

Niger Delta Development Commission (NNDC): A Development or Patronage Agency?

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Abstract

After unsuccessful attempts by successive Nigerian governments to transform the general socio-economic environment and enhance the productive capacity of the Niger Delta Area, the Niger Delta Development Commission (NNDC) was officially inaugurated on 21st December, 2000, with a vision to offer a lasting solution to the socio-economic problems of the Niger Delta region and a mission to facilitate the rapid, even and sustainable development of the Niger Delta into a region that is economically prosperous, socially stable, ecologically regenerative and politically peaceful. Twenty years after the Commission was established, those nagging problems for which it was established to redress subsist. In fact, they have assumed epidemic dimensions as the region still contends with environmental degradation, increasing poverty, youth restiveness, high rates of criminality, and infrastructural decay. At the heart of the problem is the nature of the State in Nigeria as an instrument of accumulation and dispensing of political patronage to satisfy the insatiable appetite of Nigeria's ruling class. Against this backdrop, effective solution to Niger Delta development problematic will only come with fundamental changes in the way resources are allocated and accounted for by the Commission.

Keywords: Niger Delta; Resource governance; Development; NNDC; Patronage agency; State

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I. INTRODUCTION

Nigeria is a major oil-producer, in fact an oil-dependent state and a leading member of Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC). The country is the eleventh largest producer and the eighth largest exporter of crude oil in the world and oil production (crude production and natural gas liquids), national output is currently running at roughly 2.39 million b/d. The majority of reserves are found in the Niger River Delta and offshore in the Bight of Benin, the Gulf of Guinea, and the Bight of Bonny. Consequently, oil revenues constitute the overwhelming proportion of government and export revenues (Lewis & Watts, 2013). Against this backdrop, the Niger Delta Region will continue to assume considerable attention and importance both nationally and internationally due to her rich ecosystem and tremendous natural resources. The Region is situated in the southern part of Nigeria occupying a surface area of 112,110 square kilometres housing over 28.1 million inhabitants (2006 figures), 75% who live in the rural and 25% in the urban areas. Sustaining the largest wetland in Africa and one of the largest wetlands in the world, the Niger Delta consists of 25,900 square kilometre of mangrove forest, fresh water swamps, coastal ridges, forest and fertile dry land. The innumerable creeks and streams have in the past, provided habitat for a variety of fish and marine and wildlife. The abundance of rain and fertility of the land have no doubt, set the conditions for the Region to have one of the highest rural population densities in the world (RTCND, 2008). Comprising of nine states, the region is richly endowed with natural resources, high quality crude oil, solid minerals, agricultural land capable of growing diverse crops and vast fishing waters.

The discovery of oil and its first commercial production in Nigeria set in motion processes that resulted in profound transformation of the Region especially, its place in the Nigerian state's political and economic architecture. Oil and gas alone from the Niger Delta have generated forty percent of Nigeria's national Gross Domestic Product (GDP) over recent decades. In fact, between 2000 and 2004, oil accounted for about 79.5 percent of total government revenues and about 97 percent of foreign exchange revenues. Paradoxically, however, these vast revenues from an international industry have barely touched the Region's own pervasive local poverty (BRACED Commission, 2012). Despite its contribution to Nigeria's economic growth, the region's Human Development Index (HDI) score was a low value of 0.564 in 2005 (NDHR, 2006). Although these ratings put the Niger Delta at a slightly higher level than Nigeria's overall HDI of 0.453 at the same period, the region rated far below countries or regions with similar oil and gas resources. For instance, the HDI for Saudi Arabia in 2000 stood at 0.800, while in 2003 the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Libya, Venezuela and

Indonesia achieved scores of 0.849, 0.844, 0.772 and 0.697 respectively (UNDP, 2006; BRACED Commission, 2012). Also, human per capita income is very low confirming the alarming rate of poverty in the region. Other human development indicators such as life expectancy, maternal and child health, access to education and quality health care services as well as overall wellbeing of the inhabitants is steadily on the reverse, due to abysmal neglect over the years. The composite employment data which are conservative due to inadequate documentation showed that the rate of unemployment surged from 14.0% in 2007 to 19.7% at the end of December 2009 and thence to 21.1% by December 2010. The unemployment rate has for some time been higher in rural communities than in cities for all age groups. For example, unemployment rate amongst 18-24 age groups was said to be higher in 2006 at 30%. Another age group highly affected is 25-44, about 88% in 2006 (NDDC Master Plan, 2001).

