

## **Oil Globalization in the Niger-Delta, Rural Historic Environments, and Mortgaged Future: What do we tell the Next Generation?**

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### **Abstract**

This study analyzes the ways in which globalized oil extraction in the Niger-Delta results in the loss of cultural heritage of the people which is a critical asset for the well-being of the present and future generations. It explicates the ways in which the oil-ecology nexus in an oil producing, multi-ethnic developing country like Nigeria, could threaten sustainable development now and mortgage the future of the next generation. The study examines the local and transnational-alliance dynamics and ambiguities underpinning the inevitable reality of denying the future generations of their heritage and the prospects for resolving the contradictions occasioned by oil-related cultural drawbacks in the Niger-Delta. The ‘*Hangzhou Declaration*’ of 2013 was unambiguous in its advocacy for culture-driven development for human survival. The *Declaration* affirmed the ‘role of culture as a system of values and a resource cum framework to ensure sustainable development, thus the need to draw from the experiences of past generations, and the recognition of culture as part of the global and local commons for creativity and renewal’. Therefore, if sustainable development approximates to ‘development that meets the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet theirs’, it is crucial to discourage ecological destruction of historic cultural environments with persisting environmental scarcities that has continually fueled violent resistance in the impoverished enclave. The prospects for resolving the current crises thus lie in harnessing the past to create the future as well as promoting more ecologically sustainable patterns of oil extraction by global oil giants and the adoption of environmentally-friendly practices and attitudes by the locals for sustainable development to emerge.

**Keywords: Niger-Delta, Hangzhou Declaration, Culture, Oil Globalization, Sustainable Development**

### **Introduction**

The major issues in Nigeria’s trado-cultural environment especially in the Niger-Delta region where crude oil is exploited are linked to the fundamental question—whose environment and for what purpose? Embedded in these issues include the disconnect between the preservation of cultural artifacts, environmental management, oil extraction, the notion of national development as evidenced in cultural tourism, and the influence of the state within the rentier context of state relations with global capital. Culture has been diversely conceptualized by different scholars.



Approaches adopted by these scholars also vary between disciplines and in some cases within disciplines. Essentially, culture could be what I as a scholar wants it to be in so far as it is anchored and shaped by clear empirical operational initiatives. Each scholar or research must or need explain 'how they propose to measure culture in accordance with their conceptualizations'. Culture is God's gift to mankind and has been likened to an unwritten constitution that is fundamental to the survivability of man (Obafemi, 2005). But for our purpose here a few definitions may suffice to the effect that culture is 'the totality of the way of life evolved by a people in their attempt to meet the challenges of living in their environment, which gives order and meaning to their social, political, economic, aesthetic and religious norms and modes of organization, thus distinguishing a people from their neighbors' (FGN, 1988). But quoting Smith and Erhun, Omoniyi Ibietan affirms that 'culture represents a complex whole which include knowledge, belief, art, law, morals, customs and any other capabilities acquired by man as a member of society (Ibietan, 2017). Speaking to ideas and activities as evidenced above, culture remains a way of life of a people especially given the position of Edward Taylor and quoted by Onigu Otite to the effect that 'Culture represent that complex whole which includes the knowledge, beliefs, arts, morals, law, custom and any other capacities and habits acquired by man as a member of a society (Otite, 1978). All of this fall within the perspective held by the cultural policy of Nigeria that includes or comprises:

...the material, institutional, philosophical and creative aspects. The material aspect has to do with artifacts in its broadest form (namely: tools, clothing, food, medicine, utensils, housing). Institutional deals with political, social, legal and economic structures erected to help achieve material and spiritual objectives; while philosophical is concerned with ideas, beliefs and values, the creative concerns of a people's literature (oral and written) as well as their visual and performing arts which are normally molded by, as well as help to mold other aspect of culture (FGN,1988).

