

THE BORDERLESS WORLD: COMMUNICATION POWER AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN THE NIGER DELTA

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Abstract

Knowledge is a primary resource, no less important than land, labour or capital for improving the lives of people. Communication has been the only way of delivering such knowledge through such channels as Computers, Radio, TV, teaching, workshops, seminars and the print media; etc. This paper studies communication in this era of globalization as effective tool for promoting sustainable development in the Nigeria's Niger Delta by raising awareness and sharing knowledge, environmental monitoring and report, enabling reliable early warnings and increasing situational awareness. Through descriptive- analysis of events and developments in the region's struggle against the activities of oil conglomerates, it established that the internationalization of the Niger Delta question by communication is one of the major factors that brought the current level of sustainable development to the region.

Introduction

The Niger Delta, as now defined officially by the Nigerian Government, extends over about 70,000 km² and makes up 7.5% of Nigeria's land mass. Historically and cartographically, it consists present day [Akwa Ibom State](#), [Bayelsa State](#), [Cross River State](#), [Delta State](#) and [Rivers State](#).. In the year 2000, however, Obasanjo's regime expanded its definition to include [Abia State](#), [Edo State](#), [Imo State](#) and [Ondo State](#). Some 31 million people of more than 40 ethnic groups, including the [Ijaw](#) and [Igbo people](#), speaking some 250 dialects live in the Delta (CRS Report for Congress, Nigeria: Current Issues Updated January 30, 2008). The region made Nigeria Africa's biggest producer of [petroleum](#). Since 1975, the region has accounted for more than 75% of Nigeria's [export](#) earnings. Much of the [natural gas](#) extracted in oil wells in the Delta is immediately burned, or [flared](#) into the air at a rate of approximately 70 million m³ per day. This is equivalent to 41% of African natural gas consumption, and forms the single largest source of [greenhouse gas](#) emissions on the planet. The environmental devastation associated with the industry and the lack of fair distribution of oil wealth necessitated the resurgence of numerous environmental movements and inter-ethnic conflicts in the region, including recent guerrilla activity by the [Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta](#) (MEND).

The electronic and print media, particularly the privately and internationally owned ones, ran commentaries and reported activities in the region. The resurgence of protests and resistance by the social movements in the region due to the mobilization and sensitization of even the region in Diaspora,

led to the involvement of the international civil society in the struggle. Amnesty International, Green Peace Movement, the Geneva-based Un-represented Nations and Peoples Organization (UNPO), the London-based Rainforest Action Group, and eventually the United Nations and Commonwealth of Nations, became involved in the struggle for human and environmental rights of the Niger Delta peoples. Other International Non-governmental Organizations (INGOs) and activist groups that got involved in the struggle include Body shop, Friends of the Earth, Committee for Writers in Prison of International PEN, and host of others. Consequently, the Nigerian state and multinational oil companies could no longer contain the crisis as a local issue due to its internationalization and have through many processes, commissions, and legislation, began to address the Niger Delta question. Today, the region occupies sensitive position in governance, with the ministry of Niger Delta created to handle issues relating to the region. This paper explores the role of boundless communication order in the processes and events that led to these achievements.

Sustainable Development

Sustainable development is defined as "development that meets the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (Sharhan, 2000:44). It is an extension of socio-economic development, including the environmental dimension. Environmental sustainability rests on the rational use of resources, such as: fossil fuels, nuclear energy, renewable, agriculture, livestock, forestry, biodiversity, water, fisheries, and minerals. Economic sustainability demands people to take a more long-term view of the economy. Investment needs to be increased stability promoted; the skills of the workplace need to be improved and workers empowered and rewarded. Within this element there is considerable need for innovation, enabling products to compete on elements other than price. Economic sustainability includes these elements: energy, transport, waste, employment, investment; competition and stability, education and skills, business and industry, trade, tourism. Social sustainability on its part refers to a sense of social cohesion, cultural inclusion and people empowerment. This is achieved through making meaningful improvements in the places where people live and work, giving them the chance to play an effective part in shaping change for a preferable future. The key elements within the social sustainability pillar are health, poverty, communities, housing, travel, crime, recreation, consumption, food safety and stress.