Of the 30% habitable land in the Niger Delta, less than 50% of land available for agriculture has been put to use while the remaining has been degraded by the petroleum industry. 44.2% of the people are employed in Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing Industry. Of the 27.1 million people in the Region (2000 figure), about 75% live in rural settlements. The annual Per capita income is very low; 66% of the population earns less than NGN25, 000 (65 USD) and 76.6% less than NGN54, 000 (140 USD). Worse still over 70% live at subsistence level. Only 27% of the Niger Delta populace have access to clean and portable water due to ground and surface water pollution deriving from petroleum industry operations and other challenges in the region. In addition, 70% of inhabitants of the Niger Delta live without access to electricity and without modern energy services for industrial and domestic needs (BRACED Commission, 2012). Complicating this economic picture is the deep-seated feeling of neglect which lies at the root of a widespread discontentment in the Niger Delta.

The quality of life has further been affected by youth restiveness which metamorphosed from minor unorganized hostilities to highly sophisticated cocktail of militant organizations, and criminal gangs which fed on agitations for fair play in development of the region. This has reinforced the wrong impression or belief by the national ruling class that the Region is peopled by groups that are prone to conflict, criminality and violence. What seems to be worrisome is the fact that the region is not progressing fast as expected especially, with the increase in oil revenues allotted to the area, courtesy of 13% derivation formula.

It is argued in this paper that at the heart of the problem is the nature of the state in Nigeria especially, the expansion of political corruption which flourished under all regimes, and that the structure of corruption and rent distribution is consequential for economic outcomes in the region. The Niger Development Commission is used here to demonstrate the extent to which state institutions created to ameliorate the conditions of majority of the inhabitants of the oil resource region have been plagued by inefficiency and corruption within state institutions.

Although the Nigerian State had established a number of dedicated institutions of restraint, that should ensure checks and balances such as the (i) National Assembly, (ii) Code of Conduct Bureau, (iii) Independent Corrupt Practices and Related Offences Commission, and (iv) Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), the sad reality is that the political and business classes who occupy these institutions operate in a world of impunity. It is also noted here that the accumulative character of the State and the political and institutional dynamics of Nigerian governance architecture, to a significant degree, define the patterns of politics and operation of past development interventionist agencies and the present Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC). A logical start-off point is an examination of the nature of the state in Nigeria.

The nature of the State in Nigeria

The concept of the State has acquired particular importance among social scientists and historians, and like other analysis, it tends to be impeded with the ever contradictory views surrounding most of the social science issues. Consequently, its conceptualisation has given rise to plethora of theories by Marxists and liberal theorists. The emergence of these theories became inevitable because the state is a theory of the ways in which economic and social structures, groups and circumstances express themselves politically, more so, the state in contemporary world had gradually permeated all spheres of human life (Duncan, 1982). Anderson (1986) in his own contribution put forward the debatable idea that the state was invented on the initiative of collective entities: the bourgeoisie needed to protect its interests, or the aristocracy needed to reassert its authority. This thesis, according to Badie and Brinbaum (1994), provides a satisfactory explanation of some aspects of the founding of the state at the latter stage in its development, but it fails to account for its origins. They contended that it was Hobbes who put forward the most convincing strategic analysis of the origin of the state via a contractual exchange of utilities, whereby individuals surrender a part of their freedom in to the hands of the sovereign who in return guarantees their security.

