

# The Prospects for Peace in the Niger Delta

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## 2. Perceptions from Below - Findings of consultation in the Niger Delta

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## **Executive Summary**

The Niger Delta is preparing for a very bloody and politically charged intra/inter ethnic and militia based count down to the 2007 electoral process. This politicalisation of already tense relationships in the Niger Delta spells real trouble for all stakeholders and their assets, most importantly the lives of the population in the region. We can expect a significant escalation of violence and direct action in the Niger Delta throughout 2006, which is more than likely to rapidly transform into a high intensity conflict.

As was explored in the preceding study based on UK respondents' views, this very worrying dynamic in the Niger Delta has come about through the perceived and real decades of neglect faced by the regions population. The resultant poverty and lack of social mobility is perceived as being completely unjustified because the majority of Nigeria's wealth flows from the oil under their feet. It is strongly believed that the political elite and the oil majors do not care about the population of the Niger Delta. The hopes that were raised with the birth of democracy in 1999 have been trampled on by the continuation of heavy handed tactics employed by the state security services and blatant theft of state and local government assets by the political elite, which should have been used to benefit the population as a whole. These political failings and absence of the state drives the conflict dynamic in the Niger Delta and the result is the absence of a social contract. The result is a patrimonial political situation and is unfortunately unlikely to change.

The 2003 electoral process in the Niger Delta was won by those with a monopoly of violence. All serious contenders have learned from this and now believe that to gain office they have to have enough supporting fire power. The politicians are willing to risk all because if successful the resultant levels of impunity and wealth are so high. The population of the Niger Delta have therefore given up on the state to provide for them. They are searching for other avenues of social mobility and this has led to a massive increase in the illegal sectors. Violence pays in the Niger Delta and the lack of opportunities through other avenues has left many to believe that violence is the only option left open to them to reverse the decades of neglect and finally gain a small foothold from which they can help themselves. However, due to the short term and local nature of conflict, this battle for change will be fought on several fronts based around competing attachments to ethnic, political and militia groups, some will also be fighting for the financial rewards of violence itself.

The oil majors' actions in the Niger Delta act as secondary conflict escalators to the underlying dynamic. The traditional means of existence, farming and fishing, is perceived to have been significantly affected by the environmental degradation of the Niger Delta caused by the actions or more importantly the inaction of the oil majors'. The oil majors' are perceived to be at one with the state because they operate in joint ventures with the State and they are present where the state is not. This has resulted in them becoming de-facto states and facing the brunt of the locals' anger. Aside from being perceived as destroying the traditional means of existence the oil majors are believed to have dramatically escalated the conflict dynamic by employing short term engagements, such as cash payments with favoured sections of communities. This has resulted in an increase the intra/inter ethnic conflict dynamic.

All stakeholders in the Niger Delta have a lot to lose and nothing to gain in the long term from the pending violence. However, the most worrying thing about the research was the witnessing of a pervading sense of calm and acceptance that violence was the only option left, that was capable of changing the situation. This does not mean that the majority of the population would not prefer a peaceful transformation of the current political and developmental situation. They have just faced up to the reality that currently, there are no peaceful avenues of change accessible to all. All stakeholders must work together to counter the seriousness of the situation. The state must live up to its responsibilities and use international help to reform the current political situation in order to deliver free and fair elections. The oil majors must take a step back from their relationships with a the minority of the population of the Niger Delta in order to gain the much needed social licence to operate from the majority. The international community, both state and non-state actors, must realise the international importance of a mounting conflict in the Niger Delta not only to uphold the notion of conflict prevention not resolution and protect the lives and human rights of the people of the Niger Delta, but to secure energy demands and deliver on promises of delivering the Millennium Development Goals and security in the whole of West Africa.

Development programmes in the Niger Delta have shown that with avenues for voice the population can and will work together for the benefit of all. Therefore a transparent and accountable multi-stakeholder engagement foundation for the Niger Delta, which can deliver on recommendations from below, is paramount and a pilot project to demonstrate its potential for successes should start as quickly as possible. This would demonstrate to the population of the Niger Delta that their plight has no longer been forgotten and there are non-violent avenues for still open for change. However, time is quickly running out. Does the political will exist to act before the violence is unleashed and many lives are lost?

## **Process**

This series of issues briefs is the second part of a two stage investigation into the current situation in the Niger Delta. The first stage was a series of consultations in the UK. These briefs represent the findings to the same series of questions when asked to a wide variety of individuals both urban and rural based in the Niger Delta. This report is therefore solely based on the findings of this primary research.

All interviews were conducted in an anonymous fashion and therefore this series of issues briefs reflects what I hope is a true representation of the general sense of opinion and heartfelt desires of the marginalised population of the Niger Delta. I was very aware that as a young white British man the individuals I interviewed might be inclined to tell me what they perceived I wanted to hear rather than their true feelings. In order to counter this I worked very closely with a well respected and independent Nigerian woman from the Niger Delta who would quickly take the interviewed individuals to point if she felt they were being a little creative in their answers.

Each issue brief is written as a stand alone insight; however it is highly recommended to read them all in order to get a clear understanding of the situation in the Niger Delta. There are many areas of convergence within the issue briefs and this reflects the complex interlinked nature of the underlying conflict dynamic that creates the current situation in the Niger Delta. Failing to realise these links and work through and around them would spell disaster for any engagement in the Niger Delta. The complex nature of these links has led to some repetition in the sections of this report, it is important that these repetitions are reflected in this paper because it helps to understand some of the complexities that exist on the ground.

This paper has been produced with assistance from OSI Development Foundation and Stakeholder Democracy Network, to inform members of the new All Party Group for the Niger Delta within the UK's Westminster Parliament. It does not attempt to be an in-depth analysis of the possible solutions to the problems facing the region. The paper is the author's overall assessment and distillation of the core issues affecting these wide-ranging aspects of the conflict dynamic in the Niger Delta, from the perspectives on stakeholders in the region itself.

## Violence and Conflict Drivers

The primary driver of conflict in the Niger Delta is the **systematic failure** of the Nigerian government to **utilise the revenue** generated through oil production for the **good of the people**. The resultant poverty of the majority of the population is only dwarfed in seriousness by the excesses of the state elites. This **disparity** between the majority and minority is the direct result of **endemic corruption**, the ‘chopping’ of funds, that should have been used to benefit all. This visible disparity thrust into the faces of the majority on a daily bases, is a very serious conflict escalator in the Niger Delta.<sup>1</sup> The outcome of this failing by the state is a long history of broken promises and **removal of the social contract** between the state and the majority of its citizens in the Niger Delta. Reinforcing the demise of the social contract is the belief that politicians from outside the ‘South-South’ zone<sup>2</sup> of Nigeria have developed Abuja on the back of the oil wealth, while continuing to forget and more importantly not care about the fate of the Niger Delta. The wealth and potential for future revenue generation that does exist in the Niger Delta is a worrying aspect to the conflict dynamic. The resources necessary to fund and sustain a high level conflict are readily available.