Culture as a way of life of a people is of necessity the very foundation and fabric of human society and not a dimension as hitherto conceived. It is a learned, shared, compelling and interrelated set of ideas whose meaning provide orientations for members of the society.

Culture in Nigeria is not homogenous; Nigeria is culturally diverse with almost 300 distinct local languages. The cultures in themselves are very rich in historical content and backgrounds and this probably explains the pride associated with how the people perceive their culture and heritage. Heritage comes in the form of religion and ancient places of worship, artifacts, belief systems, old towns and monuments, shrines, burial sites amongst many others. What is common in most climes in Africa and in Nigeria in particular is the people's attachment to their traditions and cultures. It is within this context that majority of the population consider it important to preserve their cultural heritage, because it keeps the integrity of a people. 'The importance of intangible cultural heritage is not the cultural manifestation itself but rather

the wealth of knowledge and skills that is transmitted through it from one generation to the next'. The Hangzhou Declaration was unambiguous on the linkage between culture and sustainability thus the theme of the conference, 'Culture: Key to Sustainable Development' (Hangzhou Declaration, 2013).

Given the above background, the focus of this present paper is to affirm the importance of culture in human sustainability and development in the oil Niger-Delta, explicates the ways in which globalized oil business within the purview of the oil-ecology nexus threaten historic-cultural environments in the Niger Delta while mortgaging the survivability of the next generation in the region. In doing this, the paper interrogates the local and transnational- alliance dynamics and ambiguities underpinning the inevitable reality of denying the future generations of their heritage.

## Conceptual Insights

### Oil Globalization

The end of the cold war created several new beginnings in world history. For instance, it brought fresh impetus and understanding to emerging perspectives to the environment and environmental factors in the explanation of global developments (Miller, 1995). Greater focus thus came the way of the environment and the link it shares with issues on security, heritage and development. Within this context, environment-heritage nexus became important in interrogating human-induced factors in issues of cultural preservation in minority but resource rich territories or climes such as the Niger-delta of Nigeria. Outside the purview and imperative of preserving the cultural heritage of the Niger delta region, it must be reiterated that general environmental problems are dire as 'crude petroleum activities damage the fertility of the soil, destroy wildlife and the breeding ground for marine fishes' on account 'of the toxicity of oil and gas' (Obi, 1997).

The integration of Nigeria into the global capitalist orbit was made possible through the instrumentality of oil. And although billions of dollars accruing the state is yet to translate to better life for the population, the oil bearing communities are regularly made to hold on to the short side of the stick ostensibly made possible by the state-oil unholy alliance (Ukaogo, 2008). This alliance unleashes its power on the spineless oil victims – the oil bearing communities thus ensuring and entrenching oil globalization with its benefits on the oil-state alliance while promoting the globalization of poverty on the victim communities. The emergence of two stakeholders in the oil contest notably the oil-state alliance and oil bearing communities have 'increasingly blurred' the demarcation between the two while leaving the communities as orphans. This dichotomy is more understandable for while the alliance seeks global inclusion through integration into world finance capital cemented by the quest for capitalist expansion through the appropriation of surplus value and the alienation of the local population, the weakened oil communities lay spread-eagled on the turf of poverty. In understanding this dilemma, an appreciation is required in coming to terms with how through manipulation external

economic agents devastate local environments and their heritages while deepening scarcities and provoking conflicts.

