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# **Regional Conflict and National Development in Nigeria: A Study of the Niger-Delta Region**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This paper examined regional conflict and national development in Nigeria with focus on the Niger Delta region. The Niger Delta region has witnessed unprecedented spate of violent conflict in the last decades, and all efforts to manage these conflicts seem to have failed to yield the desired result. The paper investigated the emerging trends of some of these conflicts, and assesses the menace of regional conflict on national development. The paper adopted both primary and secondary data while the theory of war economy is used as the theoretical framework. Findings reveal that youth militias, rebels, armed gangs, bandits, religious fanatics, and politically-sponsored group used regional conflict as a conduct-pipe to carry out illicit deals that benefit them economically. The study concluded that the persistent crisis in Niger Delta region though has negative implication such as loss of revenue, rise in unemployment, destruction of economic facilities and untimely death are most time traded by individuals who cash out and this do not translate to national development. As long as inequality persists, a large number of people are living in poverty, and the numbers of frustrated, aggrieved, and aggressive people will continue to rise, and as such, regional conflict will remain. The paper recommended that oil companies, the various levels of government and other stakeholders should address issues of neglect by oil companies, marginalization and inequality leading to wide spread poverty.

**Keywords:** Regional Conflict, National Development, Niger Delta

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Conflict is inevitable in human societies (Ellis, 2020). He opined that this perception however includes the assumption that acute and chronic conflicts hamper national development. The author stressed that the lingering violent conflict in the Niger Delta region attracted serious concerns because of the strategic importance of the region not only to the national economy but the supply of crude oil in the global oil market. However, successive Nigerian governments and international organizations attempted to promote peace in the Niger Delta but the initiatives were seen to not yield immediate positive response. Ukeje (2021) noted that while the presence of huge reserves of gas and oil has turned the Niger Delta into the economic “jewel in the Nigerian crown, the exploitation of these resources is not in the hand of the people of the region. Rather, he furthered that the resources are being exploited for the Nigerian state by foreign multinational corporations (MNCs). Since these MNCs provide the technology for translating the rich resources of the Niger Delta into wealth, they practically control the key to the country’s economic prosperity. In the exercise of this onerous responsibility, the multinational corporations fall under the supervision of the Nigerian state.

According to Ikelegbe (2005), three principal parties are impacted by the oil-related activities in the Niger Delta, namely Nigerian State, Multinational Oil Corporations and the local communities in the Niger Delta region. Discussing further, he noted that for the relationship to be harmonious, the three parties must share in the benefits of the gas and oil wealth. He opined that at the present, it would seem that there is less than adequate concern for the interest of the Niger delta people by the Nigeria state and the multinational corporations in the distribution of the benefits of the gas and oil wealth derived from the region. The Niger Delta people strongly believe that the Nigeria state has failed to represent their interest in the manner the prosperity being generated from their place is being distributed despite the environmental problem they suffer as a result of oil exploitation and as such would want to take over the control of these resources themselves (Onduku, 2011). The prosperity being generated from oil production in the region instead of creating real wealth for the people of the Niger Delta region has brought about environmental degradation, instability, corruption and repression. Oil production instead of spreading contentment and harmony in the region, has brought about frustration and a complex, multi-level conflict, which has persisted for a long time now (Ake, 2001).

The struggle of the Niger Delta people in Nigeria has been a concern since the discovery of oil in Oloibiri, Bayelsa State by Shell-BP in 1956, and in Ogoni, Rivers State in 1957 (Naanen, 2016). Despite the fact that the Niger Delta holds the secret to Nigeria's abundant crude oil export, accounting for about 90% of Nigeria's revenue, (Richard, 2019), local communities in the Niger Delta remain poor. Collier, (2013) found that resorting to conflicts by the Niger Delta people has become the only viable way of expressing grievances by the oil rich communities. Since majority of the youth in the Niger Delta are unemployed, opportunity cost of fighting becomes extremely low, which further exacerbates the already deteriorating conditions. Naanen (2016) shows that low education attainment, unemployment and poverty persists in Niger Delta communities. Although the Niger Delta locals claim that the government has not done enough in bringing this situation under control (Welch, 2017), the Nigerian government has not been completely responsive to their demands. However, adequate effort has not been made in trying to combat conflict using development measures in the Niger Delta. This may be as a result of ignorance of the theoretical stance on the effect of underdevelopment on conflict, which this paper tries to shed more light on using empirical evidence. This paper therefore examines the emerging trends of regional conflict and their implications on national development.

