

# Spoils politics and environmental struggle in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria

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*The protracted conflict in the Niger Delta communities is currently being diagnosed with a view to understanding the nature of the resource struggle. From the 1980s, the region's cry of marginalization and exclusion from oil revenue allocation was couched in a wave of environmentalism. Environmental activism had assumed the shape of peaceful community protests against the transnational oil companies and was largely directed at ecological remediation and environmental justice. Environmentalism has now assumed new dimensions both in demands and strategy. The struggle has advanced to a low intensity conflict ostensibly against the state which has resulted in the militarization of the region. Although amnesty has been granted the militants by the federal government since October 2009 as a first step to resolving the conflict, there has been criticism trailing its framing and implementation that did not take into account some historical and socio-political antecedents of conflicts in the region. This paper revisits these and applies the greed and grievance framework to investigate the nature of the conflicts. It examines the pattern of environmentalism and discusses the complex nature of the conflicts against the curtailment of primordial motivations if environmental justice is to be achieved. Contrary to the literature, it demonstrates how grievance may manifest in greed in a mutually reinforcing pattern.*

**Keywords:** Greed, grievance, militancy, environmentalism, Niger Delta, Nigeria

## Introduction

In the last five decades, the oil-rich Niger Delta communities have predicated their abject poverty, environmental degradation, and the general underdevelopment of their area on the economic marginalization and socio-political exclusion from revenue allocation by the federal government. Not surprisingly, the Niger Delta struggle has been characterized by a clamour for self-determination manifesting in the guise of agitations for economic justice, resource control, environmental security, political representation and even secession, as shown by the Biafra-Nigeria Civil War which lasted for three years, from 1967 to 1970 (Nwajaku-Dahou 2009; Okonta 2008). This seems in line with continued global emphasis on the need for "security-development nexus" (Stern and Ojendal 2010:5)

Environmental activism in the region was globalised in the 1980s and 1990s courtesy of the campaigns waged by writer and environmentalist Kenule Saro-Wiwa on the platform of the Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP). The flawed trial and execution of Saro-Wiwa and eight others of his Ogoni kinsmen by the Nigerian state further accentuated the globalization and eventual radicalization of the Niger Delta struggle (Wiwa 2005; Rowell et al. 2005). Violent campaigns by militant youths locally and the Commonwealth of Nations' sanctions against Nigeria in 1999 gave impetus to environmental issues at the national and international levels. However, since 1999 some indigenes of the Niger Delta area have been appointed to key national positions, including ministerial appointments. And after initial resistance, the Ijaw-born Vice-President Goodluck Jonathan was elevated to the post of Acting President on February 9, 2010 as a result of the debilitating ill-health of President Umaru Yar'Adua. Jonathan was elected Nigeria's President in May 2011.

Other fence mending actions were taken by the government. From 2000, the federal government began the implementation of the increased derivation-based oil-revenue sharing formula to the oil-bearing Niger Delta region. The

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revenue distribution formula to the region had been increased to 13 percent from a negligible 3 percent in 1999. These moves culminated in a sort of deference to the Ijaw tribe, the largest ethnic group in the Niger Delta and the fourth largest in Nigeria.

With the increase, the Niger Delta oil-producing states, especially Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Delta and Rivers became awash with huge revenues. Added to this monthly revenue allocation from the federal centre has been a steady inflow of internally generated revenues as well as development funds from international organizations (Iyayi 2005). Also, the oil multinationals operating in the Niger Delta had been *forced* through incessant disruptions of operations to increase their community development funds to their host communities (Shell 2007). Ironically, however, rather than dousing the flames of conflict, these revenue inflows have more or less fed and exacerbated them (Eberlein 2006).

This paper draws on both primary and secondary sources of data to examine the trajectory of the conflict and its ubiquitous nature and functions. Briefly, it scans the recent amnesty package and problems facing its implementation. The paper makes a contribution by shedding light on the relationship between greed and grievance in the Niger delta conflicts and offers plausible explanations why stability and development remain largely elusive in the area despite the emergence of democratic rule and policies and actions deferring to the region. It suggests that oil wealth will continue to fuel insecurity in so far as good governance is elusive, injustice is perpetrated, and violence is rewarded.

The paper is structured into five parts: the first part introduces the study; the second spells out the theoretical framework of the study; the third section characterizes the Niger Delta region focusing mainly on its strategic importance and conflict dynamics. The fourth explains the changing contours of the conflict as well as the functions of violence, and the fifth section concludes.

### **Conceptual and theoretical framework**

Scholars are increasingly linking resource conflicts to greed and at other times grievance. Yet the interrelationship between the two has implications for conflict and development. After the Second World War, there was the belief that the endowment of natural resource wealth would bring about socio-political and economic development to resource-endowed states. But rather than engendering development, resource dependence has been found to be inimical to growth and a catalyst for conflict especially in developing countries (Humphreys *et al.* 2007; Le Billon 2001; Auty 1993). In fact, most natural resource-endowed states have performed worse in terms of democracy and development than their counterparts which lack such natural endowments. According to analysts, most developing natural resource-dependent states suffer from 'resource curse' which manifests in the forms of poor economic growth and exposure to shock, low income and standards of living, poverty and inequalities, corruption, poor governance, and civil war (Gary and Karl 2003; Ross 2003).