### **The Niger-Delta**

The word “Niger-Delta” has different meaning for different people having conjured misleading and distorted interpretation of the region’s contemporary history. A proper understanding of the Niger-Delta is best done by a patient survey of its political and geographical definition. Geographically, the region is situated within latitude  $4^{\circ}\text{N}$  -  $8^{\circ}\text{N}$  and on the equator and longitude  $4^{\circ}\text{E}$  -  $8^{\circ}\text{E}$  of the Greenwich Meridian. The region is dominated by swamps of the River Niger and tributaries that constitute an integral part of the River Niger system. The tributaries are at the River Nun and Forcados with several other rivers crisscrossing the territory notably River Benin, Brass otherwise called the Nembe River, the Cross River, Bonny and a number of other smaller streams. On the whole the region constitutes a labyrinth of meandering creeks and lagoons with an incredible greenery and serene nature of the area that probably compelled Mary Kingsley (1965) to observe that ‘the swamp region of the Bight of Biafra(Niger-Delta) is the greatest in the world and that in its immensity and gloom, it has the grandeur equal only to that of the Himalayas’. The cartographic definition of the Niger Delta Environment Survey (NDES) is in tandem with that volunteered by the Sir Willink Commission’s Report that identified the limits of the Niger Delta to include Aboh in the North, Benin River estuary in the West, the Palm Point in the east and Akassa and River Nun to the South.

The Niger-Delta constitutes a number of ethnic nationalities but by far the earliest to inhabit the creeks were the Ijaw (Izon). Other nationalities include but are not limited to the Ndokwa, Isoko, Andoni, Itsekiri, Urhobo and Ibos but the core of the Niger-Delta lies between the Forcados River on the west and the Brass River to the east. For geographical delineation, the core Niger-Deltas includes Rivers state, Bayelsa state and Delta state, which the 1999 census accorded an approximate population of 10 million people but in contemporary reasoning, the meandering creeks and rivers, similar topography, common history and ancestry, climatic and culture appeared to have the inclusion of such states as Edo, Akwa Ibom and Cross River States inevitably into the core Niger-Delta states. However, except the Ijaw (Izon) that represent one of the most ethnic nationalities in Nigeria, other nationalities in the region constitute a cluster of people whose past and present appear bound by common historical development. These were the states crisscrossed by the creeks and lagoons and essentially had an interlocking history from the past. It was perhaps in acknowledgment to the above that these nationalities were later grouped into one big political family called the South-South zone.

Politically, the Niger-delta includes three other states located outside the core swampy territory. Whereas Abia and Imo states constituted the hinterland territories from which the slaves and palm oil (Martin, 1988:168) were taken to the seaport in the slave epoch and are connected to the core Niger-Delta by a maze of intermingling seas, Ondo state is in part peopled by the Ijaw of the core Niger-Delta. Moreover, the three states have beneath their subsoil the new resource-crude oil that presently differentiate the Niger-Delta from the other geographical zones.



This explains why the governed has from time to time created economic zones made up of these areas listed above, the most recent being Oil Mineral Producing Areas Development Commission (OMPADEC) and Niger-Delta Development Commission (NDDC). For the NDDC, the Act establishing it defined the Niger-Delta in terms of those states that produce crude oil. Accordingly, section 2(1)(b) of the enabling Act impliedly defined the region by adding the two hinterland states of Abia and Imo states as well as Ondo state to the core states.

### **Rural Historic Environments**

Nigeria's multicultural diversity comes with a plethora of heritages from constituting ethnic nationalities and communities. From all indications across the country, cultural heritages in the country are nearing extinction including the material and non-material components. At the best of times, we may conveniently attempt a conclusion that the heritages are endangered. Human activities are central to the observed challenges at preserving these cultural heritages. For sundry justifications, we have had and still having daunting challenges in desecration of historic cultural sites through man-made or human-induced distortions such as the involvement of oil exploration and exploitation, trafficking, sale and exportation of art works, looting of museums, role of Christianity, and development initiatives amongst others. The reality above is footnoted by the avalanche of advocacy for the cultural preservation of the collective Nigerian heritage (Onyima, 2016).