## **2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

This study adopts the theory of war economy. The theory was propounded by a secretive US Trotskyist economist, Edward Solomon in 1933 but gained prominence in academic literatures of political science in the late 1940s to the 1980s. This theory has been used by Ikelegbe to explain the intractability of the Niger Delta conflict. In this paper, it is used to explain the relationship between the reasons and impact of the Niger Delta conflict on national development.

One of the propositions of this theory is that the resources of states are prone to endless conflict and war. Incidence of primary commodity exports, especially mineral wealth in states has been found to be associated with conflict and the occurrence and duration of civil war (De Soya, 2000). This theory is related, first to the acute struggle for access and control of resources by rulers and counter elites and merchants' accumulation and political consideration (Ikelegbe, 2005). Collier notes that in extreme cases, this increases vulnerability to conflict redde violent conflict over power and resources. These struggle spurn appropriation and privatization through patrimonial network, exclusive contact with foreign firm themselves through the war (Ikelegbe, 2005). Even the armed forces in Sierra Leone and Liberia were often drawn into the illegal, informal and violent economy through protection, complicity and direct activities. Various factions fought for control over diamond mines as a source of personal enrichment (Nwolise, 2013). As Ifeka (2021) note, the situation of disorder produces new opportunities and is quite functional in terms of economic profiting.

This theoretical framework aptly explains the implications of the conflict in the Niger Delta region where the struggle over the control of oil resources in the region between the indigenes of the region and the Nigerian state has produced an informal economy that is counterproductive to revenue generation for national development. The Niger Delta region is strategic to the generation of revenue for national development in Nigeria as oil and gas from the region account for 80% of her national revenue and 95% of foreign exchange earnings as such conflict within the region would no doubt produce negative implications on national development. The conflict has produced a safe haven for all sorts of economic crimes to thrive in the region. It promotes transnational border crimes such as smuggling, trafficking in precious gems, oil bunkering, illegal and clandestine commerce, piracy, arms and drug trafficking and other organized crime syndicates in the region that have negative implications for national development. As the conflict escalates the informal economy booms while the national economy suffers huge losses. The conflict conditions create more opportunities for the plundering of the resources and other valuables by the militias which they market through their established networks of illegal trades, within and outside the country. The conflict has therefore created a parallel economy (informal economy); that is antagonistic or antithetical to the growth and development of the national economy. The more the informal economy progresses the more the national economy catches cold. Put differently the conditions which produce growth and development in the informal economy on the contrary ice underdevelopment in the national economy. The conflict situation has produced a paradox “business as crime and crime as business,” business for the actors of the informal economy but crime for the actors of the national economy. Furthermore, the more the conflict in the region intensifies the more the economic activities in the region get grinded, leading to decline in revenue output and shading of oil workers to cover the additional cost of meeting with the increasing security challenges in the region. Worse still most oil companies in the region have relocation business activities from the region to safety areas for fear of insecurity to life and property leading again to loss of jobs by Nigerians. Again, Nigerian state is incurring additional cost to meet up with increasing security challenges in the region and these are resources that the country could have been directed to national development. The youth militia groups are fond of imposing illegal levies on villagers, farmer and businessmen in region and as such further compounds economic hardship on the citizens. They also engage in hostage taking and demand ransoms for the release of their hostages and this also negatively affects the economic life of people. This theoretical framework is found to be adequate for the explanation of this study because it not only offers a holistic view of the conflict but unveils the current causes or variables which provoke the conflict, the dynamics as well as their inter-linkages, how they mingle or interact to produce and sustain the conflict and the implications of the conflict on national development.