Literature Review

The media play a significant and commanding role in democracy and public affairs, substantially impacting the formation of policy agenda and the performance of political institutions (Linsky, 1986). And "although the verdict is mixed about the extent of media influence on various policy arenas, evidence

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strongly suggests it is a sizable factor” (Graber 251). The media serve as both the primary, and in some cases, the only mechanism communicating information to the public. In addition, the media often serve as the internal communication device among public officials and government leaders (Kingdon 59; Cohen 41).

Researchers have explored how public policy develops by examining the information flow (Sabatier and Whiteman 1985; Bradley 1980; and Riffe 1988 and 1990), looking at who is affected (Stone 1997; Kingdon 1995; Cobb and Elder 1972; and Walker 1977), the policy’s relative level of importance among government agencies (Cobb and Elder 1972; Kingdon 1995; and Stone 1997), whether the proposed policy includes the practical application of programs and policies (Stone 1997), and what the policy’s and public’s relationship is with the media agenda (Kingdon 1995; Linsky 1986; Cobb and Elder 1972; and Rogers and Dearing 1988). Mass communication literature focuses on the last element by exploring the relationship between the media agenda and public opinion.

Agenda-setting suggests that the public’s attention to issues closely tracks the issues receiving media coverage (Kingdon, 1994; Miller, Goldenberg and Erbring, 1979; Erbring, Goldenberg and Miller, 1980; and Funkhouser, 1973). However, there are other factors that can make issues arise in the consciousness of the public without media exposure (Sabatier and Whiteman 1985; Bradley 1980). Besides playing important roles in elevating issues to the systemic agenda, the media possess a “distinctive capability to shape public policy” (Kingdon, 1995). The literature presented so far supports the claim that media have the capacity to shape public opinion and can influence some stages of the public policy process. Kingdon pointed out in his research that while studies are saturated with demonstrations of the viability (strength) of media influence once a policy is formulated, accounts of how the media influence the “pre-decision” policy process are overlooked. Cook (1998), Lambeth (1978) disagreed with this conclusion and argued that the press is “not impotent” in its coverage.

With this conclusion, we shall now review literature on the media and sustainable development. In many respects, sustainable development has been a highly successful concept, taken up by governments and other institutions around the world since the 1992 “Earth Summit” (Lafferty, 1999). Many advocates of sustainable development find great encouragement in “ecological modernization”—a reform of economics, institutions, and technologies in response to ecological needs that is based on the idea of a “green” society, realized by the application of appropriate legal, policy, and management tools (Gore 1992; Hajer 1995; WCED 1987).

At the most basic level, the sustainability of human societies is a function of the relationship between ecosystem and energy production, human energy and material expropriation, and the ecosystem transformations that result from withdrawals of energy and matter and additions of waste and pollution. Historically, many societies have collapsed by overshooting the carrying capacity

of the ecosystems they depended on for life support (Diamond, 2005; Chew, 2001; Tainter, 1988). Sustainable development, therefore, is the possibility of expropriating natural resources in a manner that does not compromise the survival of present and future generations (World Council on Environment and Development, 1987). Sustainable development has become “part of the mission of countless international organizations, national institutions, sustainable cities and locales, transnational corporations, and nongovernmental organizations” (Parris and Kates, 2003: 560). Meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs requires:

- ▶ Social and environmental justice. Deep concern is expressed on behalf of both current and future generations; developed and underdeveloped countries and humans and non-human species (WCED, 1987; Hawken, 1993; Kinlaw, 1993; Common, 1995; Elkington, 1998; Hempel, 1999; Berke and Conroy, 2000; Gottlieb, 2001; McNeill, 2000; Moffatt et al. 2001; Agyeman, et al., 2002; Evans, 2002).
- ▶ Stewardship of built and natural environment, and
- ▶ Ecological modernization (Mol and Sonnenfeld, 2000). It is because of Nigerian state and Multinational Oil companies’ deviation from these international standards that the Niger Delta people began their struggle.

