

# Partnership for Environmental Justice in the Niger Delta: The Actors, the Options, Possibilities and Limitations □

J. Shola Omotola

Email: sholaomotola@yahoo.com

Department of Political Science and Public Administration,

Redeemer's University,

Redemption City,

Ogun State

Nigeria

## Abstract

This paper analyses the imperative of partnership in the conceptualisation and execution of a sustainable environmental justice system in the Niger Delta. In doing so, the paper identifies the key actors in the process of forging such a partnership, most notably the federal, state and local governments; the oil majors; and the local communities. It also discusses available options, namely an all-inclusive, participatory, bottom-up approach that is people-driven versus the usual state-centric, top-down approach, which has tended to dominate official responses to the Niger Delta question. It also examines the possibilities and limitations of such a process. The paper submits that all these actors are of equal significance, but with different roles to play in the partnership, and that the bottom-up option offers better prospects of genuine partnership and success. Partnership not only provides opportunities for all stakeholders to collectively identify and be informed about environmental issues at stake, but also allows for popular participation, including open and effective dialogue among stakeholders. This is apart from fostering relationships and providing a platform for addressing identified environmental justice concerns, as well as making it possible to integrate available knowledge on environmental justice, and in the process tapping into local initiatives in solving local problems. Attaining this form of partnership requires that the affected/target population assumes higher levels of empowerment and ownership, both in environmental policy conception and implementation, as well as freedom of active participation. It also requires that adequate attention be paid to the gender dimension of environmental injustice. This is essential because women have been found to be vastly affected by environmental insecurity in the Niger Delta. After all, women have constituted themselves into one of the most formidable movements for environmental justice in the Niger Delta.

## Introduction

The environmental problems of the Niger Delta, ranging from the degradation of environmental resources through the pollution of the land, water and the air; denial of means of livelihood, particularly farming and fishing; and attendant health hazards, are already dominant and recurrent themes in the extant literature<sup>1</sup>. The responses to these environmental, security and developmental issues, especially by the federal government of Nigeria, the oil multinationals and

---

□ Paper for presentation at the AEGIS 4th European Conference on African Studies will be held on 15-18 June 2011 in Uppsala, Sweden. This is a draft, please do not cite.

<sup>1</sup> Cyril Obi and Siri Aas Rustad, eds., *Oil and Insecurity in the Niger Delta: Managing the Complex Politics of Petrol-Violence* (London and New York: Zed Books and Nordic Africa Institute, 2010); Kiikpoye A. Aaron and Dawari George, eds., *Placebo as Medicine: The Poverty of Development Intervention and Conflict Resolution Strategies in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria* (Port Harcourt: Kemuela Publications, 2010).

the local communities, have also been vastly documented<sup>2</sup>. However, these accounts pay little attention to the importance of partnership in redressing the challenges of environmental insecurity in the Niger Delta.

This paper basically seeks to address this concern, with the primary aim of highlighting the significance of partnership in the conceptualisation and execution of a sustainable environmental justice system in the region. The paper identifies the key actors in the process of forging such a partnership, most notably the federal, state and local governments; the oil majors; and the local communities. It also discusses available options, namely an all-inclusive, participatory, bottom-up approach that is people-driven versus the prevailing state-centric, up-down approach; and the possibilities and limitations of such a process. The paper submits that all these actors are of equal significance, but with different roles to play in the partnership, and that the bottom-up option offers better prospects of genuine partnership and success. Though the current existence of a Niger Delta presidency for the first time in Nigeria's history and the ongoing amnesty initiative of the federal government (and some states in the region too), offer some possibilities in forging such a partnership; the internal contradictions in the Niger Delta struggle, including pervasive official corruption at both the state and local government levels, and the opportunity for predation that the conflict environment offers for militants, pose serious limitations for the success of such a partnership.

The paper is divided into five sections. Following this brief introduction, the first section conceptualizes environmental justice, showing its desirability and applicability to the Niger Delta case. The second discusses the contending options in promoting environmental justice in the Niger Delta, namely the bottom-up versus the top-down approaches. This is followed by an analysis of the imperative of partnership by the key actors in the Niger Delta question for a sustainable environmental justice. The last substantive section of the paper engages the factors that may work for and against the building of such a partnership for sustainable environmental justice in the Niger Delta. The final section recapitulates the main arguments of the paper, before concluding.