### **3. CONCEPTUAL REVIEW**

#### **Concept of Conflict**

The word conflict has no universally acceptable meaning. However, according to Idede (2015), the term conflict derives from “conflegere”, a Latin word which means to strike together. Idede further remarked that unlike the way it is now understood, the word originally had a physical rather than a moral connotation. The scholar reasoned that at the technical level, the word conflict could simply be defined as opposition among social entities directed against one another. Richard (2019) opined that the word “opposition” as used here is better understood when contrasted with the word “cooperation”. It is then axiomatic to say that when you are not cooperating, you are opposing and then there is conflict. In this sense, a conflict exists where there is too little or no cooperation. Kriestberg (1973) defines conflict as a relationship between two or more parties who believe they have incompatible goals. This means that conflict is said to exist when two parties pursue interests that are at cross-purpose with each other.

The above definition agrees with Hoivk and Meijer (2014) who define conflict as incompatible behaviours between parties whose interests are, or appears to be incompatible classing. For Idede, conflict simply refers to a fight, a quarrel, a struggle, a bitter argument, opposition, difference in opinion, desire etc. This definition portrays conflict in a negative light rather than positive as falls short of explaining the

concept of conflict. Contributing to the exploration of this concept, Collier (2013) perceives conflict as a breakdown in the normal activities of an organization in such a manner that the individual or group involved experiences disharmony in working together. Richard (2019) defines conflict as the simultaneous occurrence of two or more mutually antagonistic impulses or motives while Wilson and Hanna (2000) describe it as a struggle involving ideas, values and/or limited resources. Deutsch (2017) views it as an action, which prevents, obstructs, interferes with, injures or renders ineffective another action with which it is incompatible. Collier and Hoeffler (2018) define conflict as a breakdown in standard mechanism of decision making. For Deutsch (2017), conflict exists where incompatible activities occur. As far as De soya (2000) is concerned, conflict occurs when the actions or beliefs of one or more members of a group are unacceptable to and hence are resisted by one or more groups or members. Pruitt and Rubin (2016) define it as perceive divergence of interest or beliefs that the parties' current aspirations cannot be achieved simultaneously.

From definitions offered by the scholars above, conflict connotes a disagreement between two or more parties who believe they have incompatible goals or beliefs with each other. For Nwolise (2013) conflict refers to a clash, confrontation, battle or struggle. Essentially conflict connotes disagreement, dispute or controversy in ideas, or viewpoints held by two or more individuals/groups. In general terms and by way of comparison, dispute involves negotiable interest while conflicts are concerned with issues that are not negotiable, issues that relate to ontological human needs that cannot be compromised. Hence, Coser (2000) defines conflict as a struggle over values and resources in which the aims of the opponents are to neutralize, injure, or eliminate their rivals. Here, conflict is presented as a means of resolving dispute. This conceptualization of conflict is in line with Otite (1999) who opines that conflict may therefore not be regarded only in a negative light of dysfunctional or disjunctive process and a breakdown of communication as some scholars tend to suggest. He asserted that conflict is a contact and communication. It is a normal process of interaction particularly, in complex societies in which resources are usually scarce. From this assertion, conflicts generally occur wherever there are incompatible groups with divergent orientations, values and beliefs.

### **Concept of National Development**

The concept "national development" cannot properly be conceived without first clarifying the concept of development. Unfortunately, the concept, "development" like other concepts in social science has no generally accepted meaning. Consequently, scholars view development from two broad perspectives; the traditional view and the contemporary view.

Traditionally, development meant the capacity of national economy whose initial economic condition has been more or less static for a long time, to generate and sustain an annual increase in its gross national product (GNP) at rates perhaps 5% to 7% or more (Todaro and Smith, 2004). Development within this perspective is seen almost purely as an economic phenomenon, thus the major index of development has been a growth of income per capita or per capita GNP. It was believed that the benefits of growth will invariably extend to all segments of society. This process is referred to as a "trickle down effect." Furthermore, development has been defined as a type of social change in which new ideas are introduced into a social system in order to produce higher per capital incomes and levels of living through more modern production methods and improved social organization (Rogers, 1969). Base on the foregoing, some development scholars have come to equate development with westernization. According to Ake (2001), modernization theory posits an original state of backwardness or underdevelopment characterized by among other things, growth that is at least potentially amenable to alteration through normal process of capital. Original state of backwardness is initially universal. According to the theory, the industrialized countries have managed to overcome it. All the other countries could conceivably overcome backwardness too if they adopted appropriate strategies. These theorists often use words as "modern", "institutional differentiation," "development", "nation-building", "westernization", "backward", "primitive," "tribal", "detribalized" etc (Offiong, 2018). What modernization theories most often end up with is in eventuating ethnocentric practical recipes which admonish the poor societies to initiate them all

