

Regional Inequality and the Niger Delta

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Summary: This brief explores regional inequality in Nigeria, focussing specifically on the Niger Delta. Specifically, it explores one of the Government of Nigeria's (GoN) responses to the marginalisation of the Niger Delta, the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC), and examines this in the context of the worsening development situation in the Niger Delta. Poverty and inequality in Nigeria has strong regional concentrations, resulting in significant levels of regional disparity. The Niger Delta is a region that has been somewhat marginalised from Nigeria's national development, despite being the region that generates Nigeria's oil wealth. The GoN's policy response to this marginalisation and relative underdevelopment is the NDDC, which was established in 2000. The development of the Niger Delta since the NDDC was established shows that poverty reduction progress has been slow, particularly given the Niger Delta's substantial natural resource endowments and additional federal government resources. It is difficult to assess the effectiveness of the NDDC, however, and the extent to which it has contributed, or failed to contribute, to poverty reduction in the Niger Delta. What is apparent, however, is that natural resource endowments do not necessarily translate into welfare gains for communities. In addition, national level government political and financial commitment to address regional disparities may not be enough: it may be rejected because of the 'top down' nature of the approach and ineffective if reliant on institutionally weak state and local governments.

1. Introduction

This brief explores regional inequality in Nigeria, focussing specifically on the Niger Delta.

The first section of the brief outlines the development, poverty and inequality context in Nigeria. The second section examines regional inequality in the context of the Niger Delta. The third section explores one of the Government of Nigeria's (GoN) responses to the marginalisation of the Niger Delta: the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) and examines this in the context of the worsening development situation in the Niger Delta.

2. Development, poverty and inequality in Nigeria

Nigeria is the most populous country in Africa, with its population of 140 million people accounting for 47% of West Africa's population and a nearly a fifth of sub-Saharan Africa's population. Nigeria's population is diverse, made up of around 200 ethnic groups speaking 500 indigenous languages, practicing two major religions — Islam and Christianity (World Bank, 2007).

Nigeria has made some positive economic development progress in recent years. The World Bank has commended Nigeria on its macro-economic performance over the last two years, as Nigeria's economic reform efforts have shown positive results. These include an 8.9% increase in non-oil growth in 2006, the critical second reading of a Fiscal Responsibility Bill in both the Senate and the House and the successful negotiation with both the Paris and London Clubs resulting in the clearing of foreign

debt. The US\$750 million of fiscal space created through negotiation with the Paris Club creditors has been allocated to poverty reduction and the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) (World Bank, 2007).

Nigeria's political progress has also been recognised. Nigeria has successfully made the transition to democracy following three consecutive democratic elections; most recently in April 2007 when for the first time power was handed from one democratically elected leader to another. Whilst problems with the election process have been highlighted, the establishment of democracy in Africa's largest country is a significant achievement and marks a key institutional change (Heymans and Pycroft, 2005). The democratic transition has also strengthened Nigeria's international profile and it is now a leading nation in the African Union, Commonwealth, in the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), and in the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) (World Bank, 2007).

Despite this progress, a significant proportion of Nigeria's population lives in poverty. Approximately 70 million people live on less than US\$1/day (World Bank and DFID, 2005: 8), 54% of Nigerians live below the poverty line (UNDP, 2006a) and over one-third live in extreme poverty (defined as those who cannot afford 2,900 calories per day) (UNDP, 2006b). Poverty has increased in recent decades: between 1970 and 2000, those living on less than US\$1/day increased from around 36% to around 70%, translating into a real increase in the number of people living in poverty from 19 million in 1970 to 90 million in 2000 (Sala-i-Martin and Subramanian, 2003:4). Human development indicators are also poor: Nigeria's Human Development Index (HDI) is low (0.448), giving the country a ranking of 159 out of 177 countries (UNDP, 2006a). Disaggregated figures highlight the various dimensions of poverty in Nigeria: one in five children die before the age of five; 3 million people are living with HIV/AIDS; and 7 million children are not attending school (DFID, 2007).