Consent to a Hobbesian - type may be regarded as a rational device for binding together the rulers and the ruled only in polities in which community and associational mechanisms of security have failed to function. At this stage the inevitable key question is: how do the state, as a type of political system that was invented under specific historical circumstance function everywhere and for whom? According to Wallerstein (1974), the state satisfied the needs that arose from the emergence of a market economy, whereas the origins of the state

may be traced back to a rural economy which clearly antedated the appearance of capitalism. Hechter and Brustein (1980), argue that the state is the regulatory mechanism of a civil society characterised by class conflict and the growing division of labour. Yet others have regarded the state, variously, as the defender of the rural social order, as the harbinger of a form of neo-mercantilism, hindering trade, and the generation of bureaucracy as a new source of obstacles (Badie and Brinbaum, 1994). The foregoing is the functionalist explication of the origin of the state. Unfortunately, recourse to the functionalist explication will always produce dubious results, due to the fact that its methodological rigour is limited. However, it has proved to be useful for identifying some constituent elements of the state and understanding how they first took shape and how they fitted together, but it cannot seek to ossify these data into a functionalist theory of state without losing sight of the effects of combination or innovation. Furthermore, it cannot serve as the basis of a theory of state, it can, however, clarify some aspects of the way in which it functions.

For our immediate purpose, analysis of the state as a mode of domination provides a useful point of departure. Ihonvbere drawing inspiration from Ake states that:

“The state is a specific modality of class domination. It is a modality in which the system of institutional mechanisms of class domination are differentiated and disassociated from the ruling class and appears as an objective force standing alongside society. The essential feature of the State form of domination is that the system of institutional mechanisms of domination is autotomized and becomes largely independent of the social classes including the hegemonic social class (1989:44)

To conceive the state as a mechanism of domination, is to understand also why it is necessarily a living contradiction, a contradiction of interests of powers and social forces. Little wonder then the dominant social forces struggle to maintain their domination and the subordinate social forces struggle against their subordination and related disabilities. This is the context in which public policies including development strategies are made (Ihonvbere, 1989).

The state in Nigeria is essentially different from the state in advanced countries but comparable to the state in most developing countries in which the majority of the population is tied to agrarian pursuits often of marginal or precarious profitability. The state enjoys a pre-eminent position because it was created by foreign conquest and domination and not through a gradual process of aggregation or expansion of indigenous societies. This implies that the colonial power, and the economic process it fostered, determined the essential elements of the future for the subjugated peoples. Furthermore, continued foreign penetration and domination of the economy after political independence together with the constraints of peripheral capitalism in the world economy, meant that access to the State remained disproportionately important in the struggle for upward mobility (Joseph, 1991).

The various institutional elements that make up the state include the much spoken about government, civil administration or bureaucracy, the Local Government apparatus, parliamentary assemblies and law enforcement agencies (the armed forces, police, judiciary etc). Consequently, what the state stands for is a number of particular institutions which together constitute its reality, and which interact as parts of what may be called the state system (Miliband, 1969). The personnel of the state need not be members of the ruling class. They may be recruited from among the dominated class. But the nature and role of the state effectively prevent such personnel from using the state to destroy the fundamental interests of the ruling class (Ekekwe, 1986). Positions in the institutions which constitute the state are occupied by people, some wielding more power than others. The social characteristics of these people, power wielded by political and economic bodies and groups of persons outside state institutions, the political process, and thus the attendant general distribution of power remain crucial in considerations of the role of the state (Miliband, 1969; Otobo, 1988).

Although the issues raised thus far are in relation to the economically advanced capitalist states, Otobo (1988) contends that they remain valid even in the context of developing country like Nigeria, where due to a combination of historical and material circumstances, majority of the people do not enjoy other freedoms commonly taken for granted in the former. Also, productive forces have not been channelled so as to achieve an enviable level of material existence for a substantial number of the population. More importantly, due to the differences in the level of the development of the productive forces the Nigeria state, through its several institutions, is to a great extent a direct instrument of accumulation for the dominant class or social group. To conceive the state simply as an instrument and direct mechanism of the ruling class, is necessarily an over simplification of a more complex process but adequate enough for our purpose.

As a consequence of the above, I argue that it is the governing elites' relationship to the state which largely enables actors to get rich and dominate the social scene in Nigeria. The petro-economy is more significant in this regard because it facilitates the diversion of public revenue by successive holders of political power. The link between holding positions of power with the state apparatus and acquisition of wealth is also clearly related to the political hierarchy. This is in agreement with Bayart (1993) who submitted that the exercise of supreme authority in particular, generally goes hand in hand with a proportional increase in wealth. This situation introduced a qualitative rupture within systems of inequality within the country. In fact, participation in politics provides a hold over the economy, much more than the opposite' and related to this

point, is that the post-colonial state is thus comparable to the traditional state since one's position in relation to the apparatus of the state also determines one's social status, the nature of one's relationship to the economy and one's material power (Sklar, 1979). Although the foregoing analysis are accurate in general terms, these affirmations nonetheless, should be treated with caution because they have led prematurely to the identification as dominant class of "bureaucratic or state bourgeoisie", or of an "aristocracy" or a "political class", or an "organizational or managerial bourgeoisie", all of whose definitions raise more problem than they solve (Cohen, 1972; Skalar, 1975; Sandbook, 1975).