### **The Imperatives of Environmental Justice in the Niger Delta**

It is apposite to begin with a clarification of the concept of environmental justice. As a concept, environmental justice basically has to do with all institutional measures, aimed at ensuring a sustainable clean environment to all, irrespective of their identities. The California Energy Commission posits that ‘the concept behind the term "environmental justice" is that all people – regardless of their race, color, nation or origin or income – are able to enjoy equally high levels of environmental protection’<sup>3</sup>. Another useful definition sees environmental justice as the ‘fair treatment of people of all races, income, and cultures with respect to the development, implementation and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies, and their meaningful involvement in the decision-making processes of the government’.<sup>4</sup> This is in line with the position of the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), which defines environmental justice as ‘the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, or income with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and

---

<sup>2</sup> Osaghae, Eghosa E., ‘The Ogoni Uprising: Oil Politics, Minority Agitation and the Future of the Nigerian State’, *African Affairs*, 94, 376 (1995), pp. 325-344; Fynas, Georges J., ‘Corporate and State Responses to Anti-Oil Protests in the Niger Delta’, *African Affairs*, 100, 398 (2001); Omotola, Shola J., ‘From the OMPADEC to the NDDC: An Assessment of State Responses to Environmental Insecurity in the Niger Delta, Nigeria’, *African Today*, 54, 1 (2007), pp. 73 – 89.

<sup>3</sup> California Energy Commission, ‘Environmental Justice’ available at [http://www.energy.ca.gov/public\\_adviser/environmental\\_justice\\_faq.html](http://www.energy.ca.gov/public_adviser/environmental_justice_faq.html) (accessed on 17 May, 2011).

<sup>4</sup> See ‘What is Environmental Justice’, available at <http://www.usccr.gov/pubs/envjust/ch2.htm> (accessed on 17 May, 2011).

policies'<sup>5</sup>. Environmental justice is also seen as 'the principle that environmental costs and amenities ought to be equitably distributed within society. Due to the ethical, political, and public-health implications, and because many choices confront those researching environmental justice, standardized measures are needed to inform public dialogue and policy'<sup>6</sup>. For the EPA, this is only achievable when 'everyone enjoys the same degree of protection from environmental and health hazards and equal access to the decision-making process to have a healthy environment in which to live, learn, and work'<sup>7</sup>.

While these definitions are useful, they are, however, not comprehensive enough to be regarded as jointly exhaustive of the entire domain of issues involved in environmental justice. A more elaborate way of understanding environmental justice was given at the People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit held in Washington, D.C on 27 October 1991, where the following comprehensive list, with respect to the US context, was adopted as the main principles of environmental justice, namely<sup>8</sup>:

1. Environmental justice affirms the sacredness of Mother Earth, ecological unity and the interdependence of all species, and the right to be free from ecological destruction.
2. Environmental justice demands that public policy be based on mutual respect and justice for all peoples, free from any form of discrimination or bias.
3. Environmental justice mandates the right to ethical, balanced and responsible uses of land and renewable resources in the interest of a sustainable planet for humans and other living things.
4. Environmental justice calls for universal protection from nuclear testing, extraction, production and disposal of toxic/hazardous wastes and poisons and nuclear testing that threaten the fundamental right to clean air, land, water, and food.
5. Environmental justice affirms the fundamental right to political, economic, cultural and environmental self-determination of all peoples.
6. Environmental justice demands the cessation of the production of all toxins, hazardous wastes, and radioactive materials, and that all past and current producers be held strictly accountable to the people for detoxification and the containment at the point of production.
7. Environmental justice demands the right to participate as equal partners at every level of decision-making including needs assessment, planning, implementation, enforcement and evaluation.
8. Environmental justice affirms the right of all workers to a safe and healthy work environment, without being forced to choose between an unsafe livelihood and unemployment. It also affirms the right of those who work at home to be free from environmental hazards.
9. Environmental justice protects the right of victims of environmental injustice to receive full compensation and reparations for damages as well as quality health care.
10. Environmental justice considers governmental acts of environmental injustice a violation of international law, the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, and the United Nations Convention on Genocide.

