

Distributive Justice Narratives among Different Ethnic Groups in the Niger Delta Post-Conflict Peacebuilding Processes

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Oil exploration and exploitation is characterised with inequality, marginalisation, neglect, divide and rule in the Niger Delta, Nigeria. There are different ethnic groups in this region. It worrisome to note that one ethnic group is favoured above others when it comes to the distribution of oil wealth. Distributive injustice gives room for lack of cohesion and unity among the inhabitants of the Niger Delta region. Policy makers, peace entrepreneurs, government, and international oil companies failed to realise effects of distributive injustice on peacebuilding processes in the Niger Delta. This article therefore, sets to identify reasons for protracted Niger Delta conflict. It sets to examine the nature of distributive injustice in the region. It also examines the impacts of distributive injustice on ethnic relations in the region. It examines how ethnicity brings about distribute injustice in the Niger Delta. This paper posits that resolution of ethnic divisions would lead to enduring peace in the Niger Delta. Distributive Theory is the theoretical explanation adopted in the study. The theory pointed out that equity, equality and fairness will reduce inequality in the distribution of oil wealth in the region. The total number of participants in the study was seventy-two. It was found that the general demands of the inhabitants of the Niger Delta could be stated as sharing of political offices, the creation of State structures, the creation of Local Government Headquarters, apology, oil bloc allocation, more compensation and the monetisation of benefits but distribution of these were ethnic based. Most ethnic groups in the region were neglected, abandoned, and discriminated against. Distributive justice including fairness, equity, and equality should be the focus of socio-political actors in order to ensure enduring peace in the Niger Delta, Nigeria

Keywords: *Distributive, Justice, Conflict, Oil, Ethnicity, Conflict, Peacebuilding*

Introduction

Distributive injustice by major actors in oil exploration and exploitation has been the major reason for the Niger Delta conflict. The distributive injustice is reflected in the distribution of oil wealth, socio-economic goods in the region. Most findings in the literature failed to look at a narrative such as ethnicity, as a major issue in the Niger Delta conflict. The Niger Delta is located in the South-South geo-political zone of Nigeria. It comprises nine States of the 36 States of Nigeria. The States include: Abia; Akwa-Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross-River; Delta; Edo;

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Imo; Ondo and Rivers. The Niger Delta region comprises several nationalities, including, Ogoni, Ikwere, Ekpeye, Ogba, Egbema, Engenes, Abua, Isoko, Urhobo, Itsekiri, Kwale and others¹. The region covers the area of about 70,000 square kilometres with an estimate of over 31 million people of which 16,092,797 are males and 15,131,780 females.²

In the Niger Delta region, the dominant occupations are farming and fishing³. There are oil mineral deposit and other natural resources in the region, which include timber, cocoa, rubber, coal and tin⁴. The Shell-BP started oil exploration at Oloibiri in the Niger Delta in 1956⁵. As of January 1, 2012, Nigeria's oil reserves stand at 36.2 billion barrels (5.61×10^9 m³). The Niger Delta region produces one fifth of world oil and gas, making Nigeria the 6th largest oil producing nation in the world and Africa's biggest oil producer. The proceeds of oil production in Nigeria largely end up in the pockets of a few cabals⁶. According to Idoko⁷ the "black gold" has become a "cabal gold" in the hands of few who hold political power. The Niger Delta region is affected by lack of security of life and poverty, as well as a lack of infrastructure, wanton ecological damage, theft and unjust distribution of revenue from the sale of oil. Ekpolomo said that conflict in the Niger Delta is as a result of ethnicity, politics of corruption and embezzlement of funds by the government officials, and apathy by the Federal Government, multinational oil and gas companies when it comes to the development of the region⁸.

This study examines ethnicity as a major factor in the Niger Delta. It examines how ethnicity brings about distributive injustice in the Niger Delta. This paper posits that resolution of ethnic divisions could lead to enduring peace in the Niger Delta. This paper is divided into sections and subsections. Section One provides introduction while section Two explains distributive justice and ethnicity. Section Three provides the contextualisation of the study. Section Four examines different dimensions of the conflict. Section Five consists of method while the Sixth section discusses the findings. The final section provides the conclusion which sees ethnicity as an important narrative in the quest for the Niger Delta conflict resolution.

Contextualising the Niger Delta Conflict

The history of the Niger Delta conflict can be traced to the period of amalgamation, by the British of the Southern protectorate, the Northern protectorate and the Lagos colony. According to Olukoshi & Laakso⁹ the Colonial

¹Ajodo-Adebanjoko (2017).

²Egere (2021).

³Akintunde & Hile (2016).

⁴Kew & Phillips (2013).

⁵Anifowose, Lawler, Horst & Chapman (2008).

⁶Kalejaye (2012).

⁷Idoko (2013).

⁸Ekpolomo (2015).

⁹Olukoshi & Laakso (1996).

Government's Mineral Ordinance of 1914 (section 1) stated that the entire property and control of all mineral on the land, and under the rivers, streams, water courses in Nigeria, is and shall be vested in the colonial power. The ordinance was replicated in the Nigerian Independent Constitution. The ordinance provides that every piece of land within the geographical entity called Nigeria belongs to the Federal Government of Nigeria and must be made available for use whenever needs arise. The law removes control over the land and its resources from the Niger Delta inhabitants.