the way and they would acquire a sudden leap into the 21st century. Obi (2015) opines that the disputing performance of most countries that pursued development from the traditional approach led to a new thinking of the concept of development. The mindless pursuit of development through an increase in income per capita without a thought on how the benefits of growth are distributed in the society resulted in greater income disparities, a few very rich people and a mass of people wallowing in object poverty. While the rich were getting exclusively rich, the poor were getting miserably poor. This means that the “trickle-down effect” did not take place. Celso Furtado describes this phenomenon as ‘growth without development and this shows that the recorded growth in the state economy failed to address the needs of the citizens (Obi, 2015). That is why Dudley Seers question: What has been happening to poverty? What has been happening to unemployment? What has been happening to inequality? He noted that if all three of these have declined from high levels, then beyond doubt this has been a period of development for the country concerned. If one or two of these central problems have been growing worse, especially if all the three have, it would be strange to call the result “development” even if per capita income doubled (Seers, 1969).

The new focus on the meaning of development is one that makes people the garget or end of development. Development in this sense is not just and about growth but about people: the distribution of income to enhance better quality of life for all. Development is therefore a process by which people create and recreate themselves and their life circumstances to realize higher levels of civilization in accordance with their own choices and values (Ake, 2001). Gauba (2014) submits that development may be identified as a process in which a system or institution is transformed into stronger or more organized, more efficient, and effective form proved to be more satisfying in term of human wants and aspirations. In all, development means efforts by man to improve and sustain socio-economic and political transformation of humans and the basic structures of the society from a comparatively low level to more qualitatively, and quantitatively remarkably improved form.

National development, going by the above conceptualization of development could mean the improvement of peoples’ life styles, through improved education, skills, income distribution and employment generation. Okpata (2014) posits that national development entails some positive qualitative and quantitative changes in the society. United Nation Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA) defines national development as a sustainable and responsible socio-economic development which ensures growth while protecting the resource base for the benefit of future generation. However, national development connotes the pursuit of the wellbeing of the peoples of a particular country by ensuring that their skills and creativity are improved to the highest limit possible.

## **1. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This study is field survey research which involves the use of triangulation (primary and secondary data). Nigeria has a total population of 44,112,908 (National Bureau of Statistics, 2022). However, the sample size of 400 respondents was determined using the Taro Yamane’s formula. Data were obtained through the administration of structured questionnaire to the respondents. The questionnaire was structured into two sections. Section A entails the demographic attributes while the Section B centred on questions used in examining regional conflict and national development. Their responses were rated with options of strongly agree, agree, disagree, and strongly disagree. Data obtained were presented using tables and percentages. Simple percentage statistical method was used to determine degree of acceptability.

**5. DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS**

**Socio-demographic Characteristics of the Respondents**

**Table 1: Administration of Questionnaires**

Number of questionnaires administered	400
Number of returned questionnaires	350
Number of valid questionnaires	300
Percentage rate of successfully completed and returned questionnaires	86%

**Source: Field Work, 2024**

The interpretation of the above is that 400 questionnaires were administered to the various category of respondents. 350 returned while 50 were wrongly filled, manhandled, and destroyed. Then, 300 questionnaires were properly filled representing an acceptance number of 86% which is also a good response rate for this study.

**Table 2: Frequency and Percentage distribution of Respondents by Age**

Age	Frequency	Percentage
18-30yrs	95	32.0
31-40yrs	150	50.0
41-50yrs	55	18.0
Total	300	100

**Source: Fieldwork, 2024**

The result presented in table 2 above shows frequency and percentage distribution of respondents by age. The table revealed that 18-30 yrs, 31-40yrs, and 41-50yrs have frequencies of 95, 150 and 55 respectively. This indicates that majority of the respondents are within the age bracket of 31-40 years representing 50% of the population of this study.

