

**Full Length Research**

# Elites and Conflict in Nigeria: A Case Study of the Niger Delta Insurgency

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The Elites in any given society play a significant role in the development, management and resolution of conflict in such society. The political and other elites in the Nigerian state, especially in the troubled Niger Delta region of Nigeria are expected to do the same. However, this seems not to be the case as this study would show. In the last two decades, the oil belt of Nigeria had been engulfed by violence. The inhabitants of the region were demanding for better deal from the central government in terms of development of the region, provision of social amenities, employment for the teeming youth of the region, among others. This paper examined the role the elites, particularly those from the region had played in furthering and sustaining the conflict in the region. The paper provided answers as to how transparent and accountable were the elites in the management of the resources of the region. The paper argued that the elites did not judiciously manage the resource of the region and this had contributed to poverty, unemployment, and underdevelopment of the region which had exacerbated conflict in the region. The paper recommended, among others, the recruitment and subsequent elections of people of worthy character or integrity into office who would judiciously manage the limited resources of the region, development of the region by all tiers of government, among others. The paper adopted historical, descriptive and analytical methods by relying on secondary sources of data, such as books, journals, periodicals, newspapers and internet materials.

**Key words:** Elite, Conflict, Nigeria, Niger Delta, Insurgency

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## INTRODUCTION

The name Nigeria was coined by Miss Flora Shaw later Mrs. Lord Lugard (cited in Gberevbie, & Oni, 2014). The Nigerian state is a classic example of the disappointment of the African postcolonial state venture. Nigeria is situated in the tropics, on the eastern frontier of the Gulf

of Guinea on the West Africa. She shares border with Chad and Niger republics in the North, Cameroun in the East, Benin Republic in the West and Atlantic Ocean in the South (cited in (Otuene, 2006). It has a total area of about 923,768 square kilometres (km<sup>2</sup>) out of which



Source: <http://www.mapsofworld.com/nigeria/nigeria-political-map.html> Accessed on 15/10/15  
**Figure 1:** Map Of Nigeria Showing The 36 States Of The Federation And Federal Capital.

13,000 km<sup>2</sup> constitutes water and the remaining 910,768 km<sup>2</sup>, land. She is the most populous black nation on earth, with an estimated population of about 181,562, 056 (<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ni.html> accessed on 2/9/16). The country is also rich in resources such as crude oil, gold, coal, natural gas, limestone, copper, rubber, uranium, diatomite, bauxite, timber and many others (cited in Otuene, 2006 ).

Nigeria is Africa's leading oil producing nation with a daily production of 2.4 million barrels per day in 2015 (<http://www.statista.com/statistics/265195/oil-production-in-nigeria-in-barrels-per-day/>, accessed on 2/9/16) and she occupies the 13th position in the world (<http://www.africanvault.com/oil-producing-countries-in-africa> accessed on 2/9/16). She also has the second largest proven oil reserve in Africa estimated at 37 billion barrels

([http://www.opec.org/opec\\_web/en/about\\_us/167.htm](http://www.opec.org/opec_web/en/about_us/167.htm), accessed on 2/9/16) and the 10<sup>th</sup> largest in the world (<http://www.africanvault.com/oil-producing-countries-in-africa/> accessed on 2/9/16). Thus, oil is fundamental to the Nigerian economy. It is almost the only, source of the nation's revenue and the fiscal base of Nigeria's economic growth and development. Nigeria relies wholly on it to discharge its functions and sustain the economy.

Notwithstanding its tremendous human and natural resources, the nation has failed to successfully utilise its resources for improving the wellbeing of its people and the advancement of the country. Since attainment of

independence fifty-five (55) years ago, she has been finding it difficult to grapple with numerous challenges confronting it such as nation-building, economic problems, insurgencies in the Niger Delta and Boko Haram in the North-East. Below is the map of Nigeria showing the thirty- six (36) states that make the federation. See Figure 1

The Nigeria oil is situated in the Niger Delta and its presence has transformed the region into the "economic jewel in the Nigerian crown" (Imobighe, 2004, p. 101). The Niger Delta derives its name from River Niger and has been described by Ogundiya, (2011), as one of the prominent trouble spots in the world. It covers land areas of 70,000 square kilometres and this represents 7.5 percent of Nigeria's land mass and is occupied by 31million people ( Obi, & Rustad, 2011; Adebajoko & Ojua, 2013). Despite the abundant natural resources that the region paraded, it lacks basic infrastructures and social amenities. For instance, it has two (2) percent of federal roads, less than 30-40% of the settlements that have electricity; educational facilities are inadequate (Olusola, 2013).

