

Rethinking Institutional Strategy for Delivering Development in the Niger Delta Region

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I am delighted to be invited to deliver this Special Address, titled: “Rethinking the Institutional Strategy for Delivering Development in the Niger Delta Region”, at the 6th Sustainability in the Extractive Industries Conference, 2017. This conference has been organised, first, to deepen our conversations on, as well as sharpen overall strategies for, the development of the Nigerian economy.

But of a more specific design, and this is very important to me and all who are from the Niger Delta, is to develop a more integrative, robust, engaging and sustainable strategy for delivering development to the Niger Delta region.

This conference could not have come at a more opportune and urgent time. We are, daily, confronted by the challenge of mounting social and physical infrastructural development needs, across the nation and within the Niger Delta region, in the face of dwindling economic power, occasioned by declining oil revenue. The dynamics are changing. Interestingly, the urgency has become even more acute, due to increased awareness, widespread access to information, the vigour of engagement in all areas, as well as our shared commitment to improve the living conditions of all Nigerians.

It becomes, therefore, imperative for us to fashion a veritable strategy, a worthy masterplan, within whose body of prescriptions and recommendations we find the roadmap towards a great country which ennobles our collective aspirations and meets all our expectations.

Introduction

Since the early questions began, leading to the Willinks’ Commission of 1958, in which, for the first time, the agitations of the people of the Niger Delta for equity, justice and development were distilled into a document and given voice, the Niger Delta great region has witnessed many conversations such as this. Beyond words, it has led to agitation, violence and destruction of oil installations. Today, in this hall, this conversation continues, for it springs from the region’s hunger for social justice and sustainable development.

This, unarguably, will not be the last gathering of technocrats and stakeholders to continue to seek answers. But there is an earnest hope in me, and, I believe, in all of you, that we take definitive steps towards finding enduring resolutions. That we find, all of us, the moral force and imperative to begin to move beyond words and weapons into positive action; from destructive to productive engagement, which will help transform our beloved region into the sum of all our dreams and aspirations. And the time to begin to take this definitive and decisive walk is now, with this single step.

The Niger Delta Region

As many people who know me will attest, the subject of institutional strengthening, due process, integrative strategy and the overall sustainable development of the Niger Delta region is one of which I am deeply concerned, and about which I am always happy to speak. This is because it is important for us to fully understand the dynamics and imperatives of the development challenges facing us as a region and as a people. By so doing, we become better able to contribute, as stakeholders and partners, to the process of that development, with collective action and within vision.

The Niger Delta has remained, arguably, the most important region of this country, particularly in socio-economic terms. Yet, for a long time it has suffered untold neglect and widespread devastation and deterioration. Right from that Willinks' Commission of pre-colonial Nigeria, many prescriptions have been made on how best to develop the Niger Delta region and improve the living conditions of the people.

For a region that has produced, over the years, a majority of Nigeria's wealth, it remains a tragic paradox that all the indices of development have been negative for the Niger Delta. These have manifested in pervasive regional poverty, mounting unemployment, poor infrastructural facilities and services, depleting environmental resources which impacted negatively on the traditional livelihoods of the people, and lopsided developmental initiatives that created very few islands of riches amidst a sea of poverty.

For instance, in its 1995 report, the World Bank described the Niger Delta as the least developed area of Nigeria, with per capita income of less than \$280 per annum. It declared that all indices of development such as education, health, sanitation, job creation, water and other physical infrastructures, were far below acceptable standards. The report also showed that environmental resources were gradually being degraded and that it offered an extremely poor human capacity and skills base.

The Niger Delta region is the largest mangrove forest in Africa, as well as the third largest wetland in the world, after Mississippi in North America and the Pantanal in South America. Covering about 70,000 square kilometres and about 7.5 per cent of Nigeria's landmass, it boasts a great expanse of rich rain and mangrove forest, rivers, creeks, canals and rivulets, many of which empty into the Atlantic. It is buffeted throughout the year by tides, resulting in erosion, flooding and silting.

The region is home to over 40 million people from 40 ethnic groups who speak about 250 dialects, out of which 800 of 13,000 communities are oil-producing. The traditional livelihoods of the people are farming and fishing, the discovery of oil in Oloibiri in 1956, has provided a considerable alternate economic activity. In all, it hosts over 1,100 producing oil wells from about 400 documented oil and gas fields.