The population of the Niger Delta perceive that because they are not composed of a majority unifying ethnic group, they have been marginalised since independence. Their developmental needs, as originally highlighted by the Wilkins Commission at the end of the colonial era have never been addressed. Abandoned and subdued by successive military junctures it was **hoped**, but not expected, that **democracy might finally deliver development to the population of the Niger Delta**. However, little has changed and some commentators even suggested that things had been better under military rule. It was generally believed that the current 13% derivation that the South-South states receive of the oil wealth was not enough to address the decades of neglect faced by the population of the Niger Delta and some felt it was an insult. However, what is crucial here is that all believed that if this 13% was spent wisely and the governments at the state and local level no longer enriched themselves at the expense of the people, then this amount would go a long way in reversing the plight of the Delta.

It can be assumed with some confidence that the continued **poverty** of the Niger Delta is primarily due to the failings of the Nigerian state and this poverty is the key to the expected upsurge in violence. The violence rapidly developing in the Niger Delta is said to be a **final cry for voice** based on a well thought through argument that things have to change, people have simply had enough; they are pushed to the wall.<sup>3</sup> This

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<sup>1</sup> “The disparities hit us in the face on a daily basis”.

<sup>2</sup> The South-South is one of 6 so-called geopolitical zones that the 36 states of Nigeria are sometimes grouped into for practical reasons. They consist of the South-East, South-South, South West, North East, North West and North Central.

<sup>3</sup> It was repeatedly said that “we have been pushed to the wall and have no other option”. However, in my opinion it is the combination of this sense of despair with, originally politically funded, access to arms that is the crucial conflict dynamic and separates the situation in the Niger Delta from other failing states. This is why the conflict in the Niger Delta is potentially so destabilising for not only the state of Nigeria, but the whole of West Africa, let alone the knock on effects to the energy security plans of the West. Not only are people desperate, they also have access to significant military means to challenge their current situation and a dramatically increasing desire to do so. Non violent avenues have not worked. Sadly, violence pays in the Delta.

feeling of being pushed to the wall has resulted in individuals being drawn to support local ethnic and conservative groups as the majority reinforce their attachments to those in society to whom they feel the closest. This has resulted in a complex web of local conflict dynamics, that if ignited would be catastrophic for the Niger Delta. Just as the violence in the Niger Delta is primarily down to political failings and the resultant poverty, the answers to the conflict dynamic also exist within the state. However, there would need to be a dramatic reform of the political system, before the 2007 elections, if these answers were to be found.

It was widely recognised that the current and increased conflict dynamic, which is undermining the security of all stakeholders in the Niger Delta, stems from the violence associated with the 2003 general election. By all accounts, the 2003 democratic process was completely flawed in the Niger Delta. The People's Democratic Party (PDP) incumbents and prospective candidates mobilised and armed youth militias and state security services to gain an **electoral result** "via the **barrel of the gun**". The term 'democracy' was commonly used to explain the current political situation in Nigeria. In the rare instance where individuals got the chance to vote in 2003, the electoral process was described as a "PDP selection not election". This reality undermines the legitimacy of the state in the minds of its citizens, yet more worryingly sets a clear precedent that **violence is a legitimate way to gain political power** because there is impunity and no one has been prosecuted for election-related violence or rigging in 1999 and 2003. Political office in the Niger Delta, at both the state and local government levels, is 'a winner takes all' situation. Therefore, individuals are willing to gain it at any cost. That cost in the run-up to the 2007 elections could take the form of hundreds, if not thousands of lives, let alone the widespread destruction of property and increase in poverty. The Niger Delta is rife with arms and loyalty formation as political, ethnic and militia based groups prepare to secure 'their lot' and prepare to fight for either themselves, or the highest bidder. The current situation in the Niger Delta was perhaps best described as 'the calm before a storm'.<sup>4</sup> Preparing to guard assets, without addressing the root-causes of this storm will be futile. There is a real danger that once started, this result of serious political failing will be all consuming, even peaceful activists were expressing the concerned opinion that **violence now seems the only option left open** to the majority of the population. As expressed time and again, "things have to change" and violence is perceived as the only option left open to achieve this. Associates of violence have the status and structures of support desired by all and only held by a few. The **lack of social mobility outside of illegal channels** is creating the self replicating belief that violence pays.

The perceived environmental degradation<sup>5</sup> has significantly reduced the agricultural yield of the Niger Delta; therefore the traditional means of existence such as farming and fishing is significantly reducing and youths are looking to other avenues of social mobility. The recognition that violence pays is very difficult to ignore for large numbers of disenfranchised youths, from all backgrounds. These youths are therefore attracted to the disingenuous, short term, self replicating spiral of gang culture in a bid to gain at least a foothold of social mobility and status. Those that have been in armed

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<sup>4</sup> Warri was the clearest example of this.

<sup>5</sup> It is visible to most that the environment is heavily polluted; "my coconuts are polluted in the inside". However a widely agreed health and environmental impacts assessment has not been carried out to prove this.

groups, either political, ethnic or militias have soon realised that the higher up the ladder one is, the more there is to be gained and the chance of being held to account is very slim. Therefore, the Niger Delta's armed groups are undergoing a series of worrying splits and formation of counter alliances in a misguided attempt to gain an advantage in the up and coming violence. The leaders of the two best known militia groups Dokubo-Asari's Niger Delta Peoples Volunteer Force (NDPVF) and Ateke Tom's Icelanders are known to have been previously closely associated with the ruling PDP. These groups have recently undergone splits of their own and are part of the worrying trend of **increasingly fractured loyalties**. The most pronounced difference between the two consultations was the importance associated with bunkering. In the Delta oil bunkering was spoken about and was seen as an avenue of social mobility and thus reducing the level of violence in the Niger Delta. The opinion was also regularly expressed that they were just taking what was rightly theirs and which the state and oil companies were stealing from them in the first place. It was also not seen as a serious issue for the people of the Niger Delta as it was controlled by outsiders.

As political manoeuvres are the key to the conflict dynamic in the run-up to the 2007 election, which is expected to be a very bloody time and human rights violations will increase. It is expected that the violence will really begin to escalate in association with the campaign for selection of candidates at the PDP primaries in early 2006. It is impossible to predict how this violence will pan out. One thing that can be assumed is that the violence will not be based around a relatively simple two sided dynamic. Poverty and the perception that there is no other way, has forced peace loving individuals to agree with others that violence is the only option left. Therefore, the Niger Delta is a **complex web of shifting loyalties** and associations of which perhaps 10% are hell bent on the spoils of illegal activities and violence, whilst the majority are so desperate to transform their situation that they are willing to go to any means to achieve this. The poverty driven conflict dynamic at the local level will be played out within and around the violence associated with the 2007 elections. The PDP candidates will fight anyone that threatens their attempt to secure their political patronage systems. There is still a small avenue of hope through which this very worrying dynamic can be reversed. This is discussed in the sustainable development section of this paper.

