

From Adaka Boro to the Niger Delta Avengers: The Dynamics and Management of the Revolt in Nigeria's Niger Delta

Chris O. Ikporukpo

Department of Geography, University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria

Abstract

Although, there was an earlier expression of dissatisfaction, the Twelve-Day Revolution led by Adaka Boro marked the beginning of the revolt in the Niger Delta Region. The revolt may be divided into six phases. Although, the objectives of the phases are similar, the approach has varied. The basic driver of the revolt has been the need for justice in the fiscal federalism regime in order to promote development in the region. The strategies employed in the revolt includes: advocacy, civil disobedience, sabotage, kidnapping and armed resistance. The approaches used by government in managing the revolt include re-engineering the fiscal federalism regime, establishment of development agencies for the region, and armed suppression. It is the ineffectiveness of the management strategies that has resulted in the unending revolt.

Keywords: Fiscal federalism, Development, Revolt, Management of revolt, Niger Delta.

1. Introduction

On February 23, 1966, Isaac Jasper Adaka Boro, a former police officer and former president of the students' union of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, as "Leader of the Liberation Government" and "General Officer Commanding the Niger Delta Volunteer Service" declared part of the Niger Delta Region "The Niger Delta Peoples Republic" as a means to free the region from the oppression, underdevelopment and neglect it had suffered. Thus began the Niger Delta revolt. Although the revolt which started on February 23, 1966 was quelled by the Nigerian armed forces within twelve days (see Boro, 1982), it provided the foundation for subsequent rebellions in the region.

The next phase of the Niger Delta rebellion emerged in 1990 with the presentation of the Ogoni Bill of Rights to the federal government (MOSOP, 1990; Saro-Wiwa, 1992; Saro-Wiwa, 1995; Hunt, 2006). Whereas more than twenty years separated the first and the second phases of the rebellion, it has been more or less continuous since the 1990s. In the early 1990s, as the Ogoni revolt continued, the Association of Minority Oil States emerged to pursue a cause similar to that of the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (Ikporukpo, 1996). The greatest catalyst of the revolt has been the Kaiama Declaration of 1998 by Ijaw youths drawn from over five hundred communities representing over forty clans. This has been the opening of the floodgate of revolt; for, since then so many groups have emerged, the most significant being the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND). The Niger Delta Avengers (NDA), which emerged in March 2016, is the most significant of the recent groups.

The existing literature on the Niger Delta crisis/revolt assumes that the various stages are discrete events, with no relationship. Thus, not only is each stage analysed in isolation but also many of the stages have not been given attention. The MOSOP, the Ijaw Youth Council and the MEND phases are those that have received considerable attention. It is the reason for the revolt and the approach that are usually discussed. The management of the revolt has been neglected. Whereas the neglect of the other phases need not be, a meaningful analysis of the Niger Delta crisis/revolt requires an integrated approach for a better understanding of the issues involved. It is this integrated approach that is adopted in this paper. The paper analyses the various phases of the revolt from a comparative perspective, emphasising the objectives, the approach, and the management. The work addresses the following issues:

- i. what are the distinctive differences, if any, in the objectives pursued in the different phases;
- ii. what are the distinctive differences, if any, in the revolt strategies adopted in the various phases; and
- iii. what are the distinctive differences, if any, in the strategies adopted by the government in the management of the revolt at the different phases?

The information for this paper are basically from secondary sources. Data on the characteristics of the Niger Delta Region were obtained from several works on the geography and ecology of the area. These sources were complemented by the author's wide knowledge of the region, gained through several years of fieldwork in the area. Several volumes of the *Central Bank of Nigeria Statistical Bulletin* provided information on the significance of oil in the region and, indeed, in Nigeria. Government documents (such as gazettes, press releases and laws) dealing with oil and the Niger Delta Region, several publications on the Niger Delta by individuals, non-governmental organisations (such as Human Rights Watch) and international organisations (such as the World Bank and the United Nations Development Programme) were useful sources of information on the revolt in the Niger Delta. The publications of the various groups and organisations that have been involved in the revolt and memoirs of participants were particularly useful. Archival documents, particularly newspapers, news

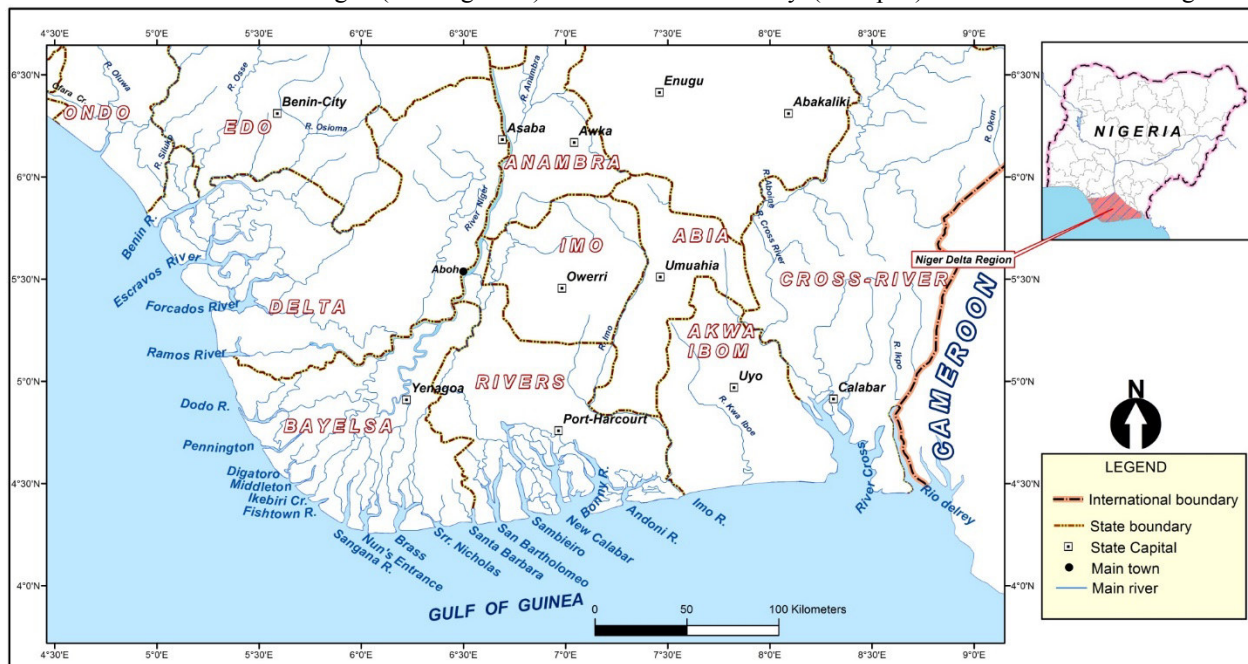
magazines and government publications, on the Niger Delta obtained from the National Archives Ibadan were also utilized. The various sources of data are cited in the relevant parts of the paper.