Although the region is also rich in agro and aquaculture, as well as other non-oil products, it is as a result of this sector that the region has become important over the years, contributing about 65% of federally-distributed revenue. Since 1956, the sector has provided about \$600 billion of revenues to the exchequer to fund Nigeria's budgets. Sadly, this has barely impacted the region.

Past Intervention Efforts

When the Willinks' Commission turned in its report in 1958, it recommended that the Niger Delta deserved special attention and should be designated a special area for development. As a consequence, the Federal Government established the Niger Delta Development Board, NDDB, in 1960; a board that was, at best, moribund. It was scrapped and was followed by many other intervention agencies which likewise failed. These included:

- The River Basin Development Authority which was established after the Civil War, not just for the development of the Niger Delta but for the whole country, negating the prescriptions of the Willink's Commission's report.
- The Presidential Task Force which devoted 1.5% of the Federation Account to the development of the Niger Delta region.

- The Belgore Commission which was to identify the root causes of the disaffection in the oil producing areas and suggest the best way forward. It recommended the establishment of a developmental agency and this gave birth to the Oil Mineral Producing Area Development Commission (OMPADEC) in 1993.

The continued underdevelopment of the Niger Delta is a consequence of the failure of these efforts. And it is for a number of reasons:

- There was weak institutional governance and poor enforcement of regulations and policy, which often led to recklessness.

- Lack of continuity in policy

- No Regional Master Plan that captured an aggregate of the peoples' needs, aspirations and hopes and provided a integrative vision.

- Most projects were designed to manage emergent regional crises or for political/institutional patronage, and did not have long-term benefits.

- Poor manpower and leadership instability. As a result, appointments were based more on political expediency than professional competence.

- Funding was grossly inadequate.

- Of course, the political will to succeed was lacking.

This created a spiral towards sustainable under-development and worsened the peoples' conditions, leading to frustrated expectations. This slowly gave rise to tension, agitation and conflict, as well as vices such as armed robbery, kidnapping, vandalism, oil theft and other forms of economic sabotage.

To understand this dilemma and fashion a proper strategy that changes the spiral, from the negative to the positive, it is important to understand how the sustainable development goals, SDGs, sponsored by the United Nations, helps tackle all the factors and outcomes of failure as enumerated above. To achieve that, we must, as a matter of urgency, rethink and overhaul our institutional strategies, strengthen all our social and political structures, institutionalise better governance protocols in our conduct, as well as reaffirm a collective commitment to doing what is right and proper at all times, for the good of the people.

Achieving Sustainable Development

The Agenda 21 Report of the United Nations defines Sustainable Development as one "that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs." The concept of sustainable development first began to take a major hold on world development economics in 1992 when the first global United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, known as the Earth Summit, was held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

Later in December that same year, the UN General Assembly established the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) to ensure effective follow-up on resolutions from that major conference.

To fully address sustainable development, the United Nations sponsored 13 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), namely:

1. Poverty Reduction
2. Reduction of hunger
3. Enhanced education and equality
4. Water and sanitation
5. Improved well being
6. Affordable clean energy
7. Decent work and economic growth
8. Sustainable cities and communities
9. Responsible consumption and Production
10. Climate action
11. Biodiversity protection
12. Peace, conflict prevention and security
13. Partnerships and Collaborations.

These goals were designed to create a common set of development goals for all communities in every country with 2030 as the deadline for attainment. To ensure buy-in and successful implementation, the United Nations has continuously encouraged dialogue and partnership at all levels of governance. In all these, governance remains an over-arching platform and vehicle for the successful implementation of sustainable development goals.

That is why, for most parts of Africa and in Nigeria, sustainable development has remained elusive and we are compelled, by an indefatigable desire to do right by the people, to gather and continue to share ideas. Poverty, for instance, is still a major challenge, as 41% of the Sub-Saharan African population (or roughly 300 million people) lived, as at 2004, on one dollar a day or less. Most countries on the continent have not managed to reap fully the benefits of globalization.

Multiple armed conflicts, insufficient access to education and widespread pandemics, such as HIV and malaria, have also undermined Africa's efforts at achieving sustainable development. The continent is challenged by serious environmental threats like desertification, deforestation, climate change and, as with the Niger Delta region, erosion and pollution.

