

## **Chapter 5: MOSOP AND IYC: A CASE STUDY OF LOCAL RESISTANCE SINCE THE 1990s**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The Niger Delta has been an arena of struggles, mostly violent ones. This chapter examines the dynamics of local resistance and mobilisation against forces perceived (by the people) as predatory – the Nigerian state, the multinationals and their local cohorts. Two of the prominent social movements in the Niger Delta – the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP) and the Ijaw Youth Congress (IYC) – have conducted their agitation for undoing the ecological damage to the region in such a way that attracted international attention. MOSOP's strategies of advocacy, lobby and mobilisation of actors/environmental activists within the international community as well as IYC's (sometimes) violent struggles have combined to push the Niger Delta problematic to levels beyond the scope of the Nigerian state. Their engagement with the problems confronting the region have reverberated beyond the borders of the Nigerian state in which case global state and non-state actors have been drawn into what could have been Nigeria's internal affairs, *stricto sensu*. Hence, the disposition of social movements towards the situation in the region, their *modus operandi* and the plausible effects of their actions (e.g. hostage taking) have been a factor in the internationalisation of the crisis in the Niger Delta. This chapter discusses the strategies adopted by MOSOP and the IYC in leading the resistance against the Nigerian state and the oil multinationals. This chapter next puts local resistance in historical perspective as a prelude to illuminating its thematic concern.

The history of mankind has been identified with the resurgence of several forms of identities. These identities include religion, ethnicity, human rights, secessionist claims,

hyper nationalist beliefs<sup>200</sup> and of course, environmental rights. The post-Cold War era has witnessed not only intensified competition among these identities for the control and domination of the politico-economic scene but also their tendency to constitute a serious challenge to state authority.

The rise of ethnic militias in Niger Delta in the early 1990s as was discovered by the author in his field work was informed by marginalization and social deprivation of the minorities. As a matter of fact, the region is synonymous to violence as peaceful co-existence has now given way to conflagration of all sorts. In the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century a more dangerous dimension was introduced into the environmental crisis in the Niger Delta – the indiscriminate use of lethal weapons by local militia in their struggle against the dysfunctional structure of the Nigerian state and the policies of the foreign oil multinationals.

Therefore, these ethnic militias were founded to challenge the state and the oil companies over environmental degradation that emanated from oil extraction in their land for over four decades. It can be said that there are three principal protagonists in the oil-related crisis in the Niger Delta. These are the Nigerian state, the multinational oil companies and the host communities. Therefore, the Niger Delta crisis is the collective result of various violent clashes between the ethnic groups in the region on the one hand, and the Federal Government (or the state) and its business partners, the multinational oil corporations (MNOCs) on the other.<sup>201</sup>

Our analysis also includes the various ethnic clashes that have been engendered by the reasons discussed in the preceding chapter of the thesis. For instance, studies have

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<sup>200</sup> V. Ojajorotu, “ Ethnic Conflict at the Local Government Level and Its Implications on Nigeria’s External Image; The Case of the Niger Delta”, in A. Mukoro (ed), *Institutional Administration; A Contemporary Local Government Perspective from Nigeria* Lagos; Malthouse Press Ltd, 2000), p. 77

<sup>201</sup> C.I. Obi, “Oil, Environment and conflict in the Niger Delta”, *Quarterly Journal of Administration*, Volume XXX (3 and 4), September 1998 - January 1999, p. 433; See also T. Imobighe, 2004, “Conflict in Niger Delta: A Unique case or a ‘model’ for future conflicts in T.Rudolf, *et al* (ed) Other oil-producing countries? In oil policy in the Gulf of Guinea: Security and Conflict, Economic growth, Social Development

revealed that the Ijaw ethnic group has appeared the most violent, aggressive and warlike of all the ethnic groups, when one considers how it has engaged some other major ethnic groups in the Niger Delta and the multinational oil companies in various battles. At present, the military prowess of the Ijaw militia has proved a hard nut to crack, as state forces are faced with the herculean task of curbing the excesses or hyper nationalist tendencies of this particular group. The recent militia crisis in Rivers State proved this point very vividly as Port Harcourt; the heart of oil operations in the Niger Delta recently witnessed a violent struggle between Dokubo's Niger Delta's People Volunteer Force (NDPVF) and Tom Ateke's Niger Delta Vigilante Service (NDVS). The formations of these groups were surrounded with controversies, as some argued that they were formally cults like: "Icelanders, KKK, Germans, Dey Gbam, Mafia Lords, and Vultures, which were originally formed in the early 1990s as university fraternities, but later largely evolved into criminal gangs."<sup>202</sup> However, in an attempt for these cults to acquire weapons and access to power these groups established alliances with Asari or Tom's armed groups that were notorious for control of oil bunkering routes (ibid). These groups given their militant membership base became a tool in the hands of some politicians in the latter inordinate quest to capture political by all means.

The insensitivity of the Nigerian state to the plight of the oil-producing region for over four decades has been the basis of the persistent violence against the state and oil multinationals. Nigeria, the fifth largest oil-producing nation in the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), has failed to translate the huge revenue from oil into development of the country and the oil-bearing region in particular. Instead it has enriched the few individuals from the dominant ethnic groups at the helm of state affairs. Hence the various discourses on Nigeria's oil industry can be situated within two schools of thought with emphasis on the impact of oil extraction on the economy: the economic well-being of the local people vis-à-vis the environment of the oil-bearing communities of the Niger Delta.

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<sup>202</sup> Human Rights Watch/Africa, 2004

The sorrowful condition of the region has generated two theoretical schools within academic circle in Nigeria and beyond. These schools are categorized into the developmental school and the under developmental school. The development school with scholars like Pearson, Schalz and other liberalists argue that inflow of foreign capital into less developed countries is responsible for the development of such societies. Pearson and Schalz in their writings on Nigeria's oil industry argue that foreign oil companies in Nigeria have greatly helped to develop the oil sector with provision of huge capital, technology, personnel and the life of the host communities.<sup>203</sup>

The other school of thought argues that the operations of foreign oil companies in Nigeria are responsible for the underdevelopment of the region as opposed to the submission of the liberalists or development theorists. Scholars like Cyril Obi and Daniel Omoweh fall into this group. They argue that Shell and other oil companies alongside the state are largely responsible for the precarious condition of the oil-bearing communities in the Niger Delta.<sup>204</sup> Local forces challenged the forces that were responsible for this underdevelopment for almost four decades before the issue became one for global discourse in the early 1990s.

Hitherto, the local people have in various ways expressed their dissatisfaction with the iniquities attributed to the oil economy, especially the negative impact of oil production on the environment, politics of exclusion and gross violations of human rights. Nigerian laws stipulate that crude oil is on the exclusive legislative list and this has given the oil multinationals opportunities to use the land of the local people without remitting due benefit to them or giving appropriate compensation for damages done to their land and health.

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<sup>203</sup> For details, see S. Pearson, *Petroleum and the Nigerian Economy*, Standard University Press, California, 1970. L. Schalz, *Petroleum in Nigeria*, Ibadan, 1968.

<sup>204</sup> D. Omoweh, *Political Economy of the operations of Shell Petroleum Development Company in Oloibiri Area, Nigeria*, Stuttgart, Germany, 1998.

\_\_\_\_\_ The Role of Shell Petroleum Development Company and the State in Underdevelopment of Niger Delta of Nigeria, unpublished PhD. Thesis, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria 1994.

The local people had carried this yoke for over three decades and in the 1990s, the region that has been the base of oil extraction activities started grappling with agitation and confrontation of all sorts and from militant youths that organized themselves into social movements. These social movements were formed along ethnic lines but with the principal aim of bringing about a change in the policies of the Nigerian state and foreign oil multinationals towards the region. The aim principally is to force the government into recognizing and guaranteeing their right as a people to control their land and the proceeds that come therefrom.

Since the successful discovery of Oil in Oloibiri (Bayelsa State) in 1956 by Shell D'Archy, making history as Nigeria's first commercial oil well, the Niger Delta has since produced the bulk of Nigeria's oil and (by extension) national wealth. By 1958, Nigeria became an oil exporter with a production level of about 6,000 barrels per day; within a short period other MNOCs such as Mobil, Elf Aquitaine, Chevron and Agip joined Shell in mining activities in the region.<sup>205</sup> In the 1970s, production reached a peak of two million barrels per day. This is in sharp contrast to the present production level of about one million barrels per day.<sup>206</sup> That period was appropriately termed the 'oil boom' era. Presently, Nigeria is the fifth largest producer of crude oil in the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC).