The Niger Delta environmental and human rights abuses led to the establishment of the Henry Willink Commission by the colonial government in 1957 to inquire into the minority groups' concerns and to allay their fear. The commission recommended, among other things, that the Niger Delta region be treated as a special area for development. The committee's recommendations led to the creation of the Niger Delta Development Board (NDDDB) in 1960, which was created to address to the development issues in the region. Lack of funds and political turmoil marked its operations¹⁰. The same fate befell the development of the Niger Delta in 1976 when eleven river basin authorities were created in the country, and the Niger Delta River Basin Authority (NDRBA) was deliberately starved of funds because of the fear that such funds may be diverted to sponsor unrest in the region¹¹. The oil Mineral Producing Area Development was also created (OMPADEC) in 1992, and the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) in 2000. They were all created for the socio-economic development of the Niger Delta region. Okpongkpong notes that the initiatives generally failed due to ethnic politics in the country, and they were also used to prevent the Niger Delta indigenes from occupying sensitive political positions in the country¹². According to Jekayinfa¹³ ethnic tension began in the Niger Delta during the colonial era when one ethnic group was favoured over others. This is reflected in the struggle for socio-political economic development among the various ethnic groups. Ethnicity has become a major problem and has adversely affected issues concerning Niger Delta development. Arguably, and given what has happened historically, the three hegemonic groups are usually united to conspire when it comes to the issues concerning the Niger Delta. The groups are the Yoruba, Hausa and Igbo. They usually pay "lip-service" to the development of the region. This is evident in the petroleum industry bill presented before the National Assemblies, which until today has not passed into law.

The politicisation of the development of Niger Delta also surfaces in the derivation formula, which allocates certain percentages of total oil earnings to each State in the region from the federation account. Anugwom¹⁴ notes that there was a battle about the oil derivation formula between the Nigerian legislative arm of government and the Niger Delta people before a 1.5% special fund increment was approved in 1980 for the development of the oil mineral producing areas. However,

¹⁰Ajodo-Adebanjoko (2017).

¹¹Nuoli (1978).

¹²Okpongkpong (2003)

¹³Jekayinfa (2002).

¹⁴Anugwom (2001).

the oil revenue sharing formula has been the subject of much controversy even before Nigerian independence. Ojo notes the oil revenue sharing formula in the pre-independence era¹⁵. In 1958, 50% of oil derivation was allotted to each State in the region; in 1968 it was reduced to 10%. The status quo was maintained until 1999 before it was increased to 13%. Attempts to increase it beyond 13% were rebuffed by the legislators from the Northern part of Nigeria. The argument was that the oil belongs to the entire country but the land belongs to the indigenes of the Niger Delta¹⁶. This position is buttressed by the existing Land Use Act, which was inherited from the colonial masters¹⁷.

To compound the problems of the Niger Delta inhabitants, many leaders have also called for an end to the derivation formula. The Governor of the Central Bank of Nigeria, Sanusi Lamido Sanusi in an interview with the Financial Times, in 2012 noted that Boko Haram, poverty and the general unrest in the Northern part of the country is a result of the lower sums they get from the Federation Account compared with the oil producing States which get 13% derivation every month. The same position was echoed by the Niger State Governor Aliyu Babangida¹⁸. He called for a review of the revenue sharing formula to 'reflect current realities'. He went further to say that the North, apparently is beginning to see the extra funds allocated to oil producing States under the 13% derivation allocation as an injustice that ought to be redressed, and a direct cause of the Boko Haram onslaught. The Governors from the Niger Delta States saw these provocative statements from two leading Northern elites as political manipulation and calculated attempts to put the Niger Delta in perpetual poverty. This reflects the political tension between the North and the Niger Delta. Makinde & Adeyoke¹⁹ note that the Oil Pipelines Act 1996, the Petroleum Decree of 1969, the Land Use Decree 1978, the Exclusive Economic Zone Act 1979, the Oil Mineral Pipeline Decree 1990, the Petroleum Decree 1991, the Land (title vesting) Decree 1993, the National Inland Waterways Decree 1997 and other relevant legislations, including those dealing with revenue allocation, are all offshoots of colonial ordinances. These laws taken together vest all the land where oil is extracted, produced, transported, stored, and the proceeds thereof, in the State and are therefore sources of conflict in contemporary times. However, the indigenes of where oil is found can only be paid compensation and the amount to be paid as compensation cannot be determined by the Niger Delta people²⁰.

The inhabitants of the region formed social movements to address environmental and human rights abuses. The Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (1998) notes that the Ijaw National Congress (INC) was formed in 1991 to challenge environmental and human rights abuses in the region. The congress came together to bring Ijaw nationality under one fold, to forge ahead politically, economically

¹⁵Ojo (2010).

¹⁶Iyobhebhe (2005).

¹⁷Mbanefo & Egwaikhide (1998).

¹⁸Wallis (2012).

¹⁹Makinde & Adeyoke (2007).

²⁰Omorogbe (2003).

and socially within the Nigerian federation. The aim of the organisation is to achieve peace and justice for the Ijaws nationwide.

