The Democracy/Environmental Justice Challenge in Nigeria's Niger Delta and the Developmental Leadership and Governance Culture Imperative

Kelly Bryan Ovie Ejumudo, Ph.D.
Department of Political Science, Delta State University, Abraka, Nigeria
Email: drkellypaulovieejumudo@yahoo.com

Abstract
Managing the democracy/environmental challenge in Nigeria's Niger Delta is a daunting and herculean task. This is because the country's failed democratic enterprise and its weak, poor and shallow democratic institutions have largely denied the region the access to the developmental opportunities and benefits (food and human security, socio-economic assistance and empowerment, development-oriented programmes including educational scholarships, skills acquisition, small and medium scale businesses and massive infrastructural development) that are derivable from the large scale oil exploration, exploitation and production activities, despite the multi-dimensional socio-economic threats faced and costs (environmental pollution and degradation, unemployment, social and economic dislocation and crime) borne by the region. This study which examines the democracy/environmental justice challenge in the Niger Delta derived its data from valuable secondary sources. The study contends that managing the democracy/environmental justice challenge in Nigeria's oil region that is faced with crisis prone under-development predicaments requires, as a matter of exigency, a true and genuine developmental leadership and governance culture and agenda. The study concluded with some useful remarks
Keywords: Democracy, environmental injustice, leadership and governance culture

Introduction

Arguably, there exist a nexus between environmental justice and democracy. This is because environmental justice seeks to analyze and overcome the power structures that have the potency of thwarting and militating against the principles of fairness and equity which democracy both represents and enforces. Again, while democracy represents a vehicle for the actualization of the principles of fairness, equality of opportunity, liberty, representation and the preservation of individual and social rights, environmental justice is an increasingly important element of policy making that underscores equity and fairness toward the disadvantaged individuals, groups, communities, societies, institutions, regions and nations. Environmental justice also offers the opportunity for merging two difficult agenda at both national and international levels, by seeking to resolve the conflict between environmental and social goals and focusing on tackling environmental problems as part of the social exclusion agenda. Democracy and environmental justice therefore function to promote and actualize the principles and ideals that both serve the intra-generational and inter-generational needs and purposes of societies and nations and protect the rights and concerns of individuals and groups in an enduring climate of equity, freedom and interdependent reality.

In the face of the recognized and acceptable efficacy of environmental justice principles and practices across communities, societies and nations, particularly in the third world, there is still massive environmental degradation such that the rural, urban and generally neglected areas have experienced large scale erosion and water-quality deterioration, deforestation, declining soil productivity and socio-economic dislocation in the Niger Delta. Worse still, majority of the people, especially the youths have little or no access to the benefits derivable from production activities that should expectedly mitigate the negative effects and costs of the environmental degradation and emerging crisis to which they have been somewhat perpetually subjected. As a consequence, they cannot lead a life that they value and cherish and their potentials are hardly actualizable and realizable. In the Niger Delta region of Nigeria, the costs of environmental pollution and degradation that is borne by the marginalized, oppressed and pauperized people as well as the benefits that should flow to them in the form of employment, skill acquisition programmes, educational scholarship schemes, provision of basic social amenities and other pro-poor life-enhancing programmes are heavily disproportional so much so, that the principles of fairness and equity that underlie or underpin environmental justice are impaired with one likely hazardous consequence, environmental crisis.

The above reality questions any objective and rational claim to the existence and operationality of a functional and consolidated democracy in Nigeria despite the long and tortuous years of democratic experimentation. This is particularly because the environmental injustice problem in Nigeria's Niger Delta is mainly a product and a manifestation of the shallow, flawed, failed and largely pseudo democracy that is in practice in Nigeria. Essentially, the concomitant poor presence or near absence of democracy and democratic culture has, in fact, constrained or undermined environmental justice and equity in Nigeria, a rentier state that

operates a mono-product economy with devastating effects on the oil-rich Niger Delta region. The justification for the above position is that true, consolidated and functional democracy and an ingrained democratic culture presupposes an institutional and governance climate that encourages and upholds fundamental human rights, guarantees equity and fairness and promotes responsible, accountable and representative governance that are at the heart of environmental justice. Moreover, a democratic state with embedded democratic culture will naturally generate benign policies that will manage the inter-linkages between the environment and economic concerns and consequentially seek at least relative balance between the costs borne by the different regions of the Nigerian state and the distributable benefits enjoyed by them.

There is thus an unsettled democracy/environmental question and challenge in Nigeria generally and the rich-oil Niger Delta in particular and central to the challenge are critical intervening variables notably true developmental leadership and governance culture and agenda.

