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MULTINATIONAL OIL COMPANIES AND THE NIGER DELTA CONFLICT IN NIGERIA: STUDY OF SHELL PETROLEUM DEVELOPMENT COMPANY

Princewill Okwara, Ph.D
Department of Political Science & International Relations,
Nile University of Nigeria, Abuja
princewillokwara@gmail.com& o.princewill@nileuniversity.edu.ng,08038896689

Njoku Hyacinth Tochukwu, Ph.D
Miva Open University, Nigeria
Email: hyacinth@miva.university, Phone:+234 806 431 1278

Abstract
Multinational oil companies in Nigeria have longstanding record of oil explorations within the oil producing communities of the Niger Delta region. Hence the general objective of this paper is examined the operation of Shell Petroleum Development Company and conflict in the Niger Delta region. The study adopted qualitative method of data collection by analyzing related historical data collection on the operation of the Multinational oil companies within the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. The article findings revealed that conflicts between Shell Petroleum Development Company and host communities have led to economic underdevelopment, loss of human life and environmental degradation of the Niger Delta region. In conclusion therefore, the paper recommended that to eradicate conflict between SPDC and its host communities of the Niger Delta region, company they should provide infrastructure development, technology transfer, improvement on their community relations strategies in order to impress the community and most importantly, they should introduce grassroots approach to the implementation of their strategies, particularly the Global Memorandum of Understanding (GMoU), for optimum results.
Key Words: Conflict, Multinational Oil Companies, SPDC, Niger Delta, Oil producing Communities.

Introduction
Oil mineral is undoubtedly, the main source of the Nigerian economy. Oil accounts for over 80% of the nation's 95% of the national budget and 80% of the nation's Gross Domestic product (GDP), 90% of foreign exchange earnings, 95% of the national budget and 80% of the nation's wealth. Between 2002-2005, Nigeria, according to SPDC Report (2006) earned at least N1300 billion from oil export. The vanguard newspaper puts the figure for the 1980-2002 periods at $177.3 billion. In fact, in the 1990's, Nigeria earned so much from its oil mineral resources that a top government official was quoted as saying that money was not Nigerian's problem but how to spend it. Also, during the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) states' negotiations with the European Economic Community (EEC) for the first lone convention, Nigeria even contemplated contributing to the European Development Fund (EDF), instead of being a recipient. With its oil dependent wealth Gowon and the subsequent military and civilian regimes undertook various development projects especially highways, road, industries etc, which enriched the military and the bureaucratic elites and their contractor friends (SPDC Report, 2006).

The wealth also enhanced Nigeria's leadership aspiration. It was able to extend assistance to the need African States, contribute generously to African Liberation movements and to the liberation fund of the A.U, etc on one occasion Nigeria even paid the salaries of civil servants in faraway Granada (Rowell, 1994). The state of the art architecturally designed mansions erected my public officers, top military men, contractors etc, the huge amount of dollars sunk into the ECOMOG venture in the Liberia and Sierra Leone, and the huge number of various currencies recently revealed as stolen by top public office holders came largely from foil revenue. But oil which brought so much wealth to the nation and to many corrupt individuals also brought to the people of the Niger Delta such poverty, diseases, strange ailments, persistent pollution and degrading of their environment. But despite this high cost of hosting the oil multinational companies (MNC's), the oil producing communities of the Niger Delta are developmentally neglected and their demands for basic amenities and for adequate compensation for damages were treated with levity and sometimes cavalierly dismissed as irritants and unsatisfied Oliver Twists. It is against this background of the above facts that necessitated this academic study.

The frequent conflict between the multinational oil companies and their Niger Delta host communities forms the problems of this study. The Niger Delta often accuses the multinational oil companies of total neglect non provision of basic amenities and lack of development even after the oil exploration activities has denied them their lakes, farmlands, drinking water, fishponds and general air pollution through gas flaring etc. To this end various Nigerian Government since the first republic have had to contend with the problem of fishing out a workable and effective formula in the form of commission to cater for the developmental needs of the Niger Delta people. In this regard, the Niger Delta Basin Development Authority (NDBDA) and now the Niger Delta Development Commission were all set-up. All these commissions have come to contend with the problem of lack of development in the Niger Delta, seemingly to no avail as the state of underdevelopment in the region still cast a gory scenario of its original form vis-a-visa the enormous amount of oil wealth it contributes to the national income of Nigeria.

