

Economic and Social Council

*Measures to Quell the
Violence Arising from
the Niger Delta
Conflict*

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INTRODUCTION

ECOSOC, which stands for the Economic and Social Council, is in charge of taking care of economic, social, cultural and health matters as well as human rights and fundamental freedoms. It also coordinates the work of the UN and the specialized agencies. It is composed of 54 members, 18 of which are elected each year by the General Assembly for a three-year term (“UN Documentation: Economic...”, 2018). The Secretary-General reports to ECOSOC on issues called for by resolutions, such as:

1. development
2. economic indicators
3. coordination within the UN system (“UN Documentation: Economic...”, 2018).

The Niger Delta, occupying 7.5% of the total land area of Nigeria (70,000km²) and with approximately 30 million inhabitants (and quickly increasing), is a region that now faces catastrophic problems that put at risk its vast resources. The Niger Delta region accounts for over 90% of Nigeria’s proven gas and oil reserves, and the sector currently provides the Federal Government more than 90% of its foreign exchange.

As a region abundant in fossil fuels and minerals, the current conflict in the Niger Delta is driven by a mixture of weak governance, systemic corruption, underdevelopment, political marginalisation and economic inequality. As an aftermath of these unsolved conflicts, inhabitants of the Niger Delta face issues such as lack of energy, poor governance, gas flaring and most importantly: oil pollution (“The Niger Delta”, n.d.) fueling the counterproductive circumstances that one of the richest regions in the world faces.

As a problem that started decades ago, social and ecological repercussions have penetrated the region. Mostly, oil companies have been accused of increasing this conflict by significantly damaging one of the most fertile regions in the world. Government repression to their opponents has originated catastrophic effects turning people powerless in front of the State and oil companies while being unable to influence social, political and economic factors that determine their wellbeing (“The Niger Delta”, n.d.). Ethnic groups have protested against the significant damage to their communities originated by the major oil companies like Shell, Mobil and other

companies that prosper at their expense (Hallmark, 2017). Oil companies are fearless, unintimidated corporations that will not leave the territory because of the simple fact that taking oil from dangerous regions is not a novelty nowadays.

Adding to this disappointing situation, the Nigerian government has attempted to quell the rebel attacks with a combination of military force and appeasement over the last 10 years, being mostly ineffective (Hallmark, 2017). As a result, rebel groups like Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force (NDPVF), People's Liberation Force (PLF), Niger Delta Survival Movement (NDSM), and others (Malina, 2010) have originated as opposition groups that organize and engage in acts of violence and terrorism directed at oil interests. These attacks have caused the deterioration of society and furthermore, millionaire costs (in dollars) in Nigeria's oil production.

As a response, in 2009 the Nigerian government announced an amnesty program, which paid MEND militants millions of dollars and released their leader from jail, causing MEND to declare a ceasefire. As an outcome, many members laid down their arms and for the most part, the group ceased active operations (Hallmark, 2017). Similarly, an independent scientific assessment carried out by the United Nations Environment Programme, UNEP, over a 14 month period has shown the evident impacts of pollution, overall stating that it could take 25 to 30 years, with an initial investment of \$1 billion just for the first five years, to clean up pollution from more than 50 years of oil operations in the Niger Delta ("Cleaning up Nigerian...", 2011). Despite the fact that Nigeria is the world's 8th largest producer of crude oil the country remains as one of the poorest nowadays that face the resurgence of new opposition groups. Simultaneously people stay in a raw reality where the government fails to deliver even the most basic of development needs to a population living on top of one of the world's largest deposits of oil and gas.

HISTORY OF THE PROBLEM

During the last decades, oil companies have caused a social, economic, political and environmental problem inside the region of the Niger Delta. Niger Delta militants have no ties to radical Islamic groups like al-Qaeda or ISIS and have shown little or no interest in risking or murdering the innocent. However, drill sites, pipelines, tankers and facilities have become targets of these groups in order to stifle oil

production and cripple the Nigerian government economically (Hallmark, 2017). While the conflict hasn't gotten as much attention in the press as it deserves simply because international oil companies working in dangerous places is not a novelty, Nigeria's oil production and economy including world oil markets and oil prices stand in a danger zone.