The cultures of the people are very rich in historical content and serves as the imperative for their preservation. We identify burial sites, places of worship, artifacts, places of worship; shrines etc. as cultural environments and in most cases, they have remained historic in Nigeria and several other climes. This is so because; there is an intrinsic link between these cultural sites and the environment where they are located. For instance, Africans see religion and ancient places of worship, artifacts, old towns and monuments, shrines, burial sites as heritages necessary for preservation; a desecration of which comes with heavy sanctions and punishment. In the light of the above, this paper uses religion, belief system and burial sites as parameters in our examination of the imperative for cultural preservation and oil globalization that has destroyed and desecrated human habitats especially the historic-cultural environments of the people. The study is concerned about what happens to these sites in the face of the onslaught by oil exploration in delta communities where oil giants destroy the habitat in their quest to lay pipelines for oil transportation to preferred destinations.

These historic sites are valued across Nigeria notably burial sites and forms part of the belief system embedded in the religion of the people. Across the south west region of Nigeria with a dominance of the Yoruba ethnic nationality, 'graves...were transformed into domestic shrines because the people made regular sacrifices on them, especially in times of hardship' (Olufunke, 2016). These sacrifices deify the grave and become site of cultural tourism in the area and beyond where tourists from diverse persuasion flock for sundry reasons. Indeed, the depth and seriousness of such sacrifice was aptly captured by W.S Allen in the case of a woman to the effect that in three days after her burial 'a goat was killed and its blood sprinkled around the

grave, while a male relative said a long prayer for the children of the deceased who knelt by the grave (Allen, 1885). The nature of such sacrifices naturally depended on the status of the deceased in the society. For instance, in the burial of a war or army general, there is an obvious difference in rituals and scale of feasting than those of an ordinary citizen. This difference, it could be inferred may increase the tourism potential of the burial site of the dead. Olufunke citing Allen captured this disparity thus:

...the burials of war chiefs were much more expensive and elaborate in terms of rituals and the scale of feasting than those of ordinary people. For instance, on March 29, 1869, the death of Bashorun Ogunmola, Ibadan's head chief, was announced by several gunshots. Seven women, one boy, and a horse were killed to accompany him to the other world...Meanwhile, during his illness (he had died of smallpox), a boy and a girl had been offered in sacrifice. On the eve of his death, sixty sheep and goats were killed in sacrifice, "each tied in a bundle and thrown about in front of his house supposing that, when death comes and sees these victims, he will feed upon them and return and so the diseased life would be spared (Olufunke, 2016).

The reverence and importance associated with burial sites encourages a submission that a desecration or destruction of such sites in whatever guise by oil companies in the delta region remain a burden of sort to the people. This was confirmed by a scholar to the effect that burial and: 'burial sites bring memories back and reminds one of prophecies and proclamations made by the departed when they were alive, where or if these declarations comes to reality, then the departed did prophecy of a future that came to pass' (Jaja, 2013).

These fond memories associated the dead and where they are interred greatly show that 'Burial sites' uniqueness lie not only in its being the abode of the ancestors but more important is the motley history it unconsciously exhibit' (Jaja, 2013)

### **Why are Historic Environments Important?**

The importance of rural historic environments cannot be over emphasized in all societies globally. Using cemeteries, graveyards, and mausoleum or burial sites as an epic example of cultural heritage requiring preservation, it is pertinent to observe and submit that it constitute the 'abode of the ancestors' and reminds the living about the dead (Jaja, 2013). The peculiarity of the Niger-Delta emphasizes that the land scarcity and land hunger in the region have encouraged specialized methodologies and strategies in matters of burial. This has yielded typologies of burial in the region only determined by the availability of land or otherwise in localities and communities of a deceased person. It is in this regard that typologies of burial sites can be

identified to include Special Mausoleum burial, house burial, cemetery, compound and the swamp. Whichever burial type chosen in any Niger-Delta community, its justification revolves round land availability within the context of topography and space. And in the considered view of Jones:

Burial sites bring memories back and reminds one of prophecies and proclamations made by the departed when they were alive, where or if these declarations comes to reality, then the departed did prophecy of a future that came to pass (Jaja, 2013).