The State and the establishment of special development interventionist agencies for the Niger Delta

In an attempt to transform the general socio-economic environment and enhance the productive capacity of whole regions, government has initiated regional development programmes. For most cases these programmes have collapsed without realising their intendment. To begin with, part of the problem is that the State has pursued development with confusion of purposes and interests and with policies characterised by ambiguities and contradictions. Few examples will suffice. The Sir Henry Willink's Commission report of 1958 recommended that the Niger Delta be made a special area to be developed directly by the Federal government (note that it was before oil was discovered in the area). Accordingly, the Federal Government established the Niger Delta Development Board under the Niger delta Development Board Act of 1961. The board took off in 1963 but remained moribund until the outbreak of the civil war in 1967. What later became Niger Delta Basin Development Authority is a shadow of what was recommended for the development of the Niger Delta by Sir Henry Willink. After the civil war, nothing substantial happened in respect of development of the Niger delta, rather the idea was politicised and made nonsense by the proliferation of River Basin Development Authorities all over the country thereby defeating the original intention of the Willink's Commission to develop the Niger Delta. The River Basin Development Schemes was adopted in 1976 with the enactment of the River Basin Decree No. 25 of 1976. The Decree established eleven corporate bodies: Sokoto-Rima, Hadejia - Jama'are, Chad, Upper Benue, Lower Benue, Cross River, Anambra-Imo, Niger, Niger Delta, Benin-Owena and Ogun-Oshun River Basin Authorities (Balogun and Ukeje, 1986).

The Basin Authorities suffered under a politically machinated management, especially between 1979 and 1983. The management was made up of politicians who knew nothing about irrigation schemes and farming but were more interested in contract awards. This led to decisions detrimental to the operations of the authorities. In most cases, there was no synchronisation of agricultural activities from land preparation to harvesting. Most projects were abandoned after mobilisation fees have been paid out, while works on others were grounded due to lack of funds (Balogun and Ukeje, 1986). More importantly, its failure to solve the problems of the Niger Delta may be a result of the authorities' fragmented approach to development policies.

Following series of crisis and agitations in oil producing areas mostly located in the Niger Delta, the Oil Mineral Producing Areas Development Commission (OMPADEC) was established by the Babangida administration via Decree No. 23 of 1991 with the aim of improving the lives of the rural folk through the provision of infrastructural facilities. The commission was allocated two percent (2%) of the derivation fund, while the state kept one percent. Prior to the establishment of OMPADEC there had been legal and political delays in utilising the limited derivation fund both under the second republic and subsequent military regimes, a situation which meant delayed development). The Commission in its 1994 report gave itself pass mark in terms of provision of small scale loans for cottage; small and medium size enterprises, infrastructural facilities such as roads, electricity, water projects, jetties, school buildings, health centres, shore protection/Reclamation etc. However, evidence abounds to contradict OMPADEC's claims. Onosode (1999) argues that the commission has performed dismally with uncompleted, abandoned and ill-conceived projects dotting the landscape. In most cases, massive land clearance for uncompleted projects without mitigating measures crated further environmental crisis and disaster in the already ecologically fragile and sensitive region (Onosode, 1999)

The Abacha regime through Decree No. 25 of 1994 established the Petroleum Trust Fund (PTF) with a board of Trustees which was inaugurated on March 21, 1995. Its membership was made up of Major General Muhammadu Buhari (as Chairman), Professor J. P. Clark, Chief D. B. Zang, Alhaji Ahmed Talib, Chief Rufus Giwa, Professor Chimere Ikoku, Alhaji Yahaya Gusau and Chief Tayo Akpata (Kukah, 1999). The establishment of this institution drew commendation from the Nigerian populace due to its objectives, especially given the collapse of social infrastructure which was the bye-products of executive thievery. There were high hopes due to the perceived personality of the no-nonsense, frank and ascetic Gen. Buhari, its Chairman. Events have however shown that the hopes were misplaced as the Niger Delta region complains of lop-sidedness in execution of the PTF projects (THE GUARDIAN, Monday, July 12, 1999; TELL, September 6, 1999).

Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) and Niger Delta development paralysis

Development is positively influenced by good governance and responsive policies. Within this context, governance has four key dimensions, namely, economic, corporate, administrative and political governance. It is an indisputable fact that all four must interact to create an environment within which growth, development and

poverty reduction can take place in a country. The relevance and effectiveness of these components provide a measure of the extent to which a country's environment may be conducive to development. The point needing stress is that good governance, and by extension the existence of a conducive development environment does not happen by happenstance; it depends on effective and well-functioning institutions. It is also an indisputable fact that weak, complex and inefficient institutions create incentives for corruption, reduce productivity and output, and hinder development (ACBF, 2003). The operations of Niger Delta Development Commission have shown that the effectiveness of a particular institution in Nigeria is influenced by a number of factors. Among these are the nature of the State, the effectiveness of other supporting institutions, available manpower, the cost of accessing and maintaining such institutions and the free flow of information essential for oversight functions. The Niger Delta Development Commission was officially inaugurated on December 21, 2000 with a vision "to offer a lasting solution to the socio-economic difficulties of the Niger Delta Region" and a mission "to facilitate the rapid, even and sustainable development of the Niger Delta into a region that is economically prosperous, socially stable, ecologically regenerative and politically peaceful" (NDDC, 2006). The law establishing the NDDC provided the following as the funding sources: (i). Federal Government contribution, which was to be equivalent to 15% of the monthly statutory allocation due to member States of the Commission from the Federation Account. (ii). Oil and gas processing companies' contribution of 3% of their total budget. (iii). 50% of the Ecological Fund Allocations due to the member States. (iv). Proceeds from NDDC Assets and miscellaneous sources, including grants-in-aid, gifts, loans and donations. The NDDC Act also provides for a Governing Board of twenty members: Ten of the members are appointed by the Federal Government (The Presidency) including the Chairman, Managing Director/Chief Executive Officer (MD/CEO, the two Executive Directors, three Representatives of non-oil producing states, one representatives each from the Federal Ministry of Finance and the Federal Ministry of Environment and one representative of the oil companies. Each of the nine oil producing states appoints one member each while the oil companies appoint one member to represent them (NDDC, 2006).

Also established in the Act is a monitoring committee whose members shall be appointed by the President with functions, among other things clearly stated in the following words: "The Monitoring Committee shall (a) Monitor the management of the Funds of the Commission and the implementation of the projects of the Commission and (b) have access to the books of account and other records of the Commission at all times and submit periodical reports to the President, Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces. The foregoing underscores the fact that NDDC was established as a Federal Government Agency under the management and control of the Presidency. Therefore, the Federal Government ought to ensure that all revenue accruing to the Commission must be judiciously and equitably channelled to benefit the people directly. Failure to do so should attract consequences for abuse by Federal government appointed functionaries (Dan-Princewill, 2020). Regrettably, the government at the centre turn a blind eye to the long-running saga of sleaze in the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC).

Recent revelations have shown that NDDC has long deviated from its core mandates and has been turned into a milking cow by politicians, civil servants and contractors. The palpable frustration in the region derives from the fact that the establishment of the Commission, almost twenty years ago, has failed to reduce poverty and foster development by providing access to health services, safe water, roads, tackle environmental degradation among others. In fact, there is not much to justify the trillions of Naira the Commission had received thus far. The region is littered with abandoned projects and half-baked infrastructures that dilapidate as days run into months (Business Day, 2020). In 2017, the then Managing Director, Mr. Nsima Ekere, announced that the Commission's contingent liability was N1.3trillion (USD 3.368billion), with 8,000 projects spread across the nine states (Ebiri, 2020), while Godswill Akpabio, the Minister of the Niger Delta, had in 2019, said that a total of 1,200 projects were abandoned in the nine states of the Niger Delta. Yet, Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC) paid the NDDC \$136.6 million as fees in 2019; \$79.6 million in 2018; \$79.6 million in 2017, and \$125.14 million in 2016. This is just one out of over 15 oil firms operating in the region (Business Day, 2020).

