

**INTERGENERATIONAL RELATIONS IN THE QUEST FOR THE EMANCIPATION
OF THE NIGER DELTA**

BY

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ABSTRACT

This paper seeks to explore the nature of relations between two distinct generations involved in the Niger Delta conflicts. These generations are identified as the elders, which include village chiefs, elites, and political leaders on one hand, and youths of different Niger Delta communities on the other. While relying on a critical review of extant literature and data generated from semi-structured interviews, the paper argues that before the Ogoni crisis of the 1990s, which culminated in the execution of Ken Saro Wiwa, the relationship between the elders and the youths was mostly cooperative. The events of the 1990s marked a turning point in intergenerational relations across Niger Delta communities coloured by conflict, distrust, and disagreements. The paper finds that whereas the elders preferred dialogue and peaceful protests as useful strategies for expressing their grievances against the Nigerian state and multinational corporations operating within the region, the younger generation opted for armed resistance, leading to the emergence of multiple militia groups. Based on the findings of this study, it becomes evident that conflict in the Niger Delta is associated with several unintended consequences, one of which is the breakdown of relationships between members of the older and younger generations. Therefore, the paper concludes that there is a need for concerted efforts aimed at improving trust and cordial relations among members of different generations within the Niger Delta region.

Keywords: Emancipation. Intergenerational Relations, Collaboration, Conflictual Relationship.

Introduction

The discovery of crude oil in 1956 at Oloibiri, in present-day Bayelsa State, marked a watershed in the history of the Niger Delta region as insecurity, violence and conflict coloured the canvass of the region (Tamuno and Felix, 2006). Virtually all oil-bearing communities in Isoko, Urhoboland, and Ijoland, in Delta State and Bayelsa State bear the brunt as espoused by scholars of the region (Tamuno, 1970; Aghalino, 2009 and Okpevra, 2015). Thus the Niger Delta region could be said to be a theatre of socio-economic and political conflicts. Conflicts occasioned by brute exploration and exploitation of crude petroleum resources by oil prospecting companies with the connivance of the federal government, operating within the region, and unscrupulous interest groups from the affected communities.

The geography of the Niger Delta region is sufficiently familiar. The region is a heterogeneous multicultural, ethnically diverse region (Alagoa, 1972), and (Okaba, 2005) that cuts

across, today, nine states (Abia, Akwa-Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross-River, Delta, Edo, Imo, Ondo and Rivers) in the South of Nigeria (Azaiki, 2006), (Egbuche, 1998) and (Durotoye, 2000) However, instances abound where just one or two communities or local governments in a state produce oil. Abia and Edo states are good examples. Nonetheless, the geographical zone is known for its unique history of fundamental contributions to the economic development of Nigeria from pre-colonial days to the present era. The same region that was the Slave Coast became the palm oil coast and later transformed into the oil and gas Delta. At present, this richly endowed region contributes almost 90% of Nigeria's annual income through the exploitation of crude oil and gas (Ugochukwu, 2001) as it plays host to an estimated 34 billion barrels of oil and 93 trillion cubic feet of natural gas (Adam (2018).

Of the nine states in the region, this study is concerned with two ie. Delta State and Bayelsa, which housed our study area. A vivid description of the Niger Delta region has been done by various scholars as the geographical area where the River Niger flows into the Atlantic Ocean. The region is described as the largest wetland in Africa and one of the largest in the world covering an area of 70,000km (Tamuno, 1970; Aghalino, 2009). According to the World Bank Report, 1995, the area consists of sandy, coastal ridge barriers, brackish or saline mangrove fresh water and permanent seasonal swampy forest.

Thus, this paper seeks to investigate the trends and paradigm shifts like relations between youths and elders in the conflicts and struggles that feature prominently in the contemporary history of the Niger Delta region. The paper is divided into three main sections. The first section discusses the concept of intergenerational relations, the framework upon which the paper is predicated. The next section provides an overview of the quest for the emancipation of the Niger Delta, while the last section interrogates available evidence on the nature of intergenerational relations in the Niger Delta struggles.

Conceptual Framework

The idea of generations as a lens for understanding the varied actions of certain groups is commonly utilized by researchers of inter-group relations. This is especially because it has been used over the years to understand individual and group identity. However, despite its popularity among scholars of inter-group relations, there is no consensus on what a generation entails. This

is because the term “generation” has transcended race, gender and social status to delineate a group of people with certain traits such as age, role, or cohort. The term generation has also been applied to a group of people who share the same ideology.

