

## The Niger Delta Crisis and National Integration in Nigeria

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**Abstract:** This paper examines the causes of the Niger delta crisis in Nigeria and assesses the impact of the crisis on the effort at building a strong and virile state where every citizen will have an undoubted feeling of belonging. The amalgamation of over 350 ethnic-nationalities into one nation state, Nigeria in 1914 marked a watershed in the history and politics of the country. Three other phenomena namely the struggle for political independence by the nationalists, the emergence of the oppressed and dominated minorities in the political and economic arrangements of the country, and the struggles for self-determination and resource control by the minority groups, particularly in the Niger-Delta region of the state became central issues. Communities in the Niger-Delta since independence are faced with political instability, ecological degradation, and wide spread poverty; leading to lack of allegiance to the country. Ethnic suspicion and antagonism which has grievous implications for national integration became the order of the day in Nigeria. This paper submits that enduring peace and stability in the Niger delta region of the Nigerian state is a major factor for sustainable national integration. This could only be accomplished with a resolute political will and determination by the citizens and government at all levels of governance in the country to see and treat Nigerians as the same people irrespective of the place of birth or ethno-regional affiliation.

**Keywords:** National integration, Niger Delta crisis, Minority groups, Nigerian.

### INTRODUCTION

The Nigerian state is well endowed with a lot of natural resources, with petroleum forming the main stay of the economy. This makes it possible for the government and transnational oil companies to earn substantial revenues and profits from oil and gas exports. With the commencement of oil exploration in commercial quantities in Oloibiri in the Niger Delta in 1956, came great excitement and tall hopes for rapid development. But little was known of the pains associated with the exploration of oil such as spillage, deforestation, noise pollution and other sundry ecological degradations.

Although, oil exploration in commercial quantity began in 1958, two years after it was discovered in Oloibiri (now in Bayelsa State), with the increase in revenue generation to the Federal, State and local governments, the poverty level in Nigeria, particularly the oil producing region know as the Niger Delta continues to increase. Almost 80 per cent of the local inhabitants of the Niger Delta fall below the

poverty line of \$1 per day as they depend on the aquatic resources for their livelihoods [1]. Rather than the oil bringing blessings and fortunes for majority of the inhabitants of the oil producing states of Nigeria,, its proceeds have resulted in impoverishing the masses and creating violent conflicts in the Niger Delta region. However, several development initiatives have been taken by the Nigerian government to enhance the socio-economic development of the region, such as the establishment of Development Boards, provision of basic infrastructural facilities, among others. While some of these initiatives are laudable and need to be strengthened, they have however failed to address the problems faced by the Niger Delta people [2].

This paper examines the vulnerability that the Niger Delta region is exposed to, resulting into a continuous crisis situation and how this has affected the pace of development in the region and the national integration process of the country. Commencing with some theoretical reflections on state and nation, the paper reviewed the extant literature on national

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integration, presents Nigeria in socio-cultural and historical perspectives and explained the intricacies of the Niger Delta crisis and the factors fueling the crisis. In the concluding sections, attempts are made to juxtapose the Niger Delta crisis in the context of national integration in Nigeria while some recommendations are made.

#### Theoretical Frameworks of Analysis

For Max Weber, a state is a form of political community that has been successful in claiming the monopoly of the legitimate use of force within a given geographical territory. However, the typical statehood of today is arrogated the privilege of nation-state. But before its invention by the western hegemony in the eighteenth century as a means of economic control, there were states without nations as well as nations without states. The question then arises: what features distinguish statehood and nationhood? In other words, what social functions and obligations are analogous to the functions and obligations of the state?

For Karl Marx, the state in the context of modernization and globalization can only be built on democratic principles of the proletariat-based equal rights. In order to achieve its objectives, the proletariat must overthrow the bourgeoisie, by gaining political power and taking control of the state. Perhaps this Marx's ideology may be the motivating factor responsible for the ongoing youth's militancy against the state in Niger Delta region of Nigeria, as a result of the crude oil exploitation by the state at the expense of the masses that benefit little or nothing from the oil economy. It is in this sense that Naanen [3] contends that the present movement for resource control is about the state infringement upon the people's rights. He argues that the colonial government policy of expropriating indigenous people's right by vesting control in the crown has been sustained in the petroleum act of 1969 by the Nigerian government which has resulted in physical and institutional marginalization of the Niger Delta people of southern Nigeria in distribution of the oil wealth of Nigeria.