---

<sup>5</sup>US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), 'Environmental Justice', available at <http://www.epa.gov/environmentaljustice/> (accessed 17 May, 2011).

<sup>6</sup> John Harner, Kee Warner, John Pierce and Tom Huber, 'Urban Environmental Justice Indices', *The Professional Geographer*, 54, Issue 3 (2002), pp. 318–331.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> 'What is Environmental Justice?', available at <http://eelink.net/EJ/whatis.html> (accessed on 17 May, 2011).

11. Environmental justice must recognize a special legal and natural relationship of Native Peoples to the U.S. government through treaties, agreements, compacts, and covenants affirming sovereignty and self-determination.

12. Environmental justice affirms the need for urban and rural ecological policies to clean up and rebuild our cities and rural areas in balance with nature, honoring the cultural integrity of all our communities, and providing fair access for all to the full range of resources.

13. Environmental justice calls for the strict enforcement of principles of informed consent, and a halt to the testing of experimental reproductive and medical procedures and vaccinations on people of color.

14. Environmental justice opposes the destructive operations of multi-national corporations.

15. Environmental justice opposes military occupation, repression and exploitation of lands, peoples and cultures, and other life forms.

16. Environmental justice calls for the education of present and future generations which emphasizes social and environmental issues, based on our experience and an appreciation of our diverse cultural perspectives.

17. Environmental justice requires that we, as individuals, make personal and consumer choices to consume as little of Mother Earth's resources and to produce as little waste as possible; and make the conscious decision to challenge and reprioritize our lifestyles to insure the health of the natural world for present and future generations.

It follows, then, that any people or region denied these principles of environmental justice have become victims of environmental injustice and therefore requires environmental justice. Such regions or people are generally referred to as Environmental Justice Communities (EJC), defined as:

those where residents are predominantly minorities or low-income; where residents have been excluded from the environmental policy setting or decision-making process; where they are subject to a disproportionate impact from one or more environmental hazards; and where residents experience disparate implementation of environmental regulations, requirements, practices and activities in their communities. Environmental justice efforts attempt to address the inequities of environmental protection in these communities<sup>9</sup>.

In relation to our case study, the Niger Delta, it is obvious that an EJC exists in the region. This position is predicated upon the fact that most of the listed principles of environmental justice are either completely lacking, or grossly violated where they exist. Not only is the region perpetually subjected to diverse forms of environmental insecurities, including environmental pollution and attendant health hazards and denial of means of livelihood, notably farming and fishing, but also that the people of the region have been largely marginalized, if not excluded, in the search to possible solutions<sup>10</sup>. It is largely for this reason of marginalization, nay exclusion that almost all prescriptions to the Niger Delta question have failed to yield the desired results. Until all core actors in the Niger Delta question, most notably the government at all levels –federal, state and local- and the oil multinationals realize that the attainment of sustainable solution to the Niger Delta problem is wholly dependent on bringing the people to the centre as the owner and driver of the process, the deepening crisis of the region may continue for decades ahead.

---

<sup>9</sup> US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), 'Environmental Justice', available at <http://www.epa.gov/environmentaljustice/> (accessed 17 May, 2011).

<sup>10</sup> For recent insight, see J. Shola Omotola, 'Conceptual and Theoretical Issues in Development with Reference to the Niger Delta', in Kiikpoye A. Aaron and Dawari George, eds., *Placebo as Medicine: The Poverty of Development Intervention and Conflict Resolution Strategies in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria* (Port Harcourt: Kemuela Publications, 2010), pp.19-36.

It is against this background that many believe, and quite correctly, that the only way to guarantee environmental justice in the Niger Delta, like in any other place, is to bring the people, especially the affected communities, back into the centre of actions. But rather than do this, as we will see in the next section, the reverse has so far been the case.