**Table 3: Frequency and Percentage distribution of Respondents by Level of Education**

Education	Frequency	Percentage
No formal education	3	1.0
Primary Education	7	2.3
Secondary Education	120	40.0
OND/NCE	109	36.3
B Sc.	50	16.7
Higher Degree	10	3.3
Others	1	0.3
Total	300	100.0

**Source: Fieldwork, 2024**

The result in table 3 above shows that the highest number (120) of the respondents, representing 40.0%, is those with secondary school education. This figure is followed by those with OND/NCE with 109, representing 36.3% of the respondents. This indicates that most of the respondents are aware or understand the concept of regional conflict and national development in the Niger Delta.

**DATA ANALYSIS**

**Research Question 1: *What are the emerging trends of regional conflict in national development?***

**Table 4: Response rates for emerging trend of regional conflict in national development**

Questions	SA	A	D	SD	Min	Max	Mean	Std.
Greed and opportunities for resource benefit are motivation for violence and conflict in national development.	99	118	28	55	1.00	5.00	4.00	0.862
Struggle for political relevance and economic space to further extraction of resource benefits.	46	198	22	34	1.00	5.00	2.97	0.671
Get-rich-quick syndrome is an emerging trend that has fuelled conflict in national development.	200	54	16	30	1.00	5.00	4.02	0.599

**Source: Field Survey Data, 2024**

In table 4, on whether greed and opportunities for resource benefit are motivation for violence and conflict in national development, 55 respondents strongly disagreed, 28 respondents disagreed, 118 respondents agreed and 99 respondents strongly agreed as it is evident that 72% (217 out of 300) respondents disagreed. On whether struggle for political relevance and economic space to further extraction of resource benefits, 34 respondents strongly disagreed, 22 respondents agreed, 198 agreed and 46 strongly agreed. On whether Get-rich-quick syndrome is an emerging trend that has fuelled conflict in national development, 30 respondents strongly disagreed, 16 respondents disagreed, 54 agreed and 200 strongly agreed. This is to show that there are emerging trends of regional conflict in national development.

**Research Question 2: *What is the implication of regional conflict on national development?***

**Table 5: Response rates for implication of regional conflict on national development**

Questions	SA	A	D	SD	Min	Max	Mean	Std.
There is a sharp loss of revenue arising from vandalization of oil pipelines and infrastructural facilities in national development.	118	99	18	65	1.00	5.00	4.00	0.673
Violence has led to political instability and decline in employment and job creation in national development.	25	219	34	22	1.00	5.00	2.97	0.956
Regional conflict has led to a decline in socioeconomic activities in the country.	230	24	6	40	1.00	5.00	4.02	0.789

**Source: Field Survey Data, 2022**

In table 5, on whether there is a sharp loss of revenue arising from vandalization of oil pipelines and infrastructural facilities in national development, 65 respondents strongly disagreed, 18 respondents disagreed, 99 respondents agreed and 118 respondents strongly agreed. Whether violence has led to political instability and decline in employment and job creation in national development, 22 respondents strongly disagreed, 34 respondents agreed, 219 agreed and 25 strongly agreed. Whether regional conflict has led to a decline in socioeconomic activities in the country, 40 respondents strongly disagreed, 6 respondents disagreed, 24 agreed and 230 strongly agreed. The high number of respondents who agreed is an indication that there are implications of regional conflict on national development.

**Research Question 3: What is the menace of regional conflict on national development?**

**Table 6: Response rates for menace of regional conflict on national development.**

Questions	SA	A	D	SD	Min	Max	Mean	Std.
Regional conflict has led to unwarranted attacks and increase in internally displaced persons.	99	118	28	55	1.00	5.00	4.00	0.708
Health facilities suffer pressure through increase in casualties in regional conflict in national development.	48	200	35	17	1.00	5.00	3.92	0.966
Conflict increases socioeconomic difficulties of the people in national development.	113	120	40	27	1.00	5.00	3.67	0.874

**Source: Field Survey Data, 2024**

In table 6, whether regional conflict has led to unwarranted attacks and increase in internally displaced persons. 55 respondents strongly disagreed, 28 respondents disagreed, 118 respondents agreed and 99 respondents strongly agreed. Whether health facilities suffer pressure through increase in casualties in regional conflict in national development, 17 respondents strongly disagreed, 35 respondents disagreed, 200 respondents agreed and 48 strongly agreed. Whether Conflict increases socioeconomic difficulties of the people in national development. 27 respondents strongly disagreed, 40 disagreed, 120 agreed and 113 strongly agreed. This indicates that there is menace of violent regional conflict on national development in the Niger Delta.

