

*Review*

# Brief but revolutionary: Yar' Adua and the sustainable development of the Niger Delta, Nigeria

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The Niger Delta is reputed to be the bastion of the economic survival and by extension, the corporate existence of Nigeria. Several years of crude oil exploration and production have resulted in environmental despoliation and pollution and the inhabitants of the area desperately poor. Successive administrations in Nigeria have attempted to tame the lingering developmental challenges of the region without much success. When the Yar Adua administration was inaugurated in 2007, the Niger Delta was one of the Seven-Point Agenda of the administration. Though the administration was brief, it had a revolutionary approach to the denouement of the crisis in the region. Using primary and secondary sources, this paper therefore, attempt to explicate and dissect the administration's approach to the resolution of the crisis in the region. This is done against the backdrop of early attempt to redress the crisis. The study argues that the hallmark of Yar'Adua's initiative is the declaration of amnesty to the militants in the region. It is contended that for lasting peace to reign in the region, the present administration must go beyond the Amnesty and reintegrate the militants into the mainstream of society by winning over their minds and making them to be stakeholders in the oil industry.

**Keywords:** Yar' Adua, development, Niger Delta

## INTRODUCTION

The Niger Delta imbroglio has continued to generate interest locally and internationally given its continued threat to peace and security and the corporate existence of Nigeria. A number of factors are responsible for the conflict in the region. The conflict in the region escalated in the 1990s at the behest of the Movement for the Survival of Ogoni people which was given an ideological impetus by the environmental activist and playwright, Ken Saro-Wiwa. The major grouse of the minority group in the region was the untoward and unsustainable exploitation of oil resources in the region by oil multinationals without due compensation. Indeed, oil Wealth from the Niger

Delta region is largely responsible for sustaining the Nigerian Federation (UNDP 2006:62). Despite fueling much of Nigeria's economic growth, the Niger Delta is somewhat marginalized from Nigeria's national development. Essentially there is a disconnect between the wealth the region generates for the Nigerian Federation and the transnational oil companies extracting oil from the region, and the region's human development progress. The region's Human Development Index (HDI) is 0.564 and while this is slightly higher than the Nigeria HDI of 0.448, the area rates below regions or countries with similar gas or oil reserves (Venezuela is

0.772 and Indonesia is 0.697 (UNDP, 2000:15; Higgins 2009; Egwu 2008). Ethnic and political unrest has continued throughout the 1990s and persists up to 2007 despite the wave of democracy and the attempt by the Obasanjo administration to redress the crisis. The 2008 budget, the first by the Yar'adua admin, shows the extent of the nation's dependence on oil and its vulnerability to risks posed by the prolonged crisis in the Niger delta. Of the projected total revenue of N1, 986 trillion, 80 per cent is expected to come from oil. Nigeria is the 6<sup>th</sup> exporter of oil within the OPEC and supplier of 12 per cent of the energy needs of the US (WANEP:1). The Niger Delta sitting on top of about 187 trillion cubic feet of gas and about 35.2 trillion barrels of oil reserves (Igbikiowubo 2010; Watts 2007). The conflict blamed on resource based injustice escalated sharply in the Feb. 2006 with the commencement of hostage taking along with attacks on oil installation as strategies to draw attention to the neglect of the host communities. This negatively affected socio economic activities in the region, leading to high level of insecurity, a disruption oil production activities and the evacuation of expatriates the main targets of hostage taking. There has also been a surge in criminal activities (kidnap for ransom) have blurred the lines between genuine protests and criminality. There is remarkable shift from cause to commerce. This had frustrated effort and intervention strategies and heightened the level of violence. In all of this, the conflict continues to escalate to bizarre levels, with local gangs shifting their targets and taking fellow indigenes especially children and elders hostage to settle political scores or simply for money. This was the gory situation Yar'Adua was confronted when he assumed office as the President of the federal republic of Nigeria on May 2007. That the president frontally engaged the crisis in the region as attested to by making it one of the seven point agenda of his administration is clearly because he felt that it would be difficult to jump start the economy without addressing the issue. This paper therefore, attempt to explicate and dissect the administration's approach to the resolution of the crisis in the region. This is done against the backdrop of early attempt to redress the crisis. The study argues that the hallmark of Yar'Adua's initiative is the declaration of amnesty to the militants in the region. It is contended that for the sustainable development and lasting peace to reign in the region, the present administration must go beyond the Amnesty and reintegrate the militants into the mainstream of society by winning over their minds and making them to be stakeholders in the oil industry.