Today, the Nigerian economy is a mono-commodity based, as it has remained crude oil-dependent since the 1970s. This contrasts with the situation in the 1960s when oil accounted for an insignificant proportion of government revenue.<sup>207</sup> At present, crude oil is produced in nine states as against the six states that occupy the Niger Delta and these are Edo, Imo, and Abia.<sup>208</sup> These states put together account for over ninety percent of

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<sup>205</sup> O. Ibeanu, "Oiling the Friction, Environmental conflict Management in the Niger Delta, Nigeria" in Environmental change and security Project Report, Issue No. 6 (The Woodrow Wilson Center, Summer 2000), p. 21

<sup>206</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>207</sup> L Amu, *A Review of Nigeria's Oil Industry* (Lagos; NNPC, 1998), p. 3

<sup>208</sup> The present geo-politics of the Niger Delta shows that it is occupied by six states: Akwa-Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Ondo and Rivers, all of which account for more than eighty per cent of Nigeria's oil. Ethnic minority groups such as the Ijaw, Urhobo, Itsekiri, Isoko, Kalabari, Ndokwas, Ndom, Ogoni, Efik, Annang and many others also inhabit the area.

government's annual income. Therefore, oil production has become very central to the survival of Nigeria.<sup>209</sup> Of all the MNOCs operating in the Niger Delta, Shell has remained the largest producer of crude oil in Nigeria, having over one hundred oil fields scattered all over the Niger Delta, controlling about fifty per cent of total production, and producing nearly one million barrels of oil daily.<sup>210</sup> This position has brought Shell very close to the corridors of power in Nigeria, and it also inform why many communities in the Niger Delta see little or no difference between Shell and the Nigerian government.<sup>211</sup>

Besides crude oil production, there are other beneficial or profitable activities in the petroleum industry as far as the government and its trading partners, the MNOCs, are concerned. These include refining, oil services, liquefied petroleum gas and liquefied natural gas production and marketing. For instance, Nigeria began the export of liquefied natural gas in 1999, having completed the multi-billion dollar liquefied natural gas project in Bonny<sup>212</sup>. Before then, the usual practice by the MNOCs operating in the Niger Delta was to flare the gas. As a result, an enormous amount of natural gas was flared over years, usually near human settlements.

The irony of oil and gas production in Nigeria, however, lies in the fact that while it is beneficial to both the Nigerian state and its business partners (the MNOCs), it has brought a lot of woe and suffering to the oil-bearing communities. The activities of the local social movements must be situated within the context of this misnomer. Some of these movements include The Chikoko Movement, Environmental Rights Action, Ogoni Solidarity Movement, Ijaw Youth Council, Peoples Democratic Liberation Party, Women in Nigeria–Rivers State, Pan African Youth Movement, Niger Delta Women for Justice, Society for Awareness and Growth in Etche, Civil Liberties Organization–Rivers/Bayelsa, Watch the Niger Delta, Isoko National Youth Movement, Egi Forum, Oron National Forum and a host of others.

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<sup>209</sup> O. Ibeanu, *op. cit.*, p. 21

<sup>210</sup> Shell Petroleum Development Company, *The Nigeria Brief; The Ogoni Issue* (Lagos; The Shell of Nigeria Ltd., 1995)

<sup>211</sup> O. Ibeanu, *op. cit.*

<sup>212</sup> *The Guardian* (Lagos) 15 July 2000, p. 15.

It must be stated that the militant nature of some of these social movements in the 1990s is a function of interplay between internal and external factors. Various internal policies that gave rise to underdevelopment by the state and oil companies combined with external factors like the globalization of the international system. This interplay established a strong linkage between local NGOs/ Social Movements and INGOs as well as created the setting for the internationalization of the Niger Delta crisis. The support received from INGOs strengthened the demands and aspiration of the local NGOs in the face of fierce repression from the state and oil companies. The availability of modern means of communication further helped to internationalize the struggle of a local people as events got the attention of international community through the Internet, the electronic media, fax, telephones and others means.

It is worthy to look at some of the groups that challenged state and oil companies' adverse policies in the Niger Delta. Whereas social consciousness had always been present in the region, the volatility that became attendant to the struggle against environmental degradation and social injustice in the 1990s was a child of circumstance. Heroes were made of the struggle inadvertently. This thesis now takes a look at the two dominant groups in the struggle. Finally these groups were formed when the state was in under military dictatorship, as their regimes (Babangida and Abacha) deepened the contradictions and crises of the Nigerian state.

### **MOVEMENT FOR THE SURVIVAL OF OGONI PEOPLE (MOSOP)**

The Ogoni people are one of the many indigenous peoples of the Niger Delta, they number about 500,000 and live in about 405-square mile homeland in the Rivers state of Nigeria. Ogoniland is made up of six clans or kingdoms, Tai, Eleme, Gokana, Ken-Khana, Nyo-Khana and Eleme. The Ogoniland is well endowed with crude oil, however, since the discovery of oil in their communities in the late 1950s they have not benefited from the wealth that accompany the possession of oil. They rose to international notoriety in the early 1990s after a massive organized public protest and campaign against Shell operation and attitude in their land by MOSOP.

Globalization of capital has played an important role in the confrontation between Shell and the Ogoni. The former represents and is positioned at the centre of ‘global structure of material accumulation which simultaneously concentrates wealth and energy in certain locales.’<sup>213</sup> The Ogoni had been effectively insulated by the aforementioned globalism because they have been left out and alienated from the scheme of things. With this scenario local resistance seems to have taken shape and becomes well grounded in that the very existence of the Ogoni had come under serious danger. The environment is destroyed, there is no basic infrastructure and the Ogonis also face repression from both the multinationals and the government. The land was no more theirs since it has been co-opted into globalized capitalist relations.<sup>214</sup> Although there are minor cracks in the unity structure of these minorities which is normal in every human set up, the Ogoni elite (like other elite) had recognized the political advantages of large ethnic constituencies and had tremendously worked to transform the Ogonis into an ethnic group with a united agenda. This attempt at unity gave birth to the Ogoni Central Union in 1945, this union engineered the separation of Ogoni from the then Opobo Division into a distinct homeland.

The Ogoni unity was vigorously pursued by the constituent units that culminated into the formation of MOSOP in the early 1990s. The setting up of the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People is a function of circumstance; it nevertheless provided the arrowhead for the struggle, not only in Ogoniland but also in all the Niger Delta. Interestingly, its activities provided a reference point for many other demands across the country. The Ogoni struggle typically exemplifies the nature and objectives of the crisis as well as local resistance in the Niger Delta region. It is an ethnic struggle championed by MOSOP to protect the interests of the Ogoni ethnic group.<sup>215</sup> This overriding objective was recurring irrespective of the changes in tactics and leadership succession within MOSOP as shown in the table below:

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<sup>213</sup> J. Saurin, “International relations, social ecology and the globalization of environmental change” in J. Vogler & M. Lmber (eds), *The Environment and International Relations*, Routledge, 1996, p.42

<sup>214</sup> A. Giddens, 1990, *The consequences of modernity*, Cambridge University Press, p.18

<sup>215</sup> V. Ojakorotu, *op. cit*

**Table: MOSOP: Leadership succession, demands and *modus operandi*.**

Leadership	Objectives/Demands	<i>Modus operandi</i>
Ken Saro-Wiwa (1993-1995)	Agitation against environmental degradation, struggle for resource control and self-determination.	Protests (violent and non-violent), lobbying, advocacy, advertorials and press releases.
Ledun Mitee (1995- date)	Agitation against environmental degradation, struggle for resource control and self-determination.	Protests (violent and non-violent), lobbying, advocacy, advertorials and press releases.

Source: Author's interaction with MOSOP members and his visit to the organisation secretariat in 10 July, 2003.

It is instructive to note that while MOSOP's struggle was essentially about emancipating the Ogoni, other social movements, formed along ethnic lines, also sought to protect the interests of their own people. The unifying factor, however, was their resolve to deal with the common enemies of the minorities i.e. the multinational oil companies and the Nigerian state. Against the backdrop of the preceding, an analysis of the relationship between the Nigerian state and the Ogonis and Ijaws, two prominent ethnic minorities in the Niger Delta, will provide a useful illustration of state violence and armed local resistance by ethnic militias.

The Ogoni struggle started with its resistance in the early nineteenth century against British colonialism but their eventual defeat incorporated them into the now defunct Opobo Division of Calabar Province in 1914. However, their first organized political action was the agitation for a separate political administrative unit (limited self-determination), and this was eventually granted with the creation of Ogoni Division in 1947. At another level, the Ogoni Central Union was formed in the 1940s to uplift and assist Ogoni citizens with scholarships to pursue academic careers abroad. This was taken on the note that it will further enhance the determination of the community to achieve their resolve to actively participate in the Nigerian political system after independence. They could not achieve much until the formation of the Ogoni Representative Assembly led by Paul T. N. Birabi. This organization eventually won a seat at the Eastern House of

Assembly. Further, it was the desire to further strengthen the demands of the Ogoni within the Nigerian state that led to the establishment of KAGOTE in the 1970s to champion the cause of the Ogonis.<sup>216</sup> In collaboration with other ethnic minorities the Ogoni agitated for a separate state in the post independence period as a platform for access to and control of oil wealth in their land. This later accounted for their support for the Federal Government in the course of the civil war that plagued the country for almost thirty months between 1967 and 1970.