To date, the failings of the international community to address or even attempt to understand the increasing conflict dynamic in the Niger Delta completely undermines the internationally recognised certainty that **conflict prevention, not resolution, is a must**. The failing of the British and American governments to positively condemn the completely flawed 2003 electoral process in the Niger Delta, has reinforced an assumption held by a majority of the citizens in the Niger Delta that a political system that will guarantee the continued flow of oil is more important to the West than the delivery of basic human rights and democracy to the citizens of the Niger Delta. The continued silence on the plight of the population of the Niger Delta and reinforcement of support for a grossly flawed political system, has furthered the belief that violence is the only option left, "if enough of us die they will have to listen".

Another worrying dynamic of the violence in the Niger Delta is the unjustifiable use of excessive force by the state security forces in response to not only violent acts but more worryingly peaceful protests or calls for change. The Nigerian police force,

military and navy are working under the same commander, Brigadier-General Zamani, and are used interchangeably to keep order in the Niger Delta, all are perceived to be corrupt, underpaid and likely to shoot first and ask questions later. It was expressed that if the current dynamic was allowed to develop into the violent situation that is expected, it would be questionable whether an unmotivated and disillusioned state security apparatus would be willing or able to keep the peace; ‘why should I die for another mans community’. This belief is widespread and gives the growing powers of the other armed actors in the Niger Delta an increased **confidence, impunity and resultant perception of legitimacy**.

Although the primary frustrations felt by the majority of the population due to the continued poverty and neglect of the Niger Delta are focused at the failings of the Nigerian state. It was widely perceived that the oil majors had an important secondary role in continuing and escalating the conflict dynamic that exists in the Niger Delta. Because the state has failed to deliver, the communities are drawn to gain some provision from the visible and accessible oil majors who are perceived as being at one with the state “if you can not get the butcher, you go after the butchers dog”. It is perceived that the oil wealth has and is propping up an unaccountable self enhancing elite, at the expense of the majority of the population. It was recognised that the oil majors do pay the Nigerian state their dues, but it was strongly believed that similar **dues are not paid to the communities** who feel the full impacts of the oil majors operations. Due to the lack of accessible channels of communication and a perception that the oil majors do not want to speak to the local communities, these communities have learnt from experience that **direct and often violent action is the only way to get a result**.

It is undeniable that the oil revenue has not led to an improvement of the situation of the majority of the population in the Niger Delta, ‘oil boom – oil doom’, seems to hold true. It is perceived that the scramble for oil revenues has undermined the harmony and respect of the Niger Delta and short term self motivated calculations have become the norm. Some commentators even go so far as to claim there is a conspiracy against the people between the government and the oil majors. It is fair to ascertain that the Niger Delta is **engulfed in short term oil politics** and the majority of the population view the oil majors as *de facto* states, who have a duty to deliver. The oil majors have tried to assume this role, but their policies have often been misguided and not focused with the long term development of the Niger Delta as a central driving factor. This failure to provide development based on the needs of the community has resulted in vast numbers of white elephant projects. There was a clear feeling of non-association between the communities and the oil majors. It was widely stated that protests are often a result of a failure of the oil majors to proactively engage the whole community in appropriate dialogues. The resultant protests are often dealt with in heavily handled, unjustified manner by the state security apparatus and this reinforces the feeling of the oil majors and Nigerian state being one and the same.

The practices carried out by oil companies and highlighted by communities as contributing to violence are not primary drivers of the conflict, but are significant accelerators, as communities and individuals within communities scramble for the understandable limited handouts. These include: the nomination of host communities, flawed memorandum of understanding (MoUs), awarding of contracts, failure to engage all structures of society, cash handouts, the relationship with state security

forces, environmental negligence and perhaps most importantly a short term focus to all of the above. These practices are all possible to change and however bad the relationship between the oil majors and communities might seem, a significant and immediate change of policy on all of the above issues would have an important impact in slowing the current conflict dynamic. It seems that all communities are **open to dialogue and crying out for change**. They have had enough of ‘brother killing brother’, but can see no other option left open to secure their own fate.

## Corruption Transparency and Accountability

Successive political failings have been highlighted as the central driver of conflict in the Niger Delta. What these failings have also resulted in is the domination of a corrupt, murky and unaccountable political system that benefits a minority at the expense of the majority. **Corruption kills in the Niger Delta.**

In 1999 and the return to democracy it was recognised by President Obasanjo that fighting corruption was going to have to be a central part of reforming Nigeria political landscape. Unfortunately, only recently has a drive to tackle corruption been launched, six years after Obasanjo's initial election. The citizens of the Niger Delta believe this process is too little too late, the perception has all ready been created both locally and internationally that **corruption is still the dominating force** in Nigeria and especially the Niger Delta. The benefits of political corruption are visible to all on the streets of Port Harcourt. The rich elites and their associates drive around in large 4x4 and are largely ignored by the police. In comparison the average citizen, who has to travel by motorbike 'okada', is daily faced with the necessity to pay bribes to the police, just in order to continue on their journey. There is also an arrogance associated with the limited spending of state and local government money. A classic example being, the building of a bridge over the river in Yenegoa, just for the political elite's use, whilst the locals are still forced to cross by canoe.<sup>6</sup>

The citizens of the Delta have come not to expect democracy and the politicians in office to deliver anything to them. The general feeling is that those in **political power** have always and will continue to be **corrupt and unaccountable**. There has been a miniscule amount of spending at the local level and therefore the desperate communities have received very little of note. It is presumed that the majority of the money, generated via the oil industry, has gone into the private bank accounts of the political elites, on a direct correlation with the vertical scale of power.

This corruption has to have been on a very large scale, the revenues generated by the state through oil wealth have been significantly larger than expected due to the internationally high oil price and many of the states in the Niger Delta are believed to be receiving in excess of N10 billion a month.<sup>7</sup> The potential developments that this sort of income could bring to the Niger Delta would go a long way in reversing the conflict dynamic. The **short term selfish interests** and corrupt practices that have become a norm in the Niger Delta for men of power are seriously threatening the livelihoods of all stakeholders in the Niger Delta. Instead of playing 'Father Christmas' to those willing to support their respective election campaigns the politicians should focus on getting **elected on the back of popular mandate of success**. The failings of the politicians elected in 2003 to deliver anything back to the communities they represent and thus gain a popular electoral mandate, means that a self replicating cycle of corruption and patronage politics will continue as the current kings become king makers. The rewards are so high that those who have power will do anything to keep it.

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<sup>6</sup> Placing the bridge 500 meters outside of the government compound would have created a desperately needed transport link for hundreds if not thousands of people.