## **Developmental Initiatives in the Niger Delta up to 2006**

Scholars have devoted much attention to efforts at the denouement of the Niger Delta conflict before the Yar'Adua years (see among others, Ikporukpo, 1981, Naanen, 1995; Osaghae, 1997; Ikelegbe, 2001; Oronto, Von Kemedi, Okonta and Watts, 2004; Aghalino 2004; Ikelegbe, 2005; Aghalino, 2009). It may not be expedient for us to spill much ink here. Suffices however that successive Nigerian governments right from the colonial period have approached the issue of the Niger Delta from three pedestals. For one, there is the institutional approach (Aghalino, 2001, Akinyele 1998). There is also the legislative approach which entails making laws to address the imbroglio and the stick approach aimed at putting recalcitrant trouble makers at bay by using the military to quell insurgents. In concrete terms, the problem of the Niger Delta and its peculiar terrain engaged the attention of the colonial state as this necessitated the setting up of the Sir Henry Willink's Commission to recommend the best strategy for the development of a region that boasts of, perhaps, the most difficult terrain in Africa (Aghalino 2009). When it turned in its report in 1958, it recommended that the Niger Delta deserved special attention and should be made a special area for development. Based on the commission's report, the federal government established the Niger Delta Development Board, (NDDDB) in 1960 to cater for the unique developmental need of the area

(Ikporukpo 1981; 119-129; Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2006: Making a Difference.... NDDC)

The Niger Delta Development Board was at best moribund and did not achieve the lofty objective for which it was established (Aghalino 2004: 119-120; Daily Independent, Friday, December 24, 2007: B4). It was probably the failure of the NDDDB that facilitated the establishment of the Niger Delta River Basin Authority, along with the other Basin Authority through decree No. 37 of 1976. It was because of the clear manifestation of potential threat to national security by anti-oil protest that some serious attention was paid to the Niger Delta question. In 1996, the 1.5 percent fund was put in place under the allocation of revenue (federation account). To disburse this fund a committee was set up (Oil Mineral Producing Areas Developing Fund Committee). The committee could not do much because its activities were halted by a supreme court judgment (OMPADEC Quarterly Report, vol. 1, No., 1<sup>st</sup> October, 1993). More importantly, the money set aside

for the committee was forwarded to the state capitals and never got to the affected oil producing communities.

What seems to be the boldest attempt of tackling the Niger Delta crises was the establishment of the Oil Mineral Producing Areas Development Commission (OMPADEC). The OMPADEC was established through decree No.23 of 19<sup>th</sup> July 1992 (OMPADEC Decree of No.23,1992). This decree raised the limit of derivation fund to 3 percent of the federation account. Section 11 of the decree which set out its objective empowered the commission among other things to; receive and administer the monthly sums from the allocation of the federation account in accordance with the confirmed ratio of oil production in each state for the rehabilitation and development of oil mineral producing areas. In the face of copious corruption and mismanagement of funds, the federal government instituted an investigation into its activities. The sordid findings probably led to its liquidation.

In fairness to President Obasanjo, the Niger Delta problem featured prominently in his inaugural speech on May 29, 1999. When he took the oath of office in May 1999, President Obasanjo was quite cognizant of the festering crisis in the Niger Delta region. This is attested to in his speech when he promised to forward a bill within weeks of the inception of the administration to the national assembly, for a law providing for 13 percent derivation to be paid to the oil producing states of the Niger Delta to be used for ecological rehabilitation, infrastructural and other developments. In 2000, the President implemented the 13 percent derivation as enshrined in the 1999 Constitution. In what seemed to be a major frontal attack on the festering Niger Delta problem, the Federal Government under Chief Olusegun Obasanjo initiated a bill to the National Assembly on the development of the Niger Delta. The National Assembly in accordance with section 58 (a) and 5 of the 1999 Constitution subsequently passed the bill establishing the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC), after the president refused to assent to the bill. Indeed, the NDDC is charged with a clear mission: 'to facilitate the rapid, even and sustainable development of the Niger Delta into a region that is economically prosperous, socially stable, ecologically regenerative and politically peaceful' (Federal Republic of Nigeria 2000. Niger Delta Development Commission Act, 2000). Possibly to guard against the weakness of the OMPADEC, the Niger Delta Development Commission Act provides for special bodies to supervise the activities of the Commission in order to avoid waste and corruption. The Commission's responsibility for the sustainable development of the area confers on it, the onerous task of mobilizing resources, effort and initiatives to ensure effective coordination, and coherence. Since inception the Niger Delta Development Commission, it has embarked on systematic efforts to put

