

CHAPTER 6: LOCAL NGOS AND THE NIGER DELTA CRISIS SINCE 1990s

We pray to God on this holy morn that no petroleum oil will be discovered in our communities. Indeed, Lord, let the oil underneath our houses and farms drift away from us. Lord, spare us the pains and the misfortunes and diseases that petroleum oil brings to our people and to our farms and rivers. Lord, protect us from further harm in the hands of those who want our properties. Amen

--- A Pastor's prayer before a Christian Congregation in the Niger Delta.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter analyses the interactions between the local NGOs and the state as well as between oil companies and these social movements from the region. It must also be pointed out that the involvement of INGOs was sequel to the globalization of the international system consequent upon the collapse of the former Soviet Union. The intervention of these bodies has played a significant role in putting pressures on the foreign oil companies and to a large extent on the government of the state. There has been an increase in the number of local NGOs and grassroots organizations (GROs) due to interest and solidarity among their members in different poor communities and as a result of assistance from INGOs especially.²⁷⁰

Since the early 1990s NGOs have shifted their focus from states policies and practices to the role of multinational corporations and international financial institutions in the protection and promotion of human rights in their areas of operations. However, certain factors were responsible for the shifts of focus by the NGOs in the 1990s and among these are,

- a perceived shift of power from Nation-states to MNCs and international financial institutions such as the World Bank and the international monetary Fund;

- *the lack of social and environmental accountability of MNCs under existing national and international laws;

- * the growing anti-corporate-globalization movement;

- * a conclusion on the part of large, international human rights organizations that they have been too focused on traditional categories of civil and political rights while neglecting economic, social, and cultural rights; and

²⁷⁰ A. Thomas, "NGOs and their influence on environmental policies in Africa: A framework" in Thomas, Carr and Humphreys (eds) *Environmental Policies and NGO Influence*, Routledge, London, 2001, p. 4. For further details on this issue see J. Fisher, *Nongovernments: NGOs and the Political Development of the Third World*, Kumarian Press, USA 1998, p. 7; and Ghai and Vivian (eds), *Grassroots Environment Actions: People's Participation in Sustainable Development*, Routledge, London, 1992.

* a desire on the part of some people in the NGO world to enlist MNCs and business executives as allies and as potential levers for promoting human rights globally²⁷¹

Prior to this period the preoccupation of MNCs corporations was the desire to increase profits for shareholders and investors. However, certain industrial/environmental disasters (Bhopal, Exxon Valdez) have had a remarkable impact in broadening the agenda of NGOs and in giving vent to the call on MNCs to promote Corporate Social responsibility. The pressure from both local and International NGOs might have accounted for shift of actions by foreign oil multinationals in the Niger Delta of Nigeria. For instance, the 1998 Annual Report of Shell stated that its Social Corporate Responsibility is second to none in the Niger Delta. This SCR has transcended far ranging areas of human life which include education, agricultural development, business development, water /sanitation and infrastructures. As at 1998, it had supported twenty-two hospitals, of which eleven were built outright. These were located in Aminnigboko, Umebule, Soku, Owaza, Okoroba, Erhoike, Ogulagha, Egbemo-Angalabiri, Oben, Okpare and Out-Jeremi. The remaining eleven were merely renovated and supported in Bonny, Nembe, Egbema, Terabor, Obiokpiti, Kwakwa, K-Dere, Igbiide, Ekakpamre and Efrun-Otor.²⁷² However, this contribution is seen as being far below the expectation of the people because the Niger Delta has been home to many foreign oil companies for over four decades with little infrastructure to show for huge resource in the region.

Given this scenario the social movements that came up in the 1990s adopted a series of strategies to confront the state and these oil multinationals especially the Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC). The response of these actors namely Shell and the Nigerian state to the local people or social movements' protests has been in form of repression between 1990 and 1999, while in some cases some efforts were made by the state to silence this opposition in order to give room for oil production. Examples of these efforts on the part of the government include the establishment of OMPADEC, increase

²⁷¹ M. Winston, "NGO Strategies for Promoting Corporate Social Responsibility", *Ethics and International Affairs*, Vol.16, Issue 1, 2002, pp.71-2.