In order to provide a meaningful contextual background to the analysis, the next section defines and characterizes the Niger Delta Region. The three sections that follow the next one discuss the basis of the revolt, the strategies and the management of the revolt respectively. The conclusion is the last section.

2. The Niger Delta Region: Contextual Background

In providing the context for the subsequent analysis, this section defines the region and discusses the settings that have thrown up the revolt. The ethnic composition, the ecological characteristics, the traditional economic foundation and the evolution of its political regions are discussed. Furthermore, in order to place in perspective the economic and environmental basis of the revolt, the impact of oil exploitation and exploration on the environment of the region and the pattern of the distribution of the benefits of oil among the different regions/states of the country are examined.

The Niger Delta is a roughly triangular region with an intricate network of rivers, distributaries and creeks at the mouth of the River Niger (See Figure 1). Its northern boundary (the apex) is where the River Niger



Source: Author.

A European traveller and adventurer, Major A.O. Leonard, in 1906, characterized the environmental challenges of the region thus:

The country may be described as one in which nature is at the worst. From the slime and ooze of the soil up to the devitalizing heat and humidity of the atmosphere, it leaves its marks on the people in an enervating and demoralizing influence (quoted in Anderson and Peek, 2002: 25).

The region is ethnically very diverse with more than thirty numerically small groups, each officially defined by the central government of the country as minority. Three ethnic groups (Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba and Igbo) are defined as the majority groups in the country. The largest group is Ijaw. Other relatively large groups are the Ibibio, Efik, Urhobo Isoko Itsekiri, Ogoni, Kwale, Ikwerre and Bini. At the country's independence from Britain in 1960, the Niger Delta was split between two regions. The eastern part was part of the Eastern Region while the western section was in the Western Region. There were then three regions in the country- Eastern, Northern and Western Regions. There are now 36 States. The western part of the Niger Delta was constituted into an autonomous Mid-West Region in 1963. Two States, South-Eastern State and Rivers State, were created in the eastern part of the Niger Delta in 1967. There are now six states; four (Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River and Rivers) are in the east and two (Edo and Delta) are in the west. The economic life of the people centres around fishing and farming. Fishing is more significant than farming in the coastal sandy ridge and the mangrove swamp zones while farming is more important in the lowland forest area. However, the two activities are more or less of similar significance in the fresh water swamp zone, although the relative importance varies from one ethnic group area to another, in this zone. Both fishing and farming in the Niger Delta Region are usually at a small scale, using simple implements. The farm size is typically less than one hectare while the fishermen and

women, using dug-out canoes, usually not motorized, fish in creeks, rivers, lakes and estuaries with only a small percentage of them venturing far into the sea. However, a few fishing companies, using trawlers, operate in the coastal waters. Similarly, there are some large farms owned by government and private companies.

The discovery of oil in the Niger Delta, first in Oloibiri (in Bayelsa State) in 1956 and subsequently in several other locations, has changed the economic landscape of the region. In spite of the search for oil in several drainage basins in the country, the region and its borderlands remain the centre of the oil industry in the country. The Niger Delta itself produces more than 90% of the country's oil output. The resource is the mainstay of the country's economy. For instance, according to the country's Central Bank sources, oil accounted for about 82%, more than 86% and more than 84% of the government revenue in 1991, 1992 and 1993 respectively. Since then the contribution has varied between 70% and 85%. In addition to oil, the region also has large natural gas resources, very little of which is currently being exploited.

The exploration and exploitation of oil in the Niger Delta have resulted in remarkable deterioration of the environment; thus adversely affecting the livelihood of the people (See Odu, 1977; Ikporukpo, 1983; Niger Delta Environmental Survey, 1997; Human Rights Watch, 1999a; UNEP, 2011). The environmental impact results mainly from the frequent oil spills and the uncontrolled flaring of gas found in association with oil. For instance, there were 6,817 oil spills involving a loss of about 3 million barrels of oil between 1976 and 2001 (UNDP, 2006). Furthermore, Nigeria flares much more of its gas than any other country. A World Bank analysis in the middle of the 1990s indicated that 76% of the gas produced is flared, compared to zero per cent in Holland, 0.6% in U.S.A. and 4% in Algeria. Among the countries studied, the next to Nigeria in significance was Libya with 21 per cent (World Bank, 1995). The situation in the country has not significantly improved because of weak laws. The federal government itself lamented the deterioration in the environment consequent on oil exploitation thus:

Oil spillage, the environmental pollution and other related hazards have begun to constitute very serious danger to the safety and security of life and property of the inhabitants of oil producing areas. There has also been serious disruption of economic life in some cases, especially in erstwhile agricultural and fishing areas as direct result of oil production activities. Problems caused include massive destruction of fishes through oil poisoning, abandonment of farmland where oil production is being undertaken, loss of soil fertility, especially in areas affected by oil spillage, etc. (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1981: 129)

In spite of the fact that the Niger Delta Region is the centre of oil production which has adversely affected the environment and livelihood of the people, it does not commensurately benefit from the resource (Ikporukpo, 1996 & 2004; UNDP, 2006; Watts, 2008; Obi and Rustad, 2011; Tobor, 2016). This is fundamentally because, by Nigerian law, oil and gas resources belong to the central government. The revenue from oil is usually allocated by the federal government, after usually keeping more than half, to the states and local government areas using mainly the criteria of the equality of states, the population size, areal size (land mass), internal revenue generation effort, social development factor and derivation. The significance of these criteria has varied over the years; although the emphasis in recent years has been on the equality of states and the population size. For instance between 1970 and 2010 the percentage share of population size and for equality of states has varied between 40% and 50%. The criterion of derivation which was 100% before 1960 and 50% in 1960, declined to 1.5% in the 1980s, then rose to 3% in the early 1990s and finally to 13% since 1999 (Nigerian Economic Society, 1999, Onuigbo and Eme, 2015). The emphasis on population size and equality of states implies that it is states with large population size that benefit more from the allocation of revenue derived from oil. Given the fact that the states of the Niger Delta region are relatively very small in population size and areal extent, they are disadvantaged. This disadvantage is particularly pronounced because land mass/areal extent is also a significant criterion.