Several reasons have been advanced for the conflict in the region. Ibaba, (2005), Omeje (2004; 2005; 2006), Müller (2010) and Madubuko, (2014) ascribed the conflict to the problem of obnoxious laws that governed the oil industry. Other scholars attributed the problems to the Nigerian federalism and politics of revenue allocation in the country (Aaron, 2015; Ajayi, 2013; Aworawo, 2013; Esikot, & Akpan, 2013; Ikunga & Wilson, 2013;

Ebegbulem, 2011; Omotosho, 2010; Ibaba, 2005; Orobator, Ifowodo, & Edosa, 2005; Ikporukpo, 1996).

While others attributed it to ecological debasement and human rights infringements (Aaron, 2006; Nwozor, 2010; Oshwofasa, Anuta & Aiyedogbon, 2012; Okumagba, 2012a; Raji, Grundlingh, & Abejide, 2013; Ebegbulem, Ekpe & Adejumo, 2013; Akpan, 2014; Osah, & Alao, 2014; Nnorom & Odigbo, 2015). Scholars such as Inokoba and Imbua (2010), Ojo, (2012), Ako (2012), Amadi and Abdullah (2012), Ndu and Agbonifoh (2014), Enuoh and Iyang (2014) and Nwankwo (2015) adduced poor corporate social obligation as factor responsible for the conflict.

For Idemudia and Ite (2006), married some of the factors together to give what they called an integrated explanation of the causes of the Niger Delta conflict. For them, economic and political factors are the root causes of the conflict in the region with environmental and social factors as the proximate and trigger causes respectively.

A critical appraisal of the works highlighted above show that the role played by the elites in the conflict was neglected in the explanation of the conflict in the region. Therefore, this paper will fill the gap in that direction.

It is against this background that this paper examines the role played by the elites, especially the elites from the Niger Delta in the conflict in the region. The study seeks to address the following question:

- I. How transparent and accountable are the elites in the management of the resources of the Niger Delta?

The paper is divided into six segments of which this introduction is a part. The second section is the conceptual clarification. Here an attempt is made to explain some of the concepts that are germane to the study. The next part examines the theoretical framework of this study, which is the elite theory. This theory will guide us in explaining the role of the elites in the conflict. The fourth segment discusses the evolution of the Niger Delta conflict as well as the agitations. The fifth section analyses the role of the elites in the Niger Delta imbroglio and the final part is the conclusion and recommendation.

## CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION

It is pertinent to attempt a clarification of the concepts of elite, conflict, Niger Delta and insurgency that are germane to the understanding and explanation of this paper.

## Elite

The concept "elite" is widely used in everyday discourse and academia. It has a long history and there is no consensus among scholars as to who introduced the concept into the social science lexicon- cum political science. Korom (2015) credited Vilfredo Pareto to have introduced the term into the political science lexicon in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Zuckerman (1977) credited Mosca as the originator of the concept.

According to Lasswell (1952, p. 6), "elites are the power holders of a body politic; they are the holders of high positions in a given society". By the same token, Soanes, Hawker, and Elliott (cited in Ibietan, & Ajayi, 2015, p. 15) see the elites as "group of people regarded as the best in a particular society or organization. In the same vein, Yamokoski and Dubrow, (cited in Lopez, 2013) define elites as actors controlling resources, occupying key positions and relating through power networks. Equally, Menges (cited in Azeez and Ibukunoluwa (2015, p. 152) sees the concept of elite as, "a descriptive term designating those who hold high positions in a society". For Azeez and Ibukunola (2015, p. 152) "elite is a group of persons exercising the major share of authority or influence within a larger group or society. That is, they are sets of people with the highest indices in their areas of endeavour".

A common feature of all the above definitions is that they are all too broad and we need to narrow down to specific and therefore for the purpose of this study, elite refers to the political or ruling elites that comprise of both elected and non-elected officials, economic elites and traditional rulers who exercise influence on policy making and execution.

## Conflict

It has been observed that conflict occupied the thinking of mankind more than any other issues and this is because it is the reason for the creation of history (Franks, 2006). There is no consensus among scholars as to what conflict is. There are those that see conflict as a natural phenomenon, others view it as an abnormal happening in society while others consider it as a necessary condition for growth and development of both individuals and society.

The difficulties in defining conflict stems from the fact that it failed to differentiate between it and its antecedent conditions (Pondy, 1967). According to Pondy (1967, p. 298), conflict has been used to describe antecedent conditions such as scarcity of resources and policy differences of conflictual behaviour; affective states such as hostility, anxiety, tensions and stress of the individuals involved in the conflict; cognitive states of the individuals such as their awareness of the conflicting situations and

lastly, conflictual behaviour ranging from passive to overt aggression. Another difficulty in the definition of conflict is that it relies on value laden terminology whereas a definition should be devoid of value in order to be analytical useful (Schmidt & Kochan, 1972, p. 359).

