

## PREFACE

In January 1993, the people of Ogoni, under the leadership of the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP), launched what they considered the struggle of their life. The struggle centred on local autonomy or limited self-determination in the Nigerian federation, economic and social empowerment, environmental protection and the payment of reparation for damaged environment by oil companies. The Ogoni hoped to achieve these through a non-violent approach, incorporating traditional techniques of non-violence with new ones dictated by the specific circumstances of the Ogoni condition as well as the general Nigerian situation. The struggle emphasized an international campaign as it was calculated that the collective power of the international community would be more effective than any local method in persuading the Nigerian military government to respond to Ogoni demands.

The struggle – its methodology, the issues involved and its message – was a novel social experiment in the Nigerian context. To all intents and purposes the international campaign can be reasonably adjudged a success in terms of the creation of international awareness about the Ogoni condition. Quite important, the struggle largely remained non-violent to the extent that no single law-enforcement or state security personnel or those of the oil companies were hurt throughout the most active phase of the struggle. This was in spite of extreme provocation and repression by these agencies and despite the fact that Ogoni youths had ample opportunities to retaliate with reciprocal violence. Whether the Ogoni have achieved the objectives of their struggle is a different matter. One's judgement in this regard should depend on whether the struggle is situated in and restricted to a local Ogoni context, or viewed in a broader Niger Delta or national context. But at least in the short run their non-violent method worked. And the awareness and attitude of the Niger Delta people has irrevocably changed. Ogoni has become a metaphor for minorities and oil-producing communities' struggle for social justice in Nigeria as well as for environmental awareness.

As the General Secretary of MOSOP from the time the struggle was launched to the end of 1999, and as the only surviving member of the founding Executive Committee still actively involved in the movement, I have often been asked how MOSOP has been able to initiate and sustain a non-violent struggle, especially the international campaign. What I am opportuned to share with readers in this paper is my response to that question. Over and above that, I have tried to suggest ways of pursuing an effective non-violent struggle in the Niger Delta, based on the Ogoni experience, and also through my knowledge of social struggle and social movements in other parts of the underdeveloped world. Quite frankly, it is my considered view that a creative non-violent approach that takes into account the peculiarities of the Niger delta situation is likely to be more productive than the resort to rampant violence. My opinion in this regard is by no means pontifical, it is only a suggestion as there are several ways of approaching the unacceptable Niger Delta situation.

My involvement apart, my considerable knowledge of the philosophy of the Ogoni struggle derived largely from my discourses between 1992 and 1994 with Ken Saro-Wiwa – the principal author of the Ogoni movement. I was in 1992 living in London as a post-doctoral fellow at the School of Oriental and African Studies of London University. London was Saro-

Wiwa's second home and his frequent visits afforded both of us the opportunity of brainstorming and intellectualizing the struggle. .At the end of that year I returned to assume the Secretary-Generalship of MOSOP. Our sometimes heated discourses continued when I returned to Europe late 1993 as a Visiting Scholar at the African Studies Centre in Leiden, The Netherlands. Some of these discussions contributed in shaping the course of the movement.

This is not an academic treatise as the paper is intended for general readership, especially those committed to positive changes in the Niger Delta. To that end the usual academic methods and jargons have been avoided.

The opinions expressed in this paper are personal. They are not those of MOSOP as an organization. And, of course I also bear responsibility for any errors of fact, presentation or interpretation. I have tried as much as possible to minimize such errors by ensuring that I stretch to its limits my commitment to objectivity.

# EFFECTIVE NON-VIOLENT STRUGGLE IN THE NIGER DELTA

By

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## Chapter One

### Introduction

On January 4, 1993, about 300,000 of Ogoni's estimated 530,000 people participated in a peaceful protest march that took place at four different centres in Ogoni. Foreign-based international non-governmental organizations sent observers and a camera crew. The rally, organized by the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP) was given wide coverage by the Nigerian press, and to some extent the Western environmental media as well. It marked the effective launching of the Ogoni movement. Henceforth Ogoni rapidly developed into not just a national issue, but an international one as well.

So much an international issue did Ogoni become that developments in Ogoni received considerable publicity abroad. When, for instance, the military government of General Sani Abacha executed by hanging on November 10, 1995 the leader of MOSOP, Kenule Saro Wiwa and eight other activists, international reaction was immediate and far-reaching. The Commonwealth of Nations which was meeting at the time of the executions, took the unusual measure of suspending Nigeria from the organization there and then. The European Union and the United States recalled their ambassadors to Nigeria. The country descended into a period of international isolation whose huge political and especially economic costs are yet to be precisely determined.

Still, in response to the Ogoni situation, the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Boutros Boutros-Ghali sent a fact-finding mission to Nigeria early 1996 with a specific brief on Ogoni. Nigeria remained on the agenda of the United Nations Human Rights Commission until 1998 with the change of political leadership in the country. In most places in the world Nigeria suffered diplomatic embarrassment. Ogoni's international campaign became an important strand in the broader developments that brought about the end of military rule in Nigeria and the emergence of the present civilian government.

The international pressure that significantly contributed to bringing about such a fundamental, political development in Nigeria did not happen by accident. It was the result of a carefully planned campaign executed with great vigour and enthusiasm by MOSOP. That campaign was an expression of the organization's strategy that outrightly rejected violence as an instrument of social struggle. The strategy instead emphasized various methods of non-violence. The choice

between violence and non-violence arose out of a thoughtful analysis of objective local, national and international developments.

The campaign remained largely non violent – at least from the Ogoni side – even when the Ogoni people and MOSOP were subjected to unremitting violence and terror by the security forces. Not a single law-enforcement officer or soldier was hurt even the angry youths had ample opportunities to act otherwise. The oil companies suspended operations in Ogoni without the Ogoni causing physical injury to a single staff of these companies. This is in sharp contrast to the situation in some other parts of the Niger Delta that can be said to have been inspired in some degree by the Ogoni protest.

### **Some Conditions for Violent/Non-Violent Struggle**

While it is true that there is a tendency for political authorities everywhere to respond quicker to violent outrages than peaceful protests, it remains debatable whether on the long run violence achieves better results than non-violence. Whether violence or non-violence will be more effective in a given struggle depends on a number of factors. These include the nature of government in power, the objectives of the struggle or the type of issues or grievances at stake, the geographical terrain of the struggle, the perceived source of support for the struggle and the leadership of the struggle.

**Nature of Government:** While an authoritarian regime – military or civilian - will most likely perceive a demand for change as a threat and proceed to crush it, a liberal democratic government is likely to accommodate or respond less coercively to such demand. Authoritarian regimes either crush dissent or at best drive it underground. Studies of social movements, including our own experience in Nigeria show that dissidence generally thrive when the existing regime is perceived to be weak or democratic and therefore less prone to resort to violence as the chosen conflict resolution mechanism. This situation is readily exemplified in Nigeria by the the Abacha regime which was generally perceived to be the epitome of repression. Militant social movements and radical demands were contained at least in the short run as the excessively high cost of confronting the government discouraged potential agitators. Even MOSOP was driven underground. But the advent of an elected government has tended to unleash a torrent of agitation – violent in many cases – that had remained bottled up under the preceding regime.

Repression, however, succeeds only for a while if an aggrieved people are really determined. In the end violent regimes unwittingly but almost inevitably destroy themselves for by refusing to accommodate peaceful demands for change they unconsciously nurture a more potent force that would peacefully or violently overthrow the regime. Examples of this situation abound in the world in the last twenty years. In the Philippine, demands for democratic reforms were consistently resisted by the Ferdinand Marcos dictatorship that ruled that country for nearly thirty years. In 1986, a huge crowd descended on Manila, the capital, besieging the presidential

palace. Marcos was forced to abandon power, fleeing into exile. The peoples' power succeeded without firing a shot.

Even more dramatic was the case of Eastern Europe where communist regimes that had seized power in the various countries after the Second World War ruled with draconian authority, stifling democratic aspirations. When eventually the possibility of change began to open up in the former Soviet Union with Mikail Gorbachev's policy of *glasnost* and *perestroika* (openness and restructuring), the people responded with a non-violent revolution. Country after country, the people rose up without the force of arms, chasing away their communist masters. Here in Nigeria it is difficult to say how long General Sani Abacha could have succeeded in ruling the country by repression if fate had not intervened to terminate that regime. It is instructive that as MOSOP was driven underground the organization intensified its international campaign, winning more international sympathy that increased the country's isolation.

**Objectives:** If the objectives of the struggle are non-political, such as cultural or educational issues, the need for violence may be minimal. But when the issues are political, economic or religious, the temptation to resort to violence becomes high. This is especially so when the authorities are not sufficiently responsive and are perceived to be incapable of suppressing the mounting agitation.

**Terrain:** The terrain and location of home base of a particular movement may aid or discourage the resort to violence. An area that is easily accessible to communication does not offer the ideal condition for armed attacks on state targets or guerilla activities generally. For the relatively easy access to the attackers by better armed and better trained state forces may make such attack extremely costly and counter-productive, even suicidal. On the other hand, inaccessibility may render counter attack difficult and make the destruction of the movement even more difficult. Much of the Niger Delta falls into this category, but as the Odi experience has shown, the state can go to any length to exercise its might when it feels threatened. This includes unleashing massive violence on indirect targets to act as deterrent to the main targets. Even elected governments in the developing world do not make themselves amenable to the same level of democratic pressure that checks the coercive excesses of similar governments in the Western world. Again, Odi has demonstrated this truism in the case of Nigeria. This is a reality which should make change-seeking groups think carefully before rejecting non-violence.

**Contiguous Territory:** Still on location, cases from different parts of the world have demonstrated that insurgents tend to enjoy the advantage of easy escape where the insurgent group occupies a contiguous territory that cuts across two countries. When the militants are attacked they slip across the border into the neighbouring country where their sympathetic kinsmen aid their protection. Although a hot pursuit action may warrant cross-border raids by the security forces, this cannot be done without triggering off friction with the neighbouring country. Unless when the affected country endorses such hot pursuit action through some form of bilateral protocol or secret understanding.

**Friendly Neighbours:** Where such cross-border ethnic affinity is not possible, militant groups need friendly or sympathetic neighbours to provide an escape corridor in order to operate more or less effectively. But where the group is surrounded by hostile neighbours the advantage of an escape corridor is removed, exposing the militants to relatively easy counter-attack. This situation is illustrated by the arrest in Rivers State of some of the Odi militants who allegedly murdered the policemen and triggered off the attack on the community by government troops. At the early stages of the Ogoni struggle Ogoni became the object of a wave of attacks by her neighbours. With such hostile neighbours it would have been foolhardy for MOSOP to resort to violent confrontations with the Nigerian security forces.

**Leadership:** Above all the most critical factor in deciding the choice of strategy for a movement is the leadership of the movement. A brash and irresponsible leadership can against all objective considerations launch the movement on the path of costly violent confrontations which may engender a rapid destruction of the struggle and the movement itself.

To what extent these factors played in MOSOP's choice of non-violence shall be examined in subsequent portions of this paper.

What are the grievances of the Ogoni people that led to their protest? In trying to find redress to their grievances why did the Ogoni people not resort to violence but instead channelled their energies into a peaceful national and international campaign? What are the relative advantages of violent and non-violent approaches in the Nigerian situation? What lessons can other marginalized groups in the Niger Delta learn from the Ogoni experience? These are some of the other relevant questions that will be addressed in this paper.

## **Chapter Two**

### **The Intellectual Foundation of the Ogoni Struggle**

#### *The Ogoni Situation in Nigeria*

The Ogoni did not rise up in protest for the fun of doing so. The protest is a desperate measure to force the government and the oil companies to address the fundamental issues that were threatening the existence of the Ogoni people. These issues also affect other Niger Delta communities in varying degrees. Although this matter of Ogoni grievances has become familiar to people who have been following the Ogoni struggle, thanks to MOSOP's campaign, it is necessary to revisit these issues for the purposes of the present paper. The issues include political marginalization, economic backwardness, the seizure of their natural resources, oil-based environmental pollution and cultural disintegration. All these and many others, put

together, were leading to the extinction of the Ogoni people. The present writer has elsewhere referred to this situation as that of internal colonialism. Let us briefly look at these issues.