<sup>7</sup> A rough guide is N250 per pound. However, this figure is almost impossible to quantify due to corruption and is just hear say.

**Corruption stems from the top** and has trickled down throughout society in the Niger Delta to become the norm; it is an everyday part of existence. The **impunity** granted to the political and military elites and their business associates combined with the impunity surrounding the growing militias is fuelling the impression that corruption pays. The recent anti-corruption drive launched by the President and Nuhu Ribadu<sup>8</sup> is deemed very much as a cosmetic exercise to appease concerns raised in the West. It was perceived that this anti-corruption drive was selectively targeting potentially non conformists and political minnows. If the government was serious about tackling corruption the opinion was repeatedly expressed that it **should start at the top**. The President could demonstrate his seriousness and recreate the moral high ground needed to achieve this, by returning to the people the chicken farms he now owns, that were created in operation 'feed the nation'.<sup>9</sup> Although it would be very difficult to prove that these farms were secured through corrupt practices, what is important here is that the majority of the population perceive this to be the truth.

No one believed that the current anti-corruption drive is the start of a tide change that will witness corruption being stamped out. Many are willing to comply and live non-corrupt lives, yet those who gain the most social mobility and have the most voice can not operate legally. The illegal, murky and unaccountable avenues are the ones accepted by all, as the **way to get things done**. These dealings need to be stopped and a few **shock arrests, of individuals at the top**, need to be made and full judicial proceeding carried out. This would be significant in helping to recreate the ideology that those who steal, especially from the desperate masses, are accountable and will be punished. Only if this happens will the people begin to support and trust the current anti-corruption operation. This transition might also result in a few brave souls standing up in the House of Representatives to challenge the current corrupt political system and increase the pressures of creating a system that is both accountable and transparent. If they were to do this without the above change they will be hounded out of parliament. Again the root-causes as well as the solutions to corruption in the Niger Delta are to be found within the political system of Nigeria. The oil companies should do all they can to help reverse and condemn the current corrupt and un-transparent image of Nigeria and the Niger Delta. The oil majors' taxes and revenue allocations could be used positively to help create a social licence to operate and a social contract for the state, saving hundreds of billions of US dollars that will be lost in the forthcoming violence. Corruption will no longer continue to benefit anybody in the short term. The long term problems associated with corruption are finally catching up with the murky world of Niger Delta oil politics. The untouchables are going to feel the full force of their decades of neglect.

The corrupt system needs to be addressed not only at the political level but local level as well. This change in attitude will not be created through internationally supported efforts such as the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI). The very few who knew about this process grouped it alongside the cosmetic attempts underway to address corruption and appease the West. The point was raised that what is the point of knowing something when you do not have the capacity or desire, if you value your

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<sup>8</sup> Nuhu Ribadu is the corruption tsar in Nigeria, as chairman of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC).

<sup>9</sup> National campaign to focus on increased agricultural production during Obasanjo's first reign as Nigerian head of state in the late 1970s.

life, to use the figures released under the EITI. Without a concerted effort by the Nigerian elite to transform the current political system alongside such long term important efforts as the EITI, then the short term conflict dynamic will undermine any programmes already embarked upon.

The international community and especially the British government could do a lot to reverse the corruption in the Niger Delta. It must call for an immediate end to corrupt practises and delivery of the wealth to the people. It can no longer be fooled into thinking that democracy will take a long time to deliver. The situation in the Niger Delta is not one of democracy taking time to deliver, it is **outright theft** and politics via the gun therefore can no longer go unnoticed. Everything possible to help deliver free and fair elections should be undertaken by the UK government. These efforts would be widely welcomed by the vast majority of the citizens of the Niger Delta and a large proportion of the political elite, who accept that things have to change, but are yet to have a vehicle to help achieve this. The Commonwealth was mentioned as a well respected institution which had some legitimacy in the Niger Delta by condemning the elections in 2003. The run-up to the 2007 elections could be the platform that finally begins to addresses the Niger Delta's corrupt and non-transparent past. **Corruption can only hold a state together for so long** and the British government should act before it becomes too late.

A relatively simple and effective mechanism through which the British government could signal its intent and gain the moral high ground in supporting a dramatic reduction of the corruption in the Niger Delta would be to **freeze all the stolen Nigerian state assets** held in London bank accounts. If this was to occur then it was widely felt that a trust fund to be held in kind for the Nigerian people would be the best place to ensure this money did not go straight back into other politicians pockets. Once this **moral high ground** is attained then the real pressure can begin to be applied to the Nigerian political system to reform. Failure to act on corruption will only go to further the belief held by many that the British government's interest is more slanted towards the securing of oil than delivering democracy and basic human rights to the population of the Niger Delta. It must be noted that a stable Niger Delta would be the most conducive to an increase in oil security and can only be achieved if corruption and its negative impacts are properly addressed; short term half measure will result in continued insecurities in the Niger Delta.

## Democracy and Civil Society

Nigeria's return to **democracy in 1999** heralded a potentially monumental transformation of the political patronage system. Lives of many activists had been lost in the fight against military control and with the comparatively democratic election of 1999 civil society was **filled with much hope** for not only the future of Nigeria but the sustainable development of the Niger Delta. This hope has proven short lived and it was even claimed, by a minority, 'that things had been better under military rule'. At least then the government could not hide behind the veil of 'democracy'. After the 1999 electoral process the momentum behind civil activism that aided the transition to democracy was somewhat lost. Developmental funds began to flow from the US and Europe and people realised and **accepted that democracy would take time to deliver**. What that time has meant so far and this is why the population of the Niger Delta are so angry, is a **continuation of elite patronage based politics** at the expense of the men, women, and children on the streets and the dilapidated farms. Just to add insult to their fate the international community is perceived to support a supposed democratic regime when the citizens of the Niger Delta know full well that since 1999 the political direction their states are heading in is anything but democratic. People are expecting the **run-up to the 2007 elections to be the most bloody and reliant on the gun** of any previous election held in the Niger Delta. When this is combined with all the other tensions that are present in the Niger Delta, the potential fall out of the failure to deliver democracy in 2007 could destabilise the whole of West Africa and put a serious question mark over the energy security policies of both the UK and the US.

The realisation that the political trajectory of politics in the Niger Delta was heading towards the barrel of the gun and not the electoral ballot box, truly came to ahead in 2003.<sup>10</sup> Citizens of the Niger Delta regularly laughed at the suggestion that democratic elections were held and referred to their political situation as '**democracy**'. Individuals are not expecting the current direction of politics in the Niger Delta to change, in fact they are sure it is going to 'go up in smoke' and a 'hail of bullets'. Yet at the same time there was a general sense of hope that things might and should happen soon, that could rapidly transform the political environment. The international community should take note and recognise that its **failure to seriously condemn the electoral process in 2003** has help set the background to the potentially truly awful situation we now face. There was a strong feeling that there is no legal way for the current Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) incumbents or their party successors to be elected on the back of a popular mandate. The politicians have simply failed to deliver and are therefore going to have to rely on a process of '**selection not election**' and then enforcement of the result through the gun. This is not a secret; everybody knows that unless things rapidly change the elections will be rigged. This is reflected in the strong feeling that the 'old guard' still remains in power and the same pre-'democratic' elites still dominate the political scene.

