

The Niger Delta Avengers: An Assessment of the Causes, Agitation, Major Challenges for OMNCs and Suggestions for Tackling Insurgency in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Current disputes in the Niger Delta (ND) region of Nigeria have resulted in Oil Multinationals (OMNCs) halting oil exploration activities and pulling out of the region. These disputes range from the controversial issue of ownership of the nation's oil domicile in the region, to a series of heated conflicts between communities and the government. However, the recent rise of a militant group called the 'Niger Delta Avengers' (NDA) has spurred the frontiers of these high confrontational disputes and the degree of restlessness in the region. Deducing the root cause of these events (disputes) has proven ultimately challenging. Therefore, the main objective of the study is to evaluate the challenges in the region, through the assessment of activities of the NDA between the period of January and August of 2016. The study also considered implications for OMNCs and suggests ways to tackle agitations and disputes in the region.

Keywords: Conflict, Nigeria, Niger Delta, Niger Delta Avengers.

INTRODUCTION

Current conflicts have placed local communities (both oil-bearing and oil-producing communities) in the ND region in an unwanted chaos. Regardless of the abundance of natural resource in the region, communities are desperately in need of economic and social gratifications in the form of basic amenities, infrastructure and other social services (Ikelegbe, 2005). The lack of socioeconomic infrastructure has led to serious unrest in the region, stemming mostly from ethnic militancy amongst local communities to brazen civil and human rights mishandlings, as well as unstable peace in the region. The most current and uprising group of militancy in the ND region is: "the Niger Delta Avengers (NDA)".

The major claims of the NDA, is tied to the constant complains of the fact that the country's wealth is derived from the ND with little or nothing contributing towards the development of local communities socially, economically and environmentally. Consequently, the region has become a "moneymaking machine" (Vanguard News, 2016) for both OMNCs and the government.

Thus, while wealth is created for both sides of the divide, the level of neglect in the local communities has constantly taken an upsurge, making local community members suffer from health, social and environmental challenges. Over the past five decades, these challenges have ranged from lack of social and infrastructural development, environmental degradation, displacement, poverty, to kidnapping, seizures of oil pipelines and installations, institutionalizing authorities as well as confrontational attacks (Ikelegbe, 2005).

The consequent result of the challenges mentioned above, can thus be linked to conflicts of various sorts in the region. With the different insurgent groups posing as militias with their individual-group demands from both the OMNCs and the government, the level of security and peace in the region is however breached.

This paper presents some of the causes of the insurgencies in the ND region and the main challenges for OMNCs operational in the region. It further concludes with suggestions on tackling these challenges and recommends sustainable solutions to reducing the agitations of insurgent groups in the region, for the benefit of both the OMNCs and the ND.

STATEMENT OF RESEARCH PROBLEM

Scholars have overtime made use of several names in addressing the ND movements. Although some movements have a genuine cause, which is advocating for peace and stability in the region by way of making peaceful protests, others have been termed “freedom fighters” (Ekine, 2008) because of the intensity of violence that come with their protests. However, they mostly claim to be fighting for their people and the generations to come (Osaghae, 2008). Indeed, violent protests usually come with lots of other atrocities like theft, destruction, rape, kidnap, etc (Ekine, 2008; Oshionebo, 2009).

- The recognition of agenda for some of the militant groups can be challenging as various militias have their different agenda, rules and procedures of carrying out their activities. Generally, these militant groups are divided into two broad groups: a group with genuine intention making necessitated demands for the wellbeing of their communities,
- a group formed into subgroups of gangs with greedy goals and ineptitude (Ako, 2011; Ikelegbe, 2011).

Thus, while activities of the latter are primarily driven by the gains from their unnecessarily unfair activities which sometimes lead to lose of lives and homes, activities of the former are based on defined and systematic approaches (Ako, 2011).

Importantly, militant groups distinctively differ from “unaffected” communities whose sole aim is to carry out various forms of attacks in a bid to make social-infrastructure demands (Osaghae, et al, 2011). Therefore, the wide-range and extensiveness of activities of the various militant groups, makes it more difficult to distinguish between groups with genuine intentions, as most of them make do with the term “local militia” when carrying out their activities (Ikelegbe, 2011).