Environmental Justice: A Conceptual Understanding
There is a growing evidence of the links between environmental problems and social injustices; environmental justice is the idea that brings them together The term "environmental justice'' otherwise called "environmental equity" has featured prominently in the environmental debate for over three decades, but it only surfaced in the legal parlance in the 1990's (Lazarus, 2000: 17) . Different scholars have attempted a conceptualization of the term and while there is no generally accepted definition, largely because of the fact that concepts in the social and environmental sciences are confounded by a wooliness of thought and usage that characterize the domain, there exist a common strand of understanding. Such conceptualization efforts date back to Brutland Report's definition of sustainable development that tied together the concern for the carrying capacity of natural systems with the social challenges facing humanity. The report, which is one of the seminal environmental documents of the 20th century, is representative of the growing global awareness of the enormous environmental problems facing the planet and a growing shift towards global environmental action. The focus of the report on environmental justice underlie the bold steps recommended for re-examining the problems associated with the critical environment and development inter-linkage and formulating realistic proposals to solve them so as to actualize the aspirational goal of the world community to protect and enhance the environment . Environmental justice therefore focuses on the disproportionate sharing of environmental benefits and burdens between different states, institutions, organizations, groups and individuals as the case is with the Niger Delta that had suffered from marginalization and oppression in the face of its centrality to the economic growth and development of Nigeria.

Taking a more critical view on the concept of environmental justice, Bullard (2000: 45) posited that environmental justice is based upon the recognition that environmental costs and benefits are not in a fair and equitable manner and that traditional environmentalism has not been sufficiently concerned with very divergent local situations and the plight of minorities. The term is therefore concerned mainly with the side effects of production activities, such as the siting of waste disposal facilities, the proximity of industrial pollution and workplace exposure to industrial toxins and the socio-economic consequences occasioned by it as McDermott (2004: 62) rightly articulated. Environmental justice thus seeks to redefine the traditional environmental movement by incorporating the concerns of minorities within environmental policy decision-making, thereby engendering environmental equality or equity as typified by the agitation of the Niger Delta over the region's hazardous, worrisome and pitiable situation and the failure of the superficial institutional remedial actions by successive Nigerian governments to address their genuine concerns (Torres, 2000: 31). The main thrust of environmental justice is a shift in focus from the environment to the people, for it underscores the need for environmental protection not to be planned within a vacuum and for environmental goals to take into account social, political and economic realities in environmentally devastated and dislocated regions like the Niger Delta.

In a broad sense, environmental justice is about positive discrimination because it seeks to achieve a redistribution of the costs of environmental justice so as to lower the disproportionately high burden borne by some segments of society like the highly marginalized and pauperized Niger Delta. In effect, it is shifting the focus of environmental protection towards taking into account the needs of the poorer sections of society that have suffered the environmental consequences of industrialization more than others (Gadgil and Guha, 2004: 53). . This holds true for the paradoxical situation of the Niger Delta that is bearing the burden of the revenue generating, yet environmentally degrading and socio-economically dislocating consequences of oil exploration and production activities without any imaginably comparative adequate and justifiable compensation in the light of developmental benefits. It also addresses the extent of linkages between environmental and social injustice and asks whether it is practicable to tackle both social exclusion and environmental problems through integrated policies and development. It therefore follows that by looking at social justice issues through an environmental lens and simultaneously by analyzing environmental issues more clearly in terms of social justice, new and more effective ways of dealing with each can be developed.

Environmental justice is equally the blend of social and environmental concerns that deals with holistic

efforts to analyze and overcome the power structures that thwarts and militates against the principles of fairness and equity Ejumudo[7]. This phenomenon views the environment as encapsulating where we live, work and play and seeks to redress the imbalances in the distribution of environmental benefits and costs. By implication, environmental justice seeks to achieve an accommodation or balance between access to environmental costs or burdens (pollution, unemployment, social and economic dislocation and crime) and environmental benefits (nutrients food, clean air, and water, health care, education, transportation and safe jobs). In this direction, the structural foundation for the environmental injustice that has become commonplace in Nigeria's Niger Delta region was constructed through the initiation and sustenance of obnoxious oil and environmental laws such that the operational menace of oil exploration and production activities as well as the failed government institutional efforts to compensate the environment that is the treasure base of the nation are only an outgrowth and a manifestation of the legal roots provided by the above detestable laws that are not likely to be dismantled even in the face of unabated protestation and reactions by the region .

Environmental justice, which is not a panacea to all social problems, especially as environmental and social goals can be in conflict, has two fundamentally basic premises; first, that everyone should have the right and be able to live in a healthy environment, with access to enough environmental resources for a healthy life and second, that it is predominantly the poorest and least powerful people who are missing these conditions. These two premises connotes environmental rights and responsibilities that focus on the inevitability of ensuring that a healthy environment exists for both the present and future generations and that countries, organizations, institutions and individuals do not create environmental problems or distribute environmental resources in ways that damage other people's health.