These perceptions that are portrayed as realities, have resulted in all politicians with a chance of gaining office as having to have an armed wing at their disposal. The money available through political corruption and the readiness of idle youths, to attempt to gain some form of social mobility, makes this process all too easy. The

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<sup>10</sup> "The 2003 electoral process was a complete joke".

**2003 elections** were won by those with the **greatest armed support**. It is now unclear as to where the loyalties of the 2003 political thugs are placed. The winner takes all outcome of the Niger Delta's politics makes the stakes so high that individuals are willing to plunge their whole region into chaos in order to gain that vital seat of immunity and power. This reality has resulted in the domination of a one party region. The PDP dominates the politics of the Niger Delta and politicians of the PDP will use every means at their disposal to ensure that this remains the case.

The lesson was learned in 2003; now serious political contenders are perceived as having a **mandate of access to power**, not through popular support, but through the **power of the gun** and their connections within the political patronage system. The people of the Niger Delta do **not get to express their political will** and some will fight to change this, unless those in power begin to visibly reduce the decades of neglect and not add to it. This lack of a social contract between the people and the politicians is widely felt in the rural communities and is readily explained as those in power having to hide in Port Harcourt to avoid the people they are supposed to represent. It seems fair to say that not only has the local population lost faith in the democratic process, the politicians do not even attempt to hide their corruption of the electoral process. It seems that that the norm during the 2003 election was that individuals were not allowed to cast their vote in a free and fair manner, or if they were lucky enough to do so, the result was made up anyway. Worryingly it is now perceived that in the run-up to the 2007 electoral process no single entity will this time have the monopoly of violence necessary to control this electoral process. This is potentially the most deadly short term conflict escalator that if allowed to ignite will result in a long term high intensity conflict dynamic.

Even those who painted the most depressing picture of the run-up to the 2007 electoral process still had hope that things might change. The national CONFAB<sup>11</sup> aimed at making suggestions to transform the current political picture in Nigeria, is a real chance for solid action. Small changes, that would allow the populations on the ground to witness a transition from the current political trajectory, would be warmly welcomed by most parties and could play a significant contribution to reducing the violence associated with the 2007 electoral process. The citizens of the Niger Delta have not lost their **desire for democracy**; all stakeholders must work together to ensure they get to exercise this most basic of human rights. However, on the whole it was believed that significant changes to the system were very unlikely and therefore a very steep and slippery path to widespread destruction and loss of life was where the Niger Delta was being pushed by its political elite. The violence is already starting as 'big men' begin to seek that **all conquering political ticket**. It is believed that this violence will steadily increase from now as we draw closer to the PDP primaries in March 2006. The political violence itself will be very significant however, the most important thing that will come out of this will be the politicalisation of already fraught tensions. It is likely that the expected political violence will trigger a horrific conflict based around a complex web of ethnic, loyalty and patronage networks, that once started would very rapidly escalate out of control. This must not be allowed to happen.

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<sup>11</sup> National Political Reform Conference held in Abuja from March-July 2005 with delegates from all over Nigeria, ostensibly to try to address the national question and try to suggest constitutional changes that better reflect the interests of the various ethno-political groups of Nigeria.

The delivery of democracy to the people of the Niger Delta is paramount in reducing the current conflict dynamic. If individuals perceive that finally ‘their lot’ might be changing and that they will have a chance to exercise their constitutional right to vote, then they will be less drawn to the last resort, that a majority are so close to, the gun. Importantly there was a general feeling that civil society’s voice from below could not change the current farce of democracy. Real emphasis was placed on the **role the international community** and especially the British government could play in delivering democracy to the people. The citizens of the Niger Delta truly believe that **staunch criticism** of the current political situation, by the British and US governments, and a strong call for democracy to be delivered, backed up by a variety of supporting mechanism<sup>12</sup> would result in a significant transition in the political process of the Niger Delta. All stakeholders realise that things need to change for the long term benefit of all and this public show of **support for true democracy is paramount**. It was suggested that debt relief and the much desired seat on the Security Council should be used to help shepherd the delivery of a true democracy. This public call for democracy would also give those politicians willing to change an international platform of support and dramatically increase their legitimacy. This would help ensure the, much worried about, energy security of the West because if the Niger Delta was stable, production could be significantly increased and more efficient.

It was recognised that the true successes of a real democracy would still take time to deliver; however the current trajectory to systematic failure must be challenged. Four key changes should be supported in order to help deliver democracy to the people of the Niger Delta. These are: ensuring that the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) becomes independent, delivering grassroots civic education about the electoral process, educating the political elite on the importance of the political process and a long term election monitoring programme jointly supported both domestically and more importantly by a large contingent of long term international observers.

INEC can no longer be funded, staffed and controlled by the PDP political elite.<sup>13</sup> It should be staffed by representatives of all the major political parties and trade unions in order to ensure its independence and legitimacy. This should help ensure a democratic foundation based around an independent and efficient organisation that should heavily scrutinise the electoral process and be heavy scrutinised itself. It must be provided with the funds, independence and technical support early enough to help to convince the citizens of the Niger Delta that significant changes to the electoral process have occurred. **This can not happen soon enough**. The international community could jointly fund and support a Nigerian government led initiative in order to achieve this.

**INEC’s independence** would help ensure a firm structure for democracy to build upon. However, unless the population and the political elites are educated on the importance of and how to ensure democracy then the reform of INEC would be of limited use. This **civic education** should not stand alone, it should be incorporated into a wider push for sustainable peace in the Niger Delta. The human capacity,

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<sup>12</sup> These are examined in detail in the sustainable development chapter of this report. Election monitoring is just the tip of the iceberg.

<sup>13</sup> “He who pays the piper plays the tune”.

experience and expertise to deliver this democracy education in the Niger Delta exist in abundance. It is the monetary funds that are severely lacking and at this point in time unlikely to be delivered early enough to make a real difference to the electoral process.

It is paramount to the potential success of the above three initiatives, that they are linked and delivered in conjunction with a complete overhaul of the electoral process itself. If the above can be achieved then the most important thing that the western political system could do, to ensure that the potential powder keg that is the Niger Delta does not explode, is a **year long election monitoring process**. What the monitoring of the 2003 elections demonstrated is that although present in abundance, local monitors had little or no impact on the electoral process. The citizens of the Delta either rightly feared too much for their own survival or were unable to access the necessary areas in order to fairly monitor the electoral process. This is not to undermine the very important role that local monitors would have to play alongside a large international presence. The combining of the well developed civil society capacity to monitor elections alongside a year long international election monitoring process could really give the local population the necessary confidence to ensure democracy is delivered. The mere presence of knowledgeable foreign nationals alongside Nigerian counterparts, would not only help reinforce a picture of free and fair elections, but remove the blanket of impunity for serious electoral violations. This is presuming that the monitoring process would be reported accurately and fairly.

