

Challenges of Good Governance in the Niger Delta: Implication for Development

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Abstract

It has been acknowledged universally that good governance is key to development and a basic ingredient to spur sustainable development goals and reduce the incident of abject poverty. Consequently, leaders are encouraged to embrace the basic tenets of good governance to stimulate the needed development in order to realize the goals of the sustainable development goals (SDGs). However, in the Niger Delta region, there is obvious lack of good governance which is needed to drive the objects of the SDGs. The region has been blighted by large scale underdevelopment despite the fact that the region is the cash cow of the nation, where the bulk of the nation's wealth of crude oil and gas are sourced from. One of the immediate fallout of the absence of good governance in the region is the total absence of basic infrastructure and the alarming high rate of poverty prevalent in the region. Entrenched and institutionalized large scale looting at the state and local government levels and total neglect of the area by the federal government is being cited as responsible for the dismal level of underdevelopment in the region. The area is a victim of endemic corruption and bad governance which has continued to retard the attainment of the SDGs and increase poverty. The high level of underdevelopment has in turn generated violent conflict in the region, which is detrimental to attainment of SDGs.

Keywords: *Good governance, Wealth, Corruption, Leaders and SDGs.*

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Background to the Study

The need for good governance is a common concern to all countries and has dominated the front burner of development discourse in the last 30 years, because of its pivotal role in engendering development and eradicating poverty.

Consequently, the need for good governance has attracted increasing attention from scholars, policy makers, international development agencies, etc. This is because sustained development is hinged on the effective application of the ethos and principles of good governance. The object of good governance is to make public office holders responsive, accountable, subject to the people. Thus it is the responsibility of governments at all levels to formulate appropriate policies, make decisions that impact on the generality of the people positively and implements such decisions effectively.

Porter and Sabine (2000), cited in (Azeez 2009) Opined that “good governance is the competence of government to formulate appropriate policies, make timely decisions, implement effectively and deliver services: the extent which a government is perceived and accepted as legitimate, committed to improving the public welfare and responsiveness to the needs of the citizens; competent to assure law and order and deliver public services, able to create an enabling environment for productive activities equitable in its conduct”.

Associated with good governance are citizen participation in decision making, consensus building where decisions are based on widespread agreement, transparency in decision making process, responsiveness to the needs of the citizenry, effective and efficient provision of basic services and ensuring equitability and inclusiveness in the distribution of resources benefits without marginalizing any group (Piece, 2012). Also, most foreign direct investment inflow is predicated on the practice of good governance and International donor agencies are more likely to direct their resources to countries with proven track of good governance. Therefore, implied in the above analysis is sound fiscal management and public financial accountability, effective state institutions to formulate and implement national development policies and goals aimed at achieving sustainable development goals (SDGs).

In view of the overall importance of sustainable development goals (SDGs) for the realization of good governance at all levels of governments, the global community through the UN General Assembly saw the urgent need to adopt sustainable development goals(SDGs) in 2015. On 17th July, 2015 the UN General Assembly's open working Group (OWG) on SDGs forwarded a proposal for SDGs to the General Assembly which were adopted. It contained 17 goals with 169 targets covering a broad range of sustainable development issues, which also borders on good governance. These are ending poverty and hunger, improving health and making cities more, combating climate change, equitable and qualitative education, achieving gender equality, access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy. Others are conserving and sustainable use of the oceans, seas and marine resources, reduce inequality within and among countries, decent work and economic growth, responsible consumption and production, clean water and sanitation etc. (Wikipedia, 2015).

The necessity for good governance is of more paramount concern to developing countries in Africa due to their low level of attainment of the SDGs, underdevelopment and alarming rate of poverty. It is pertinent to note that the need for the good governance is more compelling in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria due to its high level of underdevelopment and high proportion of people living in poverty despite the fact that the region is the cash cow of the nation.

