

## ARTICLE

# An Analytical Evaluation of the Cost of the Conflict in Nigeria's Niger Delta

Abosede Omowumi Babatunde

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## Abstract

This paper examines the nature and magnitude of the cost of the perennial oil-related conflicts in the Niger Delta. Data collected from field survey and literature were utilised. The costs of the conflicts ranged from loss of lives and property, negative impact on welfare of the people, reduction in oil production and revenue generation, to a general state of insecurity. Government conflict management strategies in the Niger Delta have been defective. An integrated bottom-up participatory process that secures the quality of life of the people and protects the environment is the path to sustainable peace and development in the Niger Delta.

## Keywords

oil exploitation, violent conflict, cost of conflict, conflict management, Niger Delta, Nigeria

## INTRODUCTION

Nigeria, sub-Saharan Africa's largest oil producer, is a classic illustration of natural resources as a developmental trap. Nigeria produces approximately two million barrels of crude oil per day (Human Rights Watch, 1999). Proven oil reserves in Nigeria are currently estimated to be 25 billion barrels. The current production capacity of 2.6 million barrels per day is expected to rise to 3 million barrels in the next few years (Iwayemi, 2006). Nigeria has earned an estimated \$340 billion over the past 40 years. Oil accounts for over 83 % of Federal Government revenue, more than 95 % of export earning and approximately 40 % of GDP (Onimode, 2001; Onosode, 2003; Imobigbe, 2004).

However, the Nigerian oil economy has remained largely underdeveloped and its citizens, particularly those in the oil-producing communities are impoverished. Equally disturbing is the incidence of unrest fuelled by oil exploitation in Nigeria and other mineral dependent countries in Africa such as Sudan, Algeria, Angola and the Republic of Congo. While oil exploitation is the main cause of the restiveness in the Nigeria's Niger Delta region,

in the other oil-dependent African states, oil revenues have provided the resources for all sides in the wars and conditioned the intensity of the fighting (Imobigbe, 2004). I argue in this article that economic deprivation and inequality in the Niger Delta oil region of Nigeria engender grievances manifested in different forms of violence. The cost of this violence is enormous in terms of human lives, displacement of people and material destruction. The incessant crisis in the Niger Delta could have more serious consequences in the near future, for Nigeria and for the international oil market.

The link between conflict and natural resources, such as oil and diamonds, has attracted a plethora of studies but there is a lack of consensus on the nature of their relationship. Researchers at the World Bank link violent conflict in countries with abundant natural resources to greedy citizens who take up arms to capture these resources. Collier and Hoeffler (2000) suggest that countries whose wealth is largely dependent on the exportation of primary commodities are highly prone to civil violence. They further argue that conflict may be explained either by grievance or greed and conclude that if we want to understand the



causes of contemporary civil wars we should ignore explanations based on grievances and look instead at the greed of rebel groups.

However, by claiming that violent conflict is a result of the greed of rebels, the research promotes a bias against rebel groups, and ignores the role that governments play in promoting violence, even with evidence from situations in African countries such as Sudan, Algeria and Angola, which points to the role of the state in fostering conflicts. In the case of the Niger Delta, the negative impact of oil has severely affected the traditional means of livelihood and created a propensity for conflict and violence. Oil-related activities have affected people's livelihoods, food security, personal security, and physical and mental health.

From the early 1990s, many of the Niger Delta states have assumed the characteristics of a conflict-ridden region. There has been a cycle of protests and conflicts in the Niger Delta, notably in the Bayelsa, Delta and Rivers states. Youth restiveness was the major factor in these protests (Human Rights Watch, 1999, 2002; Ukeje et al., 2002; Imobighe et al., 2002; Imobighe, 2004). Communal disturbances have become a persistent feature of the Niger Delta. These disturbances come in the form of conflict between oil communities and oil companies, between communities or ethnic groups and within communities. In whatever form it may take, these conflicts are invariably tied to oil one way or another. In all these conflicts, the main instruments of violence have been the marginalised and alienated youth groups in the region. Most of the local people lack the skills required to be employed by the oil companies, since the industry is technologically driven, capital intensive and less reliant on human labour. If they are employed at all, it is in the most menial and poorly-paid jobs, where they suffer the indignity of seeing outsiders arrive to take pre-eminence over them in the oil industry. Therefore, the oil communities perceive the oil companies' action as a deliberate policy of exclusion, even though most people are not qualified to be gainfully employed by the oil industry.

