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A Concise View of Niger Delta Region of Nigeria: An Interpretation of a Nigeria Historian

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Abstract

Niger Delta which is the bulk of crude oil reserves in the Nation has over the years come under severe misinterpretation from several folks in Nigeria. However, the research gives a concise and historical view of Niger Delta region, which dispassionately and scholarly the region is presently in three states in Nigeria, which are Delta, Bayelsa and Rivers State. Furthermore, the research argues that a delta does not have to produce oil neither must an oil producing community be in a delta to be recognized. Thus, the research examined a Delta, core Delta, geographical definition of Niger Delta, definition of Niger Delta and political definition of Niger Delta. A clear distinction was made in analyzing these facts. Map was used to further illustrate the originality of Bayelsa, Delta and Rivers State as the core Niger Delta and table was adopted to concisely show the rivers and the estuaries (from west to east) of Niger Delta system. Today, the political Niger Delta, region comprises Nine states, which are Abia, Imo, Rivers, Delta, Bayelsa, Edo, Akwa Ibom, Ondo and Cross Rivers State and 185 local government council area. This is the definition used presently by NDDC. The research sum up that, the political Niger Delta was done base on political oil revenue distribution, which politically provides a spirit of solidarity for ethnic minorities of southern Nigeria and economically, it serve as a guarantee for inclusion among states to enjoy the 13% derivation and other ancillary benefit form Niger Delta donors.

Key Words: *DELTA, NIGER DELTA, NDDC, NDBDB, NDE.*

Introduction: Niger Delta region is home to more than 10 million folks. According to the 2006 census conducted in Nigeria, the core Niger Delta states recorded a population as follows: Bayelsa State 1,703,358, Delta State 4, 098,391 and Rivers State 5, 185, 400 (NPC, 2006). According to Azaiki (2003, 39) Niger Delta is the largest wetland in Africa and third in the world. The region of which is the bulk of crude oil deposit in the Nation, which typical serves as the nation livewire of sustainability has over the years been misinterpreted historically. Some many Nigerians see Niger Delta region from the political definition or point of view, allowing the historical (core) view and Definition to decline due to politics of oil revenue and stronger political elites in the center to influenced things in favour of the political Niger Delta region.

A research like this need to come up with concise definition of some questions such as, what is a Delta, what is Niger Delta, geographical definition of Niger Delta, the core Niger Delta and political Niger Delta definition.

Delta: A Delta is a landform that forms from deposition of sediment carried by a river as the flow leaves its mouth and enters slower moving or standing water. This occurs where a river enters an ocean, sea, estuary, lake, reservoir or another river that cannot transport away the supplied sediment (<https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/River-delta>). Examples of prominent delta in the world are the Ganges Delta in India, Nile Delta in Egypt, Niger Delta in Nigeria, Mekong Delta in Vietnam and Mississippi Delta in the United States of America. By this definition, it is crystal clear that a delta is essential a natural creation and not what some influential Nigerians are trying to make it to be, by associating it politically to oil production.

A delta does not have to produce oil neither must an oil producing community be in a delta to be recognized. It is important that this distinction and fact are appreciated, understood and taken into proper account by us to be able to define and discuss the Niger Delta scholarly and dispassionately.

Niger Delta: Niger Delta is the Delta of the Niger Delta River sitting directly on the bight of Biafra side of the Gulf of Guinea on the Atlantic Ocean in Nigeria (<https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Niger-Delta>).

According to Azaiki (2003:52) Niger Delta bulged out into the Gulf of guinea between the bight (Bay) of Benin and the Bight of Biafra Covers more than 10,000 square miles, and has a shoreline of about 200 miles of its fourteen main tributaries.

