

# The Role of Interventionist Agencies in Addressing Poverty and Development Challenges in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria

**Efebeh, Eseoghene Vincent**

Political Science Department

Delta State University

Abraka, Nigeria.

vinefebeh15@gmail.com

08034516815

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## **Abstract**

*This paper examines the developmental activities and efforts of various governmental agencies established in the wake of environmental degradation, infrastructural decay and poverty in the Niger Delta Region. Given the rate of poverty, unemployment and the health related problems occasioned by the exploration and exploitation of oil; the performance of interventionist governmental agencies have become very insignificant in addressing the plight of the people of the region. Adopting the historical method of data collection with reliance on secondary sources of gathering information, the paper notes that as a result of the lack of political will and endemic corruption in the system, all the interventionist agencies have failed woefully to meet the purpose for which they were set up. It however suggests that genuine political will devoid of sentiments and corruption will go a long way in developing the region and thus alleviate poverty, rather than the mere emphasis on the establishment of interventionist institutions.*

**Key words:** Interventionist agencies, oil industry, poverty, Niger Delta region, Nigeria.

## Introduction

Crude oil exploration in Nigeria started in 1908 when a German company, known as Nigeria Bitumen Corporation started exploring oil in the then Western region. Crude oil was first exported in February of 1958 following its discovery in August 1956 in commercial quantity, in Oloibiri, a village located in what is now Bayelsa state. Progressively since then, oil has become the mainstay of the Nigerian economy, effectively dominating other sectors of the economy. The dominance of the oil industry has placed Nigeria as the seventh largest oil producer in the world, the largest in Africa, sixth in the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC). Fifth supplier to the United States and the most endowed oil producer in Sub-Sahara Africa, until about the last quarter of 2014 when the United States cut down on its oil importation following increase in domestic oil production and the discovering of shale oil; (Ibeanu, 1997; Ibaba, 2005; Jike 2004; Fredrick 2008; ANEEJ 2004; Ikelegbe, 2010; Mbachu, 2012; Omuta, 2014, Okaba, 2015, Efebeh, 2017). In fact, oil exploration and its contribution to Nigeria foreign exchange earnings is phenomenal. From a meager 10.2% to Nigerian total export in 1962, it was 58% in 1970. However from 1978, oil has effectively displaced primary exports such as agricultural produce and occupied between 92-93 percent of Nigerian foreign exchange earnings (Mbachu, 2012). Today, over 80% of government revenue, 90% of total export and 90% of the country's foreign exchange is adduced to the intense exploitation of oil especially in the Niger Delta region; in the view of Iyoha (2002), oil has been the engine of economic growth in Nigeria. Yates (2004), cited in Ikelegbe, (2010), aptly notes that by 2002, oil and gas accounted for 83% of government revenues, 95% of total exports, 90% of foreign exchange earnings and 40% of the Gross Domestic Product.

Paradoxically, oil exploitation has led to great harm on the Niger Delta environment, resulting to massive environmental degradation induced poverty and subsequently to forfeiture of the inhabitants' means of livelihood. Oil spillage, gas flaring, deforestation and loss of biodiversity are some of the effects of oil production which are prevalent in the Niger Delta region. While the quest for industrialization through the exploitation of petroleum has given the oil multinationals free hand to operate, the negative effects of crude oil production has also propelled the Nigerian government to take actions in mitigating its adverse effects, (Efebeh, 2017). This has led over the years, to "social activism" to draw the attention of all stakeholders to the plights of the people. The federal government of Nigeria has thus established various agencies saddled with the task of ensuring quality environment and ameliorating the sufferings of the people. These agencies which can be grouped into two types: regulatory and interventionist agencies are supposed

to be actively involved not only in ensuring the survival of the ecosystem but also in creating a peaceful atmosphere for the continuous exploration of crude oil.

## Theoretical Analysis

This study adopted the structural – functional analysis. Structural-functionalism was spearheaded by the scholarly views of American sociologists, Parsons (1951), Merton (1957), Davis & Moore (1945), as well as anthropologists, Radcliffe-Brown (1952), Malinowski (1932) and Almond & Powell (1966) among others. Structural-functionalism sees society as a social structure with functions in which all components are expected to function together comparatively and cohesively for the betterment of the entire society. These theorists emphasize the functions within the structure and the contributions of each for the overall survival and progress of the system. They argue that, in order to understand a political system, it is necessary to understand not only its institutional structures, but also their respective functional parts that made up the structure. (Almond & Powell, 1966; Gauba, 2003).