In spite of the evident and abundant resources (including crude oil and gas, which is the source of the wealth of the country, generating over 90 % of foreign exchange and government revenues) the Niger delta region paradoxically represents one of the extreme situation of underdevelopment and poverty, lacking virtually all the indices of development (Ibaba, 2005).

A school of thought which seemingly reflects the trend of opinion in the Niger Delta region argues that the pervasive level of underdevelopment and the high rate of poverty ravaging the region are due to lack of good governance and a logical outcome of the peculiar nature of Nigerian federalism which has been shaped by ethnic based political dominion. Similarly, the above view is also shared by Okoko and Nna (1997) who contended that “the plight of the oil producing area is a reflection of the political domination and economic marginalization by the major ethnic groups”, which have inexorably led to the current undesirable state of underdevelopment and poverty in the sub-region.

A corollary of the above assertion is that the oil companies have colluded with the federal government through sub-standard environmental protection laws, undermined the economics of the communities through oil based environmental degradation without the provision of viable alternatives (Naanen, 1995) Closely connected to this is the charge by the oil producing communities of criminal neglect and nonchalance shown in the provision of development infrastructure by the three tiers of government and the failure of oil companies to adhere to the philosophy of corporate social responsibility, (CSR).

Corroborating this view point, the current level of underdevelopment and poverty have been aptly explained as the consequence of lack of good governance and the character of politics being practiced by the three tiers of government. Apparently, the lack of good governance has reduced politics to political clientism, prebendelism and corruption, which have failed to make public officers accountable to the people of the sub-region.

Scholars and opinion leaders have argued that the region need not blame exclusively the perverted oil wealth distributive mechanism of the Nigerian State, the environmental problems generated by the oil companies and their nonchalance attitude towards the provision of development infrastructure but also the weak socio-economic foundation, compradoria leaders of their areas, (Political leaders, elites, chiefs, and opinion leaders) who have stolen the peoples' wealth.

Clearly, underdevelopment and poverty concerns in the region are not because of lack of resources to lift it out of underdevelopment but because the resources are not utilized for the overall benefits of the people of the region. Thus the irony is that instead of the natural resources source from the area being instrumental in engendering development, attainment of SDGs and alleviating abject poverty, they rather have posed a constraint in the lines of a “Dutch disease”, deepening underdevelopment in the region. There is nothing on ground to show that the Niger Delta States and Local government areas have received such huge sum of funds with respect to the provision of socio infrastructure and human capital development meant to lift the people out of crass underdevelopment. The question that readily comes to mind is, what is responsible for this sorry state of underdevelopment in the Niger Delta region. From their performance since the return of democracy in 1999, the region's leaders lacked all the variables that make for good governance, which can bring about the attainment of SDGs, such as accountability, transparency etc. These are imperative to drive the needed development, eradicate poverty and realize SDGs in the region.

Good governance is of essence in the Niger Delta region, because it would provide platform for governments at all levels to enact appropriate laws, formulate and implement policies that can deliver services to the majority of the people. (Piece, 2012)

In order for development to thrive in the area and attain the goals of SDGs, good governance is also required which is essentially about fostering trust, bond and ensuring the accountability of decision makers. (Piece, 2012)

For the people of Niger Delta to enjoy the dividends of democracy, they need good governance and leadership that should also offer reasonable strategic direction, which is capable of preparing effective plans and formulating sound policies that can serve the interest of the majority. Therefore this paper aims to investigate the relationship between good governance and the sorry state of underdevelopment and poverty in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria.

Good Governance and Development

Various studies have shown that there is a casual relationship between good governance and attainment of SDGs . Studies on the Millennium Development Goals have shown that in many cases, sustained progress towards the MDGS has been underpinned by good governance and women empowerment and hampered by their absence (Okara, 2011). The concept centres on the responsibility of government and governing bodies to meet the needs of the masses as opposed to select groups in the society.