The neglect of oil communities by the Nigerian state and foreign oil companies was responsible for the formation of social movements that challenges the policies of the state and foreign oil multinationals in the region. In other words, the insensitivity of the oil companies and the Nigerian state to the plight of Ogoni, and the urge for local autonomy or limited self-determination in the Nigerian federation, and the global support for environmental issues,<sup>217</sup> human rights and democracy underscored the formation of MOSOP as well as its activism in the 1990s. Ken Saro-Wiwa, a former spokesman and president of MOSOP, aptly summarized the situation of his people:

Ogoni has offered Nigeria an estimated \$30 billion and received nothing in return, except a blighted countryside; an atmosphere full of carbon dioxide, carbon monoxide and hydrocarbon;... a land of polluted streams and creeks of rivers without fish, and land which is, in every sense of the term, an ecological disaster.<sup>218</sup>

After a thorough evaluation of his people problem, they came up with line of action in the early 1990s. The international environment like the activities of global civil society organizations empowered the struggles of environmental movements in Africa like MOSOP. For instance, "These movements also took advantage of the infrastructure and interconnectivity attendant to globalization...to collect process and disseminate

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<sup>216</sup> This explanation was given by the people of Kaani when the researcher visited Ogoniland for on the spot assessment of the situation in 2003. Similar position was also presented by Ben Naanen, "Effective Non-violent struggle in the Niger Delta". Paper presented to SEPHIS

<sup>217</sup> M. Miller: *The Third World in Global Environmental Politics*, Boulder and Lynne Reinner, London, 1995, pp. 1-13.

<sup>218</sup> Cited in CDHR, 1994, p.8

information on their plight.”<sup>219</sup> Ken Saro-Wiwa asserted that the idea to champion the cause of the Ogoni in the early 1990s kicked off with a seminar he organized under the auspices of the Ogoni Central Union, the forerunner of MOSOP. “The best Ogoni brains presented papers on aspect of Ogoni life, culture and education, the disorganization of the Ogoni, their traumatic existence, agriculture, the economy, women”.<sup>220</sup> According to him the seminar concluded that there was “need for the Ogoni people to organize themselves better and to take responsibility for their political existence.”<sup>221</sup>

Given this background the Ogoni people of Nigeria carefully packaged their demands in a document called ‘Ogoni Bill of Rights’ before the government in October 1990. The Bill of Rights explicitly stated the demand of the people on the need for limited autonomy. The Ogoni Bill of Rights argued, *inter alia*

That the people be granted political autonomy to participate in the affairs of the republic as a distinct and separate unit by whatever name called, provided that this autonomy guarantees the following: the political control of Ogoni Affairs by Ogoni people...the right to protect the Ogoni environment and ecology from further degradation<sup>222</sup>

The demands of the Ogoni were widely accepted and endorsed by leaders from the major communities that made up Ogoni especially Babbe, Gokana, Ken-Khana, Nyo-Khana and Tai. However, most of the signatories to this document (i.e. the Ogoni Bill of Rights) were not leaders of the hitherto elitist Ogoni Central Union. In order to take care of this lapse in their struggle MOSOP was formed at a meeting held in Bodo, at the residence of late Edward Kobani.<sup>223</sup> The failure of the Nigerian state to address the demands of the Ogoni prompted the presentation of “Addendum to the Ogoni Bill of Rights” on 26 August 1991 and eventual injection of the plight of the local people into the international discourse.

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<sup>219</sup> C.I. Obi, *Environmental Movements in Sub-Saharan Africa: A Political Ecology of Power and Conflict*. Mimeo, UNRISD, 2002

<sup>220</sup> K. Saro-Wiwa: *A Month and a Day: A Detention Diary*. Spectrum Books, Nigeria, 1995, pp. 65-66

<sup>221</sup> K. Saro-Wiwa, *op. cit*

<sup>222</sup> Ogoni Bill of Rights (1990). See Appendix for the full version of this document.

<sup>223</sup> K. Saro-Wiwa, *op. cit*

The struggle in Ogoniland is a relevant and appropriate example of the discontent of the oil-bearing communities over their marginalization in the Nigerian federation and the degradation of their ecosystem through explorative and exploitative activities. At the heart of the struggle has been a determination by the local people to end the use of political power by the dominant ethnic nationalities (Hausa/Fulani, Yoruba and Igbo) in Nigeria and the military elite class and their foreign oil multinational allies to expropriate and transfer oil wealth of the ethnic minorities of the Niger Delta.<sup>224</sup> The transformation of the struggle into mass or social movement for the promotion and protection of Ogoni interests found expression in the presentation of the Ogoni Bill of Rights to the Nigerian state in 1990.

Claude Welch captured the frustration of the Ogoni this way: the Ogoni live atop some of the richest real estate in Africa but only a few Ogoni benefit from jobs, developments or amenities in the oil industry. Instead, they suffer serious environmental degradation that has polluted streams and fresh water sources, poisoned land through spills and blowouts and created an atmosphere fouled by decades of flaring natural gas.<sup>225</sup> The quest by the Ogoni to stem further degradation of their environment and other negative consequences of oil production along with the marginalization of the region by the state were put in proper perspective by MOSOP. The Nigerian civil war and the creation of states, which had failed to secure for the oil minorities the control of oil resources, the structural adjustment that widened both social and power cleavages within the region all led to the spread of mass consciousness of national liberation from local and foreign collaborators. Changes in global politics in the post-Cold War era, which emphasized the right to self-determination and autonomy by minority ethnic groups,<sup>226</sup> also gave impetus to the struggle in the region.

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<sup>224</sup> C.I. Obi, "Globalisation and Local resistance: The case of the Ogoni versus Shell", *New Political Economy*, Vol. 2, no. 1, 1997.

<sup>225</sup> C. Welch, "The Ogoni and self-determination. Increasing violence in Nigeria", *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol.33, No. 4 1995

<sup>226</sup> C.I. Obi, "Oil, Environment and Conflict in the Niger Delta", *The Quarterly Journal of Administration*, Vol. XXX, No. 3&4, Sept 1998/Jan 1999, p. 442

Given these factors, MOSOP, under the leadership of Ken Saro-Wiwa, assumed a more dynamic and purposeful character as it adopted far reaching methods to pursue the cause of the Ogoni. The movement sensitized the Ogoni people to their predicaments and was mobilized against the state and Shell through demonstrations, blockade of oil installations, conferences, press releases and articles in local and international media. In order to strengthen their chances for self-determination, the Ogoni harped on the need to address the exploitation, repression and ecological devastation of the Ogoni community. MOSOP also adopted other methods apart from those that were used against the state and Shell this includes lecture tours, documentaries and eyewitness accounts. The movement effectively used the platform of international human rights organizations to put pressure on Shell and the Nigerian state to recognize and respect the rights of the Ogoni.<sup>227</sup>

One salient method through which MOSOP conducted its struggle towards the realization of its objectives as highlighted above was lobbying. The movement's activities in this regard entailed petitioning international organizations and foreign governments over the ecological horrors inflicted on the Niger Delta ecosystem by multinational companies' oil activities as well as the infraction on human rights by security forces. Lobbying was done, not only at the organizational level but also at the personal. Ken Saro-Wiwa's attendance at international conferences focusing on environmental rights issues afforded him the opportunity to meet with rights activists as well as the international media in an attempt to sway international public opinion in favor of the beleaguered people of the Niger Delta. In addition, the import of such lobby was to influence the international community to apply pressure on the MNOCs and the Nigerian state to change their policies and attitudes towards the crisis in the Niger Delta and the plight of the people.

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<sup>227</sup> *Ibid*, p. 44; D.A. Omoweh, "The Role of Shell Petroleum Development Company and the State in the Underdevelopment of Niger Delta of Nigeria". Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria 1994; C.I. Obi, "Environmental Movements in Sub-Saharan Africa: A Political Ecology of Power and Conflict". Paper presented at the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development / University of Witwatersrand Conference on Environmental Conflict, Participation and Governments, Johannesburg, August 30 2002; C.I. Obi, "New Wine in New Skin?: Generation Dimensions to the Struggles for Resource Control in the Nigeria Delta and the Prospects for the Nation-State Project in Nigeria". A Paper delivered to laureates of the CODESRIA 2002 Governance Institute, August 12-16, CODESRIA, Dakar Senegal; Human Rights Watch, *The Price of Oil: Corporate Responsibility and Human Rights Violations in Nigeria's Oil Producing Communities* (New York: Human Rights Watch), 1999.

However, the Ogoni failed to put into consideration the military, which dominated the Nigeria political terrain in the 1990s, and which also appeared to have little regard for the concepts of human rights and moral principles upon which they (the Ogoni) based their campaign.<sup>228</sup> Adoption of the non-violent method by the Ogoni in the face of military opposition had severe consequences on the organization's determination to influence the relationship between the local people and their opposition (MNOCs and the Nigerian state). It is interesting to note that the Ogoni adopted this method or strategy because earlier methods by the elite before the formation of MOSOP had failed. This was not unconnected with how the elites who controlled the political parties (at the national level) organized electoral fraud that made nonsense of the vote of the Ogoni populace. In addition to this was the refusal of the elites in OCU, OSRA and KAGOTE to involve the masses in the struggle for self-determination.<sup>229</sup> With MOSOP the youth in the region were given more roles to play as the strategy adopted by the group gave every member of the community an opportunity to help in reversing the imbalance in the Nigerian federation.