Statehood therefore refers to a collection of the autonomous group of nations considered as one amalgamated political unit control by legal rules rather than cultural morality. Nationhood on the other hand refers to autonomous tribes like Igbo, Yoruba, Tiv, Hausa, Efik, etc in Nigeria. They are considered as culturally and linguistically homogeneous people that uphold their local memories and identity as expressed in common bound and heritage. However, the scientific distinction between nations without state and states without nation is clear and this find expression in the works of the social contract theorists, especially John Locke. For Locke, in the state of nature men are free and equal; Equality exists in as much as everyone is endowed with reasoning faculty. But the reality of the case is that some nations might be stronger

economically than others but the weak ones could still pose sufficient threat to the strongest, hence the reason for the amalgamation of the nations into one political unit call the state.

The question now is whether the state justifiable or not. For Machiavelli, the state terrifies its citizenry and makes decisions that affect the well-being of all without consulting anyone except a few favorites [4]. In other words, the control and direction of public affairs by a group of people and the set of institutions through which they discharge the state functions is what we normally refer to as the government of the state. When, therefore, we talk about the government of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, our reference point is the people who have been charged with the responsibility of the state such as the provision of social services and management of resources and the set of institutions such as legislative, executive and judicial through which they perform their duties and obligations to the people of Nigeria.

In the vein of the foregoing, it is pertinent to examine the manner in which the primary function of the Nigerian state is performed to satisfy the needs and expectations of the Niger-Delta people? The agitations and confrontation with Federal Government in the area are obvious from the observable wide-spread of the flagrant injustice and underdevelopment in the area. What this means is that those who control the state institutions and machinery of government in Nigeria, exercise their legitimate authority arbitrarily and never ceasing the offensive against the Niger-Delta. Thus, Nigeria government attitude towards Niger Delta is basically a repressive means of control and lacking true democratic principles. This situation of bad governance perhaps may be the basic reason for ethnic agitations for resource control and self-determination in the Niger-Delta. There has been continuous agitation for equal rights and even distribution of developmental projects through the breaking down of the existing exclusionary, discriminatory and non-democratic structures of the state.

#### The concept of National Integration

The task to unite a people under a government and create an enabling environment in which their cultural, economic and political aspirations could be met is undoubtedly an enormous one. The task is even more profound when the communities are ethnocentric and deeply divided with distinguished tendencies. Given the rich literature and the emerging interest in national integration in post-colonial Africa, it is instructive to examine some of the contending analysis on national integration in Africa and other developing areas because it will provide a contextual understanding of the situation in Nigeria.

Immanuel Wallerstein [5] in his seminal work on Ethnicity and National Integration provides a

conceptual framework on the intersection between ethnicity and ethnic loyalty and attendant impact on national integration. He suggests that "ethnicity in some respects is dysfunctional for national integration. Explaining the theoretical utility of national integration for the newly independent states in Africa south of the Sahara, Wallerstein provides an understanding of the intersection between ethnicity and national integration. However, the analysis did not provide a pragmatic approach for incorporating national integration in the polity of the emerging countries in Africa, beyond the definitional clarification of ethnicity and national integration. Nonetheless, subsequent work by Wallerstein [6] on the Politics of Independence in the newly independent states provided the platform on how states can further integrate. He argued that integration can only become plausible when the citizens legitimize the state as the holder of force, authority, and the central locus of legislation and social decision. In an effort to better address the challenge of national integration it is important that an operational definition of the term be provided because the term "integration" is often loosely interpreted.

Weiner [7] highlights the general usage of the term; in this regard, he suggests that the term "integration" may refer to the following:

- The process of bringing together culturally and socially the discrete groups into a single territorial unit and the establishment of national identity.
- The process of establishing national central authority over subordinate political units or regions which may or may not coincide with distinct cultural or social groups;
- The process of linking of government with the governed;
- The minimum value and consensus necessary to maintain a social order
- The capacity of people in a society to organize for some common purpose.