in place enduring institutions and operational mechanisms which will consolidate its take-off, in order to prevent the mistakes of the past. A pointer to the failure of the Niger Delta Development Commission could be seen in the caustic remark about the Niger Delta in 2006 Human Development Report by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) when it noted that "the Niger Delta is a region suffering from administrative neglect, crumbling social infrastructure and service, high unemployment, social deprivation, abject poverty, filth, squalor, and endemic conflict" (UNDP 2006)

The Obasanjo administration in some rare instances waved the olive branch to the agitators in the Niger Delta. This was done by putting in place a number of committees to keep the peace in the region. It is difficult to assess the achievements of the plethora of committees aimed at tackling the restiveness in the region. What perhaps is not in doubt is that intentions by government are not in short supply. The multiple knee-jerk responses and proliferation of committees is a pointer to the fact that the government is yet to get its bearing right in taming the crisis in the region. Nevertheless, it may not be out of place to posit that the fire-brigade responses of the government so far to the issues in contention in the region is a manifestation of the little premium place on the region despite its economic importance to Nigeria (Aghalino 2008)

At the twilight of the Obasanjo administration, he initiated the Council for the Social Economic Development of the Niger Delta. The Council, which was likened to the United States of America's post World War 11 Marshall Plan for Europe entails several far reaching measures and is reportedly valued at over N20 trillion, most of which will come from the oil industry (International Crisis Group 2006). The programme, it is envisaged, will also create some 20, 000 new jobs for the locals. Another facet of the plan is the pledge by President Obasanjo to flag off the N230 billion (\$1.75 billion) highway- the long abandoned East-West road; the dredging of the River Niger; upgrading of the Petroleum Training Institute, (PTI), Effurun, Warri to a degree-awarding institution; establishment of a Federal Polytechnic in Bayelsa State by September 2006; rural electrification of 396 communities; water supply for over 600 communities, and appointment of an officer in the office of the Secretary to the Government of the Federation to coordinate the various intervention programmes by all tiers of government and those of the oil companies and development partners.

The nuts and bolts of the Council initiative span nine core areas. It calls for addressing employment generation, transport, education, health, telecom, environment, agriculture, power and water resources. Of these, the employment component is the most critical and strategic since it puts money directly into the hands of the

people. The plan also initiated a process by which the Nigerian military will absorb some 500 men and women from the region, up to the mandated 1,000 persons as from May 2006. Though not spelt out, it seems the spread is aimed at absorbing elements from the cadre of the various ethnic militias

It is noteworthy that the leading militia group in the Niger Delta, the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), rejected the initiative, thus leading one to suspect that the government took a quick approach without adequate consultation of all stakeholders concerned. It took almost seven years before President Obasanjo launched the promised "Comprehensive Development for the Niger Delta". When he launched the plan on March 27 2007, two months to the end of his 8 -years rule, because of its timing or its doubtful motive, or both, the Niger Delta Regional Master Plan recently launched by the outgoing President Olusegun Obasanjo did not attract the expected enthusiasm both from its target beneficiaries and their compatriots in other parts of the country. It would appear that, increasingly, it became clear that Obasanjo administration in its untidy succession plan could not but include the South- South in its calculations if he was to bequeath a Nigeria that would be minimally governable (Amuta 2008). This must have influenced the choice of His Excellency, Dr. Goodluck Jonathan , the then governor of Bayelsa state, an Ijaw as the vice presidential running mate of Umar Yar' Adua in the ticket of the People's Democratic Party during the 2007 elections.