Against this backdrop, the study seeks to investigate the activities of militancy in the region with specificity to the NDA. The study also intends to probe further, the management implications for OMNCs resulting from the activities of the militant group and militancy in the region.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The increased agitations and anxiety amongst the locals in the ND region is extremely alarming. Such agitations and anxiety are some of the root causes of factors rising from internal

armed conflicts, insurgencies, as well as civil wars in region. Recently, the NDA has claimed responsibility for the attacks and sabotage on oil pipelines and infrastructures of OMNCs in the region. These claims have been announced since June 2016 (Vanguard News, 2016). However, this is not the first-time militant groups will arise in the region as militancy has been on the rise since the early 1990s.

Recent studies on insurgency and micro-roots of civil wars have shed light on the rise of various insurgent and militant groups in regions where natural resources are in abundance (Daly, 2012; Forney, 2015; Humphreys and Weinstein, 2008; Weinstein, 2006). These insurgent groups are created with the perception of protecting the environment and its inhabitants from factors such as exploitations, poverty, displacements, political alienation, lack of education and other socioeconomic challenges. However, various other studies have shown that insurgent groups are formed from the forceful situations of individuals who feel the need to save-guard their lands and resources (Collier, et al, 2003).

Ikelegbe (2005), opines that inhabitants of the ND region are seldom pushed by increased frustration into joining militant groups to device channels through which possible changes can take place in the socioeconomic and political arena of the region. Howbeit, militant groups in the region date back from the era of the 1990s with the creation of the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND). This group became popular when it claimed to have been liable for an attack on Shell’s SNEPCO facility offshore, the Bonga in 2008 (Asuni, 2009). Many other groups have been formed with the NDA being one of the most recent.

Researchers have argued that the power struggle for the control of natural resources usually comes with susceptibility to conflict, violence and warfare (Collier and Hoeffler 1998; De Soysa 2000; Mwanasali 2000). These struggles are basically associated with natural resource-rich economies. The resource rich economies are characterised with wars and conflicts that are prone to the initial thought of control over natural resources which eventually lead to conflicts (Reno, 2003). Thus, drivers of conflicts from insurgence usually range from issues of horizontal inequality (in terms of economic, social and political dimensions), to the over dependence on natural resources, etc (Collier, et al, 2003).

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The ND region falls into the category of horizontal inequality, where its natural resources in the region are being controlled by both the government and OMNCs. At the same time, the country relies majorly on these resources for its economic growth and sustainability (Mahler, 2010). This consequently leads to consistent and intense agitations between communities and OMNCs in the region.

In another argument, Collier and Hoeffler (2004) claims that economic conditions and downturns drive societies into conflict outbreaks. These forms of conflicts are common in most developing countries and sometimes referred to as “conflict trap” (Alderman, Hoddinott and Kinsey, 2004; Collier and Hoeffler, 2004; Justino and Verwimp, 2006). The conflict trap is a term used to describe patterns of civil wars and conflicts in resource rich nations. However, these patterns have been described in various studies as an internal way of breeding insurgent groups due to resentments resulting from an incapacitated way of governance, destabilization, unnecessary government spending, exploitation of human and natural resources, etc (Hegre, Strand, Gates and Nygard, 2011).

Finally, another issue which gives rise to conflicts and wars in the ND region is greed (Reno, 2003). Conflicts in this manner, are high triggers to the accumulation of greed in which case, it gives rise to an opportunity to steal and carry out illegal businesses (Allen 1999). This consequently results into the illegal sales of natural resources such as crude oil and other minerals, bunkering and vandalising of oil pipelines. A good example for eliciting this theoretical perspective is Liberia, where there is control over the extraction of diamond and gold (Ellis 1998). Also, in Sierra Leone, the struggle over the control of diamond producing areas has led to conflicts in various parts of the country (Keen, 2003). These struggles are made through the commercialisation of the so-called natural resources which is a common phenomenon in most developing economies.