**Political Marginalization:** Ogoni's greatest problem is that of being a minority within a minority in a country where every aspect of life is controlled by fierce ethnic competition. With a current population of about 550,000 Ogoni stands little chance against the dominant ethnic groups. These groups individually account for several millions in a total national population of more than 100 million. This meant that Ogoni's voice could hardly be heard in national decision-making process that affects their life. A ready example is the military institution that has ruled Nigeria for about thirty years since the country gained independence from the British in 1960. The ethnic character of both recruitment into the officer corps and appointments to political offices has ensured that no Ogoni person became a member of the central military council that made decisions for the nation or even a military governor of a state. Of the few junior officers Ogoni had none ever held any political appointment. Such political disadvantage was not limited to periods of military rule. At state level Ogoni was also a minority. Manipulation of electoral factors such constituency delimitation and voters register by those already in control of power ensured that an Ogoni person could hardly become a governor. Ogoni people became helpless in the successive military and civilian governments. They felt highly alienated.

**Underdevelopment:** Because of the critical role of government in economic development and in the distribution of privileges, groups that are not adequately represented in government automatically lose out in terms of economic and social progress. This has been the position of Ogoni. Political marginalisation has translated into deep economic disability to Ogoni as a group and individual Ogoni persons as well. Some of the basic social amenities that however inefficient have been taken for granted in many parts of the country have remained absent in Ogoni. Nearly all of Ogoni has to this day remained without portable water. It was only recently and largely as a result of the protest that a small part of Ogoni was given electricity. Apart from the Eleme area the rest of Ogoni has no functioning telephone line. Ogoni businessmen watched helplessly as their counterparts from other ethnic groups received big government contracts. Highly qualified Ogoni men and women rarely are given the kind of lucrative appointments that are easily available to their less qualified counterparts from other parts of the country. The sum total of this situation has been grinding in all parts of Ogoni. The affluent and influential technocrats and wealthy businessmen that rose not on the basis of their entrepreneurial acumen but connections to those in power and have made a difference to their communities Ogoni had none.

What has remained even more painful to the Ogoni people is that Ogoniland contributed significantly to the oil that supports the national economy, the government and its elaborate system of patronage from which they were largely excluded. The people felt exploited without mitigation.

**Oil and Environmental Problem:** The oil that enriched others produced misery in Ogoni. This was an important source of anger among the Ogoni. Decades of reckless oil exploration produced in Ogoni environmental devastation that worsened the economic and social condition of the people. For in Ogoni as among other indigenous people, the economy is dependent on the environment. Repeated oil spills took their toll on the limited farmland while destroying vast areas of aquatic habitat and its fish stocks. Both peasant farming and fishing on which the people depended throughout their history were greatly affected. Uninterrupted gas flaring caused atmospheric pollution that constituted a conspicuous health hazard. A combination of rapidly rising population, environmental and economic destruction, government neglect and the indifference of the oil companies produced the frightening scenario of a future time-bomb that could lead to the extinction of the people. Informed Ogoni people were indeed scared and had to do something to avert this potential armageddon.

**Lack of Resource Control:** In many parts of the world the local communities and individual landowners are constitutionally empowered to have some measure of control over the resources of their land. In the United States, for instance, any mineral discovered on any land belongs to the landowner. The company that exploits the resources pays royalty to the owner of the land and taxes to the government. In Nigeria, the reverse is the case. Colonial and especially post-colonial laws automatically ensure the seizure by the government of any economic land. No compensation is paid for that seizure except token payments for destroyed economic crops. All Niger Delta communities are united in denouncing as unjust such laws which they claim have enslaved them. If the Ogoni had any measure of control over the resources of their land their economic and social condition would have been better. Their environment could have been better protected. But not only did they not have any control, they are denied any appreciable share of the benefits accruing from those resources. All they have to contend with is the damage. The Ogonis are aggrieved by this unmitigated social injustice.

**Cultural Liquidation:** The Ogoni had for centuries retained their identity as a result of their rigid cultural purity. They remained distinct both in language and culture, forbidding intermarriage with any group except the Ibibio. They rejected participation in the slave trade and were never enslaved. Historically they were never conquered and subordinated by any group as they fiercely resisted external aggression and sustained their independence. The only external power that successfully subdued the Ogoni were the British. And that was not without a struggle as the Ogoni fought unsuccessfully to repulse the white invaders after a protectorate was unilaterally declared over the Ogoni country in 1901. They had hitherto refused to enter into any treaty of protection that other Niger Delta groups signed and which became the basis of colonial occupation after the Berlin Treaty of 1885. The British therefore had to fight to gain control of Ogoni. The domination and exploitation that Ogoni was subjected to under the British and more intensely under the Nigerian rulers, affected all aspects of their life. Their languages and way of life were dying out. Since they lacked any measure of control over their own affairs they had no way of reversing the trend.

**Military Rule:** Although no particular regime favoured the people of Ogoni, their condition worsened under military rule. This was especially so under the successive military governments that had ruled since 1984. The extreme centralization of power in the central government, the intensification of domination by a section of the country that controlled that government, the drastic cutback of oil revenue to oil-producing states, the laws that completely dispossessed the oil-producing communities of their resources – all took place under the military. Worse still, the repressive military system made it difficult to raise a voice of protest. The Ogoni had no one to complain to. They just had to find a way of fighting for their rights non-violently. For the slightest act of force would be met with overwhelming violence by the military authorities. Ending military rule and inaugurating a democratic government that would address the fundamental problem of the political structure of the nation became a priority to the Ogoni people.

These are the important factors that brought about the Ogoni protest. To ensure the protest was successful the whole of Ogoni people had to be involved. They had to be mobilized. It was no longer a matter of a few elites claiming to be taking decision on behalf of the people when they were acting in self-interest. The international community also had to be involved as the Nigerian government which continue to perpetrate that condition will not be willing to change it. They would rather go to any length to destroy the struggle. This is how MOSOP came about. But before we tell the story of MOSOP any further, the social mobilization and international campaign that took place, let us look at earlier attempts by the Ogoni people to empower themselves in Nigeria and why these attempts failed.

### **Earlier Attempts at Self-Empowerment**

After Ogoni's resistance to British rule collapsed finally in 1914, the people adapted themselves to their new masters and became a part of Opobo Division of Calabar Province. Their first organized political action thereafter was the agitation for the creation of a separate administrative division for themselves. This was granted with the creation of Ogoni Division in 1947. The Ogoni together with other Delta communities pressed for the creation of Rivers Province which was achieved the following year. The first major self-help project came with the formation of Ogoni Central Union which awarded a limited number of university scholarships teneble abroad in the 1940s. By 1950 Ogoni's foremost nationalist, Paul T N Birabi had recognized the need for ethnic autonomy and formed the Ogoni State Representative Assembly. It was on the platform of this organization that he was elected to the Eastern House of Assembly.

In spite of self-help efforts the plight of Ogoni people continued to deteriorate in Nigeria. The rise of ethnic nationalism restricted access of minorities to government opportunities, controlled by the large ethnic groups. Self-determination was now seen by Rivers minorities as the solution. That quest brought about the agitation for the creation of Rivers State, which was actualized in 1967. Before long the euphoria that attended the creation of Rivers State died away as the Ogoni felt confronted with yet another kind of ethnic domination in their new state. The new situation did not help their economic and social condition nor their sense of belonging in Nigeria. All the conditions discussed above were now in place.

In the 1970s KAGOTE – an association of Ogoni elites – was formed to champion Ogoni cause. On the political front the quest for self-determination took the form of agitation for the creation of Port Harcourt State. The political struggle continued with the governorship candidacy in 1983 of Chief Kemte Giadom on the platform of the Nigerian Peoples Party. Giadom's electoral defeat, in the opinion of most Ogoni people, confirmed what has been a common assumption in the Rivers State: a person from the upland part of the state can hardly become an elected governor of Rivers State. The argument was that the terrain of much of the riverine parts of the state made a fair election impossible as electoral policing of these areas was difficult. The riverine areas were thus seen as vote factories to be exploited only by riverine candidates at the expense of upland candidates. What is more, there occurred a split in the NPP over Giadom's candidacy. Certain chieftains of the party from the riverine areas decamped to the governing NPN on the ground that the party should have fielded a riverine candidate instead of an upland candidate.

Such political developments did no small damage to whatever hope for political fairness and equality that the Ogoni had in Rivers State. They reinforced the people's search for alternative strategies for empowerment outside the formal political parties when these were allowed to exist, the military institution which was considered out of reach of the Ogonis and the informal politics of elite groups such as KAGOTE. The Ogoni people increasingly saw their problem as being rooted in the political structure of the country. As long as this structure remained in place there was little an Ogoni governor could do to change the situation in a fundamental way. The belief in local autonomy or self-determination increased.

### **Failure of Earlier Strategies**

The fundamental problem of the political structure of the country apart, it may be said that the Ogoni's existing strategies of empowerment also failed because they were elitist and not mass-oriented. The elites controlled the political parties and organized electoral fraud made nonsense of the vote of the electorate. Groups such as OCU, OSRA and KAGOTE, despite their noble intentions and efforts, did not involve the masses of the Ogoni people.

If empowerment was to be a reality, two crucial things had to be done. First, local autonomy which would allow the group take control over certain aspects of life had to be pursued. If the group could control, say social services such as basic education, health, utilities and

environment, as well as tertiary economic policy and natural resources, much of its problems could be solved. The feeling of domination, government neglect, economic and social backwardness would be greatly assuaged. It would not matter much who is the governor in Port Harcourt or president in Abuja.

Second, in pursuing this autonomy option, the masses of the people had to be fully involved. They had to be mobilized. They had to be made aware of their rights and the injustices of the system – which of course they felt daily - and what better alternatives that would fundamentally improve their lives are there. They had to be enjoined to take their destiny in their hands, to rise collectively and fight for their rights. For there is strength in number. That is the story of MOSOP which we will see presently.

### **The Formation of MOSOP**

By the late 1980s the thought of alternative strategies for empowerment in Ogoni was well on course. The new autonomy objective and alternative strategy of mass mobilization had to be clearly defined and articulated. The new thinking was articulated by Kenule Saro-Wiwa. Men such as Chief Edward Kobani and Dr G B Leton readily bought the idea, despite their deep involvement in the politics of the day. A statement about these two men is necessary here for their influence on Ogoni affairs of the day and the role they were to play in the mobilization process.

Edward Kobani, cut his political teeth at the University of Ibadan as a student leader in the late 1950s. He thereafter acquired a larger reputation as a political mover. “Bulldozer”, he was nicknamed. He never held any key public office at the centre beyond being the national Publicity Secretary of the Nigerian Peoples Party (1978-83). But he was a brilliant strategist adept at forming alliances. He also had a marvelous gift for sniffing out political opportunities and getting the Ogoni people involved. For long he held to his conviction that the Ogoni people could significantly improve their situation through creative political participation. He hated political opportunism, preferring to stick to his guns rather than succumb to the temptation of selling out as many Nigerian politicians do when the tide changes. He could have been a more important national figure had he come from any of the major ethnic groups.

Dr G B Leton, a brilliant scientist, was an alumnus of Imperial College, University of London and former lecturer at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. He made his reputation as a weapons scientist in Biafra. After the civil war he entered public life first as a Commissioner in Rivers State government and later Federal Minister for Education. His British training initially made him disdainful of the intrigues and willy-dealing of Nigerian politics but he was subsequently bitten by the political bug. Like his close friend, Edward Kobani, he believed strongly in political participation by the Ogoni. His political style, though, was sometimes criticised as being elitist.