The activities of the aggrieved youths, in the form of pipeline vandalism, oil bunkering, piracy, hostage taking and inter-community hostilities, have often provoked counter-violence of a more destructive nature from the country's security forces. These conflicts have not only given rise to human displacement and loss of lives and property on a massive scale, but they also pose a serious threat to national security and economic prosperity in Nigeria. This paper analyses the magnitude of the cost of the oil-induced violent conflict in the Niger Delta region. It specifically evaluates the cost of the conflict to the major stakeholders in oil activities. It also examines and reviews competing analyses of the nature and cause of the intractable conflicts in Nigeria's Niger Delta. Finally, it explores the Nigerian government's conflict management strategies as it seeks to find ways to resolve the conflict. In the light of this, there is an urgent need for concerted efforts to find an

enduring solution to the intractable crisis in the Nigeria's Niger Delta.

## NATURE AND CAUSE OF THE NIGER DELTA CONFLICT

Several arguments have been advanced as to why conflict is rampant in the oil-producing areas of the Niger Delta. A key factor repeatedly cited in the literature is that conflict is linked to oil being exploited in the region. The devastation wreaked on the environment by the oil-producing communities, a major grievance of the people whose livelihood is threatened by oil exploitation, has been reflected in the various studies on these communities (Iwayemi, 1991, 1995; Isumonah, 1998; Okonta and Douglas, 2001; Onosode, 2003; International Crisis Group, 2006).

In particular, Onosode (2003) examined the general oil and gas exploitation-induced conflicts in the Niger Delta, their intensity and the growth of environmental concern, all of which are linked to the politics of resource ownership, its mode of appropriation and its use. He noted that the critical issues of environmental pollution, resource rampage and degradation, and socio-economic, cultural and psychological dislocation in the Delta have constantly raised both local and international interest. The findings of the research generally suggest that the prospects of producing areas have been affected by both the character of modifications introduced in revenue sharing and the management and implementation of the proportion allotted to derivation for the producing areas over the years. Also, the plight of the oil minorities has become a global concern. Indeed, the study raised critical issues on the challenges facing the oil-producing areas. However, there is a need for further empirical investigations on the issue of governance and the development of the oil-producing states of the Niger Delta.

It has been argued that the struggle by the local communities is primarily directed towards securing increased local participation in the oil business and adequate access to the oil revenues (Ogbogbo, 2004). Various ethnic militias have emerged in the oil-producing areas of the Niger Delta to challenge the activities of the oil companies. The objective of these groups is the economic and political emancipation of the Niger Delta, largely through ownership and control of its petroleum resources. Some of these groups or militias have produced charters, declarations, agendas and resolutions to express their demands. These began with the Ogoni Bill of rights in 1990, followed by the Kaiama Declaration by the Niger Delta youths, the Oron Bill of rights by the Oron people of Akwa-Ibom State and the Warri accord by the Itsekiri people of Delta State. All these charters and declarations contained various demands



for resource control. However, the genuine agitations of the youth for resource control have gradually assumed some elements of criminality. It is clear that taking hostages, initially a means of expressing grievances about the activities of oil companies, has become an avenue for obtaining monetary compensation, by payment of a ransom.

Oil exploitation has created life-threatening ecological hazards and deterioration of health and the social fabric of the inhabitants of the oil communities. The implication is that the oil industry has exploited the ecosystems for resources beyond the level of sustainability (Ashton-Jones and Douglas, 1998). The ecological problem is a reality, which has to be tackled.