Geographical Definition of Niger Delta: Niger Delta region depends solely on latitude, continental position, attitude and the local regional topography such as the nearly mountains. The Niger Delta falls under a tropical rain climate, which occurs between 4° N – 10° N of the equator and at an altitude below 1000 meters, mean annual rainfall is always high, although it varies within the region (Azaiki, 2003:40). The River Niger with a catchment area of approximately $1,150,000\text{km}^2$ took its sources from the Gulf of Guinea; its Delta is in Nigeria. Studies conducted by (RSG, 1980 and NDES 1997:8) indicate either Onya or Samabri is the real tip of the Niger Delta. However, this is where the river bifurcates into the Forcados River (western branch) and Nun River (eastern branch). These further divide into an interconnected system of distributaries, rivers, rivulets, creeks and creeklets before finally debauching into the Atlantic Ocean (see map.1).



Source: www.google.com.ng/search?q=map+of+Niger+delta&biw=1366&bih=667&tbn

Additionally, of the twenty one estuaries in the region only seven receives any appreciable part of the Niger’s discharge. By implication this means that many of the waterways that thought to be part of the Niger Delta are technically speaking not part of delta. See table 1.2 for details below.

Table 1.1: Rivers And Estuaries (From West To East) Of The Niger Delta

Sl. No.	Estuaries	Percent of Niger Discharge	Contributing Rives
1	Benin	0	Ossiomo, Ethiopia-Jamieson
2	Escravos	0	Benin
3	Forcados	15	Ase, Warri, Okpari
4	Ramo	24	Forcados
5	Dodo	6	Forcados
6	Pennington	0	-
7	Digatoro	<1	Nun, Forcados
8	Engatoro	0	-

9	Koluama	3	Nun, Forcados
10	Fishtown	<1	Nun, Forcados
11	Sangana	15	Nun, Forcados
12	Nun	24	Nun, Forcados
13	Brass	9	Nun, Forcados
14	St Nicholas	<1	Orashi
15	St Barbara	0	-
16	St Bartholomeo	<1	Orashi
17	Sombreiro	1	Sambreiro, Orashi
18	New Calabar	0	New Calabar
19	Bonny	0	New Calabar
20	Andoni	0	-
21	Imo	0	Imo

Source: Environmental Resources Managers Limited (1997) NDES Vol. 4. Phase 1 Report.

This also shows that there are other river systems running parallel to the River Niger, which drains the coastal plains to the west and east of the delta but are linked to the network of distributaries, creeks, estuaries and streams which makes up the Niger Delta and so, have come to be seen as part of the region. The southernmost tip of the delta is at palm point, south of Akassa at the estuaries of river nun (NDES, 1997:4).

Core Niger Delta: The Sir Henry Willink's Commission set up by the British Government, saw Niger Delta region in 1958 to be composed only the –“three divisions (Ogoni, Degema and Brass) together with the western Ijaws” (Willink 1958:51). Presently today, these three divisions are found in three natural Niger Delta State, which are Delta, Bayelsa and Rivers. The discovery of Sir Henry Willink Commission saw the birth of the Niger Delta Basin Development Board (NDBDB) in 1961 by the first Republic Government of Nigeria. Historically and cartographically, the core Niger delta consists of the present day Bayelsa, Delta and Rivers States. The core Niger is unique by virtue of its size (nearly 26,000km²), its location and its origin. Although situated in one of the wettest places on earth, it is fed by a river that passes largely through Sahel and dry Savannah landscape (geologically some of the oldest on earth). The Niger Delta is within the continental margin of West Africa on the Gulf of Guinea, evolving as a consequence of the separation of the Africa plate from the south-America plate during the Jurassic period (Azaiki, 2003: 42).

Thus, the cartographically Niger Delta covers the area supplied with water from the River Niger and Benue as they flow together after Lokoji (the conference) to empty themselves into the sea. These rivers (now joined) break up at Abutor into River Nun and Forcados. The Niger Delta proper is that landmass and water body traversed by the River Nun and Forcados and their tributaries. Bayelsa State is the portion of that landmass and water traversed by the River Nun, which again breaks up into many rivers and creeks that empty Santa Barbara, St Nicholas, Brass, Nun and Sangana (Alagoa, 1999). According to Niger Delta Environmental Survey's (NDES, 1997) cartographical definition placed the

limits of the Niger Delta as North at Aboh, west fast to the Imo River estuary and south to palm point, below Akassa and Nun River estuary, while the willink commission's report of 1958 also supports the NDES definition the Niger Delta.