Saro-Wiwa, the writer, humourist and consummate intellectual, had to make sure he won over Leton and Kobani especially. If the most vibrant and most powerful section of the Ogoni

leadership was not involved the new project would hardly take off and if it did it could easily be derailed. With the coming together of these three men and others like Chief Emma Apenu it was less difficult to enlist the support of the Chiefs and the Ogoni intelligentsia.

**Ogoni Bill of Rights:** The first major action in the new approach was the drafting of the Ogoni Bill of rights and the formation of MOSOP to actualize the OBR. To ensure that the document enjoyed the legitimacy of the people, it was signed by all First and Second Class Chiefs in Ogoni, opinion leaders as well as the leadership of MOSOP. This manifesto spelt out concisely the travails of the Ogoni people in Nigeria. It proceeded to state in general terms the demands of the Ogoni people which should be met to address the historical wrongs committed against them and reverse their slide into extinction. The central demands include the granting of local autonomy by the Nigerian government to enable the Ogoni people control certain aspects of their life, including their natural resources, environment and culture. It also asked for adequate representation as a right in the government and other institutions of the Nigerian state. To the oil companies operating in Ogoni the OBR demanded the payment of a reparation of four billion dollars for environmental damage and six billion dollars being the share of oil royalties accruable to Ogoni. The manifesto mandated MOSOP to take the Ogoni case to the international community.

The OBR was revolutionary in the sense that for the first time a Nigerian ethnic community had openly drawn critical attention the iniquities of the existing system. It raised the neglected issue of environmental protection and who deserved the proceeds from oil, advocating ethnic autonomy as a solution and taking the matter to the court of the international community. The document was formally presented to the “Government and People of Nigeria and the International Community” through newspaper advertisements while a copy was sent directly to the Head of state in Abuja. Shell and Chevron, the two oil companies operating in Ogoni at the time, were formally sent a demand notice, asking for the settlement of the sums of money demanded in the OBR.

It has to be emphasized that the Ogoni Bill of Rights did not call for secession or a sovereign Ogoni nation as claimed by critics. It could not have been advocating secession and at the same time asking for representation as a right in the government and other institutions of the Nigerian state. The autonomy it advocated fell far short of sovereignty, being restricted to certain local affairs. The objective of MOSOP has never been to undermine the Nigerian nation-state but to strengthen it by ensuring that each group had a political space of its own and a spirit of belonging through some form of ethnic confederation or true federalism as some people would call it. For that continues to be seen as the main antidote to the potential explosive conflagration which rigid centralization and unrelenting ethnic domination could engender in the country.

How MOSOP developed into a mass movement through which Ogoni people were mobilized to prosecute the objectives of OBR we will now turn our attention in the next chapter.

## Chapter Three

### Social Mobilization and the Creation of a Mass Movement

Having formed MOSOP, the organization had to be transformed into a mass movement. But for that transformation to be achieved the people had to be mobilized first. Above all the organization had to be firmly under the control of a visionary, enlightened and dedicated leadership. The new struggle was going to be fought with a combination of intellect first and foremost and practical political wisdom. Very important, they had to be people of proven credibility who were acceptable to the Ogoni people. The leadership had to reflect that combination. The President, G B Leton, and Vice-President, E N Kobani and other officers such as E A Apenu, the Financial Secretary and Nwieke, the Treasurer, were men who combined varying degrees of political instincts with their vast knowledge of the Ogoni people. The prime mover, Kenule Saro-Wiwa officially took the title of Spokesman of the Ogoni People – a position which was greatly helped by his close association with the media and growing contacts in the international community. His business involvement also enabled him to provide the infrastructure for the new organization, such as office space and his own office staff. The present writer, Ben Naanen, became the General Secretary. Perhaps somehow presumptuously, he, the youngest member of the Executive Committee, was expected to support Saro-Wiwa in providing the intellectual thrust.

Mobilizing the people for the new social experiment initially was difficult. It needed patience. Decades of exploitation, taunting, institutionalized discrimination, ethnic degradation and failed hopes had made the Ogoni people lose confidence in themselves and had become quite fatalistic about their condition. That psychological resistance had to be broken first. They had to be persuaded that their destiny lay in their own hands and that that historical moment had arrived. Once that was achieved the people would move with the same determination and vigour with which they had defended their freedom and culture before their conquest by the British.

Series of meetings were held, some of which were attended by only a handful of people. Progress was slow. The effort just had to be persistent. Certain events gradually began to change the situation for good. In December 1991 KAGOTE had honoured Saro-Wiwa with a special reception. About the same period the Ogoni Klub conferred another honour on him with a moving citation at an event that was well attended by the Ogoni people. All this further enhanced Saro-Wiwa's reputation, a man who through his dogged defence of Ogoni interest and his massive government scholarship award to Ogoni students when he was Rivers State Commissioner for Education he enjoyed enormous popularity among the Ogoni masses. A

charismatic personality was now emerging to lead the struggle. Every successful struggle always has that kind of figure.

In April 1992 Saro-Wiwa and some Ogoni youths undertook a tour of Ogoni and the MOSOP message began to catch on. Still the incipient impact of the mobilization process seemed to have been restricted to Khana up to this stage. Gokana Kingdom was hardly affected and by Saro-Wiwa's admission elsewhere, this changed dramatically when Kobani took it upon himself to call a meeting of the Gokana people.

A major breakthrough came with two related international achievements: the admission of Ogoni to the membership of the Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization (UNPO) in 1992. Through that organization, based in The Hague, The Netherlands, Saro-wiwa was able to record the second achievement: attending the United Nations Working Group for Indigenous People in Geneva where he presented the Ogoni case. These two events were tremendous morale booster for MOSOP and the Ogoni People. They were achievements which no other Nigerian group had attempted. Saro-Wiwa, the master publicist, made the best of them in the media. He had discovered early enough the critical role of information management for any struggle. The crust of psychological barrier among the Ogoni people began to thaw.

### **The Launching of the Ogoni Struggle – January 4, 1993 Rally**

Saro-Wiwa returned from Europe armed with the message of UN and UNPO recognition and support for the Ogoni cause. While at the Working Group in Geneva he learned of the UN declaration of 1993 as the International Decade of the world's Indigenous People. The Ogoni, he argued, are an indigenous people. That status has been recognized by the UN. The struggle now had to be officially launched the day that the UN International Year began, that is, January 4, 1993. Some other expected important political development in Nigeria also played a key role in deciding on that date. But since that development did not materialize it need not concern us here. In addition, that date was a Monday and the first working day of the year. The demonstration could be felt to be a continuation of the end of year festivities. Ogoni workers could afford to lose that working day without undue consequences. Timing is crucial to the success of any event and January 4 was tremendously auspicious for the launching of the Ogoni struggle.

With the new international achievements mobilization now became less difficult. The people were gradually and meticulously worked up with a series of activities during the 1992 Christmas holidays. These included a memorial service and a visit to the grave of Ogoni's first nationalist, Paul T N Birabi. Fiery speeches were made in defence of the struggle that had effectively been set in motion. As early as nine o'clock on January 4 as many as 250,000 Ogoni people had thronged the kingdom headquarters with the largest crowd converging at Bori, singing and dancing to all manners of cultural performances. It was a great carnival. Saro-Wiwa and his colleagues made great speeches of exaltation. Women, men and children walked long distances from remote villages to be a part of the historic event. Passionate and patriotic speeches were

made by leading Ogoni men and women, denouncing Shell and government for their “genocidal crimes” against the people of Ogoni.

The star of the day was undoubtedly Saro-Wiwa himself. Hitherto a man of the pen and hardly of the platform, the occasion provided the opportunity for him to test his newly cultivated oratorical skill. The crowd went wild with excitement and pride. They have become infected with peaceful revolutionary zeal. It was the defining moment in the life of the Ogoni people. Ogoni has changed, perhaps forever. The publicity given to the rally in the national, and to some extent, international media, quickened the momentum of the struggle.

The government had opposed the rally, fearing it could turn violent. But the MOSOP leadership had instructed the people to ensure that the demonstration was non-violent. And it was so. This was one major indication of the people’s respect for MOSOP leadership and the leaders’ ability to control the struggle. Such control was decisive in ensuring that the struggle remained non-violent. Mobilizing such a relatively large number of people for a rally and ensuring that the rally was peaceful was a tremendous initial achievement of MOSOP.

### **Social Mobilization**

The January 4 rally itself was a crucial act of mobilization. That success had to be institutionalized in order to ensure a sustained struggle. The rally must not be allowed to be a fry in the pan, a momentary glory which could easily evaporate if not followed up. It was time for hard work and intensified challenge for MOSOP leadership.

To meet the challenge, MOSOP had to be transformed into a mass movement over the next several months. The organization had to be given a structure to ensure discipline and control. It was structured like a pyramid, at the apex of which was the Steering Committee, the decision-making organ. This was followed by the six clan or Kingdom chapters. At the base were the village cells which were answerable to their respective Kingdom chapters.

The executive committee, together with some selected young men noted for their education and dynamism, constituted the Steering Committee. In principle any Ogoni indigene who had made a contribution in life, was a member. But as it turned out, not more than twenty persons ever attended any single Steering Committee meeting. Most of the meetings were held either at the residence of the President, Dr G B Leton, or the Vice-President’s, Chief E N Kobani.

The real mobilizing force in the organization was a group of dynamic young men in the Steering Committee. They teamed up with others outside the Steering Committee to form the National Youth Council of Ogoni People (NYCOP). They subsequently became informally known as the Youth Wing of MOSOP, although the executive committee never took that decision. It was NYCOP which organized the village cells and Kingdom chapters, organized rallies and generally carried out the decisions of the Steering Committee. Let us now turn our attention to some of the specific measures that ensured the mobilization of the people.

**The Creation of Symbols:** Symbols are important for the success of any movement or social organization. They generate and sustain the spirit of pride, patriotism and struggle. For MOSOP one of these symbols was the Ogoni anthem which was a rallying cry. It exhorted the Ogoni people to rise up in defence of their rights, not to allow themselves to be cheated by the world any longer. It enjoined them to unite and fight together. The anthem became the inaugural song for any meeting or rally. Everyone had to stand to attention when it was being rendered in the same manner that one had to stand at attention when the national anthem was being sung. A particular style of greeting and clapping at meetings were also developed. MOSOP also adopted a flag made up of three colours arranged vertically – green, yellow and blue. At the centre is a circle of six stars in gold. The flag was designed by Tombari Kobani, at the time a student of architecture at the University of Lagos. Today every true MOSOP person has an Ogoni flag, either in the waving form or as a pin pinned on dresses.

**Mass Rallies:** A few weeks after the January 4 demonstration, hardly did any Sunday pass without a rally either at the village or Kingdom level. The Kingdom rallies, normally attended by the leadership of MOSOP, was an opportunity to brief the people on the progress of the struggle, tell them about what lies ahead and the sacrifice expected of them in order to arrive at the promised land where the suffering would end. The people were particularly interested in knowing about the organization's achievements at the international level. Somehow they had developed the view that their salvation could only come from the international community. Not a few of them believed that the United Nations would send troops to defend Ogoni if attacked by the Nigerian troops. Shell was always conspicuously attacked at these rallies and at some point the people appeared to hate Shell even more passionately than they hated the government. Government was an impersonal institution, but Shell and their alleged atrocities were there to be seen by everyone. The rallies became important occasions for renewing and sustaining the people's commitment to the struggle.