Methods of delivering free and fair elections that should be encouraged are ensuring that the votes are fairly counted. The experience in Kano in 2003, where the population waited for the count to be held in the open, was a much talked about case study. This open counting of the vote could easily occur and then the result should be sent via mobile phone to an independent INEC, supported in their attempts to deliver an accountable and transparent process by the reforming central Nigerian elite and the governments of the West. It was made obviously clear that the current international norm of election monitoring taking place for a couple of weeks over the electoral period would have limited impact on the electoral system: “what is the point of monitoring a process that is going to be truly flawed?” If the monitoring was to have the much desired effect it should monitor the electoral process from the beginning of 2006 right through until all the seats are finalised. This action from the West would receive massive support at the grassroots and prominent organisations for all ethnic groups, such as the Ijaw Youth Council would be willing to play an active supporting role in this process.

These four suggested courses of action are not a long term solution to the problems in the Niger Delta; they are a small part of the immediate action that is required in order to stave off a terrifying conflict, the impacts of which will be felt wide and far. They must be seen as a short term minimum, in order to help recreate some form of social contract that would create the space necessary to deliver on the potential benefits of democracy. The most important aspect of this would be the positive distribution of the Niger Delta’s oil wealth in order to tackle the chronic poverty and perception of neglect. The foundation for these electoral reform measures exists at the

local level but they must be delivered from above with the support of the international community.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> “Let’s hope and pray Nigeria becomes the great African superpower it can and should be. This will only occur if the Nigerian political elite have a firm commitment and belief that a free and fair electoral process is central to Nigeria’s development. 2007 will be the test as to whether this commitment exists. At the moment the population of the Niger Delta do not hold out much hope.”

## Environment

The inhabitants of the Niger Delta perceive the **oil companies** as being to blame for the **environmental degradation** of the Niger Delta. They blame the flaring of gas and oil spills for destroying their traditional means of existence and causing significant long term deprivation to their environment and health. This deprivation has ‘pushed many to the wall’ and at times they feel they ‘are forced to react’ to the oil production that is killing their land and traditional means of livelihood. Obvious changes noted by many included the significant reduction in available fish stocks, once plentiful rivers are now described as “almost barren of life”, and there is a reported visible reduction in the amount and quality of tuba yams, both staple food stocks of the population. This environmental degradation, combined with a **dependency mentality** has led to food production reducing in the Niger Delta. Many youths are not bothering to follow in the destroyed family footsteps of agriculture and fishing and are instead migrating to the towns in search of work. This, some would say forced, migration to the cities is increasing the numbers of urban unemployed youths, who can be sucked into patronage networks and get involved in corrupt and violent practices as they search for avenues of social mobility.

The above perceptions that are portrayed as realities in the Niger Delta have resulted in a vast majority of the population viewing the oil majors and oil as a curse. The reality is that it is currently impossible to accurately state as fact that the oil majors operations in the Niger Delta are responsible for widespread environmental degradation and health deficiencies. However, this is not important to the population of the Niger Delta, in their eyes this is a closed case. Gas flares dominate the local landscape of many Niger Delta communities. These flares unremittingly pump flames into the air, the effects of which are un-proved, yet clear for all to see.<sup>15</sup> Oil spills also regularly devastate the land, but for how long and to what extent is widely unknown. The ambiguities between what the locals believe and oil companies can claim must end. An independent health and environment assessment of the Niger Delta as called for 10 years ago by the UN must be conducted as rapidly as possible. If oil companies are involved, the perceived credibility of the study would be severally jeopardised.

The flaring of associated gas (AG) has been illegal since 1984; however the failings of the Nigerian state government to hold the oil companies to account and undertake their own share of implementing the reforms necessary to end the vast amounts of pollution AG creates is systematic of the failings in the Niger Delta. The feeling is that the oil companies would rather continue to pay the rather paltry fines in relation to the potential income the gas could generate. Aside from this vast income that could be generated from AG, it could also provide a source of a much needed local energy supply. The deforestation of the surrounding environment of the delta is another serious environmental concern. It really is believed that the formation of AG plants, if developed properly, could result in a significant change to the lifestyle of the population of the Niger Delta. With this in mind, it was widely recognised that even those oil majors who have undermined their perceived social licence to operate efficiently would receive adequate space to deliver, if the new AG plants were incorporated as part of a new approach to long term development of the Niger Delta based on regular consultations.

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<sup>15</sup> “My coconuts are polluted in the inside.”

Few believe that recent promises by all companies to end all gas flaring by 2009 will be met; they expect this target will be missed just like all the others in the past. It is not just unacceptable to continue to flare gas at a local level, gas flaring of this scale is not carried out anywhere else in the world and it is deemed to be the largest single contributor to greenhouse gases released within Africa. It was recognised by all that the successful conversion of AG into a useable entity should be a **'win win' situation** for all involved.

The other major environmental bone of contention is oil spills in the Niger Delta. Again the full impacts of such spills are not fully known, but are clear for all to see. The failure of oil majors to uphold, and the Nigerian state to enforce, recognised standards on pipe replacement and maintenance is a major cause of oil spills. The other major source of spills is the effect of either the bunkering of oil, or sabotage in an attempt to gain local clean up contract rights. The cleaning up of oil spills is a major area of concern for the local communities. They highlighted the fact that basic standards were again not met and described the clean up operations as 'cover-ups not clean-ups'. The problem here is often a delay in the time for the oil companies to react. When you can visibly see your livelihood being submerged in a black gold that does not benefit you at all and it takes weeks if not months for the oil companies to react in order to stop the spill, it is only natural for some anger to be directed at the oil major who you perceive is responsible for destroying your meagre means of existence. The claim that locals are involved in sabotaging pipes on their own land was strongly rebuked: 'Why would we pollute our only source of fresh drinking water when we have nothing to gain'. Most sabotages are alleged to be carried out by 'foreign/expert' Nigerians with links to either internationally controlled oil bunkering cartels or Nigerian contractors. It was not questioned that a few selfish individuals might get involved, but to punish a whole community is deemed unfair and is an escalator of the conflict dynamic that exists in the Niger Delta. **An 'act first, ask questions later' policy** to oil spills would go a long way to recreate the much needed social licence to efficiently operate in the Niger Delta.

