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## Good Governance and the Sustainable Development of the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria: Assessing the Impact of Government Interventionist Agencies

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**Abstract:** The devastation of the Niger delta environment through oil pollution has occasioned poverty, social unrest, unemployment among the people of the region. It has also threatened the sustainable development of the region and called into question government commitment to good governance. In response, the federal government of Nigeria has over the years established interventionist agencies whose focus is to find lasting solution to the socio-economic problems of the Niger delta region and to ensure its sustainable development. However, in spite of the huge amount appropriated to these agencies, it is believed that their impact on the region has been minimal. This paper, using secondary data anchored on extant literature review interrogates the reason behind their poor performances. Findings shows that among other factors like corruption and projects abandonment, the lack of emphasis in addressing the root cause of the people's poverty has been a major failure of these agencies. The paper therefore recommends among others, that government through these agencies can have positive impact on the Niger delta by directing resources to pressing area of needs, addressing environmental pollution which is the root cause of crisis in the region instead of spreading thin its resources to projects that have little impacts on the people's problem.

**Keywords:** interventionist agencies; pollution; corruption; good governance; sustainable development

### Introduction

Sustainable development has been rightly linked more to the environment, though in recent times, it has found outlets in other activities that are not strictly environmental-oriented. The concept has become a buzz word following global

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recognition of the level of pollution that certain economic activities had on the environment especially in the 21<sup>st</sup> century as industrial activities continue to impact negatively on the environment and the atmosphere. Climate change and global warming for example is seriously causing changes in weather and sea level rise. There has been massive land degradation and air pollution which has become global concern as these negative externalities are being felt globally away from its sources. All of these are serious threats to achieving sustainable development.

It is no wonder that the primary recommendation given to address ecological disaster is not just the enactment and enforcement of environmental laws but even more importantly that states should be committed to the pursuit of good governance as there cannot be sustainable development in the absence of good governance. Various studies have shown that the biggest threats to achieving sustainable development is the lack of good governance and inability of various governments to enforce environmental regulations against big corporations since it is believed that a stringent enforcement may affect economic growth and development, (Ako, 2012; Jike, 2004; Atubi, 2015; Allen, 2012; Edo, 2012; 2023). In developing economies like Nigeria, the issue of sustainable development is a concern as many developing economies are caught in the “quagmire of pursuing development sustainably, as they often sacrifice social and environmental issues for economic considerations” (Ako, 2012, p. 16). This is the case in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria where oil has to come to define the country’s economic growth and development. Therefore while the Nigerian elites pursues economic growth, they have come to disregard the impact of these pursuits on the environment of the region. However to achieve sustainable development, a country must be able to balance its economic interests and social equity with environmental concerns enveloped in good governance. It should be able to “manifestly highlights the links and interaction between the three pillars of sustainable development” which is the goal of striking a balance between “economic, environmental and social issues, in order to ensure optimal living standards for the present generation without denying similar opportunities to future generations” (Ako, 2012, pp. 9, 16).

The failure of Nigeria environmental policies has not only question the government commitment to good governance but has threatened the realisation of sustainable development in the country. The increasing poverty in the region in the face of massive oil wealth is a recurring concern as evidently this has led to friction between oil companies and host communities which has further deepened the already volatile situation in the region. One way that the Nigerian government have tried to address

the issue of poverty and underdevelopment of the Niger Delta region is through the establishment of specialized agencies saddled with the mandate of speeding up the region socio-economic development. These agencies known as interventionist agencies are directed to provide succour to environmental degradation victims or those whose livelihood have been affected by the unsustainable approach to petroleum exploration. The Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) created in 2001 by Acts of the country's National Assembly is currently the agency that is mandated to do so. However despite trillions of naira spent, the region inhabitants are yet to see any meaningful impacts of NDDC activities in their lives. In the very recent time, the agency have been embroiled in corruption, project abandonment, contract inflation and undertaking of projects that have no direct impact on the people' lives. The objective of these paper is therefore to account for the reasons behind the failure of NDDC to have positive impact in the region development despite the many projects it has to its credit. The contention here is that the failure of the NDDC and others before it cannot be totally divorced from the fact that it has not been able to address the environmental concerns of the people which paradoxically is the source of the people's poverty. However, to understand this position, it is vital that we look at sustainable development and its link with good governance which is the base on which our discourse lies.