Parson (1951) developed the idea of collectivities of roles that complements each other in fulfilling functions for the society. He held that, some roles are bound up in institutions and social structures (that is, economic, educational, legal and even gender based issues) that are functional and assist the society in operating and fulfilling its functional needs. Igwe (2007) stressed further that, structural-functional framework examines "society as a system made up of certain arrangement of parts ( structures) which behave ( function) in a coordinated and interdependent manner to achieve the objectives intended for them by society, these being the means by which equilibrium and peace can be maintained within it".

Merton (1957) concurred though, but observed a certain lapse in the functional unity, that not all parts of a modern complex society work for the functional unity of the society. He identified two types of functions: latent and manifest, saying that some institutions and structures may have other functions and some may even be generally dysfunctional, or be functional for a while and dysfunctional at another. This is because not all structures are functional for society as a whole. Here, Merton introduces the concepts of power and coercion into functionalism and identifies the aspect of 'tension' which may lead to struggle or conflict. He states that by recognizing and examining the dysfunctional aspects of society one can explain the development and persistence of alternatives. The analytical tool provided by the structural- functionalism as presented above, backs this work to objectively assess if, as Merton (1957) observed, there is any institutional (structure) and functional lapses in the assignment / mandate given to

the various agencies and their instrumentalities to achieve the purpose(s) for which they were set up at various times. As such, the success or failure of these agencies infers the propensity of socio-economic and infrastructural equilibrium or disequilibrium/contradiction as the case may be. In the case of the later, however, the continued failure of the government through the agencies may thus manifest in stiff agitations by the people in the region who may feel marginalized, disenchanting and exploited. The resultant effect may be protests and agitations that have threaten the peace and security of the region and the Nigerian state as a whole.

**The Oil Industry in Nigeria and the Paradox of Poverty**

One of the most remarkable features of post - colonial African society is the all pervasive role played by giant Multinational Corporations in dictating African economic policy drive. Researches in the activities of the MNCs have remained a flowing industry for academics. While some scholars have tended to positively analyze the roles of these big corporations,

others have totally rejected the claims made by these MNCs themselves that they are partners in progress, but rather, seeing them more as agents of exploitation. In Nigeria for instance, the Oil Multinational Corporations (OMNCs) have come under serious attacks. The reasons have been the high rate of environmental degradation that has often been the results of intense exploration and exploitation of oil in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria without clear-cut efforts to protect the environment and people. They are also known for keeping to internationally acceptable best practices in the oil and gas industry in their parent countries, but the reverse is the case in Nigeria and in most third world countries where they operate. While the contribution of the oil sector to the national economy has been enormous, it has paradoxically created poverty among the people. In spite of the huge contribution of the region to the nation, the region still lacks basic infrastructures with wide spread neglect of the environment. Consequent upon this is the direct waning of the means of livelihood of the people which has caused untold hardship on the region as can be seen on table 1 below.

Table 1. The Niger Delta Human Poverty Index as at 2005

| State       | Probability of not surviving to age 40 | Adult Literacy Rate | Unweighed average | HP1-I  |
|-------------|--|---------------------|-------------------|--------|
| Abia        | 26                                     | 26                  | 34                | 29.169 |
| Akwa Ibom   | 27                                     | 28                  | 35.5              | 30.649 |
| Bayelsa     | 30                                     | 31                  | 39                | 33.826 |
| Cross River | 26                                     | 28                  | 33                | 29.3   |
| Delta       | 20                                     | 18                  | 27                | 22.355 |
| Edo         | 22                                     | 18                  | 28                | 23.399 |
| Imo         | 25                                     | 29                  | 32                | 28.949 |
| Ondo        | 30                                     | 31                  | 42.5              | 35.442 |
| Rivers      | 24                                     | 24                  | 30.5              | 26.53  |
| ND          | 25.556                                 | 25.889              | 33.4              | 28.847 |

