

The Development of the Niger Delta of Nigeria, 1900 - 1966

By

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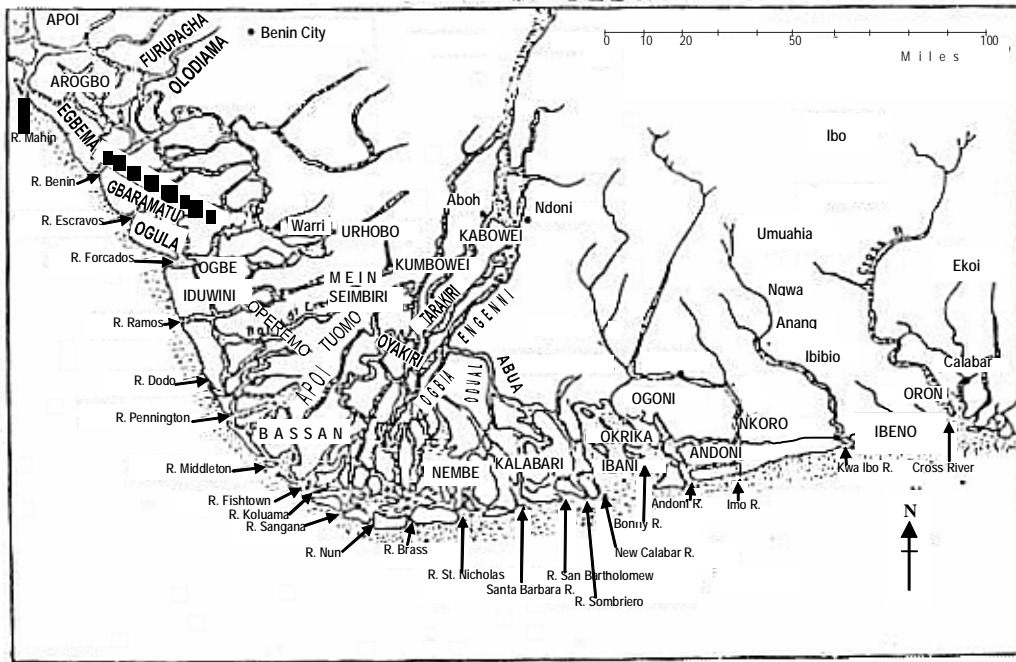
ABSTRACT

The Niger Delta Region is in Nigeria. Nigeria, a country of the Western political model since 1900, was sixty-six years of age in 1966. Owing to this fact, her policies for the development of the administrative units within this period yearns for a historical analysis. This work fills this gap. It is a study of the attempts made by the colonial and post-colonial governments to transform one of these units, the Niger Delta, from underdeveloped status to a developed one before the military intervention in Nigerian politics foiled it.

INTRODUCTION

The Nigerian Federation dispensed resources for the development of the Niger Delta for sixty-six years, 1900-1966. The Delta elites also engaged in politics with the honesty of developing their region. Development is human-centred. It is a process through which people create and recreate themselves into higher levels of civilization. It has to do with the economic and social growth of the people, which are necessary conditions endowed by their governments. Other efforts could come from the industrialized sector of the world.¹

The Niger Delta



There is, however, one way to enable the government to understand the plight of the people. This is through peaceful demonstrations, dialogue, and revolts, especially where the area is the economic gateway of the nation. In the case of the Niger Delta, that is the treasure base of Nigeria, it has always been fulfilling her obligations of creating resources of national economy, from palm produce to petroleum. Their exploitations degraded the Delta environment and created the need for development. As a result, some Delta Ijo, like Isaac Adaka Boro, resorted to revolts and nationalism in order to seize the State power to effect the development of their region.²

Our exposition will adopt the historical approach. Starting from the remote to the recent past, we shall trace the routes through which the Niger Delta Ijo and Nigerian Governments have fought for sixty six years seeking solutions to the development of their ailing region.