²⁷² I. Olojede *et al*, *op. cit.* 2000

in derivation formula, and the establishment of the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC). Paradoxically, the oil multinationals support state repression in order to continue their operations and to protect their facilities in as much as they embark on community development programs as a way of building international image to show corporate responsibility. The response from the state and these foreign oil companies has not engendered permanent peace in the region but it have further strengthen the determination of the local non-governmental organizations, international non-governmental organizations and community based organizations to address the plight of the people. At another level these agencies/organizations have established a linkage with the major these social movements in the course of their struggle.

In the course of this study, it was observed that there are no generally accepted legal standards binding the operations of multinational corporations except series of domestic laws. However, local NGOs have left with two options in articulating their demands, voluntary CSR approach and confrontational approach. Generally, the activities of NGOs in Nigeria depend largely on funding from a variety of sources. Most of the funds come from external sources, mainly from INGOs. For instance, a great number of foreign donors supported Nigerian human rights NGOs in the days of military rule as part of a broad program to support civil society groups in promoting democratic values. Notable among the donors were the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), United States Information Service (USIS), British Council, Danish International Development Agency (DANIDA), the Department for International Development (DFID), Ford Foundation, MacArthur Foundation and Friedrich Nauman Foundation. A number of embassies and High Commissions also render financial and logistical assistance to these human rights NGOs.²⁷³ However, their dependencies on foreign assistance to a large extent dictate the agenda and success of these organizations. Generally, as was noted in the literature the NGOs employed series of strategies that fall within the ambit of engagement-confrontation spectrum:

²⁷³ The author visited the offices of some NGOs in Lagos and had informal discussion with their officials especially ERA, CDHR and CLO.

- dialogue aimed at promoting the adoption of voluntary codes of conduct-the pure CSR approach
- advocacy of social accounting and independent verification schemes
- the filing of shareholder resolutions
- documentation of abuses and moral shaming
- calls for boycotts of company products or divestment of stock
- advocacy of selective purchasing laws
- advocacy of government-imposed standards
- litigation seeking punitive damages”²⁷⁴

With array of tactics available to NGOs in their struggle to change the attitude of multinational corporations most of these MNCs still cling to the view of maximizing their profit for shareholders. While in some instances public criticisms of their actions in global media have forced them to reconsider their activities and this have informed the establishment of private codes of conduct for overseas offices, subsidiaries, suppliers, and contractors.”²⁷⁵

NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATIONS AND THE SOCIAL MOVEMENTS OF THE NIGER DELTA

The origin of “private voluntary organization can be traced as far back as the turn of this century, [considering] their sustained involvement in relief and development work”²⁷⁶ after the two world wars that devastated Europe and the eventual needs to reconstruct the areas affected. Most of the large NGOs started in the western world but the independence of the Third World in the 1950s and 1960s accounted for the advent of these organizations in Africa and Asia, and they are considered as peripheral actors in the realm International Politics. The growth of NGOs in the cycle of development in the developing countries in the 1980s was a function of the failure of African states to propel the required development as a result of some internal contradictions. In view of their

²⁷⁴ M. Winston, Op. cit

²⁷⁵ Ibid

²⁷⁶ S.N. Ndegwa, *The Two Faces of Civil Society: NGOs and Politics in Africa*, USA, 1996, pp. 17-18

growth, they have played a significant role in the development of states in Africa and have in most cases ensured checks and balances with regard to states' policies and those of giant multinationals that operate in Africa.²⁷⁷ The growth and importance of NGOs in the late 1980s explains the increasing link between them and international aid agencies like "World Bank and various United Nations agencies involved in relief, environmental and development work."²⁷⁸ In order to achieve the laudable objective of development in these countries including Nigeria, most of these NGOs that came up have established a 'marriage of convenience' with local people in their areas of operations.

Therefore, the involvement of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and community-based organizations (CBOs) in the struggle against state malfeasance has been operationalised within the context of different theoretical constructs depending on the focal point of analysis. For instance, Motsisi's transformative model²⁷⁹ (as a paradigm which explains civil society engagement within states) sees NGOs as vehicles for transformation in areas where local community capacity is lacking. Osaghae's analysis of the theories of marginalization and of extraneity and globalization as they apply to exiting from the Nigerian state in protest against mis (governance)²⁸⁰ also offers insights into NGO activity.