It is the affinity between the dead and their living loved ones that underscore that attachment of the living to the final resting place of the dead. The sacredness of these burial sites manifests as justification for protests against their desecration and destruction by oil majors in their task at enforcing canalization, development, seismic activities, building of access roads, test sample pits and right of ways for pipelines.

The desecration of burial sites or cemeteries by oil majors/conglomerates in the Niger-Delta is a clear denial of the importance of city tourism or cultural tourism. This is because these sites are cultural products and the desire by the living to forge a bond with their dead forebears does not seem to impress foreign oil workers that throng cemeteries in their home countries in a clear manifestation of environmental racism against Nigerians in Nigeria (Ukaogo, 2020). Indeed, a burial site or cemetery 'is a good place to spend an afternoon or maybe eternity' and 'can enrich visitors' experiences (Pecsek, 2015:45). It has become in truth an integral part of what I will prefer to call rural tourism and indeed urban/city tourism. The avowed commitment of global capital to destroy for whatever reason burial yards or sites is a clear neglect of the 'experience-rich potentials of cemeteries as cultural products' (Pecsek, 2015:46).

This study clearly aligns itself to the reality and thus argues that 'cemetery tourism makes a fascinating cultural display for tourists, offering both nature-based and cultural activities, therefore, it can be rightfully placed in heritage and cultural tourism' (Pecsek, 2015:47). Burial sites should be regarded as 'complex attractions representing both natural and cultural values'. The destruction of these sites thus far explains the seeming disinterest of the living in several communities from visiting the resting place of the deceased loved ones that have transited to the land of ancestors. It could therefore be argued that while decision making foreign oil workers gravitates towards their home countries to participate in cemetery tourism; visiting their dead, they discourage their indigenous subordinates from doing same by consciously; on account of profit destroy and desecrate sacred abodes of the dead. This dissimilar attitude towards cemeteries by the oil majors prefer to admit falsely that cemeteries are not 'experience-rich, complex tourism attractions with excellent potentials to complement a city break of cultural nature (Pecsek, 2015:50).

## Interrogating National Development

Development absorbs a multitude of definitions and as Lawal and Oluwatoyin (2011) observed, the concept is 'a victim of definitional pluralism'. Development on a national level 'can be described as the overall development or a collective socio-economic, political as well as religious advancement of a country or nation' and this is 'best achieved through development planning, which can be described as the country's collection of strategies mapped out by the government' (Oluwatoyin and Lawal, 2011:237). Simply put, national development refers to a country's ability to make better the lives of her citizens. Making better citizen's lives could be material evidenced in the increase and improvement in the gross development product or other indicators of growth. This means that there is a 'deliberate government involvement in planning, socio-economic engineering and effective demand management. In a common daily parlance, development whether national or regional approximates to only one wish namely 'eliminating poverty, underdevelopment and inequality (Omuta and Nwoye, 2011).

Culture is precisely what enables sustainability – as a source of strength, of values and social cohesion, self-esteem and participation. Culture is our most powerful force for creativity and renewal (Bokova, 2013). The evident realization of the importance and relevance of culture including its interconnectedness to development especially in poverty-prone territories appear very suffocating especially in the urgency with which stakeholders' desire and pursue their incorporation in the public policy framework of nation states. This urgency more than anything reveals the self-indictment and troubled conscience of members of the 'civilized nations' that are agenda setters in global politics. Indeed, before now, these agenda setters never placed culture as a determining and essential factor in development and 'whenever they have incorporated the cultural dimension, they have done so from a highly generalist, ambiguous and unspecific point of view' (Sempere, 2018). Little importance was attached to the importance of culture on development before now by nation states and even the efforts of UNESCO lacked overall vision of the issue. The omission of the cultural dimension in development in the MDG document in 2000 was therefore not an accident. Today, conceptual limitations within the context of definition have resulted in a wide range of notions and interpretations on the role of culture in development that, on many occasions, have created a degree of contradiction.