Despite the huge success of this movement in bringing an otherwise local issue to the platform of international discourse, the struggle of the local people in the 1990s witnessed a severe set back with the death of Ken Saro-Wiwa, as it scaled down the impact of international support for local resistance. Ken had personified the struggle and now he was no more. Most importantly, the division that erupted after the death of Saro-Wiwa confused the international community and its support for the struggle of MOSOP and other ethnic groups in the region dwindled. Moreover, since the Nigerian state was not democratic until mid 1999, the INGOs were forced to have dialogue with the military. Unfortunately, a highly structured and commandist institution, practically unaccountable to the people, always prevaricated on the human rights issues which were prevalent in the Niger Delta.

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<sup>228</sup> Carr, Douglas and Onyeagucha, "The Ogoni people's campaign over oil exploitation in the Niger Delta" in Thomas, Carr and Humphrey (eds) *Environmental policies and the NGOs Influence*, Routledge, London, 2001, pp. 157-158

<sup>229</sup> B. Naanen, *op. cit*

It is pertinent to state that MOSOP was able to attain considerable success due to the commitment of its leaders to the struggle, especially Ken Saro-Wiwa who came into ethnic consciousness in the 60s and gave his full support to the federal side during the Nigerian civil war as a way of overcoming the domination of the minorities by the Ibos. Increasingly he realized that the liberation of Ogoniland could not be achieved through the Nigerian mechanism of state creation that followed the civil war. Therefore, Saro-Wiwa, an intellectual, environmentalist and writer gradually settled for self-determination of all ethnic nationalities including the Ogoni. Apart from his total support for MOSOP, he established the Ethnic Minority Rights Organization of Africa (EMIROAF). He was an apostle of non-violence; his weapons were his pen, brain, mouth, faith and commitment to the liberation of the Ogoniland. Ken Saro-Wiwa was able to use his popularity to garner both national and international support for the cause of the Ogoni but he was eventually consumed by the struggle in November 10, 1995.<sup>230</sup>

What the author tries to emphasize here is the fact that the Ijaw militants that epitomize the Niger Delta struggle presently are quite different from the Ogoni in some respect. While the Ogonis' methodology and philosophy was gradual civil disobedience towards the achievement of their goal, the Ijaws became militant, extremely violent and their tactics are guerrilla-like following the ascendancy of Asari Dokubo to IYC presidency in 2001. We can then conclude that the Ogoni struggle was led by the middle class and professionals that could reach out to the international community, while the Ijaws who came up after Ogoni were led by individuals with militant aspirations. It should be noted however that these two social movements emerged from different social milieu in that the conditions that warranted armed struggle on the part of the Ijaws were not present in the early 1990s when MOSOP came into limelight.. There is a historical irony among the prominent actors in the struggle for self-determination in the Niger Delta: Isaac Boro, Ken Saro-Wiwa and Asari Dokubo. While "the first and third led armed struggles against the Nigerian state, they escaped with their lives and were later reconciled with the

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<sup>230</sup> *The Guardian* Newspaper Editorial Opinion accessed at :[www.guardiannewsngr.com](http://www.guardiannewsngr.com), 21 October 2004

state. The second, an intellectual, preached and practiced non-violent protest but he lost his life in the hands of the state.”<sup>231</sup>

To further understand the relationship between the state and the Ogoni communities, it will be quite interesting to examine some of the major protests in Ogoniland and the response of the state and Shell between 1990 and 2003. The response of the state was characteristically violent and repressive. State violence can be broadly categorized into three: harassment of Ogoni leaders through arrests, detention and surveillance; masterminding violent conflicts between Ogoni and their neighbors (this was used as pretext to repress the people of Ogoni); and direct violence i.e. the use of armed forces and police and extra-judicial killings that eventually consumed Saro-Wiwa and other Ogoni 8.<sup>232</sup>

#### **STATE AND SHELL REPRESSION AGAINST RESISTANCE IN THE NIGER DELTA**

A poignant issue in the administration of oil activity is lack of local participation in the administration of the transnational oil corporations. This is also referred to as the lack of equity participation in the oil industry – a development which has been interpreted as a strategic means of keeping the people and Niger Delta states out of the dividends of the resource which belongs to them and which they agitate to control.<sup>233</sup> The Nigerian state and Shell of course frown at any agitation to alter the *status quo*. Therefore the resistance by the Ogoni against oil production has always been considered a direct threat by the Nigerian state and Shell, which is answerable to its headquarters in Britain. It is therefore necessary to consider some of the major resistance in the region that attracted the counter resistance by the state/Shell in order to ensure uninterrupted oil activities. For the sustenance of oil flows in the region, the Nigerian state (in collaboration with oil companies) put in place regular security arrangements and special task forces. This informed the establishment of the notorious and brutal task force known as the Rivers State Internal Security Force, a paramilitary force created on the eve of MOSOP’s protest

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<sup>231</sup> See The Guardian Newspaper Editorial/Opinion: [www.guardiannewsngr.com](http://www.guardiannewsngr.com), 10/21/2004

<sup>232</sup> (O. Ibeanu, “Oiling the Friction: Environmental Conflict Management in the Niger Delta, Nigeria”. Environmental Change and Security Project Report, Issue 6, 2000.

<sup>233</sup> See *Vanguard* 7 (Lagos) September 2004, p. 38

against oil production in Ogoni. Similarly, the core states of the Niger Delta also formed their own special security forces with different names e.g. “Operation Salvage” (created by Bayelsa State to protect oil installations) and “Operation Flush” (established by Rivers State).

The state and Shell have always emphasized their commitment to the forceful protection of oil companies’ activities and installations. This underscored the states leaders’ pronouncements of warning against the disruption of oil production since oil is the lifeblood of the country. Indeed the former Petroleum Minister during the Abacha regime, Dan Etete, at various times spoke against violent protest from the local people, insisting that “the present [Abacha’s] administration will not tolerate a situation where every political grievance is taken out on oil installations and operations of oil companies” and that community leaders should restrain their youths from such acts.<sup>234</sup> Similarly, he stated in 1998 that the destruction of oil companies’ property would meet the full wrath of the law since the state was (and still is) in a joint partnership with the foreign oil companies.

Accordingly, the repression of the people of the Niger Delta has been conducted by the state and Shell (and other oil companies acting in concert with the government). However, the oil companies at various times have resisted the claim that they have always collaborated with the state in perpetuating gross human rights violations in the Niger Delta. It has been proven however that Shell has, at different times, assisted the state to suppress protests in the region. For example, Shell collaborated with the Rivers State Government Security Force (made up of the Mobile Police Force) in 1990 to attack protesters in Umuechem where more than eighty persons were killed and 495 houses reduced to ashes. Moreover, the Judicial Commission of Inquiry that was set up to look into the incident discovered that there was no evidence of threat from the villagers and

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<sup>234</sup> The Human Rights Watch

submitted that the mobile police force had displayed a reckless disregard for lives and property.<sup>235</sup>

The Umuechem incident became a special case study in the analysis of brutalization in the Niger Delta. It marked the first time in which serious human rights violations were carried out. Secondly, it was the first time that arms were directed at protesters. A monarch and two of his sons died with 493 people declared missing. Whereas this community produced about 76,981,735 barrels of oil between 1982 and 1985 and produced about 1,568,378,000 of natural gas<sup>236</sup> in the same period, yet there are no good roads, hospitals, electricity, and good drinking water when the researcher visited the community in 2003. The most devastating incident occurred in 1990, when the youths of the community demanded for social amenities and compensation for oil pollution of their farmlands and rivers.<sup>237</sup> Incidentally the security agents of the state and oil company misunderstood the demands of the local people and turned the episode into festival that led to the death of about 500 people and the destruction of houses all in the name of protecting oil production in the region.

All the measures adopted by the state to contain the spate of violence in Ogoniland have severed and insulated the local people the more. On several occasions, prominent Ogoni leaders were arrested by security agents and detained. For instance, in January 1993, MOSOP leaders-Leton, Kobani and Saro-Wiwa were arrested in Lagos for questioning. A similar arrest of MOSOP leaders took place on June 23, 1993 and criminal charges were brought against them on July 1993.<sup>238</sup>

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<sup>235</sup> S. Pegg, "The cost of Doing Business. Transnational Corporations and Violence in Nigeria", *Security Dialogue* Vol. 30(4), 1999, pp. 473-484.

<sup>236</sup> *The Weekend Concord* (Lagos) 21 March 1993.

<sup>237</sup> L. Nwauzi, Etche and Oil Exploration in the Niger Delta in Boiling Point: A CDHR Publication on, The Crises in the Oil Producing Communities in Nigeria, 2000, pp. 133-143

<sup>238</sup> O. Ibeanu, Insurgent Civil Society and Democracy in Nigeria: Ogoni Encounters with the State, 1990-1998. A research report for ICSAG programme of the centre for research and documentation (CRD), Kano. \_\_\_\_\_, "Ogoni-Oil, resource flow and conflict" in Granfelt, T. (ed.) *Managing the Globalised Environment*, London: Intermediate Technology Publications.