Weiner concluded that national integration should, therefore, be examined along with the line of territorial integration, value integration, elite-mass integration, and integrative behavior. The word "integration" he further suggests should be used only when one is referring to the generalized form of holding a system together.

Moreover, in search for a conceptual framework for interpreting the political evolution of the new states Claude Ake [8] sees integration as a process by which loyalty for the new state is created through the personal influence of the charismatic leader. In the context of the new state, he argues that political integration entails changing the focus of the group from a traditional to a bureaucratic structure. In this regard, he highlighted how Nkrumah's charismatic leadership in Ghana drew upon his functional identity with the

traditional. That is, through the charismatic leadership of Nkrumah, Ghanaians of diverse origins discovered close and intimate solidarity which has become a major factor in building a virile and stable nation for the Ghanaians.

Zolberg [9] contends that national integration could better be understood when it is examined within the context of the interrelationship between the primordial and the secular institutions. Thus, he warned that national integration should not be simply advanced from the Western European and America notion of a pluralist society. To have a more comparative flavored literature review on integration, the work of Shakir [10] which focused on integration in India become germane. Shakir refuted the Weberian framework of integration: The notion that people pursue their interests in society by forming groups and selecting identifications that maximize their advantage in the competition for scarce jobs and economic resources and for political power. Instead, he suggests that national integration should be examined against the background of the inherent class divisions and the economic basis of the political power and role of the dominant economic class as the ruling class and the manipulation of the system to create political, social and economic inequalities.

However, the study of national integration appeared to have taken a paradigm shift from one that focused on the issue of nationalism in the early 1960s to one that primarily focused on "communitarian politics" in the 1980s. For instance, Larson [11], in her examination of local national integration in Tunisia, concluded that the integration of local communities into national ones is a complex approach which will depend on several factors; but it will primarily depend on the extent of the ties between local and national communities. This integration, she suggests, can be actualized with explicit government policies and programs being directed towards local communities. Midgley [12] contrarily took a critical look at communitarian approach and suggests that its major weakness is its failure to deal with the realities of the modern world, particularly developing countries.

The communal dynamics for national integration was further examined by Hyden and Williams [13] in their study of Nigeria and Tanzania presents profound examples of how communitarian politics was integrated into the national agenda, though both countries faced different challenges as this effort was advanced. However, Nigeria's effort at national integration was hampered by the presence of authoritarian military regimes at one point or another in her political history while in the case of Tanzania, the attempt to create a super community which was designed to overcome limitations of ethnicity and religious differences was enhanced by the absence of a dominant ethnic community.

Other works on national integration have shifted from the community model and have advanced educational measures as the model for national integration. In this regard, Akpan [14] suggests that a national education policy could foster national unity. The study further suggests that education agencies such as the Nigeria Universities Commission (NUC) and the Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB) should develop a student recruitment effort that will bring about diversity in university enrollment.

Davis and Kalu-Nwivu [15] argued that an educational measure such as the recruitment of faculty students and staff from diverse communities is limited in addressing the problem of national integration in Nigeria. This is because of cultural differences among ethnic groups and the nature of ethnic groups' contacts with Europeans in the pre-independence period has created a regional educational axis of North and South. Thus, ethnic groups with close proximity to the Atlantic coast benefited earlier from European education vis-à-vis ethnic groups in the northern part of the country.

### **The Nigerian State in Socio-Cultural and Historical Perspectives**

Nigeria popularly referred to as the giant of Africa, lies between longitude  $4^{\circ}\text{N}$  and  $14^{\circ}\text{N}$ , and between latitude  $3^{\circ}\text{E}$  and  $15^{\circ}\text{E}$  in the Western part of Africa. It is bordered on the North by Niger and Chad, on the East by Cameroon, the Atlantic Ocean on the South, and by the Benin Republic on the West [16]. It is the most populous country in Africa with a population of 160 million people [17] and covers an area of 923,770 square kilometers or 356,700 square miles.

Before British colonial rule, the over 350 ethnic and linguistic groups that make up the Nigerian social formation were often related culturally, politically and economically in some form to one another. These various groups came under British colonial rule through the 1914 amalgamation of Southern and Northern protectorates. Subsequently, in 1947, the colonial government divide the country into three regions (namely, the Northern, Western and Eastern regions). In 1954, it adopted a Federal constitution as the system of government [18].