The greed and grievance framework is a major contribution to the natural resource-conflict debate. The model has been popularised by Paul Collier and his associates as well as the World Bank. In recent times, this paradigm has been used extensively in analysing civil wars and conflicts in Africa, especially in resource-endowed but conflict-torn states such as Sierra Leone, Liberia, Democratic Republic of Congo, to mention only a few. Some of the central ideas of the greed and grievance thesis regarding rebellion as criminality, rebel discourse as propaganda, and the functionality of violence in conflicts are relevant to this paper (Keen 2008; Collier 2007).

First, proponents of the greed thesis maintain that the availability of natural resources in a country causes conflicts because the huge rents that accrue from such resources serve 'as spoils for potential rebels' who instrumentalise violence in order to capture such rents extra-legally (Keen 2006; Collier 2000a). These advocates argue that civil wars and rebellion are chiefly motivated by greed, even though grievance is often declared as the propelling motive of such conflicts. The dismissal of grievance as a possible cause of rebellion is predicated on the fact that "justice, revenge, and relief from grievance" are public goods and therefore susceptible to collective action and free-rider problems (Collier 2000a:98). This means that aggrieved people as in the case of the Niger Delta are likely to resist fighting and allow other aggrieved people to do the fighting while everyone will enjoy the benefits.

Secondly, rebellion is equated to organised crime. This is because it thrives only through predatory activities such as the levying of protection charges, extortion, sales of extraction rights ('booty future'), and ransom kidnapping that render the organization viable (Bannon and Collier 2003). Rebel groups are not only political organizations claiming to be pursuing social change, but they are also military and business organizations. As military outfits, they face the "problems of recruitment, cohesion, equipment, and survival" (Collier *et al.* 2003:67). As business organizations, rebellions are faced with financing problems. Several people have to be fed, clothed and housed. Also, some operational activities have to be financed, including arms purchase. Yet, revenues do not accrue directly from the military activities. For rebel groups to survive as military and business organizations they must engage in criminal activities. It is argued that most grievance-

driven rebellions cannot meet the start-off threshold, making greed-based uprisings more realistic in societies characterized by huge commodity exports and a high proportion of poorly educated young men (Collier 2000a).

Further, those (see Collier 2000b; Oyefusi 2008) who see rebellion as crimes argue that rebels deliberately misinform and mislead people by their narrative of grievance, hence should not be listened to. The propaganda of grievance is a functional deployment to garner some sympathy and legitimacy from members of the public, arguing that “the true cause of much civil war is not the discourse of grievance but the silent force of greed” (Collier 2000a: 98-101). In the same vein, de Soysa (2000) agrees with Collier that conflict is driven by rapacity rather than scarcity and that greed-driven rebellion is more likely to succeed than when motivated by grievance.

In contrast, Korf’s (2005) study of Sri Lanka shows that greed and grievance can be closely interwoven, and should not be dichotomised or seen in antagonistic terms. This rather holistic approach is the focus of this paper. Indeed, Malone (2003: viii) argues that “the pursuit of economic self-interest and of redress for legitimate grievance is neither mutually exclusive nor static goals”. The character and dynamics of conflict have been known to be highly fluid as the cases of Angola, Sierra Leone and the Democratic Republic of the Congo demonstrate (Ballentine and Sherman 2003). Even combatants whose motivations were initially driven by grievance have colluded with rebels and have also become linked to primitive resource accumulation (Keen 2008 and 2005; Cater 2003).

This paper questions the reductionism inherent in the greed thesis. As will be seen, the case of Nigeria’s Niger Delta suggests that the weakness of the greed paradigm relates to the greed-grievance dichotomy. Both variables do actually co-exist and even re-enforce each other in the Niger Delta conflicts. Despite the ambivalent character of some militants, their discourse remains salient because of the historic marginalization of the region and the avarice of the political elite. Both religious politics and ethnic fractionalization featured prominently in fuelling the low-intensity conflict in the Delta in contradistinction to the findings of the proponents of the greed thesis that these factors are not significant in conflict initiation and transformation (Oyefusi 2008, Collier *et al.* 2003). However polarised the model, the merit of the greed thesis is the emphasis it places on the motivations of conflict actors and their instrumentalization of violence for economic agendas, which are the focus of this paper.

### **The Niger Delta: mapping the trajectories of the struggle**

In several respects, Nigeria is a violently divided country. Depending on the criteria for measurement, it has between 250-400 ethnic groups (Mustapha 2007). These groups are divided into ‘ethnic majority’ and ‘ethnic minority’ based on their population size. There are three major ethnic groups in Nigeria, namely Yoruba in the South-West, Igbo in the South-East and Hausa-Fulani in the North. The Hausa-Fulani are predominantly Muslim and have with the aid of military rule dominated the political landscape of Nigeria since independence in 1960. The Igbo, on the other hand, are mainly commerce motivated; while the Yoruba have almost an even distribution of both Muslim and Christian adherents. There are also a few followers of traditional African religion among the Yoruba. In addition to this tripartite ethnic structure there are over 250 other smaller ethnic minorities. These include Tiv, Kanuri and Nupe in the North, and Ijaw, Ibibio, Efik and Edo in the South among several others, making Nigeria a multi-ethnic, multi-religious, multi-linguistic, and multi-regional federation (Suberu 2006). While the ethnic minorities in the North are concentrated in the North-Central, those in the South are mainly in the oil-rich Niger Delta region which is geo-politically referred to as the South-South.