Inequality in Nigeria is also significant and on the increase. Sala-i-Martin and Subramanian (2003:4) identify that Nigeria has experienced a sharp deterioration in income distribution: in 1970 the top 2% and the bottom 17% of the Nigerian population earned the same total amount of income, but by 2000, the top 2% had the same income as the bottom 55%.

Poverty and inequality in Nigeria has strong regional concentrations, resulting in significant levels of regional disparity. As Table 1 shows, poverty is considerably higher in the North than the South of the country (National Bureau of Statistics, 2005: 22).

Table 1: Trends in Poverty Levels by Zones (1980-2004)

Zone	1980	1985	1992	1996	2004
South South	13.2	45.7	40.8	58.2	35.1
South East	12.9	30.4	41.0	53.5	26.7
South West	13.4	38.6	43.1	60.9	43.0
North Central	32.2	50.8	46.0	64.7	67.0
North East	35.6	54.9	54.0	70.1	72.2
North West	37.7	52.1	36.5	77.5	71.2

Source: National Bureau of Statistics

3. Oil, poverty and the Niger Delta

3.1 Oil and the 'resource curse'

The resource curse argument is well documented and there is not scope to explore it in this short brief. Suffice it to say, that resource endowments – such as oil, gas, diamonds, hardwoods – can become a 'curse' in the face of the political incentives and policy failures they generate (Robinson et al., 2006). Nigeria is the world's 13th largest oil producer, and the 6th largest in OPEC. In the domestic sector, from 1970 to 1999, oil generated almost \$231 billion for the Nigerian economy, constituting between 21 and 48 percent of GDP. Nigeria has an estimated oil reserve of 32 billion barrels – sufficient for 37 years at the current rate of production (Heymans and Pycroft, 2003). Oil dominates the Nigerian economy. Between 2000 and 2004, oil accounted for around 79.5% of total government revenues and around 97% of foreign exchange revenues (UNDP, 2006).

This rise in oil wealth has not translated into significant increases in living standards in Nigeria, however. In fact, the rise in poverty and inequality coincides with the discovery and export of oil in Nigeria. As Sala-i-Martin and Subramanian (2003:4) show, in 1965, when oil revenue was about US\$33 per capita, GDP per capita was US\$245. In 2000, when oil revenues were US\$325 per capita, GDP per capita was stalled at the 1965 level. Evidence such as this has led to widespread acceptance that Nigeria has suffered from the resource curse and according to Sala-i-Martin and Subramanian (2003:24), waste and poor institutional quality stemming from oil has been primarily responsible for Nigeria's poor long-run economic performance.

3.2 The Niger Delta

The Niger Delta region is the area covered by the natural delta of the Niger River and the areas to the east and west. The broader Niger Delta region consists of nine states (Abia, Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo, Imo, Ondo and Rivers) and 185 local governments (UNDP, 2006: 44). The estimated regional population is nearly 30 million people. Difficult topography encourages people to gather in small communities. Of the estimated 13,329 settlements in the Niger Delta, approximately 94% have populations of less than 5000 people (UNDP, 2006: 15).

The oil boom in Nigeria has been driven by oil extracted from the Niger Delta region. Oil wealth, from the Niger Delta region, is largely responsible for sustaining the Nigerian Federation (UNDP, 2006: 62). Despite fuelling much of Nigeria's economic growth, the Niger Delta is somewhat marginalised from Nigeria's national development. Essentially, there is a significant disconnect between the wealth the region generates for the Nigerian Federation and the transnational oil companies extracting oil from the region, and the region's human development progress.

Analysis of poverty and human development indicators paints a dismal picture for the Niger Delta. Poverty incidence increased in the Niger Delta between 1980 and 2004 as Table 2 shows.

