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The Politics of Oil and the Niger Delta Regional Development Master Plan: Its Workability and the Option of Political Goodwill

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Abstract

Apart from the execution of the Quick Impact Projects (QIP) to kick- start the efforts at ensuring sustainable Development in the Niger Delta Region, the Act establishing the NDDC, also mandated the Commission to evolve a comprehensive Regional Development Master Plan that will involve the contributions of all stakeholders. This will ensure their accepting responsibility in case of failure to meet sustainable development requirement

by the year 2020. This paper is an ambitious attempt to ensure that this master plan umpired by NDDC does not fail, like many other development plans which did not achieve their goals. We have critically examined the inputs of the plan and arrived at some suggestions as to how it can be successfully implemented; thus, the critical option of political goodwill with its actionable variants in advocacy for good governance, stakeholders' synergy for implementation and a legal framework to guide the implementation of the plan.

Keywords: Oil, Development, Master plan, Political Goodwill

Introduction

The development challenges of the Niger Delta region are well known. This is because the area has been a subject of research, publications and public discourse since the days of Sir Henry Willink's Commission of 1958. These challenges have repeatedly been conceptualized and identified as widespread poverty, severe death of infrastructure and amenities in the rural areas, being the world third largest wetland with fragile ecosystem, high underemployment, rural- urban migration, urban decay as well as environmental degradation. Since the post-independence era, successive government, both military and civilian have advanced various attempts to influence the peace and thrust of development in order to ensure an improved quality of life for the people of the region. However, traceable legacies of these attempts translated into a picture of missed opportunities, low value for money and greater disappointments for communities of the Niger Delta Region (Egborge 2002:16).

In specific terms, the development cry of the people of Niger Delta, had severally attracted governments to set up interventionist agencies. Amongst these interventionist agencies, were the Sir Willink's Commission 1957/58 among other things ascertain the minority claims and to propose a way of allaying the fears in the proposed one Nigeria; which recommended a special development agency, having declared the region a special area requiring special intervention. In fact, the 1960 Constitution provided for and made the region a special area (Ikelegbe 2004:163). The Niger Delta Development Board (NDDDB) was inaugurated in 1960 and charged with the task of developing the region. Its status was further asserted by section 159 of the 1963 Constitution. However, the board was largely inactive arising from

intense regionalism and politicization of the period and was abandoned after the war.

The Presidential Task Force on Oil Mineral Producing Area was setup by former President Shehu Shagari to manage the 1.5 percent of the Federation Account that was due to oil producing areas for the development of the region following the 1982 Revenue Allocated (Ibid). although, the Task Force remained till the early years of the Babangida's Administration, it was largely ineffective due to lack of government attention and commitment it deserved. The Administration through Decree 23 of 1992 established the Oil Mineral Producing Area Development Commission (OMPADEC) and allocated 13% to pursue the development of the area. Because of poor management and corruption, the commission became prostrate by (1998 Otite 1999:6). Despite all these development interventions, the Niger Delta Region, with its rich resources remain neglected, underdeveloped and poor; with its attendant indicators in poor medicare services, high cost of food, infrastructure decays. These have attracted discontents, crisis and massive revolts against the Nigerian State. This has being increasingly difficult for government to manage until 1999 when it assumed a more worrisome dimension. This situation was exploited by former President Olusegun Obasanjo in 1999 presidential campaigns with the promise to frontally address the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) was setup in 2001 to replace the moribund OMPADEC; with specific mandate of facilitating the rapid and even sustainable development of the region into a region that is economically progressive and politically peaceful, as well as umpiring the development and implementation of a regional master plan that will stand as a reference point for all stake holders in the development of the Niger Delta Region (Otoghagua, 2004:315-317).

It is the aspect of the Regional master plan that we intend to critically and ambitiously examine with the sole purpose of adding our voices as scholars, towards making appropriate recommendation on hold !s implementation can be greatly achieved. This will help us to break the jinx of our historical expertise in plan making without actionable strategies of implementing them to achieve our goals and objectives. The Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC), therefore presents itself as a veritable subject of focus not necessarily in terms of its execution of quick impact projects (QIP) since 2001; but how it has fared in its attempt at developing and presenting such a comprehensive developmental master plan for the Niger Delta Region; and

how we could marshal strategies to own and support the NDDC in achieving its primary mandate of securing the region developmentally and making it amiable and attractive to the world.

The most recent and applaudable effort by the Federal Government to respond to the developmental needs of the Niger Delta region was the establishment of the Niger Delta Developmental Commission in the year 2000 by an Act of the National Assembly. Whether perceived or real, the commission had undertaken some developmental projects which have been testified to by stakeholders from the region. However, NDDC had encountered the obstacle of duplication of projects as there was lack of consultation among levels of governments and other developmental Agencies of government. Apart from its fundamental mandate of facilitating the rapid and even sustainable development of the region into a region that is economically progressive and politically peaceful, it was also mandated to umpire the development and implementation of a regional master plan that will stand as a reference point for all stakeholders in the development of the Niger Delta Region (Otoghagua, 2004:316). The core issue in this paper is to critically admonish NDDC for developing such comprehensive master plan and most importantly marshal strategies to ensure that all stakeholders own and support the NDDC in implementing the plan to achieve its primary mandate of securing the region developmentally and making it amiable and attractive to the world. Arising from the above, the paper specifically seeks to achieve the following objectives:

- ❖ To ensure that all stakeholders in the development of the Niger Delta Region buy into and own the plan for implementation.
- ❖ To ensure that the Federal Government provides a legal framework that will guide all stakeholders in the initiation and execution of projects in the Region.
- ❖ To provide the impetus for all levels of governments to show stronger political goodwill that will engender sustainable development in the Region.