The widely assumed decades of environmental negligence and resultant devastation caused by gas flaring is soon to be tried in the Nigerian courts. Environmental Rights Action in conjunction with Friends of the Earth international is taking 5 major oil companies to court on behalf of communities in River, Delta and Bayelsa states. This action will set a firm precedent for similar cases in the future and it is paramount that the oil majors live up to their responsibilities and don't attempt to delay this process.

It is clear that the perceived environmental devastation caused by oil spills and gas flaring is having a very negative effect on the lives of the communities in the Niger Delta. The ambiguities in perceptions and unproven accusations that escalate the conflict dynamic need to end. Therefore, an immediate environment and health impact assessment should be independently funded<sup>16</sup> and supported by all stakeholders. This would help to set a legal benchmark for the environmental and health impacts the oil majors have had on the population of the Niger Delta and would represent to the local communities that their plight has no longer been forgotten.

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<sup>16</sup> The independence of this study is paramount. It could be jointly funded through western governmental aid agencies and would be better received if not funded from just one source.



## Sustainable Development

The complete and historically rooted **failure of all stakeholders** in the Niger Delta to provide any form of **sustainable development for the majority of the population** has resulted in the erosion of a social contract. The political system at both a local and national level has failed to deliver. This has resulted in the oil majors attempting to fulfil the role of quasi states and they also have failed to deliver. The international community has also failed to positively engage on any level able to deliver serious changes. Therefore, the population of the Niger Delta feel as if their plight has been ignored and they have no option left open to them other than violence to highlight their fate. In recent times this move towards violence has been worsened by the resentment felt at a political system dubbed ‘democracy’. The lack of an accountable state, the presence of the oil majors in the communities, coupled with the perceived links between the two, has resulted in the oil majors facing the brunt of the anger at the joint failings to deliver. It is important not to downplay the perceived and real role the oil majors have had in contributing to the current conflict dynamic in the Niger Delta.

The real **lack of investment in and development of** the Niger Delta has led to sustained violence, along ethnic and militia based loyalties, over access to the meagre resources available to those outside of the oil revenue funded political patronage system. It now seems that this violence is about to dramatically increase because the conflict dynamic has been actively mobilised in relation to increased tensions mounting in the Niger Delta. The key to this mobilisation is that people have realised that democracy is not going to deliver. If sustainable development of the Niger Delta is ever going to be used as a tool for conflict prevention not resolution, that time is now. It is important that all stakeholders work together in order to ascertain the voice from below and then quickly and transparently act on these most basic of requests.

Most if not all attempts at development in the Niger Delta provided by either the state or the oil majors have been based on **short term**, potential conflict appeasement strategies and not with the long term sustainable development of the Niger Delta in mind. This has resulted in a self replicating cycle of anger at simple mistakes such as the provision of two schools to a community that already has a functioning facility, yet no books or equipment to deliver an education. Failures such as this are common place in the Delta and have accumulated into mounting tensions that have no avenue for expression. When the local population go to the gates of the oil facility in order to express their anger, the systematic failing to engage the population in adequate dialogue that contributed to this situation in the first place continues. It is common for the police or the military to be called, in order to remove the perceived trouble makers, who on the whole just want to be listened to.

- This worrying lack of basic civil interactions between the state, the oil companies and the population reinforces the perception of ‘them against us’ at the local level.

The population of the Niger Delta do not want much: “we just need a **foothold** in order to help ourselves”. This is why a rapid programme of independent sustainable development would have an immediate impact on the mounting conflict dynamic. The citizens of the Niger Delta are not violent at heart; they just feel they have no other

option open to them. As part of a wider process of reform, creating this other option and providing them with the kick-start necessary to help break their reliance on the meagre handouts that are left after the political patronage system has taken its course would lead to significant reduction in armed violence in the Niger Delta.

The Nigerian governments historical failing to adequately utilise the windfalls that stem from the vast amounts of oil revenue, in a manner conducive to helping all and especially those from whose land it flows, is a significant conflict driver in the Niger Delta. Successive governments, military or otherwise have propped themselves up on the back of this oil revenue. This has resulted in a shrinking of Nigeria's economy away from non primary oil based income generation and a significant reduction in the potential avenues of employment. This 'oil curse' has destroyed the local economy of the Niger Delta and has made the cost of living exceptionally high for the normal citizen. The central Nigerian elite who control the vast majority of the oil wealth are perceived as not being interested in the fate of the Delta and more interested in building a grand Abuja and lining their own pockets, while the Delta continues to fester. The oil money that does get channelled back to the Niger Delta is in the majority stolen and the little that gets used for development purposes such as through the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) is on the whole spent completely inefficiently and without adequately consulting the local population first. These inexcusable political failings could be dramatically reversed if there was the political will from within the Niger Delta political elite to get elected on the back of a popular mandate of successful reform and not through the gun. The resources that do exist could make a significant difference and the potential that exists in the agricultural sectors and others must be fully explored.

The international community has failed to adequately engage in the Niger Delta, pointing out the wealth available through the oil revenue and relatively strong standings on HDI findings. However, this completely misses the unique nature of the problem in the Niger Delta. It is the perceived failure to engage at all levels in order to change the fate of millions of Nigerians sitting on top of vast amounts of wealth that is driving the conflict. Unlike other poor areas of Africa the population of the Niger Delta truly believe they should be seeing at least some benefits of a huge wealth that exists beneath their feet. It is this **crucial perception of inequality** combined with the blatant corruption and personal-political wealth creation at the continued expense of the majority who have to live in poverty that is leading to the inevitable escalation of violence. It was claimed that the local communities and civil society have failed to develop a united front for development and therefore made the job of the international aid agencies more difficult. Individuals have been all too ready to fight over scraps at the detriment to the long term larger benefit to all. This does not excuse the failures of non-engagement.

- The failing of the international community to recognise the reality that those with a greater perceived injustice and more to gain are willing to risk more in order to achieve their goals, is now threatening not only to take the lives of countless citizens in the Niger Delta, but to destabilise the whole of the fragile Nigerian state and West Africa.

The limited engagements that have occurred that will impact on the Niger Delta are undeniably important long term initiatives such as Publish What You Pay and the

Extractive Industry Transparency Initiative. However, the findings of these initiatives will be completely undermined by an increase in the conflict dynamic. Who in the Niger Delta civil society, at the best of times, has the capacity to utilise the figures these initiatives will release in order to hold the oil majors and governments to account for the billions of missing dollars generated from the oil revenue, let alone when they are more preoccupied with their own immediate survival on a day to day basis? This **underestimate of the short term conflict dynamic** must be rapidly readdressed and a short term engagement must be launched alongside the current important long term actions.