Nigeria is Africa’s largest and most enduring federal experimentation. It is famous for its adroit usage of the federal option and institutional framework to “manage cultural-territorial pluralism and conflict” (Suberu 2006:65). As a three-tier federation, it has thirty six states, a Federal Capital Territory (Abuja), and 774 local government areas. Despite nearly five decades of independent existence, Nigeria has not been able to evolve national unity amongst its diverse ethno-religious configurations because of the politics of the ‘National Question’. The National Question has to do with efforts and plans to “reach a broad consensus for a just and equitable basis through which the diverse nationalities in Nigeria can unite, and pursue a common destiny of national development as Nigerians” (Obi 2002:106). It has become an apt euphemism to denote a divisive conflict ridden state that lacks coherence necessary for national unity and statehood. The federal experiment has been characterized by hyper-centralization as a result of oil politics, prolonged military dictatorship and minority marginalization by the majority. The politicization of the national question and sharing of the country’s oil wealth has led to a low intensity conflict in the Niger Delta.

The Niger Delta is rich in natural resources especially oil and gas reserves. It covers an extensive area of 70,000 kilometres with about 12 million people (about 15 percent of Nigeria’s over 140 million people based on the 2006 census). It is one of the most endowed regions of the world. Its mangrove forests extend over 3,750 square miles and its oil, Bonny Light, is one of the most sought after in the world market (Watts 2007; Stern 2005). The region’s oil wealth is the source of Nigeria’s black gold which makes the country the sixth largest oil exporter in the world thereby generating up to 40 percent of Nigeria’s GDP, 70 percent of government revenues and about 90 percent of all government receipts (Ikelegbe

2006). Table I shows the percentage contribution of each Niger Delta state to the national account, though this is subject to market fluctuation and insecurity that in turn affects production.

**Table I** Percentage contribution of Niger Delta states to oil revenue

State	%
Delta	30
Akwa Ibom	22
Bayelsa	18.20
Rivers	13.20
Ondo	7
Imo	2.52
Abia	1.40
Edo	1

Source: *Tell*, (February 18, 2008:25)

In spite of the immense human and mineral endowments, Nigeria is a rich country with poor people because its enormous wealth is concentrated in the hands of a small, powerful elite. Systemic corruption, poor mismanagement and underdevelopment have characterized the utilization of the Nigerian state's resources (Okonta 2008; Omeje 2006). The Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) of the mid-1980s had further deepened the economic crisis in the country. Austerity measures engendered by SAP had exacerbated the strained poverty conditions that quickly festered into tribal conflicts and contests for supremacy and access to resources. According to Olawale and Alao (2007:6) "the harsh environments that characterized SAP meant that Africa's youth have been disadvantaged from birth." This unenviable reality continues to have implications for their behaviour especially from frustration among the large brigade of unemployed youths, some of whom resort to criminality for survival (Imobighe 2003).

Another way the Niger Delta is believed to be facing economic marginalization and political exclusion has to do with the high rate of poverty in the region. For example, poverty and unemployment in the area is higher than the national average, making the Delta a paradox of 'affluence and affliction' despite being the source of the oil wealth that keeps the nation afloat (Ibeanu 2008:1). Consequently, the political class in the Delta has since the late 1950s been agitating for adequate political representation, justice and equity in the management of their affairs against the Nigerian state and the oil multinationals operating in the region.

The transnational oil companies operating in Nigeria such as Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC, a subsidiary of Royal Dutch Shell), ChevronTexaco, ExxonMobil, TotalFinaElf, and a few others contribute mostly to the region's environmental degradation. Oil spill and gas flaring constitute severe impacts rampant in the Niger Delta. For example, the amount of greenhouse effects from associated gas flared in the Niger Delta is the highest in the whole of Sub-Saharan Africa (Shaxson 2007). About 80 percent of the Delta population engages in fishing and farming occupations but environmental abuse by oil companies affects these livelihoods and exposes the local populace to poverty and misery (Omoweh 2005).

The Niger Delta conflict is not only protracted but also complex and multi-faceted because of its blend of ethnic and environmental claims, domestic politics, and international business (Wolff 2006). The conflict assumes ethnic dimensions as a result of intra- and inter-ethnic clashes that are largely driven by unbridled struggle for access to power and resources. Conflicts in the region date back to the pre-colonial era when some traditional nationalists resisted the colonialists. External rivalry aside, the competition for valuable resources in the region such as land and fishing grounds generated conflicts especially in notable city-states and towns such as Nembe, Kalabari, Okrika, Opobo, Brass, Aboh, and Bonny. Even piracy and enslavement were used as weapons against their neighbours by the disadvantaged tribes. For example, to date, the Itsekiris often refer to the Urhobos as their slaves, thereby creating ethnic tensions and conflicts (Ikime 2006).

The forms of conflict in the Niger Delta are numerous but sometimes insidious. Powerful elites and interest groups in the area have employed divisive tactics in their quest for self-determination, political restructuring, and resource control from the Nigerian state. First, they adopted a civic approach which dominated the early phase of the struggle that involved the use of constitutional means to seek socio-economic inclusion and environmental justice. Methods used included petitions to government authorities, sponsoring legislative motions, media blitz and forming political parties. For example, the use of petitions, especially by the Ogonis, intensified in the 1970s because of the huge oil spill at Kegbara

Dere. Community agitation was checked by the promulgation of the obnoxious Land Use Decree in 1978 which ceded all lands to the government (Naanen 2007).