Table 2: Incidence of Poverty in the Niger Delta, 1980-2004

	1980	1985	1992	1996	2004
Nigeria	28.1	46.3	42.7	65.6	54.4
Edo/Delta	19.8	52.4	33.9	56.1	Delta 45.35 Edo 33.09
Cross River	10.2	41.9	45.5	66.9	41.61

Imo/Abia	14.4	33.1	49.9	56.2	Imo 27.39 Abia 22.27
Ondo	24.9	47.3	46.6	71.6	42.15
Rivers/Bayelsa	7.2	44.4	43.4	44.3	Rivers 29.09 Bayelsa 19.98

Source: National Bureau of Statistics

The region's human development index is 0.564 and while this is slightly higher than the Nigerian HDI of 0.448, the area rates far below regions or countries with similar gas or oil reserves (Venezuela is 0.772 and Indonesia is 0.697) (UNDP, 2006: 15). As well, when further disaggregated to the local government level, the *Niger Delta Human Development Report* shows that state and regional HDI scores mask inequalities in human development among oil producing communities. Significantly, local government areas without oil facilities appear to have fewer poor people than those with oil facilities (UNDP, 2006: 15). The report also concludes that decline in the HDI has been steeper for the Niger Delta states than the rest of Nigeria (UNDP, 2006: 137). In addition, the high earnings of some oil industry workers leads to localised price distortions, driving up prices and so constraining the purchasing power of ordinary people and making it difficult for many to meet the costs of basic needs such as housing, healthcare, transportation, education and good and making poverty more pervasive than conventional measures reveal (UNDP, 2006: 57).

4. Federal Government Policy Response: The Niger Delta Development Commission

4.1 Overview of the NDDC

The marginalisation and poor human development progress of the Niger Delta has not gone unnoticed by successive Nigerian federal governments. Since the late 1950s, the Niger Delta has been recognised as a region requiring special development attention (Osuoka, 2007: 5). A number of special agencies have been created by the federal government to address development in the Niger Delta. These have included the Niger Delta Basin Development Board, established in 1965 and the Oil Minerals Producing Areas Development Commission, established in 1992 (Osuoka, 2007: 5). When the current federal administration came into power in 1999, it established a new body called the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) to offer a lasting solution to the socio-economic difficulties of the Niger Delta Region (UNDP, 2006: 31). In 2006, the NDDC launched the Niger Delta Regional Development Master Plan, which states the development goals and objectives of the Niger Delta. For the foundation phases (2006-2010), the key programmes are the economy, physical infrastructure, human and institutional resources, human and community needs and natural environment. Focusing on some key elements, these will seek to create an enabling environment for enterprise; improve the functioning of key markets – and access to them; increase agricultural (and fisheries) productivity and micro-investment; protect and develop human capabilities; protect natural resources and mitigate harm. (For a summary of the NDDC Master Plan Programs and Areas of Focus, see Annex 1).

The NDDC clearly aims to have a redistributory function, with nearly a quarter of the funding coming from the Federal Government¹, with additional contributions expected from oil companies operating in the Niger Delta, the Ecological Fund and States of

¹ for 78% of the US\$341 million that was disbursed to the NDDC between 2001 and 2004

the delta. Unfortunately, States have yet to contribute to the Commission, and oil companies are still wrangling over how much they should contribute (UNDP, 2006: 31-32).

Developing the Niger Delta is one of President Yar'Adua's seven priorities identified in his '7-Point Agenda' (World Bank, 2007) and the federal government's 2008 budget proposal commits 69 billion naira (US\$566) to the NDDC for 2008 (more than twice last year's federal budget allocation). Both of these are indicators of the Federal Government's commitment to tackling the poverty and marginalisation of the region (UN Integrated Regional Information Networks, 2007).

4.2 Impact of the NDDC

The NDDC *Annual Report 2005* lists a number of key achievements, including the initiation 2047 infrastructural development projects across the Niger Delta, covering roads and bridges, electrification, water supply, canalization and school construction. A range of human development programmes were established, including youth empowerment programmes and skills acquisition programmes (Niger Delta Development Commission, 2005).