### **Contending Options: Bottom-Up versus Top-Down**

There are basically two contending options in enforcing environmental justice in the Niger Delta. These are the bottom-up and the top-down approaches. The bottom-up approach emphasizes a participatory framework, through which all members and segments of the EJC, together with the government and oil multinationals, interact in finding a lasting solution to the problem of environmental injustice. Under such an option, the main responsibility of the government is to provide an enabling environment for dialogue among the EJC on the one hand, and between it and the EJC. Under such circumstances, and in an ideal situation, all policy responses will flow directly from the outcomes of the engagement between then two.

Counterpoised to the above is the top-down approach, whose distinguishing feature is the marginalization/exclusion of the local population in the policy process. Here, the government and oil multinationals hardly care about what the EJC thinks; rather, their main preoccupation has always been how to sustain oil production, frustrate and annihilate all forms of protests that could hinder production to full capacity, thereby maximizing profit. This option often come at a very high cost to the oil producing communities, exemplified by the resort to state excesses of diverse forms such as military operations against environmental justice movements. But rather than ameliorate the situation, this approach, both in the short and long term, can only complicate matters, thereby prolonging the lifespan of environmental insecurity and injustice. It also allows for the easy corruption of all interventions by the power elite.

With the benefit of hindsight, it is obvious that core actors in oil and environmental politics in the Niger Delta have, most often, expressed preferences for the top-down approach. This is exemplified by the series of dissent movements in the Niger Delta and governments violent responses to them<sup>11</sup>. For example, the Isaac Boro revolt, the Ogoni uprising, the Ijaw Youth Council and the Kaiama declaration, the agitation for resource control and the rise of militias such as MEND, among others, were all met with violence by the state. In the process of criminalizing protests in the Niger Delta, the oil multinationals have been known for complicities in diverse ways, including the politicization of corporate social responsibility, resort to divide and rule tactics among communities of the Niger Delta, and outright militarization.

The result, as many have already known, is the continuing denial of environmental justice and the escalation of violence in the Niger Delta. The lesson learned, if any, is that the search for sustainable environmental justice in the Niger Delta requires a collaborative effort of all stakeholders in oil and environmental politics. And if such collaborations will yield the desired result, it must be owned and driven by the people. This is, however, not to say that all government responses have been violent. There have also been some institutional responses such as the OMPADEC and the NDDC. The problems with these institutional responses include official corruption and poor level of embeddedness in the communities they are meant to cater for.

### **Towards a Partnership for Environmental Justice**

As the analyses of the options reveal, the bottom-up approach offers a better path to the attainment of environmental justice in the Niger Delta. Despite its theoretical robustness and practical utility, experiences over the years have shown that the search for environmental justice in the Niger Delta has leaned more on the top-down approach. This partly explains why after years and series of interventions by the various actors, the Niger Delta remains a pitiable environmental site. The poor

---

<sup>11</sup> J. Shola Omotola, 'Dissent and State Excesses in the Niger Delta', *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, 29, 1 (2009), pp.

level of coordination in the responses of the various actors, that is, the tendency to do it alone, rather than cooperate, remains another explanation for the failure of the responses.

In other to navigate the problem and promote sustainable environmental justice in the Niger Delta, there is need to promote partnership among the various actors. Partnership entails:

*A long-term commitment and reflects a condition of mutual dependency where both client and subcontractors are in a position to influence the other by their behaviour... is a set of normative rules determining what behaviour is permissible and what constitutes a violation of trust. The rules are designed to facilitate exchange in a situation otherwise open to exploitation*<sup>12</sup>.

This suggests that partnership requires sharing of generalized norms of reciprocity, trust and guiding principles. Partnership without these features may therefore be inimical to the very objective that necessitated it in the first instance. Trust implies 'believing that when offered the chance, s/he is not likely to behave in a way which is damaging to us'<sup>13</sup>. The guiding principles include congruence of mission, values and operating principles; effectiveness; accountability; transparency; mutuality; no hidden agenda; sustainability; minimizing demands; maximizing distinctive competence; and realistic time-scales<sup>14</sup>.

