

How Niger Deltans Underdeveloped Niger Delta: A Short Treatise

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Abstract

The Niger Delta region has been faced with the conundrums of development over the years despite its abundant crude oil, and other natural and human capitals. The region has been submerged in mass poverty occasioned by low standard of living; inability of the masses to afford basic human needs including food, clothes and houses; dearth of industries; environmental disasters; lingering social inequality; high rate of unemployment; as well as inadequate and dilapidated infrastructural facilities in its health, transportation, education, and power/energy sectors. These crises of development have been attributed to several factors by various scholars, key actors, and theorists. The classical realists for instance, attribute the region's underdevelopment solely to the flaws inherent in human nature. That is, the region's underdevelopment is natural and bound to be experienced. To Neo-Marxists within the region, it is the by-product of the disruptions, exploitations, irresponsibility, and insensitivity of British colonialists, successive Nigerian federal governments, and International Oil Companies (IOCs) operating within the region. This treatise however, examines the underdevelopment of the Niger Delta from a different perspective. It focuses on how Niger Deltans – through internal demagoguery; individual states' developmental failure; internal marginalization of oil and gas host communities; cultism; militancy; commercialization of violence; and ethnicity – have contributed to the underdevelopment of their region. It concludes with some feasible policy recommendations that can rescue the region from the challenges of development inflicted by its own people.

Key words: Niger Delta, Niger Deltans, development, underdevelopment.

I. Introduction

Development and underdevelopment are not natural but man-made – they are created conditions or state of affairs. For instance, the area now known as the Niger Delta, has a long standing history of how it has been underdeveloped by its indigenes and outsiders. For example, during the pre-colonial era, the Ijaws, who were perceived “to live altogether on plunder and piracy on the rivers” (Barbot, as cited in Alagoa, 2005, p. 26) preyed on ships and looted goods (Erezene, 2016), thereby causing great hardship, obstacle to free movement to the Benin Rivers, disruption of economic growth (Ryder, 1977), and by logical extension, under-developing the region. This era marked the beginning of self-inflicted underdevelopment in the region.

In post-colonial Nigeria, the Niger Delta has continued to face more complex issues affecting its developmental visions. These challenges are both externally and internally inflicted. The lingering impacts of British colonialism, successive Nigerian governments, IOCs, Niger Delta states and local governments, as well as individual indigenes are all catalysts (though in various degrees) in the underdevelopment of the region. The most conventional ways of x-raying the challenges of development in the region, had been to blame the first three external forces; while the last three internal forces are often overlooked as co-facilitators in the region’s underdevelopment. Little or no search light has been beamed on Niger Deltans’ roles which inhibit development in the region. Such roles manifest in the form of regional demagoguery, individual states’ developmental failure, cultism, militancy, commercialization of violence, and ethnicity.

Thus, the Niger Delta has become a classic example of Mazrui’s (1980) paradox of African development. It is the region that made Nigeria to be ranked among the top ten largest crude oil- producing States, as well as the sixth largest crude oil exporter in the world (NNPC 2008; BP 2009). It is the third largest mangrove forest in the world with extensive fresh water swamp, coastal ridges, fertile dry land, forest and tropical rainforest (Kuku, 2012; Pyagbara, 2004). Despite these enormous natural endowments coupled with its populations and successive federal governments’ development efforts; the Niger Delta is submerged in poverty, unemployment, low standard of living, high inflation rate, lack of modern infrastructural, educational, and economic facilities, high illiteracy rate, lack of industries, etc. leading to untold hardship on the people (Ottuh, 2013). While the region’s wealth is funding vast infrastructural development and costly peacekeeping missions in other parts of Nigeria and Africa respectively; the region lacks infrastructures and peace needed for its development (Agbiboa & Maiangwa, 2012). Similarly, despite the region’s backwardness, a microscopic few, who claim to represent its developmental interest, have

suddenly become multi-millionaires, own isolated islands of affluence, and live in luxury at the region's detriment.

However, this treatise is not aimed at disparaging the genuine efforts of some Niger Deltans, who as Kuku (2012) aptly observed, have over the years taken the region's plights to successive federal authorities and the international community for remediation and intervention aimed at protecting Niger Deltans' rights. It is equally not a justification of IOCs and successive Nigerian governments' actions in stifling the region's development. Rather, it is aimed at drawing attentions to how Niger Deltans have also contributed to the underdevelopment of the Niger Delta with a view to proffering pragmatic suggestions.

II. Operational Definition of Terms

Niger-Delta There seems to be much controversy regarding what actually constitutes the Niger Delta region of Nigeria (Ottuh, 2013). While some have constructed the Niger Delta to comprise the nine oil producing States of Cross Rivers, Akwa Ibom, Imo, Rivers, Abia, Bayelsa, Delta, Edo, and Ondo; others defined it as the seven Coastal States of Cross River, Akwa Ibom, Rivers, Bayelsa, Delta, Edo, and Ondo, with the exclusion of the two Igbo States of Abia and Imo (Umejesi, 2006).