The theory of marginalization is premised on the fact that individuals or communities discriminated against are often incapable of changing their own circumstances and thus need assistance from parallel systems and actors which in our case are NGOs. On the other hand, the theory of extraneity and globalization is anchored in "a constellation of global factors" associated with the new international environment. The weakening of state capacity in vital areas of service delivery has induced non-governmental actors' involvement in satisfying the aspirations of citizens.²⁸¹ It should be noted however that

²⁷⁷ This point has been strongly expressed in academic circles by a number of scholars including B. Michael, "The politics of Government-NGO Relations in Africa", *World Development* 17(4), 1989b. pp. 569-587; A.G. Drabek "Development Alternatives: The Challenge for NGOs". *World Development* 15, 1987; S.N. Ndegwa, *The Two Faces of Civil Society: NGOs and Politics in Africa*. USA, 1996,

²⁷⁸ S.N. Ndegwa, *op. cit.*, p. 18

²⁷⁹ Quoted in R. Rojas, "Globalization and Civil Society: NGO Influence in International Decision-Making", <http://www.rojasdatabank.org/dp83-04.htm>

²⁸⁰ E. Osaghae, "Exiting from the State in Nigeria", free download, www.hsrbpress.ac.za

²⁸¹ *Ibid*

the objectives and modus operandi of these movements (as civil society actors) do not always cohere. On the contrary, they are more often than not divergent and set the tone for conflictual relations between the state and NGOs, local and international.

As far as the Niger Delta is concerned, the negative consequences of oil production and the stiff resistance of the state against the protests from the oil bearing communities have led to the upsurge of non-governmental organizations in the region. These organizations, formed with different motives and purposes, can be classified into major groups. These are human rights groups and environmental groups with a common goal of alleviating the suffering of the local people. However, the relationship between these organizations and the local people through their social movements highlights how the former had impacted pressure on the state and oil companies to redefine their policies towards the local people in the later part of the 1990s. The activity of these organizations in changing the policies of the major actors is determined on the type of government in power in the period that this research covers. Perhaps it can be argued that the period which the military regimes held sway in Nigeria posed a serious threat to these organizations' capacity to collaborate with the social movements and local people in the area to protest against the impact of oil exploration on the people.

Most of these organizations (Committee for the Defense of Human Rights, Ilaje Environmental Rights Focus, Civil Liberties Organization, and host of others) have at various levels formed a formidable opposition against the state and the oil companies. This was in relation to this position that, "formidable oppositions have risen against settled authoritarian regimes: the clergy have riled against incumbent governments; lawyers have challenged illegal state actions..."²⁸²

Therefore, the NGOs have actively cooperated with local people to dialogue with oil multinationals to eschew violence or threat of violence as a major means of changing oil companies' policies in the region. The aftermath of the protest by youths of Ojumole community against Chevron Nigeria Limited in 1995 led to working relations between

²⁸² S.N. Ndegwa, *The Two Faces of Civil Society: NGOs and Politics in Africa*. USA, 1996, pp. 2-3

Ilaje Environmental Rights Focus and Concerned Ilaje Citizens (CIC) to seek audience with the company on how to address the grievances of the people. This attempt at dialogue succeeded after very serious clashes which had resulted in several deaths between the Ilajes and Chevron. Of note is the incident of May 28, 1998. According to the Ilaje Environmental Rights Focus all attempts by the forty-two oil producing communities under the aegis of CIC at constructive dialogue could not achieve the desired results thus culminating in stiff resistance from the company on May 27, 1998.