Indeed, a delicate balance exists between the human population in the Niger Delta and its fragile ecosystem (Bisina, 2006). Bisina, like other writers on the issue, held the view that there is a strong feeling in the region that the rate of environmental degradation is pushing the region towards ecological disaster. It has been argued that by destroying the environment, man destroys himself and this, directly or indirectly, leads to conflict (Egunjobi, 2005). One of the basic premises of sustainable development, therefore, is the recognition that environment and development are not, in the long run, mutually reinforcing. Egunjobi based his analysis of the Ogoni-Shell crisis on the context of the pervasive under-development of the oil community coupled with the environmental pollution caused by the activities of Shell.

However, generally, oil companies always refute these allegations by oil communities, claiming that their activities are carried out according to the highest environmental standards. Oil company officials claim that they have been granting scholarships to the youths and providing infrastructure such as classrooms, healthcare facilities, water boreholes and landing jetties. Fieldwork observation revealed that oil companies in the oil-producing areas have been completely neglecting their communities and have not fulfilled their corporate social responsibility to them. Many communities reported they rarely receive sufficient compensation, or any at all, for land taken by oil companies, or rendered useless by oil spills, acid rain, and other forms of pollution. The Nigerian government, through its development commissions, claimed that, despite the difficult terrain and developmental challenges confronting the oil-producing areas of the Niger Delta, it was determined to improve the well-being of the people in the areas. The recently set-up development commission, the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC), has initiated various physical infrastructure projects and human development programmes throughout the Niger Delta region. However, these efforts did not make any significant impact on either the living or environmental conditions of the oil-producing areas, which remain pervasively poor and underdeveloped. The government development agencies focused on the provision

of physical infrastructure but failed to address human capacity development. Besides, these physical amenities were insufficient; many projects were abandoned and the few commissioned ones lacked necessary facilities.

The intensity of violent agitation by the oil-producing communities against the oil companies has increased since the early 1990s. Ukaogo (1999) lent credence to the view that communities in the Niger Delta have been in conflict with oil-producing companies in the region over allegations of widespread oil spills and gas flaring, which have undermined livelihoods and exacerbated impoverished conditions. This negative trend has angered communities in the Niger Delta, provoking armed conflict, and kidnapping of oil company personnel and seizure of their facilities. He also identified the rising incidence of hostage-taking as a means of expressing grievance in the Niger Delta. It should be emphasised that intensified conflict in this region could have implications for security in Nigeria as well as the West African sub-region. It could also disrupt gas flows to neighbours who are partners and potential beneficiaries of the West Africa Gas Pipeline Project (WAGP).

Environmental degradation resulting from oil exploitation has negatively affected the economic activities of the people, resulting in the subsequent loss of income base, thereby accentuating poverty in an area which, prior to oil exploitation, was seen as largely economically self-sufficient. In this regard, Owabukeruyele (2000), apart from highlighting the environmental factor, also attributed the root cause of the conflict that has emerged in the Niger Delta, as a result of the extraction of oil, to the violation of the rights of the local community through the promulgation of obnoxious legislations. This legislation, which includes the petroleum act of 1969 and the land use Decree/Act of 1978, regulated community access to communal or open access land, and they were primarily promulgated to restrict access to such land, while making it possible for multinational oil companies to have unrestricted access to explore for oil unchallenged, even on sacred land. The research generally suggests that, as the available land gets smaller, the struggle for its ownership and control increases while the potential conflict over ownership of land increases.