Conversely, Otoghile and Eghweree (2010) have constructed four approaches to the definition of the concept 'Niger Delta'. The first approach defined Niger Delta as a geographical concept otherwise known as the Niger Delta region. By this, Niger Delta connotes the six States of the South-South, Ondo State of South-West, as well as Imo and Abia States of Mid-East – erroneously referred to as 'South-East'. The second approach defined Niger Delta as an ethno-political concept. That is, Niger Delta refers to the various minor ethnic nationalities with rich and interrelated cultural heritage (Kuku, 2012) in Cross River, Akwa Ibom, Rivers, Bayelsa, Edo, Delta, Ondo, Imo, and Abia states. The third approach coined the Niger-Delta as an economic concept. Here, Niger Delta denotes "the Oil Belt of Nigeria" (Saka *et al*, 2021, p. 323); the oil rich southern communities in Nigeria – the economic hub of the country; the proverbial goose that lays the golden eggs (Adu & Funmilayo, 2014); or the home of the huge oil mineral deposits that have sustained the Nigerian economy afloat since independence. The last approach defined the Niger-Delta as an 'agitational' concept. This approach defines the Niger-Delta as a region of insurrection (Ikelegbe, 2001); a theatre of war, turmoil, or of violent and peaceful agitations for equitable distribution of oil wealth or outright self-control of oil resource within the region. Succinctly put, as an agitational concept, the Niger-Delta refers to the melting pot of resource conflict in the last two decades, as well as the utmost threat to national security and stability in recent times (Ikelegbe, 2003). From the above, Niger Delta simply refers to

the modern-day nine oil-producing States in the South-South (Bayelsa, Rivers, Akwa Ibom, Cross Rivers, Edo, and Delta); South-West (Ondo); and Mideast/'South-East' (Imo and Abia) geo-political zones of Nigeria. 'Niger Deltans' refers to the various ethnic nationalities and people of the Niger Delta.

Development According to Modernization theorists, development is synonymous with economic development. Though this assertion has generated much controversies, it is however valid precisely when juxtaposed with the fact that it is the economic condition (substructure or economic development) of a society that determines its superstructure – legal and socio-cultural systems (Marx & Engels, 1992). Hence, Schumpeter (1934) coined development or economic development as changes in economic life which are not forced upon it from 'without', but arise by its own initiative from 'within'.

Underdevelopment Like the concept of development, the term 'underdevelopment' has been diversely defined by different scholars. Nevertheless, for the sake of space and scope of study, one of these numerous definitions shall be considered. According to Hoffman (1960) underdevelopment is an existential state of affairs in a country or region characterized by poverty, dearth of factories, lack of electric power supplies, inadequate roads and railroads, high illiteracy rate, limited government services, poor communications, few hospitals, and paradoxically, by isolated islands of wealth, with few individuals living in luxury. In a nutshell, underdevelopment simply connotes a significant, qualitative, and quantitative deterioration or depreciation in the over-all wellbeing of a people orchestrated partly from within.

III. Theoretical Framework: Modernization Theory

Modernization theory holds development as synonymous with growth and modernization; and it can be measured in terms of increase in per capita income. Secondly, the theory holds that the process of development is synonymous with americanization, europeanization or westernization process. Thirdly, Modernization theory sees development as a global marathon phenomenon or a process of catching up. Rostow (1960) argued that developed countries have gone through the following five stages to reach their recent stage of economic development, viz: Traditional stage, preconditions for take-off stage, take off stage, drive to maturity, and age of high mass consumption. To him, TWCs are underdeveloped because of their lack of productive investments – they are consumer nations rather than producer nations. That is, the unbridled consumption habits of TWCs are responsible for their underdevelopment. He recommended that TWCs can develop if only they accept aid in the form of capital, technology, and expertise from the West; purged themselves of high consumption habit; and embrace production ethics – the adoption of

Structural Adjustment Programme. Simply put, Rostow argued that as part of the pre-conditions for take-off, a country can be said to be experiencing development if it could raise its national income from 5 percent or less to 10 percent or more (Rostow, 1960; McClelland, 1964).

David McClelland's version of the modernization theory thinks TWCs are backward due to the prevalence of certain inhibiting factors such as ignorance, diseases, extended family system, geo-ethnic interest, demagoguery, superstition, traditional kinship values, and high illiteracy rate. According to him, the "N" achievements value or the need for development value is the key determinant of development in any society. Societies inhabited by individuals with the need for achievement are more likely to be developed and vice versa. He ascribed the backwardness in TWCs to the fact that they are inhabited by individuals with low need for achievement. From the above, it can be inferred that the underdevelopment of the Niger Delta, despite its abundance natural and human capitals, is also a function of cultism, ethnicity, militancy, misplaced value and reward systems – Amnesty programmes, demagoguery, etc. perpetrated by Niger Deltans. More so, the region is underdeveloped because it lacks selfless indigenous elites with burning need or appetite for development. Conversely, the development of the region depends on the will of the Niger Deltans to desist from the above conditions which inhibit development and embrace western values, attitudes and governance model that engender development.

IV. Niger-Delta and the Crisis of Underdevelopment: A Historical Overview ,

The region occasionally referred to as the 'core Niger Delta' was hitherto called the 'Oil Rivers Protectorate' by the British due to the intensity of its palm oil production, and the potential to transform it into a money-spinning industry. However, the geopolitical location of the Niger Delta has evolved overtime. Historically, most areas of the region were in the former Eastern region, while other parts were in the defunct Western Region, and later in the old Mid-West (Kuku, 2012).

Modern-day Niger Delta with a surface area of about 70,000 square kilometers, is mainly situated in the South-South; and partly in the 'South East' (Imo and Abia states) and South West (Ondo state) geopolitical zones of Nigeria. It borders Cameroon to the east and the Atlantic Ocean to the south. It currently holds all of Nigeria's oil and gas proven reserves for which it is renowned internationally. It sustains the largest wetland in Africa and third largest wetland in the world after the Mekong and Mississippi Deltas. It has the third largest mangrove forest in the world, an extensive fresh water swamp, coastal ridges, fertile dry land forest and tropical rainforest. These support a rich biodiversity on which a significant number of Niger Deltans rely on for their livelihoods and daily survival

(Pyagbara, 2004; Agbogidi & Ofuoku, 2006; Kuku, 2012). Furthermore, the region is a densely populated area with various ethnic nationalities as identified above. Most members of these ethnic nationalities are predominantly (or profess to be) Christians, while Islamic and African Traditional Religious devotees constitute the religious minorities.