Thus, developing countries with natural resource endowment are considered cursed resource economics (Mikesell, 1995), due to the struggles for resource-rich areas between governments and insurgent groups while not eliminating the fact that these resources are mostly commercialized through illegal commercial networks. The illegal trading of natural resources also leads to such struggles among insurgent groups (Nafziger and Auvinen 2002).

Ultimately, the struggle for crude oil in the ND region which has consequently left the inhabitants in constant agony for decades, can be traced back to the military era where oil exploitation and exploration activities were safeguarded by the military and other security forces (Ikelegbe, 2005). This has overtime become a norm in the region due to the increased pressure from the militant groups. Unfortunately, the failed attempts of the military to restore peace in the region has aggravated to both social and life-threatening challenges as more insurgent groups have been formed overtime.

Conflicts and violence can also be a form of commercialization for warlords and militant groups in countries blessed with natural resources. These conflicts basically give the militant groups the opportunity to reach for resources where they ordinarily would not if the country was peaceful and without natural resources. However, the consequences of conflicts are far too grievous as they are always likely to result in devastation, social unrest, economic downturns as well as environmental degradation (Oviasuyi and Uwadiae, 2010).

On their part, oil companies in the ND region have had their share of the bitter pills from such conflicts and violent acts. On the part of the communities, most youths in the region have emerged with militarized links and other insurgent groups, taking the law of the land into their hands and involving in violent acts of kidnapping oil company personnel and staffs – both local and foreigners, as well as vandalising oil pipeline. This unfair act of violence in the region has also encouraged the commercialization of crude oil and other natural resources in the region.

THE STUDY AREA: “OVERVIEW”

The ND region is home to over 30 million people which is about 22% of the entire country’s population and 62% being under the age of 30 (CRSR, 2016). Endowed with crude oil and being the main source of the Nigeria’s economic prowess. However, the ND region has suffered gruesome poverty, displacement, environmental degradation and constant conflicts.

The region comprises of the nine oil producing states namely: Abia, Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo, Imo, Ondo and Rivers states (CRSR, 2016). Expanding over 70,000 square kilometres, the region is made up of 7.5 percent of the entire country’s land mass and inhabits about 31 million individuals with more

than 40 different ethnicities and 250 different languages (Watts and Ibaba, 2011). The region also possesses a vast volume of oil infrastructure which is made up of 606 oil fields, 5,284 oil wells, 7,000 kilometres pipelines, 10 export terminals, 275 flow stations, 10 gas plants, 4 major refineries and a huge liquefied natural gas (LNG) sector (Oviasuyi and Uwadiae, 2010; Watts and Ibaba, 2011).

Basically, the country depends solely on the oil and gas industry as it contributes over 90 percent of export revenues for the country of which 85 percent is perceived to be government revenue and about 32 percent as the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (OPEC, 2016). With Angola currently overtaking the economy in terms of oil production to be the largest oil producer in Africa, there has been a sharp decline in crude oil production from 2.2 million barrels per day (bpd) to 1.4 million bpd as of May 2016 (YCharts, 2016). This is due to the recent conflicts in the region with the advent of the new militant group-the NDA.

Since the discovery of oil in the region in the 1950s, there has been a consistently rising rage of violence and conflicts which has also made the region unsafe for its people to live peacefully. Violence in the region has been consistent since the early 2000s (Okonta and Douglas, 2003) with the events of bloody ethnic wars, kidnappings, killings and other forms of violent attacks.

Notwithstanding, the presidential amnesty program introduced in 2009 under the short leadership of Late President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua was a huge success towards curbing violence and conflicts in the region. Although the amnesty program brought some calmness to the region by way of job employment, enhancement of skills and capacity building, all these however came to a halt as soon as the new presidential administration came into power in May 2015. This is one of the major structural reasons that have driven violence in the region currently.

The region has found itself in a chaotic state of confusion where on one hand, OMNCs are carrying out their operations in terms of exploitation and exploration under the auspice of some sort of protection from the military, while on the other hand, the entire region is suffering from the consequences of militant youth groups working under the disguise of protecting the inhabitants and the environment.

Basically, an action aid is generated through the positioning of arm military men to savage the situation in the region. This sort of mechanism is common amongst developing countries endowed with natural resources. Most often, these countries that are susceptible to such vulnerability which consequently condescends into the private security options offered by their counterparts and allies in Europe, the United States, and other parts of Africa that are more peaceful (Mair, 2003).