Consequently, the officials of the commission and its supervising Minister are not accountable to the people of the Niger Delta they are meant to serve but rather to a distant federal government that the people of the oil rich region can neither engage nor hold accountable (Ochonu, 2020). It is therefore not a surprise that NDDC has recently been mired in a series of damaging financial scandals bordering on alleged misappropriation of public funds to the tune of N81.5 billion (USD 211million) by the Commission's Interim Management Committee (IMC) which attracted flurry of petitions by Civil Society Organizations (CSOs). The allegations of misappropriation of public funds by the IMC was this time, too weighty, hence the decision by the National Assembly to mandate its ad-hoc committees to authenticate the veracity of deluge of petitions bordering on corruption in the NDDC. The main focus of the probe according to the Chairman of the Senate ad-hoc Committee was on all financially related allegations, mismanagement and misappropriation and the breach of extant procurement processes as enshrined in the Public Procurement Act 2007 by the management of the commission (Ebiri, 2020: 20).

Financial documents forwarded to the Senate Ad-hoc Committee by the Interim Management Committee (IMC) of NDDC, with regards to expenditure carried out between October 2019 and May 31, 2020, showed that monies expended on Covid-19 pandemic relief were outrageous.

Out of a total expenditure of N81.495 billion (USD 211million) spent by the IMC led by Mrs. Joi Gbene Nuneih as Managing Director between October 29, 2019 and February 18, 2020 and May 31, 2020, and the current IMC led by Professor Kemebradikumo Pondei between February 19, 2020 and May 31, 2020, N314 billion (USD 813million) was spent on Covid-19 as relief funds. Highly disturbing is the fact that based on the records of payment of such funds, a whopping N10 million (USD 26,000) was given to a single staff while two other staffers collected N7 billion (USD 18.134million) each. Other payments as reliefs against the pandemic are N3 million (USD 7,770) given to each of 148 staffers, N1.5 million (USD 3,886) each to 157 other categories of staffers; meanwhile, N1million (USD 2,590) each was paid to 497 others and N600, 000 (USD 1,554) each to the last category of 464 other staffers. Also included in the Covid-19 pandemic relief largesse as clearly stated in the financial documents, is N475 million (USD 1.230million) given to the police high command for purchase of face masks and hand sanitizers for men and officers across the nine states in the Niger Delta Region.

Facts at the disposal of the Senate Ad-hoc Committee further revealed that the IMC led by Ms. Nunieh, who assumed office in October 2019 and sacked in February 9, 2020 spent N22.5 billion (USD 58.290million) out of 81.5 billion (USD 211million) being investigated whereas the incumbent IMC headed by Professor Pondei expended between February 19, 2020 and May 31, 2020 N59.1 billion (USD 153.108million). Financial documents submitted to the Senate Committee showed that NDDC spent N1.3 billion (USD 3.367million) on community relations; condolences N122 million (USD 316,062); consultancy, N83.8 million (USD 217,098); COVID-19 intervention N3.14 billion (USD 8.134million); Duty Tour Allowance (DTA) N486 million (USD 1.259million); Lassa fever, N1.956 billion (USD 5.067million); legal fees, N906 million (USD 2.347million); Logistics, N61 million (USD 158,031); maintenance, N61 million (USD 158,031), and medicals, N2.6 billion (USD 6.735million) (Ebiri, 2020: 20).