The oil majors have failed in their assumed role of filling the void left by that state and providing adequate compensation for the lives their activities have undeniably disrupted. Their most significant failing has been to adequately engage with all levels of society. The over reliance on traditional leaders to deliver a social licence to operate, has alienated vast sections of society and created inter community tensions. Similarly the designation of ‘host communities’ and a failure to engage with the wider picture of the Niger Delta’s development, coupled with the short term and ‘linked’ nature of most engagements has led to an increase in hostilities towards the oil majors and an increase in inter/ intra ethnic conflicts. The oil majors should work together to learn from their mistakes and redress the current perception that they are only looking to appease the most troublesome sections of a community in order to give them the space necessary to continue to operate in the short term. They should also no longer work with NGOs that are perceived as bidders of their desires and instead work with NGOs and individuals within NGOs who have a **proven track record of success**, with the local communities. Ideally the oil majors should take a step back from directly delivering developmental assistance to Niger Delta, by creating a ‘third arm’ to their operations. The oil majors’ necessary contributions should be completely de-linked from their operations in the Niger Delta and some sort of independent foundation/ commission should be set up.

It is fair to assume that the majority of attempts aimed at delivering sustainable development to the people of the Niger Delta have made the simple mistake of trying to deliver tailor made programmes **from above**. What could be achieved through a **sustained and progressive dialogue**, aimed at addressing the individual and particular needs of specific communities, is a significant reduction in the current conflict dynamic. The Akassa Development Foundation and their successes achieved through their ability to listen to what the community wanted should not be underestimated.<sup>17</sup>

What needs to happen is a critical re-evaluation of the failings of stakeholders within the Niger Delta to deliver sustainable development and therefore firmly create the **link** in people’s minds between **peace and development**. This should be swiftly followed by the creation of a multi-stakeholder development commission, whose aim it will be to provide a new start for the Niger Delta. The problems of the past must be learned upon and all must admit that mistakes have been made.

- This is the final chance to deliver to the people, before a serious conflict engulfs the Niger Delta.

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<sup>17</sup> Akassa Development Foundation is a programme of community development from below supported by ProNatura International.

This delivery does not need to be huge, it just needs to be enough to create the perception in the short term that change is afoot. With relatively small commitments from all stakeholders a pilot project could be launched and have a serious impact within six months. If properly implemented this pilot project could create the momentum necessary to continue the sustainable development of the Niger Delta in the long term. The strengths of a pilot project of this nature are that it would bring all stakeholders together and it will aid social mobility through listening to what the citizens of the Niger Delta really want to see happen at the grassroots level. It would also remove a lot of the unattainable perceptions that are commonplace in the local communities and begin to create a mutual understanding of what can be reasonably achieved. Approaches from above have dramatically failed as they have pushed the Niger Delta to the brink of a serious conflict dynamic. It is now time for a linked up sustainable development programme to be developed based upon **ideas articulated from below**. The mental capacity to enter into sustainable dialogue with all sections of societies in the Niger Delta exists in abundance. The role of the western stakeholders should be to jointly fund a sustainable development commission and ensure it upholds accountable and transparent standards. The citizens of the Niger Delta need to be helped to help themselves. Communities know what is most important to them and local NGO capacity exists in order to map and deliver on these requests. This short term engagement based around a regional as opposed to a local community response could bide the time necessary for accompanying long term developmental reforms such as ensuring democracy to have an affect.

A typical programme that should begin to be implemented immediately must be based on local consultations with the **five key groups** that are present in the majority of communities in the Niger Delta: traditional rulers, elders, women, youth and the Community Development Committee (CDC). This could result in the creation of a sustainable water source or involve some form of transferable skills acquisition for the disengaged youths combined with civic education and an aids awareness scheme, two afternoons a week as part of a one month scheme. The key is that whatever is delivered is not just handed to the community they must be central to its delivery and be attached to the programme through some form of joint ownership. All programmes undertaken in this pilot scheme should also have a **joint focus** in order to maximise their potential as a tool for conflict prevention.

If this initial trial is successful a more long term sustainable development commission should be developed and focus its attention jointly on making sure the Millennium Development Goals are delivered and that transferable skills are developed to aid the transition and diversification of the Niger Delta's economy away from its current reliance on oil. It is crucial that whatever is attempted is focused on the micro level in the short term, this could be enough to give the much needed signal that the situation is changing and begin to ward off the pending violence. The media's portrayal of this sustainable development commission will be crucial in aiding to its success; there needs to be an uncommon openness of the commission and more importantly any pilot project launched. This process could help reverse the current misunderstood link between violence and development. Violence needs to be seen as undermining the potential for development programmes, not as the only option left open to eventually witness development being delivered. The oil majors must no longer seek short term

social licences through direct payments to communities<sup>18</sup> and development programmes implemented by their NGOs. They should distance themselves from their perceived role as quasi states as far as possible, through a well thought out development focused exit strategy that should focus on the creation of a new development foundation. This would even make good business sense because it would, over the long term, help to recreate their social licence to operate and as direct expectations would be much lower. It would also have a much more likely chance of delivering sustainable development to the population of the Niger Delta, in both the short and long term.

The concept of a **multi-stakeholder approach to development** based on desires from below might be relatively capital intensive in the short term, but the medium to long term benefits of the potential successes far outweigh any concerns stakeholders might have and the costs that will be incurred if this process does not happen. For the pilot project to be launched it requires all stakeholders to realise the potential seriousness of the situation and to put differences aside in order to act on behalf of the population of the Niger Delta and their own interests.

- If this engagement does not occur development agencies will be faced with providing conflict resolution strategies and immediate relief for a high intensity conflict.

International governments' energy security plans, African development and policing plans will be in ruins. The oil majors' future and therefore stock market value will be unstable and the Nigerian state will become increasingly unstable and therefore both will lose billions of dollars of potential revenue. This pilot engagement is therefore a 'win win' situation. If it works, then there is clear evidence of what needs to be done for the long term development of the Niger Delta. If not, then at least the different organisations that will have to work together to deliver peace in the Niger Delta would have started to create **much needed social relationships** that are currently severely lacking in the Niger Delta. For once the resources are not lacking in order to prevent a very serious conflict from escalating out of control. It is now a case of will and desire to face realities and live up to the responsibilities of all, not only to protect the continued flow of oil, but more importantly protect the sanctity of human life, a fact that seems to be increasingly forgotten in the Niger Delta.

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<sup>18</sup> Chevron Texaco should be wary in ending their current 'host community' status of communities. If not handled sensitively with another programme created to replace them, based on consultations with the local communities who currently benefit, the potential violent responses in order to hang on to this benefit will be huge.

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After completing an MSC State Society and Development in Africa and Asia at the London School of Oriental and African Studies, Joseph became an associate researcher for the All Party Parliamentary Group on the Great Lakes Region of Africa. He produced various papers including the APPG's submission to the Commission for Africa. When the All Party Parliamentary Group on the Niger Delta was established, Joseph was asked to carry out an independent consultation with UK civil society groups who have an interest in the fate of the Niger Delta. This report is a replication of the process carried out in the UK and aims to be a free reflection of the realities as they are perceived on the ground.

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