Methodology of the Study

The study made use of the content analysis approach as its method for the data analysis. Thus, the study made use of coded text materials and documents such as books, journal articles, newspaper reports and bulletins, television as well as radio debates. This essentially makes the study a qualitative study. These instruments were more appropriate as room was given for openness and unpredicted phenomenon.

Of huge significance to qualitative researchers in the fields of social and management sciences are, validity, reliability as well as the generalizability of data analysis, due to the fact that these have some level of effect on individuals, organisations and the phenomenon being studied (Bryman and Bell, 2007). It is therefore important for data collected for the sole purpose of this study, be used extensively to ensure high quality and reliability of results (McKinnon, 1988; Wood et al., 2001; O'Dwyer, 2002).

DISCUSSIONS

Social-Historical Turbulence in the Region (1960s to Present Times)

Historically, the disturbing turbulence by insurgent groups in the ND region can be dated as far back as 1960 (Ikelegbe, 2005). It is only recently; human and environmental rights groups came to the fur for the rights of the people and the environment following the execution of Ken Saro Wiwa and eight other environmentalists in the Ogoni kingdom.

Over the past five decades, inhabitants of the ND have pointed their views on the social and environmental issues troubling the region. Various movements and campaigns have come up to deliberate on issues of peace, economic, social and environmental development in the region (Ojakuotu, 2009). Thus, the emergence of human rights groups within civil society organisations in the region.

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Howbeit, the first set of major concerns among the ND inhabitants, came into play during the late 1950s when the country was transitioning into its independence coupled with the discovery and commercialization of oil production (Ikelegbe, 2005). The major reason being that the region is the minority area of the nation even though it stores the country's natural resources and creates wealth for the nation. Hence, the fear of legitimacy and ownership of resources which has subsequently degenerated into conflicts and wars in the region.

Consequently, the year 1966 saw a great rise of conflict in the region when the leader of ND Volunteer Force (NDVF), Isaac Boro insisted on independence for the region and also called for negotiations between the oil companies and his command rather than the federal government (Francis, Lapin and Rossiasco, 2011). This incidence was followed by the Biafra war which took place in 1967. Both incidences have led to what is now viewed to be a common phenomenon - "consistent war" in the region. However, the 1990s came with the Ken Saro-Wiwa's move for environmental change. As mentioned before, this movement is a human right cum environmentalist movement known as the "Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP)" which was peaceful and had no intentions for conflicts or violence (Agbonifo, 2011). However, the execution of Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight other human rights and environmentalists in 1995 led to an outburst of various protests and outbreaks on the then Military government of the late General Sani Abacha (Aghalino, 2009; Ekine, 2008; Oshionebo, 2009).

Militancy in the mid-2000s came with a systemic approach of attacks by the group called "Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND)" (Francis, Lapin and Rossiasco, 2011). Between the period of 2006 and 2009, the group carried out outbreaks and attacks which led to the death of 300 persons and 119 oil personnel being held hostage around the region (Tantua and Kamruzzaman, 2016). The group's involvement in the various attacks on exploration sites, pipeline vandalization, oil theft and other illegal trades also took a toll on the country's economy bringing oil production to as low as 700,000 bpd from its usual 2.6M bpd (The Technical Committee on the Niger Delta, 2008).

In addition to the ND conflicts, is the heterogeneity of the nation's cultural settings. The country is

blessed with more than 250 ethnic groups and over 500 indigenous languages (CIA, 2016). However, minority ethnicities which are concentrated in the ND live in fear of the growing tension from heated conflicts and wars in the region due to oil wealth. Therefore, there is consistent challenge from communities to the government on the legitimate rights and authority over natural resource ownership (Tantua and Kamruzzaman, 2016).

Lastly, since the year 2000, the country has experienced democratic rule, with various armed groups waging systematic movements against OMNCs and the government. Thus, the people in the region have not relented in making known their demands for structural development and improvement in their standard of living. Communities have felt completely ripped-off of their basic human rights, lands for farming, and rivers for fishing. Petro-capitalism has eaten deep into the region (Watts, 2004, 2007) and the government is now regarded as an "absentee government". All these challenges have also led to the up rise of the most recent militant group: "The Niger Delta Avengers".