Human Rights Watch²¹ reports that December 1998 was critical for the Ijaw. The day was a political turning point in the life of the region. The Ijaw Youth Conference (IYC) is made up of all the Ijaw at Kaima. The conference was attended by Ijaw youth drawn from over five hundred communities, which represented over forty Ijaw clans. Representatives of twenty-five various organisations signed the memorandum that crystallised the Ijaw struggle for resource control and self-determination. According to Courson²², IYC through lobby and petitions to the Federal Government demanded three contiguous, autonomous and homogenous Ijaw States namely: Bayelsa, Toru Ebe, and Oil River States along the coast of Niger Delta. This demand was largely borne out of the fact that the Ijaws, the fourth largest nationality in Nigeria, did not have any State of their own as noted above. Nwajiaku highlights that for political reason the Ijaw was divided into six States.²³ The other three major nationalities (Hausa-Fulani, Igbo and Yoruba) all have three or more States in the federation. Courson²⁴ notes that in 1996 the Administration of General Sani Abacha announced the creation of Bayelsa State for the Ijaw while creating more States and Local Government Areas in Nigeria. This was the same period Warri Southwest Local Government Area (LGA) was created with headquarters in Ogbе-Ijoh, and another LGA was created for the Ijaws in Ondo State with headquarters at Igbekebo. The LGA created in Ondo State for the Ijaw in Ondo State like the Warri South west and resulted in a violent conflict between the Ijaw in Ondo State and the Ilaje. The Ilajes argued that the Ijaws are tenants, and therefore should not be entitled to political self-rule. In short, the LGA headquarters re-relocation led to protracted conflict between the Ijaw and Itsekiri of Warri, and Ijaw and Ilaje.

The conflict in the Niger Delta can also be traced to the historical antecedent of the three major ethnic groups in the region (Imobighe, 2002). According to Okoh²⁵, there are some undisputed assertions in the literature on the rightful owner of Warri in Western Niger Delta. First, there are three ethnic nationalities in Warri that is Itsekiri, Urhobo and Ijaw. Second, the ethnic groups have lived in Warri for over a hundred years. Third, the three ethnic nationalities have no other place that can be called ‘home’ and lastly, all the three ethnic groups claim to be the original settlers, i.e., the indigenes. According to Okwechime²⁶ most of the intra-tribal conflicts are basically about land and tenancy issues. These conflicts erupt as a result of oil fields located on particular pieces of land. The notables among such conflicts are: the Ayankoroma/Egbo conflict; the Gbekebo/Oforiagbala conflict; the Oboro/Olota conflict; the Ayakoroma/Okwagbe conflict; the Bomadi/Ororoama conflict; the Ogbе-Ijoh/Aladja conflict; the Okerenkoko/Ogidigben conflict; and, the Kpakiamama/Ofonl conflict.

²¹Human Rights Watch (1999).

²²Courson (2007).

²³Nwajiaku (2005).

²⁴Courson (2007).

²⁵Okoh (2016).

²⁶Okwechime (2013).

Political Conflict

The Nigerian general elections in 2003, according to Campbell (2008), heightened the already tense situation in the Niger Delta. The election provided an opportunity for the militarisation of the region. Politicians gave arms and ammunition to militant groups to further their electoral aims. The elections were marred by rigging and violence²⁷. After the elections, the arms and ammunition ended up or stayed in the hands of militant groups, who used the arms for the regional campaigns and to terrorise the multinational oil companies, foreigners, oil workers, security agents and government officials²⁸.

Human Right Watch²⁹ notes that most of the guns bought by politicians ended up in the hands of their supporters who now use them to rob innocent citizens, and create a regime of tension and fear in the region. Joab-Peterside³⁰ noted that the 2003 elections in the Niger Delta were nothing but a charade and violent struggle for the control of the resources of the region by the ruling class, and their desire to continue to exploit the region (16). Historically, following the dawn of democracy in Nigeria in 1999, a number of “guerrilla” movements have sprung up in the Niger Delta. Militant groups in the region have taken up arms against the Federal government of Nigeria because of corrupt practices of political elites, long-term neglect and collusion with multinational oil companies to share the oil wealth³¹. The movements have come up with both old and new demands from the oil companies and the Federal Government of Nigeria. Prominent among such groups are the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), The Niger Delta People Volunteer Force (NDPVF), the Joint Revolutionary Council (JRC), and the Movement for the Survival of the Ijaw Ethnic Nationality (MOSEIN). According to Hunsaker-Clark (2009) the first violent militant group to emerge in the region was the Niger Delta People’s Volunteer Force (NDPVF) in 2003, which was formed by Mujahid Dokubo- Asari. The group demanded redress for the human and environmental abuses in the Niger Delta from the multinational oil companies and federal government. In the same year, another group named the Niger Delta Vigilante Group (NDV) led by Atake Tom was formed.

Militant groups in the region have taken up arms against the Federal government of Nigeria because of corrupt practices of political elites, long-term neglect and collusion with multinational oil companies to share the oil wealth³². The two groups shared similar characteristics. They were militant groups from the same ethnic origin, their operations were focused on Port Harcourt and its suburbs. There were other ethnic militia groups which began as local University fraternities. These groups adopted names largely associated with western sub-culture groups which include the Icelanders, Greenlanders, KKK and the Vulture. These groups

²⁷Emeseh (2011).

²⁸Otuchikere (2010).

²⁹Human Rights Watch (1999).

³⁰Joab-Peterside (2007).

³¹Olufowobi, Ihuoma, Adebayo, Adepegba & Okpi (2012).

³²Olufowobi, Ihuoma, Adebayo, Adepegba & Okpi (2012).

were constituted mainly by young men from Warri, Port Harcourt, Ilaje and other sub-urban areas in the region³³.