The evidence available suggests that the Federal Government does not favor dialogue in this matter although government agents feign preference for dialogue and peaceful resolution of the impasse. It is worth reiterating that the stick approach of the government to the resolution of the Niger Delta crisis has merely escalated the issue. The invasion of Odi was ostensibly to teach a 'lesson' to the residents of the town, and serve to as a warning to other militant communities in the area. In that expedition, more than 2,000 people were killed, many more injured and unquantifiable resources destroyed. The destruction of Odi by the Nigerian government, elected only in May 1999, is not only symptomatic of the crisis that has gripped the country's oil rich Niger Delta since the late eighties, it also a clear indication that the brutality and heavy handedness with which previous regimes dealt with legitimate political dissention is still very much a feature of governance in the crisis-ridden nation (CDD.Org/resources/workingpapers/niger\_delta\_eng.ht).

A manifest consequence of the violent response of the state security agencies to the crisis in the region is the militarization of the region. The Navy has guarded oil installations and escorted oil shipment since the 1990s. The Joint Task Force in the Niger Delta, Operation

Restore Hope has well over 4000 military personnel deployed to the Niger Delta (Ikelegbe 2005) . There have been crack down on the militia, piracy, oil bunkerers and illegal arms in the region. This has involved as stated earlier massive military operations, combing the creeks and condoning off and searching riverine communities that house pirates and militants (Omonibi 2004; Lawal 2004). By 2006, the region could be likened to a keg of gunpowder or ticking time bomb.

### **Yar' Adua's Administration and the Sustainable Development of the Niger Delta**

The Yar' Adua administration assumed office in May 2007 and this offered fresh initiatives for the resolution of the Niger Delta crisis. It should be recalled that by 1998, there was a worst case scenario as epitomized by 92 attacks on the oil industry which resulted in the fall of crude oil exports down to 1.6 million barrels per day. As noted by International Crisis Group, Shell was most affected by the militants attack on oil installations and confrontation with military. The country lost at least \$23.7 billion to oil theft, sabotage and shut in production in the first nine months of 1998 and about 1,000 people were killed within the same period (Report of the Technical Committee on the Niger Delta, Vol.1, Nov. 2008:9). By March 2009, production from its offshore business had plunged to 300,000 bpd down from one million before the crisis in the region in 2004. The attack on Bonga, a 43.6 billion floating, production, storage and offloading vessel and deep water subsea facility 120 km off the coast and the attack on Atlas Cove woke the government to the freighting dimension of the crisis . As the crisis has deepened, so also have crime and lawlessness. Statistics compiled by the International Maritime Bureau for 2008 show 40 reported incidents on piracy in the Delta including 27 vessels boarded, five hijackings, 39 crew members kidnapped (Crisis Group:5). This situation threatened to place Nigerian waters second only to Somalia as the world's most dangerous. The 21<sup>st</sup> January 2009 incident in which gunmen attacked the M.T. Meredith, a tanker carrying 4,000 tons of diesel fuel, was one of the most daring acts to date. The Bonga attack coupled with this suggests that pirates ' have an increasing ocean going ability to threaten maritime energy assets' (Nincic, 2009). To Yar' Adua, this deplorable situation was unacceptable and he elected to take certain confidence building measures to tame the Niger Delta monster. This thinking as it were was aimed at involving the insurgent groups in a dialogue with constituted authority. The main purpose for seeking this accommodation with insurgents is effectively economic rather than political because the impact of continued instability and conflict in that region on the rest of the

nation was becoming searing. As noted by WANEP (2008), the creation of the Peace and Conflict Resolution Committee which mediated in peace agreements with militants in core states of the Niger delta in December 2007, a visit to the creeks by members of the Senate and a huge budget allocation to the region in 2009 are some of the confidence building measures(WANEP 2008:1). It must be added also that the release of Asari Dokubo, the leader of the Niger Delta Volunteers Force and the Governor General of the Ijaw, the then Governor of Bayelsa state, DSP Alamiyesegha were aimed at responding to some of the conditions set down by the militants (Thisday, Nov.12, 2007:17). The Yar'Adua administration donated 10 speed boats to some of the militants groups that participated in the signing of the peace agreement by Bayelsa chapter of the Niger Delta Conflict Resolution Committee in December 2007. These boats were meant to be used for surveillance and monitoring of activities of criminals in the waterways. It is believed that making the militants part of the efforts to secure the Niger Delta waterways would ensure effectiveness as they understand the terrain better (WANEP, 2008). One other way the administration tackled the restiveness is to constructively engage the militants. In this direction, there was the desire by government to persuade the militants to form and register private companies that would be hired to provide security for pipelines and other oil industry facilities (Lewu and Salem, 2008).Although this initiative was heavily criticized, the government was convinced that the use of militants as pipeline guards will put an end to armed conflict and provide jobs for the people.