The fear of majority ethnic domination in Nigeria's violently divided federation led to the setting up of the Willink Commission in 1958, two years before independence in 1960. On the heels of independence, minority groups in the country especially in the Niger Delta had feared that they would be marginalized in independent Nigeria and had requested a separate region of their own. The concerns of the Commission for a special focus on the regions' development needs and failure of government to realize this has continued to fuel agitation and conflict. Attempts at using the instrumentality of the party system especially by leaders such as Eyo Ita before 1960 and Dappa Biriye in the First Republic (1960-1966) to redress the Niger Delta question was part of this activism.

Peaceful agitations soon graduated to rebellion against the state in 1966 by some young Ijaw soldiers. The 'Twelve Days Rebellion' or secessionist declaration of a 'Niger Delta Republic' by Adaka Boro and his associates signalled the second phase (Banigo 2008). Although this was crushed by the federal troops after less than two weeks, the seeds of violent struggle had been sown. Political agitations masquerading as resource conflicts became rampant, leading to civil war (1967-1970). Oil is central to the conflicts in what many believed was greed. The character of Nigeria's economy changed radically soon after a commercial quantity of oil was discovered in the Ijaw village of Oloibiri in 1956. Though agriculture was the mainstay of Nigerian economy in the first republic (1960-1966), this altered in the oil boom years of the early 1970s. The outbreak of the Nigeria-Biafra Civil War had brought some structural changes in the federation whose four regions then were divided into twelve states in 1967, by the Gowon military regime, to make the Biafran secession unviable as the major oil wells were excised from the Biafran Igbo enclave. Though the war was considered lost by the Igbos, the federal government created the present Rivers State in 1967 to meet the demand for state creation for oil communities, and as a means to win the support of the ethnic minorities during the war (Nwajiaku-Dahou 2009).

From the 1970s, oil assumed a phenomenal rise in the country's economic calculus. Oil revenues which had accounted for only 0.1 per cent of government revenue in 1958/1959 went up to 17 per cent in 1969/1970, 84 per cent in 1980, 82 per cent in 1992 (Ikporukpo 2007). While the oil economy has further compounded Nigeria's majority-minority ethnic relations and fuelled primitive accumulation among the ruling class, it also enabled the military government to carry out post civil war reconstruction, rehabilitation and reconciliation. Lagos, the capital of the country at that time, was transformed into a mega-city and the development of Abuja as a brand new city built from scratch commenced during the oil boom regime of Murtala Mohammed (Falola and Heaton 2008). That these cities owe their developmental strides to revenues from oil is a major source of grievance to ethnic minorities of the Niger Delta from whose land the 'black gold' is sourced.

Aside from the creation of the Rivers State in 1967, the hope of Niger Delta people for infrastructural development and general empowerment did not materialize as successive governments concentrated powers and resources at the national level, making Nigeria's claim to federalism a mockery (Suberu 2008; Sagay 2004). To compound this, as oil rents grew, so too agitation and oil revenue allocation became intensely politicized. The centralization of resources and fiscal power was accentuated by military dictatorship through decrees. For example, Decree 13 of 1970 reduced the share of revenue based on derivation by 50 per cent (Obi 1998). The inordinate emphasis on equality of states, land mass and relative population, rather than derivation and social development needs, proved unfavourable to the Niger Delta people considered a minority in the Nigerian federation. The revenue formulas in place remain highly contentious and constitute a chief factor of a possibly genuine cry of marginalization and ensuing conflicts.

The civic approach of engagement with its minimal success of state creation has not addressed the problems of the region; neither has outright rebellion. The changing face of activist environmentalism changed to a mass movement approach starting from the 1990s when Ken Saro-Wiwa began the mobilization of Ogoni communities. This third phase was characterized by non-violent protests, rallies, local and international campaigns against the excesses of oil companies and the Nigerian government, sensitization of communities to their rights, amongst others. This gradual mobilization culminated in the formation of the Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP) in 1990. This social movement drew up the Ogoni Bill of Rights (OBR) and demanded political restructuring, local resource control, environmental protection, compensation for decades of environmental degradation, amongst other claims. MOSOP soon became a household name and probably the strongest force on earth against any multinational oil company (Agbonifo 2009; Naanen 2007).

The response of government to MOSOP's peaceful mobilization and activities was repressive. Rather than engaging with it, the rulers of the Nigerian state resorted to illegal imprisonment, torture, divide and rule strategies, and extra-judicial murders (Okonta 2008). Things came to a head when on November 10, 1995 environmentalist Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight of his Ogoni kinsmen were executed by the state after a kangaroo trial in defiance of world leaders' pleas.

Nigeria became a pariah state in the international community and was then suspended from the Commonwealth of Nations.