The relatively difficult terrain of the region and its oil-pollution damaged environment together with its relative disadvantages in benefitting from the oil resources, present a peculiar development challenge. It is thus one of the least developed parts of the country. As a World Bank study showed, "despite its vast oil reserves, the region remains poor (with) GNP per capita...below the national average..."(World Bank, 1995:2). The largest oil company in the country, (the multinational, Shell) expressed the situation clearly thus:

Despite widespread poverty, decaying social and physical infrastructure, massive youth unemployment and rising crime, there is little visible social investment in the area by government or traditional donors. *Poor governance has led to revenue allocation practices unfavourable to the region and has discouraged donor investment. Historically overall support to the Delta appears to have been less substantial and intensive than in many other- and more prosperous- areas of the south* (emphasis mine). (Shell, 1999: 7)

The United Nations Development Programme put it much more dramatically thus:

In reality, the Niger Delta is a region suffering from administrative neglect, crumbling social infrastructure and services, high unemployment, social deprivation,

abject poverty, filth and squalor, and endemic conflict (UNDP, 2006: 9).

Since petroleum became very significant, there has been the tendency by the federal government and some Nigerians to define the Niger Delta as including all oil producing areas. For instance, States such as Abia and Imo, which are not in the Niger Delta, have been included by the Federal government in its conceptualization of the Niger Delta Development Commission. Consequently, there is now a distinction between the Niger Delta and the “Political Niger Delta”; the latter including all states currently producing petroleum. This paper centres on the Niger Delta region and not the “Political Niger Delta”.

3. The Basis of the Revolt

Given the setting in the Niger Delta Region discussed in the last section, the driving forces of the revolt articulated by various organisations are examined in this section. In order to provide an orderly discussion and comparison of the different stages, the reasons are identified and thematized. As a prelude, an agitation for autonomy which emerged in the Niger Delta Region a few years before the country’s Independence in 1960, but which was not a formal revolt, is briefly discussed. The discussion is necessary because its objective of minority rights was one of the issues raised in the revolt.

In the years preceding independence, the minority ethnic groups in the country expressed fear that they will suffer oppression and marginalization once the “colonial master”, Britain hands over governance to Nigerians. These fears were expressed by minorities in each of the then regions- East, West and North. The argument of the people of the Niger Delta, then, divided between the Eastern and the Western Regions, was that their developmental needs were not appreciated by the federal and the regional governments. They believed that the constitution of the region into two or more political regions was the solution to the neglect and the underdevelopment of the Region (Ikporukpo, 1986a). However, the Henry Willink Commission which was set up by the colonial government to enquire into the fears of the various minority ethnic groups in the country did not recommend the creation of new regions/states but recommended the setting up of a Federal Board because it felt that the region was “...poor, backward and neglected” (Nigeria, 1958:4). The Niger Delta Development Board which subsequently emerged, had little or no developmental impact in the region because the federal and, particularly the regional governments (Western and East Regions) did not display any political will to develop the area (Ikporukpo, 1981).

In spite of the fact that more than two decades separate the “Twelve-Day Revolution” and the next phase of the revolt, it (the Twelve-Day Revolution), is rightly acclaimed as the beginning of the Niger Delta revolt; for it is the reference point for the other phases. As a political leader, a former governor of one of the Niger Delta States (Bayelsa) and a participant in the AMOS phase, put it, Isaac Adaka Boro is the “patriarch of the (Niger Delta) struggle” (Alamieyeseigha, 2005:174). He further added:

...the ideas spawned by Isaac Boro continue to abide in our hearts. They took root in the mind of Saro-Wiwa (one of the leaders of the MOSOP phase), and they have taken root in the consciousness of uncontrollable young men who are themselves as fiery latter-day clones of Boro, seeking to express their discontent...And that is why the spirit of Boro will rage through the land until justice is done the Niger Delta people (Alamieyeseigha, 2005:176).

Not only has Adaka Boro served as the “patriarch” of the Niger Delta revolt, his native town, Kaiama, has also served as the “mecca” of the Niger Delta revolt. This, for instance, explains why the youths that met in December 11, 1998 to herald the beginning of the Ijaw Youth phase chose Kaiama as the venue (Ijaw Youth Council, 1998). Furthermore, the Niger Delta Avengers in various statements referred to the inspiration and foundation provided by Adaka Boro (“Twelve-Day Revolution” phase) and Ken Saro-Wiwa (the MOSOP phase). As earlier indicated, the revolt may be divided into six phases. These are the Niger Delta Volunteer Service (Twelve-Day Revolution) phase, the Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP) phase, the Association of Minority Oil States (AMOS) phase, the Ijaw Youth Council (IYC) phase, the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) phase and the Niger Delta Avengers (NDA) phase.

Table 1 displays the bases of the various phases of the revolt. The bases may be conveniently divided into the following:

- i. neglect and underdevelopment;
- ii. equitable fiscal federalism and control of oil;
- iii. environmental protection; and
- iv. political restructuring and autonomy.

The issue of neglect and underdevelopment is one that runs across all the phases and derived from the agitation in the Niger Delta a few years before independence.

The leader of the Niger Delta Volunteer Service (NDVS), Adaka Boro, argued that the region lacked basic infrastructural facilities, such as roads, schools and hospitals. He declared: “there are just a few hospitals of ordinary health centre status” and that the “few dispensaries (available were) not better than first aid boxes”

(Boro, 1982:64). “Economic development of the area is certainly the most appalling aspect”, (Boro, 1982:65) he added further. Similarly, MOSOP in its “Bill of Rights” lamented that “Ogoni people lack education, health and other social facilities” and that it is intolerable that one of the richest areas of Nigeria should wallow in abject poverty and destitution” (Saro-Wiwa, 1992:95). AMOS, Ijaw Youth Council, MEND and the Niger Delta Avengers, all put up similar arguments. For instance, the Ijaw Youth Council in its “Kaiama Declaration” posited “that the quality of life...is deteriorating as a result of utter neglect, suppression and marginalization...” (Tamuno, 2011:327).