Source: Grinding Poverty and Deprivation in Niger Delta, Vanguard, Aug, 26, 2007

As Singh et al, (2015) notes, despite its vast oil resources, the Niger Delta region remains poor. GNP per capita is below the national average of \$280. Unemployment in Port Harcourt, the Rivers State capital, is over 30 per cent and is believed to be equally high in the rural areas. ....Education levels are below the national average and are particularly low for women. While 76% of Nigerian children attend primary school, this level drops to 25-35 % in some parts of the Niger Delta. They further notes that the poverty level in the Niger Delta is exacerbated by the high cost of living. In the urban areas of Rivers State, the cost of living index in the highest in Nigeria. Succinctly put, the discovery of oil in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria has not been beneficial to the inhabitants of the region, but has rather displaced many from their environment without giving them alternative means of livelihood. Majority of the people have become poorer, unable to feed, clothe

and shelter themselves. This has been made possible by the negative activities of oil production. The economic and environmental cost of oil spillage, gas flaring and deforestation cannot be undermined, as these practices have tended to adversely affect the people. The socio-economic indices that spread through the Niger Delta region and that have also inhibit the sustainable growth and development have led to wide spread poverty and apathy where greater percentage of the population are living below poverty line. For instance, according to a UNDP report (2006:76), a total of 6817 oil spills occurred between 1976 and 2001. More than 70% was not recovered as approximately 6% spilled on land; 25% in swamps and 69% in off-shore environments. Oil spillage which is the uncontrolled release of any product relating to oil production, caused by equipment failure, operation mishap and human error or intentional damage to facilities, is one of the most

common of the environmental impacts of oil exploration and exploitation in the Niger Delta region, (Ndinwa, Chukwuka & Akpafun 2012). Most of these oil spills occur because most of the pipelines are old and corrosive; others are adduced to sabotage of oil production operations.

There is also the case of gas flaring in the burning of natural gas that is associated with crude oil when it is pumped up from the ground. Gas flaring has today become the cheapest way to separate crude oil from associated natural gas. It is also a significant source of *greenhouse* gases released into the atmosphere. Gas flaring generates air pollution and heat. It has been linked to the depletion of the stratospheric ozone layer and also strange diseases affecting the inhabitants of the region. Besides, it is a waste of a potential source of income as Nigeria lost \$2.3 billion to gas flaring per year (Oil Watch, 2010). Thus, the economic and environmental cost of oil exploitation on the people of the Niger Delta region has ultimately been the loss of their source of income and the subsequent displacement from their land. According to Orubu (2002), oil production in the petroleum industry is largely capital and skill intensive and it is this characteristic that has tended to reduce the ability of oil companies to absorb the largely unskilled immigrant labour from the rural oil-producing communities. The depletion of the active labour force in the rural communities and the population pressure and open unemployment in the region have led to further mass exploitation of urban resources and the development of slums leading to new wave of environmental problems. Thus, it is this "paradoxical linkage which seems to exist between oil industry activities and the incidence of poverty in the Niger Delta that provides one forceful justification for environmental intervention (Orubu, 2002:130). Over the years, the federal government has been responding to this dilemma in many ways through the establishment of both regulatory and interventionist agencies. However, pollution still continues to affect the ecology of the Niger Delta environment and thus the economic lives of the people.

### **Stemming Poverty through Interventionist Agencies**

Interventionist agencies were established by the government of Nigeria for the purposes of addressing the socio-economic and infrastructural problems faced in the Niger Delta region resulting from the negative effect of oil production on the environment and their source of livelihood. Despite the huge revenue from the proceeds of oil and the contribution of the oil industry to the Nigerian economy, the issue of environmental degradation, lack of social amenities and infrastructures, unemployment and poverty had become synonymous with the region. Consequent upon this, protests and social activism have in turn developed over time and have led to the

vandalization of oil pipelines, communal clashes, kidnapping of oil workers and hostage taking in the Niger Delta region, with serious negative impact on the nation's external image and the economy. As a result of this, the Nigerian government decided to take some interventionist measures at various times to address these crises. These measures include the establishment of the Niger Delta Basin Development Authority (NDBDA), Presidential Task Force (PTF), Oil Minerals Producing Areas Development Commission (OMPADEC), and lately the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) and the Ministry of Niger Delta Affairs.