The term conflict is derived from a Latin word *confligere* meaning to strike together, to clash. This implies that it has to do with the actual encounter with arms. As Fink (1968) notes, it connotes a scuffle, or a *mêlée* specially one that is protracted and intense. Conflict is defined as 'a serious disagreement or argument; an incompatibility between opinions' (cited in Franks, 2006, p. 50). Similarly, Robbins (cited in Franks, 2006, p. 58), defines conflict as "all kinds of opposition or antagonistic interaction between two or more parties". For Boulding (cited in Oberschall, 1978, p. 291) conflict "is a situation of competition in which the parties are aware of the incompatibility of potential future positions and in which each party wishes to occupy a position that is incompatible with the wishes of the other."

### Concept of Conflict

For Dahrendorf (1959, p. 135) defined conflict as

All relations between sets of individuals that involve an incompatible difference of objective- i.e., in its most general form, a desire on the part of both contestants to obtain what is available only to one, or only in part-are, in this sense, relations of social conflict.

From the above definitions, conflicts are characterised by incompatibility of goals, involvement of two parties, the behaviour of the parties in the conflict is intended to thwart the effort of the others and it is over something. The study sees conflict as the antagonistic relationship between the people of Niger Delta and the central government over the control of the natural resources of the region.

### Niger Delta

As Saka, Azizuddin and Omede (2014), rightly note, there are different definitions of what constitutes Niger Delta. According to Saka et.al (2014), there are two definitions of Niger Delta namely geographical and political. The geographical definition of the Niger Delta sees Bayelsa, Delta and Rivers States as constituting the Niger Delta. This is based on the fact that the geographical word delta refers to the routes of the waterways which the River Niger created to empty its content into the Atlantic Ocean, forming a delta from where the name Niger Delta was derived and the above mentioned states are the channels through which it is

done (Omonisa, 2015).

The second defines Niger Delta as one of the six geo-political zones into which the country is divided. This is the South-South geo-political zone and it comprises of Akwa-Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross-River, Delta, Edo and Rivers States.

The last definition is the legal one which is based on the Act establishing the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) and which is also known as political Niger Delta (Saka, et.al, 2014; Etekpe, 2007; Naneen, 2007; Omotola, 2006). And going by that definition, Abia, Akwa-Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross- River, Delta, Edo, Imo, Ondo and Rivers States constitute the Niger Delta.

### Insurgency

The concept of insurgency has no universally accepted definition and it is as old as warfare itself (Afolabi, Ola, & Bodunde, 2016). According to Kilcullen (2010), insurgency is the most widespread form of warfare today. Even though it is regarded in the military circle as an irregular or unconventional, it has been the commonest form of conflict throughout history.

The U.S. military field manual on insurgency (cited in Kilcullen, 2010, p. 1) defines insurgency as "an organized movement aimed at the overthrow of a constituted government through the use of subversion and armed conflict. By the same token, Drew (cited in Afolabi, et.al, 2016) sees insurgency as an armed revolution against the established political order. He conceived the term as a civil war.

In a like manner, Inchi (cited in Gwaza, 2015), sees insurgency as a violent move by a person or group of persons to resist or oppose the enforcement of law or running of government or revolt against constituted authority of the State or of taking part in insurrection. Frisch (2011, p.2), defines insurgency from the perspective of an organisation. According to him, insurgency refers to "a non-governmental organization working to affect social and/or political change through violent means against existing power structures and in a way that deliberately challenges the state's monopoly on the legitimate use of violence".

Metz (2007), contended that the core of insurgency is prolonged, irregular violence; political, legal and moral ambiguity; and the use of difficult terrain, mental warfare, and political enlistment. For him, insurgency arises when a group decides that the gap between their political anticipations and the openings or chances afforded them is unacceptable and can only be resolved by force.

From the foregoing definitions, insurgency can be described as an organised political movement that seeks to take over the administration of a state from legitimate government through violence means.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Prior to the introduction of the concept of elite into the political lexicon by the classical elite theorists notably Pareto, Mosca and Michel, political thinkers such as Plato, Aristotle and Machiavelli recommended a rule by special few class of the people. For example, Plato's ideal state was entrusted to a few individuals known as the philosopher kings (based on their reasons and capacity to rule). Aristotle held that some persons were fit to rule while others fit to be ruled. In one of his classic, he discussed six-fold classification of government which was based on who rule and in whose interest? He recommended the "polity" as the best form of government. Polity refers to a system of government in which few people rule in the interest of all. Machiavelli in his classic work Prince used interchangeably such terms as "nobles", "aristocrats" or "the great" as the society's elites (Korom, 2015). However, it is important to note that the aforementioned Italian thinkers were the first to systematically address the role of elites in contemporary society (Sadanandan, VinuKumar & Simon, 2013).