### **Sustainable Development**

The United Nations World Conference on Environment and Development which was organised in 1987 defined Sustainable Development as “*development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs*”, (WCED, 1987). This definition was influenced by the belief that consumption pattern must have to change as it was having a toil on the environment. Thus, the idea behind the concept as noted by Dasgupta (2007), is that each generation should at the very least leave behind a reasonable proportion of its productive base to its successors as it has inherited from its predecessors.

Today however, sustainable development has become one of the most widely used concept in policy circles (Bac, 2008). Whether in the academia, business organizations or government policy debates, the concept has continued to generate heated emotions whenever it is discussed. According to Lele (1991), the concept has become the watchword and theme of many international agencies, conferences and slogan of environmental activists. Haque and Mudacumura (2017) asserted that

sustainable development as a concept, and in whatever fora it is used, has now become an ideology in not only developed economy but also in developing countries.

According to Parkin (2000), there are well over 200 different definitions of sustainable development, a number that increases with the passage of time. In fact a critical review of the literature on sustainable development clearly shows a lack of synthesis of these various definitions. Questions surrounding who determines what is to be sustained, (Sachs, 1999; Satterthwaite, 1996; Redclift, 1993), how can future generation needs be determined (Redclift, 2006), and the disagreement that arises from how to best put the theory of sustainable development into practice (Berke and Conroy, 2000) has further made the concept elusive. However as Sachs (1999) observed, the term has continued to attract large followership primarily because of the promises it hold out or the trade-off it promises between environmental sustainability and economic development and growth. Hence, Richardson (2013) sees sustainable development as a convergence between politics and economics. To him, sustainable development is a political fudge advanced by the Brundtland report which allows for conflicting parties and perspectives without the loss of credibility. To arrive at a trade-off was no easy feat as it became apparent that not all countries share the same perspectives on causes of environmental problems. For example, it was necessary to consider the concerns of developing nations as any boycott from them would have ruined the conference (Chasek, 2020). These concerns revolves around the rift between the developing economies of third world nations and industrialized economies and the accusation levelled against the industrialized nations that they are the cause of environmental degradation since pollution were seen majorly as the result of the production techniques used by developed nations (Linnér and Selin, 2021). Countries like India and Nigeria underscored the importance of their resources in achieving economic growth and would not welcome any form of restriction that will hinder their utilization even though they welcome cooperation on environmental issues, (Linnér and Selin, 2021).

There are three notable threads to the debate on sustainable development that can be gleaned from the literature, (Allen, 2012). Firstly, there is the attempt to explain with the aim to understand the concept through its various perspectives; secondly is the strategies that can be employed to realise its goals; and lastly is the problem of implementing it both in developed and developing countries. These threads are well represented in the works of Mudacumura, Mebratu and Haque, 2017; Sachs, 2015; Enders and Remig, 2014; Baker, 2012 Constantinos, 2006; Obi, 2004; Livesay, 2002; Meadowcroft, 1999; Hajer, 1997; Moffat and Linden, 1995). However, in spite

of these different threads, one thing that these scholars all agree to, is that sustainable development is now the defining yardstick in many countries environmental policy since the 1980s as it marked a shift, away from the traditional notion of economic development to one that places emphasis to the importance of the environment. Environmental sustainability is so important that according to Ogunkan (2022), other sustainability indices will suffer greatly without environmental sustainability as it provides the necessity for other outlets to strive in their sustainability pursuit, e.g. economic and social sustainability.

### **Good Governance and Sustainable Development**

A key component of sustainable development which is now widely considered as a fourth pillar for its actualization is good governance. Sustainable development demands an all-inclusive framework for its success. Its success depends on the notion that government should be responsible and accountable to the society. This is what is referred to as good governance, without which the very idea of sustainable development becomes a farce, or an impossible framework. Good governance places certain core functions in the hands of government. These functions include but are not limited to the placement of emphasis on education and health care, infrastructural development, ensuring environmental justice, the protection of the environment through the enactment of sound regulations and also the protection of individuals from violence, oppression and crime, (Sachs, 2015).

To be certain, good governance is more of a complex phenomenon. It is an all-embracing concept and that is why many scholars have come to believe that it offers the best instrument available to leaders and policy makers that can enable them achieve sustainable development. Defined as “the exercise of political, economic and administrative authority in the management of a country’s affairs at all levels” (United Nations Development Programme, 1997:31), it can help to integrate the three pillars of sustainable development. It can only be achieved when every player is key into the process (Ramzy et al, 2019). Distinct from government, it shows the various means through which government (and other powerful social actors like big corporations) can engender social inclusiveness at all levels of government. That is why Frant (2015), posits that, there cannot be sustainable development without good governance since good governance entails the following characteristics among others:

- The rule of law;

- Equity;
- Citizen participation;
- Accountability;
- Consensus orientation, and;
- Transparency (UNDP, 1997).