**Appeal Fund:** To raise fund to run the organization, an appeal fund was launched. Every Ogoni person was required to pay a mandatory levy of one naira. But over and above this financial consideration, the levy was expected to be an expression of membership of MOSOP and commitment to the struggle in the same manner that taxation is supposed to be a symbol of loyalty to the government. People enthusiastically paid as much as they could afford. Parents paid for their children. Expectant mothers paid for their unborn babies. To get the maximum mobilizing effect, the fund was launched in each of the Kingdoms and even at village levels. The launching was done with great fanfare and was usually a big event. Each village brought its own contribution to the Kingdom launching. The villages competed to see which among them would raise the most fund. The Kingdoms similarly competed. Individuals also competed. Meticulous records of these funds were kept and till date villages and individuals use it as one of the reference points to express their contribution to the struggle. The fund provided the seed money for the struggle.

**Night Vigils:** Night vigils were also kept to pray for the success of the struggle. This programme was launched in March 1993 at Bori with a candlelight procession from the

grounds of Birabi Memorial grammar School to the Khana Local Government headquarters where the vigil was held. A singing competition among the village choirs was held as part of the events. As usual for similar gatherings fiery speeches were held in exhortation of the struggle which was portrayed as a divine struggle in the tradition of the jihad and medieval crusade. The star preacher that night referred to Ken saro-Wiwa as the Moses of the Ogoni struggle. The respective kingdoms also held their vigils. Vigils subsequently became a feature of the struggle as these were normally held any time things appeared to be getting difficult for the struggle.

**Accidents:** As in many situations in history when accidents have dramatically altered the course of events, certain accidental events significantly contributed to galvanizing the Ogoni people and catalyzed the mobilization. One of such events was the shooting in April 1993 of unarmed farmers of the village of Biara. The villagers had gathered to prevent Shell's contractor, Willbros from bulldozing their fresh crops for a pipeline. Troops that Shell had brought along with Willbros shot into the crowd, injuring several people. The effect of the incident on the struggle was immediate. The incident was interpreted as a confirmation of the alleged conspiracy of Shell and government to annihilate Ogoni people. The tension that followed led to Shell's suspension of operations at its oilfields at Dere and Bodo West. Further demonstrations followed, leading to the shooting to death in Tai Kingdom one of the demonstrators, further raising tension. The funeral of the young man was converted to a big solidarity event by MOSOP. A great crowd from all parts of Ogoni attended. These events sealed the fate of Shell in Ogoni and helped in no small measure to focus the struggle.

**Ethnic Attacks:** The other crucial events which played a tremendous part in mobilizing the people were the ethnic attacks on Ogoni by her neighbours, the Andoni, Ndoki and Okrika, from August 1993. Ogoni faced a state of emergency as these attacks encircled the people, threatening their struggle and existence. There were allegations that these attacks were sponsored by government and Shell, and in some cases actually carried out or led by elements of the security forces. Although the allegations have not been proved and Shell has continued to deny any involvement, they were enough to harden the people's perception of Shell and government as enemies of Ogoni. Again, as history has taught us, nothing mobilizes a people more than external war. Young men from all over Ogoni rose up to the occasion, forming vigilante squads that successfully repulsed the attacks. These accidents and external aggression shall be discussed in detail in a subsequent chapter.

## Chapter Four

### The International Campaign

The greatest strength of MOSOP lay in its international campaign. We have already mentioned the organization's rejection of violence, focussing its energy instead on a peaceful international campaign. We have also seen the reason for choosing non-violence. We now have to probe these reasons further, demonstrating why the external campaign was so important. The reasons include: first, the fundamental external influence that inspired the launching of the Ogoni struggle; second, the nature of the government in power; third, the geography and size of Ogoni; fourth, the absence of friendly neighbours; fifth and very important, the nature of the men who led the organization.

External Influence: MOSOP was basically inspired by international developments. Perhaps the greatest influence was UNPO of which Ogoni became a member in 1992 and provided the platform to launch the international campaign. By then MOSOP had been in existence for years but had not taken the plunge to commence the struggle. UNPO's charter forbids the use of violence by its members. Member nations or organizations that used force were ineligible for admission while those admitted had to continuously demonstrate a commitment to non-violence. UNPO itself was founded to support the struggle of nations and peoples across the world who felt unrepresented in their respective nation-states by providing them access to the international community, especially the United Nations, international NGOs, foreign governments and the international media. Through such channels the members could prosecute their international campaign which was expected to bring about international pressure on their home governments to address their problems. The organization's secretariat in The Hague, The Netherlands, also held training sessions on non-violent methods, conflict resolution, diplomacy and negotiation.

Once Ogoni became a member of UNPO it had to uphold the organization's peaceful charter and principles, benefiting from the advise and services of the organization. Mention must be made of the then General Secretary of the organization Dr Michael van Walt van Praag, an international lawyer and former aide to the Dalai Lama, the Tibetan spiritual leader. Van Walt at every opportunity advised Saro-Wiwa Ken Saro-Wiwa, who in 1993 was elected Vice-Chairman of the organization's General Assembly. The present writer who in 1995 became the Vice-President of UNPO's Steering Committee (the decision-making organ of the organization) - also benefited from van Walt's advice.

Military Dictatorship: Even if in disregard of its international obligations MOSOP decided to resort to acts of violence, such thought was immediately discouraged by government repression. The Babangida regime had arrested several activists and the human rights situation was deteriorating rapidly as pro-democracy activity gathered momentum. The regime which never really wanted a successful democratic transition that it had promised was becoming

increasingly sensitive to criticism and actions which could be construed as oppositional. The last thing the organization wanted at this formative stage was prolonged incarceration of its leaders. Any act of violence would simply have given the regime the opportunity of smashing the organization.

It would be recalled that even without any show of violence by MOSOP Ken Saro-Wiwa was repeatedly arrested and his passport seized when he wanted to travel abroad for a human rights conference in June 1993. The same Babangida government had enacted a Treason and Treasonable Offences Decree in 1993 specifically targeted at MOSOP. Under the decree virtually everything that MOSOP stood for was punishable by death. The organization had to be very careful not to court early martyrdom. The boycott of the June 12, 1993 presidential election by the Ogoni at the instance of MOSOP, even if the election did not go anywhere, was seen by the regime as an act of confrontation and the organization was accordingly targeted. The manifesto of the Ogoni struggle struck at the root of everything that ensured military domination of Nigeria – resource control, political restructuring, oil production, etc. The government was jittery the Ogoni struggle would spread to other oil-producing areas and make them lose control of the country. Everything had to be done to stop MOSOP.

Of course the situation became worse with the seizure of power by Abacha. The story of MOSOP and the Ogoni people under that regime is already a familiar one to Nigerians. The repression culminated in the execution by hanging on November 10, 1995 of Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight other MOSOP activists. Everything was done to destroy the Ogoni struggle, to no avail. MOSOP would almost certainly have been exterminated if it had launched itself as a violent organization. Discretion, it is said, is the best part of valour and MOSOP had to act with utmost discretion.

It may be of interest for groups in Nigeria which out of understandable frustration have resorted to militant activities to know that MOSOP had external offers of military assistance which were politely turned down. Ogoni representatives interacted abroad with revolutionary groups from different parts of the Third World with which they were always meeting in the same campaign arena, especially in Europe. Ogoni had similar problems with these groups although different objectives and different approach. On a number of occasions this writer was approached by certain friendly groups with offers of weapons which could be smuggled to destination in Nigeria using their international contacts. They also offered to make available their experience in subversive operations by allowing MOSOP operatives access to their training facilities. The discussions often sounded interesting, adventurous and tempting. One would listen well and carefully explained why MOSOP would not take the armed revolutionary path, citing some of the reasons being discussed here. Ken Saro-Wiwa was at the time under the detention that would eventually end in his execution. The young activists who were always angling for action would certainly have been excited, but leadership calls for sober reflections and control over emotion before any important decision is taken.

Geography and Size of Ogoni: Another factor which discouraged the resort to arms by MOSOP was the geography and size of Ogoni. With an easily accessible area of 404 square miles and heavy concentration of population, Ogoni would be a delight for any mean military commander on extermination mission. An armoured column can mow down Ogoni in a matter of days. Ogoni simply was not conducive to armed insurrectionary or guerilla activity, especially under a ruthless military regime. MOSOP certainly did not want to commit the people to a collective premeditated suicide.

Hostile Neighbours: Ogoni's neighbours, like most Nigerians, were not sympathetic to the struggle. Although the Ogoni people felt they were prosecuting a cause on behalf of the dispossessed people of the Niger Delta, the struggle did not sit well with the leadership of non-Ogoni groups. They were apprehensive Ogoni's mass-based populist struggle could spread to their domains and destroy their elite leadership. They would rather destroy the Ogoni struggle than aid it. There was consequently nowhere for escape for potential hit-and-run militants from Ogoni. No escape corridor. Furthermore, Ogoni is not located close to an international boundary to enable the militants slip across the border after operations.

Leadership: Perhaps the most critical aspect of any struggle is the leadership. It can determine the success or failure of the struggle, and even decide the fate of the people it claims to be leading. A leadership can be self-centred, heartless and reckless, doing things that would ultimately destroy the people they claim to be leading instead of helping them. Let us assume MOSOP leadership was reckless enough to commit Ogoni people to armed confrontation with the authorities during the ruthless Abacha years. The result would have been easily predictable.

Leaderships are inspired by different impulses. Some are inspired by personal material gains, others by publicity and ego. Still some genuinely want to make a definite positive difference in the life of their people as a legacy for history. In most cases every leadership is a combination of all these factors and more. The real difference lies in which factors supercede the others. If the personal dominate, the people stand to lose. But if the public and impersonal gain ascendancy, the people's interest is best served.

In the modern era a reasonable measure of formal education and enlightenment appear indispensable for the leadership of social movements. Education makes one conscious of the consequences of one's actions. It makes one aware of the alternatives to a given course of action and affords one the opportunity of making a rational choice. History and contemporary experience have shown that leaders with little education tinged with disguised ignorance have a greater propensity for extremism than those with substantial education. The latter is likely to toe the line of moderation. Ignorant but ambitious people tend to make up for what they lack in intellect with sheer force of action.

Splits in social movements often tend to reflect the division between the intellectual wing of the leadership and the less educated section. While the intellectuals may be steering the organization along the path of moderation and patience informed by rational calculations, the less educated

may be angling for quick action and immediate and dramatic results. Unfortunately the people of action often tend to win in such leadership contests since membership of most social movements are understandably tend to be dominated by impatient, excitable and often jobless young people who want immediate improvement in their lives. This leads to extreme actions which could invite far stronger counter measures that could destroy the movement. It makes nonsense of a struggle and the people's sacrifice when a movement is prematurely terminated as a result of the recklessness or ambition of its leadership.

Sometimes a radical and impatient followership could on its own do things that could implicate its moderate leadership. It is possible to argue that the behaviour of an organization largely reflects the position of its leadership, but often the relationship is less straightforward and less predictable. Leadership of a social movement is a delicate matter. There is always the possibility of the existence of internal conspiracy even without any discernible split in the movement. Without the knowledge of the leadership such a conspiratorial group could commit outrages which would implicate the organization and its leaders. Such a position often arise when the conspirators become impatient with the style and direction of their leaders but lack the clout and support to challenge that leadership.

Infiltration by agents provocateur could also turn a peaceful organization violent. Such elements are normally state or secret service agents who are sent when a movement whose goals are not co-terminus with official policy appear to be getting successful. The mission of the agents would be to undermine the organization from within either by causing a leadership crisis or by inducing elements of the organization to commit atrocities that could lead to a destructive reprisal or even the discrediting of the organization, making it lose public support. Such acts may even be committed by the agents themselves, which would disguise themselves as members of the organization. A rival organization, unhappy with the success of its competitor, can also sponsor internal subversion along similar lines.

The point being made is that there are several factors, which could undermine an otherwise peaceful organization and its leadership and end up destroying the organization. The leaders should therefore always be on the alert to discern signs of potential trouble and act immediately. It is also important that given the crucial role of leadership in any social movement, the people should be extremely careful in deciding whom to choose or give their support as leaders. We shall in the course of this work see how this situation applied in the Ogoni case in the hope that other exploited Niger Delta communities could benefit from that experience.