Elite theory can be categorised into two classical elite theory and modern or contemporary elite theory. The classical elite theory is represented by Gaetano Mosca, Vilfredo Pareto, and Robert Michels and their collective works are referred to as Italian School of elite theory (Sadanandan, Vinu Kumar & Simon, 2013). The modern or contemporary elite theory has these scholars as its representative Wright Mills, Jeremy Burnham, Michael Mann, Theda Skocpol and many others (Evans, 2006).

The major distinctions between the classical and modern elites are that; for the classical elite theorists, they believe that there is a single cohesive elite group which dominate the affairs of the society and not controlled by another group, whereas the modern or contemporary elite theorists hold the view that there exist many elite groups in a society and leadership emerges because of competition among them (Sadanandan & Sri. Vinu Kumar, 2013)

Another major difference between classical and modern elite is the assumption of the inevitability of the elite. For the classical elite theorists, they are of the view that the rule by the elite is inevitable in a society while the modern elite theorists reject this assumption (<https://revisesociology.wordpress.com/2011/11/29/5-elite-theory/> 17/12/2015).

Pareto, in his insightful analysis of the elite, divided the elite into governing and non-governing elite and ascribes to the group scholarly prevalence or predominance which differentiated them from the general population. Similarly, Mosca (cited in Odubajo & Alabi, 2014), divides society into the ruling class and the non-ruling class. The ruling /political class is the elites and the sub-elites. The sub-elite class in this setting alludes to technocrats, managers and civil servants, who are above the masses in terms of

access to opportunity from a state. The elite class which is made up of both governing and non- governing elites are highly organised compare to the masses and, as a result, they cannot be challenged by the masses (Odubajo, & Alabi, 2014)

Mitchel centred his analysis on bureaucracy and not the actual government undertakings. He contends that every social and political organization in a society is run by a few minorities which make the decisions (cited in Odubajo & Alabi, 2014). Michels (cited in Odubajo & Alabi, 2014) attributed the oligarchical tendencies of an organisation to the complex nature of the organisation, the nature of human being and the phenomenon of leadership. The classical elite theory of Pareto, Mosca and Michels will be our guide for this study and the theory is a reaction to democracy and socialism. The major thrust of elite theory is as follows:

- I. In every society, there is a minority that governed the society. According to Pareto minority rule is the reality in all societies whether simple or complex, developing or developed,
- II. Major decisions which influence society is taken by the elite, and these decisions more often than not are beneficial to the elite class rather than the generality of the people or masses.
- III. The mass of the people is controlled and manipulated by the elites, inertly accepting the distorted information used by the elites to justify their rule.
- III. The fundamental changes in the society take place when elite replaces another. Pareto (cited in Ibietan & Ajayi, 2015, p. 16) calls it "circulation of elites." According to Pareto, people are ruled by elites, where throughout human history, the continuous replacement of certain elites with another, new elites rise and old elites fall. In his words, "elites or aristocrats do not last. They live or take position in a certain time. History is a graveyard of aristocracies" (cited in Ibietan & Ajayi, 2015, p. 16).
- IV. The rule by the few minority is unavoidable in human society and the ruling minority is superior to the mass of the people who lack direction and capacity to govern and thereby require the leadership of elite for guidance.

The elite theory has been criticised on the grounds that:

- ❖ The notion of elite revolves around power and yet this concept is not well defined by the classical elite theorists and this makes it possible to

include in the ruling elites wielders of different sorts of powers and also those who wield no power (Tittenbrun, 2013).

- ❖ Similarly, Korom (2015) contends that the elite theorists failed to develop a clear-cut elite concept and that most of their arguments were general and lacking concrete substance.
- ❖ Dahl (1958) criticised the elite theory on the ground that no single elite exercised overall influence on every aspect of decision making. In his work *Who Governs?* Examine three political issues in New Haven, Connecticut namely: party nominations for local elective offices/ positions, public education and urban development.

He found that no single elite operating behind the scene, but rather many lines of cleavages and politicians who were responsible to the desires of the citizenry.

- ❖ It is too simplistic because it fails to differentiate between different political systems. It assumes that all political systems are the same. The genuine differences between democracy and authoritarianism are dismissed. They are all regarded as oligarchy.
- ❖ The argument that political elites are superior to the masses is simply an assertion. There are no objective criteria being provided by which we can measure the superior quality of the elites.

In spite of the limitations of the theory, it contributes to better comprehension of socio-political life of the society. Moreover, it is a useful guide in understanding how changes occur in political power. It is useful in the analysis of Niger Delta conflict, especially the role of the elites of the region in the crisis in that it directs our attention to the source of policy flow and whose interest such public policy serve. Besides, the elites of the region enjoy autonomy (relative political power and control of state institution). Put differently, the ruling elite in the region make, execute as well as interpret the laws that govern their region.

They decide who gets what, how and when? As Arowolo and Aluko(2012) rightly note, the level of stability and progress or development achieved in any society is a function of elites initiatives.