The Niger Delta Avengers (NDA): "Chronology of Activities"

The NDA is a group of militants campaigning against the activities of OMNCs and waging conflicts with the government. The group has been active since January 2016 but officially made a public appearance on their existence in March 2016 (BBC News, May 2016). The ideology behind the group being 'regional', is synonymous to most of the group members hailing from different communities in the ND region. The major objective of the group is

In recent times, several attacks have taken place in the ND region by the NDA with the most recent occurring in Delta state. Thus, there are major halts to the operations and activities of OMNCs at their oil terminals in Delta state (The Economist, 2016).

The economy has so far witnessed a huge crash, bringing oil production to as low as 1.69 million barrels per day (bpd) in the third quarter (Q3) of 2016 from its previous 2.11M bpd in the second quarter (Q2), thereby tightening the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) to 17.5% (Europe Newsweek, August 2016). Since the recent attacks on oil pipelines and installations as well as the killing of soldiers and civilians, more militant groups have taken-off claiming various demands from the government and OMNCs (Voice of America, 2016). The table below

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describes the series of activities that have taken place from the inception of the “NDA” group in 2016. On every event, the NDA has claimed responsibility.

Fig. NDA Militant Activities

Date	Activity (Vandalizations, kidnapping and killings)	Location
January 14	Gas pipelines and oil installations	Warri, Delta state
February 10	The Bonny-Soku Gas Export Line	Bonny, Rivers state
February 14	Shell’s underwater Forcados 48-inch Export pipeline	Burutu, Delta state
February 19	The Eni Clough Creek-Tebidaba Pipeline	Bayelsa state
May 4	The vandalization of the Chevron Valve platform	Abiteye, Delta state
May 4	Shell’s underwater Forcados 48-inch Export pipeline blown up again	Burutu, Delta state
May 5	The Escravos-Lagos pipeline	Lagos state
May 5	The destruction of several Chevron oil installations and pipelines	Abiteye, Delta state
May 6	Crude oil pipeline linking Warri to Kaduna	Delta state
May 6	Gas line for the supply of electricity for Lagos and Abuja	Lagos state
May 6	Oil pipelines	Alero, Dibi, Otunana and Makaraba
May 9	Killing of three Military soldiers	Bayelsa state
May 13	Chevron pipeline blown up again seven days after repairs	Makaraba
May 20	Escravos pipeline system blown up again after the commence of repairs from the May 5 th attacks	Lagos state
May 25	Chevron’s major electricity feed pipeline	Warri, Delta state
May 27	Blowing up of Eni and Shell’s pipelines	Nembe, Bayelsa state
May 27	Several oil and gas pipelines belonging to the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC)	Warri, Delta state
May 30	Conflict with the Military forces leading to the death of twenty civilians, two police personnel and several military personnel as well as a few militants	Gulobokri and Eweleso
May 31	Chevron’s oil wells RMP23 and RMP24	Didi, Delta state
June 1	The NDA suspected of killing two military personnel and four civilians.	Ijere, Delta state.
June 2	Pipelines blown up	Bayelsa state
June 3	Shell’s Forcados 48-inch Export pipeline the third time after consistent repairs	Burutu, Delta state
June 3	Oil pipelines	Bayelsa state
June 8	Chevron’s oil well RMP20	Warri, Delta state
June 9	Shell’s Chanoni Creek oil facility	Warri, Delta state
June 10	Eni’s Obi Obi Brass trunk line	Bayelsa state
June 16	NNPC’s crude oil pipeline	Oruk Anam LGA, Akwa Ibom
July 1	NNPC’s crude oil trunk line linked to the Warri refinery	Warri, Delta state
July 2	NNPC’s two major oil trunk lines	Delta state
July 3	Two of Chevron wells	Warri, Delta state
July 5	Chevron well	Otunana
July 5	A manifold and two main crude oil pipelines of NNPC	Delta state
July 6	Chevron manifolds RMP 22, 23 and 24	Delta state
July 8	Shell’s and Eni’s pipeline 1, 2, and 3	Bayelsa state
July 11	ExxonMobile’s “Qua Iboe 48” crude oil pipeline	Eket, Akwa Ibom state
July 12	NNPC’s natural gas pipeline	Ogijo, Ogun state
July 13	NDA confrontation with military personnel	Delta state
July 18	Shell’s crude oil trunk line	Warri, Delta state
July 24	NNPC’s natural gas line	Nsit-Ibom, Akwa Ibom
July 31	Shell’s “Trans Ramos” crude oil pipeline	Odimodi-Burutu LGA, Delta state