Given the strategies employed by the state to create divisions among the Niger Delta communities, several communal conflicts have erupted since 1993. Among the prominent cases of conflicts in Ogoniland were those involving Andoni (July 1993), Okrika (December 1993) and Ndoki (April, 1994). Apart from these, other incidents of violence between communities in the region have led to loss of thousands of lives and the destruction of property especially in Warri i.e. the conflicts between the Ijaw, Itsekiri, and Urhobo, and between the Urhobo and Isoko communities in Delta state.

In addition, the state had used extra-judicial killings to eliminate prominent activists who are perceived as threats to oil production in the region. In order to substantiate these actions, series of decrees were rolled out by the state in the 1990s not only to silence opposition from the community and the activists, but were invoked by the military regime to sentence and execute the Ogoni 9 in 1995.

The situation in Ogoni deteriorated in 1993, when Shell workers were beaten by aggrieved youths in the community. The response of the state and oil company was so dramatic that it marked the extension of (continual) military harassment and eventual use of military force against protest in the Niger Delta region especially in Ogoniland. Similarly, on 30 April 1993, when about 10000 Ogoni people protested in Nonwa against pipeline construction by Wilbros (an American oil servicing firm working for Shell), the response of the military was so severe on the people. In this particular incident about fifteen people were wounded and the owner of the farmland where the firm (Wilbros) was working lost her arm. This particular episode resulted in the death of one Mr. Agbarator who was shot by Nigerian soldiers on 4 May 1993.

Another important incident that aggravated the state's harassment of Ogoni leaders was the decision taken by MOSOP to boycott the 12 June 1993 presidential election. In fact this incident marked a watershed in the annals of MOSOP. The election divided the leadership of the organization such that the militant group wanted an outright boycott while the conservatives favored participation in the election. On the basis of this, name-calling ensued. It was assumed that those who opted for participation had been bought

over by the government. The situation got to a head on May 21, 1994 when four of Ogoni leaders – Albert Badey, Edward Kobani, Samuel Orage and Theophilus Orage were murdered in Gokana. Those killed represented the conservatives within MOSOP. Almost immediately government swung into action arresting the militants including the entire MOSOP leadership and subsequently charged them under military law. This single event resulted in the death of about one thousand persons.<sup>239</sup>

Another facet of the state's response to the Niger Delta issue merits consideration. The state evolved a strategy that would create a disharmony among the ethnic groups in the Niger Delta as could be seen in the war between the Andoni and the Ogoni which led to loss of lives and the destruction of property worth millions on Naira. This unwieldy situation made it possible for the state to sustain its determination to silence opposition in the region. Professor Claude Ake (who was appointed to look into the remote and immediate causes of the inter ethnic conflict), noted

I don't think it was purely an ethnic clash, in fact there is really no reason why it should be an ethnic clash and as far as we could determine, there was nothing in dispute in the sense of territory, fishing rights, access rights, discriminatory treatment which are the normal causes of these communal clashes.<sup>240</sup>

The change of government in November 1993, which brought General Abacha to power, exacerbated the state violence against the local people. A series of measures were taken by the government to permanently incapacitate the opposition by minorities in the region. It is interesting to note that Shell was also in collaboration with the Abacha government in this act of repression. To this charge, the Shell provided a rebuttal. But evidences abound that Shell was indeed culpable.<sup>241</sup> The government has continued to pay Shell

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<sup>239</sup> R. Boele, 1995, Ogoni: report of the UNPO mission to investigate the situation of the Ogoni of Nigeria, The Hague: Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organisation; M, Crow, 1995, *The Ogoni Crisis: A case study of Military Repression in South Eastern Nigeria*, New York: Human rights watch/Africa, No 7(5), July., O. Ibeanu, 1997, "Oil, conflict and security in Nigeria: Issues in the Ogoni Crisis", *AAPS Occasional Paper Series*, Vol.1, No.2 and D, Robinson, *Ogoni: the struggle continues*, Geneva: World council of Churches, 1997

<sup>240</sup> <http://www.ratical.org/corporations/ogoniFacts.html>

<sup>241</sup> Author's empirical findings.

back by providing armed security and other logistics at its installations<sup>242</sup> in order to avert the shutting down of flow stations and disruption to oil activities. This is to prevent loss of revenue which should accrue to government. For instance, major oil companies in the region estimated that they lost about 200 million dollars in 1993 due to incessant protests and unfavorable conditions in the Niger Delta. They have consistently called for urgent measures from the state to forestall such occurrence in the future. Such measures almost always include the use of force to suppress dissent and legitimate demands by the people. Supposedly heeding the above admonition by the oil companies, the state collaborated with these MNOCs to deal with aggressive communities. A report in a leaked memo from the Rivers State Commissioner of Police urged "the Nigerian Army, the Nigerian Air force, the Nigerian Navy and the Nigerian Police" to "restore and maintain law and order in Ogoniland...The purpose of this operation order is to ensure that ordinary law abiding citizens of the area, non-indigenous resident of carrying out business ventures or schooling within Ogoniland are not molested".<sup>243</sup> While in another memo of May 12, 1994 it was stated that since Shell could not continue with its oil production Ogoni leaders should be wasted. The memo was reportedly signed by Lt. Col. Paul Okuntimo of the Rivers State Internal Security Task Force.<sup>244</sup>

This same task force was linked with many dastardly acts against the oil minorities in the 1990s. The head of the task force stated in one of his unguarded utterances that:

I will just take some detachments of soldiers; they will stay at four corners of the town. They have automatic rifles that sound as death... We shall surround the town at night... The machine gun with 500 rounds will open up and then we are throwing grenades and they are making *ee KPUWAA*... and they know I am around.<sup>245</sup>

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<sup>242</sup> See C. Ake, "Shelling Nigeria Ablaze", *Tell* (Lagos), 29 January; S. Kretzman, "Nigeria's Drilling Fields: Shells Role in Repressions", *Multinational Monitor*, Vol.26, No 1&2, 1995; P. Ghazi & C. Dudu, "How Shell tried to Buy Barretas for Nigerians", *The Observer*, 11 February 1996; and A. Rowell, "Sleeping with the Enemy", *Village Voice*, 23 January 1996

<sup>243</sup> <http://www.ratical.org/corporations/OgoniFacts.html>

<sup>244</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>245</sup> <http://www.ratical.org/corporations/OgoniFacts.html>. Inhabitants of some communities visited in Ogoniland strongly confirmed this position but this could not be confirmed from the leaders of the communities, as they were reluctant to comment on the issue. The aggressiveness and wickedness of the task force was widely reported by the Nigerian media and human rights organisation in Nigeria and abroad.

He went further, “what do you think the people are going to do? We have already put roadblocks on the main road, we do not want anybody to start running... so the option we have made was that we should drive all these people into the bush with nothing except the pants and the wrapper they are using that night.”<sup>246</sup>

Despite all these repressive measures, the Ogoni responded to state violence by increasing their mobilization and campaign against the state and oil companies especially Shell. This approach was considered as the most viable way to portray the oil company’s battered image abroad. In addition, MOSOP adopted a measure to raise money through **“one Naira per Ogoni Person”** in 1993 with a view to sustaining the cause of the Ogoni within Nigerian federation and at international fora. Most importantly, MOSOP was able to sensitize other communities in the Niger Delta to embrace the struggle by the Ogoni. This accounted for the dramatic increase in protests by other communities in the region. It also gave impetus to the adoption of a series of bill of rights which were presented to the state and oil companies in the region. For the Ijaws, they took up the struggle in a violent way consequent upon their adoption of the *Kaiama Declaration* in 1998. The Oron, the Urhobo, Isoko, Ikwerre and other ethnic communities followed suit.

One fundamental factor that weakened the Ogoni struggle in the 1990s was the implosion of MOSOP, which culminated in the killing of other prominent Ogoni citizens on 21 May 1994. The rancor among the Ogoni leaders which resulted in the death of four of their leaders gave the state the “opportunity” to nail the organization that had been a thorn in the flesh of the state/oil companies. Generally, see below the response of the state, oil companies and local communities to the activities of oil multinationals.

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<sup>246</sup> *Ibid*

Human rights Violation	The response of the oil companies	The response of the state	The reactions of the communities
Pollution of water	Initiation of community development projects	Militarization of the communities	Making representation to the government
Destruction of farmland	Supply of arms to the states as a measures of protecting facilities	Divide and rule tactics in the communities	Embracing dialogue
Destruction of aquatic lives	Very lukewarm, at times non-chalant, and discouraging	Settlement of the elites and community leaders	Peaceful demonstrations
Destruction of wildlife		Establishment of some dysfunctional bodies	Hostage taking
Poor living conditions	Provision of casual jobs	Interventionist agency response: OMPADEC/NDDC	Armed confrontations/Reaching out to international community

**Source: Compiled by the researcher based on the questionnaires**

Overall, the factors that culminated in the fall of the Ogoni can be summarized, as Bob<sup>247</sup> argues, in terms of the shrinking of domestic and international opportunities which had engendered the formation of social movements. The developments which undermined MOSOP's struggle and ultimately led to its fall are as follows:

- The differences (between the radical and conservative wings) within the MOSOP leadership over the issues of organizational structure and strategies.