Nevertheless, without delving into the rightness or wrongness of the definition of “generation”, this paper settles for the definition of generation as a group of people who share a common social location in historical times. Social location, in this sense, refers to the predisposition of an individual or a group to certain modes of thought and experience, which everyone is not predisposed to. This conceptualization of generation draws from the social philosophy of Karl Mannheim and provides a broad perspective for understanding the concept of generations. As such, with this understanding of the concept of generation, intergenerational relations may be taken to mean the nature of relations between individuals or groups who belong to different social locations in historical times. Thus, for the sake of labelling, these distinct generations will be identified as "youths" and "elders".

Therefore, in line with the postulations of Kowal & Dowd(2001) who suggested that any person aged 50 years and above can be rightly described as an older person, “Elders” in this paper will be taken to mean a group of persons aged 50 years and above, who occupy certain socio-political levels within the society. This generation includes Chiefs/kings, technocrats, successful businessmen, retirees, political leaders, as well as leaders of thought. This class of persons usually dominate the political, economic, and traditional landscape of the region, and their prominence usually flows from their role as intermediaries between the ordinary people of the region and the state/multinational corporations exploiting the oil reserves of the region. (Osaghae Etal) Conversely, the term “youths” will be used to refer to younger persons, usually those aged 50 years and below, who have not attained considerable socio-political standing in society. This group of people are mostly unemployed, under-employed or engaged in subsistence fishing or farming activities.

Focusing specifically on the nature of relations between youths and elders in an African context, Timothy and Ellie(1999) stress that intergenerational relations within the African context are hinged on the norms of respect, responsibility, reciprocity, and resilience. Respect and loyalty as a value much cherished for the elders and older generation, is a practice deeply entrenched in African culture. This is so because they are seen as the embodiment of wisdom, as

well as the custodians of history and culture. Since the elders serve as a medium of advice, reproach, warning and encouragement, they are instrumental in providing a sense of identity, commonality, culture, respect for authority and sacredness of their immediate environment and nature.

Therefore, this instils in the youths, the sense of responsibility and reciprocity, to carry out functions, instructions and orders given with the firm knowledge that they too one day, will emerge with the mantle of eldership and leadership with the wealth of wisdom passed on to them. Nevertheless, the extent to which the ideas of Timothy and Ellie apply specifically to the Niger Delta context will be discussed in the subsequent section which focuses on the nature of intergenerational relations between youths and elders in the Niger Delta.

Emancipating the Niger Delta: A Retrospect

Since the creation of the Nigerian state, the “minority question” has been a recurring question for successive Nigerian governments to address. The fear of being dominated by the majority ethnic groups and not being given equal opportunity to pursue their political interest has given birth to the call for restructuring, practice of true federalism, and self-determination, (Tyungu, and Koko, 2020). Indeed, scholars have argued that the agitations of several ethnic nationalities were a result of colonial heritage and carry-over of the pre-colonial structure of lumping different ethnic groups together to form one entity despite its pluralistic features such as religion, demography, class and ethnicity (Otite, 1990).

The Niger Delta region is peopled by distinct minority ethnic groups and as such it possesses the contraptions of the minority question facing the Nigerian state since its inception. The region, since the discovery of crude oil has been a hotbed of conflict, and this is mostly a result of the series of violent confrontations between the Niger Delta people, the Nigerian military, as well as multinational oil corporations operating across the region. The region has witnessed untold hardship as a result of environmental degradation as well as the rapid erosion of socio-cultural norms and values passed on and cherished for generations (Oronto, D, 1998). This is in contrast to the fact that the economic and financial mainstay of the Nigerian state is dependent on its oil resources. Rather, the consequence of the exploration activities has given

birth to instability, insecurity, conflict, violence, crime, and social tensions (Ugbomeh and Atubi, 2010).

Successive governments have tried to proffer solutions to the Niger Delta question. This has resulted in the establishment of the Niger Delta Development Commission and the Ministry of Niger Delta. Other approaches include the 13% derivation to oil-producing states. So why do conflicts still linger in the region? (Okoh, 2005).

Available research shows that the primary reasons why there is restiveness in the region stems from the underdevelopment of the region as a result of the destruction and degradation of the environment which is their main source of livelihood. Other issues like feelings of marginalization in the political affairs of the Nigerian state, absence of true federalism and resource control have equally been considered as plausible explanations for continued conflict in the Niger Delta. Deep-seated frustration suffered by the people over time despite several approaches of dialogue, signing of memoranda of understanding without implementation, lack of participation in decision making, indiscriminate and extra-judicial killings as well as refusal to obey court orders to repair and compensate victims could well be reasons why the conflict mode has escalated in the region since the advent of the millennium. Besides, it has been argued that the struggle to participate in securing revenues for local communities, and not minding the fact that the region consists of several ethnic nationalities agitating for their economic sustainability, has contributed to the unending conflict in the region (Babatunde, 2012).

