through direct budgetary allocations. The development areas would have the mandate to ensure urgent infrastructural and socio-economic transformation of the Niger Delta. They should be domiciled in the oil producing communities, and should carry the locals along in the execution of their mandate. Activities of the development areas should be subjected to periodic review through a feed-back mechanism put in place by the Federal Government to ensure optimal performance.

It must stated, however, that any strategy designed to address the Niger Delta crisis must start with a comprehensive environmental clean-up and restoration of the spatial ambience of the region which has been desolated over the years by the activities of oil production. This will require the incorporation of the Niger Delta peace and development plans into the wider national development strategy. The extant statutory bodies dedicated to the transformation of the Niger Delta, such as the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDNC) and the Ministry of Niger Delta Affairs, should synergize in an attempt to work out credible modalities for delivering development dividends to the people of the Niger Delta. In doing this, care must be taken to ensure that local initiatives and inputs are sought for and elicited in such a manner that process is participatory and reflective of the aspirations of the people.

## IX. Conclusion

The Niger Delta represents one of the worst degraded and worst impoverished environments in the contemporary world. For over five decades, the Nigerian State has connived with the oil multinational in ruining the Niger Delta in the name of oil exploration and production. The people of the region have been exposed to sundry socio-economic, political and ecological malaises for which there has been no proper recompense. The apparent insoluble instability in the Niger Delta, even in its post-amnesty phase, is a sort of retribution for decades of abuse of the land and people of the Niger Delta. It is on this note that this paper submits that the crisis will prevail, and may even degenerate the more, until and unless the organic context which precipitates and sustains it is comprehensively and adequately addressed. This is



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without any prejudice to the prospects of the amnesty programme.

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