Conceptual analysis

The most recent and noticeable effort by the Federal Government to develop the Niger Delta region was the establishment of the Niger Delta Development Commission in 2000 by an Act of the National Assembly. The broad

responsibility of NDDC was essentially to co-ordinate development efforts of various stakeholders in the region in a sustainable manner.

Since its inauguration in 2001, the NDDC has undertaken more than 2000 infrastructural projects and various developmental programmes in its efforts to bring sustainable development nearer to the people and usher peace and stability into the region. Whether perceived or real, traditional rulers, beneficiaries and journalists have at one time or the other commended the NDDC for its efforts in the infrastructural and human resources development in the region (Okereka 2007:91, Abati 2004:2). These achievements of the NDDC, is in pursuance of the interim action plan. This was focused on the completion of uncompleted OMPADEC projects, provision of critical infrastructure to mitigate the severe deprivation of the past and execution of human development programmes to alleviate the widespread poverty across the Niger Delta Region. NDDC (2006:10) capture its achievements in the implemented Quick Impact Project (QIP) of the master plan. The summary of the QIP's included Education, Regional power supply, Road Construction, Human Capital Development, Health, Jetties and Agriculture. The efforts of the NDDC for the past seven years can aptly be termed palliative because variables in the Niger Delta are still in violent conflict arising from poverty. But critical followers of events in the region would not have given too much, if they absorb NDDC for its inability to single handedly deal with issues of sustainable development of the region. This is what defines its umpire role of developing the newly presented Niger Delta Regional Development master plan. It took the commission an exhaustive five years to produce the document. The master plan is a product of long painstaking efforts midwife by the NDDC in consultation with all relevant stakeholders. Thus, what we have is not an NDDC plan but a peoples plan, one that all stakeholders can claim ownership of (Edem 2007:30).

The collective vision of stakeholders captured in this master plan is the accelerated development of the hitherto turbulent and under develop region into Africa's most peaceful, most prosperous and most pleasant region ... (Ibid). The master plan is a development initiative primarily designed to offer an integrated roadmap for the sustainable development in the Niger Delta Region. It follows the global principles of sustainable development and fosters, within its principles, the vital concept of good governance, cooperation and partnership, the absence of which had proved negative for the Niger Delta for a long time. The plan is based on a short, medium and

long term projections and plans broken down into three phases of five years, each at a first instance, which is expected to last from 2006- 2020 (15 years) (Alaibe 2007:43). Strategically, the plan maps out the nine NDDC states with 27 senatorial districts and 185 local governments; detailing what each needs and the ideal location without political prejudice.

The implementation starts with “Demonstration Projects” which will build confidence and gradually spread good practice across the region. The demonstration projects include developing growth communities in the rural areas. Growth centres in the cities and growth pole for industrial hubs. The growth poles strategy would create 27 new development hubs, three in each state one in each senatorial zone different from existing hubs to drive development with communities. To serve its purpose of stimulating industrial development, the growth pole will be sited where natural resources and other conditions have marked development potentials (NDDC 2006:12). In the rural areas, growth communities would be created to combine agricultural development with community development. The joy of stakeholders in the Niger Delta Region about the plan is that (A body) partners for sustainable development. PSC, was jointly set up; which held meetings and consultations in all states of the region, with high level representation from state and local government, Shell Petroleum Development Company SPDC, host communities, civil society organizations and NGO’s, etc.

It is expected to harmonize its activities with other service providers for implementation purposes, as prescribed by the master plan, so that we don’t give one community two water projects from two service providers, when resources of the second agency could have been utilized to provide a medical centre ... (Alaibe 2007:40). It is therefore not strange to experience the overwhelming acceptance displayed by stakeholders in the Niger Delta Development project, arising from the political copious manner in which inputs were sought from all stakeholders in the region. This will ensure an effective share of blame to all concerned in event of failure, in the successful implementation of the master plan, by the end of 2020 when countries of the world shall be taking stocks of achievements of the millennium development goals.

Challenges and strategies for a successful implementation of the master plan

Nigeria and Nigerians have always won all laurels and prizes for well thought out plans; but have always failed to win accolades in implementation of plans. This had been the major problem leading to the intractable under development facing the country since independence. The overwhelming acceptance of the Regional Development Master Plan which arose from the fact that it is a product of all stakeholders; ordinarily, will suggest that its implementation will be without major impediments but as scholars who are not unaware of possible extraneous variables that may silence this plan; like we have before, it becomes noble to highlight some of these possible hitches or suggestions on how its implementation can be successful. These perceived challenges and the way out can be examined in the following headings;

1. The challenges of stakeholders' synergy or implementation of the plan

Over the years, the efforts by stakeholders in the development of the Niger Delta Region have being on parallel basis. Thus, Federal, States, Local government and multinational oil companies have not made any comprehensive plan and adopted any uniform implementation plan to achieve the development in the region.