It is pertinent to note that good governance is a fundamental requirement for promoting development, attendant eradication of poverty and attainment of SDGs all over the world. (Okara, 2011) Many world leaders have supported the view that good governance promotes development and eradication of poverty. Former UN secretary – General Kofi Annan expressed his opinion when he asserted:

Good governance is perhaps the single most important factor in eradicating poverty and promoting development. (Graham, Amos & Plumtre, 2003)

The literature on good governance emphasized that in order for good governance to be effective, government and institutions at all levels that are entrusted with governance must be accountable to the people that they serve. In addition, public officers given responsibility to lead must do so in transparent and accountable manner.

Okara (2011) posited that good governance, while is it a necessary condition to engender development , it is however not sufficient if visionary leadership is lacking. Good governance and quality leadership are indeed inseparable for effective delivery of service. Good governance rests on the twin values of inclusiveness and accountability. Inclusiveness implies equal participation and equal treatment. Indeed good governance improves growth by improving the business environment through enhance policy, implementation, higher investment and growth. The quality of policy is affected by the presence of inclusiveness combined with the external accountability mechanism. Further policy implementation largely depends upon the quality of public institutions, including the bureaucracy.

To a large extent universally the institutional and human capacities for governance determine the way in which the effectiveness of public policies and strategies are realized especially in service delivery through equity, participation, responsiveness and the rule of law. These elements are crucial for the attainment of SDGs, human development and eradication of poverty in the society, since ineffective institutions usually result in the greatest harm to the poor and the vulnerable. (Piece, 2012).

The World Bank carried out a study to establish the relationship between good government and development. The Bank used over 100 indicators, using a composite index of good governance, based on perception of voice and accountability, political effectiveness, regulatory quality, the rule of law and the levels of corruption. The research found a strong correlation between its governance indicators and development (Sundaram, 2015).

Also, the United Nations Development Programme, (UNDP) enunciated principles of good governance which are critical to development and eradication of poverty (Graham, Amos & Plumtre, 2003). They are:

- A. Legitimacy - participation and consensus orientation
- B. Direction – Strategic vision
- C. Performance – Responsiveness, effectiveness and efficiency
- D. Accountability – Accountability and transparency
- E. Fairness – Equity and rule of law.

Corruption and Challenges of Good Governance in the Niger Delta

Maiangwa (2012) has noted that the Nigerian State “command and expend vast resources, but it cannot get things. Hence, the state has become the primary means for the accumulation of personal wealth”. Similarly, the theory of prebendalism, states that state offices are regarded as pretends that can be appropriated by office holders, who use them to generate material benefits for themselves and their cronies seteolu, (2005) quoted in

Maiangwa, (2012) posited that “clientism assists us to understand the mechanism of how class control legitimizes the lopsided distribution of resources among social groups and enhances states of the political elite”

Therefore, politics in the Niger Delta region is premised on prebendal and clientelism politics, which further enhances our comprehension of corruption and underdevelopment in the area. Since the return of democratic governance in 1999, the Niger Delta governors, local government chairman and other public office holders have been looting the wealth accruing to these states with impunity. In its report, the Commission for Africa in 2005 posited that “Nigeria has suffered from government that have looted the resources of the state: that could not or would not deliver services to their people; that in many cases were predatory, corruptly extracting their countries” (Maiangwa, 2012)

Ake (2000) posited that the greatest impediment to good governance is the political conditions, the prominent being the politics of self-aggrandizement and exploitation at the expense of promoting the general good of the people is the driving force for seeking political power. Also Ikporukpo (2001) averred that the prevailing perception in the region is that the people are being deprived of the benefits of oil and gas exploited and this has consequently generated underdevelopment and widespread poverty resulting from bad governance. Governance in the Niger Delta region is characterized by bad governance and high level of corruption both at the state and local government levels.

Pervasive corruption has been highlighted as responsible for the failure of government at all level to confront development challenges facing the people despite huge fund accruing from the region. It has been argued in several quarters that if government officials in the area have judiciously utilized the revenue accruing to their state and local government areas, for the benefit of the people through job creation, and infrastructural development, the region would have been described as a developed area.