Whereas the issue of neglect and underdevelopment was unequivocally expressed in all the phases, that of equitable fiscal federalism and the control of the oil resources was not clearly indicated in all the phases. For instance, the “Twelve-Day Revolution” phase referred to a situation where the oil of the region was “being pumped out daily from...(the) veins” (Boro, 1982:117) of the people, which was a reference to the exploitation of the people of the Niger Delta. However, there was no explicit reference to equitable fiscal federalism and oil resources control. This is understandable given the fact that oil had not emerged as a major source of revenue at the time (1966) and the principle of derivation was still a major revenue allocation criterion. However, this was a significant theme in the revolts of MOSOP, AMOS, Ijaw Youth Council, MEND and the Niger Delta Avengers. This is explainable by the fact that not only had oil become the mainstay of the country’s economy but also the principle of derivation in the allocation of revenue among the states and the local government areas had been drastically de-emphasized. The argument of the revolting organisations had been that the oil producing states of the region ought to be allocated all the revenue or at least 50% of the revenue as was the case before the late 1960s.

Table 1: The Reasons for Revolt in the Various Phases of the Revolt.

Phases	Reasons for/ Objectives of Revolt
Niger Delta Volunteer Service (Twelve-Day Revolution)	i. Oppression, neglect and underdevelopment of region. ii. Control of region’s oil resources (implicit). iii. Secession.
MOSOP / Ogoni	i. Oppression, neglect and underdevelopment of Ogoniland. ii. Control of Oil Resources. iii. Environmental Protection of Ogoniland. iv. Autonomy.
AMOS	i. Neglect and underdevelopment of the Niger Delta. ii. Environmental Protection of the Niger Delta. iii. Equitable revenue allocation/just Fiscal Federalism.
Ijaw Youth Council	i. Neglect, suppression, marginalization and underdevelopment. ii. Environmental Protection. iii. Control of Oil Resources.
MEND	i. Neglect and underdevelopment. ii. Environmental Protection. iii. Control of Oil Resources. iv. Political Restructuring (implicit)
Niger Delta Avengers	i. Neglect and underdevelopment. ii. Political Restructuring of the Country. iii. Environment Protection. iv. Control of Oil Resources.

Source: Conceptualised and compiled by Author from Information in various Publications, Government Documents and Author’s Records.

The basic argument was forcefully and succinctly put in a 1992 publication by the Association of Minority Oil States (AMOS) thus:

When the majority ethnic groups were in control of sources of revenue, derivation was held as a principle of justice. The derivation principle then asserted on equity grounds, that the region from which the bulk of the revenue is obtained should receive an extra share beyond what every other state received. Then derivation earned them 100 per cent of revenue. When the minority States came into the revenue scene through oil, derivation was reduced to 20 per cent and finally to the present 1.5 per cent which might be taken away any day! (Quoted in Ikporukpo, 1996:17)

Before oil became the major source of revenue, groundnut, cocoa, and palm oil produced in the areas of the

majority ethnic groups were the main sources of revenue. The position of the Niger Delta Avengers was particularly peculiar. It demanded a redistribution of the oil prospecting blocks which are currently controlled mainly by people from other parts of the country. It insisted that the oil blocks should be redistributed in the proportion of 60% to persons from the Niger Delta and 40% to others. The demand for the control of the oil resources (commonly referred to as resource control) (Alamiyeseigha, 2005; Ikein, Alamiyeseigha and Azaiki, 2008; Ako, 2011; Obi and Rustad, 2011) was heightened by the largely uncontrolled environmental damage from oil exploration and exploitation.

Environmental justice then became a common organizing principle for revolt (Ikporukpo, 2004 & 2011b). As the Ogoni declared in their “Bill of Rights”, apart from the general neglect and underdevelopment, the “...neglectful environmental pollution laws and substandard inspection techniques of the federal authorities have led to the complete degradation of the Ogoni environment, turning our homeland into an ecological disaster” (Quoted in Saro-Wiwa, 1995:68). Ken Saro-Wiwa, one of the leaders of the Ogoni revolt, further lamented the neglect and the environmental damage, focusing on the challenge of gas flaring, also declared thus in a poem:

The flames of Shell are flames of hell
We bake beneath their light
Nought for us save the blight
Of cursed neglect and cursed Shell. (Saro-Wiwa, 1995:79)

The issue of environmental justice was also very central in the Ijaw Youth Council phase. This is obvious in the “Kaiama Declaration” by more than 5000 Ijaw (the largest ethnic group in the Niger Delta) youths from more than 500 communities in the States of Bayelsa, Delta, Rivers, Edo, Akwa Ibom and Ondo, that met in Kaiama the hometown of Adaka Boro. The Declaration of 11 December, 1998, bemoaned “the unabating damage done to (the) fragile natural environment and to the health of (the) people” consequent on oil production. There was also environmental concern in all the other phases except that of the “Twelve-Day Revolution”. The reasons are not far-fetched. The “Twelve-Day Revolution” was at a time the oil industry in the country was relatively young and its production was not widespread; and so was the environmental impact. Furthermore, the environmental movement had not taken root in the country; indeed, the global environmental movement itself was at its infancy.

The preceding analysis indicates that there is some similarity among the bases of the revolt in the various phases. However, there is much more dissimilarity on the issue of autonomy/political restructuring among the phases than any of the other demands. At one extreme is the “Twelve-Day Revolution” that demanded secession and at the other is AMOS and MEND that did not have such a clear-cut demand. The “Twelve Day Revolution” started with the declaration of “The Niger Delta People’s Republic”. The “Declaration of Independence” defined the territorial boundaries of the new “Republic”, which included not all the Niger Delta but only that part which is the homeland of the largest ethnic group, Ijaw. A state of emergency was also declared, including a “dusk to dawn curfew...(in) all towns until further notice” Adaka Boro signed the “Declaration” as “General Officer Commanding the DVS (Delta Volunteer Service) and Leader of the “Liberation Government” (Boro, 1982: 119-121).

The Ogoni (MOSOP phase) regarded the issue of autonomy as the most fundamental demand. As MOSOP declared in its “Bill of Rights”:

...the Ogoni people be granted POLITICAL AUTONOMY (Capitals in original document) to participate in the affairs of the Republic as a distinct and separate unit by whatever named called... (Saro-Wiwa, 1992: 95)

The demand went further to add that the autonomy must be one which guarantees political control, control of economic resources, adequate and direct representation in all national institutions, use and development of Ogoni language/culture, right to religious freedom and right to protect Ogoni environment. The demand by the Ijaw Youth Council in its “Kaiama Declaration” of “self-determination” and a federation with the ethnic nationalities as the federating units is, to an extent, similar to the MOSOP demand of political autonomy.