However, the NDES and Willink commission report of 1958 about Niger Delta should therefore be regarded as authentic and correct objectively and scholarly. The Niger Delta is a specific area inhabited by the Ijaws principally, the Isokos, the Urhobos, Itsekiris, the Ogonis as well as some Kwale areas. These are the areas that ought to benefit (Odondiri, 1999:13). From the protagonist of the geographical definitions, the Niger Delta people are the Indigenous inhabitants of the three core Niger Delta States (Ebeku, 2006:20). The core Niger Delta today consist of more than 50 ethnic groups, which are Ijo, Isoko, Urhobo, Ogoni, Engenne, Andoni, Okrika, Ikwerre, Itsekiri, Kalabari, Epie-Atissa, Ogbia, Abua, Odua, Ibani, Ogba/Egbema and Degema etc. It is crystal clear that the views are historically correct and any other addition is political objectively. See Map 1.2



Source: www.google.com.ng/search?q=map+of+Niger+delta&biw=1366&bih=667&tbm

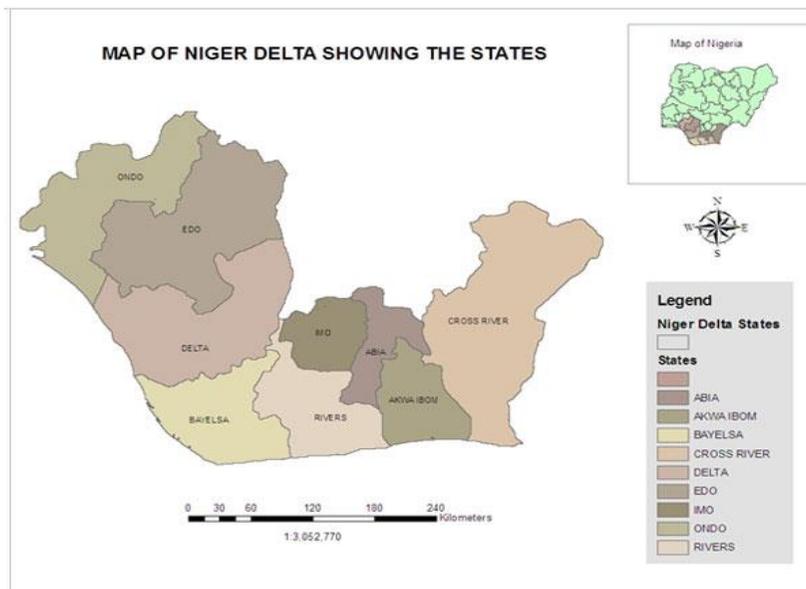
Political Niger Delta Definition: According to Eni Group, Nigeria Agip Oil company (NAOC) "Niger Delta one of the largest in the world, is a complex and fragile system of wetlands and dry lands covering about 70,000km² of which 20,000 are seasonally flooded zones, tidal and swamp areas. Thus, the Niger Delta covers an area of 70,000km sq and consists of a number of distinct ecological zones, coastal ridge barriers, mangrove swamps, fresh water swamps, forests and lowland rain forest. Due to politics of oil revenue distribution they have been a conflicting plethora of definitions of the Niger Delta all aimed at distributing the geographical definition with a view to securing higher shares of the oil revenue. In 2000 Olusegun Obasanjo's government included Abia, Akwa Ibom, Cross

River, Edo, Imo and Ondo States to the core Niger Delta making it a total number of nine states constituting as the major Niger Delta region. However, there is another prominent opinion by Nigerians that treats the six states of the southern zone of Nigeria, namely, Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo, and Rivers as constituting the Niger Delta or south-south zone of Nigeria.