COLONIAL GOVERNMENT AND THE NIGER DELTA, 1900-1957

The Niger Delta was colonized by Britain because of her resources in palm produce. The colonization was in two phases, the informal and formal periods. The informal period, 1843-1900, started at Badagry at the Methodist Manse. It was first nurtured by a Methodist priest, Reverend Thomas Birch Freeman,

who appealed to Governor George Maclean of the Gold Coast to extend the British Protectorate to Badagry, where he was stationed. As a result, the informal period came into being in 1843, with Sergeant Bart, a Fante soldier, at the head. Their policies were two fold. First, was to abolish slave trade and enable the Atlantic Trade in palm oil flourish. Second, was to halt the French in Dahomey from encroaching on the Niger Delta through Badagry. As these were going on, a gunboat was stationed at Fernando Po with Colonel Edward Nicolls in charge.³

In 1849, Britain took steps to colonize the Niger Delta palm produce resources for her Industrial Revolution. Her Majesty's Government divided the Niger Delta into two bights, Bights of Benin and Bonny (Biafra), with John Beecroft as the sole Consul. Between 1849 and 1885, the Badagry end of the Western Delta transformed into the Lagos Colony in 1861, while the entire Niger Delta was renamed 'Oil Rivers Protectorate' in 1885, to forestall the Germans in Cameroon from reaching the Niger Delta through Calabar. With the English expansion into the hinterland, they keep changing the name of the Niger Delta as their politics demand, from the Oil Rivers in 1885 to Niger Coast Protectorates in 1893, Southern and Northern Protectorates in 1900, and finally Nigeria in 1914. They ruled Nigeria until 1960 when it became independent.⁴

The first developmental programme of the colonial government in Nigeria was land reclamation in the Niger Delta. They met the latter's environmental problems when it was nature-induced. Being a flat swampy and muddy basin, criss-crossed by a labyrinth of waterways, the Delta was subjected to excessive flooding and erosion. This left the indigenous inhabitants, the Ijo, with only about 30% land for human habitation. As a result, they were confined in densely populated small and scattered settlements.⁵

Rather than leaving it as it was, the colonial government planned for its reclamation because of the imperial benefits to be derived. The reclamation would not only give the Ijo enough levees for habitation but also increase their palm produce economy which Britain wanted for her Industrial Revolution. Hence, the colonial botanists saw Nypa palm, *N. fruticans* Wurm, as a panacea to the Delta environmental problem. It was imported from Singapore and planted in the Niger Delta between 1906 and 1912. From here it spread across the region. But this could neither check erosion nor help in reclaiming the Delta lands. Instead, it began the dreaded degradation of the Niger Delta environment in

several dimensions. It was fast replacing the mangrove forest, *Rhizophora*, whose stabilization of the shoreline was the means of checking erosion. *Nypa* was also dislodging small islands and villages into the river. These became a great concern to the Delta Ijo in the 1940s.⁶

Under this condition, they initiated to the English imperial government of Nigeria the first move for the development of the Delta, in particular, and Nigeria, in general. The initiative came from the President of the Nigerian Youth Movement, pioneer politician and first newspaper editor in Nigeria, Ernest Sisei Ikoli, who is a Nembe Ijo from the Eastern Delta. According to written and oral sources, Ikoli, in 1941, advocated for a Nigerian Federation of four states (Eastern, Western, Northern and Southern States) to Sir Bernard Bourdillon, Governor of Nigeria, from 1935-1943. The Eastern State was to cover the Igbo, Efik, Ibibio, Annang, Ogoni, Ikwere, Ekpeye, Ogba, and the people of Upper Cross River. While the Western State was meant for the Yoruba, Edo, Ishan, Ika-Igbo, Itshekiri, and Urhobo groups, the Northern State was for the Hausa, Fulani, Kanuri, Benue-Plateau, and others in the core northern part of the country. The Southern State could have accommodated the Niger Delta Ijo. Each of these proposed states was meant to develop its area of administration.⁷