A critical examination of the nature of the Niger Delta crises has been conducted by Imobighe (2004) and Ukeje (2001). In particular, Imobighe explored the monstrous nature of conflict in the Niger Delta. He alleged that oil production in the Niger Delta, instead of spreading contentment and harmony in the region, has brought about frustration and a complex multi-level conflict which has persisted for a very long time, and has, since March 2003, escalated into unprecedented inter-communal violence of the most destructive nature. It is important to note that youths are at the centre of the violence project that has become recurrent and intensive in the oil-producing areas of the Niger Delta. Ukeje (2001) sought to "bring the youth back" into the discourse on violence in the Delta region. In



his opinion, youth played a pivotal role in conceptualizing and giving expression to community moods and feelings, transforming these into useful resources for political action that invariably included, but hardly ever started, with violence.

## COST OF THE CONFLICT TO THE NIGERIAN STATE AND OIL MULTINATIONALS

In Nigeria and other oil-dependent countries in Africa such as Congo, Sudan, Chad and Angola, the ownership of enormous oil resources played a pivotal role in the crises and insurrections that have engulfed these countries. In general terms, oil-producing countries tend to be unaccountable, and, therefore, misappropriation, corruption and plunder are common. The Transparency International 2007 corruption perceptions index stated that, over the decades, around \$20 to 40 billion has been illegally and corruptly appropriated from some of the oil-rich countries in Africa, by politicians, soldiers, business-persons and other leaders, and kept abroad in the form of cash, stocks and bonds, real estate and other assets. In addition, oil-induced conflict has created instability, disrupted crude oil production and revenue and increased defence spending (Fearon, 2005). In Nigeria, Angola and Sudan, the availability of substantial onshore production makes oil companies vulnerable to attacks by insurgent groups who are agitating for control over the resources in their country because of marginalisation and environmental dislocation, brought about as a result of oil exploitation activities. Where oil is produced onshore, or where surface pipelines are present, bunkering – the theft of oil from wells and pipelines – has become a growing problem for the oil companies (Wolf Christian, 2004)

Attacks on oil facilities by militant groups, particularly MEND (Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta) since December 2005, including a spate of oil worker kidnappings, have forced oil production shutdowns of up to 800,000 barrels per day, threatening Nigerian government plans to double production to 4,000,000 barrels per day by 2010 (International Crisis Group, 2006). As a result, the entire region has been militarised. The navy has guarded oil installations and escorted oil shipments since the late 1990s. The Joint Task Force on the Niger Delta, Operation Restore Hope, has about 4,000 military personnel deployed in the region (Ogwuda et al., 2004; Omonobi, 2004).

The theft of processed crude oil involves the vandalism of pipelines. The Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) reported that there were 114 line breaks in the Port Harcourt and Warri areas of its distribution network between April and May 2000 alone. The NNPC,

in collaboration with the Nigerian Police Force, arrested about 589 persons and investigated 101 cases of pipeline vandalism between April 2000 and December 2001. Industry experts have estimated that the amount of crude oil Nigeria loses to illegal bunkering ranges from 70,000 to 300,000 barrels per day, which is the equivalent output of a small oil-producing country. In its 2006 annual report, Shell Nigeria estimated illegal bunkering losses at 20,000 to 40,000 barrels per day in 2005, down from 40,000 to 60,000 in 2004. In a December 2005 report, the Washington-based Council on Foreign Relations Independent Task Force calculated that a loss of just 70,000 barrels a day at a price of \$60 a barrel would generate over \$1.5 billion per year, which is enough to fund arms trafficking and buy political influence.

In 2004, the Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force (NDPVF), led by Alhaji Dokubo Asari, threatened to unleash war on the state if the government refused to give greater control of the region's vast oil resources to the Ijaw people. And the incessant clashes between the NDPVF and a rival armed group, the Niger Delta Vigilante (NDV), led by Ateke Tom, provoked an immediate response from multinational oil companies, global financier markets, and Nigerian government officials. Shell Petroleum Development Company, which produces about half of Nigeria's approximately 2.1 million barrels per day (bpd) production, shut down a facility that produces around 28,000 bpd because security concerns prevented the company from travelling to the area to fix a technical problem. The threat of supply disruption rattled already twitchy oil markets and helped push global crude prices above an unprecedented 50 US dollars a barrel (Human Rights Watch 2005).