Having discussed why the Ogoni people rejected violence in favour of a non-violent international campaign, we should now see how that campaign was prosecuted.

## **The International Campaign**

MOSOP's international campaign falls in three phases. The first was the foundation phase when the initial contacts were established. This phase stretched from late 1991 to May 21, 1994 when Saro-Wiwa was arrested over the Giokoo murders. Saro-Wiwa dominated this period, joined subsequently from late 1993 by the present writer when he resided in Europe as a Visiting Scholar at the University of Leiden in Holland and still retained his position as the General Secretary of MOSOP.

The second phase came after Saro-Wiwa's arrest and that of Ledum Mitee, who was elected Deputy President in June 1993 following the resignation of Dr G B Leton and Chief E N Kobani, President and Vice-President respectively, as a result of disagreement over the June 12, 1993 election boycott. This period saw the intensification of the campaign in which the military crackdown in Ogoni and the release of those arrested, became the key rallying issues. For a while during this period the General Secretary, still based in Europe, became the principal contact with the outside world, joined subsequently by one or two other activists, who were able to sneak out of the country to attend some international forums, especially at the UN in Geneva. In Britain the period saw a new Ogoni Community Association in place of the old one which had disintegrated following the Giokoo incident. The OCA was to be transformed later into MOSOP-UK which increasingly played an important role in the international campaign as its international headquarters. Across the Atlantic, this phase also witnessed the beginning of the activism of some Ogoni people in the United States.

The third phase came with the execution on November 10, 1995 of Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight others. The campaign entered a frenetic phase, driven largely by the executions, achieving dramatic results. It was marked by the suspension of Nigeria from the Commonwealth of Nations, the recalling of Ambassadors by the United States, Canada and the European Union and sanctions by the EU, the UN Secretary-General's special fact-finding mission to Nigeria, severe pressure on Nigeria at the United Nations. Generally, events of this period rapidly accelerated Nigeria's international isolation. The campaign at this phase assumed a world-wide dimension as large numbers of Ogoni people who fled abroad in the wake of the executions inaugurated MOSOP chapters in their respective countries of asylum. The later part of this phase has been marked by the factionalization of the campaign, following a leadership crisis.

It is perhaps necessary to mention that getting a foothold in the international community, let alone making Ogoni a key international issue, was not as easy as it would appear when told. It was difficult to convince skeptical organizations and diplomats who later joined the Ogoni bandwagon that Ogoni had a case worth supporting. Although NGO activities had grown rapidly in the developing world since the 1970s, much of Africa, including Nigeria especially, was left out. Other than the apartheid situation in South Africa, the international community seemed not to pay any significant attention to Africa. The continent's economic crisis and political instability worsened this lack of interest. A calculated campaign strategy, persistence and a series of blunders by the Nigerian military government in its handling of the Ogoni issue

gradually turned skepticism to support and eventually a band-wagon. Having been used to mostly religious and political movements, the government very clearly had not dealt with the kind of protest, issues and international campaign that an organized social movement such as MOSOP represented and therefore was inadequately prepared to handle it. The same challenge applies to the oil companies which had hitherto not been held accountable for the consequences of their reckless operations in the country and the exploitation of their host communities. Even with their limitless resources MOSOP took these companies by surprise. Like the government the record and blundering of the oil companies aided MOSOP's campaign. The government and the oil companies have clearly learnt their lessons.

Having identified the different phases of the campaign, let us proceed with the discussion taking each of the different sets of actors. These are: international non-governmental organizations, the United Nations system, the Commonwealth, European Union and the United States.

### **International Non-Governmental Organizations**

UNPO: Ogoni's entry into the international community was greatly assisted by Ogoni's admission into UNPO in 1992, a non-governmental organization that promoted the interest of oppressed minorities in the international community. Before and after the admission, Ken Saro-Wiwa had separately established contacts with environmental organizations based in Europe such as Amnesty International, Green Peace and the Rain Forest Action Group. Through such contacts he was able to arrange the filming of the Ogoni part of *Drilling Fields* which focused on the activities of oil companies in different parts of the Third World.

The *Drilling Fields* was broadcast on Britain's Channel 4 television in 1992. The film became the first major international exposure of Ogoni. UNPO broadened these contacts, opening up new avenues. It was UNPO that provided much of the initial ideas for the international campaign, linking MOSOP to experienced campaigners in Europe, and arranged contacts with the Western media. These campaigners, working with international non-governmental organizations based mostly in London, Geneva and Amsterdam, assisted MOSOP representatives. They suggested how best to approach these organizations and helped the representatives through complicated United Nations processes and cavenous building in Geneva.

Indigenous Peoples Movement: Saro-Wiwa's contacts with Society of Threatened Peoples, an indigenous advocacy group in Germany, introduced the idea of attending the 1992 session of the UN Working Group for Indigenous Population in Geneva where the Ogoni issue was for the first time given a hearing at a UN forum. Henceforth Ogoni became a part of the indigenous people's movement, a growing international pressure group comprising the indigenous peoples themselves and their advocacy organizations in Europe. Assisted by the Secretariat of the Working Group at the United Nations in Geneva and by the World Council of Churches, this

writer, on behalf of MOSOP was able to attend the Working Group's session in 1994, 1995 and 1996 where Ogoni case was strongly articulated and serious lobbying work done.

Although the Working Group's secretariat had no objection in recognizing and treating Ogoni as an indigenous people, it remained skeptical whether Ogoni people truly qualified as an indigenous group, given well known international definitions of indigenous people. Indigenous peoples advocacy groups that we met in Geneva were similarly skeptical. The common assumption has been that African groups did not qualify as indigenous people since the end of colonialism on the continent removed one of the central attributes of indigenous people. The immediate perception of indigenous people is that of Indians on reservations in the United States and Canada and those of Central and Latin America that were colonized and marginalized by white invaders. One of the advocacy groups even asked me to do an essay it would publish to prove that the Ogoni are an indigenous people before it could extend assistance to MOSOP. The essay was done and published accordingly. In it I used wide-ranging anthropological, political and economic arguments to make a case for the existence of indigenous people in Africa, including the Ogoni.

The group, based in a Scandinavian country, subsequently sent a fact-finding mission to Ogoni, helped to publicize the Ogoni case and thereafter granted MOSOP financial assistance. The categorization of Ogoni as an indigenous people has since been taken for granted.

Environmental and Human Rights Groups: The environmental campaign group, GreenPeace was there from the beginning. The London headquarters of the organization had sent a camera crew to cover the January 4 rally and subsequently played an important role in the campaign, from the environmental angle, with Shell being its main target. Its branches in The Netherlands and the United States were fully involved. It made a number of publications on the activities of Shell in Ogoni. From the human rights perspective the support of Amnesty International was crucial. The organization sent a three-man fact-finding mission to Ogoni in 1994. Its reports on the human rights situation in Ogoni and the rest of the country contributed immensely in galvanizing international opinion against Nigeria.

The number of organizations that worked on Ogoni are countless, especially after the 1995 executions. Mention must be made of Friends of the Earth, Millieu Defense, Pax Cristi International, Article 19, International Commission of Jurists, The International Working Group on Indigenous Affairs (IWGIA), Sierra Club. Some of these organizations also sponsored MOSOP for awards which were important moral boosters and also provided much needed financial help. We mention here the Right Livelihood Award in 1994, and Goldman Prize, 1995. They demonstrated in different parts of the Western world, caused embarrassment to Nigerian diplomats and visiting government officials, lobbied for various measures of sanctions against the country, and put Shell in the moral dungeon across the world, not without some economic cost to the company.

It has to be mentioned that this network of organizations did not just come on their own to work for Ogoni. In fact many of them as a matter of principle do not take up a cause without being invited. And even when they are invited they are selective in the causes that they support for the fact that they are limited by funds, personnel and even their own constitution. That they worked so much for Ogoni is indicative of the lobbying efforts of MOSOP. MOSOP's representatives campaigned from Oslo in the northern tip of Europe to Colombo, Sri Lanka in the southern end of Asia, from California on the West coast of the United States to Auckland, New Zealand close to the eastern end of the world. It was also an indication of the popularity of the Ogoni cause. That popularity again was the result of sustained campaign by the organization. And the the blunders of the Abacha regime even made MOSOP's work easier sometimes.

### **The United Nations System**

As stated, Ogoni's first appearance at a UN forum for the first time came with Ken Saro-Wiwa's attendance in 1992 of the UN Working Group for Indigenous Population. Two years later he asked the present writer to attend. It was cheaper for the General Secretary to attend from his base in Holland than fly in somebody from Nigeria. Moreover, Saro-Wiwa knew he could not do everything alone, from Ogoni to the international scene. From early on in the struggle he began getting potential talents in MOSOP involved. This writer would have attended the Geneva forum with Saro-Wiwa in 1992 but for some reasons he could not go. He was in that year a Fellow at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London and Saro-Wiwa, who had his second home in London, discussed the Geneva trip extensively with him before proceeding there.

Once in Geneva in February 1994 it was possible for Ben Naanen to establish other contacts at the UN forum and with sections of the large NGO community in the city. Another feature of that visit was his granting of an extensive interview on Ogoni, published in the Geneva Tribune, the leading newspaper in the city. The press engagement was arranged by a lady Saro-Wiwa had previously met in Geneva. The following year, Ben Naanen, Barika Idamkue – Saro-Wiwa's cousin and Alfred Ilenre attended. Ilenre, Saro-Wiwa's friend Isoko in Delta State of Nigeria, attended on the platform of the Ethnic Minorities Organization of Africa (EMIROAF). This organization was another front formed by Saro-Wiwa and of which Ilenre was the Secretary.

The sessions of the Working Group were always followed immediately by the annual sessions of the UN Sub-Commission for the Prevention of Racial Discrimination and Protection of Minorities. MOSOP representatives always combined attendance at the two UN forums, building up a network on Ogoni while quietly pursuing effective lobbying work. Networking and lobbying are as important as the formal presentation of addresses on the floors of the plenary sessions. Accreditation to enable the representatives attend the Sub-Commission was arranged by UNPO, which gave full assistance to its members through its Geneva office.

UNPO also organized lunch time press briefings and video presentations by its members in the course of these UN sessions. Ogoni featured prominently in these activities.

Nigerian diplomats at the UN were worried and embarrassed by MOSOP activities in the world body. Some of the diplomats claimed to have known about the Ogoni problem for the first time through these appearances and so did not seem to have an answer when confronted with questions by critical foreigners. Often they told lies. The truth is they had a difficult job. It was not easy defending the glaring atrocities of the Abacha regime as the diplomats were obliged to do by virtue of their job. Most of them simply did not enjoy such drudgery which they necessarily had to do to keep their livelihood. Some of them were even privately sympathetic to the Ogoni cause. For fear of losing their jobs none of the diplomats could openly embrace the MOSOP campaigners. Some of them, being the diplomats they are, quietly developed contacts with the MOSOP men in the hope of extracting information from them, especially on MOSOP's funding sources, to no avail. MOSOP officials also tried to extract information from the diplomats who could offer virtually nothing. Some of them confessed they sincerely could not say anything since they received little information from their supervising External Affairs Ministry in Nigeria. It was difficult to tell when they were telling outright lies and when they came closer to the truth.

Other than the state diplomats, MOSOP representatives also lobbied senior officials of the Human Rights Commission. Initially it was difficult to convince both UN and state diplomats. For the UN mission in Geneva had spread disinformation that the Ogoni people were planning secession like Biafra.

As an organization made up of sovereign states the diplomats were reluctant to support a cause that would lead to the dismemberment of the member states of the UN. This writer remembers his first meeting with one of the Assistant Secretary-Generals, an African. As a graduate student he had visited Lagos for research at the height of the Nigerian civil war and based on what he was told by Nigerian diplomat, Ogoni evoked memories of Biafra. But he was persuaded to see the falsehood in the diplomats' claim and a copy of the Ogoni Bill of Rights presented to him. It was emphasised that Ogoni was not struggling for sovereignty, but human rights, environmental protection and local autonomy within the Nigerian nation-state. The international community got the message and the Biafra kite dangled by our diplomats could no longer fly. Mounting atrocities perpetrated by the security forces in Ogoni tremendously helped in swaying international support for Ogoni.