### **Niger Delta Conflict: Evolution and Agitation**

The Niger Delta region of Nigeria dubbed by Osaghae (2015) as the "Oil Republic" of Nigeria has been the theatre of militancy since restoration of democratic rule in 1999. This section of the study examines the evolution of the conflict in the region.

The Niger Delta conflict dates back to the colonial era

when the people of the region opposed economic deprivation by the British merchants (Nwankwo, 2015; Saka, Azizuddin, & Omede, 2014; Adebajoko & Ojua, 2013; Etekpe, & Ibaba, 2013; Okoli, 2013; Obi, & Rustad, 2011; Oloya, & Ugeyaywighren, 2009). According to Oloya and Ugeyaywighren (2009), prominent traditional rulers from the region such as King William Dappa Pepple of Bonny was removed from the throne and banished to Fernando Po in 1884; Jaja of Opobo was unseated and deported to West Indies; Nana of Itsekiri was exiled to Accra in 1894; the Oba of Benin was deposed and banished to Calabar in 1897 where he died sixteen (16) years after.

The root of the Niger Delta conflict has also been traced to the Akassa Raid which occurred in 1895. The Royal Niger Company denied the people of Nembe (Akassa) to take part in oil and palm produce business and the people revolted and attacked the company's depot in Akassa (Nwankwo, 2015; Ako, Okonomah, & Ogunleye, 2009; Oloya & Ugbeyavwighren 2009; Aghalino, 2006). However, it is important to note that the pre-independence conflict in the Niger Delta has nothing to do with oil. This is because oil has not become the mainstay of the Nigerian economy. The conflict during this period was centred on poor state of development in the region, marginalisation by the major ethnic groups in the East and Western regions.

According to Ekpebu (2008), the neglect, domination, and repression which have caused the present state of affairs in the Niger Delta was as a result of abandonment and repression by the former Eastern region of its minority ethnic groups in present states like Akwa-Ibom, Rivers, Cross-River, Bayelsa and Southern part of Cameroun. The neglect and domination by the Yoruba ethnic of the West accounted for the demand by the minority in the region for the creation of Mid-West region. The dominance of oil as the mainstay or livewire of the Nigerian economy, politicisation of the principle of revenue allocation, the struggle for access to oil resources by both the majority and minority ethnic groups, among others, brought oil into the conflict (Ibaba, 2011).

The conflict in the region took a different dimension when in 1966, Isaac Adaka Boro, together with Sam Owonara and Nottingham Dick attempted to secede the Niger Delta region from Nigeria through armed struggle and proclaimed the region as an independent state called Niger Delta Republic (Okolie-Osemene, 2013). The action of this trio was grassed by the perceived marginalisation and deprivation suffered by the people of the region as a result of oil exploration activities (Okoli, 2013). The rebellion was crushed by the federal troops, twelve (12) days later. This rebellion is known as the Twelve Days Revolution. The revolution was symbolic in the sense that subsequent protests in the region derived their inspiration from Boro's twelve days' revolution. In

fact, Asari's Dokubo group name Niger Delta People Volunteer Force was derived from Boro's Niger Delta Volunteer Service (Asuni, 2009).

The current crisis in the Niger Delta can be traced to the Ogoni uprising of the early 1990s and it arose because of tension between multi-national petroleum companies and the Niger Delta's minority ethnic groups who felt cheated or short-changed. Since then, competition for oil has resulted in violence in the area contributing to the militarisation of the area by both the ethnic militias and the Nigerian armed forces.

As earlier highlighted, the present crisis was ignited by the Ogoni uprising of the 1990s. The Ken Saro- Wiwa led Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP) demanded compensation from the oil companies for the environment debasement and presented to the government a list of their demands. The Bill expressed the agony of the masses because of petroleum exploration, neglect by both federal and state, lack of social amenities as well as political marginalisation. Consequently, they demanded to be allowed to manage their resources. A thirty-day ultimatum was issued to all oil multi-national companies operating in the communities to pay the sum of US\$10 billion in arrears as royalties and damages for the destruction of the environment as well as putting an end to gas flaring in oil producing communities in Ogoni land (Adebajoko & Ojua, 2013).

The federal government reacted by banning all public gatherings and declared disturbance that prevent the free flow of oil production as treasonable and punishable by death. Subsequent revolts among the Ogonis led to the death of four prominent chiefs from the area and the later hanging of the "Ogoni nine" including Saro-Wiwa by the military administration of Late General Sani Abacha. The hanging of Saro-Wiwa marked a new phase in the politics of the Niger Delta struggle. This new phase is characterised by violence, the bombing of oil installations, hostage taking, kidnapping and many more (Esikot, & Akpan, 2013).