Only recently, President Muhammadu Buhari launched the Ogoni Clean-up, a bold measure determined to clean Ogoniland and propel region-wide remediation. The Ogoni Clean-up is quite instructive. Over the years, the adverse impact of pollution on the traditional livelihoods of the people, particularly in an area that was once called the food basket of the Niger Delta, has been great indeed. The clean-up of the environment will ultimately get to other parts of the Niger Delta as President Buhari promised in his speech at its flag-off.

Rethinking Our Current Approach: What We Must Do

Mahatma Ghandi once said: "The difference between what we do and what we are capable of doing would suffice to solve most of the world's problems." It compels urgent attention that the Niger Delta wallows in poverty, occasioned by under-development, despite its riches. It remains a haunting and unsettling paradox. At the core of whatever we must do, particularly in Government, is the urgent need to enthrone sustainable livelihoods. The logic is that what we do today to provide livelihood must be such that it sustains earth's resources, and remains important for the future search for and enjoyment of such livelihoods.

The dynamics and methods for tackling poverty, for creating employment for our graduating students, for instance, for preserving the environment and for boosting agriculture, industry and allied pursuits, must be done within the context of a shared vision, through integrated implementation and partnership. As I reflected earlier, agriculture, in which the Niger Delta people have founded their core preoccupation and occupation, presents the strongest and most rewarding option to fighting poverty and facilitating sustainable development.

It worked great wonders in countries such as Mexico, India and China, where the Green Revolution is one of the success stories of modern times. In his book, "The End of Poverty," Jeffrey Sachs describes how the Rockefeller Foundation, wary of the grim possibility of massive hunger due to a rapidly rising global population, began developing and promoting high-yield varieties of staple crops, first as a pilot project in Mexico, and then replicated in Asia.

In 1944, the Foundation set up an institute to develop high-yield varieties of wheat for Mexico. Scientific breeding, using crosses of strains brought from Japan after World War II, led to a breakthrough. "Mexico went from a large net importer of grain to a significant net exporter between 1944 and 1964," he says.

In Asia, India went from eleven metric tonnes of wheat production in 1960 to twenty-four million tonnes in 1970, thirty-six million tonnes in 1980, and fifty-five million tonnes in 1990. This has also worked wonders in the Philippines and Peru. Similarly, in China, agriculture has led the way to the emergence of this Asian giant as a major force in the world economy. This is especially remarkable when you consider that China, with a population of over 1.3 billion people, is able to produce enough food for her people, and yet has more than enough to make her a major exporter of agricultural produce to the world. It opens up the economy and challenges activities in industry for processed and allied products.

In Nigeria, the reverse seems the case. From a country that exported cocoa, groundnuts and palm to the world, we have become one massively dependent on imports, of agricultural produce and processed foods. Indeed, it remains a tragic irony that we showed Malaysia the secrets of palm production and lost it in the process. Yet, Nigeria continues to boast of great land resource, with a capacity to produce the organic foods the world hungers for.

A World Bank study shows, for instance, that the Peremabiri area of Bayelsa State is capable of producing enough rice to feed Nigeria and the rest of Africa. How can we exploit these opportunities to fight poverty, which is at the core of the continual agitations in the land? How can we sustain them? It is vital to note that tackling and defeating poverty are essential to the urgent need to boost security in the region – or in any society, for that matter.

In his book, "How Rich Countries Got Rich, and How Poor Countries Stay Poor," Erik Reinert declares that for such initiatives to work, funds must be matched by the establishment of industrial and service sectors that can absorb the physical and human investments. Also, Jeffrey Sachs lists a number of factors why some countries fail to thrive, including the poverty trap, lack of innovation and governance failures.

In the late 1970s, Nigeria began its own Green Revolution amidst fanfare. Soon after, it collapsed and Nigeria lapsed back to its unenviable status as a major importer of grains and processed foods. Yet, the Nigerian Green Revolution failed due to, among others, a misapplication of funds, insincerity among the leadership, lack of innovation, geo-politics and, above all, poor governance. It is only one of many failures that have come to haunt us as a nation.