The militant groups engaged in “guerrilla” warfare with the Federal Government. They attacked oil pipelines, were involved in oil smuggling, killed oil workers, and kidnapped oil workers and the affluent in the country. The militants attacked police, military and oil installations. At times, the militant groups also operated in other regions beyond the Niger Delta, such as Lagos in the South west and Abuja in the North. To receive the attention of the international community, the militants have attacked pipelines and offshore facilities in the *Bright of Benin* and Lagos harbour³⁴. Militants also targeted Chevron pipelines in Lagos international harbour after amnesty was given to them by the government³⁵. They carried out the attack to show their grievance to the whole amnesty arrangement³⁶. Asuni³⁷ reported that the Nigerian government arrested and prosecuted some of the militant members but all were later released as a result of the amnesty agreement that government signed with the militant groups in 2007. After the peace agreement in 2009, some of the militant groups were however not satisfied. They decided to return to jungle and resumed attacks on oil workers and oil installations. For instance, as a result of renewed attacks on oil installations and oil workers, the Nigerian army descended heavily on the belligerent militant groups led by John Togo. John Togo was killed and his hideout, Oporoza in the Gbaramatu Kingdom was destroyed³⁸. In the Niger Delta, protests by women have never included hostage taking until 2003. According to Abiola³⁹, in an extreme reaction to the deplorable environmental conditions, about six hundred women in the region took hostage of about seven hundred oil workers from different nationalities.

Distributive Justice and Ethnicity

Distributive justice is a method of sharing benefits and burdens of lives between members of a society or community⁴⁰. The benefits and burden could be classified as social, economic or moral. Maiese⁴¹ argues in some cases, the thing to be distributed is not a benefit, but a burden (2). The principles of distributive justice arrange how the benefit and burden *ought* to be shared or distributed among members of a given society⁴². The concepts of what, how, where, when, who, whom and which are very important in distributive justice. According to Waldron⁴³,

³³Ojo-Olatunde (2002).

³⁴Emued (2013).

³⁵Gleichmann, Odenwald, Steerken & Wilkinson (2004).

³⁶Gleichmann, Odenwald, Steerken & Wilkinson (2004).

³⁷Asuni (2009).

³⁸Amnesty International (2009).

³⁹Abiola (2002).

⁴⁰Armstrong (2012).

⁴¹Maiese (2013).

⁴²Armstrong (2012).

⁴³Waldron (2010).

distributive justice involves choosing criteria for the distribution of something valuable among people who have some claim to a common social good or benefit. The most important thing is that distribution must follow the principle of “fair share”. Fair allocation of resources among diverse members of a community is paramount in distributive justice⁴⁴. Fair allocation depends on the pattern, procedure and total amount of goods or quantity of burden to be shared. Rawls⁴⁵ argues that one's place of birth, social status, and family influences are matters of luck and should not unduly influence the amount of benefit we receive in life. He maintains that the job of distributive justice is to limit the influence of primordial sentiment so that socio-political and economic benefits might be distributed more fairly and to everyone's advantage. Nozick⁴⁶ believes that distributive justice is a matter of setting down rules that individuals should follow in acquiring and transferring resources and benefits.

The aim of distributive justice, according to Maiese is not to achieve any particular outcome of distribution, but rather to ensure a fair process of distribution. In human society, the number of available resources and wealth are scarce and limited. Procedure, pattern and the process of distribution have always been contestable. Therefore, available resources must be rationalised among members of society. If the principle of rationalisation is based on the principle of equity and fairness, generally, it is assumed that justice is done and served. Rescher⁴⁷ says that the morally acceptable form of distribution is “fair share”. There are three identified principles of distribution which have become acceptable as “fair share”. They include equality, equity, and need⁴⁸.

The first principle of distribution is equality. Rawls⁴⁹ and Dworkin⁵⁰ claim that equality is a strong norm in contemporary democratic societies such as USA, UK and other Western nations, where social and economic justice movements appeal to the principle of equality when decrying the inequalities, we see around us. The equality principle determines who gets what and how goods will be distributed equally among all persons⁵¹. This principle falls into economic criticism because individual wants are different, even in a socialist economy. Dworkin⁵² argues that a person who worked so that he would have enough resources for a rainy day is not treated with equal dignity if he is required to subsidise the person who did not work or save, despite being conscious of the consequences and despite having had the opportunity to do so. This is in line with the second principle of distribution, namely equity. This includes distribution of benefits in proportion to the individual's contribution⁵³. It is based on the

⁴⁴Rawls (1971).

⁴⁵Rawls (1971).

⁴⁶Nozick (1974).

⁴⁷Rescher (2002).

⁴⁸Rawls (1971).

⁴⁹Rawls (1971).

⁵⁰Dworkin (1971).

⁵¹Deutsch (1985).

⁵²Dworkin (1971).

⁵³Maiese (2013).

individual's ability to produce. Those who make a greater productive contribution to the society deserve to receive more benefits. Thus, in theory, people who work harder in more valuable jobs should earn more money⁵⁴. This sort of distribution is typically associated with an economic system where there is equal opportunity to compete, such as a capitalist economy. In competitive systems, wealth or goods might also be distributed according to effort or ability⁵⁵. The third principle is need/desert, where benefits/burden is distributed according to individual or group need, so that people would get an equal outcome. Individuals that need more social benefits or goods will receive more, as occurs when governments offer social support based on size of family⁵⁶, or states provide reparations payments to victims.