Consistent environmental degradation is one of the major reasons for conflicts which has remained unabated in the region (Omofonmwan, 2009). The decades-long continuous exploration and exploitation activities have left the region's soil impoverished and no longer fertile for farming. Pollution and gas flaring have resulted in health complications for the people (Adekola), and the loss of aquatic life and biodiversity has left the people without food to sustain themselves. The recent victory gained by the region against the multinational oil company, Shell, is a testament to the fact that the company over time had engaged in the destruction of the natural and aquatic environment of the Niger Delta (Reuters, 2009). The Dutch court in its ruling placed the blame directly on Shell being responsible for several oil spills and the environmental pollution in the Niger Delta. The armed insurrection led by Adaka Boro in February 1966, marked the beginning of armed insurrection in the Niger Delta. Whereas the conflict was quelled

in a fortnight, it provided a template for future generations to continue in the struggle for the emancipation of the Niger Delta. This template became fully operational when Niger Delta youths, with the Kaiama declaration of 1998, announced their recourse to armed resistance in pressing home their demands.

The period post-Adaka Boro war of 1966, saw the use of dialogue, peaceful protest, litigations and letter writings/petitions to multinational and international communities (?) yielding little or no meaningful result. The killing of Ken Saro Wiwa (Ogbogbo, 2008), and his followers was the last straw which ignited the reawakening of the Adaka Boro era, albeit this time, a more collective than individualistic approach was adopted (Campbell, 2002). Nevertheless, it is crucial to emphasize that the previously amicable relationship between the youth and elders transformed cooperation into conflict. Specifically, while the elders leaned towards maintaining interaction through a subtle and peaceful dialogue, the youth favoured armed resistance as a strategy to highlight the prevalent underdevelopment in the region. (Osaghae, 2011).

Intergenerational Relations in the Niger Delta: Collaborative or Conflictual?

The pre-colonial political system in the Niger Delta was structured along clearly defined roles and responsibilities for different age groups. This was a result of the gerontocracy system of government and governance practised by the people. For instance, apart from the Aboh, Itsekiri, Aniocha and Ika-speaking groups who had centralized monarchical states, there existed 'fragmented societies', like the Ukwuani, Urhobo, Isoko and Ijo. These groups had their council of elders, namely, Ndokwa (Ukwuani), Ekpako (Urhobo and Isoko) and Okosuwei (Ijaw). The basic unit of social and political organization was the village group, which consisted of people who traced a common descent from the male line. The Council of Elders attended to governance and welfare. They usually met to discuss together with some 'officials'. They had a spokesman called Otota (Urhobo/Isoko), Ugo (Ukwuani) and Ogulasuwei (Ijaw). He would be one of the elders in the village but chosen for personal qualities, like good oratorical skills, rather than seniority.

However, at the turn of the 19th century following the coming of the British and its eventual culmination in independence and her departure from Nigeria, several modifications

were carried out in the political system of the Niger Delta. The kingship system was introduced and the Urhobo/Isoko group had Ovie, Ukwuani/Aniocha (Obi), and Ijos (Pere). The system was further rebranded by the kings incorporating them as chiefs and as in the case of parts of Anioma. Nevertheless, gerontocracy still holds sway in most of Ukwuani land despite the modifications associated with the advent of colonialism in the area. Suffice it to say, in the pre-colonial and post-colonial political structure of the people of the Niger Delta, gerontocracy play(ed) a pivotal role in the day-to-day affairs of the communities.

Furthermore, as earlier stated, the major occupation and mainstay of the people Niger Delta is fishing, hunting, and crop production. It is worth noting that there was a strong connection of collaborative intergenerational relationships between the youths and elders of different communities when carrying out their agricultural production. For instance, during time of harvest of fish and crops like yam and hunting games, the elders collaborate with the youths who bring the harvest while the elders oversee the logistics of sharing between families and provide prayers to the ancestors for a bountiful harvest. This communal way of life created a strong bond between the youths and the elders. While the youths see the elders as their wealth and bank of wisdom, a link between their ancestors and God, the elders in turn see the youth as their strength which they can rely upon any time they are needed to carry out any activities. This practice was the template which engendered the rise of economic growth in Nigeria during the independence era. In light of the former, it is therefore safe to posit that, the agro-communal nature of an age group society, pre-independence, laid the bedrock for Nigeria's economic growth during the independence era.