It may be necessary to have a glimpse of the working of the relevant organs of the United Nations. Being an organization comprising nation-state entities, its activities are normally conducted by representatives of national governments. However, there are two forums that concern human rights – rights of minorities, indigenous people, civil liberties, discrimination etc - where non-state actors such as NGOs and other organizations are allowed to participate. These are the Working Group for Indigenous Populations, and the Sub-Commission for the Prevention of Racial Discrimination and Protection of Minorities. They both come under the

Human Rights Commission, based at Geneva. Above the Human Rights Commission come the General Assembly and the Security Council, both of which are based in New York.

The procedure at the Working Group was slightly different from the general UN procedure. At the Working Group all that any organization that want to present its case would do is indicate its name on the list of speakers for the day and would be called upon to read its address when it is its turn. Each session of the Working Group elected its Chairperson who presides over that session. The Chairperson is supported by senior officials of the UN Human Rights Commission and the secretariat staff of the Commission who provide all the logistics and secretarial service, including translation into the five official languages of the UN.

As for the Sub-Commission, any organization that wants to attend has to be accredited by the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). Without such accreditation the normally tight security at the UN gate may not allow one in. Getting accredited by ECOSOC is a very difficult task and organizations without such accreditation have to go through those that are accredited. Here there is a bit of politics. Fear of reprisals by their home governments, funders or sheer competitive instincts normally make such accredited organizations wary of allowing other organizations use their platform. Sometimes the best they can do is include your organization's case as part of their own address. In which case the issue may not receive the kind of attention needed. When the accredited organization agrees to really help by allowing a non-accredited one read its own address it has to approve the text of the speech to be presented to ensure it does not go against its interest or principles and that the language is proper. The United Nations is a forum for world diplomacy and intemperate language or undecorous behaviour is not allowed. Above all, it is an organization founded to promote world peace and not violence. It becomes understandable why it is difficult for militant or revolutionary groups to have access to the UN where they can present their case.

The Human Rights Commission is strictly for government representatives. But non-governmental actors are allowed access as observers and for lobbying the various government delegations to support a particular cause. Having been effectively lobbied and convinced, a country's delegation could introduce a motion which if supported by simple majority of state delegations at the Commission becomes a resolution. One of the highest forms of action the Human Rights Commission can take against a country with persistent and widespread human rights violations is to send a Rapporteur to that country to report on the human rights situation there.

When intervention of the Human rights Commission is unable to check the human rights excesses of a particular government the Commission can by simple majority of votes refer the matter to the General Assembly. The Assembly will debate the matter and take appropriate binding action against that particular state if the sponsors of the resolution are able to return a majority when the vote is taken.

In diplomatic circles, the mere appearance of a country on the Commission's agenda in connection with the country's human rights record is bad enough, not to talk of sending a Rapporteur. If a Rapporteur is sent, in most cases the affected country becomes diplomatic about it. That is to say, the country would co-operate with the Rapporteur and do things that could impress him or her to show that the human rights situation there is not as bad as presented. But not so with Nigeria under General Sani Abacha and his Foreign Minister. The ubiquitous bestiality of the Abacha regime combined with the crudity and arrogance of its Foreign Minister to make a shameful caricature of the country in the international community. Diplomacy is about winning friends for one's country, but Nigeria's foreign minister was marvelous at winning yet more enemies for the country. Those were the dark days of Nigerian diplomacy.

When largely as a result of MOSOP-inspired campaign of the international community a Rapporteur was appointed for Nigeria, the Nigerian government did all it could to frustrate his entry to the country. When eventually he was allowed in he was harrassed and hounded. His access to Ogoni was extremely limited and unpleasant. This was an unbecoming treatment for a UN diplomat of that rank and on such a sensitive mission. The earlier mission sent to Nigeria by the UN Secretary-General Boutros-Boutros-Ghali and headed by the Togolese judge Kofi Amega met a similar situation. The behaviour of the Nigerian government was yet one of the strongest campaigns against that government itself.

Largely as a result of the Ogoni issue coupled subsequently with the Abiola question and the failure to democratize, Nigeria remained on the agenda of the UN Human Rights Commission from 1994 to 1998. The motion against Nigeria at the Commission shortly after the November 1995 execution of Saro-Wiwa and eight other Ogoni activists found an easy passage at the Commission and General assembly in late 1995.

### **The Commonwealth of Nations**

Ogoni was one of the issues that turned a placid Commonwealth into an activist organization. Ogoni became a Commonwealth issue mainly after the arrest of Ken Saro-Wiwa and others following the Giokoo murders. Like other international bodies mentioned here, the Commonwealth Secretariat in London received petitions and visits for the release of the detainees. Leading members of the Commonwealth like Canada and South Africa were also approached. As the world's foremost statesman, Nelson Mandela, the then South African President was an obvious lobbying target. Of course so was Britain – the mother of the commonwealth - from the beginning. Mandela had sent his then Vice-President, and currently President Thabo Mbeki to Abuja. Abacha seemed to have given an assurance that Saro-Wiwa would be released. Being a former ANC representative in Nigeria Mbeki reportedly had a good relationship with Abacha and it was hoped that relationship could be exploited to the benefit of positive political changes in Nigeria.

When the death sentences were passed on October 30, 1995 by the Ibrahim Auta tribunal which tried the accused, the campaign took a frantic turn in the hope that the sentence could be commuted. Like many other countries the Commonwealth condemned the sentences and appealed for clemency. Many members argued that strong measures be taken against Nigeria at this stage. But Mandela, the most respected Commonwealth leader, still counted on his quiet contacts with the Abacha government. One way or the other it was expected that the death sentences will not be implemented and that Abacha might settle for some political or diplomatic deal. It was therefore to utter shock of the world when ten days after the sentences the executions were carried out without even the grace of the 30-day appeal period that the tribunal chairman had stipulated. The Commonwealth Heads of Government (CHOGM) who were at the time meeting in Auckland, New Zealand, exploded. Ken Saro-Wiwa Jr had flown in to plead with the Commonwealth leaders for action to save his father's life, only to be confronted with the news of the execution on arrival.

The Commonwealth leaders reacted immediately and decisively. Nigeria was there and then suspended from the organization. Nelson Mandela, who seemed to have given some assurance that his quiet contacts with the Nigerian government could work, was enraged. He has been betrayed by Abacha and his credibility bruised. John Major, the serving British Prime Minister, made the quote of the day - describing the executions as "judicial murder". That was the first time such action has been taken against a member so swiftly and with such dramatic ease. The only other case of suspension was that of South Africa as a result of her apartheid policy. But then the decision was not taken so swiftly.

Individual Commonwealth members also took their own action. Canada, which had been one of the most critical of Nigeria's human rights record and its military dictatorship and was sympathetic to the Ogoni cause, recalled its Acting High Commissioner and granted asylum to a limited number of Ogoni refugees. Diplomatic ties between the two countries were subsequently broken, not to be restored until the advent of the Obasanjo administration.

In the typical blundering if arrogant the-world-can-go-to-blazes attitude of the Abacha regime, it failed to reckon with the timing of the execution. If the regime had delayed the executions - if it was still bent on carrying them out - until the end of the meeting, it could have been possible to evade such a decisive response. But the regime foolishly thought the executions could be done quietly without the world knowing. How it ever thought such a heinous crime could be committed in an open prison yard without the world knowing is mind-boggling to imagine.

The Commonwealth's action against Nigeria was based on the Harare Declaration the previous year. The Declaration required the observance of minimum standard of human rights and democratic norms for its members, failure of which would attract some concerted response by the organization. Nigeria was the first test case of the application of that policy. A monitoring group was set up to follow Nigeria's progress in human rights and democratization. MOSOP and other pro-democracy and human rights groups in Nigeria and abroad continued to campaign for Nigeria's expulsion, instead of mere suspension. These groups converged on

Edinburgh, Scotland in 1997 where the last CHOGM meeting took place, pressing their case against Nigeria. Somehow, the Commonwealth argued that it paid better to encourage Nigeria along the path of democratic transition and respect for human rights by continuously engaging her than by expelling her which would close every avenue of such positive engagement. This was where the matter rested until the death of Abacha and a change of government the following year.

### **The European Union**

The EU was beginning to develop interest in the political and human rights situation in Nigeria before the Ogoni explosion. Ken Saro-Wiwa had by early 1993 started making efforts to establish contacts with some members of the EU, especially the British. The British, however, consigned such contacts to low-level diplomatic personnel. Apparently they did not seem to pay much attention to the situation that was beginning to unfold in Ogoni and with Saro-Wiwa not yet having the international stature he acquired later. Even after the suspension from Ogoni in April 1993 of Shell – a giant Anglo-Dutch economic interest in the country – the British still did not seem overly interested. Meanwhile in The Hague the present writer was meeting with the Dutch Foreign Ministry to arouse its interest in Ogoni. MOSOP's contacts with the Dutch Foreign Ministry, as those with many other governments in Europe, were mostly facilitated by UNPO.

In February 1994 in an effort to propagate the Ogoni issue in Europe, especially among the academic community, the present writer had organized a seminar on Ogoni at the University of Leiden in the Netherlands where he was resident at the time. He and Saro-Wiwa were the two speakers. Apart from academics NGO representatives also attended. Incidents such as the ethnic attacks on Ogoni and the growing human rights violations were dramatized to get attention. Being Holland, the home base of Shell, the Shell card was played to let the people see what a demon their model corporate citizen was outside their country. Such initial modest efforts were later to be part of the big picture that Ogoni subsequently became in Europe.

As elsewhere, the Giokoo tragedy and the ensuing arrests and the rapid deterioration of the human rights situation in Ogoni transformed the campaign. In London and The Hague it became easier to have access to the government and parliamentarians while MOSOP officials started networking at the European Commission in Brussels. A few members of the Ogoni Community Association in London transformed the group into MOSOP-UK and became the spearhead of British campaign, especially against Shell where the company's international headquarters are located. In Lagos designated MOSOP activists constantly badgered the embassies which were actually eager to follow what was happening in Ogoni and report to their home governments.

Meanwhile, Chief Moshood Abiola's arrest, growing indications of Abacha's reluctance to hand over power and the regime's rapidly expanding campaign of repression combined with the Ogoni crisis to force European governments to begin to act. Traditionally, European

governments defer to the British in matters concerning Nigeria as the country's former colonial master. Britain was therefore expected to provide the initiative on EU policy on Nigeria. While some EU members were pressing for significant measures against Nigeria, Britain urged a cautious approach. Graduated sanctions measures were put in place. Late 1994 the Desk Officer for Nigeria at the European Commission went on a fact-finding mission to the country. The mission though mainly concerned the existing programme of economic assistance to Nigeria by the EU which were being reviewed, also addressed some political questions such as Ogoni and the stalled transition programme.

Then came the big bang – the executions – to which the EU responded immediately by recalling its ambassadors. Nigerian missions in most of these countries were downgraded. Far-reaching sanctions measures were put in place, including the suspension of economic assistance programmes under the Lome Convention, the ban on the sale of arms and on sporting links, and denial of visas to leading members of the regime and their families. These measures did hurt Nigerians considerably but the regime in its foolish pride pretended they did not matter. The measure which could have hurt the regime most and directly – freezing the assets in Europe of members of the regime – the EU refused to take.

### **The United States of America**

As the unrivalled dominant power in the post-cold war world and the acclaimed bastion of human freedom, the Ogoni people and other pro-democracy forces in the country expected America to play a decisive role in protecting human rights and in restoring democracy in the country. But beyond Nigerian oil which is cheaper to refine and of which the United States remains the largest single buyer – the oil that was causing trouble for Ogoni people – Nigeria has never been important in American foreign policy. The other issue that America worried about in its relations with Nigeria was the drug business.