Officially, Nigeria as an entity came into being in 1914 when the Northern and Southern protectorates were amalgamated by Sir Fredrick Lord Lugard. The reason for the amalgamation was purely economic. The Southern Protectorate was more viable and had resources than the less endowed Northern Protectorate. In order to bridge the gap, the two protectorates were merged together [19]. In 1960, Nigeria became an independent state, with a Federal system of government and a republic in 1963. Nigeria is currently made up of 36 states, with Abuja as the Federal Capital. For political and administrative expediency in the sharing of offices, the country is divided into six geo-political

zones, namely: South West, South East, South-South, North West, North East and North Central. The Niger Delta region is located in the South-South geo-political zone. The Nigerian state has been known to be endowed with abundant human and natural resources. It is the fifth largest exporter of crude oil to the United States of America, and the sixth largest producer of crude oil among the OPEC countries [18].

Shell British Petroleum (now Royal Dutch Shell) first discovered crude oil in 1956 at Oloibiri, a village in the Niger Delta in the present day Bayelsa State and commercial production began in 1958. Oil has been an important part of the Nigerian economy since vast reserves of petroleum were discovered. The Niger Delta region covers an area of about 75,000 square kilometers. It is traversed and crisscrossed by a large number of rivers, streams, canals and creeks. The tides of the Atlantic Ocean shield the coastal line throughout the year, while the main land it subject to regimes of floods and erosion by various rivers, particularly the River Niger. It has a population of about 32 million people and more than 400 ethnic groups. The Niger Delta is one of the largest wetland in Africa. It is rich in both renewable and nonrenewable natural resources such as oil, gas bitumen, non-timber forest products and timber forest products, wildlife, etc. Eighty –five (85) percent of the total revenue for Nigerian government is generated from oil and gas exploration in this region [20].

The region derives its name from being situated at the mouth of the River Niger. Before the creation of the Nigerian state, economic activities of the Delta in pre-colonial days entailed mainly export of salt and fish to the hinterland. In the 18th century, when the slave trade was at its peak, the region was West Africa's largest slave traders, however, diverted to palm oil trade in the 19<sup>th</sup> century when the slave trade declines [20].

The main ethnic groups of the region are the Ijaws (the largest ethnic group), the Itsekiris, Yorubas, Efiks, Ibibios and other smaller groups. Within AkwaIbom State it is the Ibibios who make up the majority of the population. The Niger Delta region includes the following States: Abia, Imo, Delta, Edo, Rivers, Bayelsa, Cross River, AkwaIbom and Ondo. The major traditional occupations of people in this region include farming and fishing, while secondary occupation includes industries like gin distillation, textile weaving, and boat carving. Tertiary occupations include trade and commerce, and transportation.

### **The Niger Delta Crisis and Its Influencing Factors**

The exploration of oil in Nigeria's Niger Delta Region in 1956 prompted a chain of events that led to the political and economic marginalization of the inhabitants. Indeed, it has been argued that oil has been more of a curse than a blessing to the people who have

been at the receiving end of dreadful government oppression and brutality, often resulting in fatalities, thus, the call for a fairer deal or control of the endowed resource by the people.

The campaign for fair deal or control of the oil wells by the people of the Niger Delta region did not start today. The first major episode of violent military in the Niger Delta occurred in February 1966, on the eve of the secession of the Eastern Region, or Biafra, which included the eastern oil producing part of the Niger Delta. Isaac Adaka Boro, an Ijaw born in Oloibiri and leader of the Niger Delta Volunteer Force (NDVF), declared the independence of the Niger Delta People's Republic, consisting of the present day Rivers and Bayelsa States. Boro's abortive twelve-day revolt anticipated the Biafran civil war. Both conflicts were motivated by the control of oil revenue. Boro called for oil companies to negotiate directly with his 'government' rather than with the national authorities. Over a year later, in May 1967, the Eastern Region renamed itself the Republic of Biafra, leading the country into civil war. In the same month, the Federal government broke the East into three states. One of them was Rivers State which included many of the minority groups of the Delta, as well as the bulk of the oil producing areas. However, any expectations of greater resource control were disappointed, as the Federal military government transferred the control of oil resources to itself through legislation both during and after the war [21].