But assessment of development in the Niger Delta since the NDDC was established shows that poverty reduction progress has been slow, particularly given the Niger Delta's substantial natural resource endowments and additional federal government resources. And, as mentioned above, according to UNDP, the worsening of the HDI has been more acute for the Niger Delta states than for the rest of Nigeria (UNDP, 2006: 137). However, we do not really know how effective the NDDC is. We also do not know much about which programme components are more or less effective at achieving the programme's overarching goals. This is a really important data gap, as - given the programme's multisectoral nature - clearly attributable information about causality would go a long way to telling us which approaches might be best at reducing spatial disparities and regional inequalities.

Although this lack of information is disappointing, it is not unusual. We find data about programme inputs and eventual development outcomes (e.g. poverty rates, economic growth rates) tend to be better than for intermediate outputs and processes (Bedi, et al., 2006). Also, although we do know that the Niger Delta is still doing really badly – across a wide range of development indicators – we do not know the counterfactual. How bad would performance have been without the programme?

If we look at a range of indicators, we can see how significant the challenge still is. Disaggregated human development indicators paint a dismal picture. The prevalence rate of HIV/AIDS is among the highest in Nigeria (UNDP, 2006: 17). Energy availability is poor, despite the region providing the United States with one fifth of its energy needs (UNDP, 2006: 25). For example, in Bayelsa State is not linked to the national electric power grid (UNDP, 2006: 110). Similarly, while the delta region has a dense network of freshwater distributaries and vast groundwater reserves, no part of the region has a regular supply of potable water (UNDP, 2006: 110). Some health indicators are below the national average. As Table 3 indicates, the Niger Delta region (South-South) has a higher than average infant mortality rate and the highest post-neonatal mortality rate in Nigeria (UNDP, 2006: 125). The region also fares comparatively poorly in terms of accessing health treatment. For example, only 25.1% of children with acute respiratory infections and fever sought medical treatment from health providers, compared with 49.5% in the North Central region and 52.6% in the South West region (UNDP, 2006: 123). The South-South zone also had the largest proportion of births attended by traditional attendants (UNDP, 2006:

123). Interestingly, in a 2003 NDHS survey, the Niger Delta had the largest proportion (34.8%) of respondents identifying the distance between their residence and health facilities as a major problem. In this same survey, nationally, 30.4% of women cited a lack of money as a barrier to accessing health care. In the Niger Delta, this was 47.1% and the highest regional figure (UNDP, 2006: 125).

Table 3: Child and Infant Mortality Rates by the Regions of Nigeria

	Neonatal mortality	Post-neonatal mortality	Infant mortality	Child mortality	Under-five mortality
National	53	56	109	121	217
North-Central	53	49	103	70	165
North-East	61	65	125	154	260
North-West	55	59	114	176	269
South-East	34	32	66	40	103
South-South	53	68	120	63	103
South-West	39	30	69	47	113

Source: NDHS 2003

Additionally, there is an intense feeling among the people of the Niger Delta that they should be doing far better: the Niger Delta has a self-assessment poverty rate of 74.8% (UNDP, 2006: 58).

These indicators, which are particularly shocking when the resource endowments of the region are considered, are driven by range of factors. A recent workshop, convened by the World Bank and comprising a highly distinguished panel of experts on the Niger Delta titled 'Social and Conflict Analysis of the Nigerian Niger Delta' identified eight issues that characterise the Niger Delta (World Bank, 2007b). This provides an excellent basis for a synthesis of the current situation.

1. *Social and political exclusion:* The two post-military national elections (1999 and 2003) are widely agreed to have been extensively rigged in the Niger Delta states, with fraudulent results sustained by violence and threat and so leaving a serious democratic deficit. The political process is held in complete mistrust and considered exclusionary and corrupt. Formal institutions have failed and local customary institutions have become eroded. Youth have turned to violence and militancy to challenge the government and extort oil from oil companies (World Bank, 2007b).
2. *Economic exclusion:* Despite substantial resource flows to the State government, and significant natural resource endowments the people of the Niger Delta are destitute. The panel described the Niger Delta as an 'iconic representation of destitution amongst the possibility of wealth'. The people of the Niger Delta feel excluded from the wealth generated by their resource rich region – substantiated by the region having the highest rate of unemployment in Nigeria (World Bank, 2007b). Remote rural communities have very limited economic opportunities and often cannot tap directly into the employment

benefits of the oil industry because they lack capital resources or skills (UNDP, 2006:17).