There are varying estimates of the quantity of crude oil that is stolen daily. Some estimate that between 10% and 15% of national daily production is stolen, ranging from 75 to 300 million bpd per day. In 2001, Shell lost on average about 30,000 bpd. The losses to Shell increased to 100,000 by 2002. The other oil companies lost about 100,000 bpd. Total losses to the nation in 2002 were about 200,000 bpd which was almost 10% of the total production of approximately 2 million bpd (Oduniyi, 2003). Shell alone lost about 100,000 bpd, a total of 9 million barrels, in 2003. It is also estimated that the nation loses about 3.5 billion USD annually. Profits in excess of 1 billion USD are said to be made from the illegal business annually (Oduniyi, 2003).

The attack on Nigerian navy units guarding the Shell facility, the kidnapping of four foreign contractors and blowing up of pipelines, in January 2006, led to a \$1 a barrel jump in world oil prices (International Crisis Group, 2006). The special Adviser to former President Olusegun Obasanjo on petroleum matters, revealed in 2004 that 300,000 barrels of crude oil, an equivalent of \$8.5 million a day, are lost to illegal pipeline tapping, and the volume of crude oil spilled per incident can be as high as \$5 million. In 2003, vandalism of oil equipment left a bill of



\$5.8 billion to the oil operators and the government. Lastly, from 1999 to 2003, oil industry production deferment led to a loss of 6.8 billion dollars.

Indeed, the perennial violent conflict in the Niger Delta region has significantly affected the level of crude oil production and revenue generation, caused national insecurity and an increase in defence spending (Human Rights Watch, 1999, 2002, 2005). However, the recent amnesty programme of the Yar'Adua Government has led to temporary ceasing of hostility in the region. The present government of President Jonathan has sustained the amnesty programme of its predecessor. Some of the ex-militants have been sent overseas for training in various capacities, as part of the ongoing re-integration process of the programme. The implication is that multinational oil companies are able to operate in a crisis-free environment, thereby increasing oil production output. The amnesty programme is perceived as a short-term solution to the crisis in the Niger Delta. The youth militants have threatened to renew hostilities even after accepting the amnesty, accusing the government of insincerity in their management of the conflict and development of the region.

## COST OF THE CONFLICT TO THE OIL-BEARING COMMUNITIES

In the oil-producing areas of the Niger Delta states, the negative impact of oil production has severely affected the traditional means of livelihood of the people and created a propensity for conflict and violence. This area has witnessed both violent intra and inter-communal or ethnic conflicts and clashes with oil companies in which the core issues involved have not been resolved. Among the oil-related conflicts in the Niger Delta is that between the Ijaw in Nembe/Kalabari, Basambiri/Ogbolomari, and Okpoma/Brass in Bayelsa state. In Ondo state, there is the Ilaje/Ijaw conflict. Also, inter-ethnic conflict was witnessed between Ogoni/Adoni, Ogoni/Okrika in Rivers State (Human Rights Watch, 1999, 2002, 2005; Environmental Rights Action, 2000; Imobighe, 2004; Iwayemi, 2006). These clashes are usually caused by conflicts over ownership of land where oil wells are located, and claims to oil company compensation and contracts. The violent inter-communal and inter-ethnic conflicts have led to more loss of lives and property than conflict within community or ethnic group and between community and the oil companies or government.

Incessant conflict in the oil-producing areas has taken a toll on the people, particularly the women and children who have been internally displaced: the psychosocial impact on them is enormous (Obi, 1998; Isumonah, 1998). The consequences of the violent conflict may range from disruption of children's education because of insecurity

and displacement and the inability to cater for the children as a result of disruption of economic activities, to exposure to trauma and diseases. The internal displacement caused by the violent conflict has resulted in loss of livelihood in the form of physical, financial, human, social and economic assets (Ukeje, 2001; Ojo, 2002).

