
DEVELOPMENT, LEADERSHIP FAILURE AND CONFLICT MANAGEMENT IN THE NIGER DELTA

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ABSTRACT: *The quest for development of the Niger Delta has spurred government at both the federal and state levels to initiate various policies and programmes aimed at developing the region. Unfortunately, the much desired development of the area has remained a mirage. While the government and its sympathizers blame the persistent conflicts on the region and difficult terrain for its inability to develop the area, a school of thought blame leadership failure and added that development and conflict can take place simultaneously. This study interrogates the development and conflict nexus and equally provides answer to the question: is development a panacea for conflict management? The study relied on desktop research and other secondary data and established that leadership failure in the Niger Delta is responsible for the low level of development in the area.*

INTRODUCTION

Development is the long term objective of every sovereign state. Nigerian government through its various institutions and agencies has embarked on several developmental programmes; Operation Feed the Nation (OFN) launched in 1976, Green Revolution in 1980, Directorate for Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DF-RRI) and National Directorate for Employment (NDR) among others.

In spite of these efforts, the country cannot be said to be developed in whatever index development is measured (see United Nations Poverty Index World bank Data, <https://www.worldbank.org> or National Bureau of Statistics – Third Quarter Report of 2019: <https://www.nigeriastat.gov.ng>). Reasons given for the low level of development in the country differ, depending on the ideological orientation, class/status or occupation of the person discussing it. However, the reasons include conflict and other forms of insecurity in the country, corruption, difficult terrain and leadership failure.

Among the six geopolitical zones, different reasons are given for their low level of development. For instance, it is argued that the South-South geopolitical zone is not developed because the zone is conflict prone and has difficult geographical terrain (government and oil producing companies' viewpoint). There is a deep-seated feeling of discontentment in the region largely because the Niger Delta is the engine that drives the Nigeria's economy.

The level of conflict in the Niger Delta is often linked to the low level of development in the area. This opinion is often emphasized by government of different levels. Development according to the narrative cannot take place in a conflict prone environment. As logical as this argument appears, it ignores the school of thought that believes that conflict and

development can take place simultaneously. This study therefore, interrogates the nexus between:

- i. Conflict and development.
- ii. The role of leadership in development and conflict management

The study provides answer to the question; “is development a panacea for the management of conflict?” The scope of the study is the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria. It relied extensively on desktop research, consultations of institutional and policy documentations and academic journals that are relevant to the subject matter.

Theoretical Framework

The development and conflict nexus has led to numerous theories with each explaining or predicting the nature of relationship between both concepts. In this paper, the Frustration-Aggression theory shall be adopted in analysing the topic.

Frustration aggression theory was developed in 1939 by John Dollard, Neal Miller, Robert Sears, Orval Mowrer, Leonard Doob and further developed by Leonard Berkowitz and Neal Miller in 1941 (Faleti, 2018). The theory holds that conflict is the outcome of frustration triggered by the gap between needs expectation and need attainment or what is referred to as the “want-get-ratio”. As Ibaba (2011) puts it, people tend to be aggressive when what they get falls below expectation.

The theory as was reformulated by Dollard and his colleague holds that frustration causes aggression, but when the source of the frustration cannot be challenged, the aggression gets displaced into an innocent target. For instance, if a man is disgraced or humiliated by his boss in his place of work and could not react for fear of losing his job, it is very likely that any of his subordinate will suffer the consequences. This theory explains the circumstances surrounding conflicts in the Niger Delta which are largely a fallout of frustration arising from failed expectations, denial of “benefits” and destruction of ecosystem and leadership failure.

Is the Niger Delta Developed?

The indicators of development in any society are measured by some of the following:

- Human Development Index (HDI) which is a combination of life expectancy, level of education, gross national income per capita for standard of living.
- Unemployment.
- Gross poverty and inequality
- Economic growth and transformation.

Studies have shown that the Niger Delta cannot be said to be developed. Ibaba (2017) did an extensive study on the poverty status of different states in Nigeria and quoting from a data from the National Bureau of Statistics in 2004 and 2014, he came out with the figures in the table below:

Table 1: Profiling the Poverty Status of States – 2004 & 2010

Geo-Political Zone/States	Poverty Rate 2004	Poverty Rate 2010	Population Living in Poverty 2010	Geo-Political Zone/States	Poverty Rate 2004	Poverty Rate 2010	Population Living in Poverty 2010
North				North-			