In order to pave the way for its manifestation, Bourdillon worked closely with Ikoli between 1941 and 1943. Ikoli was then a legislator, representing Lagos, in the Nigerian Legislative Council. Since Bourdillon could not implement it before the expiration of his administration in 1943, he handed over to his successor, Arthur Richards. The latter ruled Nigeria between 1943 and 1947, but Richards was not amenable to the above idea. For this reason, Ikoli called for a direct representation of Eastern, Western, and Northern Provinces in the Nigerian Legislative Council, which became the cornerstone of the 1945 Richards Constitution of regionalism. This single nationalism of Ernest Ikoli laid the foundation of the Nigerian independence movement.⁸

This came with serious implications for the Niger Delta. While the Eastern, Western, and Northern Regions so created became dominated by the Igbo, Yoruba, and Hausa majority groups and their allies, the Southern Region meant for the Delta Ijo was not created. The Niger Delta became a minority in the Igbo dominated Eastern Region and was left in the doldrums of underdevelopment. Even the creation of Rivers Province in 1947 to compensate the Ijo could not develop the Delta area. Secondly, the entire Western Delta and parts of the Eastern Delta areas of Obolo (Andoni) and Opobo were not included.⁹

As soon as the above was experienced, the Ijaw (Ijo) Union Port Harcourt was formed, in 1952, to chart new ways for Niger Delta development. It replaced the Ijaw (Ijo) Rivers Peoples League of 1942 and had Mr. H. B. Thom-Manuel as President and Chief H. J. R. Dappa-Biriye as Secretary, to mention but two. Their major assignment was to draw a Niger Delta Development Plan and present to the Colonial Governments of Nigeria. They resorted to this decision because the Macpherson and Littleton Constitutions of 1951 and 1954 still maintained the Nigerian Federation of three regions. The influences of this omission committed the Ijaw Union to send representations to Sir John Macpherson and Sir James Robertson, Governors-General of Nigeria between 1951-1954 and 1954-1960, respectively. When they presented their Niger Delta Development Plan to them, the colonial government handed it to the British government. After the Nigerian Constitutional Conference of 1957 which was held in London, the Willink Commission was set up to look into their grievances.¹⁰

THE WILLINK COMMISSION, 1957-1960

This Commission of Inquiry was to find the means of developing the Ijo and other Nigerian minorities. It came because of the Niger Delta's craving for a state within the Nigerian Federation. According to Ejituwu, the Ijo demonstrated their patriotism to Nigeria at this colonial period and aimed at establishing their minority identity in the independence era. Before the period under review, the majority ruling groups in the country were not ready to develop the Delta. This increased the fear of these Delta Ijo, and other minorities, of internal colonization by the majorities. That was why the Rivers Chiefs and Peoples Conference (R.C.P.C.) of the Niger Delta decisively tabled the demand for the creation of Rivers State for the Delta Ijo during the Eastern Nigerian Summit at Enugu. Whereas, the latter was to consider the Eastern agenda and representation at the Nigerian Constitutional Conference in May and June 1957, the R.C.P.C. was bent for the inclusion of their demand.¹¹

To indicate what happened at the London Conference, which brought about the Willink Commission, we will resort to Chief Harold Dappa Biriye, who represented our study area. His deliberations were threefold. He called for the creation of Rivers or Niger Delta State in the Nigerian Federation and the entrenchment of fundamental human rights in the forthcoming Independence Constitution of Nigeria. These were to allay the fears of minorities' domination by the majority groups. Also, Biriye moved for

the approval of the Houses of Chiefs for the Eastern Region and the Southern Cameroon in the agreement reached at the Conference. Other minority groups in Nigeria also joined the Ijo to agitate for these things as a way to escape the internal imperialism of the majority groups. While creation of states would develop their areas, fundamental human rights were to ensure their protection in the Nigerian Federation against domination, victimization, and neglect by the majority ruling groups.¹²