The conflict in the Niger Delta, contrary to many popular views, is not far from ethnic or tribal conflict over oil exploitation and exploration. It is essentially about economic rights, environment rights, and unequal distribution of oil wealth in the region⁵⁷. Enemugwem⁵⁸ notes that the issue of marginalisation and underdevelopment of Niger Delta was discussed towards the end of colonial rule in Nigeria before oil became a factor in the national politics in 1957. Taking a look at how distributive injustice and ethnic conflict are related. For example, Nigeria, with its abundant oil resources has the capacity to produce about 3.2 million barrels of oil per day. Ethnic conflict has had untold effects on oil production. Nigeria can no longer meet the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries' (OPEC) production quota. The country's oil production level dropped below 1 million barrels per day (mbpd) owing to frequent shut-ins due to renewed attacks on oil facilities in the Niger Delta region. The United Nations Secretary General (2004) reports that prior to the escalation of violent attacks on oil installations, Nigeria produced between 2.5 and 2.6 million barrels of crude oil per day. Douglas⁵⁹ opines that the ethnic nationalities in the Niger Delta have become observant of the marginalisation tacit of the major ethnic nationalities in Nigeria. These major ethnic nationalities control political power and resources at the Federal level to their advantage. The ethnic minorities in the Niger Delta lack political power to make meaningful socio-economic policies in their favour. The balance of power in Nigeria is based on the supremacy of the "sectional" or "national" interests over local rights. Bassey⁶⁰ notes Nigeria is a country where a powerful group of individuals, with the aid of State apparatuses, are able to influence national decisions in his/her favour to create an ethnic agenda, distort history, and, ensure inequality in the allocation and distribution of resources.

The Ijaw ethnic nationality in the Niger Delta constitutes a large area where government generates its major source of revenue. As a result of oil patronage, the area has been divided into various coastal States. In the early 1990s, according

⁵⁴Maiese (2013).

⁵⁵Maiese (2013).

⁵⁶Maiese (2013).

⁵⁷Waldron (2010).

⁵⁸Enemugwem (2009).

⁵⁹Douglas (1999).

⁶⁰Bassey (2002).

Martinez-Alier⁶¹ the socio-economic, environmental and human rights abuses among the Ijaws in the hands of the multinational oil companies and the Federal Government of Nigeria increased tremendously. These subsequently increase agitation for resource control and self-rule. The ethnic groups were not happy about their predicaments, the socio-economic conditions and human rights abuses by the Federal Government Joint Military Task Force and multinational oil companies. According to Okolo⁶² the internal uprisings within the Niger Delta are a product of divide and rule mechanisms employed by the State and multinational oil companies among the inhabitants of the region. The State and multinational oil companies have used the allocation of oil fields and oil installations to determine the communities that would receive high patronage and royalty⁶³. Distributive justice is central to a meaningful post conflict peace process, whether rooted economically, socially or politically. In any situation of distributive injustice, renewed conflict is more likely⁶⁴. Efforts to ensure a just distribution of benefits/burden, is therefore key to peacebuilding processes. The next subsection contextualises the Niger Delta conflict.

Method

This study is a qualitative research. It uses purposive method of data collection to achieve its objectives and research questions. This section of the paper discuss location of the study, sampling technique, data collection, and data analysis.

Location of the Study

The study location was Warri Kingdom, which is situated in the Warri Southwest Local Government Area with its headquarters in Ogbe-Ijaw, Delta State, Nigeria. Delta State is situated in the Niger Delta, Southsouth region of Nigeria, which is one of the World's largest wetlands, and Africa's largest delta covering about 70,000km². The region is situated on the accumulation of sedimentary deposit transported by the Niger and Benue Rivers⁶⁵. The Niger Delta is a low topography region with many streams, rivers and coastal lanes. It commences in the north at a place called the south of Aboh, which is also known as Obotoh, where Niger River fork into the Forcados Rivers. On the west, the Niger Delta is bordered by Osun and Ogun State; on the east, it is bordered by the Bakassi peninsula, in the Republic of Cameroun, and the south by the Atlantic Ocean.

⁶¹Martinez-Alier (2002).

⁶²Okolo (2008).

⁶³Okolo (2008).

⁶⁴Maiese (2013).

⁶⁵World Bank Report (1995).

There are sixty ethnic groups in the Niger Delta. The total population of the region is about thirty-two million (Nigerian Population Census, 2005). There are five major ethnic groups in the Niger Delta, they are: Ijaw, Yoruba, Edo, Igbo and Delta Cross. Other notable ethnic minority groups in the region include Ikewere, Isoko, Kwale, Itsekiri, Ogba, Ogoni, Urhobo and a host of others. The Ijaw ethnic group has formed a nation as a consequence of conflict over oil resources. They are estimated to be ten percent of the Nigerian population (Central Intelligent Agency, 2008). The study was carried out in Warri Kingdom, Warri southwest Local government area, Delta State, Nigeria. The Area was selected because it is located in the Niger Delta region where gross violations of environmental and human rights took place as a result of conflict. Warri Kingdom has the largest deposit of crude oil in the Niger Delta. It has a number of oil companies and oil installations. Different forms of conflict have taken place in the Kingdom, such as political conflict between the Ijaw and the Itsekiri, environmental crisis between the inhabitants of the Kingdom and multinational oil companies, and human rights abuses resulting from the destruction of the community by the Federal Government Joint Military Task Force.