Other than the above, the administration established the ministry of Niger Delta .The ministry created in September 2008 had a twin mandate focusing on infrastructure and youth empowerment (Taiwo, 2008).Indeed the ministry possesses a great potential in assisting to address the developmental problem in the area. However, for this to be achieved, it is imperative that the ministry be well funded. The allocation of a paltry sum of money to the ministry in the 2009 budget does not portray the government as serious in using the ministry as a purveyor of development in the power (Obiyan, 2009:268).

If history is anything to go by, there is nothing to suggest that the newly created ministry would perform any wonders as anticipated by the government. In fact, as they say in the development circle, there is just no verifiable indicator around to depute that the ministerial mechanism would work. This is so because the bureaucracy in Nigeria has never been an engine of growth and national development in Nigeria especially following the advent of the military in Nigeria government and politics in 1966. Instead, it has been a study in gross inefficiency, waste, graft, and national stagnation. Given

this, 'making of a ministry as mechanization to addressing the long drawn developmental challenges of the region, at the risk of sounding monotonous, is a voyage of fantasy' (Nwokoma 2010).The creation of the ministry was received with mixed feelings. While some viewed it as welcome development, others expressed their reservation over the duplication of institutions (Crisis Group:10; Kogbara 2008).

What is the guarantee that the newly created ministry would now perform the magic which the NDDC, could not do perform till date having been hamstrung by the twin factors of poor management and funding?

One of the first steps he took in order to found a lasting solution to the problem was the setting up of the Technical Committee on Niger Delta headed by Ledum Mitee in September 2008. The committee, made up of 45 wise men and women with sound knowledge of the terrain of the region. The Niger Delta Technical Committee was to collate past reports on the Niger Delta issue and advice the federal government the way forward. According to the guidelines, the task ahead of the committee would not attract new research, field trips or lengthy debates but the bulk of the information would be found in existing commission reports, suggestions, recommendations and position papers(See the Report of the Technical Committee on the Niger Delta, vol 1, November 2009:11). At its meeting the committee elected former president of MOSOP, Mr. Ledun Mitee, as its chairman, while Nkoyo Toyo was elected as secretary. The committee publicized its Terms of Reference and consulted national and international experts and various important sources. The committee assembled and reviewed over 400 reports, memorandum and other documents from local, national and international stakeholders. Based on its analysis of these reports, it presented its report in three parts comprising compact with stakeholders in the Niger delta, the second part laid broad themes and roles for stakeholders in a regional transformation agenda and the third part recommended that the federal government create institution and mechanisms to implement the compact and other medium term processes9Report on the Technical Committee on the Niger Dela...:52-62). The high point of the report is the recommendation of amnesty for militants within a comprehensive demobilization, disarmament and rehabilitation programme(Adeyemo and Adeyemi 2010).

Prior to the establishment of the committee, government had set up a steering committee of the Niger Delta summit and appointed Prof. Ibrahim Gambari, UN Undersecretary as chairman. Gambari's appointment was, however met with stiff opposition from the Niger Delta leaders who accused him of expressing anti-Niger Delta views during the late Sanni Abacha regime (Daily Trust, 18 July 2008). Gambari eventually offered to step aside from the summit, saying that he had become the

issue as opposed to the issues the summit was to address.

Government even changed the nomenclature to dialogue as some people in the Niger Delta were, opposed to the idea; expressing reservations that it was going to be a jamboree (Punch, 6 July 2008).

MEND rejected the government's 45-man peace committee saying it is orchestrated and lacks integrity". MEND while dismissing the composition of the 45-men committee described it as "the appetizer on the menu of another banquet of deceit orchestrated by insincere government to give it a semblance of integrity". The group believed that peace in the Niger Delta would be determined from the mangrove creeks and not from air-conditioned rooms in Abuja. It described the exercise as putting cart before the horse.