Environmental justice is therefore a core element of and, as a consequence, it is critical to achieving social justice goals, particularly as it is concerned with ensuring the environment part of the social justice goal. Thus, environmental justice prevails when the environmental risks, costs and hazards or investments and benefits are distributed with a sense of equity. It does not question the current path of development and its associated environmental implications, but seeks solutions in order to mitigate the problems caused by the current development process. Environmental justice principles are thus expected to serve as a guide for organizing, networking and relating to governmental and non-governmental organizations' demands and this implies that environmental policy decisions are a product of the political process (Field and Field 2006: 18).

In the above context, there exist policy gaps as far as environmental justice issues affecting the Niger Delta region are concerned. This is because the policies are not environmentally benign enough to cushion the effects of the wreck and havoc caused by the devastating oil exploration and exploitation activities in the region, the little remedial and intervening role of the existing environmental policies are castrated by the conspiracy between the Nigerian state and the oil multinationals and the concomitant inaction by the state and its agencies in the face of the operational recklessness and attitudinal highhandedness of the oil giants (Ejumudo, 2008:13)

After all, environmental justice affirms the sacredness of the earth, ecological unity and the interdependence of all species and the right of people to be free from ecological destructions and demands that public policy be based on mutual respect and justice for all peoples free from any form of discrimination or bias. It also emphasize the strict enforcement of environmental principles and policies and the right to ethical, balanced and responsible uses of land and renewable resources in the interest of a sustainable planet and seeks to promote the fundamental right of all people to political, economic, cultural and environmental self-determination and to participate as equal partners at every level of decision-making, including needs assessment, planning, implementation, enforcement and evaluation.

Environmental justice equally protects the right of victims of environmental injustice to receive full compensation and reparations for damage as well as quality health care and affirms the need for urban and rural environmental policies aimed at cleaning up and rebuilding cities and provide fair access for all to the full range of resources which is lacking in the case of the Niger Delta region. The essence of environmental justice is the capacity of the earth to satisfy the intra and inter generational needs of society and it recognizes that access to clean and healthy environment is a fundamental right of all human beings (Cunningham et al, 2007: 542) The 1982 World Charter for Nature, for example, asserts that man's needs can be met only by ensuring the proper functioning of natural systems and it is an essential human right to redress it when the human environment has suffered damage or degradation (Cunningham et al, 2007:542) In a similar vein, the 1987 World Commission on Environment and Development stated that all human beings have the fundamental right to an environment adequate for their health and well-being. In fact, of all the nations of the world, 109 now have constitutional provisions for protections of the environment and natural resources and 100 of them specifically recognize the right to a clean and healthy environment and the state's obligation to prevent environmental harm.

For the purpose of this study, environmental justice is conceived as the holistic, eclectic and integrated efforts that seeks to analyze and reconcile the environment/ development inter-linkages and achieve relative balance in the equation between the environmental costs and benefits borne and enjoyed by different groups, organizations, institutions, states and regions by accommodating their concerns and interests in policy decision

making so as to engender fairness and equity. Environmental justice that captures two dimensions (ethical and pragmatic) is thus concerned with whether the distribution of costs and risks as well as benefits are in accordance with the norms of social justice. Policies and programmes that are perceived as unfair will therefore stand little prospect of passage even if they enhance the prospects for efficiency and sustainability (Tietenberg, 2005:501). The political conflicts in which many natural resource issues get embroiled are, as a consequence, often related to the fact that the groups who enjoy the benefits are not the same as those who bear the costs (Field, 2005:145). These are matters of equity and fairness that have become controversial as is evident in the Niger Delta dilemma.

Democracy: A Conceptual Discourse

Democracy does not have a single, unilateral or straight-jacketed perspective to its understanding, hence the necessity, exigency and inevitability of a conceptual discourse. The evident lack of a generally acceptable definition of the term "democracy" is not unconnected with the fact that concepts in the social sciences are confounded by a wooliness of thought and usage that is characteristic of the domain where political science is a specie. In the light of the above, democracy could be seen as nothing but different doctrines in different people's minds or perhaps the most promiscuous word in the world of public affairs and it could be everybody's mistress. In a similar vein, democracy is a word with many meanings and some emotional color, for it is not an algebraical symbol, but a flag or the call of a trumpet for some; and for others an obsolete mythology which has undesirable connections with capitalism and imperialism (Burns, 1935: 32) .