The result of the state management of the economy of conflict has taken an enormous toll on the region in terms of loss of life and property, livelihood as well as physical infrastructures. The state security agencies have been accused of wanton recklessness, ruthlessness, brutality and excessive force.

The state security agencies have been known to attack and indiscriminately shoot in towns and villages, burn property and raze communities. They also kill, torture, flog and rape civilians and protesters (Human Rights Watch, 1999). People in the communities have been forced to flee, thereby creating and swelling internal displacements. For a long time, oil companies hid behind the shield of security agencies rather than institute a regime of corporate responsibility and sensitivity to host communities. It is alleged that some of the oil companies purchase arms, as well as provide logistics and support for state security agencies in their repression and brutality against community members (Onojowo, 2001). Although, difficult to verify the allegation that the oil companies provided ammunition for the state security agencies, it has been argued that these practices generated resistance by the region's citizenry and finally produced a rag-tag army of enraged, lawless and militant youths (Onojowo, 2001).

Tampering with oil pipelines and illegal bunkering has led to violence and accidental death. Thousands have died from explosions on lines tapped by oil thieves. Oil-related fires and explosions is another dimension of the environmental cost of the oil activities, which occurred quite frequently between 1993 and 2001. In the best known case, in October 1998, a pipeline exploded after a leak flooded a large area near the village of Jesse in Delta State, killing over 700 people, many of whom were women and children (The Guardian, 7 November 1998). In another of numerous similar disasters, in early May 2006, more than 200 people were killed when a pipeline exploded outside the commercial capital of Lagos. (International Crisis Group, 2006). The fires in Jesse, Oviru Court, Ijalla Swamp, Ebute Oko and other parts of the country, often the result of sabotage of oil pipelines, have wreaked havoc on human lives and the environment through the loss of several hectares of farmlands and plantations. Oil pipeline vandalism took a dramatic turn in the mid-1990s. In 1999, there were 524 cases of oil pipeline rupture, of which 497 were due to vandalism. By the end of 2000, cases of oil pipeline vandalism in the Niger Delta had reached almost 800. Thousands have perished from these spillages or leakages in the last five years. The economic cost of this vandalism has been substantial at both local and national levels,



often including product shortages and black marketeering, sale of adulterated fuel and lower refinery utilisation due to disruption of crude supply to the Kaduna refinery. These harmful behavioural patterns generally reflect economic, political and environmental discontent in the region (Ikporupko, 1996; Iwayemi, 2006),

The use of mobile police forces as security by oil companies, particularly Shell, led to security force abuses. The Umuechem incident in 1990, in which Shell used these security forces, led to the killing of eighty unarmed civilians and the destruction of homes (Human Rights Watch, 1999). An armed force attack on Odi, a community in Bayelsa state in response to the murder of policemen sent to investigate the activities of the youth militant, led to the death of over one hundred inhabitants, displacement of thousands of people, and destruction of houses and property. Graffiti was found that included ethnic slurs and reflected views that the town and the whole Ijaw ethnic group should be punished for the crimes committed by their youth (Human Rights Watch, 2002; Albert, 2003). Protests by the oil-bearing communities against environmental degradation were met with brutal force by both the oil companies and the government. In May, 1998, a peaceful protest staged by youth of Ilaje, Ondo State, at the Chevron Parabe platform off the Awoye coast, demanded running water, greater local employment, medical facilities, and the fulfilment of pledges made by Chevron to grant scholarships to local students. It was met with brutal force, resulting in the death of two youths and a host of others injured (Environmental Rights Action, 1999; Human Rights Watch, 1999).

Protests by the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP), which generated international attention, ultimately led to the hanging of Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight other MOSOP activists in 1995. The government responded by creating a special security force, the Rivers State Internal Security Task Force, which was responsible for the deaths of hundreds of Ogonis during the period it occupied Ogoniland, from 1993 to 1998 (Human Rights Watch, 2002).