Although all this views above are close to the geographical definition, it is obvious that its major attractions are political and economical. Thus economically it serves as a guarantee for inclusions among the states to enjoy the 13% derivation and other ancillary benefits from donors to the Niger Delta region, while politically it provides a spirit of solidarity for the ethnic minorities of southern Nigeria. According to NDES, 1997:7 and Ebeku, 2006:20 there are also those who defined the Niger Delta in terms of “core and peripheral areas, according to this view, the core Niger Delta consists of Delta, Bayelsa and Rivers, and to some extent, Akwa-Ibom, while the periphery comprises Ondo, Edo, Abia, Imo and Cross Rivers States.

Significantly, these two views is an elastic school which rejects the core peripheral dichotomy and argues that all oil producing states, be they in the core or periphery are members of the Niger Delta region, no more no less. This broader definition accommodates all oil producing areas and others considered relevant for reasons of administrative convenience, political expediency and development objectives. Defined in this way, the Niger Delta consists of nine states as indicated above in this research paper and 185 local governments, extending the land area to 75,000 square kilometers. It is this definition that is used presently by the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC).

Map 1.3 Political Niger Delta States



Source: www.google.com.ng/search?q=map+of+Niger+delta&biw=1366&bih=667&tbm

Argument for the Core Niger Delta / Conclusion: On the whole, it is apparent that the Niger Delta can't be everything that the conflicting definitions have claimed, it can only be one objectively and the correct definitions is one that focuses on those who have always been referred to as the Niger Delta, with or without oil production revenue.

It is a historical fact that in the colonial and post colonial era, the Niger Delta was more or less conterminous with Degema, Opobo, Ogoni, Ahoada, Brass, Western Ijaw and Warri Division which today are found in the core Niger Delta States of Rives, Bayelsa and Delta, and their agitations during and after the colonial era had always been for the creation of a distinct political region for them in order to allay their fears of ethnic domination by the more populous ethnic groups in the nation, some of which are now forging geological, economic and cultural evidence to prove that they are legitimate part of the Niger Delta, a label which now confers some proprietary right over the oil wealth (NDES, 1997:7 and Ebeku, 2007: 20). Former senator David Dafinone, an urhobo leader and staunch, active spokesman of the Niger Delta region expressed the view that "any arrangement making Abia, Edo, Imo and Ondo states part of the Niger Delta amounts to an agenda to further marginalized the minorities". This above assertion is veridical correct. Furthermore, Rev. Dadikumo Odondiri, the secretary general of the ethnic nationalities, spoke out in guardian Newspaper, July 11, 1999:

Niger Delta is a specific area inhabited by the Ijaws principally, the Isokos, the Urhobos, Itsekiris, the Ogonis as well as some Kwale areas. These are the areas that ought to benefit.

Additionally, in a paper submitted to the former president of Nigeria by the World Environmental Movement for Africa (WEMFA), the president of the body Dr. Stephen Sinikiem Azaiki stated inter alia:

We have studied the position papers of the Bayelsa leaders of Thought, the movement of concerned people of the Niger Delta, Major Isaac Adaka Boro's papers, and they hold almost the same views as the report of the WEMFA study on the developmental needs of the Niger Delta in 1995. It is our understanding that the Niger Delta, as a matter of truth, historically and cartographically is the present Rivers, Bayelsa and Delta states (Azaiki, 2003).

Ironically, some of those arguing for the inclusive definitions had treated the core Niger Delta folks with contempt and derision during the colonial, pre-oil boom and early independence era. However, that is not the focus of this research. Finally on the whole, this research wishes to state on this issue by positing objectively that the Niger Delta region is seen from the views of Sir Henry Willinks Commission of 1958, NDES and also from the

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natural delta of the River Niger as defined above in the research paper by its geology and hydrology.

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