Apparently irked by the gargantuan of conceptualization efforts in the understanding of democracy,(Finer, 1949: 15) asserted that democracy has come to mean different things, some very hostile to each other, that it needs careful analysis if misunderstanding and idle controversies are to be avoided. Attempting a comprehensive definition of democracy invariably appears elusive and a mirage. And as Eliot (1914:17) rightly posited, when a word acquires a universally sacred character as the word democracy has, one wonders whether it still means anything at all. Expanding the frontiers of the argument, De Jourenel (1949: 276) noted that all discussions about democracy, all arguments whether for it or against it, are stricken with intellectual futility because the thing at issue is indefinite. Therefore efforts by scholars and political theorists across ages, disciplines and societies to define democracy have always founded on the rock of ambiguity and antinomy Williams (1999:65).

The complexity in defining democracy may be due to the fact that political systems are in a continual state of evolution and ideas regarding what ought to be the scope of governmental intervention in the lives of individuals have also changed and are continually changing. No wonder, the complexity in providing a concise and precise definition of democracy is compounded by the fact that historically the concept itself has been a locus or terrain of prolonged intellectual and ideological contestations. Essentially, after centuries of intellectual speculations as to the origin and nature of democracy, the sad conclusion is that it is an ideal towards which many nations strive. By implication, the democratic ideal remains an ideal, a possible explanation for the necessity to see democracy as a continuum where democracies can be placed and gauged in accordance with this extent of their democratization or conformity with acceptable democratic norms and values.

One may simply argue that any given nation, or a method or institution is democratic which means that it is in the process of achieving the ideal or that it adopts some principles or processes which may be called democratic (Ijomah, 1988). In fact, as far back as 1849, (Guizot, 1849) observed that such is the power of the word "democracy" that no government or party dares to raise its head or believe its own existence possible, if it does not bear that word inscribed on the burner. The difficulties of capturing the essence of democracy and of highlighting its often contradictory activities made scholars and researchers to resort to various devices and stratagems for coming to terms with the above reality (Williams, 1999:65). One of the most celebrated and an influential attempt in this direction is the concept of polyarchy formulated by Dahl (1971). He classified political regimes according to two criteria: the degree of contestation of political power and the extent of popular participation in such contestation. The two-dimensional framework proposed by Dahl has become widely adopted by political scientists as barometer to measure the extent to which various states approximate the democratic ideal (Tremblay et al 2004).

In the face of the diversity of perspectives in the understanding of "democracy", the term that was derived from the Greek word 'Demos' meaning people and 'Kratos' implying rule or power refers to government or rule by the people or masses (Mbachu, 1990). It therefore follows that in a democracy, government should not only be responsible to the demos (people), political power should also emanate from the popular will of the people and the state should be guided by and bound by the same will. (Diamond, 1999) also approached democracy as a developing process and added that consolidation is a critical step in building democracies. He further argued that the consolidation process involves three components namely: decentralization that enhances the efficiency, quality and legitimacy of democracy, political culture which is a precondition for democracy to take root, especially as democratic values, beliefs, attitudes, norms and means must be embodied in a democracy and the creation of a civil society that facilitates and enhances public

participation in the democratic process and prevents abusive power from becoming concentrated at the centre of society.

Looking at democracy from Diamond's view-point will mean a focus on the way of life that permits freedom to make choices pertaining to every area of human endeavour and this process dimension safeguards the liberty of individuals and protects them against unnecessary constrains on their actions because it is a governance system based on popular will. This may be a plausible explanation for Mbachu's [1990] position that, at a more theoretical level, democracy is a political system in which the eligible people in any country participate actively not only in determining the kind of people that govern them, but also in shaping the policy output of the government.

Besides, Mahajan (2008) stressed that democracy is not a particular kind of civilization; rather it is a civilized way of taking political action. Democracy is, in fact, a political contrivance that is aimed at reconciling freedom with the need for law and its enforcement and it is a political method by which every citizen has the opportunity of participating through discussion in an attempt to reach voluntary agreement as to what shall be done for the good of the community as a whole. Mill cited in Mahajan (2008) also viewed democracy as that form of government in which the whole people or a numerous portion of them exercise the governing power through deputies periodically elected by themselves, while Dickerson and Flanagan (2009) opined that democracy is a government in which everybody has a share. The common notion in the reasoning by the above scholars is that democracy is a form of political organization in which public opinion has control and one in which public policies are made on a majority basis by representatives subject to effective popular control at periodic elections which are conducted on the principle of political equality and under conditions of political freedom.