Sources: *Vanguard Nigeria, This-Day, Punch, and other sources*¹.

¹ A. Information on the NDA was taken from the following newspapers: Vanguard Nigeria, This-Day, and Punch papers and other online sources.

Curbing Militancy in the Region: Recommendations for Sustainable Development

Conflicts in the ND are mostly attributed to the gaps in the existing law between governing exploration of crude oil and the ownership of land (Ugoh and Ukpere, 2010). This has brought about the major unrest in the region as communities believe that they are being ripped-off of their lands and fundamental human rights.

The NDA and other militant groups believe that the laws on land ownership should be revisited as well as regulations on petroleum exploration; as these are the leading factors why government do not consider the best interest of the inhabitants of the region (Nna and Ibaba, 2011).

Nevertheless, resource control is another major discourse resulting to the heated conflicts in the region (Ikelegbe, 2011). This power control over crude and other natural resources has incited various militant groups and movements. However, several efforts have been made in curbing militancy in the region including the amnesty programme introduced by the late former President Yar'Adua's administration in 2009. The purpose of the introduction of the amnesty programme was to eliminate the violence and conflicts in the region and restore peace back to the people which could further create an enabling atmosphere for sustainable development in the region (Ogege, 2011).

Having considered the discussions above, effort should be made to respond to the sensitivity of the issues listed; to the point where these efforts are sustainable enough for peace to reign the ND. From the explanations given, there seem to be a far gap between the demands of the ND people and the government (both past and present administrations).

MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS AND PROSPECTS FOR OMNCs

Putting into consideration the assertions above, the paper has drawn out two major management implications for OMNCs operating in the ND region. These are:

- Sustainable development;
- Corporate Social Responsibility.

Sustainable Development

Sustainable development emphasizes the significance of OMNCs in the institutionalization

of management best practices with regards to their social and environmental activities towards the society, specifically in host communities. According to the World Bank Development Report (2017), good corporate governance results in effective strategic interventions for the achievement of sustainable development outcomes. The strategic integration of economic, social, and environmental goals, is a key function to corporate governance on the part of the OMNCs and a significant achievement for sustainable development in host communities (Hsueh and Yan, 2011).

It is imperative for OMNCs, based on considerable relationship with the government, to have a compelling alternative approach or mechanism, to control the pressure from insurgent groups. With regards to the above context, and in response to their extemporaneous act, more youth groups are coming up to question OMNCs, and the Nigerian government (Agbibo and Maiangwa, 2013) on human rights abuses, environmental degradation, as well as the right to resource ownership and control. However, under the pretext of calming the youths and ensuring social stability, the government itself has been in a lot of dissipation (Nwajiaku-Dahou, 2010) that have worsened rather than help curb the anxiety and restiveness in the region.

Sustainable development framework may therefore be viewed as a means for harmonising and improving the quality of human life while at the same time supporting the eco-system. Although OMNCs have this framework as part of their mandate of service to the ND region, the extent of devastation in terms of social and environmental cannot be quantified.