The most of the questions on the oil multinational companies and the Niger Delta, concentrates entirely on a roll-call of the lack of development, the effects of the oil exploitation and exploration activities on the human ecosystem, human rights abuses, criminal execution of departure, this research have under taken to fill a vacuum existing in the numerous studies relating to the development of the Niger Delta and empowerment of her youths can never come solely from the Nigerian state and the oil MNC'S feeling in the oil communities.

Research Questions

From the statement of problem, this article provide answer to the following research questions.

i. What is the historical background of oil in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria?
ii. What is the background of SPDC operation in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria?
iii. What is the role of SPDC to the conflict within the oil producing communities of the Niger Delta Region?

Research Objectives

i. Examine the historical background of oil in Niger Delta of Nigeria.
ii. Analize the of SPDC operation in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria.
iv. Evaluate the activities of SPDC and conflict within oil producing communities of the Niger Delta Region.

Conceptual Analysis: The Concept of Conflict.

The definition conflict like peace is also contentious. However, most scholars are of the opinion that conflict usually reflects a class of interest or goal between parties, which may be individuals or group of individuals, or ethnic groups or states. Conflict according to most scholars occurs "when two or more people engage in a struggle over values and claims to status, power and resources in which the aims of the opponents are to neutralize, injure or eliminate their rivals. He further explained that conflict emerges whenever one party perceives that one or more goals or purposes or means of achieving a good or preference is being threatened or hindered by the activities of one or more parties." Put together, in conflict parties perceive or treat each other as a stumbling block that results in frustrating the other in attaining a set of goals, or even furthering one's interest through their attitudes, behaviours or actions (Akpuru-Aja, 1997). Generally, the conflict has been considered an obstacle to progress, political stability, economic prosperity and overall socio-economic development of any society because of its destructive impact. This therefore means that conflict must be timely averted or managed properly as failure to do so will reflect a determined action or struggle over a goal, which may be overt or subtle; manifest or imaginary.

The Concept of Multinational Oil Corporations

Scholars and eminent statesmen have over the years conducted articulate investigations into the activities of multinational corporations in the growth and development of the Niger Delta region. This has in no small measure constituted a foundation for controversy. Many of these scholars have come to agree that these terms, "transnational corporation and multinational corporations are often used interchangeably to mean the same thing. In his attempt to define multinational corporations. Offiong (1980) posits that "a corporation is a business structure whose principal aim is not to serve but to earn and maximize profit from its operations" He also stressed that "such corporation must be national or foreign, multinational or transnational". He continues by defining MNC's as, "firms that own and control income-generating acting in more than one country. Ikein (1990) states that, "a multinational corporation is a company which has its parent headquarters located in a developed country and subsidiary operations in a number of other countries" Nwankwo's view are nothing short of the truth. The parent headquarters of the multinational corporations are where the funds they extract from their subsidiary are siphoned.

Theoretical Framework: Conflict Theory

Conflict theory, developed by Karl Marx, emphasizes how power struggles and economic disparities create social conflicts. It argues that society is divided into groups with differing interests, often leading to confrontations over resources, wealth, and political influence. This framework is useful for analyzing the conflicts in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. The Niger Delta is rich in oil, which accounts for most of Nigeria's revenue. However, the wealth generated from oil production is largely controlled by multinational corporations and the Nigerian government, while local communities suffer from poverty, unemployment, and environmental degradation. This reflects the classic conflict theory dynamic, where the elite (government and corporations) exploit the resources at the expense of marginalized groups (local communities). Exploitation and Marginalization. The indigenous communities in the Niger Delta experience environmental destruction due to oil spills, gas flaring, and deforestation, which harm their livelihoods in fishing and farming. Meanwhile, they receive little compensation or infrastructural development. This marginalization aligns with conflict theory's argument that those in power will continue to exploit weaker groups to maintain their dominance.