Looking ahead, it is important to recognize that the period between 1956 and 1960 in the Niger Delta's history was characterized by a blend of uncertainty and optimism. The uncertainty stemmed from the populace's lack of clarity regarding their future in post-colonial Nigeria, juxtaposed with the optimism rooted in the expectation of improved dealings with local authorities compared to the British colonial era. Despite this uncertainty, the people welcomed independence with great enthusiasm, viewing the opportunity to contribute significantly to the economic development of post-colonial Nigeria as a source of pride.

However, the discovery of crude oil in Oloibiri, Bayelsa State, in 1956, and the subsequent expansion of the oil industry in the Delta region led to notable environmental

degradation and social upheaval. This era witnessed a gradual erosion of communal and cultural lifestyles as young individuals, in pursuit of improved economic prospects, migrated from villages to urban areas to cope with the adverse effects of a harsh economy and the underdevelopment of their communities. The consequences of these events were evident; the older generation had to shoulder responsibilities left by the youth, or the remaining idle youth who were adversely affected by the pollution of their farmland due to crude oil activities. Thus began an increase in social vices and deviant behaviour, which before now was alien to the Niger Delta (Abenabe, 2019). Obaro Ikime (2001) supports this view as he puts succinctly:

What used to be the state of the Nigerian youth in the early 60s were the ones who grew up in an atmosphere of relative comfort, where even though one's parents were not rich, but had food to eat, a house to live in, clothes to wear (when it was necessary to wear them). Education was both formal and informal, as the family was an important unit of socialization and education.

By implication, the attraction to work in the crude oil economy fuelled the sharp increase in migration from rural to urban areas to make a living, the gradual decline of collaborative communal life, family hood, as well as values in the Niger Delta subtly gained momentum this period.

Interestingly, while this precarious situation persisted and was left unattended to, the ascendancy of the crude oil economy changed the political equation of the entire country in favour of the major ethnic groups, as well as the agricultural sector which was the economic mainstay of the nation, further experienced rapid neglect (Ojakorotu, 2006).

The struggle between the elders and youth in the Niger Delta, as outlined by Ogbogbo (2005), witnessed a paradigm shift from collaboration to conflict. Ogbogbo analyzed the handling styles and the gradual decline in the agitation for development since the 1960s. The elders initially pursued a 'Dialogue and Litigation Option' from 1960 to 1989, attempting legal resolutions and signing Memoranda of Understanding, which were later breached by companies. Subsequently, the 'litigation option' proved ineffective due to prolonged legal processes and inadequate compensation even with favourable verdicts. Peaceful protests yielded minimal benefits. The Ogoni struggle, exemplified by the Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP), entered a new phase in the 1990s with the presentation of the Ogoni Bill of Rights

(OBR) seeking local autonomy and control over oil resources. MOSOP also initiated an international campaign against Shell for its exploitative activities in Ogoniland, emphasizing the threat to the community's survival (Saro-Wiwa 1995). To enhance their pursuit of self-determination, the Ogoni people concentrated on garnering sympathy and attention from the global community to address the exploitation, repression, and ecological devastation faced by the community. Utilizing avenues such as lecture tours, documentaries, and eyewitness accounts, the organization sought support. Furthermore, MOSOP engaged international human rights organizations to exert pressure on Shell and the Nigerian state, urging them to recognize and respect the rights of the Ogoni people (Ojakorotu, 2006).

The initially peaceful protest in the Niger Delta took a violent turn when multinational companies, in collaboration with the Nigerian military, brutally suppressed it through indiscriminate shooting of protestors. This marked a pivotal moment in the struggle for Niger Delta's emancipation, testing the resolve of the people who were prepared for the potential consequences of the military. The assassination of Ken Saro-Wiwa and the militarization of Ogoni land, coupled with widespread local and international condemnation, created an overwhelming situation. In response, the collaborative strategy led by elders negotiating on behalf of the youth was abandoned. The youth, dissatisfied with the perceived failure of the elders and the ineffectiveness of their approach, adopted a more assertive and inclusive strategy involving all vocal groups in the Niger Delta. The suppression of the Ogoni people became a catalyst for the unity of Niger Delta youth, propelling them to confront both the Nigerian state and multinational corporations. This paradigm shift signalled a new approach in the struggle for the emancipation of the region (Ogbogbo, 2005).