Generally, there is an alliance of interest between the NGOs and the social movement to bring to an end the ugly scenario in the Niger Delta. The year 1993 is a watershed in the history of non-governmental organizations activities in Nigeria. The annulment of June 12 presidential election and the seventh *coup d etat* by the then Defense Minister, General Sani Abacha were followed by the suspension of political meetings. Of course, this was opposed by a number of non-governmental organizations. Besides, there were serious violations of human rights as well as ethnically based (Niger Delta) violations of collective/community rights by the military regime. NGOs with specific interests that were in tandem with those of social movements responded accordingly. Organizations such as the Centre for Advanced Social Sciences (CASS) 1992, Civil Liberties Organization (1987), Constitutional rights Projects (CRP) 1990, Institute of Human Rights and Humanitarian Law (IHRHL) 1993, Human Rights Monitor (HRM) 1993, Legal Research and Resource Development Centre (LRRDC) 1990, National Association of Democratic Lawyers (NADL) – formed as an affiliate of the International Association of Democratic Lawyers based in Brussels, Environmental Rights Actions and many others picked up the challenged the military during the period in question.

Most of these organizations aimed at addressing oppression and violations of human rights. For instance they investigated human rights abuses and waged war against these misdemeanors through litigation as well as through advocacy efforts. The Civil Liberties Organization published a quarterly magazine, titled *Liberty* and a *Journal of Human Rights Law and Practice* as part of its efforts in this regard. The organization has involved itself in series of projects relating to human rights violations and published a

number of reports on police brutality, military decrees, government impunity, death penalty and annual reports on the human rights situation in Nigeria. Since its formation it has given legal aid to over 4,000 indigent victims of human rights abuses. The organization also undertakes human rights education through its empowerment project, and by conducting clinics and seminars on human rights issues. The organization is extremely active in lobbying the government through dialogue and public censure and launching campaigns to end specific government abuses.²⁸³

Similarly, the Committee for the Defense of Human Rights has done greatly in publishing findings of its investigations on the violation of human rights in Nigeria. It has also published two outstanding works on the crises in the Niger Delta namely *Ken Saro-Wiwa and the Crises of the Nigerian State* (1998) and *Boiling Point* (2000). The organization affirms that its objectives are to promote, defend and sustain fundamental human rights; establish a system of prompt and efficient assistance for needy persons whose human rights are violated; and collaborate with other organizations committed to participatory democracy and social justice.²⁸⁴ The Committee for the Defense of Human Rights (CDHR), since its formation has undertaken legal actions on behalf of Nigerian citizens whose rights have been and are being violated. The organization launched campaigns against the structural adjustment programs initiated by the Babangida regime in the late 1980s. It was equally known for its advocacy against detention without trial and extra-judicial killings (e.g. the case of the Ogoni 9). The organization is also involved in organizing workshops, seminars and publications of newsletters as a measure to create awareness and enlightening the members of the society. It also produces detailed annual reports on human rights violations in Nigeria with a view to exposing the injustices perpetrated against the people of the country.

The efforts of the aforementioned organizations were complemented by the role of environmental rights organizations in the Niger Delta. Foremost in this regard is the

²⁸³ The information here is based on the interviews the author had with some members of the organisation in Nigeria in May, 2003.

²⁸⁴ The author is grateful to Eni Akinsola (Co-coordinator, Human Rights Education) of the CDHR for his invaluable contribution in providing the necessary materials that focused on the activities of CDHR.

Environmental Rights Action/Friends of the Earth Nigeria (ERA/FOE Nigeria) formed in 1993 to conduct periodic environmental survey of communities in the Niger Delta. Remarkably, prominent members of this organization and CHIKOKO (Oronto Douglas) were among the leaders that formed the Ijaw Youth council in 1998. This organization has done extensive work in investigating the Niger Delta crisis, conducting surveys, organizing seminars and workshops in addition to hosting hundreds of foreign bodies that are interested in the Niger Delta. In short, ERA/FoEN has become a think tank for researchers and it has published series of reports on the Niger Delta. The environmental Rights Action in 1993 traveled throughout the Niger Delta for six months so as to understand the issues involved in the Niger Delta. In the report compiled by its Deputy Director, Oronto Douglas, ERA noted the following:

- There is an environmental, economic, and moral crisis threatening to destabilize the region.
- The crisis was linked to the exploitation of the resources of the region to the exclusion of local people, and without regard to their environment.
- The crisis was caused by a combination of corporate, governmental, transnational, and local interests.
- The overall ecosystem of the Niger Delta is severely stressed and may collapse.
- There is an absence of good governance in the region.²⁸⁵

What this reports implies is that the agitation and struggle of the social movements are justified. The organization also suggested some measures to be adopted in order to restore Niger Delta to ecological health that it deserves. These tools are resistance, Strategic Information Access and Provision, Community Empowerment, Lobbying, Mass Education, Networking and Alliance Building and Litigation. The social movements which are intent on realizing their aspirations in the region have since adopted most of these tools recommended by ERA/FOE Nigeria.