London looked into their grievances. The Colonial Secretary, Alan Lennox-Boyd, instituted a Minorities Commission headed by Sir Henry Willink on September 25, 1957, to examine their grievances and proffer solution. This was in accordance with the recommendation of the Lancaster House Conference. Willink, a former British Minister of Health, was to work with Sir Gordon Hadow who was one time Deputy Governor of the Gold Coast; Mr Philip Mason, renowned in race relations; and Mr. J. B. Shearer, a former Secretary for Finance in Pakistan. Not the least was Mr. K. J. Hilton, the Secretary to the Commission.¹³

In examining the problems of the Niger Delta, the Commission heard the Ijo views. They reflected on the memoranda on domination, victimization, neglect, geological, and communication problems. Others were population and manpower, as well as the financial viability of the Delta for the proposed Rivers State. These memoranda were submitted by the Ijo personalities, namely, Chief Harold Dappa-Biriye of Bonny, D.E. Iwarimie-Jaja of Opobo, Josiah Jamabo of Okrika, G.B.C. Otoko, and U.O. Ekenekot of Andoni, Amatoru Zuofa of Kolokuma, as well as Alalibo Oruambo of Kalabari.¹⁴

The inability of the Willink Commission to recommend the creation of a Niger Delta State in the Nigerian Federation was noticed. Instead, London agreed with the Commission on the backwardness of the Ijo and the negligence of the development of the Niger Delta. In order to pave the way for its development, the Niger Delta Development Board (N.D.D.B.) was set up by statute in the independence era to meet the peculiar developmental needs of the Ijo people.¹⁵

THE NIGER DELTA DEVELOPMENT BOARD, 1960-1966

The Niger Delta Development Board (N.D.D.B.) was created with the Nigerian government instrument called *The Niger Delta Development Act*. Two factors actualized it. The Prime Minister of Nigeria, Alhaji Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, earnestly wanted the Board 'as a means of channelling genuine aid to the Niger Delta and its peoples'. In addition, the Nigerian Independence Constitution (Order in Council) 1960 provided for its establishment under Section 14, as recommended by the Willink's Commission report and upheld in the Nigerian Constitutional Conference of 1958. That was why the Nigerian Legislature used every effort in making the N.D.D.B. a reality in 1961. Their efforts were later enforced by the 1963 Republican Constitution that guaranteed its existence for ten years under Section 159.¹⁶

In the course of inaugurating the Board, the importance of the Niger Delta as a celebrated region of immense economic enterprise manifested. Hence, the Federal Government of Nigeria appointed a Niger Delta King of Akassa, His Royal Majesty Chief I. S. Anthony, as Chairman. The board members appointed include Messrs Jasper Adaka Boro, Mr. A. M. Ndiomu, Mr. W. Abbey, Mr. E. B. Nyore, Mr. J. A. Deiye, and Amatoru Zuofa who served as Secretary. However, the Chairman and Board members coming from the Niger Delta conveyed the gratitude of the Delta leaders to the Prime Minister of Nigeria, Alhaji Abubakar Tafawa Balewa. It was remarkably conveyed by seven men delegation, namely, Hon. I. Kemte Giadom, MHR; Hon. Nelson G. Yellow, former MHR; Hon. S. F. Nwika (Ex-NCNC Parliamentary Secretary), Hon. M.O. Okilo (NPC-NDC Parliamentary Secretary), Chief Michael Kwokwo of Gbaran, Chief Lawrence R. Nabena, and Chief H.J.R. Dappa-Biriye.¹⁷