The benefits of partnership, in this context, are many. First, it provides opportunities for all stakeholders to collectively identify and be informed about environmental issues at stake. Second, it also allows for popular participation, including open and effective dialogue among stakeholders. This is apart from fostering relationships and providing a platform for addressing identified environmental justice concerns. Third, it makes it possibly to integrate available knowledge on environmental justice, and in the process tapping into local initiatives in solving local problems. Put differently, partnership for environmental justice makes it possible for all actors in oil and environmental politics, most especially those directly affected by oil and environmental exploitation and decisions, namely the government and oil companies in pursuit of stability for sustainable production and revenues, the oil-producing communities in search of clean environment, fair share of the oil proceeds, or better still resource control, to be able to participate in the formulation, and probably, implementation of those decisions. This is crucial because, as the California Energy Commission rightly observes, 'an informed and involved community is a necessary and integral part of the process to protect the environment'<sup>15</sup>

Attaining this form of partnership requires that the affected/target population assumes higher levels of empowerment and ownership, both in environmental policy conception and implementation, as well as freedom of active participation. It also requires that adequate attention be paid to the gender dimension of environmental injustice. This is essentially so because women have been found to be vastly affected by environmental insecurity in the Niger Delta. The concern here, therefore, pertains to the question of non-discrimination and paying adequate attention to issues of vulnerability and empowerment. Their vulnerability of women makes them to suffer disempowerment socio-culturally,

---

<sup>12</sup> Harris, J. 'Working Together: The Principles and Practice of Cooperation and Partnership', in Robinson, D., Hewitt, T.; and Harriss, J. (eds) *Managing Development, Understating Inter-Organisational Relationships*, London: Sage Publications, 2000, p. 228.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, p.236; quoted in J. Shola Omotola, 'Challenges of Development in Africa: New Regionalism and Globalisation', *World Affairs: A Journal of International Affairs*, 6, 2 (2010).

<sup>14</sup> Penrose, A., 'Partnership' in Robinson, D. et al (eds), *Managing Development, Understanding Inter-Organizational Relations*, London: Sage Publications, 2000, p.p. 249-250.

<sup>15</sup> California Energy Commission, 'Environmental Justice', available at [http://www.energy.ca.gov/public\\_adviser/environmental\\_justice\\_faq.html](http://www.energy.ca.gov/public_adviser/environmental_justice_faq.html) (accessed on 17 May, 2011).

politically and economically. It is, therefore, hardly surprising to see that women have constituted themselves into one of the most formidable movement for environmental justice in the Niger Delta<sup>16</sup>.

It is needless to add that gender issues have become central components not only of human rights advocacy, but also in policy and development circles<sup>17</sup>. There are several international legal and policy instruments that seek to address the gendered gap of development. These include the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW); the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action; the Beijing Platform of Action and Beijing+10; Resolution 2000/5 of the Commission on Human Rights also affirmed the need to apply a gender perspective in the implementation of the rights to development, *inter alia*, by ensuring that women play an active role in the development process. It emphasizes that the empowerment of women and their full participation on the basis of equality in all spheres of society is fundamental for the overall development of society.

To conclude this section, it is important to note the actors to be involved in the building of the kind of partnership as envisaged for promoting environmental justice in the Niger Delta. Essentially, these actors are two-fold, the governmental and non-governmental actors. At the governmental level, the federal, state and local governments are the core institutions, which must see themselves as partners in progress, rather than as competitors. From recent experiences, these vertical levels of governments have tended to be in a kind of unhealthy competition over issues of environmental justice in the Niger Delta. This competition is reflected in the politics of revenue allocation, agitation for resource control and eventual militarization of the struggle. Moreover, it is also important that these various levels of government encourage transparency and accountability in the handlings of the Niger Delta question. This is important because so far, the reverse would appear to have been the case, epitomized by several cases of official corruption at all these levels of governments. For example, the most notable institutional responses by the federal government to environmental and developmental concerns of the Niger Delta, particularly the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC), have been known to have been underproductive for corrupt reasons<sup>18</sup>. At the level of state government, corruption is reputed as one of the main reasons why despite huge revenue allocation to Niger Delta states as a result of 13 percent derivation, there is little in terms of development project to show for it<sup>19</sup>. The situation is not different at local government level in the Niger Delta, where corruption has continuously undermined development of and environmental needs of the people<sup>20</sup>. Corruption issues must, therefore, be thoroughly dealt with in any sustainable partnership for environmental justice in the Niger Delta. Else, scarce resources for prosecuting environmental justice would end up in private purses and the problem will persist.