The struggle began with the discovery of oil in commercial quantities by Shell-BP in Ijaw community of Oloibiri, Ogbia local government of Bayelsa state in 1956. The inhabitants of the region have persistently engaged the oil companies and the Nigerian state in series of protests. They protested against the laws relating to oil exploration, land ownership, environmental degradation and fair revenue sharing because these worked against the interest of the local people (Onduku, 2001). They have been protesting against these injustices peacefully for decades. As a result, Civil society groups like Pan-Niger Delta Resistance Movement CHIKOKO; the Environmental Rights Action; the Ijaw Youth Council; the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP), Movement for Reparation to Ogbia (MORETO) and the Movement for the Survival of the Ijo in the Niger Delta (MOSIEND) emerged in the processes of the campaign for corporate responsibility, environmental sustainability, self-determination and democratic development in the Niger Delta. They were simply fighting for sustenance while transnational oil corporations like Shell, Chevron, Elf, Mobil, and Texaco are engaged in the brutal exploitation of the oil resources. The Nigerian government is only interested in increased revenue.

This paper chose the Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP), its emergence, growth and activities that led the struggle to its present state because it was the earliest group to globalize the struggle of the Niger Delta. The focus on how the media enabled them to actualize one of their major aims, was summarized as follows:

The insertion of the Ogoni resistance into global rights agenda, was born out of the recognition ...that as a function of capitalist (oil) accumulation, and as a repressive force, the unequal partnership between the Nigerian state and oil multinationals is mutually reinforcing... it must be exposed in his own backyard in Europe and North America, and global fora as a violator of human rights in, and a reckless polluter of the Niger delta (Obi, 2001:87)

Theoretical Nexus

This paper adopts the Social Responsibility Theory for its framework of analysis. The protagonists of this theory, Wilbur Schramm, Siebert and Theodore Paterson (1949), in their book *Four Theories of Press*, found that the free market approach to press freedom has only increased the power of a single class and has not served the interests of the less well-off classes. The emergence of radio, TV and film suggested the need for some means of accountability. Thus the theory advocated some obligation on the part of the media to society.

Social Responsibility Theory of media emerged with a right-based approach to address real social problems facing various communities across nations. The theory rests on the notion of a free press acting socially responsibly towards their society with a commitment both on the part of the journalists and owners of media organizations. The right to know has been recognized as the supreme right of the people by the theory and thus, binding on the media by virtue of their role and responsibilities to safeguard the people's right to know. These are the two premises on which journalists write news items and draft their stories and articles. The professional perception is that they should remain true to their duty to inform their readers, listeners and viewers and promote a rights based approach to help reduce vulnerability (Plattner, 1992, Kent, 2000).

This theory enables us to understand why the media both locally and internationally had to wage serious campaign in support of the Niger Delta struggle even in the face of government crack down on media houses and journalists. The pursuit of its obligation to the people made the media to embark on such international campaign to inform the West and their allies of the atrocities that were being committed in the Niger Delta by the oil companies and the Nigerian state. The success of this campaign led to international coalition and pressure on the Nigerian state and the Oil companies that eventually translated into the current efforts to develop the region and ensure that oil companies pursue international best practices in the areas of corporate social responsibilities, environmental protection, gas flaring and equity in the management of the oil resources.

Communication and the Niger Delta Struggle

The conflicts in the Niger Delta are necessitated by the contradictions of environmental governance and oil politics in Nigeria (Ojatorotu, 2006). The conflicts have passed through three stages, including conflict between host

communities and the oil companies, that between local militants and the Nigerian state; and that between and among the various local communities. The struggle first started in Oloibiri against Shell by the Ogoni through community mobilization and agitation. However, the nature of the struggle changed from the late 1980s. Naanen (2006), the first secretary general of MOSOP, gave a first hand account of the character, stages and dynamics of the Ogoni struggle which this paper draws heavily from. The reason for the MOSOP's campaign can be summarized as follows; political marginalization, economic backwardness, the seizure of their natural resources, oil based environmental pollution, underdevelopment and cultural disintegration. All these and many others, put together, were leading to the extinction of the Ogoni people.