Discussing how corruption had hampered development and SDGs in the Niger Delta, Maiangwa (2012) quoted Joseph Amberkedelin of South-South Element Progressives Union as saying that ' the amount of money that has accrued to South-South governors in the past nine years is enough , more than enough to transform the Niger Delta...if monies are being used judiciously and religiously , the monies that have come to the governors of the South-South today, we would not have the problems we are having in the Niger Delta... What are these people asking for anyway? Roads, Water, Electricity, School buildings and Furniture for these schools...The corruption among the governors in the South-South is enormous- the stealing is enormous'

To buttress the point that large scale corruption is prevalent in the region and has hampered development in Niger Delta states, two former Governors from the region have been convicted and jailed for corruption in the country since 1999. The former Governors of Bayelsa and Delta states, Diepreye Alameiyesigha and James Ibori were convicted and jailed for corruption after office. Earlier Mr. Alameiyesigha was impeached by the State Legislature for “gross misconduct, corruption and abuse of office in 2006 and subsequently tried and convicted by a Lagos High Court.

According to David Enweremadu (2009) during his first tenure in office (1999-2003) Mr. Alamieyeseigha and several officials of the State were investigated by the EFCC and ICPC for corruption. A notable case was an investigation by ICPC in 2003, accused the Governor of “approving several dubious contracts and payments totaling 1.7 billion naira in favour of fictitious companies”. He was also said to have awarded other contracts amounting to 667.58 million naira to another set of fictitious companies through the Bayelsa State Tender Board” which the governor presided.

Explaining further the high of mismanagement of public funds in Byelsa state, Enweremadu (2009) revealed that by 2005, all known indices of transparency and accountability have been jettisoned, while budgetary appropriations were exploited to enrich those in-charges. One common strategy adopted to siphon money was concentrating huge public expenditure on highly priced projects, which had no relevant on the people, while offered unlimited opportunities for officials to accumulate wealth. Conversely, important social services such as education, health, portable water and other anti-poverty schemes which offered fewer opportunities for primitive enrichment were underfunded.

Enweremadu (2009) also disclosed another type of corruption that was prevalent under Alamieyeseigha was direct payments to top officials in the State. For instance, the Governor in 2005 paid 100 million naira to each of the 24 members of the State House of Assembly for constituency development projects in their respective constituencies, amounting to 2.4 billion naira. The said payments were not captured in the 2005 budget.

Large scale and widespread corruption, mismanagement and misallocation of public funds as described above were not unique to Bayelsa state under Alamieyeseigha. Other Niger Delta States did not fare better. Enweremadu (2009) study also exposed the high level of corruption and mismanagement of public funds in Rivers State, from 1999-2003. Rivers State under Dr. Peter Odili from 1999-2003, witnessed mind bugging corruption cases, for instance, in the 2006 budget estimate of 160 billion naira, the Governor allocated 10.07 billion naira to maintain his office, 3 billion naira for foreign trips, the 32 members of the State Legislature equally had 690 million as travelling allowances. In addition Dr. Odili budgeted \$10 million for catering, gifts and souvenirs, \$38 million for two helicopters in 2006 (Maiangwa, 2012).

Besides, the former governor of the state, Rotimi Amaechi was implicated in an investigation by EFCC of corruption case involving the alleged theft of about N100 billion when he was the speaker of the Rivers State House of Assembly, between 1999- 2007 (Maiangwa, 2012). Also, according to the Economic and Financial Crime Commission (EFCC) the former governor of Delta State, James Ibori stole about \$292 million while governor of the State between 1999-2003 (Maiangwa, 2012). Supporting the assertion that State funds meant for development purpose are often embezzled, Julius Ihonvbere, a political scientist, added “that if you go to the Niger Delta, some states that have collected over 600 million since 1999, have nothing to show for the huge money” (Vanguard Newspaper, July 15th 2007).