Democracy as a complex process of institution building and the development of a liberal political culture and traditions promotes an uninhibited growth of free speech, an unfettered development of the press and respect for not only the rule, but the due process of the law. It can therefore be safely stated that democracy cannot exist in the absence of fundamental human rights, whether individually or collectively, which is in consonance with Nnoli's (2003) postulation that democracy is a system of government usually involving freedom of the individual in many respects of political life, equality among citizens, justice in the relationship between the people and the government and the participation of the people in choosing those in government. Democracy that can affect and impact on social justice, by implication, encapsulates liberty, equality, fraternity, effective citizenship control over policy, responsible and responsive government, honesty and openness in politics, informed and rational deliberation, equal participation, power and virtues as Huntington explicitly underscored. It is not only primarily a means through which different groups can attain their ends or seek the good of society; it is the good society itself in operation Gauba (2007).

For purpose of this paper, democracy is seen as a political contrivance and governmental system that is planked on the strands of justice, liberty, equality and rule of law that engenders popular participation and representation through transparent institutions with ingrained culture, values and norms that culminates in the actualization of good governance typified by responsiveness and accountability for public good. The choice of this definition was dictated by the fact that the central idea that is a commonality to and therefore at the heart of the concept of democracy is the culture of liberty, free contest, political equality and social justice, decentralization, popular participation, control and representation, institutionalized norms and values, fundamental human rights, access and governance based on rule of law and popular will for common good.

Leadership and Governance: A Conceptual Explanatory Insights
There are almost as many definitions of leadership as there are scholars who have attempted to define the concept (Mahal, 2007). The reason is that they have attempted definitions from various perspectives and angles such as traits, behaviour, influence, role relations, interaction patterns and occupations. This may be why leadership is replete with multi-myriad reams of research theories and multifarious definitions; for after over fifty years of empirical investigation, leadership remains an enigma and it is wrapped up in the paper of management and tightly knotted with the cords of incomprehension and confusion. The lack of generally accepted definition of the concept has led to a mushrooming growth of contingency models, path-goal and open-system models, not to mention the transactional and vertical dyad approaches. Unfortunately, the growing mountain of research information has produced an impressive mass of contradictions. As a consequence, frustrated writers feel that the concept has outlived its usefulness and must be abandoned in favour of some other more fruitful ways of cutting up the theoretical pie.

All the same, leadership is lifting of people's vision to a higher sight, the raising of their performance to a higher standard and the building of their personality beyond its normal limitations (Drucker, 1987). It is also the ability of an individual to influence motivation and enable others to contribute toward the effectiveness and success of organizations, institutions and societies. Leadership is, by implication, the ability, capacity and willingness to deploy resources, work effectively with them so as to derive returns on co-ordinate efforts and

resources. It is the tool that is utilized to produce differentials between countries and corporate organizations in terms of levels of progress and development as well as performance. In all aspects of human endeavours, the most critical ingredient, if we are to work the works of national development and lift ourselves from the bane of poverty, is excellent leadership. It is therefore a sine qua non for running the state apparatus in such a way as to create an environment that is conducive to the creation of wealth and individual prosperity.

otably, the importance of leadership is a plausible reason why of all the factors that seems to encourage or stimulate the creation or establishment of a federation, the most critical single one is the quality of leadership. This is principally because the other factors are merely raw materials that underlie the formation of a union and it is leadership that combines the different factors into a coherent whole, giving them weight and direction which is conducive to the union or association (Kellog, 1997).Therefore, leadership that encapsulates dynamic, charismatic, perceptive and conciliatory elements should not be parochial, with defective and jaundiced sense of judgment, cantankerous personality and blurred vision; rather, it should emphasize results, strategies, co-ordination, team work and interdependent reality.

Governance, on the other hand, is often used as an 'umbrella concept' under which elusive and ill-defined political processes and concerns as well as desirable goals and value preferences can be subsumed (Jerome, 2004). In some analyses, governance is no more than a loosely conceived, intuitive and tangential idea and it can be a more elaborate concept whose dimensions are firmly established (Boeninger, 1994). Governance may also be defined as the science of government behaviour and performance, including the exercise of economic, political and administrative authority to manage a country's affairs at all levels (Dethier, 1999) and it provides the framework through which citizens and groups exercise their rights, meet their obligations and articulate their interests. Since governance is the process of decision making and the means by which decisions are implemented, an analysis of governance focuses on the formal and informal actors involved in decision-making and implementation of the decisions made and the formal and informal structures that have been set in place to arrive at and implement the decisions. Government is one of the actors in governance. Other actors involved in governance vary depending on the level of government that is under discussion. At the national level, media, lobbyists, international donors, multi-national corporations, etc. may play a role in decision-making or in influencing the decision-making process.