The struggle started with opposition to British rule in 1901. By 1950, Ogoni's foremost nationalist; Paul T N Birabi formed the Ogoni State Representative Assembly and started to struggle for autonomy. In the 1970s KAGOTE – an association of Ogoni elite – was formed to champion Ogoni cause. These earlier strategies of empowerment failed because they were elitist and not mass oriented.

The masses must be mobilized and made aware of their rights and the injustices of the system – which, of course, they felt daily - and what better alternatives that would fundamentally improve their lives are there. They had to be enjoined to take their destiny in their hands, to rise collectively and fight for their rights.

By the late 1980s, a new agendum of mass mobilization was articulated by Kenule Saro-Wiwa and joined by such men like Chief Edward Kobani and Dr G B Leton, Chief Emma Apenu. The first major action in the new approach was the drafting of the Ogoni Bill of rights (OBR) and the formation of MOSOP to actualize the OBR. To ensure that the document enjoyed the legitimacy of the people, it was signed by all the First and Second Class Chiefs in Ogoni, opinion leaders, as well as the leadership of MOSOP. The central demands in OBR include request for local autonomy, demand for adequate representation as a right in the government and other institutions, the payment of a reparation of four billion dollars from oil companies operating in Ogoni for environmental damage and six billion dollars being the share of oil royalties accruable to Ogoni. The manifesto mandated MOSOP to take the Ogoni case to the international community.

The document was formally presented to the “Government and People of Nigeria and the International Community” through newspaper advertisements while a copy was sent directly to the Head of state in Abuja. The prime mover, Kenule Saro-Wiwa officially took the title of Spokesman of the Ogoni People – a position which was greatly helped by his close association with the media and growing contacts in the international community. In April 1992, Saro-Wiwa and some Ogoni youths undertook a tour of Ogoni and the MOSOP message began to catch on. Still the incipient impact of the mobilization process seemed to have been restricted to Khana up to this stage. Gokana Kingdom was hardly affected

and by Saro-Wiwa's admission elsewhere, this changed dramatically when Kobani took it upon himself to call a meeting of the Gokana people (Naneen, 2006). A major breakthrough came with two related international achievements: the admission of Ogoni into the membership of the Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization (UNPO) in 1992. Through that organization based in The Hague, Saro-wiwa was able to attend the United Nations Working Group for Indigenous People in Geneva where he presented the Ogoni case. Naneen reports:

As early as nine o'clock on January 4 as many as 250,000 Ogoni people had thronged the kingdom headquarters with the largest crowd converging at Bori, singing and dancing to all manners of cultural performances. It was a great carnival. Saro-Wiwa and his colleagues made great speeches of exaltation. Women, men and children walked long distances from remote villages to be a part of the historic event. Passionate and patriotic speeches were made by leading Ogoni men and women, denouncing Shell and government for their "genocidal crimes" against the people of Ogoni.

It was the defining moment in the life of the Ogoni people. The publicity given to the rally in the national, and to some extent, international media, quickened the momentum of the struggle. A few weeks after the January 4 demonstration, hardly did any Sunday pass without a rally either at the village or Kingdom level. The Kingdom rallies normally attended by the leadership of MOSOP, was an opportunity to brief the people on the progress of the struggle, to tell them about what lies ahead and the sacrifice expected of them in order to arrive at the promised land where the suffering would end. The people were particularly interested in knowing about the organization's achievements at the international level. Somehow they had developed the view that their salvation could only come from the international community. The rallies became important occasions for renewing and sustaining the people's commitment to the struggle.

Certain incidents significantly contributed to galvanizing the Ogoni people and catalysed the mobilization. One of such events was the shooting in April 1993 of unarmed farmers of the village of Biara. The villagers had gathered to prevent Shell contractor, Willbros from bulldozing their fresh crops for a pipeline. Troops that Shell had brought along with Willbros shot into the crowd, injuring many people. The effect of the incident on the struggle was immediate. The tension that followed led to Shell's suspension of operations at its oilfields at Dere and Bodo West. Further demonstrations followed, leading to the shooting to death in Tai Kingdom of one of the demonstrators. The funeral of the young man was converted to a big solidarity event by MOSOP. Other incidents include the ethnic attacks on Ogoni by her neighbours, the Andoni, Ndoki and Okrika, from August 1993. Ogoni faced a state of emergency as these attacks encircled the people, threatening their struggle and existence. There were allegations that these attacks were sponsored by government and Shell, and in some cases, actually carried out or led by elements of the security forces. Although the allegations

have not been proved and Shell has continued to deny any involvement. They were enough to harden the people's perception of Shell and government as enemies of Ogoni.