At the non-governmental level, attentions must be paid to the major oil companies and the oil bearing/producing communities, especially vulnerable groups such as women and youths, as well as environmental rights movements and NGOs. Major oil companies operating in the Niger Delta include Chevron and Shell, while notable environmental rights movements include Environmental Right Action (ERA) and the defunct Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP), among

---

<sup>16</sup> For the documented exploits of women in the Niger Delta struggles, see Oluwatoyin Oluwaniyi, 'Women Protests in the Niger Delta', in Cyril Obi and Siri Aas Rustad, eds., *Oil and Insecurity in the Niger Delta: Managing the Complex Politics of Petrol-Violence* (London and New York: Zed Books and Nordic Africa Institute, 2010), pp.150-166; Charles Ukeje, 'From Aba to Ughorodo: Gender Identity and Alternative Discourse of Social Protests among Women in the Oil Delta of Nigeria', *Oxford Development Studies*, 32, 4 (2004), pp.605-617.

<sup>17</sup> J. Shola Omotola, 'Conceptual and Theoretical Issues in Development with Reference to the Niger Delta', in Kiikpoye A. Aaron and Dawari George, eds., *Placebo as Medicine: The Poverty of Development Intervention and Conflict Resolution Strategies in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria* (Port Harcourt: Kemuela Publications, 2010), pp.19-36.

<sup>18</sup> J. Shola Omotola, 'From the OMPADEC to the NDDC: An Assessment of State Responses to Environmental Insecurity in the Niger Delta, Nigeria', *Africa Today*, 54, 1, 2007.

<sup>19</sup> David Enweremadu, 'The Vicious Cycle: Oil, Corruption and Armed Conflicts in the Niger Delta', Proceeding of the International Conference on the Nigerian State, Oil Industry and the Niger Delta, Niger Delta University, Bayelsa State, 2008.

<sup>20</sup> Human Rights Watch, *Chop Fine: The Human Rights Impact of Local Government Corruption in Rivers State* HRW Reports 19(2A), 2007.

other. All these organizations must be adequately represented in the partnership for environmental justice in the Niger Delta, if it is to be successful. It is only when all these actors are well integrated into a holistic framework that a participatory basis is provided for environmental justice. But how feasible is the task of building such a partnership on a sustainable basis? This is the question to be addressed in the next section.

### **Possibilities and Limitations**

The possibilities of building a sustainable partnership for environmental justice among these actors is hinged on a number of factors. First and probably the most important is the emergence, for the first time in the history of post-independence Nigeria, of a Niger Delta presidency. After serving as a vice president and later President following the death of Yar'Adua, President Goodluck Jonathan has just assumed office on 29 May, 2011 on the basis of his own original mandate. It is expected that the President will use his position to promote the rapid transformation of the Niger Delta. Failure to do so will automatically shift attention away from the argument that the Niger Delta region has been neglected to be victims of oil and environmental politics because people of the region had never been privileged to be part of the mainstream power structure of the country. With Jonathan's presidency, such an argument may no longer be tenable. This is more so given the enormity of power vested in the Nigerian presidency by virtue of the nature of the presidential system of government in operation.

Moreover, the new government inherited an amnesty programme for the Niger Delta from the past administration, which sought to find a lasting solution to the Niger Delta question<sup>21</sup>. As part of the government that initiated the amnesty programme, it is expected that the new government will pursue the amnesty programme to a logical conclusion. If attained, the amnesty programme is supposed to engender a comprehensive demilitarization and development of the region, thereby creating a peaceful atmosphere for the effective implementation of environmental justice policies in the region. At least for some time now, especially since Jonathan assumed office as President following the death of Yar'Adua, there had been a drastic reduction in the level of militancy in the region. As full president with real mandate, there are reasons to expect more stability in the region. At least, stable oil revenue is required to address the problems of the region.