This marked a watershed in environmentalism in Nigeria. Environmentalism soon engulfed the region as several ethnic groups and associations mushroomed from the mid-1990s onwards. In late 1998, youths from over 500 local communities gathered at Kaima community to discuss the plight of the region and demanded total resource control and self-determination as contained in the Kaima Declaration. The oil companies were asked to stop further exploration until the Niger Delta question was addressed. Government response to this threat was swift and violent as any form of opposition was crushed, with several people killed and many more arrested and detained. Similarly, oil conflicts and right of way between a youth gang and security agents which resulted in the death of about eight policemen in Odi, Bayelsa State led to the destruction of the community in 1999 by government forces. Hundreds of people were killed and property worth millions of Dollars was destroyed. These events, coupled with the gruesome murder of Ken Saro-Wiwa and his kinsmen, marked a watershed in the Niger Delta environmental struggle. It was becoming apparent that dialogue alone could not deliver on their agitation. By 1999, environmental activism had graduated into a fourth phase that has been referred to as “militia-zation” (Ikelegbe 2006) because of the eruption of various militant youth groups.

Militant environmentalism began around 1995 and blossomed by 2000. The militias are a mix of ideologues and purportedly represent the development aspirations of the people. They cut across ethnic protection, environmental activism, human rights defenders, and self-determination crusaders. Some of the popular fighter-groups include the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), the Niger Delta People’s Volunteer Force (NDPVF), the Niger Delta Vigilante Service (NDV), Iduwuni Volunteer Force (IVF), Butcher Squad, Martyr Brigade, Coalition of Militant Action of the Niger Delta (COMA), Movement of the Niger Delta People (MONDP), Expedition Force (NDEEF), and many more (Tuodolo 2008).

Ironically, the return of the country to civil rule in 1999 after 16 years of continuous military dictatorship further increased the contour of conflict in the Niger Delta as these militias became politicians’ handmaidens in electoral politics and were used to harass political opponents and rig elections. Since these self-styled freedom fighters operated as a violent arm of some political elites, they also enjoyed protection from prosecution which aided their impunity; and were paid handsomely by their patrons (Ikelegbe 2008; DonPedro 2006). Perhaps these rewards for violence led to a further mushrooming of youth groups in the region in the 2000s to take advantage of the culture of violence.

### **Sharing the ‘national cake’**

One area of conflict remains the inequity attendant on the dynamics between oil production and revenue sharing. As we have seen, how to ensure equity and justice in the distribution of oil rents has been highly controversial and conflictual. A historical survey of marginalization is pertinent to underscore its relevance to greed or grievance. Some revenue-sharing commissions established to address the issue included the Phillipson Commission of 1946, Hicks Commission of 1951, Chicks Commission of 1953, Raisman Commission of 1958, Binns Commission of 1964, Okigbo Commission of 1979, Aboyade Technical Committee of 1977, and in 1988 the Babangida administration set up the National Revenue Mobilization, Allocation and Fiscal Commission which since then has been performing the responsibility of revenue mobilization and sharing in Nigeria (Sagay 2004). The formula for revenue sharing remains problematic, however.

Agitation for equitable revenue allocation by Niger Delta groups is producing positive results. They claimed as success the increased revenue from three percent revenue sharing formula to 13 percent in 1999 that became operational in 2000. As Table 2 shows, between 1999 and 2007, the Niger Delta states of Bayelsa, Delta, Akwa Ibom and Rivers ranked first, third, fourth and fifth respectively as the largest recipients of federal government revenue allocations. These revenue in-flows which represent a huge proportion of the total revenues have become a sort of booty through militants’ environmentalism. Ironically, in spite of the in-flows, these states remain hotbeds of insurgency and agitations against the state.

The flow of resources into the region has not deterred militancy. The oil companies have increased their corporate social responsibility (CSR) to their host communities especially since the late 1990s when their ‘social license’ to operate was threatened. Shell in its Annual 2006 Report stated that it spent the sum of \$53 million on community projects in the Niger Delta in 2006 (Shell 2007). It also contributed over \$44 million to the Niger Delta Development Commission, plus paying over US\$34 billion to the Nigerian state in taxes and royalties between 2006 and 2010 alone (*Nigerian Tribune*, March 2, 2010). The conflict is inevitable since Shell’s development partnership by its selective implementation breeds conflicts in the communities, alters local economies, and changes forms of cultural relations in the localities (Zalik 2004).

Similar poverty alleviation projects by the European Commission (EC) in its Micro Project Programme valued at 71 million Euros has been expended in the region (Odiegwu, 2009; Iyayi 2005).