It is interesting to note that, the marriage of convenience between the multinationals and the Nigerian government left the youths to ponder, whose interest the military and police were protecting. The killing and maiming of defenceless citizens who carried out peaceful protests left them befuddled as to the true motive of the Nigerian government. (Ojakorotu, 2006) supports this view when he enthused that the unholy alliance which existed between the Nigerian government and multinational left the people powerless, as seeking redress from a government whose responsibility should be the protection of lives and properties, has become a clog in the wheel of the livelihood.

In a reminiscent gesture of the Adaka Boro 12-day armed insurrection, the youth of the Niger Delta, under the leadership of the newly formed Ijo Youth Congress, declared self-determination to liberate the region. The Kaiama Declaration of 1998, initiated by Ijaw youths, emerged as a well-organized catalyst for the self-determination struggle. Representatives from over five hundred communities and forty clans gathered in Kaiama, the hometown of the late Major Isaac Jasper Adaka Boro, on December 11, 1998, to reassess the position of the Ijaw ethnic group in the Nigerian Federal State. The subsequent open letter to the Nigerian government and multinational corporations urged increased local control of oil revenues and better environmental practices. Named the "Kaiama Declaration," this document set a deadline of December 31, 1998, for a positive response from the Government of Nigeria to their demands (Ojakorotu).

The grievances of the Ijaw people centred on the Land Use Decree of 1978, which, coupled with environmental degradation caused by transnational oil companies, deprived them of their natural rights to land ownership and control, disrupting their once prosperous economic state. Uncontrolled exploration and exploitation of crude oil and natural gas resulted in severe environmental damage, including oil spillages, gas flaring, deforestation, canalization, flooding, coastal erosion, and earth tremors, leading to immense hardship and environmental hazards. Factors such as the politicization of derivation allocation, cultural loss due to urban migration, and widespread poverty despite abundant resources exacerbated the people's discontent. In response, they rejected undemocratic laws like the Land Use Decree and the Petroleum Decree, demanding their withdrawal and immediate removal of military forces from Ijoland. Multinational companies employing the armed forces of the Nigerian State were deemed enemies, and they urged other ethnic nationalities to unite in the struggle against these entities and the Nigerian state.

During the 1990s, as Nigeria underwent a transition to democracy, there was a notable increase in youth unrest and armed opposition against the state. The late 1990s witnessed a rise in rebellious activities, characterized by the formation of different groups, with the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) being particularly prominent. A noteworthy addition to these groups is the Niger Delta Avengers (NDA), which emerged in March 2016 and has since stood out as one of the most notable factions in recent times. (Ikporukpo, 2018). Others

are Boys of Africa, Niger Delta Peoples Volunteer Force, Federated Niger Delta Ijaw Communities (FNDIC) Niger Delta Vigilante (NDV) and Community and Warlord based militias such as Ijaw Freedom Fighters, Mobutu Boys, Niger-delta Freedom Fighters, The Atangbata Youths, The One More River to Cross Youths, The Olabrakon- Opre Youths, The Oweiesan-Ogbo, The Adaka Marine, The Ogbokore Youths, The Alagbada Youth of Kombo, The Tomgbolo Boys.

Certainly, the aftermath of the Kaiama declaration has led to clashes between the Nigerian military and youths, resulting in the loss of lives and property on both sides. The region has been marred by reports of skirmishes and armed conflicts with forces safeguarding oil installations, including the abduction of foreign workers from multinational companies and the disruption/destruction of oil pipelines in the Niger Delta. This situation has posed consistent challenges to successive governments, with news about these incidents frequently dominating headlines. Before long, the killings, destruction of innocent lives and property, and other egregious human rights violations became highly conspicuous and garnered international attention (Ojakorotu, 2007).

It is pertinent to note at this point that this period witnessed the full-blown decline of collaboration between the elders and the youth. This was so because the youth decided to take responsibility for the struggle because dialogue and protest strategies were no longer tenable options. To them, the killings and destruction of lives and their environment which is their source of livelihood only reinforced the idea that the Adaka Boro approach still provided the best and last alternative. Besides some elders had been accused of selling out through the use of the divide-and-rule system employed by the Nigerian state and the multinational companies. This viewpoint was succinctly argued by Ikelegbe (2005) that the youths had lost confidence in the elders. They considered them as weak, fearful and ineffective in seeking access, dialogue and agreements with an insensitive and repressive state whose connivance with multinational companies leaves them in a state of despair and poverty. He further states that the youths had not been passive participants in the Niger-delta struggle as they had been active participants in the forceful actions and demands of groups such as MOSOP, they were more of foot soldiers with the elites calling the shots. The military suppression of the people's peaceful agitation was the

catalyst that gingered the transformation of the struggle to the next level. The youths took centre stage with the Kaiama declaration of December 11, 1998.