Notwithstanding the abundance of these diverse human and natural capitals inherent in the region, the Niger Delta has remained underdeveloped with a long history of developmental crises. In precolonial era for instance, scholars have observed how the Ijaws, who were perceived “to live altogether on plunder and piracy on the rivers” (Barbot, as cited in Alagoa, 2005, p. 26) preyed on ships and looted goods (Erezene, 2016), thus, causing great hardship, obstacle to free navigation to the Benin Rivers, and disruption of economic growth (Ryder, 1977). Prior to the abolition of slave trade in 1890, and even before formal colonial rule was established, Niger Deltans were bought, and sold into slavery. Hence, they constitute part of the over fifteen million slaves, who were transported from Africa to work on the Caribbean and Americans plantations – of which many died in the process of capture or transit. This led to devastation of the populations; destruction of traditional political and social formations; and a situation where people, whose labour would have advanced the development of the region’s economies and societies were, instead, forced to contribute to capital accumulation elsewhere (Thomson, 2010).

It all began with the British colonial expedition which inhibited development in the region. Wars raged too. Traditional rulers were tormented by death, deportations or replacement with stooges who aligned with British imperial powers. The 1894 bombardment of Ebrohimi and the subsequent deportation of Chief Nana Olomu of Itsekiri to Calabar and later to Accra (Erezene, 2016); the banishment of King Jaja of Opobo to West Indies; the 1897 Benin invasion and the ensuing deportation of Oba Ovonramwen to Calabar; etc. are classic examples. Also, while kingdoms, towns, and villages were destroyed; countless properties and artifacts of inestimable values, were plundered and carted away (Ryder, 1977; Green, 2015; Odemwingie, 2021). These disruptions of peace and development were partly possible because they were sometimes aided by indigenous conspirators. The support of Duke Town in British merchants’ destruction of Old Town among the Efiks (Nair, 1972); the support of Chief Dogho Numa to British colonialists to ruthlessly deal with Chief Nana Olomu in 1894 over his (Dogho’s) grouse that Nana defeated his father in 1884 to become the Governor of the Benin River (Ikime, 1982; Erezene, 2016); etc. are few examples. Modern Nigeria, despite the 1956 discovery of crude oil in Oloibiri; the generation of ₦50.696 trillion as oil revenue and the allocation of ₦ N6.577 trillion as derivation to the region from 1958-2011; as well as the establishments of various agencies

to fast-track the development of the region, the Niger Delta has remained underdeveloped. These huge earnings and allocations have not translated into improved welfare for Niger Deltans; and till date, none of the region's cities has been mapped out for a special development same way the Nigerian government did in Lagos and Abuja (Ndujihe, 2012).

V. The Nigerian State, Federalism, and The Niger-Delta Crisis: An Overview

By 1900, Britain had commenced full colonization of the Northern and Southern protectorates, alongside the colony of Lagos. In 1914, both the Northern and the Southern protectorates were amalgamated under Sir Lord Frederick Lugard; and Nigeria was governed as a unitary State. In 1939, Bernard Bourdillon divided the Southern protectorate into Western and Eastern units, while the 1946 Richard Constitution legalized this political change via the creation of three regions – Northern, Western, and Eastern regions. The 1951 Macpherson Constitution transformed the country from unitarism into quasi-federalism by granting some degrees of autonomy to the regions (Audu & Oshewolo, 2021). Subsequently, Nigeria became a federal state via the 1954 Lyttelton Constitution. This was necessitated by fear of ethnic domination by one group over the other; the north-south conflict on the issue of independence; the desire for rapid economic development via autonomy; and the regionalized status of the major political parties (Dudley, 1968). In 1966, the Nigerian federalism was abolished and unitarism was once again, imposed on Nigeria by the military regime of General Aguiyi-Ironsi, via the promulgation of the Unification Decree No. 34. The military administration of General Yakubu Gowon however, restored Nigeria back as a federal state following the counter-coup of July 1966, but jettisoned the previous 50 per cent derivation principle in 1967 (Osaghae, 2002; Ikelegbe 2004; Ndujihe, 2012).

It can be inferred that for any federal State to develop, there must be availability of sufficient financial resources to each tier of government for the development of their respective jurisdictions. Hence, various revenue allocation principles and formulae have been adopted in Nigeria to satisfy this federal criterion. For instance, the table below shows a summary of Nigeria's revenue allocation principles and formulae in percentages from 1980 to 1992:

	1. Okigbo Comm. Recommendation (1980)	2. Govt. White Paper on Okigbo Comm. (1980)	3. 1981 Act	4. Decree No. 36 of 1984	5. Revenue Comm. Report (1989)	6. AFRC Appro. Val of (5) Jan. 1992	7. AFRC Jan. 1992	8. AFRC June 1992
Fed. Govt.	53.0	55.0	55.0	55.0	47.0	50.0	50.0	48.5