On his part, Sachs (2015) noted that when good governance is talked about, it is normally often restricted to the formal levels of government like the executive, legislature and the judiciary. But this could be erroneous because we do in fact live in a world where the visibility of government is ever shrinking and the global dominance of multinational corporations is becoming even more glaring (Fineman, 2008). These powerful actors in many fronts now determine how government sometimes conduct public affairs. Put in another way, public policies by elected governments often take cognizance of these powerful global actors.

Human lives and wellbeing now depends heavily on these powerful actors social corporate responsibility towards the communities where they operate and their respect towards the natural environment. However, this is not often the case because as posited by Sachs (2015, chapter 1, para 12-13) “multinational companies are often the agents of public corruption, bribing officials to bend regulations or tax policies in their favour and engaging in tax evasion, money laundering, and reckless environmental damage.” This honest assessment tends to describe the Nigerian state relations with oil multinationals operating in the Niger delta region (see, Babatunde, 2014; Amnesty International 2009; Obi, 2010; Clark, 2009; Odukoya, 2006). According to Mukoro (2009), in spite of the oil wealth that the Niger delta region boasts of, the region has suffered neglects from the ruling elite over time who have connived among themselves to deny the indigenes their due. The result is that we have a region which though remains the “centre of Nigeria’s multi-billion dollar oil industry is one of West Africa’s most underdeveloped and violent regions”. Clark (2009) has attributed these violent conflicts and the region’s underdevelopment to the ruling elite’ inability to address the growing poverty of the Niger Delta people, a view also collaborated by Otite (2009). If the primary goal in sustainable development as a developmental framework is the eradication of poverty which an unsustainable environmental practices can and do endangers, then the ruling elites have not only failed woefully to engender this goal but they have been found complicit in abetting practices that endangers the environment. Clark observed that the “regional and central governments have failed to pay fuller attention to Niger Deltans concern, despite the pollution of their land from oil exploration and

exploitation as well as oil revenue, which was not fairly used to develop the Niger Delta to ease their situation” (Clark, 2009, p. 124).

Odukoya (2006), contend that the Nigerian state idea of development is a reflection of its elitist ideology and is one that is purely capitalist-oriented. Being a dependent economy and dependent on oil from the Niger delta region, development has been a function of “how the ruling coalition in a state perceives it in relations to its own objective class interest, both on the short and long runs”. This form of developmental philosophy have seen to it that basic necessities of life like healthcare, education, water etc. have been commodified, and the primacy of profits over social programmes. Such development cannot, Odukoya (2006) argues, engender sustainable development. The result of a development template that ignores local input, and/or civil societies invites conflicts and violent reaction which again negatively impacts on the sustainable development of the Niger delta region. Political exclusion therefore acts against the very concept of sustainability.

The Niger Delta region has become a major development challenge to the government of Nigeria. In spite of the abundant natural resources which it holds, many of its inhabitants continue to live in abject poverty and poor health. It would seem following from the above projections, the implementation of oil related environmental laws (Allen, 2012) would be the best approach to handle these challenges but successive governments have followed a pattern that has hardly guaranteed succour to the people of the region. It is to this approach that we now turn to.

## **Government Interventionist Approach and the Dilemma of Sustainable Development**

### **Sir Willink Commission and the Niger Delta Development Board (NDDDB)**

Since independence in 1960 even before oil became the mainstay of the nation’s economy, the peculiar challenges of the region has been well noted and there has being effort to addressed it. These issues were more related to the difficult terrain of the region which makes development difficult and the marginalization felt by the minority groups that makes up the region. Hence in 1958 the Sir Willink Commission report characterised the region as poor in infrastructure, backward and in need of urgent attention. Also the commission have as one of its goals the directive to address minority fears in a country dominated by ethnic majority politics. This

report which predicated its decisions on the notion of Universal Declaration of Human Rights which it recommends that it should be adopted in the Nigerian constitution was according to Oduntan (2017), unprecedented as it goes against the very logic of colonial policies whose rule was based on the fortuitous notion that the varied ethnic groups in Nigeria does not fit into British conception of civil liberties. Oduntan (2017), has argued that the Willink commission was not a sincere effort on the part of the colonizers to find solution to the minority question especially following the Niger Delta peoples agitation. It was rather more of a strategy used by the British government to deflect attention away from its own inhuman and historical role as the country's greatest offender. This is because minority consciousness which was practically nonexistent in the years leading to decolonization was a creation of colonial strategic policies to advance the belief that if they leave, the more dominant ethnic group would lord it over the minor ethnic groups. Thus "the Commission gave voice to minority claims, including of hastily formed minority associations. In other words, the Willink Commission did not simply fail to resolve or reconcile ethnicities; it actually promoted them", (Oduntan 2017:22). Minority agitations were not therefore constructively directed towards allaying marginalization connected to "protection of tribal rituals, language or any other cultural particulars" (Oduntan 2017) but rather to quote Okwudiba (1978) honest assessment:

The most ardent advocates of new states or regions have always been aspirants to high positions in the political, administrative, professional and business fields, who have failed to attain positions of pre-eminence at the national, regional or state levels, and who hope to attain such heights in smaller constitutional units, (Okwudiba, 1978, p. 161)

It was probably due to all of these inconsistencies that though the Willink Commission could be said to advance ethnic minority protection rights, it fails to actually advance a holistic treatment on how that rights were to be protected. It should be noted that the British government in 1957 London Constitutional conference delayed any discussion of independence until minority rights issue were addressed. Thus it seems that addressing the developmental issues of minority in the federation was a precondition for independence. Hence, immediately following independence, the Nigerian government in coming to terms with some of the Willink Commission recommendations instituted the Niger Delta Development Board (NDDDB) which was established by Acts of parliament in 1961. However the NDDDB did not achieved much. In fact it failed on its promise to deliver sustainable development to the region as it was effectively starved of funds and the government



which created it lacks the political will to really empower the agency to fulfil its mandate. As Azaiki, (2007) argues, NDDDB failure resonant so much so that, it marked government programme and policy failures in the region. Its powers were limited to only advisory roles in the physical development of the region. Its failures were manifested in the series of nonviolent agitations of the people of the region, most notably through a desire to win electoral seats in federal parliaments so as to be able to have greater say in their region. This was however very difficult as politics at the centre was controlled by majority ethnic group.

### **The Niger Delta Basin Development Authority (NDBDA)**

The Niger Delta Basin Development Authority (NDBDA) was created following the end of the civil war which lasted from 1967-1970. The NDBDA primary mandate was to address the developmental gap of the region. However the defective nature of the Act creating it was to largely account for its failure. At the time the agency was created, oil exploratory impact was beginning to be felt in the regions, (Azaiki, 2007). Therefore the NDBDA mandate were directed towards “providing water for irrigation, removal of excess water (drainage), prevention of waste/loss of farmland by flooding, and the provision of potable water and ensuring effective management of water” (Allen, 2012:189). Since fishing was a major occupation of the Niger Deltans, it was understandable that an agency needs to be created to address its contamination. NDBDA would have addressed some of the challenges of the region but due to politics, it could not deliver on its promise. The creation of other Basin authorities across the country shows the insignificant position of the Niger Delta in federal policies as it was not considered special enough to be accorded a special focus. Hence it suffers from lack of funds from the government. Again the federal government missed the chance to provide sustainable development to the region.

### **The Oil Mineral Producing Areas Development Commission (OMPADEC)**

The ensuring challenges to development was becoming not only violent but volatile as it was at this period becoming an infraction to the much needed oil money. The federal government of Nigeria responded to some of these challenges by introducing more development and interventionist agencies or networks that could help address the development deficit of the region. These includes in recent times the Oil Mineral Producing Areas Development Commission (OMPADEC) and the Niger Delta

Development Commission (NDDC). The Oil Mineral Producing Areas Development Commission (OMPADEC) was established in 1992 by Decree 23 by President Ibrahim Babangida to address a wide range of issues following the impact of oil exploration of the region. Unlike previous developmental efforts, the OMPADEC has been seen as a holistic approach to confront the crisis situation that was becoming a major debacle to oil production and the development of the Niger Delta States or oil producing states following the failures of several government responses to environmental insecurity in the region. Government financial obligation towards the region which stood at 1.5 percent of its revenue was increased to 3 percent and the OMPADEC was to be the vehicle through which the money was to be judiciously spent towards the coordination of development projects, by acting as mediator between oil companies and host communities, (Agbu, 2005; Frynas, 2001; Ovwasa 1999; Okonta and Oro, 2006; Sanya, 2006).