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<sup>247</sup> C. Bob, "Political Process Theory and Transnational Movements: Dialectics of Protest among Nigeria's Ogoni Minority", *Social Problems*, Vol. 49, No.3 August 2002, pp.395-415.

- The activities of the conservative elite who bargained for and accepted political offices offered by the Federal Government as these frustrated MOSOP in its attempt to forge a cohesive front against the MNOCs and the government.
- The withdrawal of the conservative elements within MOSOP's ranks vis-à-vis the boycott of the Presidential elections of June 12, 1993.
- The failure of the international community to sustain its support for MOSOP in the aftermath of the internal crisis.
- Increased repression of the civil rights movement in general by the Abacha regime.

The eventual transition from military rule to civilian administration in 1999, coupled with the interest of international community gave impetus to the Ijaws to carry out militant struggle against the state and oil companies in the Niger Delta.

### **THE IJAW YOUTH COUNCIL (IYC)**

The implosion of the Ogoni movement automatically passed the mantle of leading the struggle of the Niger Delta to the Ijaw. However, it must be stated that the struggle was started in the 1960s by the Ijaws. The Ijaws are the largest ethnic group in the region with a population of about eight million mainly dependent on fishing; they are also the fourth largest ethnic group in Nigeria after the three dominant ones. The earliest attempt by any ethnic group to challenge the injustice within the Nigerian federation was carried out by Ijaw through Adaka Boro in February 1966. The 'twelve day revolution' of the Niger Delta Volunteer Force (NDVF) was an attempt to end the marginalization of minorities of the region within the Nigerian federation. It was also predicated on the suspicion that the military government of General Aguiyi Ironsi would hijack the control of oil resources of the region.<sup>248</sup> Adaka Isaac Boro was an Ijaw man born in Kaiama, an ancient town in the present Bayelsa State of Nigeria. He lived for only 30 years (1938-1968) but he left behind a cause that was later championed by his fellow ethnic groups after 30

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<sup>248</sup> U. Okpu, *Ethnic Minority Problems in Nigerian Politics: 1960-1965*, Uppsala: Studies Historical Upsaliensa, 1977, p. 136. This position was also enunciated in T. Kaemi, *Isaac Boro: Twelve Day Revolution*, Benin City, Nigeria, 1982; C.I. Obi, *The changing forms of identity Politics in Nigeria Under economic Adjustment: The case of the oil Minorities Movement of the Niger Delta*, research report no. 119, The Nordic Africa Institute, Uppsala, 2001

years of his death. It was in remembrance of his vision and struggle for his people that the Ijaw Liberation Charter was announced and christened *Kaiama Declaration* on December 11, 1998. No doubt, the Ogoni Bill of Rights is a precursor to others in the region. Therefore, it was not surprising that the AKLAKA Declaration, Urhobo Economic Summit and Kaiama Declaration followed. One factor typifies all – the failure of the federal system.

The twelve-day revolution sowed the seed of resistance against oppression and marginalization in the region in 1966. However, “the struggle of the Ijaw, under the leadership of the Ijaw Youth Council (IYC) was built upon the lessons from the Ogoni experience... [for it] sought to put an end to the divisions among the Ijaws in the six states of the federation, as the fourth largest ethnic group in Nigeria, and the most preponderant oil minority groups.”<sup>249</sup> The Ijaws are the fourth largest ethnic group in Nigeria and they are found in the six states that comprise the Niger Delta of Nigeria. Oil was first discovered in one of their communities (Oloibiri) in 1958. Ijaw youths have since the 1990s regrouped into different groups to struggle against economic exploitation, corporate violence, environmental degradation, and political oppression in the Niger Delta. Among these groups are Egbesu Boys of Bayelsa, the Chicoco Movement, the Ijaw Youth Council, the Federated Niger Delta Ijaw Communities and the Niger Delta Volunteer Force.<sup>250</sup>

The *Kaiama Declaration* centered on the demand for immediate withdrawal of all forms of military forces from Ijaw land, any oil company that employed the services of the Nigerian armed services to protect its facilities and operations was invariably viewed as an enemy of the Ijaw. The Ijaw equally expressed solidarity with other ethnic groups that had the vision of self-determination and justice like MOSOP.<sup>251</sup> The declaration was signed and adopted at a meeting of the representatives of all Ijaw groups at Kaiama,

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<sup>249</sup> 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.

<sup>250</sup> <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/para/ijaw.htm>

<sup>251</sup> Forward March to Freedom, Communiqué issued at the end of the 7<sup>th</sup> Council Meeting of Ijaw youths Held at KOLOBIAMA community in the Opobo clan of Ijawland on the 20<sup>th</sup> Day of March 1999. See also, <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/para/ijaw.htm>

which incidentally is the home town of Isaac Adaka Boro who had carried out a major revolution against the state over the plight of Ijaw in 1966.

As noted earlier, the IYC that built its struggle upon the lesson from the MOSOP experience and upon its attempt to put an end to the divisions among the Ijaw in the Niger Delta. Moreover, “the IYC built its support from the grassroots and depended on the energy, vision and anger of the youth in the Niger Delta. It drew upon local symbols and metaphors at the community level to build pan-Ijaw neo-nationalism.”<sup>252</sup> The Ijaw Youth Council unlike the Ogoni was more militant in its approach to the demand for self-determination and control of oil in the region. It employed series of measures to express the grievances of the Ijaws in forms of hostage-taking and open confrontation with the military forces. The Ijaws made series of financial request in return for the release for oil workers held hostage in their domain. Nevertheless it is pertinent to draw a distinction between the modus operandi of the Ijaws in Warri and the Ijaws in Bayelsa and Rivers. Initially the Ijaws in Bayelsa and Rivers were reluctant to embark on hostage taking as a measure for addressing their needs. The table below profiles selected cases of abductions and hostage/kidnappings by the Ijaws:

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<sup>252</sup> C.I. Obi, “Ropes of Oil: Ethnic Minority agitation and the spectre of national disintegration in Nigeria”. Being a paper presented at the conference on, Nigeria in the twentieth Century, Flawn Academic Center, The University of Texas at Austin, March 29-31, 2002.

### Selected Cases of Abductions/Kidnapping for Ransom (2002–2003)

S/N	Action/ Date	MNC/Oil Servicing Co.	Youth Group/Ethnic Group/State	Ascertained Purpose	Outcome
1	Hostage taking of 10 workers/ April 2002	Shell	Militant Youth Gang, Ekeremor LGA, Ijaw/ Bayelsa State	Ransom Demand for NGN 3.1m.	Resulted from failure to yield to alleged frivolous demands
2	Kidnap of staff/ June 29– July 2003	Oil Servicing Co. working for Shell	Ijaw youth militants in Bomadi/Burutu LGAs/ Delta State	Demand for NGN 25.4m	State Government Intervention/ Negotiated release after 14 days
3	Kidnap of 9 crew & 4 military escorts of oil barges/ November 11– 13 2003		Ijaw Militants	Ransom/ Other demands	Released 2 days later after threats by State Government/ Security Agencies
4	Kidnap of 14 workers/ November 2003	Chevron Texaco	Militant Ijaw youths/ Bayelsa State	Ransom demands	Intervention of State Government
5	Kidnap of 19 oil workers	Nobel Drilling/Prospecting.	Ijaw Militias/ Delta State	Ransom demands	Intervention of State Government
6	Kidnap of 7 workers/ November 28– December 2003	Bredero Shaw Oil Servicing Co. (Shell)	Militant Ijaw Youths/ Delta State	Ransom demands for USD 5m.	State Government Intervention/ Negotiation
7	Murder of 7 workers & military personnel/ April 2004	Chevron Texaco	Militant youths along Benin River area/ Delta State	--	--

Sources: Augustine Ikelegbe, 2005, "The Economy of Conflict in the Oil Rich Niger Delta Region of Nigeria", *Nordic Journal of African studies* 14(2):208-234

Such requests of course put the IYC and the Ijaw communities on a collision course with the government and the oil companies. The state's response was usually violent and repressive. In the final analysis however, it can be said that the role of government in promoting peace and conducive environment for oil production left much to be desired

and it has been noted that some solutions initiated by the government have further aggravated the Niger Delta crisis.