State Govt.	30.0	30.5	30.5	32.0	30.0	30.0	25.0	24.0
Local Govt.	10.0	8.0	10.0	10.0	15.0	15.0	20.0	20.0
Special Funds	7.0	7.0	4.5	2.5	8.0	5.0	5.0	7.5
FCT Dev.	2.5	2.5	-	-	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0
Dev. of Mineral Producing Area	2.0	1.5	1.5	1.5	1.5	1.5	1.5	3.0
Gen. Ecological Problems	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	0.5	1.0	1.0	2.0
Revenue Equality	1.5	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Mineral producing States (Derivation)	-	2.0	2.0	2.0	2.0	1.0	1.0	1.0
Stabilization	-		-	-	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5
Savings	-	-	-	-	2.0	-	-	-

Source: *Offiong, O. J. (2010). The National Question and Minorities: Controversies over the Allocation of Financial Resources to Oil Producing Areas.*

From the table above, it can be inferred that the manner federalism has been practiced in Nigeria has adversely inhibited development in the Niger Delta. Hence, scholars have argued that there is a significant relationship between the Nigerian State, the pattern of federalism adopted in the country, and underdevelopment in the Niger Delta. Simply put, the lingering flawed nature of the Nigerian federalism in terms of federal government domination of the resource generation and distribution process, has continued to underdeveloped the Niger Delta. Thus, Otoghile and Eghweree lamented that:

One problem that has plagued the Nigerian nation since independence is the crisis that her peculiar brand of federalism has thrown up... the flawed federal system... is one that is dominated by major ethnic groups at the centre, leaving the minority groups with no space for self-development... The skewed federal system adversely affects the oil-rich region (Otoghile & Eghweree, 2010, pp.122-123).

VI. Niger-Deltans and The Niger Delta Developmental Crisis: Realities From History

Regional Demagoguery

Statesmen are politicians who acquire power for the greatest happiness of the greatest number of their people. The opposite are demagogues – politicians who acquire power for self-aggrandizement. They are willing to perpetrate all form of illegalities to acquire, consolidate, and utilize power for their selfish interests. They are leaders who lack the need for societal development. The Niger Delta, unfortunately, is plagued by myriad of such individuals. Contemporary Niger Delta demagogues include Niger Deltans, who: inflate the prices of government's contracts, and even sign some contracts that have never been executed as executed, while the money simply passed into their private pockets; lobby decision makers with money to influence economic and political decisions in their favour; and embezzle public funds with impunity at the expense of the region's development (Ottuh, 2013). In their struggle for power, political appointments, and contracts, the region's demagogues often employ all forms of unconstitutional means like hate speech, short-term financial empowerment of youth as thugs, etc. to achieve their goals. Thus, Owonikoko and Ifukor (2016) revealed that arms used by cultists in the region are gotten from several sources precisely from politicians seeking electoral victories. Niger Delta demagogues have succeeded over the years in abusing religion and politics, exploiting the region's vulnerability, and fermenting hatred. They often stir up civil unrest in the region; turn people – who otherwise reside peaceably with one another as neighbors, shares local, state or regional identity, interact as business partners, and suffer similar fate like epileptic power supply, bad roads, poor sanitation, etc. – into victims and perpetrators of violent agitations in order to achieve their selfish goals (Kuku, 2012).

a. Security Votes

Although the issue of Security Votes is a general plague in Nigeria, it is more worrisome in the Niger Delta because the region's ruling elites – who accuse federal government of shortchanging their region in terms of funds and development – are the ones pocketing huge public funds under the disguise of Security Votes. By definition, Security Votes denote budgeted funds provided to specific officials of local, state, and federal governments to use at their discretion on (ideally) security-related matters. Such funds are meant to supplement the expenditures of the police, military, and other federal security agencies; as well as to operate and sustain non-state security apparatuses like local militias, vigilantes, etc. (Page, 2018). In Niger Delta states for instance, the table below shows their Average Security Votes from 2015-2017:

S/ N	State	Recipient	Average Security Votes (2015-2017) in Dollars	2017 Average Rates (\$1 = ₦306) Monthly IFEM
1.	Abia	Governor	\$47,229,730	₦14,452,297,380
		Deputy Governor	\$2,586,486	₦791,464,716
		State House of Assembly	\$1,614,865	₦494,148,690
2.	Akwa Ibom	None Available	None Available	None Available
2.	Bayelsa	Special Advisor for Security	\$22,187,500	₦6,789,375,000
		Governor	\$18,750,000	₦5,737,500,000
3.	Cross River	Governor	\$20,000,000	₦6,120,000,000
4.	Delta	Governor	\$40,000,000	₦12,240,000,000
		DESOPADEC	\$5,495,495	₦1,681,621,470
5.	Edo	Governor	\$19,916,667	₦6,094,500,102
6.	Imo	Governor	\$10,810,811	₦3,308,108,166
7.	Ondo	Governor (via Ministry of Finance)	\$14,699,122	₦4,497,931,332
8.	Rivers	Governor	\$48,310,811	₦14,783,108,166
TOTAL			\$251,601,487	₦76,990,055,022

Source: Page, M. T. (2018). *Transparency International. Annex B: State Security Vote Data; Camouflaged Cash: How 'Security Votes' Fuel Corruption in Nigeria.*

Similarly, in 2006, three of the twenty three local government chairmen in Rivers State got over \$1m in security votes – Khana (₦60m or \$461,000); Tai (₦40m or \$300,000); and Opobo/Nkoro (₦36m or \$280,000). In these cases respectively, the security votes surpassed the total capital budgeted for either education or health (Human Rights Watch, 2007). Also, in 2015, each local government chairman in Delta north got ₦36m (\$100,000), while each ward councillor received more than ₦6m (\$16,700) as annual security votes. In neighboring Bayelsa, each local government chairman in 2017, got as much as ₦40m (\$110,000) annual security votes (Page, 2018).