MEND also gave conditions for it to embrace dialogue saying that it will only listen to anyone if its detained leader, Henry Okah, is released. The rejection of the committee by MEND was further corroborated by the leader of the Niger Delta Youth Peace Movement, Siloko Siasa who claimed that the exclusion of youths from the committee makes nonsense of the whole effort and proves that the nation has not learnt anything yet.

Outside the Niger Delta, the Federal Government's gesture has also been criticized. Lagos lawyer, Mr.

Festus Keyamo, expressed reservations about government intentions. According to him, government move was more of a diversionary tactic, aimed at getting the people to believe that something positive was in the offing. The TMG also expressed its misgiving over the creation of a ministry of Niger Delta, recalling government's legendary record of stalling its own efforts. To the TMG the creation of the Ministry is a jamboree. The organization said the problem of the Niger Delta goes beyond the creation of a ministry, as it believe that the existence of the NDDC had done little to douse the tension in the region. Action Aids's Country Director, Dr. Otiye Igbuzor, who observed that previous efforts had made good policy prescriptions for the development of the Niger Delta, without achieving much, called for the immediate drawing up of a marshal plan for the transformation of the area. Many also believe that despite the criticisms that trailed the creation of the ministry, the Yar'Adua administration by bringing into reality a ministry to cater for the long neglected region, has taken what could amount to a giant leap for his administration and the country, if properly executed.

What appeared to a revolutionary approach to bringing peace to the Niger Delta was the creation of the amnesty programme by the Yar'Adua's administration. To give bite to this, on June 25, the president granted amnesty to the militant with effect from August 6 and gave them 60 days within which to surrender their arms and renounce militancy. In his Independence speech President

Yar'Adua stated that 'with a view to engendering lasting peace in the area, we proclaimed a general amnesty and granted unconditional pardon to all those who had taken up arms as a way of drawing attention to the plight of the people of the Niger Delta'. He went further to state that 'on this day and in the spirit of rededication, we renew our commitment to confronting the challenges of critical infrastructure in the Niger Delta, food security, security of lives and properties, human capital development, land tenure and wealth creation'(The Guardian, October 2 2009). The programme required the militants to surrender their weapons and in return, they would receive a presidential pardon, education, training and access to a rehabilitation programme. By the expiration of the October 4, deadline which the federal government gave the militants to disarm, virtually all the key militants had embrace the amnesty deal (Ajaero 2009). In all, 8,299 militants registered with Presidential Implementation Committee from seven states out of the nine states of the Niger Delta. Most arms came from Bayelsa which had 130,877, Rivers, 82,406 and Delta 52,958 (Eregha, 2009).

It was his own way of stooping to conquer a complex problem that defied all previous solutions. In working towards this Yar'Adua has shown a willingness to both react with firmness and also offer compromises whenever possible. He sanctioned certain actions and appointments that indicate that he is ready to try anything in the effort to reduce the endemic instability that he inherited in the Niger Delta. The speed with which he confronted the various attempts to undermine his resolution to grant full amnesty to the insurgents is remarkable (Egwemi 2010). Those to whom he has offered the amnesty many of whom may even be common criminals, have been allowed extraordinary leeway to criticize the offer as long as they are acknowledged to be among those whose cessation of violence will bring peace to the Niger Delta (Barret,). As a continuation of the confidence building measure, the president held meeting with the ex-militant at the Banquet Hall of the State House, Abuja. The key ex-militants

including but not limited to Government Ekpemupolo, (Tompolo), Ateke Tom Boyloaf and Farah Dagogo, and officials of the Ministry of the Niger Delta. The meeting provided the opportunity for the president to hear first hand from the ex-militants some of the reasons that forced them to resort to militancy. It must be noted that so far, the amnesty has paid off as it has turn out to 'be the magic wand that may put an end to militancy in the region' (Ajaero 2009), in spite of the dissenting voices to the amnesty programme. While the amnesty has been described as curious because there is neither a negotiated settlement in the Niger Delta nor a victor's benevolence of any kind (Adeyemo and Adeyemi 2010). The Ijaw Foundation claimed that the amnesty programme was not a genuine effort to achieve peace in

the Niger Delta because it deliberately fails to address the fundamental causes and issues of the conflict (<http://www.pointblanknews.com/os2214.html>). The position of the Ijaw Foundation is laughable because there is the tendency to equate the Niger Delta crisis to Ijaw crisis. Nevertheless, there are strong indications that the amnesty deal is paying off as demonstrated in the increase in the oil production output of Nigeria and the reduction in illegal bunkering and other untoward crime in the region. ([www.nigeriancuriosity.com/2009/09/niger-delta-amnesty-dividends.html](http://www.nigeriancuriosity.com/2009/09/niger-delta-amnesty-dividends.html). Retrieved on 8/24/2010).

