

Economic Injustice in Nigeria (Acts 2:44-45): The Niger Delta Experience

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Abstract

Crude oil exploration and production is a blessing to the region where it is being carried out in developed nations but in the case of the Niger Delta of Nigeria it is like a curse. Using the economic liberation theology model as a method, this paper aimed at examining the situation of economic injustice in the Niger Delta of Nigeria in the light of Acts 2:44-45; 6:1. It also aimed at proffering some kind of solution to the problem by arousing the interest of and challenging the Nigerian church and state leaders to re-examine the issue of the Niger Delta region. The paper showed that the economic injustice being perpetrated against the region is the neglect of the region by the Federal Government and the Multinationals operating in the region. The work also showed that commissions and ministry such as the Niger Delta Development Commission and Federal Ministry of Niger Delta were set as a way to remedy the problem but monies being appropriated and released by the Federal Government not withstanding the fact that some monies go into private pockets does not commensurate with developmental needs of the region. The work was concluded on the presupposition that infrastructural and environmental development can tantamount to economic liberation for the region.

Key words: Economic injustice; Nigeria; Acts 2:44-45; Niger Delta

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INTRODUCTION

Injustice causes problem in a society especially in a heterogeneous society like Nigeria. Today Nigeria is being faced with various types of crisis raging from economic, social, religious and political debacle. The Niger Delta problem is located within economic deprivation and oppression. This economic deprivation has led to poverty in the Niger Delta of Nigeria. Although, the region is rich in crude oil, a verse majority of the people live in abject poverty. They live in abject poverty because their land has been depleted by crude oil exploration and exploitation. Farmers and fishermen in the immediate community of oil exploration are out of self-employment due to soil and water pollutions. In the midst of this, the people and the land of the Niger Delta are being neglected to dance to the rhythm of human imposed economic fate. This has caused a rift between the Federal Government (FG) and the people in so many ways; raging from restiveness among the youths to the women folks. Amnesty was given to those who resorted to armed struggle in the region and were empowered by the Federal Government. Some promises have been made by the Federal Government of Nigeria. Niger Delta Federal Ministry was created by the FG. The East-West road is 70% near completion. Have all these solved the infrastructural and economic problem of the people?

This paper therefore examines the situation of economic injustice in the Niger Delta of Nigeria in the light of Acts 2:44-45; 6:1. The situation is examined so as to proffer some kind of solution to the problem arousing the interest of Nigerians and challenge the Nigerian church and state leaders to re-examine the issue of the Niger Delta region. Bodies like the Niger Delta Development Commission, Federal Ministry of Niger Delta have been created, amnesty has been given to the militants in the region and monies have been disbursed to handle the Niger Delta problem but the economic and environmental problems facing the region is still prevalent. The concerns

were that even though the bulk of the crude oil came from the region, the people of the area ranked among the most backward and marginalized groups in the country. The devastation caused by oil spillage and gas flaring has made it virtually impossible for the people to earn a living from their hitherto agricultural activities – farming, fishing and trading. In communities where oil exploration and production activities are carried out, the consequences are great; deforestation, erosion, acid rains, and destroyed farmlands, are the main signposts for this gift of nature. Activities of these companies caused the pollution of the creeks and destroyed aquatic lives. And when there are spillages, the losses are unquantifiable, for example, the Mobil oil spill, on Ibeno shoreline, in January 2013; and several other oil spill incidents on August 3rd and 24th; November 9, December 16 and 19, all in 2012. Texaco oil spill and blowout caused a colossal loss of lives, destroyed lives and damaged the ecosystem of the area and destroyed the fishing gears. Adequate compensation and clean up were not done (Erng, Basse, & Odike, 2013). While we must commend some of the works done by the above commission and ministry and the Federal Government for the monies that have been released so far, we cannot downplay the fact that the region is still being faced with economic injustice because the location of projects are politically motivated and monies are going to the pockets of some few elites from the region.

1. METHODOLOGY AND THEORETICAL FRAME WORK

Using the economic liberation theology model as a method, this study juxtaposed the situation of economic injustice in Niger Delta with that of the church community communism in Acts 2:44-45; 6:1 in which resources were equitably shared among the members who were in need. This method uses the Bible as a tool to fight any status-quo of oppression and injustice. The situation that may require liberation could be economical, social, political and even religious. The situation under consideration here is the economic situation of the Niger Delta in which they are being deprived of controlling their resources. Also, the scholarly works of other scholars who have done a similar or related works on this subject matter shall be explored as a way of theoretical frame work.