This brought to mind, the need to be determined and act as a watch dog to the (PSD) — Partnership for Sustainable Development not to renege on its primary mandate but advocating a stronger synergy among the stakeholders to key into the master plan. Okirika (2007:45) in his view about this synergy approach, he declared

I buy into the plan all what we are going to do is that each of us will take the section of the master plan that pertain to our own environment and develop along those line.

This synergy will ensure that whenever any stakeholder draws its budget, it must reflect its share of responsibility in the development master plan will culminate into an integrated development of the region. It will eliminate duplication of projects and denial of statutory developmental responsibility by stakeholders. The integrated and sustainable development will not be achieved if the Federal government, state government and the developmental agencies sit down and say NDDC has produced something which we might

look at as a reference point without an implementable synergy on how annual budgets will reflect outlined projects for the next 15 years span of the plan.

2. **The civil societies and advocacy for good governance**

Good governance is defined by credible, sincere and honest people elected to political offices. It is also expected that those extant occupiers of political offices must discharge their duties and responsibilities in accordance with the law. (Okocha 2007:46) reacting to the need for good governance as a major panacea to sustainable development in the Niger Delta Region when he said;

a situation where we just dole out money from the federation account to federal states and local governments without auditing the account of those tiers of government is a sorry commentary in our level of responsibility with regards to accountability.

Previous developmental plans for the region failed not because, they were not well articulated, but lack of stakeholders to buy into it. Now the regional master plan has created official integration and synergy between what all groups can do or ought to do at every level. The realization of this goal will define the interlink between good governance and development. In attempt to specifically pin down the perceived cog in the wheel of implementing the master plan, the civil society groups must do more as watchdogs on all the stakeholders. (Ledum 2007:44) rose to these above challenge when he said:

We have agreed that we should try and unpack it in the level that we will be able to say, NDDC, looking at your budget, this is what you are supposed to do in a year, Local government, this is what you should do. The state, this is what you should do.

3. **Legal framework to guide the plan implementation**

It is good that the partnership for sustainable development (PSD) forum attempted to pursue its task with the principles of partnership and good governance believing that pooling activities under a shared vision, each partner presents a mirror through which its activities can be monitored and evaluated. Although, failed plans and budgets of development over the years had always been presented as Acts of parliament, there has not been a practicable legal framework to monitor and guide its implementation from

arbitrary application. This is why the region has suffered huge abandonment of project, corruption of development officials, etc. It is our scholarly opinion and recommendation that a clear legal framework (Law) be specifically enacted to monitor the implementation of the regional master plan. The variants of this law may recommend deductions from the revenues accruable to the partner who fails to play its role; and the money be given to the coordinator (NDDC) to effect the provision of such projects. The law must also recommend specific punishments (sanctions) to be given to representatives or partners who were in office at that failed budget year.

Conclusion and recommendations

The Niger Delta Regional Developmental Master Plan (NDRDMP) is a 15 year development roadmap for the region from 2006 – 2020 to be implemented in three phases of five years each. The board goals of the master plan with mutually re-enforcing components include poverty. This paper has attempted to elicit the attention of the Niger Deltans and all stakeholders to the fact that Niger Delta Development Commission has successfully produced the first ever comprehensive developmental plan for the region. It also admonishes NDDC for championing the Herculean task, but clearly identified some possible impediments that may adversely affect the implementation of the plan. The ideas of this paper stem from the Nigerians historical antecedents as astute plan makers, but poor implementers. These failures, particularly in our developmental efforts may be due to factors beyond the control of the plans executors, we have identified and recommended some useful hints on how the Niger Delta Regional Development Master Plan (NDRDMP) can be logically and religiously guided and implemented to achieve sustainable development in the region up to the standard of the global development initiatives of the millennium development goals by the year 2020. These hints may be seen in the stakeholders' synergy for implementation of the plan, Advocacy for good governance and veritable legal framework to guide partners and executors of the Regional master plan.

Recommendations

In order to achieve the fundamental objective of this paper, it becomes pertinent to make the following specific recommendations:

- i. The Federal Government must make it mandatory for all levels of governments and other stakeholders to buy and key into the plan by

drawing their annual budgets to capture such projects that will eliminate duplication. Thus, their project implementation must reflect the master planned projects for the next 15 years.

- ii. The Civil Society groups must step up their campaigns of good governance to all political office seekers at all levels of government. Good governance which is the underlying factor for effective plan implementation must be upheld by all political office holders who must see the welfare of the people in the region as paramount.
- iii. The Federal Government must enact a legislation that will provide a legal framework to guide all stakeholders against arbitrary application of the plan.
- iv. The stakeholders must foster such degree of synergy that will encourage cooperative, rather than conflictive inter-governmental relations. This is what will produce the form of acceptance that will translate into the general good for the people of the region.

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