

# The Contingency Theory and Government's Critical Initiatives in Resolving the Developmental Problems in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria

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## Abstract

This paper attempts to examine the philosophy and import of the contingency theory with a view to adopting it to explain the various developmental initiatives by successive governments in the Niger Delta Region. It adopts the descriptive and analytic approach in arriving at the fact that contingency theory is still contemporary, but requires a detail understanding of the situation under which is such decisions must be taken. The paper culminated in the setting up of various interventional agencies. But these agencies have not adequately addressed the developmental need of the region, because, the leaders did not perfectly understand the situation or the environment. The paper recommend among other things, that apart from understanding the situation or the environment, a genuine political goodwill is required to coast home the utility of the contingency approach to policy making and development.

**Keywords:** Theory, Contingency, Government, Initiatives, Development, Niger Delta Region

## Introduction

Social scientists, in attempt to make themselves clearer and understand the world, engage themselves in the constitution of different theories. These theories, therefore creates analytic criteria and influences our judgments about phenomena which may be social or political. Political scientists in particular, have adequately understood the fluidity of social and political events and phenomena. This has culminated in their development of several theories that have sharpened Political Scientists and Administrators problem solving abilities in area of explanation, prediction and hypothesis formulation and testing that leads to universally accepted knowledge (theory). The import of the aforementioned is to ensure better life for the members of society. In the mother discipline and sub-areas of political science, various theories have been developed in attempt to grow the discipline and position it for universal acceptance as an embraced tool for resolving identified socio-political problems. Amongst those theories, are the systems theory, the Elite's story, the conspiracy theory, bureaucratic theory, organizational theory and contingency or situational theory amongst others. The history of the development initiatives in the Niger Delta Region has been synonymous with government decisions and policies that can best be described as situational or contingent on the under currents in the Niger Delta environment. This paper therefore examines the import and the philosophy of the contingency theory as well as evaluating these contingent initiatives with a view to ascertaining whether they have expressed its utility in meeting its objectives of serving as a development approach to resolving the problems inherent in the region. Most government decisions and policies aimed at developing the Niger Delta Region, have in most cases evaded the normal bureaucratic policy making process. Rather, governments over the years have opted for contingent approaches to resolving the developmental needs of the people. These contingent initiatives have culminated in the establishment of various interventionist agencies other than using conventional government bureaucracies to implement government efforts in the government had used contingency approach after considering the peculiarly of the Niger Delta Region, to attempt in numerous ways to develop the Region. However, this assertion is not to push the thesis that government's effort so far is adequate, but we attempt to present the utility of the contingency or situational theory or approach to solving social problem. This work which is organized in four sections starts with the introduction, the section which examines the philosophy and imports of contingency or situational theory, the section that attempts to use the theory to explain contingent interventionist's development measures and the last section which deals with conclusion and possible recommendations.

## The Philosophy And Import of The Contingency or Situational Theory

The contingency theory emerged to contest the contributions of earlier theories. A contingent situation is one in which something or knowledge is dependent on the existing situation. Hence the contingency theory is also referred to as the situational theory.. the growth of this approach is consequent upon the researches of some scholars who studied a good number of organizations and observed differences among many of them. These differences were observed in their structures, patterns, mode of operations, etc. they found that some organizations had structures while some organizations had structures while some not have; some had rules, regulations spelt out as well as records while some did not have. Because of these differences, they felt or concluded that organizational forms (structures, patterns, rules, functions, etc) are not principles that indicates

that contingency theory finds its origin in organizational management, which has now been adopted to explain in wider spectrum of governmental decisions (Adamolekun 2006:119-121). The contingency theorists, therefore, recommended that individual organizations or governments should be studied in order to understand their structures, goals, operations, etc. Their view was that organizations vary depending on many variables such as the prevailing conditions level of technology, environmental factors etc. using the contingency theory, it means that no command structure, pattern, functions etc. Exist for all organizations, society or governments. It depends on the society concerned and the prevailing circumstances. Imhanlahimhin (1999:101-102) argues that, using the contingency theory, it means that leaders and managers should go into organizations or the environment with their minds open and flexible to study them. They should be without prejudices, no pre-information or knowledge is necessary, no bias. Only in this way, the contingency theory contends that leadership is any process in which the ability of a leader to exercise influence depends upon the group task situation and the degree to which the leader's style, personality and approach fit the group (Koontz, et al, 1983:667). In the view of (Ezeani, 2006:178-179), the emergence of a leader is a product of not only his personality attributes but also various situational factors, and the interaction between the leader and the situation. In the view of Sharma and Sadana (2007:214-215), the contingency is said to be an extension of the systems approach. It is also development on classical theory and human relations approach because I proposes that there is no one best way. What it means is that there is "optimum State" and because each society is different, appropriate structures and system of management is dependent upon the contingencies of the situation. The contingency theory believes that management methods used in one circumstance seldom work the way in others. All societies are not motivated the same different situations call for different approaches. No single way of solving problems is best for all situations because tasks and people in societies differ, therefore, the methods of managing largely depends on the nature of the job, the people involved and the situation. Effective administration varies with the society and its environment. This theory tries to analyze and understand the relationship between government and its environment so that specific administrative actions necessary to deal with the issue may be taken. By way of evaluation, this theory suggests that different conditions and situations require the application of different management techniques. It not only examines the relationship between sub-systems of a specific society in a given environment but also offers solutions to particular governmental problems. It is concerned with achieving harmony between government and the environment. However, this theory is said to be theoretically complex; and that its assumptions cannot be tested empirically.