**6. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

**Emerging trends of regional conflict in national development:** Data analysis reveals that greed and opportunities for resource benefit are motivation for violence and conflict in national development, 55 respondents strongly disagreed, 28 respondents disagreed, 118 respondents agreed and 99 respondents strongly agreed as it is evident that 72% (217 out of 300) respondents disagreed. On whether struggle for political relevance and economic space to further extraction of resource benefits, 34 respondents strongly disagreed, 22 respondents agreed, 198 agreed and 46 strongly agreed. On whether Get-rich-quick syndrome is an emerging trend that has fuelled conflict in national development, 30 respondents strongly disagreed, 16 respondents disagreed, 54 agreed and 200 strongly agreed. This is to show that there are emerging trends of regional conflict in national development. In line with responses from the questionnaires, an interviewee states that:

There is the profiting from violence by youth militias, rebels, armed gangs and even government soldiers. This involves plundering, looting, extortion, imposition of tolls and robbery of local people, traders and farmers. In fact, youth militias are driven by the opportunities to acquire properties and riches. Extortion and looting by armed gangs; the MEND; and government troops were common during the Niger Delta regional conflict (T. Brakemi, personal communication, July 12, 2024).

In line with above, Ikelegbe (2005) opined that war and conflict in Africa have in recent times had a considerable involvement of mercantilists, who capitalize on the profits of scarce resource. Mercantilists such as foreign mining and mineral exploiting companies often partner and take sides with state or non state actors in order to have favoured access to participate in formal or informal trading and in legal or illegal exploitation. Several companies, foreign commercial interests and private military companies supported rebels and government forces (Breytenbach, n.d). Allen (1999) declared that warlords characterize African insurgencies, rebellions and wars.



In the light of the above, transnational organized crime is heightened as clandestine companies and agents play crucial roles as middlemen between warlords in plundering resources, arms trafficking, money laundering and smuggling. Most of non-state actors of violence are linked or integrated into the global channels, structures, and networks of the black economy and informal international underground economy (Mair, 2013). A variety of less internationally respected companies, criminal rackets, adventures and carriers/pilots are involved in Niger Delta's resource war (Mair, 2013). According to Collier (2013), conflict and war region also have a high level of informal economies. This is much more than the flight towards the illegal and informal being much more prospective and profitable (Richard, 2019). Informal networks, black markets, underground economic activities and a growing general criminalization of economic life are quite extensive in conflict environment both as a form of resistance as a part of the dynamics of conflicts (Allen, 1999).

However, there are several explanatory dimensions of the economies of war in the Niger Delta. First is that it is the actual cause of rebellions and wars. Mair (2013) states that war lords and patrons of crime merely disguise their pure economic agenda with political grievances in order to legitimize their activities. The greed and opportunities for resource benefits are seen as motivation for violence and conflict by both state actors and non state actors such as rebels, insurgents, dissidents, militias and warlords. Quite related is that rebellion and war are prolonged and sustained by economic opportunities and trade network in conflict regions (Naidoo, 2000). Collier (2013) asserts that the exploitation of natural resources has played a prominent part in conflict by sustaining warring groups. Economic profiting from war provides funds for armament and payment to aides and troops. A third dimension is that the economy of war is seen as underpinning violence in the conflicts in Africa's resource rich regions. This occurs as an increase number of actors struggle for economic space to further extraction of resource benefits.