In the late 1980s, several indigenous tribal groups began raising concerns about international oil company operations in the Niger Delta, a region of about 27,000 square miles. The Ogoni and other ethnic groups such as the Ijaws, Itserikis, Urhobos, Isikos, Liages, Ikwerres, Ekpeyes and Ogulaghas complained that Shell, Mobil and other oil companies were prospering at their expense, as the ethnic groups saw little of the wealth generated by the oil production, while suffering the fallout from widespread environmental degradation caused by exploration and production efforts (Hallmark, 2017).

As protests started to rise, the Nigerian government faced their first involvement in the issue during November 1995 when main activists such as Ken Saro-Wiwa, leader of the Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP), were hanged by the government. As an aftermath, the Niger Delta opposition groups were radicalized and began to organize and engage in acts of violence and terrorism directed at oil interests (Hallmark, 2017). Over the next decade, loosely-formed rebel groups focused on kidnappings and "bunkering" (stealing oil from pipelines and selling it locally or on the larger world market) (Hallmark, 2017).

In early 2006, the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) led by Henry Okah, originated while altering the ongoing climate in the region. MEND gave the fierce appearance of being a large, well-organized and coordinated group. As an estimated 100,000 militant group, their goal was to destroy the Nigerian government's ability to produce and export oil, and to make it clear that the government could not protect oil company personnel or assets (Hallmark, 2017). MEND engaged in any kind of attack linked to oil in the Niger Delta, especially kidnappings, along with a few killings of oil company personnel. It even took the attacks offshore, targeting platforms, tankers and FPSOs (Floating Production, Storage and Offloading vessels). Overall, these attacks meant a high cost for the Nigerian government as billions of dollars in lost oil earnings (Hallmark, 2017).

Over the last 10 years, the Nigerian government attempted to quell the rebel attacks with a combination of military force and appeasement, being generally

ineffective (Hallmark, 2017). In 2009, the government declared an amnesty program, which paid MEND militants millions of dollars and released Henry Okah from jail while in return, MEND declared a ceasefire (Hallmark, 2017).

In February 2016, a new group, the Niger Delta Avengers (NDA), emerged on the scene. Smaller than MEND but with the same goals, the attacks have had the same crippling effect on Nigeria's oil production as those by MEND: a drop of 800,000 barrels per day in 2016, from 2.2 million barrels per day to 1.4 million, the lowest production level in 25 years (Hallmark, 2017).

While these issues remain unsolved, government and private enterprise meet less than 10% of the energy needs of the region ("The Niger Delta", n.d.). The high cost of running generators and lack of sustainable alternatives is a significant obstacle to economic diversification of the Niger Delta. For the people of the Niger Delta this is particularly contradictory as vast amounts of oil and gas are taken daily from beneath their feet and gas flares burn billions of dollars worth of useful gas over their heads that could easily provide electricity. Simultaneously, gas flared every day in the Niger Delta is equivalent to the daily gas consumption of Brazil. This multi-billion-dollar waste not only leaves communities without effective energy solutions, but remaining as the single, biggest contributor to CO₂ emissions in Africa ("The Niger Delta", n.d.).

Adding to the severity of this context, 79% of Nigeria's urban population live in slums due to 'slum clearance', leading to mass displacement and social dislocation, being too often the government's response to the complex challenges of cities. This complex situation reflects the governance failure when managing substantial resources (in this case hundreds of billions of US dollars of oil receipts) being dissipated for personal gain ("The Niger Delta", n.d.) rather than used to improve health, education and developmental infrastructure.

CURRENT SITUATION

As already established, the Niger Delta, which is composed of the states of Delta, Bayelsa and Rivers, has a strategic location along the Gulf of Guinea which puts it on top of the most enormous, high quality oil reserves in the entire country (Malina, 2010). This places a spotlight over the Niger Delta, the most envied territory of all Africa, and leads people to inevitably fight over its natural resources.