The theoretical frame work for this paper is the consideration of some similar scholarly work carried out to fight oppression with the bible. Dawsey (2001) did a work on “Liberation theology and economic development” and observed that Latin American Liberation theology has earned the world’s admiration for its heroic stand on behalf of the oppressed and marginalized people. He explained that from the incipience of Latin American Liberation Theology around 1968, liberation theology has been surrounded by controversy because of its often-

unabashed association with Marxist analysis. Dawsey observed further that twenty-five years of oversimplified economic rhetoric, especially concerning dependency theory, the recent disintegration of the Soviet bloc, and the loss of confidence in command economies, even in Cuba, have caused liberationists to re-evaluate the economic theories that underpin much of their thought (Dawsey, 2001 citing Ellis and Maduro 1990, p.10, 77-93, 209-210). To Dawsey, Liberation theology is rooted in commitment to the poor, not just in Latin America, but throughout the world. The greatest poverty in the world today is in Africa. Walshe (1987) did a work on “the evolution of liberation theology in South Africa.” The background of his work was informed by the legitimization of apartheid in 1948 in South Africa. It all started in the 19th century. Esack (2001) argued that the case of South African liberation theology is overblown because the leading figures in liberation theology-despite their prominent positions-have remained confined to the inner margins of their ecclesiastical structures. Esack argued further that the tensions between the church and those on its inner margins do not only arise from the fact that the South African church lives in different worlds and that they also emerge from the fact that some of the most ardent and prominent advocates of liberation theology have adopted an adhoc anti-apartheid theology rather than a comprehensive theology of liberation and inclusivism. The Latin American and South African liberation theologies are models for contemporary political, economic and social liberation theology. This paper therefore is situated within this models.

2. ECONOMIC INJUSTICE IN NIGERIA: THE NIGER DELTA MILIEU

The injustice being faced by the Niger Delta people of Nigeria could be traced to ethnic disparity. It is so because the tribes that constitute the Niger Delta are being referred to as minority tribes and as such when resources are being allocated it is allocated on the basis of population statistics. The areas that have more population according to the record of Nigerian census receive more forgetting that the Niger Delta terrain need more money to develop than some other parts of Nigeria. Although, some special percentages are being given to the region from oil sales by the FG, it does not in any way commensurate with the damage caused by oil exploration and the developmental needs of the region. The Niger Delta as it is today is suffering from environmental degradation as a result of oil exploration and exploitation. This has led to lost of employment in the sense that the fishes in the river, the land for crop cultivation, the animals for animal faming and some important species of the trees in the forest for lumbering which were the major sources of their livelihood are being affected and there are no evidence that the plight of the people are permanently addressed

by the Federal Government of Nigeria. All we hear is a white paper master plan for the Niger Delta which will take a numerous decades to actualize. People have also argued that huge amounts of moneys have been allocated to Niger Delta through the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) and the recent Niger Delta ministry yet the impacts have not been concretely felt in many of the creeks of the Niger Delta. While the efforts of the Federal Government in creating and allocating money to develop the area must be applauded, the development is too under-funded and slow to really alleviate their plight and suffering because up till now good networks of roads and bridges, modern medical facilities, proportional employment, well equipped primary and secondary schools and all embracing scholarships in the creeks where we can call the real Niger Delta are lacking and they are yet to be properly addressed by the Federal Government of Nigeria and the multinationals operating in the area. All of these constitute economic injustice to the Niger Delta people who are living in the remote creeks. When all the crude oil that are pumped out on a daily basis are quantified in monetary terms for the years the multinationals have been exploring and exploiting crude oil in the area, can it justify what has been released to NDDC and the ministry of Niger Delta for the development of the area? Can it justify the development on ground when compared to other communities in other parts of the world where crude is also being produced? Can we say, it is faire to see the people living in the communities where crude is being pumped for sales every day living in and with abject poverty? These questions cause serious puzzles in our minds and we know the answers but the Federal Government is politicizing reality. This is why amnesty that has been granted to few militants in the Niger Delta cannot in any way solve the economic problem that made the militants to carry arms to fight in the first place. The Federal Government is gaining a lot from the amnesty because the production of crude oil has risen to over 2.4 barrels per day (Egbo, 2010, p.3). Probably this was the agenda of the Federal Government in granting amnesty to the Niger Delta militants. We are just scratching the problem in the surface. It is our prayer that militancy should not come up again in Niger Delta in the future. Recently, there is a Petroleum Industry Bill (PIB) of which the oil producing areas in Niger Delta are expecting some hope of development but it is still creeping in the National House of Assembly. We are yet to know the reason why it is still wasting time. And eventually when the bill is passed, how are we sure that the FG and the multinationals will comply strictly? This question is being raised here because similar bills have been passed by the National Assembly in the past but they are not being implemented as expected. Resource control was suggested but it was turn down in a hurry by the Federal Government. All these constitute economic injustice to the Niger Delta region of Nigeria.