In its 2008 November issue on African Governance Rankings, African Business magazine ranked Nigeria as number 37, better only than countries like Sierra Leone, Liberia, Angola, Eritrea, Sudan, Chad and Somalia where there have been long years of leadership crisis and war. The report ranked small countries like Mauritius, Seychelles and Botswana first, second and third, respectively and to underline its rising profile in Africa, Mauritius is involved in more multi-sector investments in other African countries. Almost 10 years after, the Nigerian situation is not significantly better.

Strengthening Institutional Governance: “Less Politics, More Governance”

A major cause of and trigger for sustainable underdevelopment is poor governance. According to a report by the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) ‘governance’ means “the process of decision-making and the process by which decisions are implemented (or not implemented).” It covers all strata of society, but is most prevalent in Government, government structures, institutions and the faithful implementation (or lack thereof) of the strategies for sustainable development (whose goals were earlier mentioned).

In its report, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) describes governance as encompassing all aspects of the way a country is governed, including its economic policies and regulatory framework. It says: “Corruption is a narrower concept, which is often defined as the abuse of public authority or trust for private benefit.” In 1996 the Board of Governors of the IMF asked the financial institution to “promote good governance in all its aspects, including by ensuring the rule of law, improving the efficiency and accountability of the public sector, and tackling corruption, as essential elements of a framework within which economies can prosper.”

Characteristics of Good Governance

Good governance has eight major identifiable characteristics.

1. It must be participatory;
2. It must obey the rule of law;
3. It must be transparent;
4. It must be responsive;
5. It must be consensus oriented;
6. It must recognise and respect equity, justice and fairness;
7. It must promote effectiveness and efficiency; and
8. It must be accountable.

Consequently, it becomes imperative for us, in rethinking our strategies, to:

1. Reform our governance systems to ensure daily compliance with rules and regulations, as well as reduce discretionary actions.
2. Restructure the over-bloated balance sheets of all public institutions to free resources for urgent development needs.
3. Re-engineer the public-sector workforce to enthrone skills and professional competence, a requirement to improving commitment to service delivery to citizens.

Ultimately, Government and all institutions of governance must fix themselves. Recently, I have begun to advocate that we must begin to play less politics and offer more governance, because in that we

offer to the people the best of our capacity and capability, and begin to fulfil their dreams and meet their expectations.

Improving Planning and Monitoring

As stated earlier, one of the major reasons for sustainable under-development has been the absence of a shared plan. Nigeria is a signatory to the sustainable development goals (SDGs) and has, over the years, developed plans and programmes for integrated development. From the introduction of the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) in 1986 by the Government of General Ibrahim Babangida, the Federal Government, through the National Planning Commission, has built into its Rolling Plans measures aimed at achieving development.

Nigeria's approach to sustainable development also received a boost from the establishment of the VISION 2010 and Vision 2020 Committees, a body charged with the articulation of a long-term sectoral economic development programme designed to usher the nation into the third millennium. Yet, poor implementation and monitoring of deliverables remain undermining factors.

Consequently, it is vital to:

1. Evaluate all budget concepts for feasibility, ability to meet community needs, benefits, impacts, financial effectiveness, consistency, suitability, as well as sustainability.
2. Integrated and participatory approach to budget planning for inclusive, rather than exclusive, development of cities and rural areas.
3. Development of growth clusters that would be a trigger for sustainable livelihoods and shared development.
4. Periodic monitoring and evaluation of projects and programmes, using quantifiable and “tamper-proof” tools to reduce implementation gaps.

We are still hopeful that this vision will succeed, and a measure of this confidence comes from the determination of the present Federal Government, under President Muhammadu Buhari, to decisively tackle corruption and enthrone probity.

Collaborative Stakeholder Engagement

Some of the major impediments to development are exclusionist governance and territorialism. In most government institutions, stakeholder engagement is poor and planning often occur without the needs analysis of the communities and beneficiaries of development initiatives. While the Johannesburg Summit developed clear strategies for LEEDs, SEEDs and NEEDs analysis, Nigeria remains challenged by a planning process that springs from the top-down, rather than bottom-up.

What this does is we offer projects and programmes that are fundamentally flawed and difficult to implement. Even when implemented, they are not beneficial and become white-elephant in nature. Ultimately, they address nothing and perpetuates underdevelopment, despite heavy financial outlays.