In 2013, (15 May-17 May, 2013) a world gathering in Hangzhou, China with over 100 countries in attendance met to deliberate on the 'next era of human development'. It was 'the largest and most high-profile global event in 15 years dedicated to culture and development' and had in attendance high profile officials as ministers, private companies including experts and civil society actors, like His Highness the Aga Khan, chairman of the Ag Khan Development Network, H.R.H Prince Sultan bin Salman Abdulaziz, and Liu Yandong, Vice Premier of the People's Republic of China (Hangzhou Declaration, 2013). Indeed, this was the first International Congress that critically focused on the linkages between culture and sustainable development organized by UNESCO since the Stockholm Conference in 1998. The attendees were cutting-edge leaders that rubbed minds together to join forces to prove and validate the



Siamese link between culture, sustainable development and genuine peace. The outcome of the gathering now known as the Hangzhou Declaration placed culture at the heart of public policy, stressing the importance and power of culture in addressing challenges of material lack cum poverty, environmental sustainability and lack of social inclusion. Given the post-2015 development framework, with the participation of the global community and the major international stakeholders, the Congress provided the very first global forum to discuss the role of culture in sustainable development.

The key ambition and objective of the gathering of these 450 representatives was to among other issues ‘set clear and concrete recommendations to harness the power of culture and the creative industries for sustainable development’. Interesting and yet very disturbing, this gathering was coming two years short of United Nations’ Millennium Development Goals cycle, a date state parties were expected to have achieved significantly in the attainment of these goals. Sadly, the continued disconnect between culture and development has gone on for long with incredible and verifiable development deficits. The belated realization by stakeholders that development will be more complete when placed on a culture-driven cart. In her opening speech, UNESCO’s Director General Irina Bokova observed without equivocation that:

Culture was largely forgotten from the Millennium Development Goals in 2000, as if humanity could develop without culture. But what is at stake today is sustainable and inclusive development, rather than just development, and culture is our most precious asset. In less than ten years, culture has arisen as a matter of public policy and provided evidence of its potential for growth and social cohesion. UNESCO is at the forefront of this movement. We must integrate this know-how into the post-2015 world sustainable development strategies (Bokova, 2013).

The summary of all of this was that culture is a driver and an enabler of sustainable development, thus explaining in greater detail UNESCO’s longstanding advocacy for culture as a driver and an enabler of sustainable development.

### **Rural Historic Environments and Oil Globalization in the Niger-Delta**

Oil exploration and exploitation in the Niger-Delta region of Nigeria has destroyed several heritage sites in rural communities of the Niger-delta. Ancient places of worship, shrines, burial grounds/cemeteries, artifacts, old towns and monuments are today desolate in the region on account of oil exploration that has decisively destroyed or desecrated these places of traditional relevance. Specifically, the laying of oil pipelines across homesteads and communities have compromised areas of traditional authority in too many ways than one. In the process, rural communities that are the custodians of heritages and abode of historic environments are harangued in chains of impotence. The desecration of these rural historic environments by global capital represented by the oil majors remains inconsiderate of the linkages between culture and

development. Clearly unattached and indeed aloof to the provisions of the *Hangzhou Declaration*, the oil majors ignored:

some of the most important policy documents that have underscored the importance of culture for sustainable development in recent years, including the UN General Assembly Resolutions N. 65/1 (“Keeping the Promise: United to Achieve the Millennium Development Goals”, 2010), N. 65/166 (2011) and N. 66/208 (2012) on “Culture and Development”, as well as a number of other relevant declarations, statements and normative instruments adopted at international, regional and national levels (Hangzhou Declaration, 2013).

A year before the Hangzhou Declaration in China, the communiqué of the UN Conference on Sustainable Development in Brazil with the theme, "The Future We Want" clearly highlighted indispensability of cultural diversity and the imperative for a ‘more holistic and integrated approach to sustainable development’ (UN, 2012). This in all consideration show the global commitment to culture which the oil majors remain determined to continually subvert. In all,

- Culture is shared by members of a society;
- Culture is not genetically transmitted;
- It is historically derived and ... transmitted from one generation to another;
- Culture is created... through the process of adjustment to the social setting;
- Culture is universal-found in every human society;
- Culture is dynamic.