Although Willink singled out Port Harcourt and Ahoada as non-Delta areas which the Board should not cover, N.D.D.B. could not deny Port Harcourt its headquarters because of the available social convenience. By Monday December 10, 1962, it has moved into its permanent secretariat complex on Azikiwe Road. The four Zonal Offices were located at Degema in the Eastern Delta, Ayama on the Nun River in the Central Delta, Bomadi in the Western Delta and Bori (Ogoni) at the Eastern Delta margins. In short, the Board was granted ten years to transform the Niger Delta from its underdeveloped state to a developed one.¹⁸

It must be remarked, however, that before the N.D.D.B.'s existence, Government of the Federation had surveyed the Delta region following the recommendation of Willink and the Nigerian Constitutional Conference. In support of this claim, there is documentary evidence on how the Federal Minister of Transport, Hon. R.A. Njoku, commissioned the Netherlands Engineering Consultants (NEDECO) to survey the region from late 1958 to April, 1960. Their submissions and that of the Niger Delta Congress gave the Board a sense of direction towards the economic development of the Delta, principally in agriculture, forestry, fisheries, hydrological engineering, and industrialization.¹⁹

The influences of the Dutch and the British were not hidden in the area of technical advisers. Their agricultural, fisheries and forestry experts assumed duties in the N. D. D. B. between December 1962 and March 1963. So also were the soil scientists, transport economists, project analysts, civil engineers and hydrologists. With their expertise, they first studied the traditional economy of the Delta Ijo. In discovering that canoe-making, house construction, fishing, farming and timber logging are major, they thought of developing these economies for the local people before embarking on the actual development of the region. This was in line with the first assignment which the Federal Government of Nigeria gave the Board. They were tasked to examine the condition of the Delta region 'in order to ascertain what measures are required to promote its physical development'.

Taking this instruction into account, the N.D.D.B.'s experts went into experimentation. Their experimental farms at many places like Bori in the Ogoni area of the Eastern Delta margins were in Soya beans, groundnuts, jute and maize. Others include the crop seedlings imported from India, Philippines, Singapore and the South American nation of Dutch Guiana.²⁰

However, the initial good harvest of the experiments encouraged the N.D.D.B. into oil palm, rubber, cocoa, coffee, sugar-cane and rice cultivation. These plantations were located at Bukuma and Nembe in the Eastern Delta, Kpaa, Korokorosei, Toruibene, Okolobiri, Igbematoru and Ogobiri in the Central Delta. To be specific, over 300 acres of mechanized rice plantation was established at Peremabiri in the Central Delta between March 1965 and April 1966. Its 300 tons capacity rice mill had a pump irrigation scheme which was installed in 1965. Although it was used in processing the N.D.D.B. rice, an actor's account of Chief Frank-Opigo stated that it also accommodated the needs of the Delta rice farmers.²¹

These varieties of economic development encouraged the N.D.D.B. to also research into the fisheries industry of the people. In order to enable them exploit the under-exploited Delta, they modified the local techniques and brought them into mechanized fishing and the use of different mesh-sizes in the deep sea and estuarine zones. The N.D.D.B. experts also introduced trawler fishing and the set-netting method from powered craft as well as the cold-storage facilities in the Eastern Delta fishing economy. It could be remembered that prior to the N.D.D.B. era, the Delta Ijo were transporting themselves by hand-pulling in dug-out canoes to waterways destinations. The introduction of powered river craft became a great revolution in the fishing and transportation economies of the people.

Nevertheless, the impact of the N.D.D.B. was also felt in the Central Delta fishing industry in the area of fish ponding. This was because of their comparative advantage in the cost of constructing and maintaining a fish cultured pond, owing to the flood waters of the Nun River. Hence, they developed a method of using the large fresh water swamp and the brackish areas for fish culture at Ekowe, Peretorugbene, Peremabiri, and Otuaka. The last three had their fish ponds constructed in rice plantations. They complemented these innovations with the introduction of a method of fish preservation by kiln-smoking, icing and cold storage.²²