Another episode was that of Ken Saro-Wiwa in 1990s. His aim was to redress the political and socio-economic wrongs imposed on the Niger Delta people. He was tenacious and determined in pursuit of liberation for his people through the platform of the Movement for the Emancipation of the Ogoni People (MOSOP), which he founded in 1992 with others that believed in his dream. He was accused of instigating members of his movement of kill four Ogoni members. He and eight other fellow compatriots were arraigned for trial, in a military tribunal set up by the autocratic government of General Sanni Abacha, for the murder of the Ogoni four; they were convicted, and hanged in November, 1995.

Instead of abating, the agitation for better accommodation in the distribution of the oil wealth in the Niger Delta continues to gain momentum. So that Years after Ken Saro-Wiwa's death, the potential consequences of the Niger Delta conflict have worsened in both human and economic terms. Various militant groups have sprung up of recent to undermine the activities of the oil companies using different methods and tactics, thereby daring the Nigerian state. Prominent among such groups are the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), the Niger Delta People Volunteer Force (NDPVF), the Joint Revolutionary Council (JRC), and Movement for the

Survival of the Ijaw Ethnic Nationality (MOSEIN). What then are the factors fueling the Niger Delta crises?

The Niger Delta region has experienced several crises which have hampered development in the region and in the nation at large. The crisis is driven by a combination of: (a) structural factors that make the region particularly vulnerable and unstable, (b) specific factors that contribute to the political struggle and drive the violence and, (c) factors that worsen the conflict by making violence and crime profitable. All these three factors are thematically expatiated thus:

### **Poverty**

The Nigerian government has made billions of naira as revenue from oil in this region since its exploration. Despite the huge amount, the citizens of this region live in abject poverty and are deprived of the basic necessities to spur them to life such as portable water and electricity. Oil spillage covers the entire water surface, thus resulting in the death of living creatures thereof. There a significant disconnection to the wealth the region generates to the nation and the human development progress of the people living in the region [22]. This act makes the citizens angry and resolves for violence because they are not benefiting from the "Black Gold" that makes Nigeria the Africa's largest producer.

### **Environmental Degradation**

The social and environmental costs of oil exploration and production in this region have been very far-reaching on the people in this region. These include soil infertility, pollution of air and drinking water, loss of wildlife, degradation of farmland and damaged to aquatic ecosystems; all of which have caused serious health problems for the inhabitants of this region. As a result of these, oil companies in this region often evacuate people of this region from their homeland, thus marginalizing them further. These environmental changes have had significant implications for local livelihoods, and the alienation of people from their resources and land [23]. Measures to counterbalance environmental damage are inadequate and resulted in the discontent of the inhabitant of this region to often retaliate by taking to the vandalization of oil pipes of oil companies which even result to oil spillage.

### **Unemployment and Underdevelopment**

The Niger Delta region is underdeveloped in all sectors, despite being the heartbeat of the nation. Away from the main towns, there is no real development, no roads, no electricity, no running water and poor telecommunication network. The underdevelopment is so severe; the youth of the region are the hardest hit by lack of development. This is why many of them have resorted to militancy in an effort to have national and international attention to their plight [23].

Also, the anger of the people of the region, especially the youth, results from the fact that the other parts of the country, sometimes the arid regions, are built to the standards obtainable in the developed world. They have bridges built over dry land and less traveled roads, while most of the Niger Delta communities are only accessible by boats and seriously in need of bridges. Furthermore, the unemployment rate of this region is on the high side. The majority of the youth from the region is unemployed, they do not benefit from the presence of the Multinational Corporations operating in their communities. Less than five percent of the people from the Niger Delta work in these companies, women in the region in oil companies are less than one percent. A majority of the beneficiaries are from other parts of Nigeria [22].

### **Corruption and Bad Governance**

Corruption, in general, is a cankerworm that has eaten deep on our government in the nation. Corruption, especially at the state and local level, is endemic and at the root of many of the region's problems [2]. Large sums of money are received at both the state and local government levels, but there is little evidence of this being applied to productive development endeavours. This situation exacerbates the sense of hopelessness, exclusion, and anger of the citizenry of the Niger Delta, who have lost faith in existing governance structures. Government officials in this region, including all the States Governors, do not utilize the monthly allocations they get efficiently to better the lives of the ordinary people through the creation of jobs, provision of social infrastructures all that they do is to embark on giant projects that gulp huge money having little or no connection to the life of the people in the region.