Despite the humongous nature of Security Votes as seen above, it is pertinent to state that these funds differ from budgeted security expenditures on personnel allowances, salaries, training, equipment, and operational expenses. They do not pass through the normal budgetary bureaucratic processes; their specific security usage are not specified; their various recipients are not accountable on how they are spent; they are not subjected to legislative oversight, independent audit, public scrutiny or to key stipulations of the Public Procurement Act. Hence, they are usually susceptible to price inflation, corruption, and

provision of sub-standard goods and services. Thus, Niger Delta demagogues have preyed on these loopholes to channel these funds to cover electoral expenses (like campaigns, hiring of thugs, vote buying, rigging, and post-election litigations), enrich themselves, party and security officials, etc. (Page, 2018). This view supports Ndibe's (Ndibe, as cited in Dada, 2015, p. 27) claims that security votes have led to 'do or die' gubernatorial contests amongst Niger Delta demagogues because there exist for the winners, the freedom to siphon huge monthly allocations amorphously termed 'security votes'.

Against the foregoing, it is apt to state that the crisis of development in the Niger Delta is indeed paradoxical. Despite the availability of huge security funds, cases of kidnapping, cultism, arm robbery, extra-judicial killings, etc. have exponentially curved up in worrisome dimensions in states like Edo, Delta, Imo, Abia, etc. – an obvious validation of the public opinion that security vote is a mere acronym to secure the financial interest of the recipients instead of the lives and property of Niger Deltans (Dada, 2015). Also, amidst human insecurity like abject poverty, unemployment, hunger, illiteracy, infrastructural deficit, etc.; the available public funds that would have been used to remedy the region's underdevelopment, are being primitively and undemocratically accumulated by the region's demagogues under the guise of security votes.

b. The Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC)

The NNDC was established in 2000 to develop the Niger Delta in "...transportation, health, education, employment, industrialization, agriculture, fisheries, housing, and urban development, water supply, electricity and telecommunications" sectors (NDDC Act, Section 7[1] [b]). The agency is jointly funded by the federal government, and oil and gas companies operating in the region (NDDC Act, Section 14 [2a and b]). For instance, ExxonMobil contributes an average of \$30m annually (Peel, 2005); while Shell Petroleum Development Company of Nigeria and its partners have remitted about \$2bn (₦720bn) to NDDC in 16 years (Agency Report, 2019).

Aggregate data from the reports of the Nigeria Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (NEITI), the Niger Delta Regional Development Master Plan (NDRMP), and the Fiscal Allocation and Statutory Disbursement (FASD), shows that NDDC earned a total revenue of ₦1.53 trillion from 2001-2016 (excluding 2005-2006); spent a total of ₦3.03 trillion from 2007-2016; and owes phantom contractors a debt of over ₦3 trillion (Uduu, 2019).

In spite on these huge earned revenues, questionable debt burden, and celebrated expenditures in water supply, education, electricity, transportation, health,

industrialization, housing, etc.; about 51 percent of Niger Deltans still live on \$2 or less per day; only 49 percent have access to portable water; “there is one secondary school for every 14,679 children; and one child in five dies before their fifth birthday” – indicating high infant mortality rate (Isidiho & Sabran, 2015, p. 39).

This paradox of development exist because the Commission funds are often diverted and misappropriated by the region’s demagogues. For instance, in August 2020, a ₦6.404bn contract for seven skills acquisition programmes for 136 slots, was awarded but never executed; yet the contractors fraudulently demanded 60 percent (₦3.9bn) payment, claiming they have achieved significant portion of the contract (Amaize & Anaba, 2020). The same year, the NDDC Interim Management Committee led by Professor K. D. Pondei, allegedly misappropriated and diverted ₦6.25bn COVID-19 palliative supposedly meant for cushioning the impacts of the pandemic on Niger Deltans. This ₦6.25bn excludes the ₦1.25bn used to ‘take care’ of NDDC staff during the pandemic (Agency Reporter, 2021; Babatunde, 2021). Furthermore, an audit report on NDDC activities and programmes by the Office of the Auditor General of the Federation, revealed ₦139.317bn was misappropriated between 2013 and 2018. The report further shows 626 contractors engaged by NDDC to execute ₦309,172,941,001.86 contracts – in Abia (32 projects), Akwa Ibom (64 projects), Bayelsa (80 projects), Cross River (29 projects), Delta (99 projects), Edo (51 projects), Imo (33 projects), Ondo (50 projects), Rivers (106 projects), and 82 other projects in the region – got a total sum of ₦61,468,160,743.03 as mobilization fees. Despites collecting these huge funds, the contractors never visited the project sites (Salem, 2020). As an addendum, the table below shows few other funds diverted and misappropriated by administrators of the agency, who are mainly Niger Deltans:

S/N	Expenditures	Amount
1	Supply of doses of hepatitis B vaccines, doses of typhoid vaccines, & Lassa Fever kits	₦ 2.527 billion
2	Excessive imprest payment to NDDC Executive Board members	₦ 1.358 billion
3	Illegal engagement of external solicitors	₦ 1.583 billion
4	Fraudulent award of the contract of emergency contracts	₦ 3.002 billion
5	Rent Payments on a property that belongs to River State Government but released to Federal Government to house NDDC headquarters	₦ 1.225 billion

6	Fraudulent appointments of SAs and PAs for members of Governing Board and payment of their salaries and allowances at government expenses	₦ 1.006 billion
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Source: *Compiled by the author from analysis by Salem, T. (2020, October 21). Alleged N139.3Bn Fraud: MD NDDC shuns Reps summons. The Vanguard Newspaper.*