3. *Poor governance and corruption:* Corruption, especially at the state and local level, is endemic and at the root of many of the region's problems. Large sums are received at both the state and local level, but there is little evidence of this being applied to productive development endeavours. This situation exacerbates the sense of hopelessness, exclusion and anger of the citizenry of the Niger Delta, who have lost faith in existing governance structures (World Bank, 2007b).
4. *Poor infrastructure and public service delivery:* The panel (World Bank, 2007b) describes the current situation as 'akin to a human emergency' and UNDP describes infrastructure and social services as 'generally deplorable (UNDP, 2006: 15). The general neglect of infrastructure, often rationalised by the difficult terrain of the region, has worsened the population's access to fundamental services (UNDP, 2006: 16). For example, the town of Edeoha, in the state of Rivers, lacks basic services such as water, education, healthcare and electricity and jobs are hard to come by. There is no local government office in the town, the primary schools lacks chairs and desks, and the nearest hospital, which lacks medicine and equipment, is twenty kilometres away (International Crisis Group, 2006: 17). Analysis above highlights the poor human development of the region.
5. *Environmental degradation:* Oil exploration and production gas led to environmental damage on many levels: land, water and air pollution, depleted fishing grounds and the disappearance of wetlands (World Bank, 2007b). These environmental changes have had significant implications for local livelihoods, and the alienation of people from their resources and land has led to the inefficient use of resources that remain and poor or inequitable land use practices (UNDP, 2006: 17). Measures to counterbalance environmental damage are inadequate and this is a major focus of community discontent (World Bank, 2007b).
6. *Escalating violence and disorder:* The democratisation of the means of violence has emerged, as the state has lost monopoly power over the use of force. This violence has emerged in many forms, and exists between communities over host community status, resource and land claims and surveillance contracts; within communities over compensation distribution; between communities and oil companies; and between communities and security forces. The fault lines of these conflicts often coincide with, or are justified in terms of, ethnic differences (World Bank, 2007b). Persistent conflict, while in part a response to the region's poor human development, also serves to entrench it as it is a constant drag on the region's economic performance and opportunities for advancement (UNDP, 2006: 16).
7. *A vicious cycle of violence:* Conflict has become militarised, with the intensive proliferation of arms, sabotage, hostage taking and the emergence of warlords and youth cults. This process is fuelled by the illegal bunkering of oil fuels (World Bank, 2007b). Since January 2006, the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) have been central to this violence (International Crisis Group, 2006:i).
8. *Landownership:* There is much juridical ambiguity over land rights. While the Land Use Decree of 1978 formally vested all land in State governments, the

expropriation of this has never been accepted by the individuals, families and communities that have made customary claims to the land. This has resulted in a double system, and combined with weak judicial systems has resulted in long running conflicts and ambiguity at many levels (World Bank, 2007b).

4.3 The influence of politics and institutions

Osuoka (2007:1) argues that the Niger Delta case demonstrates how huge investment in export-focused non-renewable resource extraction can exacerbate conflict and local impoverishment rather than promote development. In sum, he argues that the Niger Delta is characterised by massive poverty, environmental degradation occasioned by the exploitation of crude oil and natural gas and corrupt systems of governance (Osuoka, 2007: 1). Essentially, while the Niger Delta produces oil wealth that accounts for the bulk of Nigeria's foreign earnings, these vast revenues have not translated into improved human development outcomes for the Niger Delta population (UNDP, 2006: 14). The slow pace of systemic reforms, and lack of jobs, water, schools, electricity and clinics in some parts of the Delta have boosted support for insurgents such as MEND (International Crisis Group, 2006: i).

The challenge is that this federal government support for development in the Niger Delta – both politically and financially – is problematic in itself. A key criticism of the NDDC (and the development planning institutions that have failed in the past) is that it is an imposition from the federal government and a top down approach to development planning and implementation. Local communities had no say in determining the composition of the NDDC and it primarily comprises Federal Government representatives. It is therefore perceived by local communities – who have experienced political marginalisation historically - as existing to facilitate the political goals of the ruling party (UNDP, 2006: 35; Osuoka, 2007: 6).