As Ekpo (2004:65) notes, the Niger Delta has for long remained a hot bed for political activism and agitation for minority rights. It follows therefore that, agitations in the region pre-dates the discovery of oil in commercial quantity. Such agitations led the colonial government in 1958 to set up the Henry Willink Minorities Commission to look into the fears expressed by the people of the Niger Delta as well as other minority groups in the Country. Tosanwumi (2008: 14) notes that, prior to this time, the interest of the minority ethnic groups were crushed aside when constitutional conferences were being held in London and Lagos, and preparation were in full gear to give the country independence. Aside giving a report of far reaching steps to be taken by the federal government to allay the fears of the minority groups, the commission as part of its recommendations, emphasized the need for the establishment of a special board through which the government will meet the infrastructural needs of the people of the region and thus eliminate the fears and agitations for the creation of states for minorities in the region. To this end, the Niger Delta Basin Development Authority (NDBDA) was established in 1959. The board was charged, among other things, with the responsibility of bringing about rapid development of the region. It was also to advise the federal government and the then regional government of Western (Midwestern inclusive later) and Eastern Nigeria on the infrastructural development of the Niger Delta. These programmes of action would have produced some measures of development if they were carried out genuinely. Various factors acted against its implementation; chiefly among these was the nationwide crisis which culminated into a 30 month civil war; a war which saw the Niger Delta becoming a major part of the blood theatre. According to Ekpo (2004), the first major blow was the slashing of its 50 percent budget allocation to 20 percent by the federal government. The government soon discontinued out rightly the funding of the NDBDA, thus, leaving it at the mercy of foreign donors. As a result the board failed to achieve the purpose for which it was established.

In 1981, the then National assembly enacted the Revenue Act, a law designed to focus attention on the development of the area by making provision for

the allocation of 1.5 percent derivation. However, no effective administrative organ was established to administer the fund. A Presidential Implementation Committee (PIC) was established in 1987 by the Babangida administration to administer the 1.5 percent derivation fund. The committee could not achieve much due to reasons that had to do with inadequate funding and logistics. Secondly, the committee operated from Lagos, far away from its area of responsibility. This made it lost touch with the realities in the Niger Delta, the travails of oil producing communities, their woes, agitations and aspiration (Ekpo, 2004). The resultant consequences of the failures of all these initiatives to address the Niger Delta problems are responsible for the restiveness that eventually engulfed the region. These agitations necessitated the creation of the Oil Minerals Producing Areas Development Commission (OMPADEC), by President Ibrahim Babangida in 1992. The OMPADEC replaced the PIC, which had become moribund. According to Horsfall (1999), the Decree 23 of July 1992 which set up the commission empowered it for the urgent as

well as rapid infrastructural development of the Niger Delta region, among others. While these objectives can, without prejudice, be said to be overreaching, OMPADEC recorded little success. Even though, in the areas of road construction, provision of water and electricity as well as land reclamation and provision of loans were some of the high points of the commission; generally, OMPADEC was a total failure due to inter-ministerial intrigues and diverse political calculations in government.

As Horsfall (1999) notes, “governments - civil or military - never stopped eyeing our funds with a view to either poaching them or indirectly controlling or sharing in them.” He further noted that, in March 1993, two billion naira was taken from OMPADEC account by the Federal Ministry of works for projects which “never ever took place”. This account is an indication that there was a clear lack of governmental commitment. As table 2 below shows, the commission's entitled funds from the Federation Account and budgeted sums were either not fully paid or withheld.