The key responsibilities of OMPADEC according to Omotola (2007) were

- a) To receive and administer the monthly sums from the allocation of the federation account in accordance with confirmed oil-production ratio in each state;
  - for rehabilitating and developing oil-mineral-producing areas;
  - for tackling ecological problems that have arisen from the exploration of oil minerals;
- b) To determine and identify, through the commission and the oil-mineral-producing states, the actual oil-mineral-producing areas and to foster the development of projects agreed upon with local communities in the oil-mineral-producing areas, (see also, Oguine, 2000; Osuntawa and Nwilo, 2005)

OMPADEC failed to meet to meet these expectations and it failed miserably. Its activities were dogged by misappropriating funds meant for development. More than anything, it was enveloped in the sectional and ethnic based politics in the centre. Its mandate was captured by elites who have access to the federal government or more specifically to the Head of State. This means that projects carried out were not reflective of sustainable development but by primordial interests and against public sentiments, (Ibaba, 2008). To put it simpler, its major obstacle was *corruption*. Corruption was a major feature of the agency that two successive head of the agency, Albert K. Horsfall and Professor Eric Opia, were dropped for misappropriating funds and not being able to give account for billions of naira purportedly spent on projects, (Frynas 2001; Omotola, 2007). The fact that its activities were not even regulated

led some scholars to see it more as a contract than a development outlets, (Ovwasa, 1999). Opia was accused of stealing over 200 million dollars and it was also a common joke that projects worth hundreds of millions of dollars were given to ghost contractors whose addresses were unknown, (Sanya 2006; Okonta and Oro, 2006). The failure of OMPADEC to make any meaningful impacts was so glaring that it was sooner or later that it would be disbanded. That was the case when immediately following the electoral victory of Chief Olusegun Obasanjo, a new agency was created to replace the ineffective OMPADEC.

### **The Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC)**

The problems of the region which has assumed greater intensity in terms of social activism, youth restiveness, hostage taking, kidnappings, pipelines vandalism, and so on and so forth (Jike, 2002), was the template on which electoral campaigns were based on. and this was the selling point of the Olusegun Obasanjo campaign promises that if elected he would make sure that he creates an agency that would critically look into the programmes of the Niger Delta region. The Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) was established in 2001 following the passage of a bill in the National Assembly in 2000. One recurring problem that had bedevilled previous development efforts and agencies were inadequate funding. It was therefore determined that this will not be the case of NDDC and so, the agency was opened to various funding arrangement, one of which was that it will be independently funded straight from the federation statutory accounts. This funds would account for 15 percent of its budget. Other funding sources includes oil multinational contributions which was contained in Section 14 of the Act. They were expected to bring in about 3 percent of their total annual budget, (NDDC Act, 1999). In 2017, the NDDC Act was amended to provide more funding for the agency. Prior to the amendment, gas companies were excluded but with the amendment Act, gas companies are required to contribute towards the funding of the agency, (Agbakwuru, 2017)

With so much funds and more importantly, viable and sustainable funding process, NDDC seem to be a departure from earlier efforts. Following its creation, projects were aggressively pursued especially in the year 2002 and 2003 when 810 projects were executed and this alone spurred hope in the region that they now have a government sensitive to their demands, (see Table 1). But how well has the agency performed since two decades of its formation?

**Table 1. Sectoral summaries of projects executed by the nddc  
in 2002 and 2003 (NDDC 2004B)**

Project type	2002 projects	2003 projects	Completed projects	Commissionable Projects	Commissioned Projects	Total No. of Projects
<b>Building</b>	402	15	316	275	138	417
<b>Canalization</b>	9	9	0	0	0	18
<b>Electrification</b>	130	24	125	106	46	154
<b>Flood control</b>	1	0	1	1	0	1
<b>Jetty</b>	41	6	32	31	11	47
<b>Roads/Bridges</b>	40	18	20	12	4	58
<b>Water</b>	91	24	76	70	21	115
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>96</b>	<b>96</b>	<b>570</b>	<b>495</b>	<b>220</b>	<b>810</b>

*Source: Omotola (2007)*

However, despite the huge amount given to these agencies, the problems identified above still persist and as some scholars have argued has even worsen in recent times, (Elekwe and Ukachikara, 2018). It should be noted that NDDC since its inception has received over 40 billion dollars to execute capital projects and yet has not been able to bridge the infrastructural gaps in the region, (Akinpelu, 2021). The agency has come under renewed attack given the forensic audit report that was submitted to the presidency in 2021. The report among other horrifying accusations was that the agency kept over 300 bank accounts and has over 13000 abandoned, unverified, and poorly executed projects. This is despite the allocation of 6 trillion naira that the agency received between 2000 and 2019, (Premium Times, 2021). A report by the auditor-general of the federation shows that between 2008 and 2018, about N90.9 billion that was meant to execute 176 projects cannot be accounted for (Akinpelu, 2021). The report further shows the level of corruption in the agency to the extent that projects that were awarded were either abandoned, poorly executed or not carried out at all.