**Table 2** Nigeria: Federal revenue allocation to states, 1999-2007

S/No.	States	Population 2006	Allocation 1999-2007 N	Per Capital Allocation	Ranking
1	Abia	2,833,999	180,913,356,049.45	63,836.78	14 <sup>th</sup>
2	Adamawa	3,168,101	200,358,588,269.16	63,242.49	15 <sup>th</sup>
3	Akwa Ibom	3,920,208	495,266,604,843.58	126,336.82	4 <sup>th</sup>
4	Anambra	4,182,032	183,439,623,354.30	43,863.75	34 <sup>th</sup>
5	Bauchi	4,676,465	227,082,096,536.85	48,558.49	31 <sup>st</sup>
6	Bayelsa	1,703,358	452,260,540,942.94	265,511.15	1 <sup>st</sup>
7	Benue	4,219,244	221,639,773,288.79	52,530.68	27 <sup>th</sup>
8	Borno	4,151,193	242,143,511,536.62	58,331.07	23 <sup>rd</sup>
9	Cross River	2,888,966	190,394,175,888.13	65,903.92	12 <sup>th</sup>
10	Delta	4,098,391	561,421,465,722.84	136,985.82	3 <sup>rd</sup>
11	Ebonyi	2,173,501	149,606,220,047.59	67,911.73	11 <sup>th</sup>
12	Edo	3,218,332	196,650,837,309.93	61,103.34	18 <sup>th</sup>
13	Ekiti	2,384,212	152,866,276,435.50	64,116.06	13 <sup>th</sup>
14	Enugu	3,257,298	172,943,975,753.31	53,094.31	26 <sup>th</sup>
15	FCT, Abuja	1,405,201	193,027,632,752.09	137,366.56	2 <sup>nd</sup>
16	Gombe	2,353,879	146,500,259,934.10	62,237.80	16 <sup>th</sup>
17	Imo	3,934,899	231,384,556,606.10	58,803.18	22 <sup>nd</sup>
18	Jigawa	4,348,649	225,625,079,684.13	51,883.95	29 <sup>th</sup>
19	Kaduna	6,066,562	256,110,734,255.77	42,216.78	35 <sup>th</sup>
20	Kano	9,383,682	370,935,172,516.81	39,529.81	36 <sup>th</sup>
21	Katsina	5,792,578	280,544,163,809.26	48,431.66	32 <sup>nd</sup>
22	Kebbi	3,238,628	196,139,911,137.47	60,562.66	19 <sup>th</sup>
23	Kogi	3,278,487	195,125,198,336.31	59,516.84	21 <sup>st</sup>
24	Kwara	2,371,089	165,588,098,911.35	69,836.31	10 <sup>th</sup>
25	Lagos	9,013,534	311,928,495,035.61	34,606.68	37 <sup>th</sup>
26	Nasarawa	1,863,275	145,006,177,121.79	77,823.28	6 <sup>th</sup>
27	Niger	3,950,249	237,369,691,547.30	60,089.81	20 <sup>th</sup>
28	Ogun	3,728,098	195,378,106,884.06	52,406.91	28 <sup>th</sup>
29	Ondo	3,441,024	257,395,751,810.07	74,802.08	9 <sup>th</sup>
30	Osun	3,423,535	210,051,538,274.76	61,355.16	17 <sup>th</sup>
31	Oyo	5,591,589	263,298,045,707.53	47,088.23	33 <sup>rd</sup>
32	Plateau	3,178,712	155,194,100,865.61	48,822.95	30 <sup>th</sup>
33	Rivers	5,185,400	621,996,274,440.22	119,951.46	5 <sup>th</sup>
34	Sokoto	3,696,999	214,300,345,320.76	57,966.03	24 <sup>th</sup>
35	Taraba	2,300,736	176,332,044,844.11	76,641.58	7 <sup>th</sup>
36	Yobe	2,321,591	177,230,732,544.09	76,340.02	8 <sup>th</sup>
37	Zamfara	3,259,846	182,989,541,536.86	56,134.41	25 <sup>th</sup>
	NIGERIA	140,003,542	9,056,438,699,855.15	64,687.21	

Source: compiled by the authors from government revenue allocations. Nigeria's N1 is equivalent to about US\$160

### **Institutionalized corruption and legitimization of violence**

The nation seems to thrive on the politics of disorder that has institutionalized corruption and legitimized violence. Though the prebendal and corrupt character of Nigerian politics has been well noted in the literature (Okecha 2009; Ibeanu and Luckham 2007; Smith 2007; Watts 2005; Joseph 1987), yet the Niger Delta experience is puzzling as huge revenue inflows into the neo-patrimonial sub-national units have resulted in power tussle by the elite who engage in zero-sum competition to capture the disbursements (Suberu 2008; Collier 2007; Watts 2007; Eberlein 2006).

Many government officials have been indicted for the development failure of the region. On 15 September 2005, Governor Diepreye Alamiyeseigha of Bayelsa State (the largest recipient of federal oil revenues between 1999 and 2007) was arrested by British security officials in a London airport for laundering up to the tune of £1.8 million among other charges. He was later placed under house arrest after paying \$1.25 million. He, however, jumped bail in London and appeared in Bayelsa State on 20 November, 2005 (Watts 2007). He was later tried and convicted in Nigeria. Similarly, the former governor of Edo State 1999-2007 (another state in the Niger Delta region), Lucky Igbinedion, also pleaded guilty to corruption and money laundering charges.

The case of James Ibori, former Delta State governor (1999-2007; and the third largest recipient of oil revenues in Table 2), was more dramatic. Ibori was arrested and charged to court in Nigeria for corruption and money laundering charges. Curiously, he was discharged and acquitted of all 170 count charges on December 17 2010 by Justice Marcel Awokulehin at Asaba, Delta State. The justice said that the prosecution had failed to show "critical collaborative evidence. Thus, I accordingly hold that the prosecution failed to make a *prima facie* case in any of all the 170 count charges, so I quash and dismiss all the 170 count charges against him" (Ezea 2010:16). Many saw this as one of the biggest 'sales of justice' in the country.

As the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) made attempts to re-arrest Ibori for retrial using fresh evidence, he fled the country and was later arrested in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, on May 12, 2010 by the Interpol and he was extradited to the United Kingdom for trial. On February 27, 2012, Ibori pleaded guilty to the ten count charges preferred against him at the Southark Crown Court in London. These charges bordered on money laundering, corruption and other financial crimes to the tune of over \$250 million. He is currently serving a 13-year jail term in the UK. His wife, sister and lawyer were earlier convicted by the same court for aiding and abetting these crimes. The trios are serving five years jail terms each (Ajaero 2012).