In addition, the implementation of government policies and programs has inadvertently fuelled the Niger Delta crisis. One of such policies relate to the creation of local governments in the Niger Delta ostensibly as a means of promoting development. Rather than achieve this purpose, local government communities have become a hotbed of conflict over location and relocation of council headquarters as well as asset sharing. The most notable and protracted conflict of this nature is the current crisis in Warri, where property worth millions of Naira have been destroyed and thousand of lives have been lost. The reason being that the council headquarters first located at Ogbe-Ijoh, an Ijaw town was relocated to Ogidigben, an Itsekiri enclave sparking violent protests and outright conflict. In view of the volatility of these local government areas, many of these oil companies' regional headquarters have relocated to Port-Harcourt and Lagos.<sup>253</sup> Aside from the above, claims to land ownership in the Niger Delta have always constituted a very serious factor to the region's peace. For instance, land remained the main subject of conflict between the Ijaw and Itsekiri ethnic groups in 1997.

These conflicts notwithstanding, the Ijaws continued to champion their cause. They established offices in major cities in the Western world and made necessary contacts with international human rights organizations for the purpose of internationalizing the plights of their people. They used modern communication facilities such as the Internet, fax and telephones to project their demands within international circles. In spite of all these means employed to articulate their demands locally and globally, the Nigerian state and foreign oil multinationals continued to indulge in repressive actions as a means of sustaining oil production. State security forces in collaboration with oil companies in the 1990s raided, killed, maimed, and raped thousands of innocent people of the Niger Delta. Despite being subjected to series of heart-wrenching policies by the oil companies and

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<sup>253</sup> The information is based on the researcher visit to Warri (7-9July, 2003) to ascertain the causes and impact of the crisis on the development of the town. Warri is a renowned oil city in the Niger Delta and a home to most major oil companies in Nigeria.

the Nigerian state, the Ijaws did not relent in their efforts to achieve their demands as enshrined in the *Kaiama Declaration*.

Based on the investigation conducted when the author visited some communities in Ijawland, there were a number of instances where security agents have forced the local people to evacuate their villages as a way of protecting the oil companies' facilities. A case in point was the invasion of Odi by the Nigerian army, an action which led to the death of about 2000 people and about the same number was forcefully evacuated to the army barracks in Elele in Rivers as prisoners.<sup>254</sup> In his reaction to this particular incident the IYC President, Felix Tuodolo stated:

It is clear to us that the whole operation was designed to instill fear on the Ijaw and stop the mass of our suffering people from continuing our peaceful struggle to end the degradation of our lands and creeks by transnational oil companies and the Nigerian state. We insist that oil companies should not continue to operate in our communities under the cover of soldiers of occupation.<sup>255</sup>

It follows that the Ijaws are determined at all cost to achieve their demands notwithstanding the intimidation being inflicted on them by the state and oil company forces. Over the years, several (fragmented) groups formed by Ijaw activists have aligned themselves with the struggle against environmental degradation and agitation for resource control. These groups have at one time or the other consummated working alliances with the IYC whenever expedient. The table below presents an overview of some of the known Ijaw groups:

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<sup>254</sup> IYC, Press Release of 24 November 1999

<sup>255</sup> *Ibid.*

S/N	Movement	Demands	Specific Actions	Leadership/period
1	Ijaw Youth Council (IYC)	End to marginalization, neglect, militarisation, and repression. Compensation for ecological damage, restructuring of the Nigerian state, resource control.	Kaima Declaration, Seizure of oil facilities, violent confrontation with state security forces, ultimatums to oil multinationals to vacate Ijawland, demonstrations.	Collective leadership under Isaac Osuaka.
2	Ijaw National Congress (INC)	End to state repression and neglect. True federalism and development.	Coordination of Ijaw ethnic struggle, advertorials, press releases, meetings with state officials.	Joshua Fumudoh (1991-2000); Prof. Kimse Okoko (2001-date)
3	Ijaw Elders Forum (IEF)	End to militarisation and repression. Development and equity participation.	Interviews, advertorials, press statements and comments.	Edwin K. Clarke (1991-2000)
4	Niger Delta Oil Producing Communities (NDOPC)	End to neglect and underdevelopment.	Violent confrontations (agreed to cease fire after meeting with President Obasanjo in January 1999).	Sunday Eregbene (1998-9)
5	Niger Delta Volunteer Force (NDVF)	End to neglect, marginalization and underdevelopment.	Seizures of oil facilities, armed confrontations with the state and other groups.	1998-2000

Source: Adapted from Ikelegbe, "Civil Society, oil and conflict in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria: ramifications of civil society for a regional resource struggle", *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 39, 3, 2001.

Irrespective of the differences in their background, leadership style, organizational profile, action plans, area of operations and experiences, social movements in the Niger Delta, according to Ikelegbe,<sup>256</sup> have adopted such broad strategies, methods and tactics as:

<sup>256</sup> A. Ikelegbe, "Civil Society, oil and conflict in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria: ramifications of civil society for a regional resource struggle", *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 39, 3, 2001, pp. 457-460.

- *Advocacy and agitation* (intended to raise public awareness on the plight of the people of the Niger Delta through “press statements, interviews, conference communiqués, advertorials, commentaries and publicized meetings”).
- *Dialogue* (which has found expression in the call for meetings and consultation with a view to reconciling the communities and the oil multinationals).
- *Monitoring* (of MNOC and government activities in the Niger Delta especially in volatile communities where there is no love lost between the main actors).
- *Popular action* (against MNOC and the state).
- *Litigation* (resort to the legal process to compel MNOCs for instance, to clean up oil spills and to pay compensation to affected communities).
- *Armed confrontation* (in extreme cases where all the other methods appear to have failed).

According to Ikelegbe,

there is some of understanding, support and congruence between the groupings and their methods. The methods employed by the groups have tended to be dictated by the expediencies of regime type and disposition and international support.<sup>257</sup>

This position explains the Niger Delta crisis dimension in the military regimes and civilian regime of President Olusegun Obasanjo.

### **DEMOCRATIC SETTING AND RESOURCE CONTROL AGITATION IN THE NIGER DELTA**

There is no gain saying that it is expected that civil agitation of which, ethnic violence is one would become more prominent under a democratic government in Nigeria. This is so because the military had suppressed such voices through repression. For the Niger Delta crisis to have gained renewed vigor during (the current) Obasanjo’s administration is therefore expected. Ethnic violence is a legacy bequeathed to the democratic government of President Olusegun Obasanjo by the Nigerian military in May 1999. The alarming rate it has assumed calls for prompt attention and urgent solutions in order to move the nation forward.

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<sup>257</sup> *Ibid*, p. 460

Despite every effort by the state to address the ugly situation in the region, the tempo of resource control agitation has increased among the people and leaders of the states in the region. The struggle for resource control in Nigeria dated back to the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries when the region was invaded by European explorer and the eventual integration into world market that laid foundation for the control and struggle for palm oil between the middle men and the hinterland local. The current agitation for resource control dates back to the early 1990s, with the emergence of social/ethnic groups that came up to challenge the state and oil companies. However, this novel idea was later on hijacked by the states governor in 10 October 2000, during a summit which brought together the seventeen Governors of the southern region of Nigeria in Lagos. The summit deliberated on the issues of common concern and made a strident call for reform in fiscal and political policies of the state. They (the Governors) unanimously agreed that the instability and underdevelopment of the states, and owed to these unresolved issues within Nigeria fiscal and political arrangements. The most important issue discussed in the summit was the issue of resource ownership and control by the Governors from the South, especially the Niger Delta States namely Bayelsa, Rivers, Akwa-Ibom, Delta, Edo, Ondo and Imo.<sup>258</sup>

At the end of their summit they issued a communiqué which affirmed

- That Nigeria's federal status as presently constituted be restructured along a legal framework that would grant reasonable measures of autonomy to the states and the component parts of the federation.
- That resource control and derivation should henceforth be accepted as the basis of revenue generation and allocation.<sup>259</sup>

The involvement of these governors in the struggle for resource control since 1999 has been given different interpretations. The Deputy Director of Environmental Rights

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<sup>258</sup> This summit appeared in the major daily newspapers in Nigeria on the 11 October 2000. See *The Guardian* (Lagos), *The Comet* (Lagos), *The Punch* (Lagos) for details.

<sup>259</sup> *The Guardian* (Lagos) 11 October 2000

Action/Friends of the Earth in Nigeria however remarked that the people of the Niger Delta region align themselves to this struggle due to the fact that:

1. The dominant position and view in the delta when they [the Governors] arrived on the 29 of May 1999 was resource control. To take a contrary position may probably have amounted to committing political suicide.
2. They came into office without an ideology or program, and "resource control" readily becomes a platform to forge one.
3. It was a convenient issue the governors could use to compel the Federal Government to implement constitutional provisions relating to revenue devolution or allocation, which they (the Federal Government) were reluctant to let go.
4. "Resource control" advocacy was discovered by some governors to be a good weapon through which they could fight political Sharia.<sup>260</sup>

The activism by the people of the region has achieved considerable success in changing the policy of the state and oil companies in the region. This was made possible through the internationalization of the crisis by the social movements that came up in 1990s. The environment created by the restoration of democracy further strengthened the people to aspire for the control of their resources. It must be mentioned that the acceptance of the introduction of Sharia in the North by the Federal Government also galvanized the social forces in the Niger Delta to agitate for the control of their resources. If the northern states could realize their aspiration to implement Islamic Law, then the people of the Niger Delta could ensure that their aspiration vis-à-vis resource control was attained.