3. SOCIO-HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF ECONOMIC OPPRESSION IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

While the Exodus story was an important event in the history of the Hebrews, it only marked the beginning of a multi-dimensional struggle that was to encompass the entire spectrum of Hebrew society. Political freedom and independence are undoubtedly important by unless they are accompanied by economic and social justice, they are meaningless. The economic life of the Hebrews was also in God's mind. Life is inconceivable without a sound economic basis. The economic struggle is a struggle for survival. According to Karl Marx, economic power gave the wealthy the resources which enabled them to control man's political destiny. The complex structures of human society repose upon an economic foundation. In our day and generation we are witnessing a scramble by the superpowers to control the raw materials from developing countries. As a matter of fact the economics of many developing countries are controlled by foreign forces through multinational corporations. Even in those countries where there is talk of economic independence, one finds that the only consolation comes from a few progressive socialist countries who have made an effort to redistribute the national resources so that the broad masses of the people can also benefit (Banana, 1990, pp.42-55).

The practice of economic disparity was one which the prophets of the Old Testament condemned in their contemporary society. Notable among these was the prophet Amos whose call came to him out of his people. Amos could not fail to note that under the more complex economic conditions of the Northern Kingdom, the independence of the farmers had been destroyed in the rise of the great landlords who bought up farm after farm and who manipulated the grain markets to their own personal advantage, enrichment and self-glory. The whole social structure had become corrupt; bribery was rife. Amos was understandably perturbed by this social injustice and moral decay. His prophecy of doom for the oppressive class was grounded in deep and sincere convictions 'After crime upon crime of Israel I will not relent, for they sell honest folk for money, the needy for a pair of shoes, they trample down the poor like dust' (Amos 8:4-6).

God's denunciation of economic injustice is quite explicit and his desire for equitable distribution of the natural and national resources comes out clearly throughout the pages of the Holy Scripture: "Let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an overflowing stream: Amos 5:24 (Banana, 1990, pp.42-55).

4. SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONTEXT OF ACTS 2:44-45; 6:1

In the New Testament, we find clear evidence of a deliberate move towards economic socialism: "And all

who believed had all things in common; and they sold their possessions and goods and distributed them to all, as any had need” (Acts 2:44-45;6:1). So the Bible does not just condemn economic exploitation, it also provides a formula or to put it in present day language, an economic policy. The early church community was faced with some economic situation such as starvation, scarcity and inequitable distribution of the available food resources.

Concerning the socio-economic situation of the early church community, Stegemann and Stegemann (1999, pp.218-219) revealed that:

After the death of Jesus, the social and economic situation of the followers of Jesus hardly changed significantly. Yet also after a certain time Jews from the Diaspora joined them – perhaps even somewhat prosperous ones, as in the case of Barnabas. When the Acts of the Apostles mentions that a great many priests also became obedient to the faith in Christ (Act 6:7), this probably corresponded more to the Lukan ideal image of the Church than to reality. We would assume that the concentration in Jerusalem also had economic grounds. At first, certainly, it also created new problems, for we may surely exclude the idea that one of the apostles native to Galilee could return to his own house or property in Jerusalem. That means, however, that the apostles were dependent on local supporters, as in the itinerant charismatic period of Jesus’ following. This was possible, especially with a material solidarity motivated by an “overheating of community feeling.” Only with stability of location. In any case, the economic alienation of the closest followers of Jesus was probably also modified, even if it was still maintained by individual itinerant missionaries. According to the presentation in Acts, the early church lived “together and had all things in common,” with the needs of all being met (Acts 2:4-45; 4:32-37). That is without doubt an idealization beginnings – going back to Jewish and Greek social utopias – with a paraenetic intention that has its parallels in the ancient presentation of the Essenes. Yet one can hardly doubt that the common life of the *ekklesia* was defined not only by religious and social but also by a certain amount of economic interaction. This was probably the background of the patronage role that Luke ascribes to the Levite Joseph, called Barnabas, who comes from Cyprus, and – even if with a different significance – to Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 4:36-37; 5:1-11). Of prime importance, nonetheless, was the fact that poverty was apparently a significant problem in the *ekklesia* of Jerusalem. This is indicated not only by the differences that Luke mentions between Hebrews and Hellenists regarding the care of widows but also and indeed especially by the intensive collective activity of Paul in the Diaspora for the miserably poor (*ptochoi*) among the saints in Jerusalem (Gal. 2:10; Rom 15:25-29; cf. I Cor. 16:1-4; 2 Cor. 8-9; Acts 11:29). The Famine mentioned in Acts 11:27-28 and the Sabbath year that followed it (*cf. Ant. 20. 101*) probably made the situation of the Jerusalem church especially acute but hardly changed it fundamentally. Perhaps this is also still reflected in the fourth century in the name *Ebionaei*, which Jerome and Epiphanius attest for the Christians in the land east of the Jordan.

Capper (1995) referred to Luke’s church community in Acts 2:44-45 and 6:1 as goods sharing community. Capper explained that Luke’s account of the community of goods of the earliest community in Jerusalem is clearly idealized with popular philosophical catchphrases. He affirmed further that instances of formal community of property

were a feature of Palestinian Jewish culture, and had persisted for approaching two centuries amongst the sect of the Essenes prior to the events which Luke purports to describe and as such features of Luke’s account suggest linguistic usages and organizational forms employed in the legislation for Essene community of goods revealed in the Rule of the Community discovered in Qumran cave 1. Capper revealed further that the elements of Luke’s account are illuminated by the practicalities of Essene property-sharing arrangements revealed in the accounts of the Essenes given by Philo and Josephus. To Capper, these clues point to the probable Palestinian origins of the tradition and suggest that a group within the earliest Jerusalem Church practiced formal property-sharing and as such Luke’s portrayal of earliest Christian community of goods can be taken seriously as an historical account.

Goods or property sharing was practiced in first century Palestine especially among household members (Johnson, 1977; Johnson, 1981). Luke’s church community was familiar with the practice of *oikonomia*, which is a compound of *oikos/oikia*, house, and *nomos*, law or management. Also Calef (2014) situated the church community of Luke in the first century Mediterranean world of Jesus and the evangelists of which house was not so much a building but the household, which in the ancient world was the primary unit of production, and so, the site of human livelihood. Thus “economy” means literally “the law or the management of the household,” and refers to the ordering of relationships and resources for the livelihood of the persons of the household. In the ancient context, that ordering was hierarchical and patriarchal, with the father acting as *oikonomos*, “one who managed household. This household is other wise called the church (*ekklesia*) in Luke’s narrative (Elliott, 1991). Israel’s community was instructed by Yahweh through the prophets not to neglect the poor. The poor here means the orphans, the sick, the weak, the down trodden, the less-privileged, widows, the needy and the marginalized. God intended his land also to provide for those people who had not been allotted land. According to the law, a tithe was set aside for the tribe of Levi, the priests who were not allotted land. Also, a tithe of the produce from the land was to be placed in storage in each town, and the resident aliens, the orphans, and the widows were to be allowed to go and eat their fill (Deuteronomy, 14:22-29). The Georges were expected not to favour the rich against the and were not to be prejudiced against the rich in favour of the poor (Ex.23:3,6). As corruption and oppression increased, the poor were easily exploited. When they are oppressed they cry out to God as their final habitat (Fleming, 2004, p.346).