In theory, the Delta State should be one of the wealthiest countries in Africa, however the territory is plagued with armed groups and insurgent individuals fighting against each other over territory's good concentrating in the illegal trade of crude oil. These fights are mainly caused by decades of neglect by the Nigerian government's corruption, which is considered the main route of all their economical, social, and environmental issues creating an unbalance in society resulting in social movements and protest from civils to armed groups (Malina, 2010). Currently, corruption is widespread and the environmental impact caused by the MNCs (Multinational Corporations) operating in the states has alienated and marginalized the local population allowing these groups to proliferate during the last couple of years. The MNCs have offered monetary compensation for the appropriated and polluted lands, yet this has led to an inter-communal and inter-ethnic violence within the members of the state creating an inner conflict between the government and society. Citizens states that the monetary compensation will not solve their current situation since they will not be able to fix their homes of to fix the environmental damages caused by the foreign companies. Currently one of the most recognized inner conflicts going on is between the Ijaws and the Itsekisih in the Warri area of the Delta State. Despite the fact that this issue is one of the best now around the world it has not come to a close end or solution. Ever since the discovery of oil, this ethnic conflict has been magnified primarily by the desire to get control over the resources. Additionally, the conflict is fueled by a political dispute over the borders, creating fights to become the main leader with benefits of the Delta. (Malina, 2010)

Although its tremendous resource wealth should make the Delta one of Western Africa's most prosperous regions, things have been getting complicated over the last years. The Niger Delta has been undergoing a series of political, social and environmental issues that has lead most citizens sustain themselves through criminal activities such as piracy, kidnapping and oil theft since it has become almost impossible to find job opportunities around the field (Malina, 2010). One of the major criminal activities undergoing this country is the oil theft within the citizens as well as the government. Nowadays it is estimated that the amount of stolen oil is higher than 5 to 10 % of the Nigeria's total national product affecting the government production and at the same time the nation's economy, creating a vicious cycle affecting everyone in it (Malina, 2010).

In an effort to combat oil bunkering in 2003 the Nigerian government began to increase its military presence to protect not only the society as well as the oil to ensure the nation's security. This initiative culminated in the year 2008 with the deployment of a Joint Task Force, however the government's strategy did not work since some military personnel took the opportunity to form part in the illicit trade putting everyone else once again into the cycle. Additionally, report of extortions, rapte and the general intimidation by the security forces have drove youths into forming part of this armed groups (Malina, 2010).

The following list shows the main military groups at the time and the present day:

MEND: Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta

FNDIC: Federal Niger Delta Ijaw Communities

“General” Boyloaf

Outlaws

NDSF: Niger Delta Strike Force

NDPVF: Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force

NDV: Niger Delta Vigilantes

PLF: People's Liberation Force

NDSM: Niger Delta Survival Movement

(Malina, 2010)

The violence cause by both the militants and society, was initially directed at the MNCs, yet the attempt of the JTF, Joint Task Force, to curtail the militants led to an increase of violence between the militants and the army. Moreover, the Nigerian government has not express any concerns or even virtually presence in the region, creating a more unstable environment (Malina, 2010).

In 2009, in the aim of killing the violent insurgency, the Nigerian Presidency implemented an amnesty in which it is offered a clean state to militants in which its demands for resource control, environmental justice and a sustainable socio-economic development had resulted in a massive regional disruption. (Golden-Timsar, 2018)

The amnesty was originally designed to last a period of five years, but it has remained since. The amnesty program was introduced as a disarmament, demobilization and reintegration program to eradicate the increase of violence. (Golden-Timsar, 2018)

Approximately 30000 people in the Niger Delta enrolled in the Presidential Amnesty Program as ex-militant yet only 2, 700 weapons were surrendered. Some militant, fearing the program and its potential repercussions, found three main potentially problems of the amnesty, which are the following:

- Reinforcement of militant hierarchies and commodifications of violence
- Substitution of militancy for criminality and ongoing communal tensions
- Professionalization of illegal oil lifting of Nigeria's current production

(Golden-Timsar, 2018)

UN ACTIONS

In August of 2011 the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) carried out an independent scientific assessment over a 14-month period. The aim of the assessment was to demonstrate that the cleaning up the Nigerian oil pollution could take around 25 to 30 years; plus the cost of billions of dollars for the restoration of the environment impact without considering the damage of approximately 1 million people.

After a specialized agency team examined the region of over 200 locations, surveyed 122 kilometers of pipeline rights of way, analyzed 4,000 samples of soil and water, reviewed 500 medical records, and engaged over 23,000 people at local communities, they concluded that there was more pollution than previously thought.