Now, it is possible for one to look at the poultry farming introduced by the Board to improve the economy of the Delta Ijo. Their varieties of poultry were imported from the Netherlands. The multiplicity of the hybro hens was by the use of incubator installed by them. Through this medium, many indigenous people were inducted by the N.D.D.B. experts into poultry farming economy. The varieties of their orientation were mainly the hyline and hybro layers.²³

As a foundation for what is to follow, the soil scientists of the Board were not left out in the preliminary industrial raw materials survey of the Niger Delta. The soil maps they produced and the laboratory and water samples led the Board to plan for the industrial development of the region. This goes in line with the aims and aspirations of the Niger Delta Congress. Their in-depth knowledge of this low-lying region and the annual flooding of the Central Delta from the Rivers Niger and Benue made them to implore the N.D.D.B. technical experts to control these waters. For nothing else, it will salvage lives and properties in the Central Niger Delta.²⁴

After examining these problems, the civil engineers and hydrologists of the Board used the Federal Levelling Grid to measure the land and sea levels. Second was their embankment of some Central Delta communities along the river banks. They did it, in collaboration with the Federal Survey Team, to check river bank erosions, as well as the ravages of the annual flood that keeps lives and properties in danger and making building construction not viable. Considering the hydrological aspect, documentary evidence of the N.D.D.B. mentioned the installation of river gauges on the Forcados and Nun channels of the Niger. From here they were able to measure the river flows and construct irrigation and drainage system which checked the excessive annual flooding of the Central Delta.²⁵

What led to the easy task of the Board were the waterways clearing and canalization of the Delta. This was also carried out by the Civil Engineering and Hydrology Section of the N.D.D.B. in collaboration with the Federal Inland Waterways Department. They opened both old and new routes between the Nun and Sangana rivers in the Central Delta for smaller launches to penetrate into the area. In Peremabiri, the clearing and opening of creeks to great length was what reduced the distance between Peremabiri and Igbematoru by 38 kilometres. The routes between Port Harcourt and Nembe were also shortened by about 25 percent. Following the above considerations to stabilize the indigenous population was the preliminary planning for the development of the Niger Delta by the Board. This has to do mostly with the mangrove and salt water related tree planting, raffia palms cultivation and the construction of roads and bridges over the region. It was not uncommon to find the N.D.D.B. venturing into forestry development. The rich mangrove forest of the people that lines the Delta banks 'extends about twenty miles inland'. In the colonial period, Europe utilized it among other things in developing England.²⁶

When the N.D.D.B.'s forestry experts were in the Niger Delta, they delved into the mangrove timber resources of about 50,000,000 tons that spread over 4,000 square kilometres length of the saline water area. According to the eye-witness account of Chief N. A. Frank-Opigo who was a Federal Legislator then, they studied its usefulness and growth rate and how it could be commercially cultivated for export. From here they resorted to using drainage, ridging, and dyking to increase the productivity of mangrove shrub. In its cultivation, they preferred allowing it to grow well to about three feet round and 92 feet tall at the maturing age of 30 and 40 years.²⁷

But to avoid the deforestation of the already existing Delta mangrove forest, they regulated the number of timbers to be used annually and wanted the Board to instigate a Federal Forestry Act that can enforce it. As a result, they prepared the stock-maps of the locality of the mangrove trees and the quantity for cutting annually. Both oral and written evidence stated that the maps covered about 3,500 square kilometres of mangrove forests. In fact, in 1963 not less than 600 tons of mangrove timbers were exported to Europe for pulping test and other uses. The positive result of the test proves that the Niger Delta mangrove timber is one of the best raw materials for making toilet tissues, as well as high quality paper production, if mixed with other components like the raffia palm fibres.²⁸

