

## THE MINISTRY OF NIGER DELTA AFFAIRS (MNDA), 2009–2015: ACHIEVEMENTS AND CHALLENGES

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**Abstract:** *The paper examined the achievements and challenges of the Ministry of Niger Delta Affairs (MNDA) in the six years of its existence from 2009 to 2015. The finding indicates that its greatest achievements were fundamentally on project execution and keeping the hope and aspirations of the people of the Niger Delta alive. However, the MNDA was greatly challenged with lack of political will on the part of the national political elites to develop the Niger Delta, corruption, inadequate funding, abandon projects and therefore failed to positive impact on majority of the people. The paper concluded that if all the objectives for establishment of development agencies on the Niger Delta since Nigeria gained independence in 1960 had been achieved, there would not have been any need for new ones. Therefore, the paper recommended that government should endeavour to implement policies and programmes that are made for the country.*

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### INTRODUCTION

On May 29, 2007, the democratically elected government headed by President Olusegun Obasanjo handed over the baton of leadership of the country to President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua. The president, in a seven – point agenda, indicated the resolve of the Federal Government of Nigeria to tackle the numerous problems facing the

nation (Akande and Olomola, 2008), of which the issue of security and the Niger Delta crisis were articulate. Before his assumption of office, the security situation in the Niger Delta and the nation at large has deteriorated greatly. This made the issue of security a central theme in the campaigns preceding the elections and all the presidential candidates of the political parties that contested the election acknowledged it. Although the issue of establishment of a full-fledged ministry to combat the Niger Delta crisis was not part of the election promises of Alhaji Umar Musa Yar'Adua of the People's Democratic Party (PDP), it was his main rival, Alhaji Atiku Abubakar, the candidate of the Action Congress (AC) in the April 21, 2007 nation-wide general election, that made the issue of establishment of a Ministry of Niger Delta as an election promise at a rally in Benin in Edo State. However, when Alhaji Umaru Musa Yar'Adua won the election, the president was faced with the stark reality. In the Niger Delta, the drums of war were beating with increasing crescendo, as a coalition of insurgency groups led by the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) illustrated boldness, mastery and dominance of the creeks and forests of the region by engaging in kidnapping, abductions, hostage taking, terrorism, sea piracy and oil bunkering, despite the engagement of security agencies (Abolurin, 2010:165; Arogundade, 2009:15-20; Etekpe, 2009:48; Paki and Agusomu, 2016).

The Federal Government, barely one month on assumption of office, attempted to inaugurate a Delta Summit in June, 2007, which was designed to bring together major stakeholders to discuss and proffer solutions to the Niger Delta situation (Taiwo, 2008). However, when the composition of the summit was fervently challenged by groups agitating for membership and leadership positions, government decided to set up the Technical Committee on the Niger Delta (TCND) in September 2008 with 44 members headed by Mitee Ledum and Nkoyo Toyo as Secretary, with the terms of reference:

To collate, review and distil the various reports, suggestions and recommendations on the Niger Delta from Willinks Commission Report (1958) to the present, and give a summary of the recommendations necessary for government action. To appraise the summary recommendations and present a detailed short, medium and long term suggestion to the challenges in the Niger delta. To make and present government any recommendations that will help the Federal Government achieve sustainable development, peace, human and environmental security in the Niger Delta region (Report of the Technical Committee on the Niger Delta, 2008: vi).

The report of the technical committee did well to review previous reports on the Niger Delta, including the Willinks Report (1958), Belgore (1992), Etiebet (1994), Vision 2020 (1996), United Nations (1997), Popoola (1998), Ogomudia (2001), Presidential Panel on National Security (2003), the Niger Delta Master Plan (2004), Niki Tobi (2005), and many other related documents on the Niger Delta and made relevant recommendations to end the lingering crisis in the region. However, the Mitee – led Presidential Technical Committee Report on the Niger Delta has not been endorsed by way of a Government White Paper for immediate implementation.