Pertinently, it is noteworthy to observe that, contrary to the prevailing perception that the youth of the Niger Delta chose armed resistance as a final option, one could contend that they were compelled to take this path, left with no alternative but to safeguard themselves and their environment. Hence, confronting the Nigerian state became the sole and ultimate recourse for survival. While Ikelegbe and Osaghae(2011) admit the youth's disappointments with the failed dialogue and foreseen patronizing approach of the elders triggered its decision to seek alternative methods, Ndoro (2020), and Victor (2020), hold the perspective that while the youth's strategy may have appeared effective in discreetly challenging the Nigerian military through guerrilla-style smash-and-grab operations, the elders simultaneously played an intervening and mediating role in easing the tense atmosphere. Despite being aware of the formation of the Ijaw Youth Congress and the subsequent decision to adopt armed resistance, the elders provided passive support once they recognized the unwavering determination of the youth.

Summarily put, by Ndoro (2020), "Our approach in the struggle for emancipation was explicitly outlined, understanding our roles - when militants acted, youths engaged in dialogue, and then elders mediated and provided advice". He acknowledges that without their interventionist roles, the situation could have deteriorated far beyond the current state. The semblance of peace we experience is attributed to their strategic and diplomatic efforts. However, this acknowledgement does not absolve some elders of involvement and collaboration with multinational companies, thereby undermining the overall struggle.

For his part, Victor (2020), in his analysis, Victor (2020) squarely places responsibility on the government and multinational companies. He asserts that both elders and youths bear some complicity, but the crucial aspect often overlooked is the extent to which the government and multinational companies utilize the divide-and-rule tactic by attempting to influence and pit the youth against the elders, leading to conflicting interests. The widespread poverty in the region is underestimated, and the government and multinationals exploit this by creating discord between the youth and elders. This discord eventually erodes their relationship, diverting focus from the core struggle. Victor contends that, based on his observations, the amnesty program initiated during the administration of former President Yar'Adua, while commendable, was co-opted by certain elders, militants, and government officials. This

co-optation hindered the much-needed rehabilitation, reintegration, and empowerment of repentant militants due to insufficient financial resources, leading to accusations between the elders and the youth. This perspective is supported by Ikelegbe and Umukoro's (2014) field assessment, indicating mismanagement of funds within the amnesty program by personnel, politicians, and leaders of the Niger Delta. Ironically, the very youths who fought against neglect and marginalization in the Niger Delta ended up being neglected and marginalized themselves. Similarly, Omare(2020) He acknowledges the neglect of the youths in the struggle and recognizes a continuous link in the collaborative roles of the elders and youth. Notably, where he diverges is in the elders' interventionist and mediatory roles, suggesting that, driven by "political consideration," they often dilute the objectives of the struggle. He contends that these elders, who were or still are politicians and career professionals with past experiences in positions of power, tend to factor in personal interests when negotiating on behalf of the youths. The outcomes they achieve typically result in projects that only address surface-level issues, neglecting the fundamental and structural challenges that jeopardize the livelihoods and health of the Niger Delta people. He further emphasizes that when the youths perceive these shortcomings, they resort once again to armed resistance against multinational companies, leading to renewed conflicts. The lack of genuine commitment from the government and the nonchalant attitude of the elders contribute to these cyclic patterns, creating an illusion of progress while merely perpetuating the status quo. He critiques the belief that building roads to nowhere resolves the region's problems, highlighting the disparity between such actions and true development.

Moving on, from an elders viewpoint, Clark laments the profound underdevelopment in the region but contends that elders should not bear all the blame, as they too have suffered from decades of exploration and exploitation in the area. He explains that the elevation of a South-South minority, former President Goodluck Jonathan, signals consistent subtle pressure and diplomacy that facilitated the region's representation in that office. Despite this, he acknowledges the significant role played by the youths in exerting pressure. Clark emphasizes that the elders, by intervening as mediators for peaceful negotiations between the youth and the Nigerian military, prevented the situation from escalating. During the peak of the struggle, when he advocated diplomatically for Niger Delta development, he was perceived as a threat by companies and the military government. However, the youths' interventions and threats to destroy oil pipelines forced the government to allow him to continue his efforts unharmed.