²⁸⁵ O. Douglas, Nigeria: Using a variety of advocacy tools in the Niger Delta. A report of the findings by Environmental Rights Action's survey of the Niger Delta in 1993

However, in 1999, the organization hosted the Oil Watch Africa Conference and General Assembly in Port Harcourt to discuss the crisis in the region. ERA also organized a constitutional conference in 1999 to address the failure of the 1999 Constitution which was bequeathed to the civilian regime by the military. It organized roundtables through Democracy Outreach Programs to address vital issues as they affect the Niger Delta and went further to launch the Community Environmental Parliament (CEP) projects, which afforded local people to discuss the issues that affect their survival in the region. ERA/FoEN also worked closely with some media organizations in Nigeria to expose government's and oil companies' policies. It was equally involved in publication of leaflets and newsletters on the issues that affect the region.²⁸⁶

ERA also partnered with communities in the Niger Delta to identify local problems through Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) and through the establishment of community institutions as agencies for change. This partnership led to the establishment of Community Resource Centers (CRC) and the Rural Environmental Action Project (REACT).²⁸⁷ These institutions are basically established as forms of self-help, "they contain a meeting room, a small library with essential books for local teachers and students, and a community micro-credit scheme for women".²⁸⁸ They are managed by a Board of Trustees to address community issues that border on environmental, political, educational and economic problems. These centers were first established in Okoroba, Botem-Tai, Anyama and Sangana, all communities in Rivers and Bayelsa State.²⁸⁹

Besides ERA other organization and centers like ANPEZ Centre for Environment and Development were established in response to the injustice inflicted on the local people by the state and foreign oil multinationals. According to the Executive Director of Doctors for All Nations, an NGO that is concerned with health the situation in the region. These organizations sprang up because the people had no confidence in government. In order to avoid anarchy and violence, the NGOs were bestowed with the responsibility of

²⁸⁶ The information was obtained from ERA's newsletters and interactions with the staff of ERA in Benin City.

²⁸⁷ O. Douglas, *op. cit*

²⁸⁸ *Ibid*

²⁸⁹ *Ibid*.

providing the basic things like security and social amenities to improve the lives of the people.²⁹⁰

The alliances between local NGOs and CBOs, INGOs and People's movements in the Niger Delta's struggle for self-determination in terms of their resources, socio-economic, and political life have greatly facilitated the globalization of the struggle in the 1990s. This development essentially drew assistance from both within and outside Nigeria for their struggle. Therefore foreign grants from international organizations have further strengthened the position and struggle of the local people for justice delivery in the Niger Delta. It is in this regard that Doctors for All Nations confirmed that NGOs in Nigeria are networking with a number of other NGOs in America to attract them to the Niger Delta and to provide water for some remote communities and to make their inputs in the area of health and agriculture. With regard to great assistance from INGOs and states outside Africa, it is interesting to note that social movements like MOSOP did not receive any support from any African government because of the principle of non-interference enshrined in the Charter establishing the defunct Organization of African Unity (OAU).

Despite military repression against the print media in Nigeria, the media played a significant role in publicizing the course of the Ogoni. However, this was not the case with the electronic media, many of which were under the firm control of the state. The print media's ability to reach out to its target audience was also severely constrained by the military.

²⁹⁰ See Dr. Prosper Ufuoma Ahmoregba's interview with *Vanguard* Newspapers on the relationship between NGOs and the local people of the Niger Delta. The details of the interview can be found at <http://www.vanguardngr.com/articles/2002/politics/p212042004.html>

NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATIONS' RELATIONS WITH THE STATE AND OIL MULTINATIONALS IN THE NIGER DELTA

The growing significance of NGOs in the area of development and their increasing opposition to states' illegal actions, corruption and authoritarianism has put the two on a path of collision in most cases. These actions of the NGOs have redefined the policies of the state and foreign oil companies that dominate the energy sector seeking to maximize profits with strong resentment against interference by pressure groups like NGOs and social movements in many African states as the case in the Niger Delta of Nigeria reveals.