The demand by Niger Delta Avengers is peculiar. Its demand was “the immediate implementation of the 2014 National Conference Report”. The National Conference which submitted its report in August 2014 was set up in March 2014 to study and provide recommendations on the socio-economic and political challenges of the country. The National Conference recommendations included, among others, issues of devolution of power, fiscal federalism and the creation of more states (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2014). The demand of the Niger Delta Avengers was informed by the fact that a number of the issues of interest to it, such as political restructuring/autonomy, were addressed by the National Conference. The implementation of the Report was demanded because the current President whose tenure began in May 2015, has indicated that the Report will not be implemented. MEND had a related demand for the convocation of a sovereign national conference. The National Conference which was organized was not sovereign.

The next section analyses the strategies employed in the different phases to achieve the objectives.

4. The Strategies of Revolt

Given the grievance at each phase of the revolt, what approaches did the rebelling organisations adopt to achieve their objectives? This is the issue examined in this section. These approaches, as Table 2 shows, are conveniently divided into seven groups. These are:

- i. armed struggle;
- ii. sabotage of oil facilities;
- iii. illegal export of oil;
- iv. Kidnapping;
- v. advocacy;
- vi. protest march; and
- vii. civil disobedience.

Four of the phases (the “Twelve-Day Revolution”, Ijaw Youth Council, MEND and Niger Delta Avengers) involved the use of arms in one form or another. Whereas in the case of the “Twelve Day Revolution” arms were employed in order to overrun the territory defined as part of the “Republic”, in the others, arms were used essentially in the process of achieving the other strategies, such as sabotage. In order to achieve the objective of liberating the region, Boro’s troop of only one hundred and fifty nine was divided into three divisions, the Western, Central and South-Eastern, each with defined responsibility. The revolution was quelled within twelve days by the Federal Army. Perhaps, based on the lessons of the Niger Delta Volunteer Service, the later revolts involving use of arms operated more or less as guerilla forces, content with disrupting the operations of the oil industry.

The use of arms at the Ijaw Youth Council phase was particularly necessitated by the determination to implement four fundamental resolutions that emerged from the ‘Kaiama Declaration’ of December 11, 1998. These were that:

- i. all land and natural resources in Ijaw territory belonged to the Ijaw communities (and not the federal government);
- ii. all undemocratic decrees (laws) that rob the communities the right of ownership and control of land natural resources are rejected;
- iii. all “military forces of occupation and repression” must withdraw from the region; and
- iv. all oil companies must leave the region because the people were “tired of gas flaring, oil spillage, blowouts and being labelled saboteurs and terrorists”.

Table 2: The Strategies of the Niger Delta Revolt

Phases	Strategies
Niger Delta Volunteer Service (Twelve-Day Revolution)	i. Armed Struggle. ii. Sabotage of Oil Facilities.
MOSOP / Ogoni	i. Advocacy ii. Protest March iii. Civil Disobedience
AMOS	i. Advocacy
Ijaw Youth Council	i. Armed Resistance ii. Advocacy iii. Sabotage of Oil Facilities iv. Kidnapping
MEND	i. Armed Resistance ii. Advocacy iii. Sabotage of Oil Facilities. iv. Unauthorised export of Oil v. Kidnapping
Niger Delta Avengers	i. Armed Resistance ii. Advocacy iii. Sabotage of Oil Facilities.

Source: Same as Table 1.

It was decided that the resolutions must be implemented beginning December 30, 1998; that is nineteen days after the Declaration. The immediate pre-occupation from December 30, 1998 was to drive the oil companies away from the region. Oil production in the Niger Delta Region is dominated by multinational corporations. Shell is the largest. Other companies operating in the area include government owned one-Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) - and relatively small Nigerian privately-owned concerns. The Nigerian Military while protecting the oil companies and oil facilities had armed confrontation in many instances with some armed youths. There was considerable loss of lives, particularly because there was marked brutality by the Nigerian Armed Forces, a situation Human Rights Watch termed “Crackdown in the Niger Delta”

(Human Rights Watch, 1999b).

Following the “crackdown”, in many cases involving armed attack and death of sometimes unarmed youths, a number of youths withdrew and established resistance organisations and camps in the largely inaccessible creeks of the region. The best known of these organisations include Niger Delta Peoples Volunteer Force (similar in name to Adaka Boro’s revolt organisation), Niger Delta Vigilante, Niger Delta Liberation Force, Coalition for Militant Action in the Niger Delta, Greenlanders and Bush Boys (Ikorukpo, 2007). It is a combination of some of these groups that metamorphosed into MEND. Given this background, the MEND phase was much more furious than the Ijaw Youth phase. Among the armed attacks on oil facilities/oil companies, the most daring and the most spectacular was that on Shell’s Bonga Oilfield located 120km offshore on June 19, 2008. This attack according to MEND was meant to warn the government and the oil companies that no oil facility was outside its reach.

MEND also attacked government facilities and activities for appropriating the natural resources of the Niger Delta. The best known of such attacks was the bombing of the venue of the 50th independence anniversary celebrations in Abuja (the capital city) on October 1, 2010. Although, MEND warned the public to avoid the venue because a bomb had been planted, there was loss of lives and property. The Niger Delta Avengers has used arm in the process of blowing-up oil pipelines but has not had the type of impact MEND had.

The sabotage strategy (Ikorukpo, 1986b), as Table 2 indicates, has been particularly popular, perhaps, because of the feeling that the oil industry did not only represent the channel for the oppression and underdevelopment of the region but also the oil companies themselves were part of the problem. Although, the Niger Delta Volunteer Service blew-up the oil pipeline linking the Oloibiri oilfields and Port Harcourt, it was at the MEND, Niger Delta Avengers and Ijaw Youth Council phases that the sabotage of oil production facilities was particularly marked. The objective of such sabotage was clearly indicated by MEND as being, “... to totally destroy the capacity of the Nigerian government to export oil” (Quoted in Courson, 2009:18). Understandably, the Niger Delta Avengers concentrated on the oil-export pipelines in its blowing-up activities. The export oil pipelines of the Forcados Terminal, the Escravos Terminal (both in Delta State), Bonny Terminal (Rivers State), Brass Terminal (Bayelsa State) and the Qua Iboe terminal (Akwa Ibom State) have been affected. There have been many more cases in the Forcados Terminal.