It has been noted that the poor state of development and the difficult terrain of the Niger Delta were acknowledged before the country gained independence in 1960. This made the "Minority Commission" to recommend that the Niger Delta be treated as "a special area for development" (Colonial Office of Nigeria, 1958). As a result, successive governments in the country since independence have made

the development of the Niger Delta a cardinal point and have sometimes gone further to establish special development agencies for the region. First, the Niger Delta Development Board (NDDDB) was established in 1961. This was followed by the Niger Delta River Basin Development Authority (NDRBDA) in 1976, Special Fund created by the 1981 Revenue Act for Oil Producing Areas and the Presidential Task Force for the Development Producing Areas, which administered the special fund amounting to 1.5% of the federation accounts, the Oil Mineral Producing Areas Development Commission (OMPADEC) (1992) and the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) (2000) are part of federal government development intervention efforts. Unfortunately, these agencies could not fully deliver the expected results, hence the establishment of the Ministry as a coordinating vehicle to drive the development process of the region (Oru, 2014:8). These attempts in addition to efforts by the Niger Delta states and local governments and aids and donations from international development partners, have pumped billions of Naira into the Niger Delta, which has not been able to deliver the expected results and assuage the yawning of the people for development (Paki, 2016).

Therefore, the establishment of the MNDA by President Umaru Musa Yar' Adua on September 10, 2008, was meant to formulate and coordinate policies for the development and security of the Niger Delta region comprising states such as Abia, Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo, Imo, Ondo and Rivers. This can be seen as part of the Federal Government's institutional approach to solving the Niger Delta crisis; charged with the infrastructural development, environmental protection and youth empowerment in the region. The creation of the MNDA was therefore a direct response to the series of agitations by the people of the region on the perceived sense of lack of development, environmental degradation, socio-political and economic exclusion and conflict and violent crisis. The MNDA was established to also coordinate the activities of government agencies, communities in the area, International Development

Partners (IDP) (through the National Planning Commission {NPC}), donor agencies and other relevant stakeholders involved in the development of the region, especially partners interested in the vast mineral resources in the Niger Delta region which extraction and processing have led to conflicts of various dimensions. With the establishment of the MNDA, the already existing Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) incidentally became a commission under the ministry.

However, the actual operation of the MNDA started in February 2009, after the appointment of the two Ministers and the posting of a Permanent Secretary (PS) with complimentary few senior staff. Therefore, the appointment of an indigene of the Niger Delta, Obong Uffot Ekaette, as the pioneer Minister of the MNDA and Elder Godsday Orubebe, as Minister of State, was seen as the beginning of an empowerment process, expected to boost government's resolve and address the lingering crisis in the region.

It is pertinent, therefore, to raise two fundamental questions germane to this research work. What were the achievements of the MNDA between 2009 and 2015? What were the challenges of the MNDA within the stipulated period? The main objective of the paper, therefore, is to discuss the achievements and challenges of the MNDA in the six years of its existence from 2009 to 2015. In order to achieve the set objectives, the paper was divided into eight sections. The second section is methods of study, which is followed by the theoretical framework. The functions, vision and mission of the MNDA are enumerated in section four. Section five discussed the structure of the MNDA. While the section six dealt with the achievements of the MNDA, the section seven discussed the challenges of the MNDA. The paper ends with concluding remarks.

### **Methods of Study**

The method of this study derived its sources from secondary data. Among the secondary sources of data were textbooks, journal

articles, government publications, official papers, conference papers, reports, newspapers and magazines. It should be noted that the MNDA is an ongoing phenomenon, therefore it will feature constantly in the news as can be captured in print and audio media broadcasts.

The technique of data analysis was the correlation of data. This is to prove qualitatively that there is positive correlation between achievements and challenges of the MNDA.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study depends on dialectical materialism as the theoretical framework of analysis, which is a tradition of social analysis associated with the German Philosopher, Karl Marx. The theory tends to understand the evolution of human society through the process of production and distribution of the means of its material existence. Paramount to the theory is the postulation that the exploitative relations give rise to class struggle in the historical development of any society, especially as it emphasizes the inequality and crisis that defined the internal contradictions of the capitalist state and the challenges of development (Onibode, 1983: 58; Nwosu, 2013: 33).