In addition, federal government support – again politically and financially – is just one of or a range of challenges. Nigeria's federal system gives much responsibility and autonomy to state and local governments and therefore their effectiveness is central to development progress. While before 1999 local governments often lacked funds, increases in crude oil prices have resulted in the federal government distributing additional revenue to state and local governments. The problem, it seems, is institutional weakness and endemic corruption at the local and state levels of government, which results in the ineffective delivery and implementation of development policies and programs (Osuoka, 2007:6). For example, Human Rights Watch finds that in Rivers State, which is the wealthiest state in Nigeria, local governments have failed to make more than nominal investments in education and health. This results in a stark contradiction between Rivers' wealth and the deprivation experienced by many people living there (Human Rights Watch, 2007: 2).

5. Conclusion

'First nature' geographic challenges, associated with remoteness and challenging topography, provide a difficult geographical context for the Niger Delta's development. These geographic challenges, and the small, separated communities this difficult topography leads to, presents governments, and communities, with a range of 'second nature' geographic challenges in relation to infrastructure, service delivery and economic development.

These first and second nature geographic challenges are not the only challenges constraining poverty reduction and development in the Niger Delta, however. The resource curse has indeed gripped Nigeria, and the Niger Delta, and the failure of the

country and this region to translate the enormous oil wealth derived from this region into human development progress is emblematic of this. Indeed, the Niger Delta case demonstrates how natural resource endowments do not necessarily translate into welfare gains. There are a number of factors, such as corruption and weak institutional capacity, which can hinder this. In addition, and importantly, the inflationary impact of rich, heavy industry can have significant implications for the purchasing power of local communities. Poor human capital development hinders these communities from being able to derive direct benefits from this economic activity in the form of employment. These factors combine to leave the community feeling marginalised and in the case of the Niger Delta, has spurred much conflict and violence, which has its own poverty inducing effects.

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Annex 1: NDDC Master Plan Programs and Areas of Focus

Programme	Areas of Focus
Economy	<p>Reduce poverty by pursuing improvement of productivity among the vast rural agricultural/fishing populace</p> <p>Combat waste of primary products by promoting processing and storage</p> <p>Pursue rural micro-enterprise and SMEs in the urban and peri-urban areas</p> <p>Promote ICT services</p> <p>Promote human- and environmental endowment-based economic activities e.g. sports and tourism</p> <p>Promote industrial development especially of agro-businesses but also light manufactures</p> <p>Promote local content for the vast oil sector for economic growth and job creation</p>
Physical infrastructure	<p>Create an enabling environment for enterprise</p> <p>Improve access to raw materials and product market</p> <p>Enhance competitiveness of local producers by reducing stand-alone Infrastructural burdens</p> <p>Designate and equip growth centres and growth poles across the region for decentralised and accelerated development.</p>
Human and institutional resources	<p>Upgrade the quality of education across all tiers for enhanced contribution and productivity</p> <p>Fortify governance for effective planning, plan implementation and optimal deployment of resources for development</p> <p>Manage and prevent conflict</p>
Human and community needs	<p>Address huge deficiencies in healthcare facilities, water and other amenities in the rural areas to slash infant and maternal mortality, morbidity rates from preventable and curable diseases like Malaria</p> <p>Arrest the spread of HIV/AIDS</p> <p>Improve urban housing to cater for growing population and reduce slum growth</p> <p>Improve availability of cost-effective and environment-friendly mass transit options</p> <p>Address gender gaps in access to education and economic opportunities</p> <p>Improve law, order and security in the region</p>

	Proactively prevent conflict
Natural environment	<p>Take full stock of the adverse impact of past oil & gas, industrial and individual activities on the environment</p> <p>Pursue remediation and prevention/control of further degradation</p> <p>Promote sustainable exploitation of natural resources including non-timber forest products (NTFPs)</p> <p>Clear invasive species</p>