Another strategy, related to that of sabotage which has been commonly employed by MEND, is the illegal siphoning of crude oil and products from oil company pipelines and exporting the same; commonly referred to as “oil bunkering”. The orientation of MEND and other smaller resistance organisations was that oil bunkering, in this regard, was legal because they were benefitting partly from a resource which had been appropriated by the federal government. This regular source of funds explains why although kidnapping of oil company workers, particularly expatriates, was a strategy, no ransom was usually demanded. Kidnapping (evident in the Ijaw Youth Council and MEND phases) was simply meant to hinder the oil exploration and exploitation processes and draw international attention to the neglect of the Niger Delta.

As a high-ranking MEND-associated group leader declared:

We never believed in kidnapping, but, as I told you earlier on, it is one of the strategies at the early stage; we used it....And we know all the kidnapping we did was never to extort money from anybody, but it was part of the strategies....But when we saw that other groups started coming on stage, we resolved to leave the stage for them. They took the kidnapping as a business venture. (quoted in Oriola, 2011:134)

For instance, an American, who was the captain of a ship owned by an oil services company, kidnapped during the attack on the Bonga Oilfield (referred to earlier) was released within a few hours without any ransom payment.

In an attempt to facilitate their operations, MEND and other associated groups established camps, mainly in Bayelsa, Delta and Rivers, which operated like military establishments. In addition, the leaders adopted such appellations as “Generals” and “Commanders”. General Tompolo, who operated one of the largest and best known camp, “Camp 5” in the Gbaramatu Clan of Delta State, is a typical example.

Advocacy, though apparent in virtually all the stages, was particularly evident in the MOSOP phase. Apart from the “Ogoni Bill of Rights” and its “Addendum”, several pamphlets, newspaper adverts, letters and press conferences publicizing the state of the Ogoni and their environment were characteristic. A news-letter, “Ogoni Review” was also published monthly. Ken Saro-Wiwa, one of the leaders of MOSOP, at the individual level, published a number of books on the state of Ogoniland (e.g. Saro-Wiwa, 1992, 1995). The advocacy strategy was particularly successful at the international sphere. For instance, several international human rights and environmental NGOs, such as Amnesty International, Greenpeace, the London Rainforest Action Group, the British Parliamentary Human Rights Group and the United Nations of Unrepresented People’s Organisation, became sympathetic.

As a follow up on advocacy, the MOSOP leadership also organized very successful protest marches and

civil disobedience. These indicated clearly that MOSOP became a mass movement. The most spectacular and the most successful was the protest on “Ogoni Day” of 1993. Virtually all Ogonis participated. The placards, which were on display, told the story of the Ogoni agony. Some read, “*Save Ogoni Environment*”, “*Save Ogoni from Pollution*”, “*UN Save Ogoni*”, “*Shell, Save Ogoniland*”, “*Shell Leave Ogoni*”, “*Assasins Go Home*”, “*Give Ogoni Oil Money Today*”, and “*No Oil Right, No Peace*” (See Saro-Wiwa, 1995; Hunt, 2006). A good example of civil disobedience was the boycott of the 1993 presidential election by the Ogoni. What is clear is that MOSOP and AMOS employed non-violent resistance.

The reaction of the federal government, that is, how it managed the various phases of the revolt, is examined in the next section.

5. The Management of the Revolt

The federal government has employed both punitive and appeasement strategies; although the former has been more frequent. The punitive measures include:

- i. quelling/suppression of revolt; and
- ii. trial and punishment of those involved.

The appeasement approaches include:

- i. more favourable fiscal arrangement;
- ii. establishment of development agencies;
- iii. environmental remediation; and
- iv. amnesty to those involved in revolt.

Attempting to quell or suppress, has been a popular management strategy (Table 3). The only exception is the AMOS phase. The fact that military regimes were in existence in most years of the period covered may be partly responsible. The “Twelve-Day Revolution” began only about five weeks after the first military coup d’état of January 15, 1966. Thus, it took only a few days for a large number of federal soldiers to arrive in the Niger Delta to quell the revolt. After a few battles, notably that of Imbiana, Adaka Boro and his men surrendered, given the superior numerical strength and fire-power of the federal armed forces.

The MOSOP phase typifies the height of suppression and state violence (See Saro-Wiwa, 1995; Human Rights Watch, 1999a; Mbeke-Ekanem, 2000; Hunt, 2006; Kukah, 2011; Wiwa, 2012). In spite of the fact that this was essentially a phase marked by non-violent resistance, the leaders of MOSOP were not only interrogated regularly by the State Security apparatus but were also detained several times.

Furthermore, Human Rights Watch reported that there were “several cases in which individuals marked as MOSOP activists had been extra-judicially executed, beaten, or detained by the members of the security forces” (Human Rights Watch, 1999a:126).

There was also a lot of state violence in the management of the revolt during the Ijaw Youth Council phase. Two examples typify this. These are the bloody suppression of a demonstration in Yenagoa, the capital of Bayelsa State (Human Rights Watch, 1999a & 1999b) and the invasion and destruction of the village of Odi (Bayelsa State) by the Nigerian Military in 1999. The first case was on December 30, 1998 when several Ijaw youth demonstrated in Yenagoa and several other towns against the oil companies and the Nigerian government in support of the Kaiama Declaration. Thousands of military personnel were mobilized for the operation in the Niger Delta. At least seven individuals were shot dead in Yenagoa on the 30th and sixteen others on the 31st in nearby communities. Several individuals were arrested and detained for several days. The violence in Odi from November 20 to 24, 1999 was much more far-reaching. According to the federal government, the invasion of Odi was necessitated by the murder of some policemen by a group of youths in the village. Several individuals, particularly the elderly who could not escape were killed and all buildings, except a bank a church and a community health centre, were destroyed. Some of the graffiti (Albert, 2003) left by the invaders reflect the issues of interest, particularly the control of oil resources, during this phase. Two of these read: *Na you get oil* (meaning you think the oil belongs to you), *foolish people*, and *come take oil now* (meaning why don’t you come now to control your oil).