The study was carried out in 2016; nine years after amnesty and post conflict reparations were awarded to the militant groups. When the researcher visited the region during the period of data collection, evidence of conflict was visible all over the Kingdom. There were burnt houses, destroyed amenities and the numbers of people in the community scant. Military, police and other security outfits were present in different locations in the Kingdom. Fear and apprehension were clearly present among the inhabitants. The researcher was only able to enter the Kingdom with the support of an ex-militant and consent of the leaders of communities selected for this study: Itsekiri, Ijaw, and Urhobo.

Sampling Techniques

Qualitative sampling techniques were used in this study. A purposive method was used to select the towns and villages that participated in the study. The participants were also selected purposively based on socio-economic attributes which reflected a balanced of representation in the selected study area. These methods of sampling were used because it was an explorative study that sought an in-depth understanding of the problem. This study required face-to-face interaction. The total number of participants in the study was seventy-two. Six participants did not continue with the study. They withdrew their initial consents during the visits of the researcher to the study location.

Figure 1. *Distribution of In-depth Interviews by Respondents*

Participants	Itsekiri	Ijaw	Urhobo	Total
Political Office Holders	03	03	03	09
Delta State Oil Producing Area Development Commission	03	03	03	09
Traditional Figures	03	03	03	09
Oil Company Workers	03	03	03	09
Non-Governmental Organisation Staffers	03	03	03	09
Market women	03	03	03	09
Artisans	03	03	03	09
Militant Members	03	03	03	09
Total	24	24	24	72

Source: Fieldwork, 2019

Method of Data Collection

Qualitative methods of data collection were used to gather information from the participants. As mentioned above, the study was an exploratory one which employs qualitative methods of data collection. In-depth interviews were conducted among seventy-two respondents in the selected areas. Permission was sought from the participants and different associations/organisations to which each respondent belongs, before any interview was conducted. Many associations/ organisations forbid their members from granting interviews without permission, most especially the multinational oil companies' staff because of the worries about information being stolen and use against the organisation in future. High-level consultations were initiated by the researcher to get consent of these associations/ organisations before the data collection. Transport fare was given to the respondents from the Travel Grant secured by the researcher from Boston University West Africa Research Centre.

The study was limited to data intended to reflect the views of the wider Niger Delta community rather than individuals who have experienced severe trauma since the purpose of the study was to understand how distributive injustice among ethnic group could promote conflict in the Niger Delta. Arrangements were made in case of inadvertent inclusion of victims of severe trauma. Referral networks were arranged with local NGOs to give supports for individuals if this happened. This was not necessary however in the end. Discussants were members of the community, but none were victims of rape, widows, and widowers.

This study used in-depth interview guide to gather information from participants. The interview guide consisted of semi-structured questions. The guide contained a series of qualitative questions on how distributive injustice and conflict are interrelated. What forms and types of redress women and men desire in the Niger Delta conflict. How the narratives of distributive injustice enhance understanding of ethnic conflict and a series of other questions on the application

of distributive justice to address human rights violations, and ensure recognition of political and civil rights in the Niger Delta region.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis of qualitative data collected was used in this study. Themes for analysis were generated by the researcher during the interviews processes and from the literature review. The themes that emerged for analysis in the study including: conflict; divisions; marginalisation; benefit; politics and power; and socio-economic

Findings

In this section, the findings from the analysis of data collected were reported. The findings were categorised as follow: Conflict; divisions; marginalisation; benefit; politics and power; and socio-economic.

Conflict

In this study, the roots of the Niger Delta conflict were examined. It was noted above, the Niger Delta is comprised of nine States and different ethnic groups. These ethnic groups have different reasons for conflict. Many were agitating for political recognition, creation of additional local authorities and economic empowerment, and many were asking for control of resource. To get the attention of the authorities and to get their demands recognised, different ethnic groups directed their focus towards oil benefits distribution injustice. This was revealed in the first in-depth interview conducted with a director of a nongovernmental organisation who participated in the study. He said that it was an agitation for resource control and recognition in the distribution of wealth that aroused the interest of different ethnic groups in the Niger Delta conflict. This was confirmed by a woman leader who participated in in-depth interviews. She said that women supported men in the struggle directed towards environmental and human rights protection.

Conflict in the Niger Delta among the ethnic groups was as a result of inequality, marginalisation, segregation and alienation of other communities by oil bearing communities. Every ethnic group wants proceeds of oil exploitation and exploration to be extended to them.

Ethnicity and conflict are closely associated in the Niger Delta. Marginalisation of one ethnic group by the other leads to a protracted ethnic conflict in the region. Potentially, distributive injustice festered ethnic hatred and tensions in the Niger Delta region.

Politics and Power – Conflict

Ethnicity in the Niger Delta is examined from the point view of politics. Government practiced divide and rule among the inhabitant of the region. Many people opted out of politics because they did not see any benefit accrued from involving in politics. Politics is the region favoured the group that had people in the position of authorities. A youth leader added:

Since the creation of Delta State, an Ijaw man has not emerged a governor of the State. The usual campaign is that the nation's president is an Ijaw man. But, this is a state affair. We must have an opportunity to serve at the State highest office.