In a society faced with the challenge of justice-conscious people, leaders must wake up to their responsibility. The economic situation in Luke’s church community has a resonance with the Niger Delta situation

of Nigeria because both societies present a people who were marginalized in the sharing of resources and leaders responding adequately to such situations. Has Nigerian leaders responded appropriately to the socio-economic agitations of the people of the Niger Delta?

5. ANALYSIS OF ACTS 2:44-45

Acts 2:44 reflect the language of Greek philosophizing about the ideal society. The usage $\kappa\omicron\iota\nu\kappa\iota\varsigma$ (*koinos*), 'they had all things in common' is a representation of the unity of the early church community. *En autois hapanta koina*, 'there were to them all things in common' is also found in Plato's Republic, a Utopian scheme, and in other literature which emphasizes the philosophical ideal; it is found, for example, in praise of the tribal economy of the primitive Scythians or in connection with the renunciation of the ideal philosopher and as such, it is therefore clear that Luke presents the early Christians in Jerusalem in the dress of Greek thinking about ideal political organization, or a state of detachment from possessions realized by the ideally pious (Capper, 1995 citing Mealand, 1977; Johnson, 1977). Also the Greek term $\epsilon\chi\omega$ (*echo*) is also used to mean to have, that is to hold possession, property or riches or furniture or utensils or goods or food etc. It could also mean to hold things together as companions or friends.

Acts 2: 45 presents to us how fellow members of the church contributed to the common purse of the church for the care of those in need by $\pi\iota\pi\rho\kappa\sigma\kappa\omega\ \kappa\tau\omicron\mu\alpha$ and $\pi\alpha\rho\chi\iota\varsigma$ (*piprasko ktēma huparxis*) meaning, they sold their possessions and goods. The Greek word $\kappa\tau\omicron\mu\alpha$ (*ktēma*) means possession of property, lands or estates. Also, $\pi\alpha\rho\chi\iota\varsigma$ (*huparxis*) means possessions, goods, wealth or property (Strong, 2001: Gk2933, 5223). Both *ktēma* and *huparxis* give the understanding of material possessions and substances. Those who gave sold their possessions and those who have substance like money or food gave it. The Greek word $\delta\iota\alpha\mu\epsilon\rho\zeta\omega$ (*diemerizo*) was also used in verse 45 and means to cleave asunder, cut in pieces, to be divided into opposing parts, to be at variance to distribute (Strong, 2001). The resources were divided according to $\chi\rho\epsilon\iota\alpha$ (*chreia-needs*) of the individuals.

In Acts 6:1, the word $\pi\alpha\rho\alpha\theta\epsilon\omega\rho\omega$ (*paratheoreo*) was used to indicate the nature of economic problem that brought the agitation among them. In this context, the Greek word $\pi\alpha\rho\alpha\theta\epsilon\omega\rho\omega$ means to overlook or neglect. It is from the root word *par-ah'* meaning from, of at, by, besides, near (TDNT-5:727,771). This implies that those neglected were placed beside or outside others. Those that were neglected were the $\eta\lambda\lambda\eta\nu\iota\sigma\tau\iota\varsigma$ (*Hellenistes*) $\chi\epsilon\rho\alpha$ (*chera*), that is the Grecian widows. The resources were meant for all the widows but some were neglected due to their region and ethnicity. This is not far fetched from the Niger Delta situation.

6. APPLICATION OF ACTS 2:44-45 FOR THE NIGERIAN SITUATION IN NIGER DELTA

6.1 Unity Among Humans (2:44)

Ochulor and Metuonu, (2011) saw the problem of disunity in Nigeria in the fight for the socio-economically oppressed when they argued from the view point of Jesus and Marxism in their article that adherents of religion should be united to influence the society to discard their prejudice and unite in the struggle to end exploitation and oppression particularly, in Nigeria. Of course Jesus Christ and Karl Marx were both revolutionary figures whose missions were the liberation of man from the evils of exploitation and oppression. Luke's church community were together and had all things in common. By so doing, no one was left to suffer while others were living in affluence. They were together to fight the same course. The course of making sure no one suffers unnecessarily among them. Niger Delta is being left alone to fight for themselves. It appears after the declaration of amnesty to the Niger Delta armed fighters, the entire world kept quiet about the economic problem of the region. While the amnesty is highly appreciated, we must understand that what is being done for the freedom fighters should not be used to replace rapid infrastructural and economic development of the entire region. The church community came together and were united for a common front. This is a challenge to the church in Nigeria. The church in all the regions of Nigeria should speak in one voice until the oppression of Niger Delta people and other groups are properly addressed.