Table 3: Approaches to the Management of the Niger Delta Revolt by the Federal Government

Phases	Management Approaches
Niger Delta Volunteer Service (Twelve-Day Revolution)	i. Quelling of Revolt. ii. Trial and Death Sentencing of Leaders (Later pardoned).
MOSOP / Ogoni	i. Suppression of Revolt ii. Trial and Hanging of some Leaders. iii. Invitation of UNEP to study Environmental Damage. UNEP Report (2011). Initiation of Clean-up of Ogoniland.
AMOS	i. Increase of derivation per cent in Revenue Allocation Formula from 1.5 to 3.0 and later 13.0. ii. Establishment of Oil Mineral Producing Areas Development Commission (OMPADEC) in 1992. Replaced with Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) in 2000.
Ijaw Youth Council	i. Suppression of Revolt.
MEND	i. Initially Suppression of Revolt. ii. Later Amnesty Programme, 2009.
Niger Delta Avengers	i. Suppression of Revolt (ongoing currently) ii. Future is unknown, negotiation going on.

Source: Same as Table 1.

As Table 3 indicates, the approach of trial and punishment of those involved in revolt was evident in the first two phases; although a financier of MEND (Henry Okah), a Nigerian permanent resident of South Africa, was tried and convicted in South Africa for financing bombings by MEND. Whereas, the trial in the first of these two revolts was in a regular court that of the second (MOSOP) was through a “special tribunal”. About two weeks after the collapse of the “Twelve-Day Revolution”, Adaka Boro and two other leaders, Timipre Owonaru and Nottingham Dick, were charged in a Port Harcourt high court for “levying war against the state with the intent to overthrow the Head of the Federal Military Government” (West African Pilot, 23 March 1966: front page). They were sentenced to death on June 21, 1966 for treason (Daily Times, 22 June 1966:1). Although they lost an appeal at the Supreme Court in Lagos (the then capital city), they were subsequently pardoned. The hanging of Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight others on Friday 10, November 1995, based on a flawed trial, was described by the then British Prime Minister as “judicial murder” and as “a foul and heinous crime of state murder” by the Civil Liberties Organisation of Nigeria. Similarly, whereas, the Ijaw National Congress described it as “callous and premeditated to intimidate the struggle for oil rights in the Niger Delta”, it was condemned by Tell Magazine (an authoritative Nigerian News magazine) as “the greatest show of insensitivity to minority and human rights” (Ikporukpo, 2011b:1).

It is in the AMOS phase that some positive aspects of the management attempts are apparent. In order to address the developmental and environmental challenges of the region, as indicated in Table 3, the derivation aspect of the revenue allocation arrangement was increased from 1.5% to 3.0% and subsequently to 13 per cent. Development institutions, Oil Mineral Producing Areas Development Commission (OMPADEC) and later replaced with Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC), were also established to address the challenges. However, many critics argue that these actions are not far-reaching enough. For instance, Aaron and George (2010) argue that the setting is simply one of defining “placebo as medicine”. Others argue that the measures have not been successful because of a lack of governmental will power, complicated by corruption. (See UNDP, 2006; Aaron & George, 2010; Tamuno, 2011; Ikporukpo, 2014)

As Tamuno (2011:25), put it:

Its (NDDC) limitations included funding arrangements from the federal purse. In practice, funds authorized were not released to the NDDC for years. Paralysis through lack of timely implementation of its Master Plan, followed in an era of inflationary spirals at home and abroad, culminating in the post-2008 global economic “melt down”.

Unfortunately, the Ministry of Niger Delta affairs has also been faced with similar hindrances. As the current Minister of the Ministry lamented, although, the Ministry was established in 2008, it has not completed any project except a cassava processing plant in Ondo State. (Vanguard Newspaper, Nigeria, Tuesday August 9, 2016: 39)

In spite of the state-violence that marked the Ogoni people phase, it is the activities of the revolt at the phase that led to (though belated) a strategy of environmental remediation by the federal government. Thus, although all the oil producing parts of the Niger Delta have been severely polluted by oil, it is only the Ogoni area that has been identified for remediation. The assessment by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) was at the instance of the federal government. UNEP’s conclusion was that environmental damage was

“tragic” As it put it,

It is clear from the UNEP’s field observations and scientific investigations that oil contamination in Ogoniland is widespread and severely impacting many components of the environment. The Ogoni people live with this pollution every minute of every day, 365 days a year (UNEP, 2011:204).

The Report faulted the environmental standards of the oil companies, including remediation methods, and recommended and urged the federal government to take urgent action to remediate the environmental damages. Following this Report, the federal government has initiated the remediation process; although the UNEP Report indicated that given the extent and severity of the pollution, the environmental restoration may take 25 to 30 years.

The Amnesty Programme (The Niger Delta Amnesty Deal, as the spokesperson of President Yar Adua christened it, (Adeniyi, 2011) is a curious intervention. The Programme, (only in the MEND phase) initiated on 25 June 2009 was meant to bring peace to the region. It involved the forgiving and rehabilitation of former militants through training so that they would live normal lives. As is evident in Table 1, there has never been such a demand at any phase of the revolt. The leader of the militants, “General Boyloaf”, who spoke on behalf of all the militants that were received by President Yar Adua at the formal launch of the programme, made the point about the challenges in the region. He declared:

You are all aware of how we got to where we are today in the Niger Delta. Our people are hungry and dying, our infrastructure is in a deplorable state, our communities have no water and light while oil spillage and gas flaring have become the order of the day. Yet, this is the same region that produces over 90 per cent of our national income; how then do we fold our arms and see the future of our generation yet unborn crumble before our eyes? (quoted in Adeniyi, 2011:80).

The Amnesty Programme is a diversionary tactic employed by the federal government to turn the revolt away from its primary focus; that is, the development of the Niger delta and its economic emancipation. This explains why initially many members of MEND rejected the programme, arguing that they have not committed any offence requiring amnesty. A fundamental flaw is that given the very high rate of unemployment among the youth, the Amnesty Programme is perceived by many as an avenue of employment. Apart from the skills training, the participants are given a monthly stipend for a given time period. Thus, militants engaged in sabotage, usually expecting amnesty, have emerged in areas where until the Amnesty Programme such militancy was unknown. The result is that apart from the Niger Delta Avengers, other minor groups have recently emerged. The Niger Delta Greenland Justice Mandate is a very good example.

In certain cases groups that are not associated with the Niger Delta revolt, whose intention and actions are largely criminal, have emerged demanding to be part of the “Amnesty Programme”. A very good example is a gang involved in kidnapping, the vandalization of pipelines and theft of petroleum products in Arepo and Ibafo areas of Ogun State. Arepo and Ibafo are settlements near the city of Lagos (the former capital of the country and the chief commercial/industrial centre) Arepo and Ibafo are more than three hundred km from the Niger Delta Region. As it became more and more difficult for the gang to carry out its criminal activities, it asked to be part of the “Amnesty Programme”. The leader of the gang threatened in October 2016 thus: “grant us amnesty or we will cripple Lagos (and) Ogun States” (Saturday Vanguard, 29 October, 2016: 10). When the threat was rebuffed, the group planned to bomb 3rd Mainland Bridge, the longest bridge in the country, which links the mainland and the island areas of Lagos city. This was however foiled.