Clearly, the ethnic division was pervasive and described as “everywhere” and reflected, according to participants, in “everything”. A female youth leader claimed:

Ethnic divisions are everywhere in this community. There are divisions in the market, government ministries, among the artisans, professionals and nonprofessional, and politicians. People belong to different associations that are identified with their ethnic group.

A Director of an NGO said: Ethnic division is reflected in everything people do. It is easier for a foreigner to buy a parcel of land in Warri than the indigenes to be allocated a parcel of land outside his/her ethnic group. The Urhobo are not ready to welcome the Itsekiri. What brings them together is school because government determines the allocation of pupils to primary and post-primary schools.

It is evident in this paper, therefore, that ethnic divisions contributed to the protracted Niger Delta conflict but were also exacerbate by the conflict. The causes of the conflict, as noted above are interwoven and interlinked. But there is little doubt that oil companies and federal government patronised the ethnic groups that possessed oil resources and neglected others. The neglect of ethnic groups without oil compounds the Niger Delta conflict had severe consequences on both men and women in the region.

Ethnic Divisions - Conflict

Ethnic divisions characterised the relationship among the Niger Delta inhabitants. The people of the region were living together in peace before oil politics divided them. Ethnic divisions led to ethnic conflicts between Ijaw and Itsekiri; Itsekiri and Urhobo in the Niger Delta. Conflict between ethnic groups is always over land distribution and the ownership of land, most especially a piece of land with commercial oil deposits. As noted above, the participants said that the Niger Delta conflict created divisions among the inhabitants of the region. They said that before the conflict the three major ethnic groups in Warri lived like brothers, sisters and neighbours, that is, the Ijaw, the Urhobo and the Itsekiri. The conflict created a deep division among these ethnic groups. The participants also said that government and oil companies were fond of creating disunity in the

region. Participants assumed that government used favouritism and nepotism to divide the inhabitants of the region. Oil companies used royalties, contracts and employment as weapons of division. Many interviewees said that some ethnic groups were favoured more than the others. They received contracts, jobs and money from multinational oil companies, while others were neglected. A political office holder described how the government used the availability and amount of oil extraction from communities as a determinant of government patronage. He said: The Itsekiri are more favoured in terms of contracts award and employment in the oil companies. They have people in high places in government and oil companies. Oil companies give employment to the Itsekiri more than the Urhobo and the Ijaw because Chevron has its oil rigs and platforms in the area.

Ethnicity has divided the inhabitants' unity of purpose. The inhabitants think and act in ethnically divided ways whenever it comes to the distribution of political and economic materials. Conflict between Ijaw and Itsekiri almost destroyed the entire Warri, a city that housed the regional headquarters of most of the oil companies. The political office holder went further to say:

Hardly the Itsekiri support other ethnic groups in the struggle for the emancipation of the Niger Delta. They are government allies. They are favored people. Government usually favoured them at the expense of other ethnic groups. For instance, the Itsekiri have become the Chairpersons of Warri South West and Warri South east Local Government than the Urhobo and the Ijaw. Favouritism and nepotism have created deep-seated hatred between Itsekiri and other ethnic groups in Warri. The other ethnic groups at times transferred aggression towards the Itsekiri, burnt and destroyed their communities.

There were always contestations between the Ijaw and the Itsekiri over perceived favouritism from the multinational oil companies. Chevron was considered to favour the Itsekiri because it has its oil rigs in the Itsekiri land. Another political office holder that participated in the in-depth interviews claimed:

Government sees the Itsekiri as the original settlers in Warri but this is not true. Warri belongs to the three ethnic groups Ijaw, Itsekiri and Urhobo. Look at the settlement patterns; you will agree with me that each ethnic group occupies a different quarter. Warri is no man's land. It belongs to different ethnic groups.

Marginalisation - Injustice

Ethnic conflict affects the peace processes in the Niger Delta region. The Itsekiri complained of marginalisation during the peace process. The participants in the in-depth interviews said that the Itsekiri were not considered in benefits distribution processes because their involvements in the conflict were not recognised. Many Urhobo and Ijaw make accusations of favouritism against the Itsekiri. The Itsekiri are alleged to have collected contracts and appointments from the oil companies such as Chevron and Shell. A female youth leader observed:

Many times, government would not invite the Itsekiri to a peace meeting. The negotiators would say the conflict did not affect our community like others but this

is not true. Most of our villages and settlements were attacked and destroyed by the Ijaw militants and the Joint Military Task Force.

The divisions among the ethnic groups reflected the way the participants responded to the question on who are you fighting in the Niger Delta? A youth leader who was involved in the in-depth interviews said:

Land allocation causes a major conflict among the Ijaw, the Itsekiri and the Urhobo. In the region, if you get a portion of land, the resources on it belong to you. The oil companies usually patronise individuals and communities that possess oil fields. Ownership of land has become a major issue among the ethnic groups. It is common for an ethnic group to grab the land of the other. This usually generates conflict in this region.

Benefits- Distributive Injustice

Ethnic considerations were applied when negotiations were underway after the cessation of hostilities by the militant groups. The composition of the groups involved in the distribution of oil revenue was based on ethnic recognition. It was observed that the Ijaw ethnic group was mainly considered in the negotiation process. The Itsekiri and Urhobo were not adequately represented. A woman leader claimed:

When the government representatives wanted to talk to women in the community, they looked for elite women. The elite women have been disconnected with the grassroots. Government bribes them by given them money, appointments and contracts to talk to us. Government takes the voices of these women as other women's voices but this is not so because they are not part of us in this community. They do not represent us because what they got ended in their pockets.