The applicability of other salt tolerant trees like the Delta raffia palms to industrial uses was also discovered. According to the British and Dutch forestry experts of the N.D.D.B., this valuable palm is a native of the vast Central Delta fresh water swamps. They estimated its extensive resources to be over 22,000,000 palms that can yield more than 150,000,000 gallons of alcohol annually at a revenue of 10,000,000 pounds sterling. The N.D.D.B. was most interested in using the works of these experts in industrializing the region. They know that the Niger Delta needs an industrial revolution as the key to develop not only the region but also Nigeria. As such, they planned for the establishment of six viable factories for the production of tannin and particle boards from mangrove bark; fibre from mangrove air roots, raffia palm, Nypa palm and sudd grass. Others are charcoal from mangrove wood for industrial and domestic uses, mangrove timber for electric and telephone poles, railway sleepers, general purpose construction, flooring blocks, and containers for corrosive liquids. Not the least is the integrated saw-milling and wood using industry, as well as pulp and paper mills all over the region.²⁹

In order to pave the way for more industries, the N.D.D.B. experts established a forest tree nursery at Bori in the Eastern Delta margins. This produced more than 1,000,000 trees for experimental planting in other parts of the Niger Delta. Better still, these trees were new to Nigeria and the transplanting in the Primrose Creek was completed in October 1964. The species of these trees include the Cajeput tree, known as the key to the manufacturing of several products, such as the more valuable Cajeput oil. While its soft bark is the raw material for stuffing pillow, the stem is a fine cabinet timber. All in all, these six factories conceived by the N.D.D.B. were master-minded to revolutionize the Niger Delta industrially and enhance a high standard of living in the region. In fact, the industrial sector of the Board was for

capacity building and regional engineering. It was planned to possess a stronger economics for the Delta people and increase their quality of life, in particular, and Nigeria, in general.³⁰

Yet, there was the last factor in the preliminary survey of the possible ways to develop the Delta of Nigeria. It was connected with the building of model towns, resettlement, tourist centres, and road network, instigated by the Niger Delta Congress that was in the regional politics in Nigeria then. Four model towns were to be constructed at maritime highway junction in the Western, Central, and Eastern Delta areas around Bomadi, Brass, and Degema, as well as the Eastern Delta margins of Ogoni, respectively. They were to be designed as industrial towns, commercial centres, and naval bases, in accordance with their maritime locations since the Niger Delta is the Nigeria's shoreline. The model towns were proposed to accord Nigerians and foreigners the opportunity to invest in the Niger Delta and densely populate this sparsely populated region. From there, it will improve the lifestyle of the Ijo and create the enabling environment for their practice of mechanised agriculture, as well as small and large scale enterprises.³¹

Obviously, these towns were not only taking the N.D.D.B. industries already analyzed in this paper. Within the period under review, the *Report of the International Bank Mission* reveals the economic potential of this area. They discovered that one million acres of land in the Central Delta can produce enough rice and cocoa for West Africa. In the mangrove belt and Atlantic littorals of the Eastern Delta areas of Brass, Kula in Kalabari, Bonny and Obolo (Andoni) were found unlimited raw materials for salt, paper, timber, and boat building industries. Others were for trawl fishing, fish canning, and international glass factories. Gas and crude oil refineries for internal and external uses were programmed for Bonny. However, for the Ijo neighbours of Ogoni, their clay was most suitable for ceramic industry, scientific tiles, brick making, and industrial pipes. Oral evidence from Chief Alalibo Oruambo of Kalabari deliberated on how games reserve, resettlement, and tourist centres were to be widespread all over the Delta area. Being for mixed economy, they were seen as what can stop the Niger Delta Ijo from drifting into other regions in search of greener pastures.³²

Instances of the development plans of N.D.D.B. include their proposed communication network. Oral history from Chief Abraham Batubo of Kalabari deliberated on N.D.D.B.'s discovery that 450 kilometre of roads could be built in the Niger Delta to link other parts of the Nigerian Federation, particularly