### **Insincerity of Federal Government**

Different commissions and agencies had been set up by Federal government both in the past and as at present to monitor and oversee to the development of this region. A commission that is not fully funded to carry out its duties will also not produce any fruitful. There have been a lot of complaint from chairmen or directors Remote rural communities have very limited economic opportunities and often cannot tap directly into the employment benefits of the oil industry because they lack capital resources or skills and commissions set on ground to see to all these problems are not fully funded to do so and hence problem remains.

### **National Integration in Nigeria in the face of the Niger Delta crisis**

The issue of national integration is very important in deeply divided states like Nigeria. It is generally agreed that a nation is a community of people having a common descent, history, and language if that definition is accepted this therefore suggest that Nigeria must be committed and determined to leave no stone

untuned in her effort to unite the various and different nationalities that make up the state. The League of Nations Organization which later transformed into United Nations organization redefined the meaning of the word 'Nation' by equating nation with state. If a nation should mean a community of people of a common descent, history, and language, then national integration is not a needful process; all we need to talk about is national growth and development.

In the case of Nigeria and many other countries in Africa which are referred to as nations as a result of equating a nation with a state based on international law, there is a need for such countries to search for nationhood and national integration. For Welch [24], national integration thus refers specifically to the process of creating a sense of territorial nationality which eliminates subordinate parochial loyalties. In fact, to secure this in Nigeria, attempt was made to allow for the co-existence of imperial rule side-by-side with traditional institutional order, thereby creating a national integration on the part of the colonized people. That is, to say, national integration entailed a definition for administrative purpose of the relationship between the representatives that rules and the indigenous political authorities. As a matter of fact, the concept of indirect rule should have performed this role creditably in Nigeria, but indirect rule as an administrative system through the indigenous political authorities was vague. It was interpreted differently by different colonial administrators such as Sir Frederick Lugard, Hugh Clifford, and James Cameron.

However, the statement has often been made that Nigeria is an artificial construct. The artificiality of Nigeria has been taken to mean several and different things. For Dudley [25], it is often taken to mean that the territorial boundaries of Nigeria were imposed by imperial power. Secondly, and related to the first, artificiality is taken to refer to the claim that Nigeria as a state would not have been what it is but for the action of the metropolitan powers which created it, and thirdly, that it is artificial because her "territorial boundaries" contain within them a heterogeneous collection of people with little or no common bond holding them together. This implies that the problem of national integration arises from the pluralistic nature of Nigerian Society. As Awolowo [26], asserted that the so-called common Nigerian nationality or integration is a "vener of façade consciously or unconsciously put up by some Nigerians to cover up what many of their fellow men see quite plainly as rabid nationalism. Nonetheless, the works and views discussed thus far are largely narrow in their conception of "integration". Thus, there is a tendency to assume that integration cannot be promoted without a corresponding development of social, cultural and economic integration, growth and development. This point emphasizes the need for a holistic conception of societal dynamics and development. The state, social classes and other transnational forces and interests

which affect the level of political stability play very important roles.

From the above, it important to note that for Government to promote integration, they must go beyond political mobilization, organization and education. It must be seen as pursuing policies and programmes which are centered on the socio-economic development of the people at large e.g job creation, free education, housing, etc, as against policies which promote accumulation of the nation's resource by a few at the expense of the majority.

Where political intolerance, suspicion, the manipulation of ethnic groups and religious sentiments, crude accumulation and the misuse of state power characterize the activities of stake holders in and outside power, they can hardly contribute to national integration.

In the light of the foregoing, it is a fact that Nigerian government depends on the earnings coming from the sales of crude oil to perform its obligations, which forced the reduction of oil barrels being produced per day thus leading to loss of revenue to the government. Also, the Niger Delta crisis since it began has rippled across energy markets, contributing to higher prices as attacks on oil platforms in the region usually push oil prices up. So, the crisis in the Niger Delta region has hampered the operations of the oil companies which have resulted into some of the companies laying-off their staff thus further increasing the population of the unemployment in the region and the country generally [27].