A participant in an in-depth interview said that ethnicity played a pivotal role on the ethnic militant groups that benefited from government largess. He said that militant groups that were of Ijaw extraction were favoured above other ethnic groups. The researcher asked a further question from a Director of an NGO as to why distribution of oil wealth was one-sided. He said that the so called ex-militant groups that consisted mainly of the Itsekiri do not fit the description of militants because their objectives were unconnected with the struggle. As revealed in the literature, the Itsekiri Native Youth Council is a socio-cultural association and they cannot be referred to as a militant group.

That said, the actual number of Ijaw compared to the Itsekiri and Urhobo benefitting from distribution from government compensation could not be ascertained because the Presidential Amnesty Committee did not provide an analysis of the beneficiaries on ethnic basis. Yafugborhi reported in the that there were alleged irregularities in the distribution of benefits of the Federal Government sponsored for the Itsekiri⁶⁶. The Itsekiri National Youth Council (INYC) led by Esimaje Awani, called for a stop to further payments of the Itsekiri beneficiaries' monthly stipends to David Tonwe's faction of INYC. The Itsekiri Native Youth

⁶⁶Ugbajo Itsekiri USA, Inc. (2010).

Council, the name used to collect payment of benefits from the government, is unknown to the Itsekiris. No one knew what they were doing. A political office holder that participated in the second in-depth interview said: Majority of the militants that were given monthly allowance, collected scholarships and vocational training were majorly from Ijaw ethnic group. What about the Itsekiri? Government and oil companies enjoy dividing us in this region.

A political office holder corroborated this view: Many of the beneficiaries of oil wealth are from a particular ethnic group. The Itsekiri ex-militants were excluded. When the list of beneficiaries was released we realised that the names of the Itsekiri ex-militants were not include. The list contained the names of the Ijaw ex-militants as if the conflict affected the Ijaw alone. The conflict affected the Itsekiri, the Urhobo and the Ijaw.

As noted in the findings of this study, inhabitants of the Niger Delta demanded sharing of political offices, the creation of State structures, the creation of Local Government Headquarters, apology, oil bloc allocation, more compensation and the monetisation of benefits. Other demands included the rebuilding of communities, hospitals, markets, roads, schools, housing, scholarships, waterways, small cottage industries, electricity, recreation centres, and loans for agriculture. In the literature review, it is interesting to note that in some circumstances, national and administrative panels often recommended distributive justice for the victims of gross violations of fundamental human rights.

Socio-economic - injustice

Allocation of socio-economic facilities also had ethnic dimensions. Ethnicity played a major role in which ethnic group enjoyed government patronage. The government faced a problematic responsibility in the allocation of socio-economic facilities⁶⁷. A political office holder said:

Most of the facilities provided after the conflict were located within the Ijaw community. The three ethnic groups were not contacted to determine the location and even distribution of these facilities.

Ethnic division affected where government offices were located. An interviewee in Delta State Oil Producing Area Development Corporations (DESPODEC) said: If your community does not bear oil deposit, please, forget about social amenities. Social facilities are provided by government as a weapon of politics in this region.

Ethnic divisions in the Niger Delta region were reflected in government institutions. DESPODEC for example, has three offices in Warri alone. Different offices were allocated to different ethnic groups. There are offices that were occupied just by the Itsekiri. The one for the Ijaw has employees from the Ijaw and the one for Urhobo has only Urhobo as their employees.

⁶⁷Ihuanedo (2014).

Conclusion

In this study, ethnicity is identified as a major narrative of the Niger Delta Conflict. Distributive inequality, environmental degradation and imbalanced socio-economic distribution are also identified. Distributive Theory is the theoretical explanation adopted in the study. The theory pointed out that equity, and equality will reduce imbalance in the distribution of oil wealth in the Niger Delta. The theory also shows that only distribution of social, economic and political power based on equity, equality and need could bring enduring peace in the Niger Delta region.

As noted in the findings of this study, the general demands of the inhabitants of the Niger Delta could be stated as sharing of political offices, the creation of State structures, the creation of Local Government Headquarters, apology, oil bloc allocation, more compensation and the monetisation of benefits but distribution of these were ethnic based. Most ethnic groups in the region were neglected, abandoned, and discriminated against. However, women's demands, on the other hand, included the rebuilding of communities, hospitals, markets, roads, schools, housing, scholarships, waterways, small cottage industries, electricity, recreation centers, and loans for agriculture. This finding supports the notion that women's needs often slightly different from general demands in peacebuilding processes. This reason is majorly because of the socio- biological nature of women. These demands could be categorised as socio-economic and political justice. In the literature review, it is interesting to note that in some commissions, national, and administrative panels often recommended distributive justice for the victims of gross violations of fundamental human rights but the effort must be ready to accommodate every ethnic group in the Niger Delta. The provision of socio-economic facilities should be the priority of the government, however, the region is abandoned, neglected and underdeveloped, as noted in the findings of this study. These are attributed to ethnic tensions, and fuelling the Niger Delta conflict. In this study, it can be concluded that the provision of basic socio-economic rights is the constitutional responsibility of the government, and this should be the major focus of any form of peacebuilding processes in the Niger Delta. Distributive justice including fairness, equity, and equality should be the focus of socio-political actors in order to ensure enduring peace in the Niger Delta, Nigeria.

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