-East				Central			
Abia	22.3	57.8	1,638,051	Benue	55.3	67.2	2,835,331
Anambra	20.1	57.4	2,400,486	Kogi	88.6	67.3	2,206,421
Ebonyi	33.1	73.6	1,599,696	Kwara	85.2	62.0	1,470,075
Enugu	31.1	63.4	2,065,126	Nassarawa	61.6	60.4	1,125,418
Imo	27.4	50.7	1,997,528	Niger	63.9	33.9	1,339,134
All Zone	34.2	59.2	9,700,887	Plateau	60.4	74.7	2,378,497
				FCT	43.3	55.6	781,291
South-South				All zone	63.3	59.7	12,132,167
Akwai-Ibom	34.9	53.8	2,109,071	North-East			
Bayelsa	20.0	47.0	800,578	Adamawa	71.7	74.3	2,353,899
Cross River	41.6	52.9	1,528,263	Bauchi	86.3	73.1	3,418,510
Delta	45.4	63.6	2,606,576	Borno	53.6	55.1	2,838,307
Edo	33.1	66.0	1,124,099	Gombe	77.0	74.2	1,746,578
Rivers	29.1	50.6	2,623,812	Taraba	62.2	68.9	1,585,206
All Zone	48.9	56.1	11,792,399	Yobe	83.3	74.1	1,720,298
South-West				All Zone	67.3	69.1	13,662,798
Ekiti	42.3	52.6	1,245,095	North-West			
Lagos	63.6	49.3	4,443,721	Jigawa	95.1	74.2	2,484,697
Ogun	31.7	62.5	2,468,905	Kaduna	50.2	61.8	3,749,197
Ondo	42.1	46.1	1,586,312	Kano	61.3	66.0	6,193,230
Osun	32.4	38.1	1,304,366	Katsina	71.1	74.8	4,332,848

Source: Ibaba (2017)

The poverty level of the different zones before 2004 is presented in table 2

Table 2: Poverty Level by zone in Nigeria

Zone	1980	1985	1992	1996	2004
South-South	13.2	45.7	40.8	58.2	35.1
South-East	12.9	30.4	41.0	53.5	26.7
South-West	13.4	38.6	43.1	60.9	43.0
North-Central	32.2	50.8	46.0	64.7	67.0

North-East	35.6	54.9	54.0	70.1	72.2
North-West	37.7	52.1	36.5	77.5	71.2

Source: National Bureau of Statistics, 2005

Although the tables indicate that the rate of poverty is comparatively higher in the North than the south of the country, the fact remains that there is high level of poverty in the South-South zone and as Ibaba, (2005 & 2011) puts it, the huge oil revenues States of the region get have barely benefited the population living in poverty.

Like the level of poverty in the zones and the country, the rate of unemployment is also very high and frightening. The National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) in its 2018 annual report stated that a person is employed if he/she is engaged in the production of goods and services thereby contributing to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in a legitimate manner, which is a component of the national accounts and receives any form of compensation for that activity. To get the unemployment rate of a country, the formula below is used:

$$unemployment = 100 \times \frac{unemployed\ population}{labour\ force\ population}$$

Therefore, a person is said to be unemployed if he or she does not ultimately utilize his/her skills, time and educational qualification to contribute meaningfully to the growth of the GDP and be paid or rewarded for such (NBS, 2018). The implication of this definition is that rural farmers only farming seasonally will be considered unemployed if they only work on their farms during planting and harvesting period and do nothing in between. If farmers however, work in dry and wet season as is increasingly becoming the case, they will then be said to be fully employed.

Going by this explanation, it will not be far from the truth to say the rate of unemployment is generally high in the country and Niger Delta in particular. This is because most of the inhabitants of the region are either farmers or are engaged in fishing and the activities of oil producing companies have adverse effects on their occupation. The rivers are polluted in addition to the menace of sea-pirates and the farmlands suffer same in addition to herders' attacks. Youths that are fortunate to be employed are employed as casual staff.

The Human Development Index of the Niger Delta in 2005 has not significantly changed till date. In a study carried out by the Technical Committee on the Niger Delta, the group came out with the HDI as presented in table 3

Table 3: HDI for the Niger Delta States

States	Life Expectancy	Education Index	GDP Index	HDI
Abia	0.492	0.578	0.560	0.543
Akwa Ibom	0.506	0.638	0.540	0.576
Bayelsa	0.455	0.523	0.520	0.499
Cross River	0.556	0.630	0.565	0.584
Delta	0.587	0.636	0.621	0.615

Edo	0.579	0.602	0.600	0.594
Imo	0.503	0.546	0.591	0.547
Ondo	0.501	0.575	0.512	0.529
Rivers	0.563	0.590	0.620	0.591

Source: Report of the Technical Committee on the Niger Delta

The focus of this paper is HDI of the Niger Delta States of Akwa-Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo and Rivers.