Professor Pondei, while appearing before the Senate Ad-hoc Committee, explained that the Commission expended N1.5 billion (USD 3.886million) as COVID-19 relief on NDDC staff, while portion of the COVID-19 palliative was given to various youth groups in the Niger Delta to help cushion the effect of the pandemic on them to curtail violent social eruptions. Against this backdrop, N5 million (USD 12,953) was disbursed to youths, N5 million (USD 12,953) for women and N5million (USD 12,953) for people living with disabilities in each Senatorial District in the Niger Delta States. However, Joi Nunieh claimed that between October 2019 and May 31, 2020, only N8 billion (USD 20.725million) was spent by the IMC under her leadership contrary to the N22.5 billion (USD 58.290million) stated by the Senate Ad-hoc Committee. The question needing answer is who authorized the above expenditures? On his own part, NDDC Acting Executive Director, Projects, Mr. Cairo Ojoughboh, disclosed that some lawmakers have their finger prints on 1000 out of the 2,900 sleaze-prone emergency contracts. He submitted that the budget(s) of the NDDC from 2001 to 2020 have always been hijacked by the two chairmen of the National Assembly Committee- the Chairman in the House of Representatives and Chairman in the Senate (Ebiri, 2020).

For example, the Minister of Niger Delta Affairs and former Governor of Akwa Ibom State, Senator Godswill Akpabio had earlier forwarded a letter to the National Assembly investigating the allegations of corruption against the management of NDDC where he noted that 60 per cent of the contracts for NDDC were awarded to members of the National Assembly. However, the part of the letter where the Minister stated the names of the National Assembly who were beneficiaries of the contracts were not read on the floor of the house. Senator Akpabio in the document listed Senator Peter Nwaoboshi representing Delta North Senatorial District in the Nigerian Senate against 53 projects which included, Emergency Repairs of Ause Street, Owo Phase 2, and Emergency Repairs of Idumuoge Road via Ojemaye, Emergency Repairs of Otolokpo College Road, Otolokpo, and Emergency Repairs of Police Ishu Ani Ukwu Road, Isese Uku. They also included Emergency Repairs of Old Sapele Agbor Road, Obiaruku, Emergency Repairs of Ehwerhe Obada Agbarho Road, Emergency Repairs of Hon. Ifeanyi Eboigbe Street Boji Owa/Goodwill Street, Owa Alero, and Emergency Repairs of Ahiana Okwu to Obuocha Okwu among others. Also, Minister Godswill Akpabio listed Hon. Mutu's name against 74 projects which included various emergency road projects in Delta, Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa and Rivers State. Other lawmakers that Akpabio listed projects against are Senator Mathew Urhoghide (6), Sma Anyanwu (19), and others simply identified as Ondo and Edo reps (Ekombong, 2020). The point needing stress is that the so-called "Honourable Members" simply collected funds for contracts and disappeared without as much as visiting the site of the project.

In so far, as the kleptocratic officials of NDDC and the supervising minister are in good graces of the presidency, they can maximise their rent/bribe-extraction possibilities of funds allocated to the commission and neglect commission's development remit without consequences. The kleptocrats favour policies that will transfer the most resources into their pockets while opposing policies that distribute benefits widely throughout society with little opportunities to extract pay offs at the centre. As corrupt rulers, they support policies that

produce personalized gains even if they result in lower overall social wealth. The obvious consequence of the malfeasance playing out in the NDDC over the years is, perhaps, the pandemic nature of unemployment in the region which has remained far above the national average. According to the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) 2018 third quarter job data, Nigeria's unemployment was 23.1 percent. However, Akwa Ibom had the highest unemployment rate of 38 percent, while Rivers State returned 36.4% in joblessness. Bayelsa, another major oil producing state, had an unemployment rate of 32.6%, while Delta State had a rate of 25.4%. Abia, another oil-producing state, returned a humongous 31.6% in unemployment. Unfortunately, Abia, Akwa Ibom, Rivers and Bayelsa states topped the chart with the insurgency torn Borno, which has been under the siege of Boko Haram and rebels for over a decade. The list brings a vicarious pain when compared with other non-oil producing zones. While the South-South, which produces over 80 percent of crude oil, returned an average unemployment rate of 32 percent, South-West recorded 14 percent. North-West zone, on the other hand, reported 27 percent unemployment rate (Business Day, 2020:2).