But America's consignment of Nigeria to a peripheral position in its foreign policy did not deter MOSOP from exploiting that potentially critical source of influence. MOSOP's first official contact with the United States came with Ken Saro-Wiwa and Ledum Mitee's visit to the country sometime in late 1993. They met with some environmental organizations and especially the Ogoni community which they tried to mobilize into action. A good section of that community actually started working, encouraged by the prospects of an empowered Ogoni with a growing popularity in the international community.

The Giokoo incident divided the Ogoni community in the US, pitting a section of it that was affected or those simply horrified by the killings into opposition against MOSOP. Those who were either connected to or sympathetic to the accused and arrested men started building up a campaign for their release. UNPO office in the US started establishing contacts with Congressmen, especially the Congressional Black Caucus and the Human Rights Subcommittee. It arranged for members of the Ogoni community to meet these political leaders. In

Lagos designated MOSOP people who had fled there lobbied the United States Embassy. Before long the Ogoni campaign snowballed into a general campaign by the highly articulate Nigerian community in the US which was appalled by the rot and disgrace wrought on the country by Abacha, the Abiola issue and the general lack of progress towards democracy in the country.

As elsewhere the campaign became dramatic with the execution of the Ogoni Nine which made the State Department

to issue a statement of condemnation. Like the European Union and Canada, Washington recalled its ambassador and put in place a limited sanctions package, including visa restrictions for senior members of the regime and the suspension of direct air links between the two countries. There are also indications that the United States linked its decertification of Nigeria – based on American anti-narcotics law - to the political and human rights situation in the country. The campaigns moved to other levels of American society with some cities and counties adopting their own sanctions against Nigeria. Some of those cities placed a ban on investments in Nigeria. As in Europe, too, the call for the freezing of the assets of members of the regime generally failed.

One important thing the Clinton Administration did was to grant immediate political asylum in the United States to Ogoni refugees who had fled to Benin Republic following the executions. Many of the formalities and the consequent long delay associated with the processing of asylum seekers were waved. The new immigrants intensified the campaign, especially against Shell. But the influx of the refugees also created problem for MOSOP, leading to a leadership crisis and further division within the Ogoni community in the United States. They all still campaign in the name of MOSOP, but a MOSOP with more than one leadership.

### **Corporate Organizations**

Corporate bodies, are by their business nature, not the most enthusiastic social activists. But as far as Ogoni was concerned, one multinational company broke that rule. That was Britain's cosmetic giant, the

Body Shop – a company with a big social conscience. Ogoni's association with the company can be traced to June 1993 when MOSOP officials met with the company at the United Nations human rights conference in Vienna, Austria. The company has since remained involved in the Ogoni struggle, employing some personnel with responsibility for its Ogoni project while making some of its franchises in Europe and the United States Ogoni campaign points. Many of the campaign initiatives of MOSOP could not have been possible without the Body Shop which to this day remains a thorn on the side of Shell on the Ogoni issue.

The Body Shop was in the forefront of campaign for the release of Ken Saro-Wiwa. When the executions were still carried out regardless, it switched the campaign to the release of the Ogoni 20, who were arrested with the Ogoni Nine and faced similar fate if the tribunal trial had

continued. It was a triumph for the Body Shop and the rest of the Ogoni campaign network when the men were released by the government of General Abdulsalami Abubakar. May be thanks also to the death of Abacha.

## **Chapter Five**

### **Crisis and Division**

Crisis and division are intrinsic to social movements. What is important is how the crisis is handled when it inevitably arises and whether the movement is able to survive the crisis. MOSOP has never been an exception to this rule. There are many factors which can bring about crisis in a change-seeking organization. These include personality clashes among the leadership, ideological differences over the method and direction of the struggle, mutual distrust, management of funds, external subversion, etc. All these factors in varying degrees affected MOSOP, although the issue of funds was not important in the beginning. And that was mainly because there was no fund to manage. These factors were all interwoven in a number of incidents that brought about crisis in the organization. These incidents included the Willbros shootings in April 1993, the June 12, 1993 election boycott, attacks by Ogoni's neighbours, the killing of the Ogoni Four at Giokoo, and the execution by the Abacha regime of the Ogoni Nine. Let us examine these incidents.

#### **The Willbros Shooting and Negotiation with Government**

As mentioned, in April 1993, the troops that were requisitioned by Shell to accompany its pipe-laying contractor, Willbros, opened fire on unarmed villagers in the village of Biara. The farmers were protesting the bull-dozing of their crops by Willbros. A number of protesters were injured. The incident sparked off demonstrations throughout Ogoni. At least one person was killed by troops in the demonstrations. Willbros and Shell decided to negotiate for compensation so that the pipeline project could continue. The negotiation was facilitated by the civilian governor of Rivers State, Ada George. Willbros offered a one million naira compensation for the victims – the dead and the injured. The Ogoni negotiators, including the President of MOSOP Dr G B Leton, decided to accept the compensation in the interest of peace.

When Ken Saro-Wiwa, who had been away to Europe during the negotiation returned, he strongly felt otherwise. The compensation was too small, an insult. The pipeline project must be discontinued or at best suspended, pending an environmental impact assessment study which was not done before the commencement of the project. Dr Leton and others who participated in the negotiation felt belittled and insulted. Saro-Wiwa should have made his views known before travelling out, not after MOSOP had committed itself and they had staked their own credibility in the negotiation. Even if he did not like the terms of the agreement he should have gone along with it as a collective leadership. Leton felt Saro-Wiwa was making his position as

the President of MOSOP untenable. In the end the project was discontinued and the money not paid. It was obvious where the power in the organization lay. The rest of MOSOP leadership took this development in its stride. Although the matter rested there, seed of discord has been sown. It was only a matter of time for the imminent personality differences and conflicting perceptions over the direction and method of the struggle to explode.

### **June 12 Election Boycott**

Hardly had the Willbros incident settled when another critical policy issue came up. The presidential election that was supposed to consummate Nigeria's transition to democratic rule under General Ibrahim Babangida had been scheduled for June 12. This generated a hot debate in MOSOP – whether the Ogoni should participate or not. As usual it was Saro-Wiwa who broached the issue. It was a potentially explosive issue. Most members of the MOSOP executive committee members were politicians who were either card-carrying or executive members of the two military-formed parties – the Social Democratic Party and the National Republican Convention. Each of the two parties saw the prospects of its victory. As some of the MOSOP politicians felt close to Chief Moshood Abiola, the SDP presidential candidate, they also felt close to winning important positions in an Abiola government to the benefit of Ogoni. Abiola himself had, like any clever street-wise politician, taken advantage of the Ogoni crisis to promise a new deal for the Ogoni people. Some Ogoni people took him seriously. Others did not, remembering how many times the people have been taken for a ride by sweet-talking, rogue politicians. Nobody thought much about Babangida's hidden agenda.

In principle, MOSOP members who supported participation felt no room should be foreclosed in the effort to find a solution for the Ogoni problem. At least not for an election as important as a presidential one, as the solution to that problem would inevitably come through political channels. They further argued that no government would feel obliged to an Ogoni people who did not vote for it and that the people would lose out in the new dispensation, worsening their plight. They contended that the issue could be very divisive, for most Ogoni people were interested in politics and it would be difficult to persuade them not to vote. One of the strongest and prophetic points was the potential of a deep crisis in Ogoni should there be any attempt to forcibly exclude them from participating in the election.

The people who advocated boycotting the election equally had a compelling argument. They said Ogoni people should not vote for a president that would swear on oath to uphold a constitution that enslaved them. That a boycott would be a clear message yet that the Ogoni wanted change. That nothing would change in the situation of the Ogoni people as long as the existing political structure in the country remained. That since that problem was structural, not even a benevolent president could bring any fundamental improvement to the Ogoni. That in any case the boycott did include those elections that directly affected the Ogoni people – the local government and governorship elections. Fundamentally, Ken saw in the boycott a huge publicity value for the organization, both in Nigeria and abroad. Election boycott, he always stressed, was one of the weapons of non-violence.

There was always a chance the issue of party politics could bring problems for MOSOP. Earlier, the question had arisen whether MOSOP should support a particular party, mobilizing Ogoni vote en bloc for that party. The issue was quickly dropped, being as potentially explosive as the issue of whether to boycott the election or participate in it. MOSOP leadership did cut across the two parties in which case which party should the organization adopt? Again, assuming the adopted party lost the election would that not be a foolish gamble? That was the political dilemma the organization faced. That dilemma was resolved by Saro-Wiwa's position that the organization remained non-partisan and that everyone was free to keep his political affiliation without committing MOSOP to any party.

Saro-Wiwa was further critical of Dr Leton's political role. Leton, a high-ranking SDP member, had attended as an elected delegate the Jos convention that returned Chief Abiola as the party's presidential candidate. Ken's argument was that as the President of MOSOP Leton's political interest could be misconstrued to be that of the organization. Leton was not happy about this and every day he felt boxed into a corner by Ken. Chief E N Kobani, MOSOP's Vice-President and another senior member of SDP, was careful about his own politics. Chief E A Apenu, the Financial Secretary; Chief Nwieke, the Treasurer; and Chief Sam Orage, a high-ranking member of the MOSOP Steering Committee, were senior members of the National Republican Convention. The General Secretary, Ben Naanen, who in 1991 had been Director of Campaign for the defeated SDP governorship candidate for Rivers State, had abandoned politics but still had sympathy for SDP. He would not allow that sympathy to stand in the way of his responsibility to MOSOP. Saro-Wiwa himself had flirted with politics and nursed gubernatorial ambition, though he fell shy of filing papers for the SDP primaries in 1991. Apparently his view of politics had since changed.

Eventually, the question of whether to boycott the election or not was put to vote at a crucial Steering Committee meeting on June 1, 1993. It was a day of reckoning and the pro-boycott and anti-boycott factions prepared their cases well and argued them articulately in the debate that preceded the vote. The pro-boycott group won by eleven votes to seven. Although they lost, those who were opposed to the boycott remained convinced that the Ogoni people would be making a big mistake by cutting themselves off from Nigerian politics. The following day all attempts by the politicians to persuade Saro-Wiwa to reverse the position failed at a highly acrimonious meeting that further deepened the division. The gladiators had taken their stand. Mutual distrust between Saro-Wiwa and the politicians was getting to an explosive level.

The President and Vice-President, seeing their position defeated on such an important issue, coupled with what they considered Saro-Wiwa's arrogance and intransigence, resigned their offices and not their membership of MOSOP. Partly so that they could freely participate in the election. On polling day, NYCOP ensured there was no polling in Ogoni. Even those who wanted to vote could not do so. The boycott had been effectively implemented. MOSOP would never be the same again. And the Ogoni struggle as well. All efforts at reconciliation failed. Saro-Wiwa would later be arrested and incarcerated without trial in Owerri prison for one month. The government apparently took exception to what it saw as MOSOP's effrontery.

### **Ethnic Conflicts and the Defence of Ogoni**

The spate of bloody conflicts between the Ogoni and her immediate neighbours between July 1993 and April 1994 more than anything else united the Ogoni people. But they also brought about developments that later divided the people. The general feeling in Ogoni was that the attacks which came from nearly all directions, were officially sponsored to destroy MOSOP and the Ogoni struggle. The state of emergency that ensued in Ogoni did much to unite the people as young men from all parts of Ogoni rose in defence of their land. Nothing unites a people more than external war.