Development and Conflict

The Niger Delta has a long history of conflicts that predate the country's independence. These conflicts are in form of boundaries and communal disputes, kingship and chieftaincy tussles, host communities and oil producing companies conflict, farmers and herders conflict among others. Every conflict is triggered by an unresolved issue and there is the school of thought that believes that conflicts in the region are triggered by the quest for development in the area. It is therefore argued that the development of the area is a panacea for conflict management within the region. Proponents of this school (Stakeholders of the region) are quick to point to some instances:

- The Adaka Boro and the Niger Delta Volunteer Service and the Nigerian State in 1966. The principle focus of Boro's Niger Delta Volunteer Service which was launched in 1966 was to create a Niger Delta Republic in order to address the human and infrastructural challenges of the area (Boro, 1982).
- The Saro-Wiwa and Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP) in 1992. MOSOP operated more like a pressure group but its activities led to the execution of the famous "Ogoni Nine". The basic objective of the movement was to address the development challenges of the Ogoni people in particular and the Niger Delta region at large.
- The emergence of the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) and its various conflicts with the Nigerian state and oil producing companies. MEND is one of the first and largest militant groups in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. its area of operation was the Niger Delta and it had allies such as the Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force, the Niger Delta Liberation front and the Joint Revolutionary Council, and its opponents include the Niger Delta Avengers, Red Egbusu Water Lions, Chevron, ExxonMobil, Royal Dutch Shell and the Nigerian state. The group has been confrontational in its approach towards achieving its objectives. The group knocked down oil production in the region and its method included; armed assaults on production sites, pipeline destruction and other activities that disrupted oil production process. The main aim was to check the degradation of the Niger Delta environment and address the development challenges of the people (<https://www.globalsecurity.org>).

Several other groups have sprung up in the region to seek for self determination, resource control and more involvement in governance. In the process, there are counter groups and in most instances, open confrontations. Owugah (2000) categorized the Niger Delta conflicts into four phases, while the first, second and third phases are not considered violent phases, the fourth phase is a more militant phase with the issuance of the historic

“Kaiama Declaration”. By the Ijaw Youth Council (IYC) and the Ogoni Bill of Rights which calls for self determination and resource control.

In fact, the Niger Delta is considered the center of various conflicts that includes; electoral conflicts that are often triggered by claims of inconclusive elections or confrontations between “political enemies” as in the cases of Rivers and Bayelsa States. Inter-community conflicts, inter-ethnic and intra-community conflicts. The underlying driving force for these conflicts is development. No doubt, there might be other hidden and unresolved issues, there is a significant relationship between the various conflicts in the region and the low level of development in the area (Etekpe & Ibaba, 2013).

Is Development a Panacea for Conflict Management?

Conflict occurs in all climes and places, as long as there are interactions among individuals, conflict is bound to occur. While there is no single formula that can stop the occurrence of conflict, its occurrence can be managed. Development can be a panacea for conflict management. If the active parties in a conflict are gainfully engaged, their involvement will reduce. For instance, studies (www.theguardian.com) have shown that the relative peace in the Niger Delta presently is a fallout of the Amnesty policy of former President Umaru Yar’Adua’s administration. The policy demobilized about ten thousand former militants and placed them in skills acquisition training centers across the country. These militants are thereafter, reintegrated into the society. A large number of them are paid a monthly allowance of sixty-five thousand naira (FRN, 2019). This form of empowerment takes them out of the poverty circle, hence playing active roles in conflict do not appear attractive to them any longer.

The above assertion does not explain why other regions (South-West, North-West and South East) that are considered underdeveloped are not conflict prone. The explanation lies in leadership failure.

Development and Leadership Failure

Leadership failure in the Nigerian political system has become an issue that requires immediate redress. It is the sub-structure of every challenge that the country is presently going through and the story is not different in the various states of the country. Leadership failure has bred materialism, lack of accountability, misplaced priority, mismanagement and corruption in the country’s polity and among the political leaders.

In the Niger Delta, leadership failure has become an enigma that should be of concern to everybody because the much talked about development of the region is tied to leadership failure. The resources the states in the region get in comparison with other states of the country if properly managed can impact meaningfully in terms of human capital development, job creation, and reduction of the poverty level in the area.

The table below shows the amount of money selected states in the region received from the federation account in March, 2018 and September, 2019.

Table 4: Amount received Selected States in March, 2018

i. Akwa-Ibom	₦17.2 billion
ii. Bayelsa	₦13.2 billion
iii. Delta	₦17.4 billion
iv. Rivers	₦14.7 billion
v. Osun	₦ 1.5 billion
vi. Ogun	₦ 2.9 billion

vii. Imo ₦ 3.9 billion

viii. Gombe 3.2 billion

Source: <https://www.pulse.ng> quoted in Ikporukpo (2019, p. 177).

Table 5: Amount received Selected States in September 2018;

i. Akwa-Ibom ₦12.9 billion

ii. Bayelsa ₦10.9 billion

iii. Delta ₦14.2 billion

iv. Rivers ₦12.4 billion

v. Osun ₦ 1.7 billion

vi. Ogun ₦ 3.0 billion

vii. Imo ₦3.9 billion

viii. Gombe ₦3.4 billion

Source: <https://www.pulse.ng> quoted in Ikporukpo (2019, p. 177).

With such huge resources, difficult terrain or conflicts cannot be tentative enough to explain the low level of development in the region. If the challenges of leadership is redressed, there would be impactful changes (development)and it will be a panacea for conflict management.

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