The various militant groups, such as the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) and the Niger Delta Avengers (NDA), have emerged to fight against perceived oppression. Their activities ranging from pipeline vandalism to kidnapping oil workers are efforts to challenge the existing power imbalance. This resistance mirrors conflict theory's assertion that oppressed groups will eventually rise against their exploiters. The Nigerian government has responded with military force, repression, and at times, amnesty programs to neutralize resistance. This reflects how elites use both coercion and selective concessions to maintain control, another key aspect of conflict theory. While the broader conflict is between the Niger Delta communities and the government/corporations, there are also internal conflicts among local elites, political figures, and militant groups. Some local leaders benefit from oil-related corruption, further deepening class struggles within the region. The Niger Delta conflict is a clear example of conflict theory in action. It highlights how economic inequality, exploitation, and resistance shape societal struggles. Until the structural inequalities in resource distribution and political representation are addressed, tensions in the Niger Delta will likely persist.

Review of Shell Petroleum Development Company Operation in the Niger Delta Region

Shell companies collectively form one of the world's largest corporations. They are involved in oil and gas exploration and production (upstream activities) as well as refining, transportation and marketing (downstream activities). Shell companies are exploring for and production in oil and gas in almost 50 countries of the world. In Africa, shell companies have major production interests in Nigeria, Gabon and Egypt. Following a long period of a dual holding companies that is shell petroleum NV of the Netherlands and the shell United States of America called shelled petroleum incorporated. Oronta (1999), the shell Petroleum Development Company of Nigeria Limited, is the Pioneer and the largest oil exploration and production company in Nigeria. Tamuno, (1999:53), the company started geological reconnaissance operations in 1937 and it was granted an oil exploration license on November 4, 1938. Yehudi (1998) shell in 1956 discovered the first commercial oil field in Nigerian at Oloibiri, Bayelsa State after the company must have drilled several unsuccessful wells. Akinsanya (1997: 91 - 94), from a production of 6,000 barrels of crude oil per day in 1958, when the shipment was made, the rate of daily production by the company has increased to more than one million barrels. The name of the company operating the Joint Venture was then changed to the Shell Petroleum Development Company of Nigeria Limited. Adebayo A.G. (1988: 26 - 28), NNPC and Shell signed an agreement meant to consolidate the venture in 1984.

In 1989, the Federal Government rationalized its interest in the NNPC – Shell Joint Venture from 80% to 60% while shell increased its participation to 30% thus allowing Elf Nigeria Ltd and Nigeria Agip oil company acquires 55 respectively. However, in July 1993, Elf increased its interest by acquiring an extra 55 from the Nigeria government. A memorandum of understanding (MOU) between the Nigerian government and oil companies and the NNPC / Shell / Elf/ Agip Joint Venture were signed on Thursday July 11th, 1991. (SPDC, 1992: 15-17), under the present terms of agreement as fixed margin provided the oil prices remain between $12.50 and $23 a barrel. Walter Rodney (1974: 5), any rise in price within this range therefore boosts government revenues. Yehudi Davide D. (1998: 15-17) apart from the company's role, responsibilities and commitment to environmental protection and to building increased community relations shell has staff strength of about 4,928 regular employee and over 11,000 employees retained via contracts and about 300 expatriates.

Multinational Oil Companies (Shell Petroleum Development Company) and Conflict in the Niger Delta Region

Nzimiro (1977) view multinational corporation as creating economic problems and conflict within the Niger Delta. He equally believes the theory here in Africa, created a neo-colonial economy which for decades will remain a trading economy, by so doing many African countries have remained an export-oriented economy whose industrial units are vertically integrated with the parent industries in the metropolis with no or very little integration with other industries or sectors of neo-colonial state itself. He also believes that the existence makes it impossible to develop indigenous enterprises by native mono polities. The MNC's are also seen as being capable of shifting to lucrative sectors of the economy at any point in time, when such a sector becomes more prosperous and by so doing can regulate industries and agriculture, thus distorting the patterns of economic development of the given country. Nzimiro (1977) further asserts that MNC's help to create a parasitic class within the society a class that is essentially committed to the doctrine of capitalism through so many means they can use these means created according, to their own images and likeness to ensure the preservation of the economic manifesting of the multinational oil corporations.