Governance is equally a continuum and not necessarily unidirectional for it does not automatically improve overtime. It is a plant that needs constant tending and citizens need to demand good governance and their ability to do so is enhanced by literacy, education and employment opportunities. Governments also need to prove responsive to those demands. Neither of these can be taken for granted for change occurs sometimes in response to external or internal threats. It also occurs through pressure from different interest groups, some of which may be in the form of populist demands. Although lenders and aid agencies and other outsiders can contribute resources and ideas to improve governance, for change to be effective, it must be rooted firmly in the societies concerned and cannot be imposed from outside (World Bank, 1992). Governance is resultantly an ongoing global movement towards democratization, highlighting the rule of law, human rights, participatory development and efforts towards open and transparent administration. This provides a link between governance and the older ethical normative issues of good government in political thought. Governance then embraces not only good public management, but the movement of the governing process toward democratic, participatory and equitable models of development with alert and enlightened citizens at the centre stage (Ejumudo, 2010). Governance then becomes a means to serve the larger end, i.e. empowerment and equitable development of the masses.

Governance is also the set of values, policies and institutions by which a society manages economic, political and social processes at all levels through interaction among the government, civil society and the private sector. It is the way in which a society achieves mutual understanding, agreement and action. This includes the process by which governments are selected and replaced, the capacity of the government to formulate and implement sound policies, and the respect of citizens and the state for the institutions that govern economic and social interactions among them. Governance essentially comprises the mechanisms and processes through which citizens and groups articulate their interests, mediate their differences and exercise their legal rights and obligations. It is, in other words, the framework of rules, institutions and practices that sets limits and provides incentives for individuals, organizations and businesses. Although governance is a universal phenomenon in any society, it may or may not lead a society to human development. Governance is thus about the more strategic aspects of steering the larger decisions about the direction and roles and it is not only about where to go but also about who should be involved in deciding, and in what capacity.

At the very heart of governance, operates an increasingly universal set of generative principles, including participation, equity, sustainability, transparency, effectiveness and the rule of law. Governance must therefore be rooted in these fundamental principles to move a society toward increased levels of human development including poverty eradication, environmental protection, regeneration, peace and security, gender equality and sustainable livelihoods.

Governance is thus recognized as bedrock of development because without transparent and accountable institutions and the capacity to develop policies and laws that will enable a country to manage its environments and political life in an open and just way, development will not be feasible and sustainable.

For purpose of this study, leadership and governance are seen as social-influencing mechanisms and the set of values, policies and institutions by which societies, institutions and organizations manage their economic, political and social processes involving decision-making about the management and direction of activities and concerns as well as the capacity to effectively deploy resources so as to generate returns on co-ordinate efforts toward goal accomplishment.

Examination of the Democracy/Environmental Justice Challenge in Nigeria's Niger Delta and the Developmental Leadership and Governance Culture and Agenda Imperative

At the onset, it is important to underscore that while the proper utilization of human and environmental resources and the equitable distribution of the concomitant opportunities and benefits is critical to any developmental enterprise, the misuse of environmental resources and the mismanagement of its costs and benefits as well as the threats and opportunities relationship and equation is the immediate pathway to environmental injustice and potential crisis. In fact, in so far as the management of natural resources improves the prospects for environmental justice and it is one of the pillars of a true and genuine development agenda, environmental justice is an outgrowth of the symmetrical environment and development inter-linkage. It, in fact, involves the social context where the existing political structures execute their roles appropriately such that the conditions that are critical to relative order and stability exist. The structures will thus guarantee strategic production and equitable distribution of the costs and benefits of environmental exploits for development. It is the absence of the political, economic and environmental conditions that are necessary for the creation and sustenance of peace that invariably threaten environmental justice.

Critical to environmental justice is the democratic climate with principles that promote human development and security by demanding for and reinforcing the recognition of individual and group rights and liberty. This complementary role between both phenomenal practices is evident in the fact that while democracy represents a vehicle for the actualization of the principles of fairness, equality of opportunity, liberty, representation and the preservation of individual and social rights, environmental justice is an increasingly important element of policy making that underscores equity and fairness toward the disadvantaged individuals, groups, communities, societies, institutions, regions and nations. Environmental justice also offers the opportunity for merging two difficult agenda at both the national and international levels, by seeking to resolve the conflict between environmental and social goals and focusing on tackling environmental problems as part of the social exclusion agenda. It is therefore the absence or near absence of genuine democratic climate with ingrained institutions and processes that threaten environmental justice and the missing link is development-oriented leadership and governance.