**Table 2**, financial allocation to OMPADEC 1992-1996

| N(000,00)                       | 1992  | 1993  | 1994  | 1995   | 1996   | TOTAL  |
|---------------------------------|-------|-------|-------|--------|--------|--------|
| Expected Allocation (N million) | 6,042 | 6,414 | 6,621 | 27,827 | 38,596 | 85,590 |
| Actual Allocation               | 1,614 | 2,619 | 2,629 | 3,215  | 3,077  | 11,858 |
| Allocation Shortfall            | 4,428 | 3,795 | 3,992 | 24,612 | 35,509 | 72,335 |

**Source:** Horsfall (1999), *The OMPADEC Dream*.

The lack of commitment on the part of government is partly responsible for the problems encountered by OMPADEC. But however, as table 3 shows below, OMPADEC received very substantial funding for the five years it lasted. In 1993 alone it got about \$250million for its activities, and by December 1997,

it had expended some \$870million. In comparing tables 2 above with table 3 below, it is obvious that the government may have erred, as shown in table 3 for the shortfall in its allocation to the body between 1992 and 1996. But the millions of dollars and naira the commission received was not well managed.

**Table 3**, OMPADEC monthly financial receipts, 1993-1997 (millions of Naira)

|           | 1993    | 1994   | 1995   | 1996   | 1997   |
|-----------|---------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| January   | 316.0   | 225.0  | 318.0  | 275.5  | 355.2  |
| February  | 2,680.1 | 216.0  | 270.3  | 233.1  | 388.8  |
| March     | 0.0     | 243.6  | 327.6  | 288.5  | 231.7  |
| April     | 227.4   | 243.6  | 211.4  | 299.9  | 140.5  |
| May       | 0.0     | 172.9  | 206.2  | 286.0  | 279.1  |
| June      | 243.4   | 191.5  | 322.4  | 312.3  | 274.2  |
| July      | 239.5   | 197.2  | 309.2  | 310.8  | 278.9  |
| August    | 230.1   | 198.9  | 188.4  | 146.9  | 287.0  |
| September | 450.5   | 237.4  | 315.7  | 246.7  | 248.1  |
| October   | 193.1   | 260.8  | 195.2  | 152.0  | 293.2  |
| November  | 00.0    | 165.1  | 254.2  | 207.7  | 275.9  |
| December  | 398.8   | 184.0  | 239.2  | 471.3  | 470.3  |
| Total     | 4978.9  | 2536.0 | 3157.8 | 3230.7 | 3522.9 |

**Source:** Horsfall (1999), *The OMPADEC Dream*.

It follows that, in actual fact, the management of OMPADEC made advance payments to contractors, sometimes to the tune of over 50% of project cost, even before projects were executed. In one instance in 1993, this led to the loss of N275million over a disputed water project, (Ibeanu,2008). This implies official corruption in the board and the "eyeing" of the commission's funds by highly placed individuals in government was the bane of the commission. One is not surprised therefore that the commission failed completely to deliver on its mandate. By 1999, when the Fourth republic kicked off, a once financially buoyant organization had become a shadow of itself, virtually buried in high debts and fraud of monumental proportions (Ekpo,2004). Poor quality contracts were executed; it was littered with elephant projects, uncompleted projects and non functioning projects. In fact, the commission was a sort of 'Father Christmas' to many. The commission lacked adequate data on the oil sector, including institutions and states. All these led to the setting up of the OMPADEC interim management Board by General Abdulsalam Abubakar causing stoppage of funding of the commission. According to Okonta & Oronta (2000), OMPADEC was a woeful failure under both the Babangida and Abacha regimes. Three years after it commenced operations; OMPADEC has committed itself to projects worth \$500 million. Interestingly, the bulk of the money paid out for projects completed was to contractors whose addresses could not be traced. Even Eric Opia, head of the panel set up by the Abacha junta to probe Horsfall was appointed sole administrator in his place, he too proceeded to loot OMPADEC in an even brazen fashion. By September 1998 when he was fired, Opia had embezzled some \$208 million set aside for the development of the impoverished communities of the Niger Delta (Okonta & Oronta 2000). For an agency that was not properly equipped to carry out its functions, the sordid tale stated above is not surprising. A World Bank research team that studied the operations of the agency in 1995 found out among others, that aside the fact that there was no emphasis on environmentally sustainable development, the commission did not have the requisite personnel to enable it meet its ecological mandate. The World Bank also noted the absence of long term planning, lack of project assessment and monitoring and the absence of any form of integrated approach to development as local communities were deliberately ignored. Thus, the OMPADEC essentially deepened the misery of people of the region given the political motive behind its creation and operations as mostly evident in the kind of projects that it embarked upon in the oil region and the manner it awarded the contracts, (Omoweh, 2005).