### **NDDC under Buhari's Watch**

Since the creation of NDDC in 2001 down to 2022, it is on record that the agency have executed over 8000 projects across the nine states in the region, many of these projects are either abandoned or uncompleted. The Buhari administration alone has completed about 2,506 of these projects. This is certainly a feat for a single

administration under seven years (Nwosu, 2022; see Table 2). The Buhari administration in its bid to address the many drawbacks affecting the agency ordered a forensic audit investigation into the activities of the agency. The emanated report shows widespread non-compliance with the Procurement Act and financial fraud from its top leadership. Aside identifying the many problems bedevilling the agency inability to meet its objectives, the administration has also appropriated money to the agency to embark on some developmental projects. Under the present administration of president Buhari, the Ministry of Niger Delta Affairs which oversees the activities of the NDDC, has received N178 billion from 2015 to 2022, (Morgan, 2022). This has enabled the ministry and agency to embark on several projects ranging from roads construction, electrification, portable water facilities, provision of 288 transformers, thousands of solar-powered street lamp posts, and multi-skills acquisition centre with 500 student capacity in the nine Niger delta states among others. Following the dissolution of the agency former board, a new board was inaugurated on January 2023 with Ms Lauretta Onoche as the chairperson. This follows the appointment of Umana Okon Umana as the Minister of Niger Delta Affairs in 2022.

However, issues of corruption has continued to negate the activities of both the agency and the ministry. For instance, though cleared of the allegation by the National Assembly, the Minister of Niger Delta Affairs, Umana Okon Umana who was appointed in 2022 was accused of high-handedness and 480 billion fraud (Oyeyemi, 2022; The Sun, 2022). Such accusation have not engendered confidence and trust from the people of the region who have always considered NDDC as a conduit pipe for corruption and politics. In any case evidence on ground shows that their activities have not resulted to a reduction of poverty, unemployment and improvement in the health of the people.

**Table 2. Projects by State (2001-2022) Projects by Category (2001-2022)**

Abia	943
Akwa Ibom	1983
Bayelsa	1440
Cross River	643
Delta	3149
Edo	1106
Imo	1313
Ondo	1144
Rivers	3750
Buildings	2471
Canalization	96
Consultancy	555
Design	6
Desilting	290
Dredging	29
Electricity	3238
Equipment	70
Furnishing	33
ICT	14
Jetty	186
NGO	0
Program	8
Reclamation/Shore Protection	336
Roads/Bridges	6501
Supply	72
Vendor	0
Water supply	1636

Source: [www.pmis.nddc.gov.ng/](http://www.pmis.nddc.gov.ng/)

Lack of funds have also been identified as a serious impediments to the realization of sustainable development projects in the region by the agency. For example, in late 2021, the federal government of Nigeria set up a committee that will help towards the recovery of \$5.6 billion and N649 billion that the commission claimed oil multinationals are owing the agency. According to the Minister of Niger Delta Affairs he was quoted as saying

At the last count, about \$5.6 billion and N649 billion are monies owed to the NDDC by oil companies. So the NDDC itself is on life support because what they get on a monthly basis is just enough to pay salaries and maintain their offices, but people are not aware (Ogune, 2021).

Like its forebears, NDDC has been a conduit for corruption which oils the palm of those with access to the central government. In their analysis of the developmental profile of the NDDC, Ekekwe and Ukachikara, (2018), contend that the NDDC has not really achieved the mandates for its establishment. Rather the situation in the region has even worsen since its establishment as the table 2 and 3 shows. There is increasing poverty and health related issues in states that host NDDC projects. This further proves that NDDC has not had any meaningful impact on the lives of the people in the region.