However, our concern here is the contention that the material of social reality (society) is constantly changing in a dialectical process "governed and propelled by the law of unity and conflict of opposite, the negation of the negation" (Forlov, 1984: 4). This perspective is different from the "Hegelian Dialectics" which is purely metaphysical, speculative and teleological (Okaba, 2008: 23).

The relevance of this theory to the understanding of the achievements and challenges of the MNDA is to interpret it as part of the character of a typical capitalist state. There cannot be a genuine development in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. How can Nigeria develop the Niger Delta when the country itself is not developed? Expecting Nigeria to develop the Niger Delta region is like giving out

what you don't have. How can one give that which you don't possess? Here lies the dilemma of the people of the Niger Delta; expecting an under-developed Nigeria to develop the Niger Delta.

It is about sixty (60) years ago when recommendations for government to development the Niger Delta as a special area was made (see Willinks Commission Report of 1958) and exactly fifty six (56) when the first development agency on the Niger Delta (the NDDDB) was established in 1961 and the MNDA is the fifth one. This is in addition to other federal, states and local government development efforts in the Niger Delta. Yet there is no development, confirming the notion that Capitalism, especially in the Third World, is an impediment to development (Nwosu, 2013: 33). This is against the backdrop of the fact that the bulk of the resources that has been used to develop the country is derived from the Niger Delta. Unfortunately, the government in conjunction with foreign capital is more interested in the exploitation and expropriation of the resources in the region for primitive accumulation rather than to achieve meaningful development of the Niger Delta area.

### **Functions, Vision and Mission of the Ministry**

The Federal Government has set an onerous task for the MNDA. This is because the Ministry was established to perform the following functions:

- (i) Oversee the implementation of government policies on the development and security of the Niger Delta region;
- (ii) Coordinate the formulation of the development plan for the region;
- (iii) Formulate policies and programmes for youth mobilization and empowerment in the Niger Delta region;
- (iv) Advise government on security issues concerning the region;
- (v) Liaise with relevant governments, non-government and private sector organizations;

- (vi) Formulate and coordinate policies for environmental management;
- (vii) Liaise with host communities for the enhancement of the welfare of the people and the development of the region;
- (viii) Facilitate private sector involvement in the region;
- (ix) Plan and supervise programmes on public education/enlightenment;
- (x) Liaise with oil companies operating in the region to ensure environmental protection and pollution control;
- (xi) Organize human capacity development as well as skill acquisition programmes for the youths;
- (xii) Take adequate measures to ensure peace, stability and security with a view to enhancing the economic potentials of the area; and
- (xiii) Submit reports periodically to Mr. President on all matters concerning the region.

This accounts for the reason why the MNDA was able to articulate has a clear vision and mission for its activities. Notably, "the vision of the ministry is to serve as a primary vehicle for the execution of government's plans and programmes for rapid socio-economic development of the region", *while* "the mission is to formulate and execute plans as well as coordinate activities of agencies, commission, donors and other stakeholders involved in the development of the region" (emphasis mine).

In line with the vision and mission, the MNDA is currently executing projects and programmes in several areas such as: Construction of roads and housing schemes; Canalization/dredging; Shoreline protection, erosion control, conservation and development of the coastal ecosystems; Restoration and rehabilitation of the degraded ecosystems, land reclamation and restoration of oil impacted sites; Development of urban water schemes; Electrification; Construction of jetties; Establishment of cassava processing plants; Construction of skilled acquisition centers; Establishment of fisheries and poultry



farms; and Training of youths in various vocations to make them self-reliant ([nigerdelta.gov.ng/index.pdf](http://nigerdelta.gov.ng/index.pdf)).

### **The Structure of the MNDA**

Almost all government affairs are structured around ministries, departments, units, bureaus, agencies, commissions, etc. Interestingly, like any other ministry that is typically involved in many activities, the MNDA is therefore coordinated by a PS and the PS as at 2015 when the research was carried out was Mrs. Fatima B. A. Bamidele. The structure of the MNDA is currently made up of twelve (12) departments, which are headed by Directors. The departments in the MNDA include: (i) Infrastructural Development; (ii) Housing and Urban Development; (iii) Environmental Management; (iv) Community Development and Education; (v) Economic Empowerment; (vi) Finance and Accounts; (vii) Planning, Research and Statistics; (viii) Human Resources Management; (ix) Reform; (x) Procurement; (xi) General Services; and (xii) Special Duties.