Eastern and Western Nigeria. They also found that causeways could be constructed to link river banks. Road building in Western Delta was to take from Olomoro to Ughelli, Olomoro-Agudama- Kpakiamma, as well as Kpakiamma to Patani. Other trunk roads earmarked for construction were to commence from Bomadi to Tamegbe, Tamegbe-Ndoro and eastwards through Bomadi Creek to Alebiri and Okuburu Creek to Ikibiri. Those northwards were Agudama-Akogbogbo-Mbiama-Ahoada.³³ It cannot be sufficiently stressed that the Central and Eastern Delta zones were excluded from the proposed road development by N.D.D.B. Following the good initiatives of the Niger Delta Congress, they foresaw the possibility of constructing trunk roads between Nembe and Oloibiri, and from there to Yenagoa and Ahoada. While Okrika was to have causeways, motor and rail roads, a road from Bonny to Andoni and Ogoni was found easy with the bridging of the Andoni River to link Queenstown in Opobo and another causeway at some point to Kaa in Ogoni. Before then, the Board had noted the existing 60 kilometer road between Ilotombi-Ngo-Ikuru Town and Agbama in Obolo (Andoni). Also incorporated in the N.D.D.B. programme were the ancient Ogba-Ekpeye and Abua-Degema roads to lessen the sufferings of the Kalabari people.³⁴

Their significance was same to the development of seaports, civil aviation, railways, postal services and telecommunications. Others include canalization for inland waterways transport facilities. Bonny, Abonnema, Akassa, Brass, Opobo, Okrika, and Onne ports were to be modernized for imports and exports. However, when the Andoni river bridge could have been done to safeguard the construction of the Andoni causeway, the Board had programmed a railroad from Umukoroshe to Onne, Ogoni, Bonny, and Andoni. The Civil Engineering and Hydrology Section of the Board were able to survey the Eastern and Western zones of the Niger Delta for the implementation of the above plans.

However, the change of power from democracy to militarism could not allow the N.D.D.B. to continue. They were yet to have the required results from the experimental farms, fish ponds, forestry, poultry farm, and cash crop plantations for the production of raw materials for industrial establishments. In fact, the reports of the technical experts in these fields were to 'form the basis of the planning of the first development schemes in the Delta'. But, as they were preparing these reports of the first task of the Board, the military struck and seized power on January 15, 1966. This change of political batten was the major flaw that caused the demise of the N.D.D.B. According to Ejituwu, the Board collapsed because funds were no longer provided for its activities by the succeeding administrations.³⁵

CONCLUSION

To draw together what has been discussed about the development of the Niger Delta, three things should be noted. Foremost is the English policy of empire building through which the Nigerian nation-state was created with the Niger Delta as the cradle. As Johnston puts it, Britain exploited the Niger Delta to transform herself into a developed country. This enkindled her to protect the Niger Delta from eroding as it was the source of the palm produce raw materials of her Industrial Revolution. Hence, Nypa palms were planted at the strategic eroding zones. Its spread all over the Delta earnestly started the environmental degradation of our area of study.³⁶

As a result, the Delta Ijo went into Nigerian politics for the development of their ailing region. One of them, Ernest Ikoli, proposed a Nigerian Federation of four units: Eastern, Western, Northern, and Southern States or Regions. But Governor Arthur Richards of Nigeria took to Ikoli's second idea of regionalizing Nigeria into three regions: East, West, and North in 1946. Without creating the Southern Region for the Niger Delta people deepened their developmental problems.

This made Britain to appoint the Willink Commission of Inquiry in September 1958 to propound solutions to their problems. Hence, the Commission declared the Delta a 'Special Area' for development. This gave rise to the establishment of the Niger Delta Development Board. The Board which was mandated to transform the Niger Delta into a developed region within ten years used the first five years for developmental survey and the stabilization of the traditional economy of the indigenous people. They could not go beyond this stage when it was short-lived by the military regime that replaced the First Republican Government of Nigeria. As a result, the Nigerian military politics took a different dimension towards the development of the Niger Delta.

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