Therefore, the resurgence of the struggle for resource control in the Niger Delta during the current democratic dispensation is not unconnected with the declaration of Sharia Law in many northern states and the diversion of oil revenue to the northern part of the federation to partly fund the implementation of the law. This diversion of the bulk of oil revenue from the region is noted as the prime cause of its backwardness. Not a few of the opinion that modernization would be an illusion unless the bulk of oil revenue is reinjected into the region through investment. Godwin Darah points out the illogic and

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<sup>260</sup> O. Douglas: A Community Guide to Understanding Resource Control. A publication by the Ijaw National Congress accessed at [www.waado.org](http://www.waado.org)

injustice in giving back little to the states that generate much of the country's wealth arguing that "Delta state which accounts for 30% of total oil production loses no less than five hundred billion naira per year because of the fraudulent revenue allocation formula."<sup>261</sup>

Despite the involvement of the State Governors, the NGOs, and social movements, other bodies in the region have not relented in their efforts to achieve the goal of resources control. The women of the region made a bold step to strengthen the struggle by the local people when they embarked on extensive consultations among the various women leaders in the area prior to staging well-coordinated protests on all oil installations. The desire of the women was to paralyze oil exploration activities in the region due to government's insensitivity to the plight of the local people. This found expression in the action of Ijaw and Itsekiri women when they took over the multi-billion dollar Scarves tank farm, oil flow stations, and crude oil loading terminal in 2002.

There are other instances in which the women undertook protests in the region to portray their plight. These women are ever ready to justify their actions. For instance, "Madam Annan Uwanwan said they decided to take the driver seat to make the Federal Government and the oil companies more sensitive to the yearnings and aspirations of our people."<sup>262</sup> Chief (Mrs.) Obong Anwan Mary Attah, President of Qua Iboe Women League and Mbong O. Mbong were both leaders of civil society groups that demonstrated peacefully against the oil spill which had occurred on 12 January 1998 at Idoho oil field. This demonstration quickly went the way of so many before it as military forces were disdainfully used to quell it. Subsequently, several Eket indigenes were arrested and of course, including the principal players mentioned above.<sup>263</sup> It is instructive to note that the women took this action in order to counter government's argument which often label the youths as terrorists preparatory to mobilizing soldiers to trail them for extermination.

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<sup>261</sup> G.G. Darah, "The road from Bondage", *The Guardian* online-<http://ngrguardiannews.com>. This position is similar to what Darah stated in his paper "From Bondage to Paradise" which he presented at a forum organised by Ibori Vanguard in Port Harcourt, Rivers State.

<sup>262</sup> See Vanguard, Lagos 3 August 2002, and <http://allafrica.com/stories/200208050500.html>

<sup>263</sup> I. Olojede, *et al.*, "Oil Pollution, Community Dissatisfaction and threat to National Peace and Security", *AAPS Occasional Paper Series*, Vol.4 No.3, 2000

In one of the ERA's field reports, Mrs. Queen Uwana, Deputy Chairperson, Scarves Women Coalition argued that "for about 38 years since Chevron has been taking oil from Scarves, there has been nothing to show for it. No development. We cannot bear it again...."<sup>264</sup> The insensitivity of Chevron to the plight of women in the six communities that make up of Scarves (Ogidigben, Ugborodo, Madogho, Ajidigho, Imaghagha and Iyala) was responsible for their actions on 6 July 2002 namely the invasion of the company's platform. They interrupted oil production and demanded to have a chat with the Managing Director of Chevron before they could leave.<sup>265</sup> In reality there is no love lost between the communities and the multinational oil companies.

The government's response to the explosive issue of resource control has been a matter of concern to people of the region and beyond. This issue been subjected to different interpretations and has been perceived by the state as a 'separatist tendency' that must not be allow to grow further. The understanding of resource control by the Nigerian state must have informed the decision of the Federal Government to take the 36 states of the federation to the Supreme Court. However, the judgment of the Supreme Court on 5 April 2002 has not whittled down the agitation for resource control; rather it has further ignited the embers of conflict. The government has subsequently resolved to minimize the negative impact of oil exploration on the people while the Senate (i.e. the upper legislative chamber) has also taken a bold step towards checking the excesses of the oil companies.

It is very interesting to note that the National Assembly has taken steps to address the needs of the people through a barrage of inquiries into the institutions and oil companies that are saddled with the responsibility to develop the Niger Delta. In the process, certain anomalies were noted. For instance, Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC) was strongly criticized for non-remittance of the required three percent to the NDDC. In

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<sup>264</sup> Era Field Report: Chevron ignores demands of women.

<sup>265</sup> Era Field Report: Chevron ignores demands of women. This can also be found in Urhobo Historical Society website (<http://www.waado.org>)

fact, most of the companies remitted below the required 3% that NDDC Act stipulated as could be seen from the table below:

<b>YEAR</b>	<b>COMPANY</b>	<b>REQUIRED 3%</b>	<b>WHAT WAS REMITTED</b>
<b>2001</b>	<b>SHELL</b>	<b>\$2,004,000,000</b>	<b>\$380,074,000</b>
	<b>MOBIL</b>	<b>\$ 1,029,102,000</b>	<b>\$ 26,189,000</b>
	<b>CHEVRON</b>	<b>\$ 1,100,260,000</b>	<b>\$ 29, 631,000</b>
	<b>AGIP</b>	<b>\$ 461,551,000</b>	<b>\$ 11,173,000</b>
	<b>ELF</b>	<b>\$ 516,390,000</b>	<b>\$ 8,194,000</b>
	<b>TEXACO</b>	<b>\$ 516,390,000</b>	<b>\$ 8,194,000</b>

Source: The above figures were compiled by the researcher based on the figures released to the Nigerian Senate Committee on Petroleum.

The decision of the Senate to look into the activities of the oil companies clearly showed that there is an urgent need to address the resource control issue.

In a dramatic development which epitomizes the internationalization of the Niger Delta issue, a law suit has been filed in San Francisco in the United States seeking to hold ChevronTexaco Petroleum Corporation (CTPO) responsible for the violent suppression of protests over environmental issues by the Ilaje, Ijaw, and Kenyan activists and communities of the Niger Delta. ChevronTexaco's subsidiary in Nigeria allegedly colluded with the Nigerian military in launching fatal attacks on protesters in 1998. The findings of American lawyers representing the communities indicted Nigeria's security forces. It was reported that ChevronTexaco Nigeria ordered security operatives to launch military assault on peaceful environmental protesters.<sup>266</sup>

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<sup>266</sup> See *Daily Independent* (Lagos) 14 September 2004, p. A7

Chevron is said to provide financial assistance and other logistics to the military in the numerous attacks on hapless people of host communities. Chevron's support also includes the purchase and provision of ammunition and other military equipments for the Nigerian military and the police. The lawyers insist that Chevron's collaboration with the military was intended to curtail or silence the exercise of rights of free speech and association of the victims and the people of the Niger Delta on several issues, including the environmental damage caused by Chevron's oil and gas activities.<sup>267</sup>

Also, ethnic minority groups abroad have joined the growing list of global resistance or forces fighting the unbridled exploitation of the Niger Delta and its criminal neglect. For instance, Ijaw groups in the diaspora, embolden by the activities of their brethren at home have begun a wave of agitation to ensure that oil companies live up to their responsibility in the Niger Delta. Among others, this fresh agitation include certain demands ranging from the imposition of specific taxes on oil and gas companies operating in the Niger Delta region, taxes on gas flaring, marine life, and land pollution etc. The groups involved in this fresh agitation are basically the Ijaw community associations in the United Kingdom and Ireland.<sup>268</sup>

It is also apt to note that the London-based Friends of the Earth International has condemned Shell's stance on its rejection of the Senate order instructing it to pay compensation to Ijaw communities. The action of the Senate was informed by the severe hardship the Ijaw Aborigines of Bayelsa state have been subjected to on account of Shell's operations in their communities. After a careful analysis of the oil communities' plight, the Senate issued a directive to Shell to pay the sum of \$1 billion immediately; and \$500 million payable within five years in five different installments of \$100 million per annum commencing not later than one year after the payment of the initial \$1 billion.<sup>269</sup> The decision of the Senate was very significant because it confirmed the communities' grievances and that such pronouncement was possible under democratic system as against what operates in previous military regimes.

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<sup>267</sup> See *Daily Independent* (Lagos) 6 September 2004, p. A7

<sup>268</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>269</sup> *The Guardian* (Lagos) 6 September 2004

This chapter lays bare the strategies adopted by the social movements in their resistance against the Nigerian state and the oil multinationals. It goes without saying that their resistance was not without some form of counter-reaction from both the Nigerian government and the multinational oil companies. Social movement activity and the repression of resistance have precipitated a deplorable human rights situation in the Niger Delta. These have, in turn, attracted the attention of the international community which is (generally speaking) seized on the promotion of these rights. Therefore, local and global civil societies' preoccupation with the human rights situation in the Niger Delta is partly illustrative of the internationalisation of the region's problematic.