The above shows that most States Governors in the region spent their monthly to further their interest. The political leadership in the region lacks the necessary focus capable of stimulating and engendering development and promotes economic growth. Rather, public office holders are obsessed with desires to misappropriate the wealth of their states (Fagbadebo, 2007).

The 1999 constitution, as amended, made provision of 13 percent derivation to the oil producing states in the Niger Delta, this meant increased revenue location to these states. But there are no concrete signs of development in the region to account for this huge financial inflow to the region. The Niger Delta States are not more developed when compared to States in other parts of the country that do not received 13 % derivation since 1999.

Implication for the Attainment of the SDGs

One of the immediate fallout of absence of good governance in the region is the total absence of basic infrastructure and the high rate of poverty in the area. The levels of underdevelopment is perplexing and intriguing given that the area is the source of revenue for the country, were the bulk of the crude oil and gas resources are source from. It presents a paradox that the region is rich but underdeveloped. The region is endowed with crude oil and gas, with this condition; it should rank among the richest in the world that should have no business with underdevelopment.

The Niger Delta has been noted as the region with the poorest infrastructural decay in the country, such as bad roads, epileptic or no power, lack of access to portable water, poor health institutions, poor sanitation, poor housing, massive poverty and the high unemployment. The abrasive high rates of poverty and underdevelopment have also been substantiated by research carried out by NBS in 2010. The Nigeria Poverty profile report 2010, by the National Bureau of statistics in 2012, gave a frightening insight of the endemic rate of poverty and underdevelopment in the region.

For instance, the South -South zone has absolute poverty rate of 55.9% relative poverty rate of 63.8% and general poverty rate of 56% (NBS, 2012). In addition, the paper situate the crisis in the region to bad governance, whereby the bulk of the revenue is diverted by political office holders with little or none impacting on the ordinary people has engendered large scale underdevelopment in the region.

It has resulted in vicious conflict that has again undermined development and attainment of the SDGs in the region. Conflict prevents the sustainable management of natural resources, undermined the fight against poverty, prevents foreign investment, destroys infrastructure, creates famines, creates human insecurity, causes death, and prevents planning for the future generation, all these are consequence of lack of good governance in the region.

The kind of conflicts witnessed in the region can be likened to the Hobbesian state of nature; a state where man is an enemy unto man; Hobbes points out (cited in Ibaba, 2005). In such condition, there is no place for industry; because the fruit thereof is uncertain, and consequently no culture of the earth ... no commodious building ... no knowledge of the face of the face earth, and which is worst of all continuing fear, and danger of violent death.

The conflict resulting from bad governance has taken different dimension; kidnapping, large scale illegal bunkering, pipelines vandalism destruction of oil producing facilities, rivalry between cult groups, communities clashes, destruction of communities, killing etc, these unwholesome activities are seriously undermining development in the Niger Delta region

Conclusion and Recommendations

Lack of good governance in the Niger Delta region has been identified as the greatest obstacle to development and realization of the SDGs in the area. It is against this background that despite the increasing funds accruing to the area vis-à-vis massive underdevelopment and the alarming rate of poverty prevalent in the region that we can state that the pervasive levels of underdevelopment may not be entirely blamed on the activities of oil companies and the Nigerian states but bad governance and corruption of public office holders in the region.

The paper asserts that of all the problems that undermined development in the Niger Delta, political corruption arising from bad governance is cited as the greatest impediment that stifles SDGs in the area. It is clear that the region is a victim of high level of corruption and bad governance which have retarded the development and attainment of SDGs in the region.

In the view of the above, the paper recommends:

1. The speedy prosecution of corrupt cases against present and former public office holders in the courts.
2. Public office holders in the Niger Delta region should be made to be accountable to the people
3. The repeal of immunity clause in the 1999 constitution as amended, so serving governors can be prosecuted while in office.
4. Also, a merit award should be given to public office holders who show exemplary leadership skills, this will serve as an incentive to others to devote more effort to development. Public office holders should be made accountable to their people.
5. Civil Society Groups should wake up to their responsibilities of checkmating the activities of governments in the region.

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