Thus, the failure of the agency to meet the aspirations of the Niger Delta people necessitated the establishment of the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) by the Olusegun Obasanjo's administration in 1999. In fact, it could be said that the

Niger Delta problems have provided a forum for electioneering by ambitious politicians. Obasanjo used it effectively during his presidential campaign in 1998/1999, promising that the NDDC bill will be the first he will push forward to the National Assembly if elected as president. Without being pessimistic, many have come to see the NDDC as a mere change in nomenclature, especially when the performances of the commission are thoroughly assessed. Like previous efforts and agencies, the NDDC has also grappled with lack of agenda, official corruption, politics and inadequate staff and outright inefficiency. Thus, over a decade since its establishment, the problem it was set up to tackle are not only still there but has grown in great proportion. The NDDC mandate is not deferent markedly from the mandate of the defunct agencies. It operates under the mandate of improving social and environmental conditions in the Niger Delta region which it described as horrific in its own reports. How well the agencies have impacted on these problems is questionable because the crisis, which precipitated its creation, has shown no sign of improvement. In fact, in recent times, NDDC has come under scrutiny. There are those that regarded the NDDC as a source of corrupt practices and conduit pipe for stealing public fund. When its activities so far is compared to the rate of environmental degradation, poverty and serious health cases which engulf the region, it is safe to say that, like its predecessors, the NDDC has not recorded much success. Besides the problem of official corruption and negative politicking that the commission has to contend with, the Nigerian government has been accused of withholding the statutory allocation to the commission to the tune of many billions of naira. The oil multinationals as well have also come under serious criticism of not paying the mandatory 3% of their annual budget, as contained in the Act setting up the commission to it. What this amounts to is that, the commission is being starved of funds on one hand and the 'little' that accrues to it is being grossly mismanaged.

### **Appraising Government Efforts in the Development of the Niger Delta Region**

The aim of the government in establishing interventionist agencies is to address the problems of poverty; infrastructural development and environmental degradation engulfing the Niger Delta region. These aims are far from being achieved, as the agencies have always failed to deliver on their mandates. One of the major reasons, for instance, why NDDC have not been able to achieve its mandate has been adduced to lack of adequate funding. The Federal government and oil companies operating in the region are major providers of the funds of NDDC. The Federal Government gives it 15 percent of the 13 percent oil revenue allocations slated for the nine states while the oil companies contribute 3 percent of their annual budget to the NDDC fund. Finally, 50

percent of funds due to the member states from ecological fund are also allocated to the NDDC (ANEEJ 2004). Apart from delays in the release of funds due in parts to prolonged face-off between the Executives and National Assembly which delays passage of appropriation bills, there are evidences to the extent that, the commission does not receive even the approved allocation. For instance, the Federal Government is known to have withheld over 250 billion naira of the agency's statutory allocation in 2009. Even then, the Niger Delta 13 percent derivations are not paid in full (Human Right Watch, 2002), the case of NDDC which does not have any political clout can be better imagined coupled with the fact that some oil companies are not complying with the provision of the NDDC Act. Besides, the agency, as NEITI (2013) found in its study, the commission had not prepared audited accounts for 2009, 2010, 2011 and 2012 as at July of 2013. This is against the provisions of Section 20(1) which requires, by law, the commission to submit audited account to the President not later than 30 June in each year of the activities of the preceding year. Thus, this is in blatant contravention of the law setting up the commission. This long delay of account rendition may significantly reduce the value of the management decision of the commission. What this amounts to is that, there is lack of transparency, probity and accountability required for the commission to perform its duty of delivering on its mandated to the people of the region. It has also be found that, there are project duplication, in which case contract for a particular project are awarded twice; cases of abandoned and stagnated projects and the payments for projects exceeding the contract sums; (NEITI, 2013). Furthermore, the commission have at various times, been accused of mismanagement and or outright stealing of fund by its various management boards. There has also been a case of in-fighting among its management officials over where to site a particular project and the contractor to be awarded a particular project. This has led to the dissolution of some of its boards and another reconstituted.