The maxizim scholars often see the multinational oil corporations as causing structural distortions with respect to sectoral and regional imbalance, income wealth and other structural imbalances and warped industrialization programme. In their obsession with fast and much profit, multinational oil corporations concentrated their investment in such lucrative sectors as commence, mining finance, export agriculture, manufacturing and construction while neglecting other sectors of the economy, especially agriculture, resulting in the collapse of the rural economy and food crisis all over Africa. In line with this, Nwankwo (1981:35-45) argued with substantial facts that multinationals investments in underdeveloped countries like Nigeria is usually in viable productive venture in like into agricultural or related sectors, to them this offer less opportunity to maximize or accumulate profits in the shortest possible time frame. Rather, they invest mostly in extractive and exploitative activities of crude oil, manufacturing commences, banking etc, which do not really contribute to a substantial permanent development of a country like Nigeria, but rather renders such country as a rental state for the selfish interest of the multinationals in alliance with its agents to perpetuate more exploitation from such country.

Akinsanga (1984:30) maintained that in the area of transfer of technology benefits to host developed countries, there is little technology transferred by multinational oil corporations. This is not only because research and development afford are concentrated in the home countries of the multinational oil corporations but also because MNC's attempt to retain monopoly over technology. Another reason is because of the capital intensity of the multinational oil corporation's method of production and because consistent adaption of production process has not taken place. This group of scholars further argued that the technology so transferred by MNC's to their host countries is inappropriate, absolute, overprices and in consisted with the factor endowment of the less developed countries. Ake (1981) pointed out that more than often the transfer of technology invariably inappropriate encourages the production of goods which are irrelevant to the needs, of the needs of most of the people. The essence of the postulation made by Ake (19981:105-114) was to show an attempt by these multinational oil corporations to frustrate the impact of indigenous technology development in order to boost an efficient dependent manpower skill by third world states like Nigeria.

Multinational oil corporations have also been accused of developing vertical integrations with the control of the dependent country's support supply of raw materials, transportation etc. All these are reinforced with the control of technology by the multinational oil corporations. The development of this vertical integrations is to aid the further disarticulation of the national economy of host countries, thus making it impossible for such countries to develop technologically and otherwise, to exploited both her raw materials and natural resources independently. In the area of employment, Marian scholars have shown in their respective studies that multinational oil corporations use more capital per employee and because of this phenomenon, the MNC's are enabled to employ many the labour force in their host countries in which there exist abundant labour. Onimode (1986:17-19) accused the multinational oil corporations of contributing to the unemployment crisis in Africa especially at the Niger Delta of Nigeria. The four major sources of unemployment created by the MNC's are the initial proletarianization of African peasantry by the colonial state through forced labour, oppressive taxes and land alienation, inappropriate capital-intensive technology and the import of labour into Niger Delta through the expatriate quota. Other charges against multinational corporations' centers on its effects on local indigenous enterprises. Akeredolu (1978:35-41) for example, maintain that the expansion of private foreign investment (MNC's) and the development of indigenous entrepreneurship many naturally reinforce each other in the early stages of their extranets but tend to become competitive of process at letter stages.

And the more expensive multinational corporations become in such letter stages, the less room for indigenous industries to develop. He is of the opinion that one of the roots of the economic backwardness of most host countries of MNC's is the over prolonged sojourn of private foreign investment. He also argues that the failure to stimulate indigenous entrepreneurship in Nigeria can be attributed to capital shortages in accurate managerial skills and negative socio-cultural and motivations characteristics of the world of private indigenous entrepreneur. It can also be attributed to the activities of private foreign investors in the economy, the foreign owned commercial banks which dominated the credit system and demonstrated a strong unwillingness to help indigenous firms to rise. The above assertion was further corroborated by Luck (1997) who indicated multinational oil corporations for harassing and eventually out competing and eliminating nascent local infant industries gradually "but infallibly making the national economy fall prey to such giant multinational firms which transforms it confidently into their exclusive preserve profit making. This tendency Kojo observed is already observed in Nigeria in the combined form of the horizontal and vertical integration of the major and relevant economic activities under the hegemony of multinationals.