The oil companies' aim to attain optimum level of profit operates more comfortably "with political monopolies – be they monarchies, dictatorships, or democracies "from above".²⁹¹ Therefore, the pressure from the NGOs is very vital to alter the power relations in the oil market in a developing country like Nigeria where "there is little incentive from the very external forces that control the oil market, and fuel the petro-state, to support the decentralization of control of oil in enclave."²⁹²

The local NGOS formed an alliance with other international non-governmental organizations to put pressure on the Nigeria government and oil companies for change in their relations with the local people of the Niger Delta. For instance, ERA (an affiliate of the Friends of the Earth International, a global environmental movement in over sixty countries and a part of OilWatch International (an anti-fossil fuel group working to protect local people affected by oil and gas production) has used its strategic advantage within the NGO community in Nigeria to bring pressure to bear on the government and the oil multinationals. This link has placed ERA in a better position to cooperate with social movements in the region and to internationalize the crisis and to ultimately pressure the government and oil companies to improve on their relations with the local people. Apart from this, ERA has established close relations with many other NGOs both

²⁹¹ C.I. Obi, "Ropes of Oil: Ethnic minority agitation and the spectre of national disintegration in Nigeria". Paper presented at the conference on, Nigeria in the Twentieth Century, Flawn Academic Center, The University of Texas at Austin, March 29-31, 2002

²⁹² *Ibid*

local and international to address the plight of the local people. Some of these institutions that are in close alliance with ERA for justice delivery in environmental, social economic and political issues are the Civil Liberties Organization (CLO), Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, Institute for Policy Studies (IPS), the Bank Information Centre, the Ecumenical Community for Corporate responsibility, the International Rivers Network, Project Underground, Rain Forest Action Network, Swedish Society for Nature Conservation and host of others.²⁹³

As part of the strategies by the NGOs to put pressure on the state and foreign oil companies they have taken legal actions against the state and transnational corporations operating in the Niger Delta. It was in this regard that a nongovernmental organization – the Social and Economic Rights Action Centre (SERAC) Nigeria in collaboration with the Centre for Economic and Social Rights (CESR) New York took the Ogoni case to the African Commission on Human and Peoples Rights in Banjul, The Gambia. Their argument stemmed from the fact that Nigeria has violated Articles 2, 4, 14, 16, 18, 20, 21 and 24 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples Rights.²⁹⁴ These NGOs went further to argue that the activities of the foreign oil companies in collaboration with the Nigerian state have led to wide spread contamination of soil, water and air, and to the destruction of homes. The burning of crops and killing of farm animals and the climate of terror have all inflicted negative consequences on the people of the Ogoni. These developments have violated the rights of these communities to health, food and housing.

It is instructive to note that the Charter which these NGOs have invoked in their legal battle was ratified by Nigeria on 22 July 1983 but it was never put into consideration by the military regimes in the course of their repressive actions against the Niger Delta. Nigeria is also a member of other international organization such as the United Nations

²⁹³ O. Douglas, *op. cit*, This information was based on the author's interaction with the local staff of the organisation in Ikeja, Lagos and it was confirmed in their Newsletters and series of reports on Niger Delta most especially the one presented by the Deputy Director (Oronto Douglas)

²⁹⁴ The African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights explicitly in articles 2, 4, 14, 16, 18, 20, 21 and 24 stated various rights of the individuals or groups in Africa. These range from respect for human life, rights to property, rights to physical and mental health, protection from the state, rights to self determination, peoples shall freely dispose of their wealth and natural resources all and all people shall have right to a general satisfactory environment favourable to their development.