At the moment, several executive members of the Bayelsa State government have been indicted by the EFCC for allegedly defrauding the state of over N150 billion (*Nigerian Compass* March 28, 2010). In Nigeria, officials are not only corrupt, but corruption is official (Umejei 2009: E9). As shown, corruption has largely become 'democratized' (Human Rights Watch 2007; Peel 2005). Over time, genuine grievances have been overtaken by greed. Even 'democratic' elections are now largely 'incredible' because they are characterized by vote-buying, ballot-stuffing, political thuggery and several other malpractices (Kew 2007; Agbaje and Adejumobi 2006).

Militants' environmentalism has led to generalized insecurity and made politically-motivated killings largely the norm. Political opponents are eliminated extra-judicially in unbridled quest for power and oil largesse. As correctly noted by Amuwo (2009:38), for the Nigerian ruling class, oil wealth remains the largest motivation for political power and it is this obsession and fixation that explains the elite's "intrusive and offensive mentality". The World Bank estimates that, "about 80 per cent of Nigeria's oil and gas revenues accrues to just one per cent of the population" (Igbikiowubo, 2004:15). And it has been estimated that a greater chunk of the \$18-20 billion that the Nigerian state earns annually feeds political venality (Ifeka 2004).

The Nigerian oil industry is said to be the conduit through which a cabal of a few influential individuals manipulates the economy in their own personal interests. Recently, a government official disclosed that about N600 billion out of government subsidy on fuel every year "goes to the pockets of just a few persons who constitute the cabal" (Ogbodo 2009:21). Indeed, the National Assembly was rocked by a \$3 million oil subsidy bribery scandal in much of 2012. Even members of the parliament admit that the "National Assembly has a credibility problem" (see interview with Minority Whip of the House of Representatives by Suleiman 2012: 48). The New York based Global Financial Integrity Report reveals that between 1970 and 2008 alone, Africa lost a total of \$854 billion as a result of illicit financial outflows. Expectedly, Nigeria topped the list with a total illicit outflow of \$89.5 billion. These revenues flight exceeded development aid to Nigeria at a ratio of 2 to 1 (*The Punch* March 31, 2010).

The character of the Niger Delta conflict is convoluted and linked to a nexus of political corruption and violent militancy where criminality has largely become an "instrument of the struggle" (Ikelegbe 2008; Watts 2007; Ifeka 2004). Elite's unbridled tussle for political power has given rise to the recruitment of unemployed youth as thugs and for other criminal activities, making the roles of youth in the interface between development and security ambivalent (Olawale and Alao 2007, see also Stern and Ojendal 2010). In August 2007 alone, over 50 lives were lost as a result of gang rivalries.



Militant leaders were locked in a power tussle over political spoils. Armed militants in the guise of agitation perpetrated different criminal activities including hostage-taking, armed robbery, killing and maiming of innocent citizens (Osumah and Aghedo 2011).

This fragmentation of political order led to the setting up a Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) in Rivers State in 2008. The Commission which had 215 memoranda as well as several testimonies and evidences, attributed the problems of Rivers State in particular and Niger Delta in general to governance, politics, cultism, chieftaincy and insurgency that were interwoven. The Commission blamed the remote cause of conflict on the neglect of the area and the immediate causes on political tussle by power elite who employed insurgents to devastate opponents and their constituencies. According to Justice Eso, Chairman of the Commission “a place like Okuru-Ama, Amadi-Ama were completely razed to the ground with the government of the day looking the other way” (Eso 2009:96).

Peace-building efforts in the Niger Delta were politicized, poorly implemented and therefore ineffective. In one attempt at peace restoration, the Rivers State government raised militants’ expectations by paying N250,000 each for guns collected from them when the price of a new gun was N125,000 at the time. This made militancy more fashionable and lucrative. Justice Eso castigated President Obasanjo for heightening the profile of Tom Ateke and Asari Dokubo by wining and dining with them at Aso Rock and flying them in presidential jets, all in the name of fostering peace in the Niger Delta (Eso 2009). These militant leaders were culpable for the death of thousands of persons and destruction of several communities. For example, dynamite and bomb blasts were reportedly used by Tom Ateke-led Niger Delta Vigilante (NDV) to destroy Bukuma, Tombia, Buguma and Ogbakiri communities in Rivers State because of the supremacy tussle between him and Asari Dokubo (DonPedro 2006). Despite knowledge of this criminality by the topmost echelon of government, no charges were brought against the perpetrators. This may imply state acceptance of their activities that bother either on genuine grievance or criminality to draw attention to their cause.

The lucrateness of militancy is helped by its access to crude oil through what is called ‘oil bunkering’. This horrendous theft of crude oil has also been attributed to the complicity between some militants, politicians, civil servants, ex- and serving military officers, businessmen, and several individuals and groups (Eberlein 2006; Ifeka 2004). Bunkering involves the installation of a tap into the crude oil pipeline to siphon it. The siphoned oil is loaded into barges which dislodge their cargo into bigger ships waiting at sea. From there, the ships disappear to international markets. The bunkering cartel in the Niger Delta is said to make as much as \$60m a day. This explains why the perpetrators will do anything to protect the lucrative business.