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)

The concept of CSR relates with organisations' capacity to be responsible to their stakeholders morally, ethically and philanthropically in ways that do not jeopardize complying with the laws of the state (Carroll and Shabana, 2010). OMNCs are expected to embrace not only the views of the stockholders but also those of external stakeholders in such a manner that will not harm the returns on investment of their shareholders.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, human and civil rights groups as well as environmentalists in the ND came up with agendas for OMNCs to stop harming the region and causing

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environment pollution (Aaron, 2006; Uyigue and Agho, 2007). There was also a push for OMNCs and the government to find solutions to societal issues. Thus, other than giving much attention to business activities, OMNCs were forced to also pay attention to communities and their environment (Uyigue and Agho, 2007). Also, there was voluntary involvement from the part of OMNCs in seeing that societal issues were being solved (Agbiboa and Maiangwa, 2013). Such agendas have become a part of OMNCs CSR to the society in general.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Revisiting the Law and Constitution

Government seem to be far from the people and their well-being, hence the failure on its part to restore peace in the region; and this it has done by refusing to revisit the laws governing the exploration of crude oil and land ownership in the country. Some of these laws were enacted in the 1960s: “i. Oil in Navigable Waters Act of 1969; ii. The Petroleum Act/Decree of 1969; iii. The Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) Decree of 1978, and iv. The Land Use Act of 1978”.

The government must resolve to deciding on how to deal with the various arm groups and re-establish its stand towards eradicating the act of violence in the region.

Justice for the People

The people of the ND have fought for their civic rights for so many years. They have fought for justice to prevail over their lost homes, lands, rivers and environment; some of which have lost their lives in the process of fighting for a “just cause”. This is evident with the case of the Ogoni people where the leader of the peaceful MOSOP Movement-Ken Saro-Wiwa and many others were executed for a just cause. Over the years, more groups have been formed to criticise the injustice on the part of the government; not listening to the cries of the people and showing nonchalance are the main bone of contention for the people.

Back to the Drawing Board: Amnesty Initiatives

In May 2016, the present administration led by President Muhammadu Buhari announced its intention to revisit the amnesty international agenda and make a reinforcement of activities by cleaning up the contaminated environment, create more training opportunities and pay the

usual monthly allowances to ex-militants (Africanews, 2016).

The Amnesty Initiative was set up in May 2007 by Late President Umaru Yar’Adua to handle the disturbing issues of the ND and to bring about peace and sustainable development in the region. This was done in line with what was obtainable in Section 175 of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (The Technical Committee on the Niger Delta, 2008). Another reason why the amnesty initiative was set up, was the due to the initial failures on the part of the government to meet the demands of the ND people.

However, the amnesty agenda came to a halt and threats about conflicts arose from the militants (Congressional Research Service Report, 2016) just after the new President of the Federation, Muhammadu Buhari took over office in May 2015. This new developmental saga led to the rise of the NDA (Premium Times, 2016). Although the President agreed in August 2016 to resume payments to militants due to the recently rising attacks in the region, it is still not certain the outcome from the negotiations being made between the militants and the government (International Business Times, August 2016).

CONCLUSION

The paper has looked into the different waves of conflicts in the ND and has specifically considered the new militant group: “the NDA”. The paper suggests that the recent attacks and uprising of militant groups be addressed in a more systemic way by using dialogues to bring back not only peace but socio-economic stability in the region.

Government should take up social responsibility by engaging more in the structural development of the region. Cleaning up the environment is one major issue begging for attention as oil spillage and gas flaring both lead to contamination of water and air pollution.

Conflicts in the region can only be resolved when the proper attempt is made in bringing peace to the region. A sustainable approach should be taken towards addressing the issues of development and conflicts. This should be handled in accordance with the law and regulations binding in land ownership as well as environment standards governing both OMNCs and the government.

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Certainly, a significant path to conflict resolution is basically from the management level of any organisation. It is therefore important for OMNCs and the government to have a clearly defined strategy to tackle the crisis in the ND in a manner that does not contradict the social norms of the host communities. In a nutshell, putting into consideration the economic, social and environmental prospects of the region is very vital for both the inhabitants and the OMNCs. Also, since a certain level of accountability and responsibility is expected from the OMNCs and the government, a systematic approach to curbing conflicts in the region should begin with immediate effect.

Also, as a matter of urgency, OMNCs should get involved with an all prevailing new perspective of CSR, which will enable them to go beyond their conventional economic and legal responsibilities towards embracing new strategies in dealing with societal and environmental challenges (Wettstein, 2009) as well as recent conflicts faced by the entire region.

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