and the African Union (formerly the OAU) and the country has also ratified some international conventions that strongly oppose violation of human rights. Nigeria, for instance, has ratified the Universal Declaration of Human Rights²⁹⁵ (UDHR), International Convention on Economic, Social and Cultural rights (ICESCR) – ratified in October 1993²⁹⁶ and the International Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD) – ratified by Nigeria in October 1967.²⁹⁷ Despite the substantive provisions and legal effect of these documents, the Nigerian state and the oils companies flagrantly violated the rights of the local people. Hence the World Council of Churches (WCC) has severely criticized the activities of Shell and condemned its operations in the region. In one of the reports prepared in 1997 by the research unit of the World Council of Churches against the operations of Shell in Nigeria, the Council accused the company of causing environmental devastation in the Niger Delta. In response to this allegation, Shell at its request met with officials of WCC at the Ecumenical Centre in Geneva in 1997 to discuss the WCC's report ("Ogoni-the struggle continues") and to discuss ways through which these two organizations could help the Ogoni people. The meeting between the two parties provided an opportunity for both sides to further discuss the Niger Delta's problematique. Suffice to say that the challenges posed by WCC's reports have exerted pressure on Shell to take up responsibility for the cleaning up of oil spills in Ogoniland.

Other NGOs in the Niger Delta have taken legal actions against the SPDC for its negligence which has resulted in the deaths of hundreds of local people. Most of them have been involved in publication of reports to debunk series of allegations leveled by Shell against the youths over pipe explosions. Moreover, some of these NGOs have taken initiatives to develop the region in close participation with the communities by linking participatory community development to conflict resolution²⁹⁸ especially in the Ijaw communities with offshore oil blocs. Foremost in the execution of this function is Pro-

²⁹⁵ For details see UN Doc. A/810,71(1948)

²⁹⁶ See UN Doc. A/6316(1966)

²⁹⁷ UNTS.195 (1996)

²⁹⁸ C. Ifeka, "Oil, NGOs and Youths: Struggles for Resource Control in the Niger Delta", *Review of African Political Economy* No. 67:99-140, 2001

Natural international (Nigeria), one of the leading Nigerian NGOs with focus on the conflict in the Niger Delta.

The failure of the Nigerian state to mediate between oil companies and oil-bearing communities of the Niger Delta in terms of development needs of the region might have underscored the involvement of NGOs in community development. Most states in Africa have in the recent past been described as weak due to their inability to pursue the objectives that will engender development. Given the role of NGOs in the development of states, the World Bank since the late 1980s has recognized the position of NGOs in development process and it has increased its relationship with them.²⁹⁹ In a similar vein, it was noted that as at 1989 over 4000 international development NGOs based in OECD countries spent over US\$6 billion annually on overseas aid and this figure rose to over US\$7 billion in the 1990s and to over 20000 southern NGOs assisting about 100 million people.³⁰⁰

Looking at the impact of NGOs globally it is very vital to note that for these organizations to influence state policy certain factors must be put into consideration. Among these factors is the importance of the issues they deal with to the state. In a situation where the issues concern the core of the state's core economic and political interests it is always difficult for NGOs to alter state policy. It is argued that for NGOs to influence policy of either the state or MNOCs they must have four basics characteristics namely the legitimacy and capacity of NGOs, NGO strategies and their appropriateness; relations between NGOs and how an issue can be framed.³⁰¹ Given these characteristics in relation to the activities of NGOs in the Niger Delta struggle, NGOs were able to achieve considerable success because of the legitimacy granted to them through the nature of issues involved. They were able to articulate their argument before the global

²⁹⁹ S.N. Ndegwa, *The Two faces of Civil Society: NGOs and Politics in Africa*. Kumarian Press, USA, 1996, p. 18

³⁰⁰ A. Thomas, "NGOs and their influence on environmental policies in Africa: A framework" in Thomas, Carr and Humphreys (ed) *Environmental Policies and NGO Influence*, Routledge, London, 2001, p. 2. For more details see J. Clark, *Democratizing Development*, Earthscan, London, 1991, pp. 47 & 51, and J. Fisher, *Nongovernments: NGOs and the Political Development of the Third World*, Kumarian Press, USA 1998, p.7

³⁰¹ *Ibid* pp. 16-18

audience with negative consequences on the MNOCs involved and the reputation of the state itself.