Hitherto, experience and observation in the past had shown that some of these activities by these MNC's operating in Niger Delta show are usually geared towards sub margin or underdevelopment in a bid to frustrate any economic progress of Niger Delta and to make them more dependent on multinational oil companies as a source of development. For instance, Offiong (1980) rightly observed that the backward region assumes dependence status in relationship to metropolitan powers and domination because they were indebted to them. Therefore, in such relationship that exist between the less developed and developed nations are that of debtor and creator. The efficiency of this climaxed to dependence and domination of the former that were indebted to the letter. In concurrence to this position Ake (1987:79-42) with respect to the interview he granted News-watch magazine in 1987, contended that multinational oil companies operating in the Niger Delta shore, to the extent are supposed to help in the development of the country's economy. But paradoxically they play the purported role of development expected of them. But in actual reality as he contends, they only help to keep the national economy to be dependent and underdeveloped in the country.

The conception of Ake Claude (1985:110-116) about the role of multinational oil companies as regard development of the national economy of Nigeria or its environs could be perceived as nail. In other worlds, his perception about MNC's could be deduced as an agent in collaboration of both the ruling elites and the bourgeois, in the country, to attain their selfish interests, thereby perpetuating deeper dependence and disarticulation of socio-economic of Nigeria and other African States. In view of the foregoing the Marxism scholars in their divergent views have shown how MNC's had underdeveloped the different parts of the Nigeria national economy. It is in realization of this predicament that attempts were made to reverse such imbalance that existed in the past. In the Nigeria context for instance, attempts at regulating the activities of multinational oil corporations includes the introduction of the General Town led military administration in 1977 under the General Olusengun Obasanjo led military administration. However, this indigenization policy could not regulate effectively the conducts and operations of such MNC's Onimode (1983:15-28), in this regard, contends that: the indigenization policy that was introduced failed woefully as result of the symbiotic collaboration mechanism that exists between the bourgeois or agents in alliance with the ruling elites of Nigeria who served selfishly and fought for their sole personal interest in alliance with multinational oil companies operating in the Niger Delta.

Ake Claude (1985:110-116) posited that Nigerian ruling class in partnership and in alliance with its foreign patrons (the international capitalist interests) embark upon the said purported policy of indigenization in a bid to accommodate each other interest of confliction strains of relationship. Thus, these spheres of operations are clearly stipulated and serve as a demarcation. The advent of shell petroleum development company (SPDC) in Nigeria according to shell bulletin dates to 1956 when the company pioneered the oil industry in the country drilling the first sources of oil well the same year followed simultaneously with the first oil export two years later. Onimode (1988) the Nigeria- shell partnership started in 1938 at the down of Nigeria's oil industry. The shell-BP, a reconstructed shell Darchy carried out the earliest and longest search for crude oil in the country, which yielded result in 1956. Since 1938 till date shell has been involved in the exploration of crude oil in Nigeria. More so, the adoption of the leading-edge exploration method by the company, has enabled it to discover and explore more oil fields in the both on-shore and offshore oil drilling in the country.

Oil exploration activities of shell are in the mangrove forests of the Niger Delta, which includes Delta, Imo, Bayelsa, Abia, Ebonyi and Rivers State. this is the primary focus of the company in Nigeria. Today as operators of the NNPC/shell Joint venture, SPDC produces more than half of Nigeria's oil on behalf of its partners (NNPC, EIF and AGIP). According to the Journal of Shell Petroleum Development company, the company has to use its wealth to contribute to Nigeria development in various ways. In community development in Nigeria, shell in 1997 expected more than $36 million (SDPC, 1997). Another $94 Million was invested in projects with environmental benefits. On the health care facet, the company has built multiple hospitals, donated much equipment and has donated drugs as well. The company has helped in alleviating the problem of unemployment and has opened vocational training schools in the Niger Delta areas for the acquisition of skills by the youths in that area. Shell Petroleum Company has contributed immensely in Nigeria educational scheme. The company has been involved in the awarding of scholarship of various kinds to students in both secondary and tertiary institutions of higher learning. In addition to this, the company has built classroom blocks and laboratories in many schools and colleges, mostly in the Niger Delta areas.