6.2 Sharing Resources to Meet Needs (2:45)

Considering this passage, Johnson (2006, p.11) opines that since as embodied creatures we are also thereby inevitably social creatures, the way we gather ourselves socially into intentional communities has the same symbolic significance as it does for individuals. For Christians, this means that the faithful sharing of possessions is not simply a matter of individual faith but must express the faith of the community as well. This was truly present in the early church in the sense that resources were shared to meet needs of the less-privileged in the community. Dawsey (2001) also added that the issue of sharing resources to meet needs is idealized in Christian view of property of which this is rooted in the Bible and in Christian tradition. This understanding is predicated on the postulation that the original source of all that is good is the very act of God, who created both the earth and man, and who gave the earth to man so that he might have dominion over it by his work and enjoy its fruits (Gen. 1:28). Any attempt to hinder any one from receiving what he deserve implies oppression. How does these relate to the socio-economic problem of the Niger Delta? In both

Luke's church community and the Niger Delta of Nigeria, there are the presence of the poor and the marginalized but others who are well placed did not neglect the plight of those who are suffering. Here the Niger Delta region can be seen as a region that is very rich with natural resources but very poor in infrastructural and economic developments. Much money has equally been released by the FG but such monies do not commensurate with needs of the region. The church community of Luke has given us a recipe of how a society should be administered with resources. The powerful churches in Nigeria no more fight for the Niger Delta. The Niger Delta of Nigeria is blessed with natural resources but instead of allowing them to control their resources and magnanimously share with others in Nigeria, they are living at the mercy of those who took it away from them. However, if the FG want to give resources for the development of Niger Delta, it should commensurate with the environmental and economic needs of the region. Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) and the Federal Ministry of Niger Delta is presently in vogue yet no outstanding thing is happening to the economy of the region. Many of the projects being carried out are politically motivated. Some individuals are seriously benefitting from the system. Resources should be given to the region in accordance with the needs to be addressed. The church in all the regions of Nigeria should add their voices to the genuine agitations of the Niger Delta people.

6.3 Fairness and Justice (6:1)

Luke turns away from the conflict between the Sanhedrin and the church leaders to introduce two groups within the Jerusalem church. They were the "Grecian" Jews (Greek, *Hellenistai*, or "Hellenists") and "Hebraic" Jews. We may be surprised that subgroups exist within the early church community. But these groups are crucial to the story of Acts. Paul equally addressed the rift between the Jews and Gentiles. It is important we identify these Hebraic and Hellenistic Jews, for it will help us understand the situation of the Jerusalem church, and how the gospel message is being preached. Most commentators divide the Grecian and Hebraic Jews along linguistic and geographic lines. The Hellenistic Jews are those who speak mainly Greek, and formerly lived outside of Judea and Galilee. But they had settled in Jerusalem — retired, as it were, to the homeland. Nevertheless, they still have affinities with lands of the Jewish dispersion from which they came. The Hebraic Jews are those who speak mainly Aramaic, and were born in Jerusalem or Judea. A parallel in modern Jerusalem would be the distinction between Jews who were born in the land of Israel (*sabras*) and those who migrated to Israel from other nations. The Hellenistic Jews in the church probably attended Greek-speaking synagogues before they became Christians. The Hebraic Christians attended synagogues in which Aramaic was used (<https://www.gci.org/bible/acts6>). All of these

groups formed the church. However, issues ensued in the early church community. The one presented here was the neglect or marginalization of some group of people within the group. The group of people so neglected were the Grecian widows. The resources were meant to go round all to satisfy their hunger yet some of them were not given. The church leaders heard about the issue and created a fair and just environment by making sure that the marginalized widows were fairly and justly treated. This is a lesson that must be learnt from this passage by the church and state leaders. The economically marginalized Niger Delta people should be fairly and justly treated. The Federal Government (FG) of Nigeria should develop the infrastructural and environmental problems of the Niger Delta. The international bodies who are familiar with oil exploration in other places should lend their voices to call for fairness and justice.