The high level of corruption and wastages by Niger Deltans in the NDDC, has no doubt further de-developed the region. Thus, NDDC has be turned into Niger Delta De-developing Commission – a mere “settlement avenue for political supporters” or “an extension of the corruption that goes on at the larger sector of the economy” (Isidiho & Sabran, 2015, p. 44).

c. Individual/States’ Developmental Failure

The failure of the nine states of the Niger Delta to efficiently utilize available funds to develop infrastructures, and protect the socio-economic wellbeing and safety of their respective masses from economic saboteurs and demagogues, constitutes another serious threat to the region’s development. Rather than put in place mechanisms in form of policies, laws, and agencies to decisively probe and punish corrupt demagogues, retrieve, and redistribute such stolen public funds to address public needs; individual states in the region have consciously or unconsciously created a fertile milieu for them to thrive and recycle themselves as the governing elites.

Expressing the above sentiment, Ebiri (2020) stated that development and financial experts have attributed the decline in FDI in the region chiefly to the failure of the individual states or as a group to invest in functional infrastructures like seaports, motorable highways, and huge market for low investments. One of such experts – Mr. Billy Harry, Chairman, Board of Trustee of the South-South Chamber of Commerce, linked the bane of underdevelopment in the region to lack of access to information and state governments’ indifference to encouraging good entrepreneurial spirit. To him, the governments of the region do not interface with the organized private sector nor encourage proper growth of enterprise to take advantage of FDIs. Rather, they are carried away by temporary power that will vanish away after eight years.

Similarly, the Director-General of the BRACED Commission, Ambassador Joseph Keshi argued that lack of strong backing and concerted efforts to create conducive environment to attract investment into the respective states from the region’s state governments, were partly responsible for the divestment of Dangote's ₦600bn oil facility to Lagos. This facility would have been in the Niger Delta to provide remarkable amount of jobs and other

multiplying effects in the region. Also, he included lack of state governments' interest to revitalize agro-business, and to use agriculture as fulcrum to industrialize the region as another bane of the region's underdevelopment. In the same vein, the South-South coordinator, Institute of Chartered Economists of Nigeria, Mr. Friday Udoh opined that the South-South states' individual failures to define their economic opportunities or contents statewide; boost infrastructure; and redefine their tertiary education to support national competitiveness, are responsible for lack of FDI and underdevelopment in the region (Ebiri, 2020).

Additionally, the overdependence on the 13 percent revenue derivation from the federation account by Niger Delta states, has been isolated as another de-developing factor in the region. The region's states have failed to diversify and secure good investments from other huge natural capitals like feldspar, gold, granite, kaolin, limestone, marble, quartz, salt, quartzite, sand, silica, and tin; as well as tangible investments in tourism, agro-business, and light manufacturing (Ebiri, 2020).

d. Cultism

Basically, there are three classifications of cult groups in the Niger Delta. First, are the various ethnic cult groups like the *Ekpe* secret cult amongst the Efik, the Ogoni's *Amanikpo* society, the Ijaw *Egbesu* cult, *Owegbe* cult, *Ekine* cult, *inter alia*. Affiliation with these ethnic cult groups facilitates improved status, socioeconomic, and even political protection for their respective members (Adelola, 1997; Adewale, 2005). Also, some of these ethnic cult groups like the *Amanikpo* society, play key roles in the local arbitration process, administration of justice, and social control among their respective ethnic groups (Owonikoko & Ifukor, 2016). Second, are the numerous campus cult groups like the Neo-Black Movement of Africa (Black Axe) founded in University of Benin, the Eternal Fraternal Order of the Legion Consortium (the Klan Klansmen Konfraternity – KKK) founded in University of Calabar, the Supreme Vikings Confraternity (SVC) formed in the University of Port Harcourt, Eiyeye Confraternity, Mafite Confraternity, etc. Third, are the various street cult groups established as affiliate cults by mainstream campus cult groups like the Deebam – KKK affiliate; the Junior Vikings Confraternity, Deewell and Icclander – SVC affiliates; the Darkest Confraternity – Black Axe affiliate; Royale Confraternity – Mafite Confraternity's street cult; etc. (Owonikoko & Ifukor, 2016).

The dreadful and deadly activities of the second and third categories of cult groups in the Niger Delta, have doubtlessly stifled the region's peace, security, and development. Primary and secondary sources of data showed that Niger Delta demagogues often employ the services of these cult groups as political thugs via handsome pay and adequate

empowerment with sophisticated weapons against their political, tribal, communal, and economic rivals. Such weapons have equally aided deadly inter-cult groups supremacy wars in the region like the death of over 42 people in 2007, in Bodo community, River state due to territorial contest between Deebam and Deewell; the 2015 killing of over 40 people in Ughelli town following a territorial struggle between SVC, Black Axe, and Mafite confraternities; etc. Members of these cult groups have not only capitalized on such clashes as opportunities to loot private houses, shops, and stores, but they have also become heart-hardened enough to perpetrate other form of insecurity like piracy, illegal oil-bunkering, armed robbery, theft, kidnapping, assassinations, etc. Thus, they have not only succeeded in creating fear, psychological trauma, and harms to their fellow Niger Deltans; but have kept on scaring away potential local and foreign investors (Owonikoko & Ifukor, 2016).

e. **Militancy**

The criminal activities of cult groups in the Niger Delta have morphed into a higher monster – armed insurgency, which further threatens the security and development of the region. The exerting influences of these cult groups on armed insurgency in the region are enormous. As aptly stated by Wellington (2007) and Asuni (2009), most Niger Delta militant groups like the Niger Delta Vigilante Service (NDVS), Niger Delta People Volunteer Force (NDPVF), Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta, etc. are mere cult groups disguised as freedom fighters.