In addition, there are also (five (5) technical and eight (8) service units that are headed by officers not below the rank of Assistant Directors. The technical units in the MNDA are: (i) Legal Services; (ii) Audit; (iii) Survey; (iv) Library; and (v) Store. These departments and units perform the various functions of the Ministry with a view to achieving its aims and objectives.

### **Achievements of the Ministry**

The MNDA has been able to make notable and laudable achievements in the first six years of its existence. Perhaps the greatest achievement of the Ministry is in the area of execution of projects and programmes meant to actualize its mandate. According to Dr. Stephen Orise Oru, the then Honourable Minister in MNDA, in a 2014 Ministerial Press Briefing stated that:

The Ministry is presently executing a wide range of projects designed to open up the Niger Delta region and meet the set targets.

The projects include: Construction of roads; Development of housing schemes; Canalization/dredging; Shoreline protection, erosion control, conservation, development of the coastal ecosystem; Restoration and rehabilitation of the degraded ecosystem, land reclamation and restoration of oil impacted sites; Development of urban water scheme; Electrification; Construction of jetties; Establishment of cassava processing plants; Construction of skill acquisition centers; Establishment of fisheries and poultry; and Massive training of youth in various vocations to make them self-reliant (2014:10).

Furthermore, unsigned documents handed over to the researcher at the Ministry indicated that over the many years of its existence, the MNDA has been engaged in the following projects and programmes:

- i. On-going construction of East-West Road with a total of 338km plus additional 23km from Oron to Calabar is considered the flagship of the Ministry's projects and gulps 80% of the Ministry's annual budget, which is about 90% completed;
- ii. On-going construction of other twenty-one (21) road projects with combined length of 548.64km spread across the Niger Delta Region;
- iii. The design of six (6) road projects spread across the Niger Delta Region. These projects valued at a total cost of #202,283,419.15 are at various stages of completion;
- iv. Provision of community water projects in Imo, Akwa Ibom, Cross River and Ondo States. These projects which are valued at a total cost of #2,485,648.83 are almost completed;

- v. Design of three (3) water supply projects in three (3) namely: Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa and Rivers States of the nine Niger Delta States;
- vi. Electrification of four (4) communities, three (3) of which have been completed and two (2) have been commissioned on March 25, 2015. These projects which contract sum stand at #2,618,105,077.42, span over 487km;
- vii. On-going Development of Skill Acquisition Centres in each of the nine (9) states of the Niger Delta with varied specialization has attained appreciable levels of completion. The centre in Otueke, Bayelsa State has attained 95% completion level and has been handed over to the Federal University of Otueke on May 12, 2015 following presidential directive to the effect. the total contract sum of these projects is #30,175,379,407.77;
- viii. The Ministry has also embarked on the construction of housing schemes in each of the nine (9) states of the Niger Delta Region. In all 2 and 3 bedroom Bungalows with perimeter fencing and gate houses are at various stages of completion in each of the nine states of the region. The Housing Estate in Umuagwo, Imo State has been completed, commissioned and allocated to indigenes of the area;
- ix. In the area of Environmental Management, the Ministry has undertaken Canalization project, Shoreline Protection, Erosion and Flood Control, Remediation and Rehabilitation of oil impacted sites. Many of these projects are on-going in Delta, Akwa Ibom, Rivers, Cross Rivers, Bayelsa and Ondo States;
- x. The Ministry has established seven (7) Cassava Processing Plants in some communities in Bayelsa and Delta States. Additional nine (9) cassava processing plants are under construction in Abia, Akwa Ibom, Cross River, Imo, Ondo and Rivers States to boost the economic well-being of the people;

- xi. The Ministry has trained hundreds of non-militant youths and women in agriculture, ICT, Cassava Processing, Snailry and Chalk production. All these are geared towards empowering the youths; and
- xii. The Niger Delta Action Plan (NDAP) was developed in collaboration with the International Development Partners (IDP) to promote bottom-up participatory development process that will ensure the various States are involved and carried along in the identification and implementation of projects.