Consequently, it is important to:

1. Engage communities and solicit their inputs in the planning process.

2. All levels of government must harmonise planning efforts, by working together on local, state, regional and national plans. This is particularly important with the Niger Delta, where the Niger Delta Development Commission, NDDC, was created to facilitate shared development. To this end, a regional master plan was developed and the Partners for Sustainable Development (PSD) Forum created to ensure equity and compliance.

3. Donors and other development partners must be included in the monitoring of projects and programmes to ensure compliance to the process for delivery and implementation.

NDDC and the 4-R Initiative

These are at the heart of our policy thrust in the Niger Delta Development Commission. When we took over on November 4, 2016, we unveiled what we called a 4-R Initiative, imperative to helping the Commission rethink its efforts at facilitating sustainable development in the Niger Delta region.

As you all may already be aware, it is the Commission's mission to facilitate the even, rapid and sustainable development of the Niger Delta, into a region that is socially stable, economically prosperous, politically peaceful and ecologically regenerative.

Since 2001 NDDC has undertaken diverse projects and programmes covering these core areas, driven by the needs of the communities and the urgency to improve physical infrastructures such as roads, electricity, water supply, shore protection, canalisation and reclamation. The Commission was determined, pursuant to the Mandate enunciated in the NDDC Acts of 2000, to create wealth and jobs, reduce poverty and unemployment, improve skills and human capacity, improve peace and security, develop partnerships among stakeholders, particularly through the Partners for Sustainable Development programme and attract investments, particularly in agriculture, processing and allied products.

The 4-R Initiative is very important, because it is to:

1. Restore our core mandate;
2. Restructure our balance sheet;
3. Reform our governance structures and protocols; and
4. Reaffirm our commitment to doing what is right and proper, at all times.

It remains our determination to improve the transparency of our processes, leverage on technology to increase accountability and efficiency, consult stakeholders frequently, engage proactively and be creative about the programmes that we design, to uplift the people and the region. This is a key paradigm shift which we enjoin every institution to adopt.

It was important, also, to enter into partnerships with organisations well-equipped to help us provide real sustainable development in the Niger Delta. Only recently, we signed four Memoranda of Understanding with the Facility for Oil Sector Transparency and Reform in Nigeria (FOSTER), the Market Development Project in the Niger Delta (MADE), the Foundation for Partnership Initiatives in the Niger Delta (PIND) and BudgIT. It is our objective to strengthen processes, strengthen institutions, boost agriculture and the regional economy and ensure that NDDC is equipped to deliver on its mandate.

Beyond the Commission, it is important to state that there are good signs thing may be going in the right direction. There are strong collaborations between NDDC and States, particularly Edo, Ondo, Delta and Bayelsa Governments, as well as the oil and gas companies on projects and programmes, designed to eliminate duplications and reduce cost. Only recently, the Federal Executive Council

approved the technical audit report of the Ministry of Niger Delta Affairs, which showed a balance sheet with N423bn of funds with contractors, but only 12% performance. This is a prelude to restructuring. Various state governments in the Niger Delta region are also evaluating their portfolio of projects, with a view to reducing liabilities and improving delivery.

Conclusion

The development of the Niger Delta region – and Nigeria – cannot be sustained if these factors are not recognised and measures put in place for their implementation. It is important to strengthen regulatory enforcement at all times, to ensure compliance. It is important to improve the responsiveness of agencies tasked with the protection of the environment, for instance, and large punitive taxes for environmental abuse imposed, to boost livelihoods and combat health hazards. Added to this is the strengthening of law and order, as well as legal sanctions available to regulators and ensure the effective use of the Ecological Fund.

In conclusion, it is important for us all to begin to woo investors back to Nigeria and the Niger Delta, because sustainable development will not only improve the quality of life of our people by reducing poverty and disease and improving peace and security, it will bring investors, thereby ensuring that the economy becomes vibrant again. There will be new businesses in agriculture, tourism, and the oil and gas sector and its consequence is a region and country, full of industry and hope, which satisfies all our yearnings.

I believe the future is bright for us as a country and as a region. But, we must affirm, even here, as stakeholders, as leaders and leaders of thought, to do what is right and proper for our people. Their well-being and the well-being of the Niger Delta lie in our hands, and we cannot afford to fail.

Once more, I thank you for this opportunity and for your time and patience. God bless you.