Not only were leaders of these militant groups revered cult members, but these militant groups were unions of street and university cult groups. For instance, Ateke Tom who was the leader of NDVS, was a member and later the leader of the Icelander. Asari Dokubo was a member of a secret cult in the University of Calabar until his rustication. Government Ekpemukpolo (Tom Polo), a revered priest of Egbesu cult was the brain behind MEND formation in 2006; while Soboma George, the leader of the Outlaws street cult group in Rivers state, was the commander for Eastern MEND in the State. Conversely, Ateke's NDVS was an amalgamation of various street and campus cult groups like the Icelander (the Germans), the Greenlander, and the KKK. Asari's NDPVF was a union of diverse street cult groups in Port Harcourt like the Black Axe, the Deebam, and some members of the Greenlander who broke up with Ateke Tom (Owonikoko & Ifukor, 2016).

From the above, it is obvious that the alleged Niger Delta agitators are the same cultists hindering the region's peace, security, and development via piracy, illegal oil-bunkering, armed robbery, assassination, theft, kidnapping, etc. They seem to have disguised using the region's neglect by successive federal governments and IOCs as justification for their violent agitation; while primitively accumulating wealth for themselves. Hence, while the

region they claimed to fight for has remained underdeveloped, most of these cultists turned militants have rapidly become millionaires. Their frequent destructions and bombings of oil and gas facilities do not only scare away investors, but are as dangerous as oil spillage and gas flaring pollution perpetrated by some IOCs in the region. Their illegal oil bunkering activities under the justification of taking what belongs to them by hook or crook, coupled with the collaborative efforts of some host communities – who shield and accommodate them as heroes, freedom fighters or philanthropists, equally pose great threat to the region's development. The negative impacts of their actions are similar to those of IOCs in the region, though dissimilar in intensity. Such impacts include lands infertility; creeks, rivers, and streams pollution; loss of traditional occupations; ecosystem destruction; etc.

Supporting the above views, Ndujihe (2012) stated that the 40,000 oil spills that had occurred in the past 53 years of oil exploration in the region, are not just due to system failure (external factors), but vandalism and crude oil theft perpetrated by militants, are also responsible. While affirming these impacts, but exonerating Niger Deltans as causal agents, Ottuh (2013) opined that such environmental pollutions have enhanced poverty in the region as polluted natural waters have destroyed aquatic lives, thereby making fishermen and women who depended on them for livelihood to be unemployed. They have also led to severe health hazard, psychological trauma, poor harvest, hunger, starvation, and depletion of animal species which most Niger Deltans, precisely those in oil and gas host communities, depend on for food.

Also, while ascribing cultism and militancy to underdevelopment in the Niger Delta, Ebiri (2020) stated that despite its rich oil and gas resources, FDI in the region has been at a low ebb. Data on FDI from the National Bureau of Statistics shows that between 2013 and the first quarter (Q1) of 2020, the region whichever once received a huge chunk of Nigeria's FDI inflows in the 1970s, barely received \$474,133,792 out of the \$92,284,945,105.59 inflow – with Akwa Ibom receiving over 50 percent (\$278,263,453); Cross River: \$66,130,000; Delta: \$59,483,860; Rivers: \$49,212,960; Edo: \$21,043,519; and Bayelsa with zero investment. According to him, experts have attributed this decline in FDI and economic prosperity mainly to activities of cult groups, militancy, sea piracy, community hostility, and political instability. Despite relative efforts by some states in the region to adopt friendly policies and improve infrastructure to attract investors, the menace posed by cultism and militancy have continued to increase the risk perception of potential investors. This has lured scores of companies to move their headquarters to Lagos.

f. Ethnicity

Ethnicity is an albatross and a clog in the wheel of societal progress as it has the capacity to scare investors away via the uncondusive business environment it creates (Umezina, 2012). It has been a major hindrance to the development of the Niger Delta from precolonial era till date. In the 18th and 19th centuries, the various ethnic communities in the Niger Delta fought against and enslaved one another due to ethnicity. For instance, the Urhobos, Ijaws, Igbos, and Ibibios waylaid and sold people from rival ethnic groups into slavery (Ikime, 1969). Internecine rivalry among ethnic groups within the region, facilitated British penetration and subsequent economic exploitations following the failure of the city-states and kingdoms to form a united front against British traders, missionaries, and colonialists (Tamuno, 1972).

As in the wider Nigerian State, ethnic rivalries and affiliations in the nine states of the Niger Delta have made it possible for the emergence of demagogues with low or no need for societal development. At each election within these States, the emphasis has always been on candidates' ethnic background rather than on the right candidates who are ready to work and promote societal development (Umezina, 2012).

Ethnicity in the region has fortified indigenous demagogues, who have stifled the region's development from being held accountable for their stewardship – a move that would have served as deterrence for future indigenous leaders. Instead, each ethnic group creates celebrities and heroes out of corrupt, violent, and development inhibiting notorious indigenes. As Umezina (2012) aptly noted, if any of such leader is arrested and detained for questioning, the ethnic group to which he or she belongs, will be up in arms or even cry loud of ethnic witch-hunting or persecution.