There is no man without his culture and this perhaps explains why Dabaghian (1970:103) emphasized that ‘the pride of any society lies in its culture since no society in the world could be considered great without reference to its tradition and culture’. In summary, culture is a network of traits that could be learned, based on interaction or derived from history. With particular reference to the Niger-delta and their heritage, the unwholesome extractive procedures and practices such as canalization, drilling, gas flaring among others have destroyed the rural historic environments of the region even as burial yards, traditional cemeteries and other cultural sites and heritages have suffered destruction without reference to their traditional uses. It is interesting to note that in spite of the rampaging influence of foreign religions, rural communities are still very much attached to their traditional heritages, religious and sundry practices. Communities in the Niger Delta relish in their traditional ways of life because of their love for their cultures and heritages. However, in the affirmation of a scholar:

The once-revered values have become supplanted by fads, and the prospects of institutional continuity have become more cumbersome. Suddenly, the safety value and the social control for orderly individual conduct and group behavior have snapped and society is worse for it. Issues of ancestral

worship or deification still feature prominently in the lives of Niger Delta peoples. Any disruption of such customary practice is unwelcome as it could sever the link between the living and the pantheon of forbears in such communities and their worldview (Jike, 2004).

Further insight has revealed that the activities of purveyors of global capitalism have violated and infringed on community rights by desecrating and plundering ancestral homelands and rural historic environments through the conversion of such sites to other uses. In the displacement that follow, certain villages in the Niger Delta has seriously affected their social and cultural lives (Agahlino, 2000). A particular reference point was the 1973 forceful displacement of Igolou village in Isoko land through the instrumentality of massive oil spillage at Shell's location 13 and 18. This created problems for the villagers requiring cultural adjustments. In the unfortunate incident, communal life support systems like village gods and divinities were violated thus desecrating the heritage of the people along with the inevitable loss of numerous economic and botanical valuable plants usually used to save lives by traditional healers that must now 'search further into the interior before they can obtain herbs, roots and barks of trees for treatment of diseases' (Legwanti, 1995).

Cognizant of the above, it is pertinent to observe that by their policies, the oil majors have also pitched elders against the youths whereby the former hold the latter with utmost disdain relying on accusations of corruption against the elders. This combines effectively with curious government policies such as the Petroleum Act of 1969 and the Land Use Decree of 1978 which permitted government to usurp the holding rights of individuals and trampled on civil liberties with reckless abandon.

### **UNESCO's Advocacy, Culture and Development**

Standing on its longstanding advocacy on the link between culture and development, UNESCO through the Hangzhou declaration insists that nation states based on decades of evidence and initiatives:

- Should integrate culture into sustainable development strategies, as the international community shapes a new global agenda for sustainable development after 2015.
- Showcase culture's indispensable role for sustainability because culture is at the vanguard of social and economic development in an increasing number of countries. Yet culture is still not fully integrated into sustainable development strategies worldwide. The Hangzhou Declaration urges that public policies need to reflect and scale up the variety of initiatives at the local and national level. Because of culture's cross-cutting role across a variety of fields, the Declaration exhorts stakeholders in the cultural sector and beyond – such as education, health, and urban planning – to integrate culture in strategies for social growth and development.

- Promote cultural and creative industries, such as tourism or heritage, and cultural infrastructure. This is because museums and public theaters, are engines for social dialogue and cohesion, as well as jobs and revenues, especially in developing countries, thereby fighting poverty, unemployment and violence.