There is no doubt that human development, as enunciated in the Amnesty Programme, is meaningful. However, the fundamental challenges in the region centre around inaccessibility and acute infrastructural deficit. Given the circumstances, especially the paucity of funds, the opportunity cost of the investment in the Amnesty Programme is, certainly, much more than that of investing in the other areas of development. Furthermore, the experience in the operation of the programme has shown that, given perceived personal gains of the militants involved, more and more groups with associated militants emerge on almost a continuous basis. Similarly, militants requiring amnesty and rehabilitation have emerged in Imo State, a marginal oil producing area outside the Niger Delta. Perhaps, in order to reduce the federal burden, the Governor of the State has set up a state Amnesty Committee/Programme. Apart from these issues, the programme faces several operational challenges (see Oluduro & Oluduro, 2012; Okunfua, 2016).

6. Conclusion

The Niger Delta is, arguably, the most controversial region in Nigeria. It has attained this status largely because of the political economy and geopolitics of oil. Although, its petroleum resources are the mainstay of the country’s economy, placed in a federal arrangement which is skewed in favour of the officially defined majority ethnic groups, its people, officially defined as minorities, confront remarkable environmental, economic and

political challenges.

Consequently, there have been several revolts by different groups at different times. Six phases of revolt are identifiable. These are the “Twelve-Day Revolution” the MOSOP, the AMOS, the Ijaw Youth Council, the MEND and the Niger Delta Avengers phases. These revolts are not isolated events, rather there is a link among them. Not only have later phases been inspired by earlier ones, as clearly stated by the participants, but also lessons from the earlier ones guided the later ones. The underdevelopment of the Niger Delta Region and the need to control the oil resources of the region are reasons given in all the phases of the revolt. It was only at the “Twelve-Day Revolution” phase that the factor of environmental protection was not relevant.

Armed Resistance as a strategy of revolt characterized all phases except the MOSOP and the AMOS stages. However, whereas in the “Twelve-Day Revolution” and the Ijaw Youth Council phases, particularly the former, arms were used in direct confrontation with the government security forces, the use was not direct in the others because of the adoption of guerilla tactics. Furthermore, although there was a general dissatisfaction with the character of the federal arrangement, it was only at the “Twelve-Day Revolution” phase that secession was attempted. The sabotage of oil facilities was a common strategy except in MOSOP and AMOS phases. The approach most commonly used by the federal government in the management of the revolt was suppression, although at the AMOS phase there was the establishment of development agencies to address the underdevelopment of the region. One of the most dramatic expression of the suppression was the hanging of nine leaders of the revolt during the MOSOP phase.

In spite of the use of other strategies the emphasis of the federal government was on suppression. This is obvious from the management of the earlier phases of the revolt and has also become apparent in the management of the current Niger Delta Avengers phase. Whereas, many security personnel have been deployed and are active in attempting to prevent sabotage of oil facilities and arrest those suspected to be part of the revolt, there has been very little or no progress in negotiation which the federal government has acclaimed. Perhaps, this state of affairs is an attempt by the federal government to weaken the negotiating capacity of the Niger Delta Avengers. The Niger Delta Avengers, learning from the experience of the earlier phases, has also not identified its members, preferring to negotiate through a third party, the Pan Niger Delta Forum (PANDEF), a group of elders and leaders of the Niger Delta Region. Angered by the behaviour of the federal government, the Niger Delta Avengers through its spokesperson, “Brigadier General Mudoch Agbinibo” declared on January 7, 2017 the commencement of “Operation Walls of Jericho and Hurricane Joshua”. The declaration added:

To all Niger Delta people, we feel your pains from these dashed hopes of genuine talk once again. All fighters and commands are hereby placed on high readiness in your webs of operations to hit and knock the enemy very hard. (Sunday Vanguard, 8 January 2017:2)

The Niger Delta revolt has persisted because the federal government has not successfully addressed the root causes. The government has not in many cases addressed the root causes. The government has in many cases addressed the symptoms rather than the causes. Even where attempts are made to address the causes, such attempts have been feeble. The demands for the development of the region and for the control of the oil resources of the Niger Delta have been consistent. Indeed, even when the elders and leaders of the region (PANDEF) met the Head of State to mediate in the Niger Delta Avengers revolt in November, 2016, a 16-point demand which was presented centred on these same issues.

It is apparent that the federal government is aware of the strategies necessary to address the recurring revolt in the Niger Delta Region. This is obvious from the recommendations of the committee set up by the federal government which submitted its findings and recommendations on February 19, 2002. The committee, with the Chief of Army Staff as chairman, was made up of the Managing Directors of Shell (the leading Oil company), Chevron, Texaco, Exxon Mobil, Agip Oil Company and Total Fina Elf, Group Managing Director of Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (the state company), the Director of the Department of Petroleum Resources (the state regulatory agency), secretary to the Governments of all oil producing States, Chief of Naval Staff, Chief of Air Staff, Inspector General of Police, Director General of the State Security Service and a representative of the National Security Adviser.

Among others, the committee recommended an upward review of the derivation criterion of revenue allocation from the present 13% to no less than 50%, the repeal of those laws, such as the Land Use Act and Petroleum Act, which “disposes oil producing areas of their land” and the “industrialization of the area” (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2002). These recommendations addressed the issues of the underdevelopment of the Niger Delta Region and the control of oil resources. The recommendations were not implemented. Perhaps, it is the critical significance of oil as the mainstay of the country’s economy that informs the action by the federal government.

There is no doubt that a determined action, backed by an effective appreciation of the challenges, is fundamental. The solution to the Niger Delta question is not military might, not throwing money at problems and not the creation of a “new rich”, but a well-guided and well-guarded developmental action free of political

manipulation and corruption. Except the root causes are addressed, more phases of the revolt may emerge after the Niger Delta Avengers.

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Author Biography

Chris O. Ikorukpo is a Professor of Geography at the University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria, with considerable teaching and research experience in the areas of regional development, environment and transport. He has published extensively on conflict, the environment and developmental challenges. He belongs to several professional and academic associations and is a fellow of the Association of Nigerian Geographers.