Scholars have identified different phases of the conflict in the Niger delta. Idemudia (2009), categorised the Niger Delta conflict into three phases. The first phase, which was characterised by need dimension of the conflict occurred from 1950 to 1980s. The main concerns during this period were political and economic exclusion as well as the hegemony of the ethnic minority nationalities in the eastern and western regions of Nigeria. The main actors that spearheaded the struggle during this period were the traditional rulers and elites of the minority ethnic groups.

The second phase, which he dubbed the era of creed was from 1990s-2000 and this era was powered by "proliferation of a sense of 'relative deprivation' based on the collective experiences and perceptions" (Idemudia, 2009, p. 136). According to Idemudia (2009), three factors accounted for these relative deprivation and they are the issues of revenue allocation, corporate social

responsibility of transnational oil companies operating in the region and the rapacious nature of military rule.

The third phase in which he referred to as the era of grievance and greed was from 2000 to date. The period is characterised by increase in the strength of violence. A number of factors were identified as responsible for this state of affairs. The socio-economic reality and the experience of oil bearing communities such as Olobiri and Ogoni that have nothing to show for their contributions to the economic wellbeing of the country; the realisation by other oil communities that oil was not renewable and do not want to be another empty Olobiri. These experiences prompted the people to decide to take their destiny in their hands.

The proliferation of social movements also accounted for the increase in violence activities during the period. Social movements such as National Youth Council of Ogoni People, Isoko Development Union, Chikoko, Itsekiki National Patriots and many others, have different objectives, for instance, environment, democratisation, and human rights. And as a result, they were pushed in different directions by different social forces (Idemudia, 2009). These social movements were led by the youth who also belonged to other associations with different agenda. These social movements were weak and vulnerable to organisation capture by either youth leaders or political elites who used them to ferment trouble, thereby increasing violence in the region.

Besides, the use of force to manage conflict in the region was also responsible for the increase in the violence during the period under review. The destruction and killing of innocent people of Odioma village in 2005 by the administration of Obasanjo further worsen the conflict in the region. Unlike in the previous era when the government alone controlled the monopoly of violence, the militia groups have acquired sophisticated weapons which they got through resources obtained from oil bunkering, transnational oil companies social license of operation and many others. The implication of this is that they can meet the armed forces of the federation force with force (Idemudia, 2009). Others like Ibaba and Ikelegbe (cited in Watts & Ibaba, 2011) identified six phases and these phases are contained in the table 1.

### **Elites and Niger Delta Conflict**

There is no doubt that the elites in any given society are very few in numbers, but the role they played far outweigh their numbers. In Nigeria, the commanding positions at all levels of governments are controlled by the elites. The same goes to the economy which are not under the direct control of the foreign business concerns. The elites played major role in decisions making in government and also exercise influence on the value orientation of the people (Attah, 2013). Similarly, Adeolu



**Table 1: PHASES OF CONFLICTS IN THE NIGER DELTA**

S/No	Period	Nature of the Agitation
1	Pre-independence	Agitation for special developmental attention because of unique ecological difficulties
2	1966	Militant insurgent engagement by Adaka Boro and the NDVS. Separation or autonomy was the goal of engagement
3	1970s	Agitations by host communities against oil TNC's demanding for basic social infrastructure/amenities and payment of compensation for damages to land and property.
4	Mid 1980s	Conflict between host communities and oil. MNC's overpayment of adequate compensation for damages to property. Litigation was the instrument of engagement
5	1990–1996	(a) Emergence of civil, community, ethnic, and regional groupings in response to state and oil TNC's insensitivity and repression. (b) Peaceful demonstrations by host communities and occupation of oil production facilities, demanding for adequate compensation for damages and development attention.
6	1997– till date	(a) Militant and militia actions against Oil TNC's (b) Demand for resource ownership and control by civil, political, and militia groups (c) Violent confrontations and low intensity war between militia groups and the military

Source: Adapted from Ibaba and Ikelegbe (cited in Watts & Ibaba, 2011).

(2010) argues that the elites played significant roles in the development of their society either by vigorously encouraging its development or ferociously opposing it. Besides, they influence structure that governs their society; they initiate processes that radically transform their society and expand the frontiers of industrialization and manufacturing, thereby creating new products and services and pushing for institutional change.

However, that has not been the case in Nigeria and particularly in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. As Tijani (2008) rightly noted whatever Nigeria has or has not become, it is due primarily to the deeds and or misdeeds of its leaders. Therefore, it would not be out of place to say that whatever the Niger Delta has or failed to become rest on the shoulder of the elites from the region. This is because they are the ones that know where the shoe pinches and should have done whatever it takes to remedy the situation, but they have not instead they compounded the problems of the region. Validating the role of the elites in the recent Niger Delta conflict, the Minister of Niger Delta Affairs, Pastor Usani Usani Nguru said that "The crisis is traceable to the elite from the region...They are doing that for various reasons which are not connected to the Niger Delta improvement"

(<http://www.newsnaija.com.ng/2016/07/15/shocking-revelation-minister-reveals-sponsors-of-niger-delta-avengers> accessed on 2/8/16). Similarly, a prominent elder from the region named Sandy recounted that:

We failed ourselves... None of us during Jonathan's era went to him to say this was what we needed in the best interest of Niger Delta and he refused. Rather, the political fathers, uncles, cousins and leaders were always going to make selfish demands which they got to the detriment of the common good(<http://www.vanguardngr.com/2016/08/niger-deltans-worst-enemies-sandys-author-70> accessed on 14/8/16).