In Nigeria's Niger Delta region, there arguably exists a democratic/environmental justice challenge largely because there is a yawning gap between the costs borne by the region in terms of the hydra-headed level of environmental pollution, degradation and devastation as well as the accompanying socio-economic dislocation and evident underdevelopment and the benefits enjoyed in terms of the human and infrastructural development as well as socio-economic empowerment programmes by the region and its marginalized and pauperized people. In fact, the challenge is so great considering the failed democratic experiment in Nigeria and the environmental injustice climate that has become the reality in the Niger Delta. Worse still, the environmental laws designed to strengthen the instrument of oppression, suppression, marginalization, dispossession, deprivation and disempowerment of the Niger Delta people by the state in collaboration with its allies (the multi-national oil corporations and local bourgeoisie), the dysfunctional effects of the operations and the activities of the oil conglomerates in the region, the politicization of the derivation principle in the revenue sharing formula at the expense of the region and the deceit of the institutional panacea in the form of development commissions established to address the underdevelopment question of the region have compounded   the democracy/environmental justice challenge in Nigeria's Niger Delta.

Again, the Niger Delta troublous state of affairs and seemingly unending development crisis manifested in massive environmental degradation with the rural and generally neglected areas experiencing large scale erosion and water-quality deterioration, deforestation, declining soil productivity and socio-economic dislocation where majority of the people especially the youths in the Niger Delta have little or no access to the benefits derivable from the production activities that should expectedly mitigate the negative effects and costs of the environmental degradation to which they have been perpetually subjected leaves much to be desired. Arguably, the costs of environmental pollution and degradation that is borne by the marginalized, oppressed and pauperized people as well as the benefits that should flow to them in the form of employment, skill acquisition programmes, educational scholarship schemes, provision of basic social amenities and other pro-poor life-enhancing programmes are heavily disproportional so much so, that the principles of fairness and equity that underlie or underpin environmental justice are impaired with one likely hazardous consequence, environmental

crisis.

The development/environmental justice challenge in the Niger Delta inevitably demands and require a true leadership and good governance culture and agenda that have become a desideratum. The above position is predicated on the understanding and conviction that the true leadership/good governance typified by justice, participation, rule of law, transparency, responsiveness, equity and inclusiveness, accountability, human dignity and civil liberties will generate the conditions and create the climate that has the potency of engendering environmental justice in a genuine democratic enterprise. At least, the exigency of an appropriate and judicious exploitation, management and utilization of natural resources as well as the equitable allocation of the derivable revenue for developmental purposes in the Nigerian state in general and the Niger Delta in particular underlies the indispensability of and the need for a development-oriented leadership and governance in the country. After all, environmental justice principles are expected to serve as a guide for organizing, networking and relating to good governance demands and expectations and sound, benign and sustainable environmental policy decisions that are fundamentally about equity and fairness toward the disadvantaged individuals, groups, communities, societies, institutions, regions like the Niger-Delta are a product of a development-oriented and participatory leadership and governance.

Such leadership and governance should be visionary, people-focused, accountable and responsive, representative, development-oriented, proactive and gender sensitive with requisite managerial capability. In the face of the indispensability and efficacy of the development-based leadership and governance imperative for the development/ environmental justice challenge in the Niger Delta, it is disheartening to note that the quality of leadership in Nigeria has been very poor and unimpressive, especially given the fact that the onerous task of nation building is at variance with the inept, selfish, sectional and particularistic mentality, orientation, disposition, interest and practices that drive the ambition of those that wield power. Essentially, those that the vagaries of the Nigerian political system throw up as rulers or the military dictators who impose themselves on the people and rule by fiat, lack leadership ability and capacity as well as the aptitude to selflessly translate government policies and programmes into concrete pragmatic reality. Although leadership and governance are inextricably linked, it is not surprising that governance which is the science of government behaviour and performance, including the exercise of economic, political and administrative authority to manage a country's affairs at all levels, has been equally poor in Nigeria in all acceptable indicators including strategic vision, rule of law, development-orientation, participation, equity and inclusiveness, effectiveness and efficiency, transparency, responsiveness, accountability and consensus.

Disappointingly, since independence over fifty years ago, the country has been plagued with patent examples of bad leadership characterized by myopic, corrupt, dictatorial, ill- advised, uninformed and exclusive tendencies. Indeed, the most formidable force confronting nation building in Nigeria is this same political leadership which has constituted itself into an oligarchy drawn from what may be described as the Nigerian military/political establishment (Akinola, 2009:16). In short, political corruption has compounded the value perversion process that has become a condition per excellence through displacement of Nigeria's agricultural base, economic management of the petro-dollar mono-product economy and lack-lustre administration of a bloated and inefficient public service. The preoccupation of the oligarchy is therefore the struggle for power and position of influence on oil matters. In order to secure and exploit material and related benefits accruing from status quo perpetuation, the Nigerian leadership has arguably contrived through violence, divide and rule, bare-faced electoral manipulation and all sorts of chicaneries, a system that obstructs necessary and desirable structural, institutional and constitutional reforms (ALF, 2010:23). Specific studies on Nigeria confirm the historically conditioned mode of accumulation since the colonial era, which has extractive economic objectives and serves mainly the interests of the elites (Turner, 1976; Turner and Badru, 1985; Roberts, 1998)