**Implications of regional conflicts on national development:** Primary data reveals that there is a sharp loss of revenue arising from vandalization of oil pipelines and infrastructural facilities in national development, 65 respondents strongly disagreed, 18 respondents disagreed, 99 respondents agreed and 118 respondents strongly agreed. Whether violence has led to political instability and decline in employment and job creation in national development, 22 respondents strongly disagreed, 34 respondents agreed, 219 agreed and 25 strongly agreed. Whether regional conflict has led to a decline in socioeconomic activities in the country, 40 respondents strongly disagreed, 6 respondents disagreed, 24 agreed and 230 strongly agreed. The high number of respondents who agreed is an indication that there are implications of regional conflict on national development. This report is in consistent with an interviewee who reveals that:

There was loss of revenue; in fact, Nigeria experienced an annual loss of 4.4 billion dollars (3.2 billion euros). 70,000 to 300,000 barrels of oil was lost per day to illegal bunkering. Also, Shell Development Company retrenched more than 5,000 workers while the crisis had also impacted negatively on the telecommunication sector, as militant activities have compounded the problems of drop calls in the networks of mobile operators in the country (Nigeria) as several base stations have become inaccessible in the region. (J. Tamunoiyowuna, personal communication, July 21, 2024).

Corroborating the claim above, scholars such as Ademola (2017), Ake (2001), Ukeje (2021), Omeje (2014), Allen (1999) amongst others have identified several implications of the Niger Delta conflict on national development. They averred that the government of Nigeria relies heavily on the earnings derived from the sales of oil to be able to carry out its obligations. The crisis which began in the region has at times forced oil production shutdowns of up to 800,000 barrels per day (International Crisis Group, 2016). Besides, all the states of the region have been failing in their oil production quota and that means lower 13 percent derivation fund. The oil companies were on tenterhooks, as their operations were being carried out in fits and starts and the environment was not safe for business. Construction work on the very

important East West Road, which the people of the region had been complaining for a very long time was abandoned by Sctraco, the construction firm handling the job, after some of its expatriate workers were kidnapped by militant (Whelan, 2017).

Also, the conflict has made illegal bunkering of oil to thrive which is also the source of funds for the militants operating in the creeks of Niger Delta. Put another way, one day's worth of illegal oil bunkering in the Niger Delta could buy quality weapons for and sustain a group of 1,500 youths for two months (International Crisis Group, 2018). However, it must be noted that the activities of these bunkers have a serious threat to the supply of revenue for national development and security wellbeing of this nation. Given the place of security in national development, the Niger Delta conflict creates negative impacts on our development efforts.

Furthermore, there was a sharp decline in employment and job creation. As the crisis in the Niger Delta is hampering operations of the oil companies, some of them embarked on a lay-off of their workers. The idea was conceived in order to reduce operation cost, in view of worsening security situation in the Niger Delta region. The management of Shell opted for the measure in response to the cut in production, especially in the western operation in Bayelsa and Delta states. Finally, there was also a decline in economic activities. Since the beginning of the crisis, particularly hostage taking and attack on oil installations in the Niger Delta, there has been death of business activities. Restiveness has reduced growth in the business sector in the past three years. In River State alone, the situation assumed a worrisome dimension to the extent that about 80 percent of the companies in the state had stopped operations as expatriates have either gone to their countries, or have taken cover in other areas (Punch Newspaper, 2007). The development had in turn, increased the unemployment ratio among the youth.

**Menace of regional Conflict on National Development:** Investigation reveals that regional conflict has led to unwarranted attacks and increase in internally displaced persons. 55 respondents strongly disagreed, 28 respondents disagreed, 118 respondents agreed and 99 respondents strongly agreed. Whether health facilities suffer pressure through increase in casualties in regional conflict in national development, 17 respondents strongly disagreed, 35 respondents disagreed, 200 respondents agreed and 48 strongly agreed. Whether Conflict increases socioeconomic difficulties of the people in national development. 27 respondents strongly disagreed, 40 disagreed, 120 agreed and 113 strongly agreed. This indicates that there is menace of violent regional conflict on national development in the Niger Delta.