The greatest strength of MOSOP lies in its international campaign. In 1993, Ken Saro-Wiwa was elected Vice-Chairman of UNPO's General Assembly while Naneen became the Vice-President of UNPO's Steering Committee (the decision-making organ of the organization) in 1995. This together with military repression helped to internationalize the Ogoni struggle through the role of the both the print and electronic media. MOSOP's international campaign falls in three phases. The first was the foundation phase when the initial contacts were established. This phase stretched from late 1991 to May 21, 1994 when Saro-Wiwa was arrested over the Giokoo murder. The second phase, which came after Saro-Wiwa's arrest and that of Ledum Mitee, saw the intensification of the campaign in which the military crackdown in Ogoni and the release of those arrested became the key rallying issues. In Britain, the period saw the formation of MOSOP-UK which increasingly played an important role in the international campaign as its international headquarters. Across the Atlantic, this phase also witnessed the beginning of the activism of some Ogoni people in the United States. The third phase came with the execution on November 10, 1995 of Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight others.

The campaigns, particularly the third phase, led to the suspension of Nigeria from the Commonwealth of Nations, the recalling of Ambassadors by the United States, Canada and the European Union and sanctions by the EU, the UN Secretary-General's special fact-finding mission to Nigeria, severe pressure on Nigeria at the United Nations. At this phase, it assumed a world-wide dimension as large numbers of Ogoni people who fled abroad in the wake of the executions inaugurated MOSOP chapters in their respective countries of asylum. This task of winning the international community over the Ogoni side and making Ogoni a key international issue was not easy. The calculated campaign strategy of MOSOP, persistence and series of blunders by the Nigerian military government in its handling of the Ogoni issue were promptly reported and analysed with editorials by the media. For instance, Saro-Wiwa was able to arrange the filming of the Ogoni part of Drilling Fields which focused on the activities of oil companies in different parts of the Third World. The Drilling Fields were broadcast on Britain's Channel 4 television in 1992. The film became the first major international exposure of Ogoni. UNPO broadened this and arranged contacts with the Western media. The London headquarters of the environmental campaign group, Greenpeace, sent a camera crew to cover the January 4 rally and subsequently played an important role in the campaign, from the environmental angle, with Shell being its main target. It made a number of publications on the activities of Shell in Ogoni. From the human rights perspective, the support of Amnesty International was crucial. The organization sent a three-man fact-finding mission to Ogoni in 1994. Its reports on the human rights situation in

Ogoni contributed immensely in galvanizing international opinion against Nigeria.

UNPO also organized lunch time press briefings and video presentations by its members in the course of various UN sessions. And the Ogoni featured prominently in these activities. Therefore, the globalization of the international system and the access to modern information and communication technologies were critical in advancing the Ogoni struggle at the global level. The availability of computers, telephones, fax machines, internet and the establishment of physical offices in America and Europe afforded MOSOP the opportunity to articulate its demands and highlight the plight of the Niger Delta people before the international audiences. Shell was able to conduct its own campaign, mainly through the use of propaganda on the Internet to debunk the accusations levelled against it by the people of the region and environmental activists. The role of the media in globalizing the Niger Delta crisis cannot be overemphasized. Obi (2001b: 173-193) noted that:

Television stations and networks beamed the 'ecological violations' against the Ogoni to shocked audiences across the world In one program, Bop Van Dessel, Shell's former head of environmental studies in Nigeria, confirmed Shell's complicity in damaging the Niger Delta's fragile ecosystem.