In a similar vein, Gbenekama (2020), an elder from Gbaramatu kingdom, a significant crude oil-producing community that has been a focal point of conflict between the Nigerian military and Niger Delta militants, acknowledges the youths' advocacy for armed resistance. However, he disputes the notion that elders have betrayed the cause. Drawing on his extensive experience, having been crowned chief of Gbaramatu kingdom at the age of 24, he served as a mediator between the youths and the elders. Thus, he possesses firsthand knowledge of the dynamics between the two groups before the period of diplomacy and the eventual shift to armed resistance. Gbenekama contends that the youths have consistently collaborated with the elders. Speaking from his dual perspective as someone deeply involved in the struggle as a youth in the 90s and now as an elder, he adds a unique dimension. According to him, many who fought in the struggle in the past are now elders but still identify with the youth and remain active in the ongoing struggle. Although their role has shifted more towards harmonizing efforts to alleviate the suffering of the people, they continue to contribute to the cause. In acknowledgement, he concedes that the youths have gained various advantages from the struggle. For instance, many of the youths have received sponsorship for overseas training, and financial support has been extended to several communities. The establishment of the Maritime University in Okerenkoko stands as evidence of the fruits of their struggle. Despite these modest accomplishments, the fundamental issues of environmental degradation, pollution, and the destruction of their sources of livelihood remain largely unaddressed.

Moving on, from the Urhobo region of the Niger Delta, the relationship has been prevalently conflictual. According to Onoge, "Urhobo youth restive groups came into existence in the 1980s as pressure groups to get paid employment for their members in companies operating in the area. In some other Urhobo communities where there were oil wells, there was the additional question of the quest for fair sharing of compensations from oil companies. The presence of oil companies and the consequent promiscuous debasement of the environment have spurred the emergence of compensation agents and a veritable compensation crisis. There are accusations in several Niger Delta communities concerning the hijacking of such compensation by agents, and traditional authorities. Youth groups have emerged to ensure that they are not shortchanged" (Onoge, 2004). The traditional authorities being accused here are the chiefs, elders and elite who were once seen as the representatives of the people's interest but are now seen as a clog in the wheel of the development of the people. Since the elders couldn't find solutions to the alarming rate of

unemployment and poverty, the youths sought self-help in any way possible to stem the tide. Restiveness, disregard for traditional institutions and societal vices became fashionable with the average Urhobo youth.

The situation was no different in Ogharefe (1984) and the fledging Industrial community of Ekpan (1986) where the women with complete support from the youth partook in a standoff protest against Pan Ocean Company and Nigerian National Petroleum Company. In the Ogharefe protest, the women achieved relative success as the company negotiated with the women under the watchful eyes of the youths who feared the elders might hijack the process (Turner, 1993). However, the situation wasn't the same in Ekpan as the women, during the negotiation period were sidelined after the intervention of the elders who insisted on brokering peace and finding a solution out of the standoff. However, not long after, news filtered in that some elders had sold out (Ihonvbere, 1993).

The vicissitude of fortunes from the foregoing, clearly demonstrates the lack of trust, loss of confidence and total breakdown of the value system whereby the elders who were trusted to pursue the interest of the people, fell short of expectation.

As a consequence of their peeved state, the situation reached its peak in the 90s when the youths of Evwreni, an Urhobo clan, a major crude oil producing community with about 14 oil wells (Ofure, 2000), demanded from Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC), giving them a 21-day ultimatum to provide basic amenities like build a cottage hospital, civic Centre, borehole water supply systems, drainage channels, and build major roads linking the community.

Unfortunately, in a manner already familiar with Shell in employing the divide and rule system, they opted to cajole the king and some members of the council of chief/elders with gifts in cash and kind without the prior knowledge of the youths. When the youths demanded an explanation upon hearing the news, one of them was shot dead and others wounded.

Miffed by their actions, the youths went irate and the king, chiefs and elders were killed in a clash which engulfed the whole community in turmoil. When the dust had settled, over 30 persons had lost their lives as a result of the clash which could have been averted, but for lack of proper communication and knowledge of the inner workings of multinational companies in employing a divide and rule system (*This Day*, 2000).

In 2013, another major crude oil Urhobo community, Kokori of Agbon (Sahara Reporters, 2013) Under the banner of the recently established Liberation Movement of the Urhobo People (LIMUP), the group issued a 60-day ultimatum to President Goodluck Jonathan, demanding redress for the hardships faced by the Urhobo people and the granting of amnesty to kidnappers, threatening attacks on oil facilities in the area if their demands were not met. Despite presenting themselves as freedom fighters and enjoying significant community support, the elders vehemently opposed their approach due to their involvement in kidnapping and banditry. The situation escalated when soldiers raided the community on September 24th, 2013, leading to a halt in all economic and social activities as news of the arrest of the armed movement's leader spread. Upon learning of this, the youths attacked the palace, which had been vacated by the king and elders, resulting in a clash with the military. When the dust settled, 12 individuals were dead, the community's Chief priest was arrested, and the longstanding shrine where people worshipped their deity was desecrated by the soldiers (Vanguard, 2013). The week-long siege on the community left the economic and social activities paralyzed.