### **Analysis of Critical Contingent Initiatives By Successive Governments To Develop The Niger Delta Region**

The Niger Delta Region is immersed in a development and governance crises which denotes the crisis of contradictions and marginalization that characterized the Nigerian state. The region is home to crude oil and gas that is the major revenue and foreign exchange earner by which Nigeria is run. Yet the region is underdeveloped despite its rich resources and great potentials for growth and sustainable development. Odje (2004:12) in attempt to capture the state of deprivation in the region said;

*The people face problems of poverty, homelessness, environmental degradation, the death of infrastructure social tension, damaged farmland and polluted rivers. Many of the communities especially the oil producing ones still live in primitive conditions...*

The foregoing characterization of the region qualifies it for special development to give the people a sense of belonging in the Nigerian state. The first governmental intervention in the area was consequent or contingent upon the early agitation by the Niger Delta minorities over perceived marginalization in the new Nigeria that we to be. Government, understanding the people and the peculiarity of their environment culminated into the inauguration of Sir Willink's Commission in 1957 to among other things ascertain the majority claims and to propose a way of allaying fears in the proposed one Nigeria. The Willink's Commission recommended a special development agency, having declared the region a special area requiring special intervention. In fact, the 1960 constitution provided for and made the region a special area Ikelegbe (2004:160). The Niger Delta Development Board (NDDDB) was inaugurated in 1960 and charged with the task of developing the region. Its status was further asserted by the section 159 of the 1963 constitution. It was managed by a board whose chairman was appointed by the president with a member each appointed by the governors of Eastern and Mid-Western region to represent the regions. Other members were as prescribed by parliament. However, the board was largely inactive. The intense regionalism and politicization of the period affected the NDDDB. It did not accomplish any substantial development until the civil war, and was abandoned after the war. The presidential Task Force on Oil Mineral Producing Area was set up by President Shehu Shagari to manage the 1.5 percent of the Federation Account that was due to the Oil – producing areas for the development of the region following the 1982 Revenue Allocation (Ibid). Although, the Task force remained till the early yearly of the Babangida's Administration, it was largely ineffective due to lack of government attention and commitment it deserves. The

Belgore Commission recommended the establishment of a development agency among other things for the region to ameliorate the problems that arise from Oil production. The Babangida Administration through Decree 23 of 1992 establish the Oil Producing Area Development Commission (OMPADEC), and allocated 13% to pursue the objective of rehabilitation and development of the Oil-producing areas and the tackling of the ecological problems that arose from Oil exploration and exploitation. The focus of development was infrastructure such as roads, electricity, drinking water, land reclamation, agriculture and transportation. OMPADEC was managed by a board headed by a chairman. Between 1992 and 1996 when OMPADEC was scrapped, it embarked on about 589 projects between 1993 and 1994. As at 1996, there were 256 projects in Rivers, 369 in delta, 79 in Edo and 248 in Akwa-Ibom. There were 87 projects in Ondo, 31 in Imo and 31 in Abia (Orji, 1996) as cited by Ikelegbe (2004:163). Most of the projects failed to achieve any appreciable impact in the lives of the people; neither did they succeed in achieving the commission goal of developing the Oil Producing Areas (Jack 2005:13). OMPADEC had numerous problems ranging from inadequate and irregular funding, organization and performance deficiencies. There was massive corruption not be self enrichment or leakages but by financial recklessness and irresponsibility. There were few completed projects to justify its accruals; rather there were large scale indebtedness to contractors. Because of poor management and corruption, the commission became prostrate by 1998. (Otite, 1996:6) spotted some defects in the activities of OMPADEC when he said

*we all probably know the commission was deformed structurally, misused and abused; and it became ineffective right from when it started to function.*