**Table 3. Health-Related Development Indicators In The Niger Delta, 2015**

State	Life expectancy at birth (year)	Household with access to improved sanitation facilities (%)	Health facility to population ratio
Abia	51	42.5	1:4608
Akwa Ibom	50	36.6	1:7220
Bayelsa	50	16.9	1:7342
Cross River	55	10.4	1:3936
Delta	49	22.4	1:4514
Edo	49	34.4	1:3483
Imo	53	48.2	1:2943
Ondo	52	18.0	1:4243
Rivers	48	28.0	1:1089
Average (Niger Delta)	50.7	28.6	1:4375
Average (National)	53.1	33.3	1:4097

*UNDP, (2016) cited in Ekekwe and Ukachikara, (2018)*

**Table 4. Poverty Levels And Reduction Rates At State Levels, 2003/2004 And 2009/2010**

States	2003/2004 (%)	2009/2010 (%)	% Reduction
Abia	40.9	50.2	-22.7
Akwa Ibom	56.8	51.0	10.2
Bayelsa	40.0	44.0	-10
Cross River	67.0	60.4	9.8
Delta	70.6	53.8	23.7
Edo	53.6	64.1	-19.5
Imo	46.7	39.4	15.6
Ondo	62.8	57.7	7.6
Rivers	56.7	47.2	16.7

*Bureau of Statistics (2011) cited in Ekekwe and Ukachikara, (2018)*

Table 2 shows that the Niger delta states in spite of the establishment of the NDDC have not fared better. In fact, the rest states in Nigeria that do not have interventionist agencies like NDDC seems to fare better than states in the region. For example at birth, while the average life expectancy in Nigeria stands at 53.1, it was 50.7 in the region as at 2015. Also the table shows that access to improved sanitation in Nigeria was 33.3. In the Niger Delta it was 28.6. The same argument goes for health facility and population. Again the Niger Delta region fare poorly when compare to other parts of the states put together. Table 3 also display a gloomy picture for inhabitants of the region. The table shows that in the year between 2003 and 2010, there was an increase in the poverty level of the Niger Delta states. A look at the poverty level in some of the states in the table shows that while the poverty level in 2003 in Abia, Bayelsa and Edo states were in the region of 40.9, 40.0 and 53.6, in the years beginning from 2009 to 2010, there was an increase. This is despite the creation of NDDC in 2000.

### **Explaining Interventionist Agencies Failures in Nigeria**

Lack of citizen participation, consensus orientation, accountability and transparency, all of which are features of good governance have been pointed out as a basic reason for the low performance of NDDC. From the outset of the creation of the NDDC, it was massively attacked by the people of the region who felt that they were not consulted during its drafting. One of its critic was a prominent leader of the Ijaw nation, the most populous ethnic group of the region, Chief Edwin Clark. His



sentiment was that the people of the region were not consulted before the passage of the bill and accused the bill of being defective in certain areas. (Omotola, 2007)

Adegboruwa (2022) also bemoan a situation where those who are appointed to advance the development of oil producing communities are not from these oil producing communities themselves. An example is the nomination by president Buhari of Mr. Charles Ogunmola from Owo, a non-oil producing community for the position of Executive director of projects as one of those representing Ondo State in NDDC board, a move that drew sharp criticisms from many persons including the three senators representing the state in the senate. Situations like the above have led to calls to scrap the agency with a proposed Host Communities Development Commission to be established in its stead, (Iroanusi, 2021)

Perhaps a notable failure of these interventionist agencies lies in the total disregard to address the root cause of the peoples suffering. In spite of government efforts to address the region's infrastructural problems and provision of social amenities as table 2 shows, available evidences show that it has not worked out. A basic reason advanced in this paper is that any efforts to develop the region without due regard to the environment will at best brings marginal results. This is because the major cause of the region's woes stems from oil exploration and the negative impacts it has had on the people's livelihood. The Niger Delta region faces grave threats from the noncompliance of environmental laws by operating oil companies in the region. The non-compliance with environmental laws by oil films in the Niger Delta region has impeded sustainable development. Absence of adequate remediation efforts has reduced the resilient quality or capacity of the land for agriculture leading to poor harvest.

It is however worthy to note that though the tackling of ecological and environmental degradation features prominently in NDDC establishing Act, it has been the least attended to by the agency. The Act specifically demands the agency to "tackle ecological and environmental problems that arise from the exploration of oil mineral in the Niger-Delta area and advise the Federal Government and the member States on the prevention and control of oil spillages gas flaring and environmental pollution".

The last five decades have witnessed the disastrous impact of oil exploration in the region which seriously threatens the region's subsistent peasant population, (Eregha & Irughe, 2009). Continued destruction of the ecosystem of the region will defeat any effort at developing the region in sustainable ways that ensures livelihood

opportunities and environmental justice especially for the poor. Therefore it is normal that the Nigerian government tackles the incessant destruction of the people's environment by ensuring that the laws guiding it, are complied with.