Arguably, it is safe to say that the success of President Goodluck Jonathan will be partly evaluated against the background of what he is able to do in resolving the Niger Delta question. Such a measure of success or failure is likely to be much more predominant in the Niger Delta where he comes from. If rated to be successful, there is the probability that his people may agitate that he goes for a second term in office. Otherwise, he risks the possibility of being denied a heroic home-coming after his tenure in office. It is not likely that President Jonathan will prefer this option. That being the case, he may be compelled to pay serious attention to the Niger Delta question.

Nevertheless, there are notable limitations to be contended with. The most notable of such limitations has to do with the internal contradictions in the Niger Delta struggle, particularly pervasive official corruption at both the state and local government levels, and the opportunity for predation that the conflict environment offers for militants. With respect to official corruption, studies have shown that the Niger Delta has become notorious for official corruption at all levels of governance. While it is too early to make any definitive statement about the impact the new government will make in

---

<sup>21</sup> On the amnesty programme, see Cyril Obi and Siri Aas Rustad, 'Conclusion: Amnesty and Post-Amnesty Peace, Is the Window of Opportunity Closing for the Niger Delta?', in in Cyril Obi and Siri Aas Rustad, eds., *Oil and Insecurity in the Niger Delta: Managing the Complex Politics of Petrol-Violence* (London and New York: Zed Books and Nordic Africa Institute, 2010), pp.200-224; Aaron Kiiikpoye, 'Beyond the Euphoria: Challenges of Amnesty Implementation for Sustainable Peace in the Niger Delta', in Kiiikpoye A. Aaron and Dawari George, eds., *Placebo as Medicine: The Poverty of Development Intervention and Conflict Resolution Strategies in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria* (Port Harcourt: Kemuela Publications, 2010), pp.202-220.

combating corruption, it is unlikely that it will embark on any fundamental reform measures in the area of anti-corruption. There are already insinuations that the new government is shielding some top raking government officials of the previous administration from arrest and prosecution.

Again, the fact that President Jonathan is a Niger Deltan also has its own trappings and calls for caution. This is because over concentration on the Niger Delta may create the wrongful impression that he is a sectional leader, who perhaps, is out to avenge years of neglect of the region attributed to past leaders of the country from the majority ethnic groups. The point assumes greater significance, following the unhealthy controversy over power rotation within the ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP), for which Jonathan was believed to have betrayed through the power of incumbency; and the attendant post-election violence. Efforts must be made to redress these and related contradictions.

### **Concluding Reflections**

The paper has attempted to make a modest contribution toward filling an important gap in the vastly growing body of knowledge on the Niger Delta. While the environmental and developmental problems of the Niger Delta, as well as the responses to these environmental, security and developmental issues, especially by the federal government of Nigeria, the oil multinationals and the local communities have also been vastly documented in the extant literature, these accounts tend to pay little attention to the importance of partnership in redressing the challenges of environmental insecurity in the Niger Delta. This paper basically addressed this concern, highlighting the significance of partnership in the conceptualisation and execution of a sustainable environmental justice system in the region. The paper identifies the key actors in the process of forging such a partnership, most notably the federal, state and local governments; the oil majors; and the local communities. It also discusses available options, namely an all-inclusive, participatory, bottom-up approach that is people-driven versus the usual state-centric, up-down approach; and the possibilities and limitations of such a process. The paper submits that all these actors are of equal significance, but with different roles to play in the partnership, and that the bottom-up option offers better prospects of genuine partnership and success. Though the current existence of a Niger Delta presidency for the first time in Nigeria's history and the ongoing amnesty initiative of the federal government (and some states in the region too), offer some possibilities in forging such a partnership; the internal contradictions in the Niger Delta struggle, including pervasive official corruption at both the state and local government levels, and the opportunity for predation that the conflict environment offers for militants, pose serious limitations for the success of such a partnership. These contradictions must be carefully engaged if a sustainable partnership for environmental justice in the Niger Delta is to be realistic.