For Abidde (2007), the elites from the Niger Delta extraction have been insensitive and unconcerned to the suffering of their people. Similarly, Babalola (2014), blamed the elites of the region for the underdevelopment of the region. By the same token, Okonofua, (2013) argues that the elite from the region whom he referred to as powerful individuals used violence as means to secure economic advantage from the multi-national oil



**Table 2:** TOTAL GROSS REVENUE FROM FEDERATION ACCOUNT FOR THE YEAR 2000-2015

S/N O	STATE	YEAR						TOTAL
		2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	
1	AKWA IBOM	N201.408 billion	N252. 908 billion.	N271. 573 billion.	N303.377 billion.	N240.56 billion	N161.00 billion	N1.430trillion
2	BAYELSA	N125.830 billion	N198.729 billion	N176.444 billion	N195.017 billion	N164.60 billion	N103.66 billion	N964.249billion
3	DELTA	N163.402 billion	229.38 billion	N1882billi on	N232,274 billion	N189.93 billion	N123.838 billion	N1.127trillion
4	RIVERS	N179.688 billion	N263,133 billion	N194.741 billion	N255.263 billion	N183.76 billion	N117.037 billion	N1,193trillion
	TOTAL							N4.715trillion

Source: Compiled by the author from the Federation Account Allocation Committee (FAAC) Monthly Gross Revenue Allocation for the year 2010-2015(No data for August 2014) <http://www.finance.gov.ng>

companies operating in the region.

The role of the elites in the Niger conflict will be examined from the point views of how they manage the resources of the region. The non-judicious use of resources can result in poverty, underdevelopment and unemployment which are monster of violence. The issue of how the elites of the Niger Delta have managed the resources of the region has attracted heat debate among scholars, public policy analysts and members of the general public.

For instance, a serving minister in the present administration in the person of Dr kachikwu (Minister of State for Petroleum Resources) said that:

...the amount of money that has been out into the Niger Delta over the last 10 years, in papers it is over \$40billion. These have come from NDDC; it has come from derivation; it has come from oil companies' investments. Over \$40billion, but as I go to the creek, I see no single infrastructure that you can point to, to say this is the result for these investments. So what it means is that we must begin to do some soul searching ourselves: where did all this money go to? (<http://thenationonlineng.net/kachikwu-40b-drain-niger-delta/>, accessed on 27/8/2016)

According to Osaghae (2015), the resources accrued to core oil producing states when put together constitute over 40 per cent of the statutory revenues allocated to the

36 states of the federation. The Total Gross Revenue allocations to Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Delta and Rivers States since 2003 have been higher than allocations to all the 19 northern states put together. This has been the trend of the transfer since 2003. For example, in the last quarter of 2013, the federal government share from the federation account was N702.22 (US \$4.5) billion, states got N356.17 (US \$2.3) billion and local governments N274.60 (US \$1.8) billion, while N157.15 (US \$1.02) billion, representing 44 per cent of the total allocations to all the 36 states went to oil-producing states (Osaghae, 2015). The total gross revenue allocations to these four states from the federation account between 2010 and 2015 stood at N4. 715 trillion with Akwa-Ibom having the highest allocation of N1.430trillion closely followed by Rivers state, with an allocation of N1.193 trillion, Delta - N1.127 trillion and Bayelsa - N964.249billion. See Table 2

With this cash flow, one would have expected that there would be an improvement in the life of the people by judicious use of the resources in projects that would impact on the life of the people of the region. But that was not the case. As Ikelegbe (2011) rightly noted there was governance deficit in the region. The elites of the region are characterised by ineptitude, arrogance, and corruption and this has brought about a lack of transparency, openness and accountability in the resource use and management (Ibaba, Ukaga, & Ukiwo, 2012).

Besides, they lack fiscal discipline and this has resulted

in political instability as competition for public offices became acute and violent. They devised various means of embezzling the resources of the region through security vote, which in some states is as high as N2 million per year (Niger Delta citizens and budget platform, 2010). According to Debt Management Office, the external debt of Akwa-Ibom state was \$59.7million as of June 30, 2013, while the domestic debt stood at N81.7 million as at 2014 making her the most indebted state in the country.