The UNEP hoped that the research findings would create an impact on the government as well as on the communities to create consciousness on the issue for later on create a real change in society. The results will create a deadlock, meaning that the government will not be able to escape fact taking action on the issue, this at the same time will develop a sense of trust on the society.

The final report was presented to the Nigerian President to take action on the issue and it contained the previous findings and the following additional information and proposals:

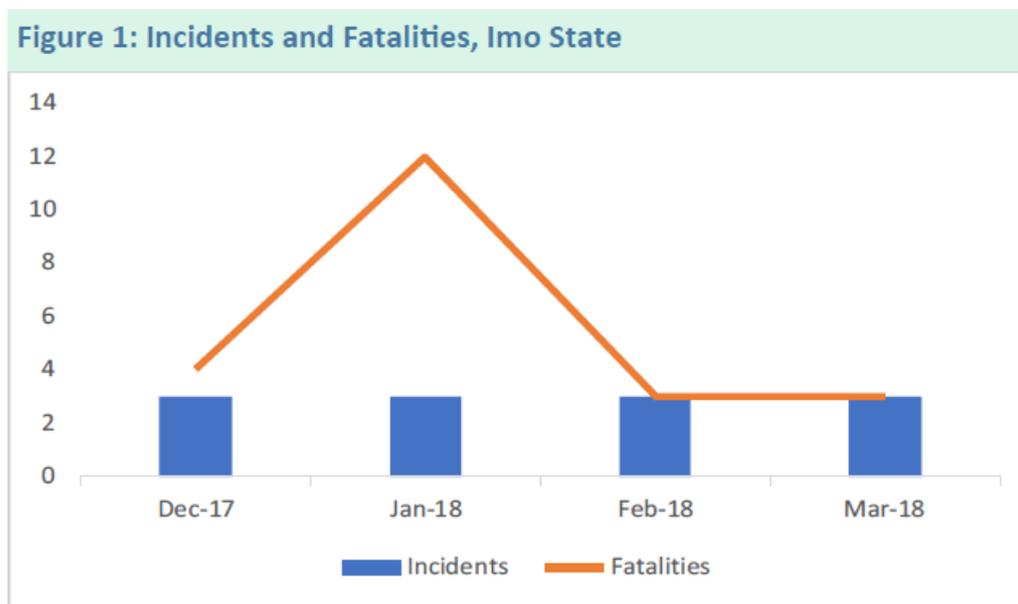
- The establishment of an Ogoniland Environmental Restoration Authority. The program will be financial by an initial capital injection of \$ 1 billion from the oil industry and the government in order to cover the first five years of the the restoration project.

- The establishment of a hundred of mini-centers will be implemented to treat contaminated soils and at the same time it will create hundreds of job opportunities for the member of the community.
- The implementation of a center to promote the learning and benefits to other communities impacted by the oil contamination.

(“Cleaning up Nigerian...”, 2011)

Since 2017 a monthly tracker has been designed to update Peace Agents, the government as well as the citizens to find patterns and trends in conflict risk and violence in the Niger Delta. The last results are the following:

Niger Delta Conflict Tracker (2017-2018)



The results shows a drastic change in fatalities yet the numbers of incidents have remained neutral.

(NDLinkAdmin, 2018)

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

As previously mentioned, the Niger Delta Conflict has been an issue that emerged decades ago and has become one of the most relevant global issues today. Currently, millions of citizens are living afraid and threatened by the armed groups and by any actions the government can possibly take.

With the purpose of helping those in need and solving this issue the Economic and Social Council proposes the following solutions, which could be taken in consideration during the debate:

1. Allow a negotiation between the government and the radical groups, offering compensation and clean-up for the environmental impacts and damage of their homes, including new job opportunities.
2. Approach or revise, the old and new settlements of amnesty, focusing on the prevention of future issues with the management of natural resources in the region.
3. The establishment of a UN commission in the Niger Delta region in charge of making sure the new settlements are followed. Furthermore, the UN would uphold these new standards and agreements in any place in the world who requires it.
4. Create a partnership between the Ministry of Niger Delta Affairs and the World Bank in order to develop a master plan on the restoration and protection of the areas in response to the need to encourage economic activities as well as the protection of the environmental degradation.

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