President Yar’Adua had admitted that an international cartel was involved in Nigerian ‘blood oil,’ akin to the ‘blood diamonds’ of Liberia and Sierra Leone (*Africa Research Bulletin* (2008:17613). It is alleged that the money realized from the crude theft is used to finance political activities, insurgency and other business interests (Cumins and Beasant 2005). As shown in Table 3 the country lost over \$20 million in 2008 alone. Furthermore, there is also a growing wave of kidnapping for ransom among militants. This has led to the abduction of thousands of expatriate oil workers and other people for huge ransoms. Initially, only foreign oil workers were kidnapped, but this has since been extended to wealthy indigenes and their relatives including aged people and school children (Osumah and Aghedo 2011; Onovo 2009).

**Table 3** Nigeria: Quantity of oil loss in barrels per day and amount in US Dollars for 2008

S/N	Month	Estimated Qty of Barrels of Oil Loss Per Day	Total Barrels of Oil Loss for the Month	OPEC Basket	Total Amount Loss for the Month in US Dollars (million)
				Price for Bonny Light Crude Oil for the Month in US Dollars	
1	January	700,000	21,700,000	88.35	1,917,195,000
2.	February	700,000	20,300,000	90.64	1,839,992,000
3.	March	700,000	21,700,000	99.03	2,148,951,000
4.	April	700,000	21,700,000	105.16	2,208,360,000
5.	May	700,000	21,700,000	119.16	2,590,763,000
6.	June	700,000	21,700,000	128.33	2,694,930,000
7.	July	700,000	21,700,000	131.22	2,847,474,000
8.	August	700,000	21,700,000	112.41	1,633,793,000
9.	September	700,000	21,700,000	96.85	2,439,297,000
10.	Grand Total				\$20,720,842,000

Source: *Newswatch* (May 4, 2009:19)

There is a sense of outright criminality by some militant groups propelled by greed. A recently concluded quantitative survey which pooled 1,500 respondents drawn from the Niger Delta found that the majority of local people who joined the militant groups had no sense of grievance and those who had a sense of grievance were not likely to participate in violent militancy (Oyefusi 2008). The discourse of grievance is now largely being employed as a political strategy for personal economic agendas by large segments of various actors who are benefiting hugely from the political economy of the resource conflict. In official circles, the Niger Delta militants were seen as criminals: "Those people are criminal elements. Don't look at all this propaganda of theirs", stated President Yar'Adua in an interview with *The Guardian* (April 30 2009:9). Yet a few weeks later, the same president granted unconditional amnesty to all the militants including Henry Okah who was standing trial for treason and gun-running. Government's agreement to dialogue means that there were some merits in the demands of the insurgents.

The amnesty programme had resulted in a phenomenal increase in Nigerian oil production as some level of peace returned to the region. Government commendation for the initiative came from local and international quarters including the United Nations. However, the amnesty deal has not engendered sustainable peace owing to poor implementation and corruption. Ex-militants have protested publicly in Edo, Bayelsa, Rivers, and Akwa Ibom States over government failure to pay, accommodate, and train them as contained in the amnesty agreement. Also, the N50 billion budgeted for the programme has become a veritable source of conflict as members of the amnesty implementation committee, local politicians as well as influential militant leaders are locked in a tussle for the largesse. Three years after its initiation, the peace deal has failed to address the historical grievances of the region which have been anchored on sustainable development, environmental security, and political restructuring. Already, some ex-militants are threatening a return to the creeks to continue with their 'struggle'. The MEND claimed responsibility for the October 1, 2010 Independence Day bomb blast in Abuja in which several lives were lost as well as the bomb explosion in Warri and Yenagoa. Some disenchanted ex-militants were also implicated in the gang rape at the University of Port Harcourt in November 2009 and some armed robbery and kidnapping incidents (Ebiri 2010; Aaron 2005).

## Conclusion

This paper has deployed the greed and grievance thesis to demonstrate how they manifested in a mutually reinforcing pattern in the Niger Delta resource conflicts. We examined the nature of the conflict by an assessment of the key actors, motivations and their interrelationship in the conflict situation.

We argue that from the late 1970s onwards environmental activism waged by the oil-bearing Niger Delta communities that was civic in nature gradually metamorphosed into a violent agitation involving power tussle to capture oil and development largesse. Since then, though grievance remains justified as a constant variable, it is also propelling greed. Indeed, large segments of both state officials and militant youth groups in the region have largely been driven by greed rather than the quest for environmental justice. Hence, some militants by their involvements in oil bunkering, political thuggery, ransom kidnapping, killing of innocent people and other crimes, seem to have more in common with the rent-seeking, profligate and power-hungry political elite than freedom fighters. To these actors, the Niger Delta is more profitable in conflict than in peace. This poses a serious threat to the peace-building effort.

As noted by David Keen (2008), the commonsense notion of conflict as a contest between two or more actors is reductionist, as is the conception of conflict as a kind of breakdown. As shown by the Niger Delta case, resource wars can be profitable to a lot of conflict actors. This profitability makes the quest for peace and stability a herculean task as profiteers will do their utmost to maintain the system of spoils. Until the motivations and vested interests of the conflict actors (state officials, oil multinationals and militants alike) are clearly identified and interrogated; justice done to perpetrators of conflict; and adequate compensation given to conflict victims, the quest for peace in the Niger Delta will largely remain a mirage.

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