The immediate past governor of the state Godswill Akpabio gave members of his party N1million each for lunch (Niger Delta citizens and budget platform, 2013). Between 2008 and 2013 the debt profile of Rivers state rose from \$32.3 million to \$42.6 million in 2013 (Niger Delta citizens and budget platform, 2014).

A study by Ushie (cited in Osaghae, 2015) showed that a large chunk of Akwa Ibom and Bayelsa states budgets went into security vote and general administration. Security votes were never accounted for by the executives at different tiers of government. In 2008-2011, Akwa Ibom allocated N244 billion for general administration, which was higher than housing, health, and education. A sum of N18 billion was allotted to security votes. While Bayelsa state earmarked N69 billion for general administration, which ranked next to works and transport, but higher than health, education, housing, agriculture, rural development and water supply.

The story is the same in other Niger Delta states. For instance, in Delta state, in 2009-2010, the total sum earmarked for general administration was N39.7 billion, while in the year under review, allocation to both health and education were N15.9 billion and N23.9 respectively (Niger Delta citizens and budget platform, 2010; 2013; 2014). Unlike other Niger Delta states, Rivers state allocates the bulk of its resources to critical sectors such as education and health. For instance, in 2010-2013, the total amount earmarked for health and agriculture was N49.2 and N181.6 billion respectively. While the general administration in the same period attracted N26.2 billion. The total amount assigned to security votes for four years (2008,2009, 2010 and 2013) was N41.5 billion (Niger Delta citizens and budget platform, 2010; 2013; 2014).

However, these huge allocations to these critical sectors did not yield any fruits. The projects in which the resources were earmarked for were either abandoned or not executed at all. The primary reason why the resources of the region have not transmuted to development or improvement in the living condition of the people is corruption. The ruling elites of the region were involved in corruption, money laundering and embezzlement of public funds. The James Ibori, Dipreye Alamieyeseigha, Lucky Igbinedon and many other cases would come to mind. James Ibori, former Governor of Delta State (1999– 2007) was jailed for thirteen years for stealing the resources of his state amounting to over

£250 million and his counterpart from Bayelsa state, Alamieyeseigha was on trial in the UK for money laundering and fraud totalling over £150 when he jumped bail and escaped to Nigeria in 2005 (Osaghae, 2015; Ibaba, Ukaga, & Ukiwo, 2012; Enweremadu, 2008).

He was later convicted and sentenced to two- year imprisonment for stealing public funds in 2007 and granted pardon by his former deputy and then president of Nigeria, Dr Goodluck Jonathan in March 2013 (Osaghae, 2015).

From the above analysis, it is clear that the ruling elites of the region have not managed the resources that accrued to the region very well. They are not ready to commit political suicide by taking sides of the people in terms of improving their living standard by pursuing policies and programme that would benefit the down trodden masses of the region.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The paper critically examined the role of the Niger Delta elites in the conflict in the region. As Niger Delta, conflict cannot be isolated from the way the Nigerian State was formed. The paper began by examining the Nigerian state, discussing its historical formation and went on to discuss the various concepts that were essential to the discourse. The elite theory which is the theoretical framework for the study was critically analysed. The paper also examined the historical origin of Niger Delta conflict. The paper contended that the elites of the region cannot be exonerated from the happenings in the region. It was the view of this paper that the elites through embezzlement, money laundering and corruption have worsened the developmental problem of the region thereby contributing to underdevelopment, poverty and unemployment in the region and this has resulted in hopelessness and frustration on the part of the people of the region and thus contributed to the violence in the region.

## RECOMMENDATION

The people of the region have a major role to play in ensuring that the elites manage the resource of the region for the betterment of the generality of the people. This the people can do by electing into positions either at state or local government levels, people of impeccable character, who will serve and not to be served. They (the people) must at all time ask questions and demand explanation from their leaders to account for the resources given to them and making sure that money earmarked for projects are spent for the projects. Put differently, there should be proper monitoring of government activities in their domains.

The civil society groups should pursue with vigour their advocacy programmes by enlightening the people on the need to vote into office, credible leaders and also furnishing them on the activities of government.

There should be strict enforcement of law on corrupt practices. Culprits should not be pardoned based on sentiment or otherwise. The laws must be allowed to take its full course. If need be there should be a reform of the existing laws to take care of modern development in this area. Any corrupt politicians found to have been guilty by a competent court of law should be banned for life to serve as a deterrent to others who may wish to toe his line and his assets confiscated by government.

Lastly, those saddled with the responsibility of administering the different tiers of government in the region should endeavour to pursue policies and programmes that would alleviate the pains and suffering of the people of the region. A hungry man is an angry man and an angry man can do anything, he does not mind that day should turn to night. So in order to prevent this, it is incumbent on government to judiciously use the resources of the region for the development of the region, thereby creating jobs for the teeming youths and also providing social amenities such as road, water, schools, etc.

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