6.4 Pro-Activeness in Conflict Resolution (6:ff)

The term proactive means taking the initiative by acting rather than reacting to events (Encarta, 2009). This is exactly what the early church leaders did here. When the agitation of the Grecian Jews was brought to the notice of the church leaders (the apostles), they immediately acted by setting up a seven-man committee to handle the issue of sharing the resources equitably among all. After the committee has been set up, we never heard about such crisis from the agitating group. This implies that they the Grecian widows who were agitating were satisfied with how the conflict was handled. This is equally a lesson that must be learnt by both the church and state leaders. Conflict should not be allowed to escalate before they are properly addressed. The Niger Delta issues of economic, infrastructural and environmental degradation have been the point of conflicts and even crisis. The FG on the other hand has equally tried to resolve it but their approach has been inadequate and very slow. The followings were set up to invest in the development of human and landscape of Niger Delta region: Niger Delta development Board (NDDDB) 1959; Niger Delta Development Authority (NDDA); Oil Minerals Producing Area Development Commission (OMPADEC); Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) and Ministry for Niger Delta (Idowu, 2012). All of these commissions are good but they have not solved the problem of the Niger Delta the way it should because it has been grossly politicized (Akinyele, 2006; Adebajo et al., 2007). Presently the Petroleum Industry Bill (PIB) seems to give some ray of light that it might tackle the problem yet the National House of Assembly is yet to pass the bill. And even when the bill has been passed, how can it adequately address the situation?

6.5 Avoiding Oppression Through Right Policies (6:1ff)

The agitations of the Grecian widows were addressed not just by speech but by corresponding actions. The complain

was that of oppression. It was oppression because the resources meant for all were been administered to a few or some thereby willfully neglecting some others just because of ethno-regional consideration. This was quickly arrested by the apostles (leaders) by way of setting up a policy of sharing. Although, the passage did not tell us in a plain text an enumeration of any policy formulated, but the policy of equity was implicit in the setting up of the seven man welfare committee to handle the situation squarely. When this committee did the right thing, such agitating widows never complained again. This gives us the assumption that the committee upheld the policy of equity.

CONCLUSION

The Niger Delta of Nigeria produces crude oil that enriches the nation but the people of the region are living in abject poverty. Consequently, this paper has shown that the environmental impact of crude oil exploration is affecting the economic situation of the Niger Delta region because farming, fishing, lumbering, etc especially in the areas where the activities are taking place has been affected adversely. Water, soil and the atmosphere are polluted thereby causing both agricultural and some vital economic activities to be grounded. This has in turn contributed to the unemployment rate in the region.

The work has equally shown that the economic injustice that is bedeviling the region is the neglect of the region by the Federal Government and the Multinationals operating in the region. Although, some money have been released by the Federal Government and the Multinationals notwithstanding the fact that some amount of these monies go into the pockets of some dubious individuals in the region, it does not commensurate with developmental needs of the region.

The passages Acts 2:44-45; 6:1 live us with the lesson of fairness and justice, unity, equitable distribution of resources in accordance with needs of people or region, avoidance of oppression through right policies and pro-activeness in conflicts resolution. All these were done in addition to what other scholars have done to proffer solution to the economic problem of the Niger Delta region.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to bring the economic development of Niger Delta region into a reality the followings are therefore recommended:

That the administration of president Muhammadu Buhari should spore the National House of Assembly to speedily pass the Petroleum Industry Bill (PIB) so as to have a working document for the development of the region and other regions that will produce oil in future and when it has been passed it should be properly implemented;

That the Nigerian state resort to resource control so that all the federating units called states can tap and manage their resources and pay tax to the centre;

That the multinational oil companies in the Niger Delta region be encouraged to embark on a number of corporate social responsibilities and adhere to international best practices in the protection of the environment;

That beyond amnesty, a micro-finance scheme be organized specially for youths and the unemployed for business development; and

That social amenities like road and bridge net works, electricity supply, good schools, state of art hospitals, water, etc be provided in the entire region.

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APPENDIX 1: PHOTOS SHOWING POLLUTED WATER AND ENVIRONMENT

These are photographs showing the poor situation of the Niger Delta area. Water and environmental pollutions are some of the aspects of the poverty situation of the people.





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