



Dear Supporter

This news and analysis summary examines events from the past month in Nigeria affecting the Niger Delta. It is based on local news reporting and direct observations in the region. We hope that the information provided in this summary is useful to readers as a guide to further inquiry.

Conflict, Security and Violence

Amnesty/Ceasefire

The apparent willingness of all sides to maintain a ceasefire despite the glacial pace of rehabilitation follow up is an indicator of a collective desire for peace that could be built on in coming months. Although President Y'Adua's absence has further slowed decision making, it has also helped the case of those who argue for further patience over the Federal Governments intentions.

- Amnesty/ceasefire holds despite uncertainties
- Kidnappings continue

The stand down that followed the amnesty agreements of October has continued to hold despite the lack of substantial follow up from the Nigerian Government. There have been incidents, such as the violent protest at Aluu in Rivers State over unpaid allowances that hint at the fragility of the process, but no major breakdowns.

There are many issues to iron out. The rehabilitation plans that have been mentioned to date are almost farcically brief – consisting of a few weeks of "skill acquisition" when lessons from elsewhere indicate a process of years is needed. The present amnesty also says little or nothing about the much larger mass of the un/under employed, who have not opted into the conflict as a means of extracting their own share of resources. Any holistic and long lasting solution for peace in the region must also address their needs.

Much could be done by state governments with economic and employment stimulus aimed squarely at rural communities. These could range from localised public work schemes, long advocated in the Niger Delta Technical Committee Report, to broader assistance in developing viable small businesses. In this regard both State and Federal Governments would also do well to address their often promised delivery of electricity to the region. The constant failure of power has decimated both small and large businesses and is a critical macro change that would have widespread impact and be a truly visible change for the region.

The international community, whose offers of assistance during the disarmament process were rebuffed, could provide technical assistance and resources for neglected issues. However this is only constructive where it is clear that they are supporting well thought through plans for delivering peace and development. As the funds at donors disposal are marginal compared to States and the Federal Government, the main political asset they bring is legitimacy for government initiatives, a commodity that should not be sold cheaply.

The potential for the present situation to be exploited by politicians acquiring small political armies (as happened in 2003 and 2007) has been apparent for some time. Under all scenarios the

international community should make it clear that there will be serious repercussions for any political actors who use the present process to secure readymade armed groups ahead of the 2011 elections.

Kidnappings continue

There appears to have been a marked reduction in crime, but measuring this improvement objectively has been made more difficult by deliberate news suppression in all of the major oil producing states. Known incidents of crime and kidnapping have gone unreported as State Governors apparently compete to cast a rosy image of their achievements.

The rate of kidnappings may well have reduced, but the ease with which unreported kidnappings are identified by local organisations is disturbing. State Governments will need overwhelming public support to end this debilitating criminal practice. This is something that cannot be achieved if they continue to suppress anything perceived as bad news. International actors, who are being encouraged to return to the region, could do well to remind states that evidence of both openness and concerted action on kidnapping will be more reassuring than simple pledges of safety.

Governance and Transparency

President Y'Adua

There has been considerable exaggeration of oil losses during peak militant activity in the months of June and July and some confusion over the scale of recovery thereafter.

- Political maneuvering over President's illness threatens stability
- States and local governments fail to disclose budgets

The illness of President Y'Adua - and its management - is clearly a national issue, but it has had a disturbing effect on the Niger Delta. The resistance to the Vice President, Goodluck Jonathan, playing his constitutional role as Acting President has fuelled local suspicions about the attitude of northern political elites to the Niger Delta region. The questions over political sincerity could not come at a worse time and if handled poorly could stir serious conflict.

In truth, the early trenchant opposition to Jonathan appears to be driven by political factions who could lose leverage under even a temporary change. Some appear quite willing to sacrifice both national interest and stability in pursuit of securing their own political interests. They also do a great disservice to other voices from the North who back a continued assertion of their interests within a respect for constitutional law.

The international community will obviously tread with care at a delicate time. However, they can put political factions on notice that cynical efforts to exploit the present situation face the risk of being vigorously challenged.

State and Local Government Budgets

Some lofty claims have been made in 2009 about improving transparency, notably in Bayelsa and Rivers State. Despite these assertions, there has been a comprehensive failure in all the key oil producing states to make detailed versions of State and Local Government budgets freely available, not to speak of credible records of actual spending. Instead of applying the principles of the long delayed Freedom of Information Bill (presented first in 2004) officials are more likely to cite public servant's "oath of secrecy", which keeps all budgets out of the public eye.

Where the EFCC (Economic and Financial Crimes Commission) previously generated considerable pressure on State and Local Governments, there is now a void in enforcing anti-corruption principles in the region. There is also little sign of the political will necessary amongst elites to enforce greater discipline.

It is time for the international community to consider more concerted independent action. This could include more aggressive pursuit of money laundering cases and visa bans for obvious offenders. Such moves would send the strongest possible signals to erring elites and to frustrated communities, who often feel badly isolated when challenging powerful and corrupt government institutions.

Sustainable Development and Environment

Port Harcourt demolitions

There have been no further demolitions since the last brief, but positions otherwise remain little unchanged. The State Government (publicly at least) remains committed to the demolitions that would displace upwards of 200,000 people.

- Standoff over Port Harcourt demolitions continues
- Communities record advocacy successes

SDN partner SERAC has added to the cases in court and further reports are due. Local and international actors are urged to use every opportunity to persuade the State Government that it must take an alternative path if its claimed interest in developing communities is to be credible. [Regular updates on the situation can be found in the SDN newsroom.](#)

Community Advocacy success stories

Two communities, with support from SDN partners, have recorded early successes in efforts to pressure different authorities to deliver on development promises. [Tere Ama community in Port Harcourt was able to secure Niger Delta Development Commission support](#) for the outfitting of their community hospital. In Ogbia, Bayelsa, the state authorities seem to have repaired a water supply after a community video highlighted successive failed projects.

Both successes reflect the view of SDN and local organisations that the best prospect for sustainable change is rooted in responsible community led advocacy. The international community, private actors, and academics can support this approach in a variety of ways. A good start would be asking tougher questions about the real community impacts of "development projects" in the region.

Other news and reports from SDN

[>> Report: Nigeria's Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative: Just a Glorious Audit? - Thu, 10 Dec 2009](#)

This paper analyses Nigeria's implementation of the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) process, a global initiative that seeks to promote transparency in company payments and government revenues from oil, gas and mining.

[>> News: Amnesty International - Police 'Kill At Will' - Thu, 10 Dec 2009](#)

Amnesty International exposed the shocking level of unlawful police killings in Nigeria , in a new

report released today.

>> [News: Federal Government: Our hands are tied on as Flaring](#) - Thu, 10 Dec 2009

The Federal Government has said that any attempt at stopping gas flaring through legislation now will lead to very unpleasant circumstances, which the nation can hardly cope with.

>> [News: Nigerian victims take Shell to court](#) - Thu, 3 Dec 2009

On Thursday, 3 December 2009, the unique legal action taken by four Nigerian victims of Shell oil leaks, in conjunction with Milieudefensie, will begin at the court in The Hague. This is the first time in history that a Dutch company has been brought to trial in a Dutch court for damages occurring abroad.

Stakeholder Democracy Network.

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