Furthermore, ethnicity within the region, has created the desire to dominate or the fear of being subjugated by other ethnic groups. These in most cases, have led to outright declaration of hostilities leading to inevitable loss of lives and property, disruption of economic activities, preventing the emergence of leaders with the need for development, and execution of developmental projects. The 1997 Ijaw-Itsekiri crisis; the 2019 Urhobo-Itsekiri crisis at Okere in Delta State; the Ijaw-Bini latent crisis over ownership of *Gelegele* settlement in Edo south; the 2020 ethnic rivalries and protests over the compositions and appointments to the Board of the NDDC; etc. are classic examples. The fear of ethnic domination in the region was well captured in a memo presented by the Itsekiri Ethnic Nationality during the 2005 National Political Reform Conference (NPRC). Parts of the memo reveal that: "All Nigerians tend to accuse the tripod – Hausa/Fulani, the Yoruba and the Igbo as the cause of instability in Nigeria.... " (Memorandum of the Itsekiri Ethnic

Nationality, 2005, pp. 4-5). It will amount to self-deception for anyone to think that development can be achieved or investors will put in their capitals or that any meaningful legal business will thrive in a region plagued by violent inter-ethnic rivalries like the Niger Delta.

g. Amnesty: Commercialization of Violence

One legendary counter-insurgency strategy to ensure peace and development is Appeasement. It involves government negotiating with insurgents to ascertain their demands and grievances. If such demands are genuine and do not endanger a country, state, or region's interests, government may shift ground and yield. This strategy is implemented with caution and utmost confidentiality to avert portraying the government as weakling, and to blindfold future insurgents/terrorists from perceiving insurgency/terrorism as a profitable business venture (Hough, 2008).

The Presidential, as well as the various States' Amnesty Programmes in the Niger Delta for militants, kidnappers, and cultists are examples of appeasement aimed at ensuring peace and security needed for development to thrive in the region. Paradoxically, these Amnesty Programmes with their attendant financial, political, and material benefits, have been executed overtly in public view to score cheap political goals by some of the region's demagogues. These have invariably kept portraying governments of the Niger Delta states as weaklings, who are afraid to decisively deal with criminals and criminalities in the region. It underscores their readiness to reward criminalities such as violence, armed insurgency, cultism, etc. at the expense of millions of legally-minded Niger Deltans. It invariably portrays criminalities in the region as profitable commercial ventures. Hence, when Niger Delta cultists turned repentant militants are unpaid or financially starved by governments, they often use or threatened the use of force against the peace and security much needed for the region's development.

The import from the above is that, while few Niger Delta criminal elements are rewarded by State governments for their nefarious violent acts, the crisis of lack of infrastructural facilities, massive unemployment, environmental degradation, epileptic power supply, gas flaring, etc. (Ndujihe, 2012) they claim inspired their violent agitations, have remained largely unresolved. For instance, a 2013 government audit report, shows that \$425.4m (₦153.1bn) was spent for the Presidential Amnesty Programme for ex-militants in the Niger Delta (Auditor-General of the Federation, 2014) to the neglect of millions of non-militant impoverished Niger Deltans. In line with this, the president of the National Association of Seadogs, Mr. Arthur Boje (Boje, as cited in Agbakwuru, 2016) opined that militant group like the Niger Delta Avengers, are not really fighting for the interest of the

communities but their pockets, and that granting them amnesty, would stir up some other groups to emerge at the detriment of infrastructural development in the region. The recent spike in banditries in northern Nigeria, and the lingering demands for amnesty to be granted to them, might have been inspired by the overt commercialization of violence in the Niger Delta.

VII. Resolving The Niger Delta Crisis: Pragmatic Suggestions and Conclusion

The Niger Delta region remains underdeveloped despite its abundant human and natural capitals, coupled with various development efforts by successive Nigerian governments. The conventional way of addressing the region's underdevelopment, has been to blame outsiders, while ignoring the roles played by Niger Deltans in stifling development in their region. Such roles manifest in the form of demagoguery, states' failure, commercialization of violence, cultism, militancy, ethnicity, and the neglect of oil and gas host communities. To resolve these, there is need for Niger Deltans to desist from acts – cultism, ethnicity, demagoguery, etc. which inhibits development in the region. Clues should be taken from the Delta State Elders and Stakeholders' Forum (who exposed and petitioned Ibori to the EFCC) by exposing and denouncing Niger Delta demagogues, cultists, and self-seeking militants. All well-meaning Niger Deltans should vehemently and collectively refrain from embracing them as heroes and freedom fighters or rewarding them with kingship, political, or religious positions.

Also, state governments in the region should put in place strong mechanisms like laws, policies, and agencies to punish actions (insecurity, misappropriation and looting of public funds, ethnicity, vandalism, economic sabotage, etc.) that promote pains – underdevelopment; and reward those that foster pleasures – peace, security, and development. Such punishment should include banning the culprits (cultists, self-seeking militants, ethnic jingoists, and demagogues) to their fifth generations, from employment, appointment or election into public service or elective offices.

Furthermore, the region's respective State governments should mobilize resources, collaborate with other tiers of governments, IOCs and other private firms to develop and transform oil and gas host communities into special cities, similar ways Nigerian government did in Lagos and Abuja. This can be done in phases. Conversely, such collaborations should be extended to diversify their economies and secure profitable investments from other natural capitals like gold, granite, limestone, marble, silica, tin, etc.; as well as in tourism and agro-business.

On the issue of Security Votes, civil societies in the region should mobilize for the enactment of laws that uphold for Security Votes to be subjected to normal budgetary process, legislative oversight, and provisions of the Public Procurement Act. This will promote integrity, accountability, and transparency in the use of security votes. Also, since security entails both national (preservation from kinetic violence) and human security (preservation from poverty, inequality, unemployment, environmental disasters, etc.); such laws should mandate recipients of security votes to spend more of such funds on human security rather than kinetic security.

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