To demonstrate his commitment towards building a new Niger Delta where justice and fair play would reign, Yar'Adua outlined his blue print for the development of the region in the post amnesty phase. The Federal Executive Council, approved about N200 billion for the construction of roads, bridges, hospitals and schools targeted at accelerating the pace of development in the region. Among the projects approved is the establishment of Federal Polytechnic of oil and gas in Bayelsa State and 44 other projects for infrastructural development in the Niger Delta. The policy would cost N14.88 billion and will be completed within 104 weeks. There was also the proposal to upgrade facilities at the Petroleum Training Institute, PTI, Effurun to the tune of N5.727 billion within 72 weeks. In terms of infrastructural development the federal government earmarked N177.133 billion for 44 major contracts which would be executed the NDDC. This would entail the implementation of the Niger Delta Master Plan through the fast tracking of projects like the on-going east-west highway, the construction of the Atlantic coastal highway and the construction of the east-west rail line running through Calabar-Uyo-Port Harcourt-

Yenagoa-Warri-Benin-Lagos (Ajaero 2009). In its determination to nip in the bud once and for all the intractable problem of the Niger delta, the president proposed making the people in the oil bearing enclave part owners of the oil industry. The idea is to make them have 10 per cent equity in the existing joint venture operations to assuage the oil producing communities. We note however that some of the policies enunciated are already being implemented. The construction of the East-West road and the engineering design of the coastal road are in the front burner. The federal university of petroleum resources in Warri is in full swing as well as the Polytechnic of oil and gas in Bayelsa state. Training programme for the rehabilitation of the ex-militants is on-going.

We must note however, just the Obasanjo administration, Yar'Adua was also willing to wield the big stick to flog recalcitrant militants into line, in November 25, 2008, the government set up a special force on security in the maritime sector, and it also boosted the resources of the Joint Task Force. The Inter-Agency

Maritime Security Task Force on Acts of Illegality in Nigeria's Territorial Waters, is to identify all illegal activities and security breaches in the coastal waters and recommend immediate remedial actions (Crisis Group:12). In May 2000, the Federal Government launched a full scale military offensive against the militants in the creeks. The attack on Gbaramatu by the Joint Task Force: Operation Restore Hope viciously decimated the community as fighter jets, warships, naval gunboats, grenades artillery and bombs were unleashed on the people of the community. (<http://www.pointblanknews.com/os2214.html>. Retrieved on 11/16/2010). The bombardment of this community was consequent upon the kidnapping of some people in the region. This resulted in heavy casualty in the camp of the military and the militants (The Nation, May 21, 2009). It is significant to stress that the military approach was not the driving force of the Yar'Adua' administration as this was sparingly used. The amnesty programme was a master stroke as hardly any genuine incentive for the militants to remain in creeks. The pocket of the renegade group of MEND is virtually without sympathy as wind has been taken from their sail. The untimely death of President Yar'Adua almost stalled the seamless handling of policies of the administration toward the Niger Delta; but Jonathan's ascension to the Presidency as acting president and subsequently president seem to have added life to taming the Niger Delta monster. The point of departure is that, while the amnesty programme is on-going, there is compelling need to adequately integrate ex-militants into the mainstream of the oil industry in order to give them a sense of belonging.

## CONCLUSION

There is balance of evidence to suggest that though Yar'Adua administration was brief, it had a revolutionary impact in the denouement and resolution of the Niger Delta conflict and by extension, the sustainable development of the oil-bearing enclave. The point was made that the regime meant worst case scenario when it was inaugurated in 2007. A careful perusal of previous efforts to checkmate the crisis in the region failed due in part to lack of political will and vested interest. The commitment and sincerity of Yar'Adua which culminated in the granting of amnesty to the militant was a master stroke as this naturally allowed other developmental initiatives of the administration to fall on fertile soil. The death of the president after a protracted illness almost created vacuum in the pursuit of the peace process in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria.

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