Furthermore, hostage-taking and attack on oil installations in the Niger Delta have led to the dearth of business activities. Restiveness has reduced growth in the business sector leading to a drop in business activities; this development has, in turn, increased the unemployment ratio among the youth. Also, there has been a negative impact on the telecommunication sector due to this crisis. Militant activities have compounded the problems of drop calls in the networks of mobile operators in the country (Nigeria) as several base stations have become inaccessible in the region [27].

The crisis has also brought about security implications to the country. As reported by Ejibunu [19] in his work 'Nigeria's Niger Delta Crisis: Root Causes of Peacelessness' the Nigerian Military, under the aegis of the Joint Military Task Forces (JTF), have been fighting with the militants since 2006 when the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) started its violent activities. MEND and other militia groups have been able to withstand the military in several clashes they have had. They have been able to do this because of their access to sophisticated weapons which they use in attacking oil platforms and facilities. It should be noted that the type of weapons

available to the different militia groups in the Niger Delta area is so overwhelming and that something should be done, to arrest the situation, before it turns to a high-level civil war. So, Nigeria security is being undermined by the militia groups, for the military to have not been able to tame them, making the militants to be operating with almost impunity. To make matters worse, the militants' tactics and weaponry are increasingly sophisticated.

As earlier alluded to, kidnapping and hostage taking have been the order of the day in this region, making oil workers abandon their work and cling to their safety. Many of the expatriates working with these oil companies have also abandoned the oil shore to their different countries. Oil companies also have find themselves in an uneasy position, stuck in a crisis that they, in a sense, helped create. For years, human rights groups accused them of turning a blind eye to the corruption of Nigeria which they created while damaging the environment in the Niger Delta [28].

## CONCLUSION

It is no doubt that the minority groups in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria constitute an important alliance for the economic development and national integration of the country because of their enormous contribution to the nation's economy through the crude oil being explored in the region. This contribution and significance arising from the volume of oil production in the region are likely to continue rather than diminish in the foreseeable year ahead. It is also pertinent to note that the region has not received commensurate attention from the Nigerian government in the provision of infrastructural facilities and appropriate response to the environmental hazards imposed on the area by oil exploration and exploitation activities.

Though the Federal government had initiated legal and institutional mechanisms to tackle these peculiar environmental problems, they have not achieved the desired impact largely due to the manifest absence of sufficient interest and commitment on the part of the government in developing this minority region that lays the golden egg for the country's wealth. To make the region have a sense of belonging and minimize the series of conflicts and agitations from the area, it is imperative for the Federal government to take proactive measures along the following lines so as to strengthen the existing institutional mechanism and thereby enhancing the process of national integration:

- The Federal government should become proactively engaged in compelling the multinational oil companies to change their corruptible, exploitative, destabilizing, brutalizing, and destructive business practices. They should also persuade the oil companies to institute an affirmative action plan. The plan should include the following requirements: (i) that a certain percentage of their workforce

come directly from the region, (ii) that a certain percentage of their incomes be reinvested in the region through infrastructural and institutional development, (iii) the provision of skill-building educational and training programs, medical facilities, and community development, (iv) payment of a certain percentage of land rights directly to the communities in which they explore for oil and gas and (v) a proactive community relations program.

- Also, there is the need for government, through the established Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC), to tackle the problem of underdevelopment of the region in a general manner, NDDC gets its funding to solve the problems of the people in this region and must make sure life is more comfortable for the people by providing electricity, portable water, good roads, good education and water systems, effective and efficient health care for the citizenry as well as create sustainable jobs for the teeming population in the region.
- The state governments in this region should also make sure they make judicious use of the share (revenue) from the statutory derivative allocation they get from the Federal government by providing the needed social amenities for the people.

Finally, there is the need for citizens and government to work towards promoting a new deal in democratic accountability, particularly in the Niger Delta region and Nigeria in general by improving participation and dialogue among communities, civil society and governments at all levels. The essence is to ensure that government budgets and expenditure work for the people. This would inculcate in the people of the Niger Delta a sense of belonging to the Nigerian state, thus having a direct positive impact on the national integration process.

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