Despite all these developmental interventions, the Niger Delta Region, with its rich resources remain neglected, underdeveloped and poor, with its attendant and indicators in poor Medicare services, high cost of food, infrastructure decay. This is why (Sharma and Sadana 2007:215) opine that though the contingency approach posses some utilities, it is not fully developed and therefore, does not offer meaningful solutions to different managerial problems. It is said to be theoretically complex. The assumptions of this theory cannot be tested empirically. The inability of the Niger Delta people to access these basic elements of development has attracted discontent, crises and massive revolts against the Nigerian state. This has being increasingly difficult to manage until 199 when it assumed a worrisome dimension. The situation was exploited Obasanjo in his 1999 presidential campaigns with contingent promise to address the Niger problem if elected. It was upon his election as president the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) was set up in 2001. The Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) was set up by the then Obasanjo Administration in 2001 to replace the moribund OMPADEC. Its visions and mission among other things it to offer lasting solution to the socio-economic difficulties of the Niger Delta Region and to facilitate he rapid and sustainable development of the area into a region that is economically progressive and politically peaceful (Otoghagua 2001:315-317). In agreement with Sharma and Sadana that the contingency theory is theoretical in tendency, no sooner did NDDC begin operation than plethora of hindrances was observed. These hindrances include, inadequate and irregular funding, corruption, inadequate attention to people oriented bottom-up development strategies (master plan), the people resistance to development, conflicts in the objectives and strategies of development plans among others. It was in the midst of the above obstacles to the operations of the NDDC that the Yar Adua'ss government took over the reigns of power. In his attempt to solve the Niger Delta problem took a contingency decision of conveying a summit to discuss the issue. This idea was met with stiff operation and the opted for a Technical committee to collate all the recommendations of previous committees set up by successive government. This is to enable the current government frontally develop the Region. The effort has also been supported with the setting up of a Ministry of the Niger Delta. According to President Yar'Adua, this ministry is created to holistically ensure that the Niger Delta master plan is effectively implemented because of the contingency nature of these initiatives scholars and practitioners have reacted variously. Uranta (2008:12) in his reaction to the creation of Niger delta ministry and the technical committee to which he is a member opines that;

*The environmental peculiarity of the Niger Delta Region and the continued agitations by the people had always pushed governments over the years to take contingency decisions that have culminated in establishment of various interventionist agencies. These agencies have not adequately addressed the problems of development in the Region. This is not uhuru; until we see a critical display of genuine political good will in terms of actual implementation of the development master plan.*

Ledum (2008:9) in his view, sees the setting up of the technical committee and ministry of Niger Delta as a step in a good direction because, its contingent on the government understanding of the peculiarity of the Niger Delta environment and the need for a quick fix approach to resolving the problems. The analogy here is that government does not need to follow the conventional bureaucratic approach to tackle the Niger Delta problems, but see to the fact that the region required urgent and peculiar attention. The most important thing therefore is

that, government must be mindful of the weakness of a contingency approach which is likely to overwhelm the leader if he fails to adequately understand the peoples need, structures that may interfere with its operations and the peculiar environment that may warrant such contingent initiatives or policies.

### Conclusion And Recommendations

The foregoing analysis may perhaps shown clearly the import of he contingency theory as may be applied to organizations and even government as leaders are faced with numerous problems that required unusual approach that demand situational attention to resolve. By way of evaluation we have shown that the contingency approach to decision making has become popular in some, if not all aspect of governmental initiatives. The use of the approach has contributed to the discovery of situational leadership of organization. There is no doubt that the study and evaluation of the work of each society would better understand and appreciated if examined with open and unbiased mind (Okoh 1998:209) The history of political economy of the Niger Delta Region has been synonymous with circumstances of fear of domination and exploitation. These agitations that have steadily grown into expressed military, has attracted successive governments to adopt contingency initiatives which culminated in the setting up of various developmental interventionist agencies.

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These interventionist agencies have not been able to adequately addressed the developmental need of the region. This inability may be linked to the limitation of the contingency theory which includes:

- i. The difficulty making generalizations since the study of the region is made situational
- ii. The difficulty in divesting oneself of prejudices, biases and prior knowledge about other societies or principles in order to be able to study society concerned with open mind as a major problem
- iii. Problem of objective conclusions may be attendant on the opened of mind. This is so because a flexible mind may have the problem of fairness.

This paper has perhaps adequately explained the developmental initiatives of government in the Niger Delta Region over the years with the philosophy of the contingency theory. Therefore, we try to push the thesis, initiatives to resolve. It is in this way that, we may recommend to organization managers and heads of governments that much as we have adequate conventional theories to explain decisions and policies contingency theory is still contemporary in it utility.

In specific terms contingency theory expects leaders to do the following:

- i. Governmental actions must be contingent upon certain actions outside the system or sub-systems.
- ii. Efforts of government should be based on the actions outside the system so that the society is integrated with the environment.
- iii. Leadership and government design must be appreciated to the given situation. A particular action is appropriate only in certain circumstances. There is no one best approach to management. It differs from situation to situation.
- iv. What a leader does depend upon a given situation and there is an active interrelationship between the variable in a situation and the administrative action.

In conclusion, contingency theory is summarized to mean that leadership is situational, that administrative actions are contingent on internal and external factors as well as the consistency of administrative action with the requirements of internal and external factors.

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