Okwara (2024), the company also has a network of 24 agricultural extension officers, who work in the communities, providing advice to the farmers and the existing corporative. Three training

workshops were held for 65 farmers in 1997, teaching them the technique in growing rice. Shell has also helped in alleviating water supply palaver in the rural areas. The company predominately in the rural areas commissioned water system. The company has given support to the Nigeria government's national immunizing campaigns. It has also been involved in the construction at roads and markets. Regrettable, Shell's activities have simultaneously ushered in some agonizing periods of social and environmental degradation over the years. This has brought about great runs and devastated aquatic and agricultural life of the people of the Niger Delta areas. Tamuno (1999) directed attention of the world to the hazards caused by oil exploration. He analyzed how the activities of the oil companies have divested the agricultural, recreational and wild life activities of the people in the Niger Delta areas. He cited an example with the Bonny Oil Spillages of July 1975.

Barnet, Muller and Ronald all agree that oil pollution destroys food sources particularly, aquatic food chains that includes fisheries resources. Evidence of environmental degradation ad abuse of human rights is most prominent in the Ogoni Enclave, a distinct ethnic minority group in the South-Eastern part of the Niger Delta. The people of Ogoni started protesting of the ecological devastation caused by Shell and Chevron Nigeria Limited. Tell magazine, an authoritative news magazine writes that the chiefs and leaders of Ogoni, during the 1991 protest submitted a document entitled "Ogoni Bill of Rights" to the Nigeria government. Their demands among other things included the right to protect Ogoni environment and ecology from further degradation. A series of demonstrations and violent protesters led to the killing of four prominent sons of Ogoni Land, who were believed to be in favor of the various oil firms, particularly Shell and the Nigeria government. This ugly development led to the arrest and the subsequent hanging of world-famous writer and environmental list Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight others. This event led to reactions from individuals from all works of life and the international community, all which condemned the governmental action of hanging.

Alagoa (1972) Laments on the problems caused by the activities of these foreign oil corporations in Africa, especially in their nefarious role in overthrowing of government that the, finds unfriendly to their activities. He also posits that these corporations exploit human and natural resources in the Third World Countries where they indulge in the destabilization and overthrowing of host governments. In Africa, the government of General Mutual Mohammed was toppled with the aid of these MNC's. Dissidents sponsored by multinational oil corporations and killed Anwar Suda, the former Egyptian President who died in Cario in 1981. The Uganda, these MNC's aided the installation of President Yaweri Muser also the Cameroon, ELF oil company has dominated to country's political arena, discouraging the government to insist on claiming the oil rich Bakassi Peninsular, thereby fuelling border conflict with Nigeria the rightful owner of the Peninsular. (SDDS, :1980:15-17). All these activities of the various multinational oil companies do not augur well for the development of Nigeria and Africa in general. These activities have helped to undermine the country and plunging the African continent further into the path of underdevelopment. Going through the pages of this work, one has little or no choice but to accept that the activities of the multinational oil corporations has done more harm than good to the development of Africa in general and Nigeria in particular. The fabrics of the political, socio cultural wounded by these agents of imperialism. Ake Claude (1987:39-42), Shell the case study of this research work, despite its huge profits, has only helped to development of an insignificant and minute fraction of Nigeria developmental projects. Nzimiro (1976:88-100), In contrast, the environmental and ecological harm it's oil prospecting ventures have done to the Niger Delta in region of the country is to say the least enormous, inhuman, outrageous and beyond financial compensation. Akinsanya (2001) the unending presence of the powerful multinational corporations in the oil industries of Nigeria ushers in a

ceaseless plague of dependency and underdevelopment, with an alarming proportion each passing day.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In recommendations of our findings, it is obvious that the Niger Delta defines wealth and poverty simultaneously. We therefore recommend the following to eradicate the Niger Delta conflict and bring about the much-needed development in the Niger Delta region and Nigeria in generally.

i) The oil and gas sector in Niger Delta are generally known to have attracted the most interest in investors in the Nigerian economy. This is because of the huge profit that oil and gas companies make in the international market.

ii) The SPDC operating in the Niger Delta region should encourage and assist the oil producing communities by embarking on the effective developments of infrastructural facilities such as good reads, portable drinking water, electricity and building of such schools with necessary educational materials that will enhance learning and human capacity development.

iii) SPDC should ensure the widest possible consultation of the people who will be affected by oil installations in their planning and the greatest possible transparency in what is planned, to ensure that oil operation have the consent of these who suffer their negative consequences.

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