Richard (2019) notes that the issues that trigger regional conflict include political, ethnic, socioeconomic, and religion, among other issues. While violent conflict remains unabated, its implications on Nigerians and Nigeria's development are immeasurable and unquantifiable. Regional conflict is a precarious issue obstructing every phase of the development process in Nigeria. Its damaging effect on the economy, especially on the means of livelihoods and those who are inhabiting conflict-affected areas, is worrisome. Conflict is responsible for the low welfare of people, and consequently imposes costs on an individual's economic prospects such that, when one's health is declined, the cost of securing good health is already imposed. It has resulted in a large number of internally displaced persons. According to an interviewee:

Conflict could be said to have resulted from tension, suspicion, mistrust, and mutual distrust among different ethnic groups that were forced to live as a country. Violent conflict also puts pressure on the health facilities and personnel. In Nigeria, whenever a violent conflict occurs, it always results in casualties, both death and injury. It has brought serious burdens and emergencies to the health sector. The fact that the activities do lead to the destruction of health care facilities and infrastructure has further heightened the pressure on the health personnel (P. Osaro, personal communication, July 30, 2024).

Collier and Hoeffler (2018) notes that since the end of the Nigerian civil war, regional conflict has remained part of the relationships between and among the diverse ethnic groups. This is because some of the problems like ethnic eccentricities, ethno-religious identities, ethnic militias, and parochial political

sentiments among other issues that resulted in the civil war, have not been resolved. To tackle some of these problems, successive administrations after the civil war instituted and embarked on different programs and policies to ensure peace and unity in others to preserve the country as an indivisible entity. Notable among these programs was the introduction of the quota system, and later federal character principle (Naanen, 2016). The purpose of which was to prevent a particular ethnic group from monopolizing or dominating leadership in the government or be left out from the economic and political opportunities of the country. Thus, the federal character principle is implemented to control and regulate every facet of public affairs (Collier, 2013). For instance, the policy is used for admission into the government schools and universities; for civil service appointments; and for recruitment into the military and police. All of these processes are tailored along with statism (Idede, 2015). However, these policies, rather than cementing diverse ethnic groups, further exposes the fixation on ethnic sharing of national opportunities and resources made Nigerians more aware of their ethnic differences. For that reason, Nigeria's independence has continued to witness challenges of regional conflict despite the various policies in place to keep the country as an entity.

## **CONCLUSION**

Regional conflict has negative consequences on the development of any nation. This study has shown that economic marginalization, environmental degradation, militants' activities, farmers-herders conflict, poverty and inequality between/among different groups, unemployment, ethnic diversity and differences, and a culture of impunity among the public officers among other reasons, have induced conflict in Nigeria. In Niger Delta, a large number of people are still living from hand to mouth and many people are hopeless, helpless, and hapless despite living in the midst of abundance. The resultant effects are frustration and aggression, which have been leading to regional conflict. Most of the youth population, who were at the centre of all violence, repeatedly joined the illicit activities to keep their bodies and souls together and provide food for their tables. This study has thus concluded that as long as inequality persists, the numbers of frustrated, aggrieved, and aggressive people will continue to rise, and as such, regional conflict will remain.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

The following recommendations are made:

1. The government and other stakeholders in the Nigerian government and administration should first of all address the issue of poverty and inequality. This can be achieved through quality governance, by putting in place committed, visionary leaders to man the affairs of the country.
2. Nigeria state, Multi National Oil Companies, International Community and stakeholders in the Nigeria project should constantly rise to the challenges of managing the security situation in the region by urgently addressing the fundamental conditions which provoke and promote the conflict. In this regard what would readily come to mind are the vexed issues of fiscal relations among the federating units in Nigeria, marginalization and neglect of the oil rich region in infrastructure development by both the federal government and oil companies.
3. Environmental degradation and rising unemployment ratio in the Niger Delta Region among others yet to be mentioned here should also be investigated and address appropriately. There should be a clearly demonstrated political will and commitment by the government and the Oil Companies towards addressing the identified problems in the Niger Delta Region.

## **Knowledge Gap**

There are several, widely documented literatures on conflict and the impact on the socioeconomic development of the people of the Niger Delta. Scholars such as Ademola, Ake, Allen, etc have examined regional conflict, violent conflict, and communal crises but very few of these literatures have interrogated the impact of regional conflict on national development. Notwithstanding, this paper therefore fills the

literature gap by investigating regional conflict and national development in Nigeria with focus on the Niger-Delta from 2013 to 2023.

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