Moreover, it is also very important to consider the strategies employed by them to exert pressure on the state and the foreign oil companies so as to change their policies in the region. Writers on NGOs activities have put a series of strategies forward.³⁰² It is apposite to allude to Thomas' (2001) four C's here. They are:

- collaboration (including reform and entryism);
- confrontation (or opposition, including passive resistance);
- complimentary activities (projects or programs carried out independently of government or other decision makers, whose success can force a change of policy to accommodate them);
- consciousness-raising (indirect, generalized campaigning)³⁰³

The NGOs involved in the Niger Delta crisis have employed these strategies to exert pressure on the state and Shell at different times since 1990. They have at different times collaborated with the oil companies to execute some basic development projects as discussed elsewhere in this research. It is instructive to note that the most commonly used strategy by these NGOs is passive resistance and consciousness-raising in an attempt to expose the activities of the oil companies and those of the state.

In the Niger Delta, the interrelationships among the NGOs in Nigeria and INGOs have greatly helped to exert pressure on the major actors (state and foreign oil companies) and the eventual internationalization of the conflict. However, the internationalization of the

³⁰² S. Moyo, "NGO advocacy in Zimbabwe: systematizing an old function or inventing a new role?" A paper to workshop on NGO and Development Advocacy, organized by IRED and 'NGO/PVP Initiatives Project', Harare, 1991.

S. Morphet, NGOS and the Environment in Willetts (ed) *The conscience of the world: The Influence of Non-governmental organisations on the UN system*, London, 1996; O. Douglas, Nigeria: Using a variety of advocacy tools in the Niger Delta. A report presented of the finding by Environmental Rights Action survey of the Niger Delta in 1993

³⁰³ A. Thomas, "NGOs and their influence on environmental policies in Africa: A framework" in Thomas, Carr and Humphrey (ed) *Environmental Policies and NGO Influence*, Routledge, London, 2001, p.16

crisis by the NGOs both local and global has been wrongly interpreted by the Nigerian state as an attempt to challenge its sovereignty. This could be seen in that the state at different times emphatically reiterated the fact that it will not tolerate the series of protests that have hampered oil production in the region. However, credit must be given to the social movements in the region, especially MOSOP and IYC for they cleverly packaged their grievances before the global audience. Despite the general assumption that NGOs cannot influence state policy under authoritarian regimes, the Nigerian case was quite different because the military lacked the capacity to control all aspects of life. Indeed there was a space left for NGOs to fill.

Finally, the revolution in Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) has had a significant impact on the operations of NGOs globally. NGOs quickly embraced the opportunity provided by ICTs to echo the suffering of underprivileged people in different societies globally. This advantage allows local people to connect other institutions and people outside their domain for urgent assistance and this empower them to articulate their interests before the global audience at a given time as was the case with MOSOP and IYC. Therefore, ICTs allow “[provide] space for the exchange of views, opinions and news that might not be possible in other media under government censorship and control.”³⁰⁴ Hence, MOSOP was able to bypass the state and oil multinationals in projecting its interests before the international community without the state’s approval affirming that the era of state total control of information is no longer possible since information is ubiquitous and inexpensive.³⁰⁵

This chapter speaks to the involvement of local NGOs in the Niger Delta. Their strategies of environmental rights advocacy and lobby within Nigeria and outside the country created awareness about the plight of the people of the Niger Delta in international circles. In addition, the collaborative engagement between these local NGOs and their international counterparts facilitated the internationalisation of the

³⁰⁴ O. Baldo and C. Sibthorpe, “The sky is the limit: Electronic networking and NGOs”, in *The South African Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 5 No. 2 Winter 1998, pp. 60-79.

³⁰⁵ *Ibid.* For detail on this see E. Talero and P. Gaudette, *Harnessing Information for Development: A proposal for a World Bank group Vision and Strategy in information Technology for Development*, Oxford University Press, 1995, pp. 145-188.

various dimensions of the Niger Delta crisis which resonated strongly amongst global environmental audiences. This awareness within the international community promoted the active engagement with the problems of the Niger Delta by global actors. The next chapter, which constitutes the kernel of this study, examines the dynamics of global civil society involvement in the crisis that has plagued the oil-rich region. It deals with not only the *raison d'être* but also unpacks the significant manifestations of global actors' engagement with what otherwise could pass for a strictly domestic crisis.