There have been efforts to address the Niger-Delta question especially in the area of poverty eradication and sustainable living for the future generation but all these efforts have tended to ignore or indeed failed to integrate culture in policies meant to redress this problem. In this, it must be recognized that the Hangzhou Declaration is a key step in UNESCO's advocacy to integrate culture into sustainable development strategies, as the international community shapes a new global agenda for sustainable development after 2015. The recommendations contained in the Declaration that are essential in the resolution of the Niger Delta question include:

- Integrate culture within all development policies and programs, as equal measure with human rights, equality and sustainability;
- Mobilize culture and mutual understanding to foster peace and reconciliation;
- Ensure cultural rights for all to promote inclusive social development;
- Leverage culture for poverty reduction and inclusive economic development;
- Build on culture to promote environmental sustainability;
- Use culture to strengthen resilience to disasters and combat climate change through mitigation and adaptation;
- Value, safeguard and transmit culture to future generations;
- Harness culture as a resource for achieving sustainable urban development and management; and
- Capitalize on culture to foster innovative and sustainable models of cooperation

### **Cultural Testimonies and Sustainable Development**

Many countries have incorporated culture into their development strategies. This is evident in the testimony of Right Honorable Michaëlle Jean, UNESCO Special Envoy for Haiti which indicates that aid programmes in Haiti that have the greatest impact are those that incorporate the cultural characteristics of the target populations. For instance, *"the emergency tents needed to be reconfigured according to Haiti's villages, not in straight lines, as is too often the case"* she informed. And for Sir Fazle Hasan Abed, founder of BRAC (Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee), if development is to be sustainable, it must be embedded in culture and social fabrics. For example, in 1979, infant mortality in Bangladesh had been as high as 252 per thousand. Most of this infant mortality had been due to diarrhoea, easily treatable with oral rehydration solution. Attempts to teach village women the importance of using this solution were initially disappointing; and it was discovered that this was because the men in the households were not encouraging its use. Following extensive work among men, infant mortality in



Bangladesh now stood at fewer than 40 per thousand, the lowest rate in South Asia, demonstrating that if an intervention was not culturally appropriate and if it had not been accepted and made part of the culture, it would not have worked.

More testimonies from Wiendu Nuryanti (Vice-Minister of Education and Culture for Cultural Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia), 10 per cent of Indonesia's GDP now comes, directly or indirectly, from the creative industries. The Borobodur Temple, a UNESCO World Heritage Site is, for her, an exemplary example of the importance of cultural heritage in Indonesia. Situated in a majority Muslim area, it is the world's largest Buddhist temple, and the local population is keenly aware of its importance for the local economy. It attracts five million visitors a year, 90 per cent of them domestic. One million jobs had been created directly or indirectly as a result of the temple.

Furthermore, Carlos Villasenor (President of Cultural Interactivity & Development), informed that turning to the cultural sector helped the Colombian city of Medellin, which was plagued by endemic violence in the 1990s, diminish violence by 80% in a dramatic turnaround. In 2011, 30% of the city's budget was invested in education, culture, and urban landscaping. New cultural infrastructures, such as public libraries and concert halls, gave access to culture to all. A new urban landscaping succeeded in bringing residents together, through the creation of open and green spaces. There is no gainsaying therefore that "the diversity, durability and dynamism of these initiatives prove the viability of culture in development models". Their value must be recognized and supported by public policy at the highest level.

### **Conclusion: What Do We Tell the Next Generation?**

The failure to incorporate culture into the development agenda of national governments must come with grave consequences. The ecology of the Niger Delta has spurned poverty in the land and it is not impossible to reverse some of these adverse consequences brought about by global oil business. The profits and advantages of cultural inclusion in the overall public policy portfolio of several third world countries are already yielding credible dividends. Having consciously destroyed the human habitat in pursuit of petrodollars, the government with its people owe the next generation a responsibility of remedying the situation or at worst ensure without fail that today's development while meeting the needs of the present generation must not compromise the ability of the next generation to meet their own needs also. That remedy is to commence the integration of culture into national development.

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