Project execution may not be the only discernable achievement of the MNDA. This is because the minds and aspirations of the people of the Niger Delta is fundamental to past and current perception of the people about how they are governed in the country. With hindsight of the failure of other federal government development agencies in the past (Paki & Ebienfa, 2011a), the establishment of the MNDA alongside the existing NDDC kept the aspirations of the people in the Niger Delta for development alive and raise hopes of lasting peace to the problem of violent conflict in the Niger Delta. It was in the same way the emergence of Dr. Goodluck Jonathan and the vice-president met the aspiration of Niger Delta people to be part of main stream governance at the federal level (Eze, Okechukwu & Mere, 2008: 3). This is important because it will determine future modes of agitation in the Niger Delta.

### **Challenges of the Ministry**

The greatest challenge of the Ministry is perhaps lack of political will on the part of the national political elites to develop the Niger Delta. This is a tread that linked all development intervention agencies that have been established in the country to tackle the Niger Delta crisis and accounts greatly for the failure of public policies in the country (Paki and Ebiefā, 2011a&b). An example may suffice. Dr. Goodluck Ebele Jonathan, who became the President of Nigeria on the demise of President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua served in office for six (6) years

(2010-2015), but was unable complete the Skill Acquisition Centre in Otueke, Bayelsa State, which has attained 95% completion level. Interestingly, Otueke is his home community and in anticipation of future problems only directed the hand-over of the center to the Federal University in Otueke. If Skill Acquisition center project established in the president's own community cannot be completed under six year tenure, imagine when projects are implemented by people from other climes. It is ridiculous.

Corruption is another challenge of the Ministry. This is a problem that has affected other development intervention agencies in the Niger Delta that led to their failure and has long been identified as one of the debilitating problems of the country (ibid). A few examples may suffice. Dr. Goodluck Ebele Jonathan established a Skill Acquisition Centre and a Federal University in Otueke, his home town, while in office as the president of the country. Interestingly, Otueke is a few kilometers drive from Oloibiri, where the first oil well was struck in Nigeria. Why Oloibiri Community did not deserve the establishment of these Federal Government institutions, when the National Petroleum Museum, which foundation laying ceremony was conducted during the Second Republic by President Alhaji Shehu Shagari over 35 years ago is still moribund?

Again, Elder Godsday Orubebe, master minded the implementation of two (2) Federal Government Projects in his home communities, while serving as the Minister of the MNDA, namely, the Canalization project in Ogbobaigbene and the Skill Acquisition Center in Tuomo, both communities are in Burutu Local Government Area of Delta State. Tuomo is an oil bearing community and as such may be excused, but Ogbobaigbene is not known as an oil bearing community. What is however known is that Ogbobaigbene is the former minister's father's paternal community, while Tuomo is his father's maternal community. Unfortunately, like Goodluck Ebele Jonathan, the two projects were not completed before the minister

left office. These are clear cases of corruption in the sitting of government projects.

However, the monumental corruption in Nigeria experienced under the tenure of President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan has made corruption under past regimes in the country look like a "child's play". You just need to open the pages of any of the national dailies in recent times and you will discover stories of corruption amounting to billions of Naira, which have been revealed by the anti-corruption institutions in the country. Though these revelations of monumental corruption in the country under the past regime does not match diligent prosecution and conviction, which makes the anti-corruption war unable to achieved the desired goals for government, in the eyes of the masses.

Again, corruption in the MNDA and other institutions have made nonsense the good intention of President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua for the establishment of the Ministry to address the development challenges of the Niger Delta and transform the area with a view to ensure a lasting peace. This has also greatly undermined the good-will of Nigerians for giving the PDP and indeed an indigene of the Niger Delta the mandate and opportunity to rule the country. A news bulletin widely circulated by the All Progressive Congress (APC) during campaigns prior to the 2015 governorship election in Bayelsa State titled "How Jonathan Presidency Duped Bayelsa State: The untold story" listed thirty-eight (38) abandoned projects worth #209 billion that has disappears, some of which are projects constructed under the MNDA was stunning (Newsfacts, 2015).