From an intellectual viewpoint, Aghalino (2009) argues that the high rate of poverty prevalent in the region has provided a new twist to inter-communal crises. To deepen the already bad situation, the decadence and decline of morals have further compounded the already tense atmosphere, as traditional rulers, elders and chiefs, are no longer regarded as youths engage in bloody fights over little resources made available by multinational companies. A case in point was the Oleh-Olomoro conflicts where the youths clashed over who got the allocation of pipes. The Irri crisis gave more credence to the decline of reverence to royalty by proxy, the elders, as the dispute between the king and the youths, under the aegis of the Irri Community Development Council (CDC) spiralled into a full-blown community tussle. While the King claimed he had the administrative responsibility of the community, the CDC members claimed they were elected by the people and therefore should be in charge (conflict profile, 2016).

Similarly, the case of Nembe is not far-fetched. The crisis which started as a result of an agreement Shell negotiated with the Chiefs of Nembe on compensation, contracts and job opportunities soon spiralled into a communal bloodletting among the people. It was alleged that the Chiefs kept a disproportionate share of the benefits and appropriated most of the money to

themselves, while most contracts were awarded to their companies and cronies. When the youths found out, they became violent (Aghalino, 2009).

Based on the presented evidence, it is reasonable to assert that the diminishing sense of unity and cooperation between the elders and youths serves as a stark illustration of the gap apparent in the erosion of traditional norms and values prevalent in the pre-colonial era. The swift deterioration following the shift from agriculture to the dominance of the crude oil economy may have contributed to the overall growth of the Nigerian economy. However, when viewed through the lens of the rural populace in the Niger Delta, they question whether this transformation has been a blessing or perhaps a curse. This scepticism arises from the widespread poverty, environmental pollution, and degradation that have left them with little to nothing (Tamuno and Felix, 2006).

From the analysis conducted, it can be concluded that the quest for the liberation of the Niger Delta commenced as a peaceful endeavour, with the youth initially working in unison. However, a subtle disconnection emerged due to new challenges faced by the youth in the Niger Delta. Despite observable instances of collaborative efforts in certain areas of the region, this paper underscores the prevalence of conflicting relationships in other parts. Issues such as a lack of trust, diminishing confidence, and pervasive poverty within the communities have fueled these conflicts. The ensuing consequences include the gradual erosion of cultural norms, values, and institutions, loss of lives and property, and a decline in the region's population.

Nevertheless, the youth have demonstrated a willingness to halt hostilities when summoned, particularly during the era of armed resistance. This shift in strategy highlights the adaptability and forward momentum of the younger generation in the pursuit of regional development, surpassing the preceding generation (Omofume, 2004).

Conclusion

Over the past two decades, the contest for control over the oil resources in the Niger Delta has remained pivotal in shaping political dynamics in Nigeria. Multinational corporations like Chevron, Shell, and Mobil, along with the Nigerian state, employ practices that concentrate power, reinforcing the state's dominance over oil resources. Continuous exploitation and exploration have left the people of the Niger Delta at a disadvantage. The armed resistance is closely tied to the Nigerian state and multinational companies' failure to engage in meaningful

dialogue with the local population. The adoption of force and militarization, rather than addressing the concerns, has exacerbated the impoverishment of the people. Key events such as the Adaka Boro 12-day armed revolt, the Ogoni uprising, and the Kaiama Declaration represent critical junctures where the government missed opportunities to address the region's structural and fundamental issues. This paper examines these landmark events, highlighting a shift and disconnect in the relationship between the elders and the youth in their strategies for handling the situation. The once harmonious collaboration during the pre-colonial and post-independence periods deteriorated into a conflictual atmosphere, ultimately leading to the transition from diplomacy to armed confrontation.

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The name "Anioma" is an acronym derived from Aniocha (A), Ndokwa (N), Ika (I) and Oshimili (O). The last suffix "MA" was added to give it a meaning in Igbo language. The names were of the four local government areas in existence at the time. Each of these Aniocha , Oshimili , Ndokwa and Ika subgroups have a long history relationship and have always been used to identify various portions of the present Anioma region for centuries by the natives of the land and historians alike.. See: <http://www.aniomavoice.org/about/>. Accessed 25th January, 2020.

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