In spite of NDDC relative success, especially when compared to its predecessor, the people of the Niger Delta have not, in actual fact, felt its presence as poverty continue to be on the increase. It has been accused of operating independently ignoring inputs from state governments by way of ideas and other areas of collaboration. Many are of the view that the youths should be the primary targets of the commission since they are seen as the primary agents of restiveness. Though the NDDC, in all fairness, has incorporated this suggestion in its programme, it is believed that they need to do more. The issue of sustainability has also not been incorporated in their activity. Probably in their bid to make their presence felt, the NDDC may have spread its budget too thinly without paying attention to sustainability. It can be seen that the NDDC is not sufficiently different from

the previous deliberately 'designed to failed efforts' of the ill-fated so-called interventionist development agencies, because the thinking of the state and its allies in the exploitation and marginalization of the region had not been altered. Thus, the commission is another aloof government agency, like its predecessors, and a superficially refurbished cocoon for official corruption by the state and its cronies is evident, considering the fact that over ten years after its existence, the oil-rich region which is the treasure base of the nation, fares relatively poor in every indicator of well-being and development. Sanubi (2011) has particularly taken a swipe at the failure of existing government policies to develop the Niger Delta region. This failure he locate within the political economy foundation of the country, citing irregularities of funding, official profligacy, corruption, excessive political interference and lack of transparency and accountability. The lack of focus which engulf previous agencies were to be the major reasons why, despite the modest achievement of NDDC, the impact the commission had had on the lives of the people, especially in poverty reduction, had been minimal. Thus, the NDDC today is virtually a mere image of itself as an instrument of government policy as its roles are being gradually shifted and or duplicated to newly established Ministry of the Niger Delta.

#### **Concluding remarks**

Attempts have been made in the foregoing analysis to establish that the continued poverty, infrastructural decay, unemployment, youth restiveness, militancy and other forms of agitations in the Niger Delta region are as a result of failure of governance and the institutional framework put in place by the government to tackle the environmental problems faced by the people of the region as thrown up by the continued oil exploration and exploitation in the region. It is apt therefore to posit that, the solution to the Niger Delta numerous problems are not more of the establishment of neither agencies nor ministries or any form of institution per se, but rather the government only need to develop the right attitude and the will power to act rightly. This became necessary as well as important because of the fact that, so many developmental agencies and commissions have been established to solve the Niger Delta crises for more than 50 years now and none has been able to solve the problems. There are those that argued that, since no special agency or body was set up to develop infrastructures' in Lagos and Abuja, it follows therefore that the Niger Delta region does not require special interventionist agency or ministry for its non-existing infrastructures to be developed and to 'help' stop further degradation of its environment, which has adversely affected the means of livelihood of the people of the region.

It is against this backdrop that one would want to suggest that, there is the need to have a total departure from the so-called normal norm or existing

order of establishing agencies or ministry that makes it look as if the nation is moving in a vicious circle that is 'destined' and designed to fail. Experiences have shown that such agencies have over time become avenues / channels through which money is stolen from government coffers and political jobbers, party loyalists and associates alike, are "settled" through appointments to the board of such agencies, as evident in the present NDDC and its sister body, the Ministry of Niger Delta Affairs. Thus, these bodies have become sources of primitive accumulation of wealth by the ruling elites and their cronies. Besides, these institutions have large bureaucracies with the numerous shortcomings associated with bureaucracy in Nigeria; a thing that made matters worse for these institutions, as policies of the bodies are bound to suffer some setbacks in terms of implementation and quick response to the needs of the people of the region. It thus follows that, the right political will on the part of the government is the panacea for development of the Niger Delta. A political will that is totally devoid of sentiments as well as corruption will see the Niger Delta transformed in holistic terms. There is also the need to de-emphasise the establishment and proliferation of agencies, bodies or any institutions for that matter, for the purpose of developing the region; especially as these approaches has failed overtime and have been used to enrich a few corrupt persons. The government should rather employ the approach used to develop Abuja; a pragmatic approach that helped to achieve the dream of building a new Federal Capital. This Marshal Plan-like approach will achieve what OMPADEC could not achieve, and NDDC and the Ministry of Niger Delta Affairs are finding difficult to achieve.

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