The use of propaganda by MOSOP and modern communication system influenced and facilitated the capacity of INGOs' to visit Ogoni land and other parts of the Niger Delta for on-the-spot assessment. It afforded them the opportunity to address politicians, parliaments, and pressure groups in order to win them over to the side of the forces of local protest (Obi, 2001b:7). MOSOP became a beneficiary of foreign grants, which enabled it to intensify its struggle and to "turn the heat" on the Nigeria state and Shell to change their attitude towards the Niger Delta. Other social movements came to the fore in the other parts of the Niger Delta to broaden and to continue the struggle, practically breathing new life into the processes set in motion by MOSOP as a result of the media coverage and international support achieved by MOSOP. Their contributions to the struggle which metamorphosed into arms struggle, the pressure and sanctions from the international communities and the debilitating effects of the struggle on Nigerian economy made both the Oil companies and the Nigerian State to initiate programmes that will usher in an era of development in the region.

When General Abdulsalam Abubakar took over the reins of power in 1998, he set up a 22-member committee (headed by Major-General Oladayo Popoola) to appraise the various recommendations made by the UN, EU and USA to the government on how to tackle the crisis in the Niger Delta. In its report, the committee recommended a total financial outlay of about fifteen billion Naira for the provision of basic infrastructure such as marine transportation, telecommunications and electricity supply in the Niger Delta

region (The Guardian 23 March 1999). The return of democracy in 1999 made the National Assembly to pass a bill in June 2000, which led to the establishment of the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) (The Guardian 16 July 2000). This commission has the primary role of formulating policies and guidelines for the development of the region and the provision of infrastructure in the areas of transportation (roads, jetties and water ways), health, education, industrialization, agriculture, fisheries, housing and urban development, water supply, electricity and telecommunications.

The Commission also has the mandate to identify factors inhibiting the development of the Niger Delta as well as to assist states in the region in terms of the formulation and implementation of policies to ensure sound and effective management of the resources of the Niger Delta. The NDDC's functions also include tackling ecological problems in the Niger Delta and advising the Nigerian state and state governments in the region on the plausible ways to prevent and control oil spillages and environmental pollution (The Guardian [Lagos] 11 July 1999).

The oil companies have also embarked on noteworthy investment programmes, involving flow line replacement and upgrading of other installations in the Niger Delta (with the exception of Ogoni land) (“Shell and Nigeria”, <http://www.pirc.co.uk/shelldec2.htm>), award of scholarships to indigenes, infrastructural developments in the health, education, and transport sectors, payment of royalties among others. Politically, the region is now strategically accommodated in governance at the federal level occupying such positions like Vice president, Inspector General of Police, among others. Recently, the federal ministry of Niger Delta was created to oversee sustainable development in the region. Though the crisis is not completely resolved, the region wears a new look when compared to the past.

Summary

This paper took a historical stride into the emergence and growth of the Niger Delta struggle with a view to finding out the role played by the globalization of communication in the achievement of the goals of the struggle. The devastating experiences by the Ogonis from Shell Oil exploration led to the intensification of the struggle against marginalization in the area. The struggle that was originally localised and non-violent changed scope and nature due to government and oil companies’ intransigency and repression. The organizational vanguard for the struggle, MOSOP, internationalized it using propaganda and the media. This enabled the Ogonis to sell their cause to the international community and win its support for. Through the media also international NGOs and Government were able to network and raise a coordinated response and pressure in affirmation to the Ogoni struggle. It equally galvanized and led to the emergence of many social and militant groups across the Niger Delta, which in effect, helped to internationalize and mobilize the masses for the struggle. Some

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of the media outfits involved include; the internet, the electronic and print media, e.t.c. The various repressive governments that Nigeria had would have not allowed the media participate in and or carry on with the Ogoni campaign if they were local communication industries and if their reach were equally local.

The combined effect of the Ogoni struggle, which later became militant in nature, international pressures, isolation and sanctions, led the oil companies and the Nigerian state to embark on economic and infrastructural development programmes in the region. Political concessions have equally been made. It is, therefore, the opinion of this paper that the borderless nature of communication in this era of globalization, contributed positively to the growth and success of the Niger Delta struggle.

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