The democracy/environmental justice challenge in Nigeria's treasure base and the corrupt and inept leadership as well as the poor governance reality in Nigeria has the potency of threatening the corporate existence of the Nigerian state, especially with the spate and hydra-headed nature of violent crimes, hostage taking, kidnapping, arson, pipeline and oil installation vandalization, youth restiveness and politically and financially motivated killings. In fact, governance crisis with in-built deprivation and marginalization that produces political exclusion pervades the Nigerian state. In the same vein, economic well-being and a well-operated democratic political environment that is a protection against social injustice and violent outburst has been compromised as Simbine et al (2010) rightly articulated. And since proactive leadership and good governance is about making use of the instrumentalities of the state for the well-being of the people and maintaining order and justice, lack of good governance generates insecurity in any polity.

In sum, the political complexion of the above problem is complicated by the elite struggle to make private capital out of the leadership malady and endless search for sustainable socio-economic development that has not really been on the agenda of successive Nigerian governments (Ejumudo, 2011:324). The absence of a true development has, as a consequence, not placed the country on the right sustainable development path. And a genuine socio-economic development contains elements such as action-oriented policies, appropriate resource

management mentality, predisposition and practice, pro-poor approach, massive
infrastructural development and socio-economic empowerment that are needed to meet the democracy/environmental justice challenge in Nigeria.   This explains
the truism of the fact that the visionary leadership and good governance that encourages and upholds environmental justice in an ideal democratic state globally are largely lacking in Nigeria and the institutional structure and governmental processes that should play a facilitative role are shallow and far from being entrenched. In the face of the poor, shallow and failed leadership and governance in Nigeria, it is instructive to note that the basis for tackling the democracy/ environmental justice challenge is almost non-existent, especially as the actualization of true democracy has been constrained and inhibited by sundry factors.

Conclusive Remarks and Recommendations

Across the globe, whether in the developed or developing world, the democracy/environmental justice challenge is a reality. At the heart of this challenge is a development-focused leadership and governance that does not only generate, create and sustain core institutions and processes that support and reinforce equity and access to unfettered opportunities which is a sure antidote for threats to sustainable peace and a desirable climate for the distribution of costs and benefits and the allocation and reallocation of resources through social and environmental justice principles.

To meet the democracy/environmental justice challenge in Nigeria therefore, there must be a focused, transparent and accountable leadership that will seek to entrench good governance through a transparently credible process for the selection and replacement of those in authority, political stability and absence of large scale violence, capacity of the government to formulate and implement sound policies for quality public service provision, respect of citizens and the state for the institutions that shape and direct interactions, regulatory quality and control for corruption that are the hallmarks of good governance realizable through visionary sustainable leadership. Arguably, entrenching good governance values and institutions in developing countries is an onerous task, especially as democratic consolidation that is central to good governance demands genuine decentralization that potentially enhances legitimacy, efficiency and quality as well as political culture that embody democratic values, beliefs, attitude and norms. The instant case of Nigeria where mass participation, rule of law, transparency, responsiveness, equity, inclusiveness, accountability, human dignity and civil liberties appears to be utopian (Ejumudo 2009:16) is exceptionally and particularly worrisome . This position derives from the fact that the process that critically builds up to consolidate good democratic governance through transparent, accountable, responsive and development-based leadership are largely constrained, stifled and stagnated to the extent that governance in Nigeria can be appropriately dubbed as poor in a largely failed state environment.

In the absence of the above conditions, or put more emphatically, in the environment of failed governance typified by visionless leadership, shallow institutions, weak democratic culture, inequity in the distribution of costs and benefits, oppression and violence, environmental insecurity and threat to peace, good governance in Nigeria will be an illusion. In Nigeria's Niger Delta, the development/environmental justice dream remains a mirage and its future is threatened by environmental devastation and degradation, deteriorating economic conditions and socio-economic dislocation despite its huge resource base. All the same, a development-centred leadership and good governance where citizenship voice (a precondition for government responsiveness and accountability) is respected is a desideratum for the Niger Delta democracy/ environmental justice challenge, because democracy creates the conditions that are precedent to and the climate that is genial for the bedding, fruition and sustenance of environmental justice, just as environmental justice is an element and an integral part of democracy and facilitates its deepening and consolidation process.

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