Inadequate funding is another challenge of Federal Government intervention agencies and the MNDA is not an exception. Apart from the fact that annual budgetary allocations are inadequate, annual budgetary releases are grossly inadequate in Nigeria. This is because there is always discrepancy between the amounts budgeted for and the fund actually release to government institutions. This led to the

non-implementation of budgets in the country. In addition, inadequate funding of the Ministry, over the years, has accumulated an outstanding debt totaling ₦43, 173,119.18 as at December 15, 2015 (John-Mensah, 2016).

Related to the above is another challenge of the MNDA, which is the problem of abandoned projects. According to a report of the ministry's Technical Audit Committee, 90% of the projects whose contracts were awarded under the MNDA between 2009 and 2015 were abandoned. The report further stated that 12% of the project were completed, 18% studded, while 70% were in progress. The report also shows that out of ₦700 billion budgeted for only ₦427 billion (60%) was disbursed, ₦273 billion of the MNDA funds were missing and most of the contracts awarded had no impact on the people. The review recommended that contractors should refund money to the government (John-Mensah, 2016).

The cumulative effect of these is that most communities in the Niger Delta has not experienced or felt the positive impact of the MNDA: Water supply project are grossly inadequate for the communities of the region; Skill Acquisition Centers are inadequate and mostly uncompleted; Construction of roads are inadequate and mostly uncompleted; housing schemes in each of the States of the region cannot satisfy the housing needs of the populace and the few constructed are mostly uncompleted; The environmental management efforts of the Ministry is grossly defective as pollution and environmental degraded areas adversely affected by oil and gas exploitation activities dotted all over the Niger Delta; The cassava processing plants established in the region are inadequate and mostly uncompleted; The youths and women empowerment programmes have not made any significant impact in the area; and There has been no known successful collaboration project completed by the Ministry. This led one staff whom this researcher came across during the research work to ask a rhetorical question: "Has the MNDA been able to achieve anything significant?"

### Concluding Remarks

There is no gain saying that the establishment of the MNDA brought much hope to the people of the Niger Delta. This is because it was meant to address the felt need of the people for development, remedies environmental degradation, ends violent conflict and engenders inclusive socio-political and economic governance in the Niger Delta, and as a result the people still anticipates that someday a people oriented government may come to power in the country and address the issues that constitutes the Niger Delta crisis, just like the intention of President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua, but in Nigeria there is a big discrepancy between policy making and policy implementation. This explains why it is correct to argue that if all the public policies made in the country since independence were implemented to the letter, Nigeria would have been a developed country (Paki and Ebienu, 2011b:12). If this had happened; there would have been no need for militancy and amnesty for Niger Delta militants. As Alagoa (2003: 10-11) observed:

If we consider our present (contemporary) government practices, we may discover that we have not done enough to manage conflicts, thus, creating opportunities for conflict to escalate to the point where we have to take fire brigade action to resolve them. And because the action was not thorough, it later resurfaces.

Unfortunately, it was an indigene of the region that was the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria for greater part of the existence of the MNDA so far. Yet the region is still faced with the same problems when the country was ruled by leaders from other geo-political zones and when such articulated priority development attention was not given to the region by government. According to the United Nations



Development Programmes Niger Delta Human Development Report (2006: 36-37):

The critical issue in the Niger Delta is not the increasing incidence of poverty, but also the intense feeling among the people of the region that they ought to do far better. This is based on the considerable level of resources in their midst, and the brazen display and celebration of ill-gotten wealth in Nigeria, most of which driven from crude oil wealth ... In addition, the oil and gas industry has damaged farmlands and fishing grounds, which have harmed traditional occupations such as fishing, farming, lumbering, craft and small-scale agro-based activities ... (Moreover, the) region (has) been excluded from tapping into modern infrastructure.

The paper therefore concludes, for the purpose of emphasis, that if all the objectives for establishment of development agencies on the Niger Delta since Nigeria gained independence in 1960 had relatively and satisfactorily been achieved, there would not have been any need for new ones, including the MNDA. This has led one to recommend that government should endeavour to implement public policies and programmes that are made for the country.

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