The NDDC situation has shown that corruption is not just an economic problem; however, it is also inter-twined with politics. Corruption is an economic issue because it affects the competitiveness of national and global economy and the efficiency of investment and development projects worldwide. Against this backdrop, corruption describes a relationship between state and the private sector. Sometimes state officials are the dominant actors; in other cases, private actors are the most powerful forces. This debate notwithstanding, the relative bargaining power of these groups determines both the impact of corruption on society and the distribution of 'bribers' and 'bribees'. Although some wealthy countries tend to be democracies, there is lack of unanimity statistically between growth and democratic government. The reason for this state of discourse according to Rose-Ackerman (1999), is that democracy is simply too general a term to capture the range of government forms that come under the rubric. In addition, a government structure that works well in one country may be dysfunctional in another context. The NDDC corruption saga has shown that the establishment of democracy especially, its Nigerian variant may not be an anticorruption strategy. In advanced democracies, the desire for re-election constrains the greed of politicians. The protection of civil liberties and free speech, which normally accompanies democratic electoral processes, makes open and transparent government. Unfortunately, Nigeria's democracy is susceptible to corrupt incentives because her rulers lack the potentials to organize government with checks and balances. This is the message the current state of NDDC conveys to Nigerians.

The probe of the Commission reveals the struggle between a state order seeking to be authoritative and a social context whose abiding political process involves the penetration of the state's boundaries and the capture of its offices for individual-cum communal ends. The NDDC's situation and by extension, the Nigeria's situation, is largely a case of recording the nature of a system in decay, a democracy whose very name had become synonymous with corruption (Joseph, 1991). For example, the Niger Delta Commission (NDDC) is controlled by the all-powerful, revenue appropriating and allocative agency of the federal government and the presidency. The Managing Director is usually a party man or woman appointed by the president and his officials in the presidency to superintend the huge pool of fund accruing to the Commission. The mandate of Managing Director includes funnelling some funds to powerful people in government and in the political party in power. This Ochon (2020) describes as a neo-patrimonial system run from the federal capital territory (Abuja) with little or no reference to the people of the Niger Delta the Commission was established to serve. The implication of the above is that the people of the Niger Delta are denied a voice on how the bud is run or miss run, managed or mismanaged. Because the chief executive officers of the commission are appointed by the presidency and is only accountable to the Minister of Niger Delta Affairs who is normally a political appointee of the president and by extension the presidency, the people of the Niger Delta are alienated from the bureaucratic operations of a commission ostensibly established to address their nagging developmental needs.

The obvious outcome of this unpalatable situation is that the Commission bears the name of the Niger Delta and is headquartered in the region but in actual fact, an appendage of the federal government. Since the president arbitrarily overruled Senate after it cleared a list of members for management positions and appointed the Interim Management Committees, the presidency is therefore complicit in the rot that has become the NDDC. This is so because the appointees owe their allegiance to him rather than to the people of the region. This notwithstanding, the people of Niger Delta should show more than passing interest in the affairs of the Commission. This implies that they keep abreast of development in NDDC by monitoring budgets approvals and ensuring that projects for which funds have been released are duly executed (The Guardian, 2020).

II. CONCLUSION

It is a sad paradox that the nagging issues of underdevelopment epitomised by the continuous loss of livelihood and poverty, environmental degradation (such as coastal erosion and floods and other forms of natural disaster), food insecurity as well as death of rural inhabitants from avoidable deaths of rural inhabitants from avoidable ailments in hospitals that are supposed to be equipped by the NDDC, roads that ought to be first

class road constructed by the commission have become death traps while resources channelled to it to turn the situation around are looted by the thieving political elite with impunity.

The revelations by the probe conducted the Ad-hoc-Committee of the National Assembly creates the impression and correctly so, that those elected by the people to represent them have turned their back on the constituents. More worrisome is the fact that records of many probe panels constituted by the National Assembly in the past, which either could not conclude their assignments or presented reports that didn't leave the confines of the chamber, abound. Consequently, there are reasonable fears that the same fate will most likely befall the recently concluded probe of NDDC (Aghedo, 2020). Inescapably, it is certain from the foregoing that a long dark shadow is still cast on the possibility of attaining the objectives for which the commission was established.

Due to the nature of the Nigerian state, the federal government appears to lack the political will to resolve the inefficiency of weak and corrupt institution like NDDC. The effective solution to the problem of development of the Niger Delta would only come with fundamental changes in the way resources are allocated, managed and accounted for by the commission which have failed woefully in the discharge of its statutory responsibilities. The path to the fulfilment of the original mission of NDDC will be smoothen if the people of the oil rich region support the fight for accountability by whatever constitutional means available to them.

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