It is hardly contentious to conclude that the cost to the host communities of violent conflict in the Niger Delta region is enormous, and far greater than the little benefit derived from oil exploitation.

## CONCLUSION

Oil production in the Niger Delta, instead of spreading contentment and harmony in the region, has brought about frustration and a complex, multi-level conflict, which has persisted for a very long time. Since March 2003 it has escalated into unprecedented inter-communal violence of the most destructive nature. These conflicts have at different times escalated so much as to generate a reign of insecurity, oil-production disruptions and

violence. Thousands have lost their lives and have been displaced.

The escalation of violence in the Niger Delta, apart from the loss of hundreds of human lives, has led to the disruption of oil production and a huge loss in export earnings, to the tune of 800,000 barrels per day, which is the equivalent of 40% of Nigeria's total oil production of about 2.6 million barrels per day. Estimating the exact human cost of the perennial conflict in the Niger Delta is extremely difficult. The official estimate of the financial loss is put at about \$3.5 billion annually (Human Rights Watch, 2002; Oduniyi, 2003; International Crisis Group, 2006). Given that Nigeria spends \$2 billion annually to service its external debt, it follows that a resolution of the Niger Delta conflict would save the country more than what it needs to service its external debt. In fact, the country would have an additional \$1.5 billion to pursue its developmental programmes and quickly transform the Niger Delta.

The destabilising effect of the Niger Delta conflict on the oil industry made the government of Obasanjo grant amnesty to the militant leaders and their supporters. The government reportedly made payments of more than \$1,000 for each rifle and \$10,000 for each machine gun handed over to the government. However, the ensuing peace was negative. After some months, there were renewed hostilities by the militants. Even the recent amnesty programme of the present government has not brought any significant change to the prevailing situation in the Niger Delta. Rather, the militants are already accusing the government of insincerity in tackling the intractable conflict and the developmental challenges confronting the people of the region.

A cohesive, engaging and ultimately successful Niger Delta peace process, which is urgently needed, would be a significant achievement for the government. The alternative is to risk a spiralling insurgency that is still in its early stages but shows signs of strengthening. Although it is difficult to predict the outcome, some analysts have characterised the conflict as a separatist insurgency in its initial stages. International analysts have warned of the possibility that an upsurge of violence could result in a one to two-year shutdown of oil operations in the Delta.

Government conflict management strategies which involve the use of force to repress protests by the oil-bearing communities have been grossly ineffective. The oil multinationals have contributed to the conflict by creating a condition where violence is the only means of obtaining benefits and good corporate governance. The oil companies' management of the ensuing hostility and resistance has tended to engender more violence and illegal appropriation of benefits. Oil multinationals have seen the ineffectiveness of the use of force and now support a new partnership of all stakeholders in the petroleum industry. They have shifted emphasis from community assistance to community development.



The prospect for sustainable peace and development in the Niger Delta region requires a critical policy reorientation. An integrated bottom-up participatory process that secures the quality of life of the people and their psychological health, and simultaneously protects the environment, is undoubtedly the path to peace and productive enterprise in the oil-producing areas. The youth should be motivated

and mobilised for public participation and for political, social and economic empowerment. There should be a political commitment on the part of the Federal Government and magnates of the oil industry to deliberately reverse the injustice done to the oil-producing areas and put the area back on the road to justice, stability and development. ■

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## About the author

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**Abosede Omowumi Babatunde**  
**bose\_babatunde@yahoo.co.uk**

Abosede Omowumi Babatunde lectures at the Centre for Peace and Strategic Studies, University of Ilorin, Nigeria and is a senior research fellow at the French Institute for Research in Africa (IFRA-Nigeria). She obtained her PhD in Peace and Conflict Studies from the Institute of African Studies, University of Ibadan, Nigeria.



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