The position of this paper is that while interventionist agencies are a welcome idea, it should not override the pressing need to address environmental discontinuities caused through oil pollution. If the people are the cause of environmental degradation in the region then such interventionist agencies will help to reduce the stress on the environment. But the major cause of ecological disaster and poverty in the region are oil exploratory activities. Attempts therefore to bypass or overlook the activities of the oil companies are a major blunder in government efforts to address the volatile state of the region. The non-implementation and subsequent non-compliance to environmental laws is a major challenge to sustainable development as sustainable development depends on the ability of government to ensure that laws governing the protection of the environment are strictly adhered to.

### **Environmental Degradation and Poverty**

Several empirical studies have been conducted which show the link between environmental degradation and poverty, (Abang, 1995; Agabi 1995; Omotor, 2000; DFID, 2001; DFID, 2002). The environment is the source of food for earth inhabitants. It provides shelter, food and clothing. More directly, it is the source of survival as many people rely on it for their basic needs. Therefore, any form of development that is directed towards lifting the people from their state of poverty will surely fail if there is no deliberate policy aimed towards preserving the quality of the environment.

The cyclical nature of poverty or the symbiotic relationship it has with the environment cannot be ignored. There is a growing consensus that poverty is one of the primary cause of ecological disaster or degradation. Therefore the recommended panacea is that elected leaders should address the rate of poverty among the population in order to reduce pressure on the human environment. This is in fact the thrust of the Brundtland report in 1987. This view was also collaborated by the World Bank (1992) when it noted that, "poor families who have to meet short term needs mine the natural capital by excessive cutting of trees for firewood and failure to replace soil nutrients". Same sentiments were shared by a former Asian Development Bank's chief, Jalal (1993) in positing that "It is generally accepted that environmental degradation, rapid population growth and stagnant production are

closely linked with the fast spread of acute poverty in many countries of Asia". Thus from the outset, it seems that poverty and poor people have been seen as not victims but culprits of environmental degradation.

However in recent times this conventional notion of the link between poverty and environmental degradation has been challenged as too simplistic and one that does not take account of other causal factors like greed, wealth, corruption, institutional and market failure as more viable explanation, (Leach and Mearns, 1995; Duraiappah, 1996). For example, Duraiappah, (1996) research shows that while poverty may cause environmental degradation it is more likely that such cause is the result of rent seeking behaviour from the elite class and other factors like institutional failure which impoverished the citizens and leads them to exert pressure on the environment. This view tallies with the conclusions reached by Dasgupta (1993), that institutional failure causes environmental degradation and results to a situation where the elites or wealthy class are empowered to 'exploit the resource base at unsustainable rates' majorly because the poor lack the resources to significantly degrade the environment, (Jeganatha, 1989; Jodha, 1989). In the Niger Delta for example, the above argument has found an outlet in the sense that the depreciation of the environment, more or less is the result of oil exploitation fuelled by the rent seeking behaviours of Nigerian elite class. This has brought about absolute poverty to the inhabitants of the Niger Delta.

It is true that poverty plays significant role in degrading the environment. This is understandable because, poverty can lead to greater pressure on the environment for instance through deforestation and unsustainable environmental practices. However any policies directed towards addressing the problem of poverty and the environment must first of all determine what causes the other. It seems that this is the reason why interventionist policies by the Nigerian government has continually failed to address the Niger Delta region. As earlier shown in this section, interventionist agencies have largely failed in their developmental projects because it has defined the peoples poverty in isolation from the environment or do not see oil exploitation and its impacts as the primary cause of the poverty of the people. This is why in prescribing solutions to the poverty-environment debates, Duraiappah, (1996) prescribed an approach that must first strive to understand the causes of environmental degradation and poverty, failure to do so, might lead to a prescription that could be counterproductive.

## Conclusion/Recommendations

A peaceful environment is a *sin qua non* to sustainable development and the pursuit of sustainable development cannot be achieved under a restive situation. Hence it is vital that oil companies approach to environmental issues and corporate social responsibility must reflect a commitment to preserve the quality of the environment. There are certain forces that have drastically limited the capacity of the Nigeria government to act against the wanton destruction of the Niger Delta region to ensure its sustainable development. The paper has highlighted some internal constraints and institutional shortcomings that have made ecological disaster a common feature of oil production in Nigeria. However, this can be overcome or at best reduced if the government is committed to addressing the poverty of the people by making sure there is wide compliance with its environmental laws. The objectives of interventionist agencies will be easily achievable if the causes of the people's poverty, the environment is given due consideration in any efforts to develop the Niger Delta region.

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