The first of these conflicts came with the reported attack by the Andoni on Ogoni migrant fishermen returning from Cameroon in July 1993. At least 18 people, mainly from Bodo, were killed in the most gruesome manner in the attack which occurred on the Andoni River. Subsequent abductions and killings by the Andoni were reported. These incidents developed to full-scale war as the Ogoni retaliated. Kaa, an Ogoni village that was a major transport point to Andoni, was razed. Other Ogoni villages were subsequently attacked. The Ogoni also attacked an Andoni village. The death toll mounted on both sides. The precision of the attacks and weaponry employed made the Ogoni to conclude that the security forces and Shell were involved, though this has never been proved.

Having united the people, the war later divided them. The war militarized Ogoni society. As in every society, there is always a tendency for those who defend that society in time of trouble to attempt controlling power as well. The young men who fought to defend Ogoni now saw an opportunity to impose their own vision of a socially-sanitized Ogoni. They went about their self-imposed mission with draconian enthusiasm, spreading fear. In many communities vigilante groups held court, tried and dealt with men suspected of nefarious activities such as witchcraft. Some village chiefs perceived to be corrupt were deposed. Some of the high-ranking chiefs had earlier in the struggle, been sent on exile for writing a petition that seemingly endorsed government repression in Ogoni. The chiefs were termed “Vultures”- a repulsive appellation which became synonymous with greed and betrayal in Ogoni. For some time Ogoni was in a state of flux as power actually passed from the traditional gerontocracy – the chiefs and elders – to the young visionaries. It was a generational coup d’etat. Criminals also took advantage of this situation to terrorise people. MOSOP tried hard to control the situation with limited success. Though order was subsequently restored, this radicalising process brought about by the war-situation in Ogoni flowed into the current of events that culminated in the killings at Giokoo on May 21, 1994.

In addition, the peace process that was to end the Ogoni-Andoni conflict created tension in the Ogoni leadership. Both Andoni and Ogoni leaders were to sign the peace document. The Andoni signed. The Ogoni representatives which included Saro-Wiwa signed as well, but Saro-Wiwa himself refused to sign. Critics claimed he escaped from the meeting just in time to avoid appending his signature to the document. Saro-Wiwa was not pleased with the terms of the agreement. Although he was supposed to be a part of the peace team, Saro-wiwa was too busy with other affairs of MOSOP to follow the progress of the negotiation. He subsequently called for a meeting of the Ogoni people at Bori. The meeting rejected the document. Ogoni leaders who had signed the document felt betrayed. Again, as in the case of the Willbros agreement, they argued that Saro-Wiwa, should have made his objections known before allowing them to commit themselves. Actually. Mutual distrust between him and other Ogoni leaders grew. Some of those who signed the document never forgave him.

The second series of attack came in December 1993. Ogoni people occupying waterfront slums in Port Harcourt were for a period of two days subjected to co-ordinated attacks by armed groups from Okrika. The attacks emanated from Okrika claims to the ownership of the waterfront land. An as yet unascertainable number of people were killed. The settlements were razed. The third came from Ogoni's northwestern neighbours, the Ndoki. The attacks occurred on the eve of Easter 1994. Again, many people were killed and their villages destroyed.

All the attacks combined to raise tension in Ogoni. It felt as if Ogoni was under seige. Large numbers of internally-displaced people returned to Ogoni. Disadvantaged and poor as they they have always been, the waterfront areas were the only places most Ogoni workers and their families could afford to live in Port Harcourt. With the Okrika attacks most of these displaced people moved back to Ogoni, without jobs. The northwestern part was Ogoni's breadbasket. The abundant availability of agricultural land there attracted settlers from land-starved and overcrowded parts of Ogoni, especially Gokana. With the Ndoki attacks, all the displaced farmers again moved back to their original villages, without alternative economic opportunities. The conflict with Andoni had driven migrant Ogoni fishermen from the fishing ports. These again returned to Ogoni without a livelihood. By April 1994, tension was palpable in the air, particularly Gokana which was most affected. It was in the midst of this situation that the tragic event at Giokoo occurred in May.

### **Mounting Tension and The Death of the Ogoni Four**

The killing of the Ogoni Four and the subsequent execution of the Ogoni Nine remain the most painful chapters in the history of the Ogoni struggle. Although reconciliation in Ogoni has gone a long way, the two tragedies will remain issues of subterranean division among the people for a long time.

The events that culminated in the killings at Giokoo, the ancestral headquarters of the Gokana Kingdom of Ogoni, on May 21, 1994, are exceedingly complex. It is not possible yet to do a wholly reliable and convincing reconstruction of the event. That diligent task will await the future

when passions would have been washed away by the inexorable tide of time and more reliable evidence becomes available. For now some conspiracy theorists suspect a sophisticated work of subversion by external forces probably linked to the military regime of the day. The argument advanced is that the regime had to do anything possible to destroy the Ogoni struggle before other oil-producing Niger Delta communities went the Ogoni way, undermining the nation's oil economy. Again, no hard evidence yet; it remains in the realm of speculation.

A simple summary of the development goes like this: the series of divisive developments described above created a deep breach within MOSOP leadership which was difficult to bridge. The greatest of these was the June 12 election boycott. These developments collectively and clearly represented a power struggle in which Ken Saro-Wiwa undisputedly held the upper hand with the youths. To be irrelevant in MOSOP meant irrelevance in Ogoni. It was therefore not only a power contest within MOSOP, but a struggle for relevance in Ogoni. Those who had lost out in the MOSOP power struggle decided to demonstrate their continuing relevance in Ogoni by organizing a new power base, mobilizing the old power elites and the chiefs who felt marginalized by MOSOP and Saro-Wiwa's rapidly-growing influence. The new group was quickly gathering strength. Although the group remained committed to the ideals of MOSOP, it was uncompromisingly opposed to Saro-Wiwa and what it considered his arrogance and radicalization of the youths. The group had formed the Giokoo Accord, which proffered an alternative vision of the Ogoni struggle. Saro-Wiwa felt isolated as the traditional Ogoni elites were all ranged against him in opposition. The efforts at reconciliation since June 12 had gone nowhere. But he was consoled by the support of the youths.

Meanwhile, certain radical youths were manufacturing and spreading all kinds of rumours about the estranged MOSOP leaders, alleging the receipts by them of large sums of money from the government and Shell. The rest, believing that the rumours were true, saw the estranged leaders and the new group as traitors. The name, "Vulture" which was previously applied to certain Chiefs who had fallen out of favour with the people and sent on exile, was now collectively applied to the new group. The youths saw the opposition to Saro-Wiwa as a grave obstacle to the realization of the Ogoni dream. Tension was mounting in Ogoni, Gokana in particular. Leading members of the new group felt threatened. They reported to the Military Administrator of Rivers State, who allegedly did nothing.

Ken Saro-Wiwa had by now decided to contest in Abacha's constitutional conference to represent Ogoni. He was advised against it as progressive forces in the country were boycotting the conference, which they felt fell far short of the desired sovereign national conference. But Saro-Wiwa, banking on his growing popularity in the country, thought he could make some difference at the conference. A day after the official closure of campaign he decided to address MOSOP rallies which had been arranged by the activists. They were apparently the usual MOSOP rallies, not for the constitutional conference campaign. His attempt to address the rally in Gokana was frustrated by security operatives. Rumours got to the rally ground that Saro-Wiwa has been arrested. The crowd that was waiting for him to address them thought the new group, which was meeting at Giokoo to formally sign the Giokoo

Accord, was responsible for the arrest. It was in this complicated situation that Chief EN Kobani, Mr AT Badey, Chief Sam Orage and Mr Theophilus Orage were gruesomely killed. Government troops stationed not far away from the scene of the attack, failed to intervene in the nearly one hour of murderous infamy.

### **Repression and the Execution of the Ogoni Nine**

The death of the four men brought about severe reprisal and repression by the government. It was the perfect opportunity –perhaps a contrived one for that matter – that the military regime was waiting for to descend on Ogoni in an attempt to crush the protest. Troops occupied Ogoni and living there became a nightmare. Large numbers of people were at various times arrested, detained and tortured. Some were summarily executed. Houses were burnt down.

The soldiers characteristically turned their occupation to a fortune hunt. The large numbers of people that were routinely and deliberately detained and tortured individually had to purchase their freedom with significant sums of money that the poor peasants could ill-afford. In some cases relations of the detained had to sell farmlands to raise the ransom fee. As poor as Ogoni continues to be, the ransom payments to soldiers tremendously depleted the area of whatever little financial resources that were there. Accounts of the human rights situation in Ogoni reverberated across the world and strengthened the international campaign against Nigeria's military regime.

The repression at this stage forced MOSOP underground. The government did not officially pronounce the proscription of the movement, but every action of the Internal Security Task Force set up to crush the Ogoni protest made it abundantly evident that action spoke louder than words. In any case, it was superfluous proscribing an organization that was not registered in the first place. It became impossible to hold open meetings of any of the levels of the MOSOP organization.

Amazingly, the organization thrived well under this most difficult condition. The women did so well providing cover for the activists, who themselves became exceedingly creative at hoodwinking the security task force. The Steering Committee meetings were held in some forest at night or outside Ogoni under all kinds of disguise, co-ordinating what has become during this period a resistance movement. The lower levels of the organization even met more frequently at various clandestine locations. With the help of the fax machine and handy video cameras, it was relatively easy to send abroad up-to-date information on the atrocities in Ogoni, fueling the international campaign. When activists traveled abroad for campaign they avoided using our national airports, always slipping across the border into any of the neighbouring countries from where they would catch a flight to their destination, returning the same way, sometimes by different route.

To facilitate communication between the leading activists who were underground and those in detention, code names were devised. There were Lion, Eagle, Bedman, Palmwine, Antelope,

etc. The codes were cracked and the identities of the people revealed when in August 1995 the security forces raided MOSOP office, carted away troves of documents and books, read those they could and burnt everything. One activist had against stern instruction to memorize the names and their codes and destroy the paper, mistakenly left the paper in the drawer of a desk.

Some of the men arrested were eventually arraigned before a civil disturbances tribunal specially constituted to try the Ogoni suspects and headed by Justice Ibrahim Auta. The suspects included Ken Saro-Wiwa, President of MOSOP; Ledum Mitee, the Deputy President. Attempts to arrest Ben Naanen, the General Secretary, failed as he had been away from the country several months before the murder incident. After a trial considered unfair across the world, Saro-Wiwa and eight of the accused were on October 30, 1995 convicted and sentenced to death by hanging. Mitee, a lawyer who had represented himself, was acquitted and discharged. The tribunal had given the convicted men a grace period of 30 days to appeal the sentence to the AFRC. But eleven days after the sentence and as the appeal process was about to begin, the convicted men were brutally hanged at the Port Harcourt prison. Pleas for clemency from all over the world having been rebuffed by General Sani Abacha.

The world was outraged, leading to the international isolation of Nigeria as described earlier. The isolation began to be broken with the advent of the eleven-month regime of General Abdulsalami Abubakar following the death of Abacha on June 8, 1998. All the international sanctions imposed on the country following the Saro-Wiwa execution were eventually lifted with the coming to power of the present elected government of Olusegun Obasanjo.

#### Postscript – Principal Characters

- Kenule Beeson Saro-Wiwa: Writer, former Commissioner, businessman, Ogoni Spokesman and MOSOP President from June 1993 – executed October 1995.
- Garrick Barile Leton: Scientist, former Federal Minister and MOSOP President 1992-June 1993, became reclusive and sick after the execution of the Ogoni Nine – died October 1998.
- Edward Nna Kobani: Educator; former student activist, former Commissioner, politician and businessman; MOSOP Vice-President 1992-June 1993 – killed at Giokoo May 21, 1994.
- Albert Tombari Bardey: Civil servant; former Secretary to Rivers State Government and former Commissioner; member, MOSOP Steering Committee – killed at Giokoo May 21, 1994.
- Chief Samuel Ntete Orage: Accountant; former Commissioner; member, MOSOP Steering Committee – killed at Giokoo May 21, 1994.
- Theophilus Orage: Civil servant – killed May 21, 1994.

- Benedict Bernard Benapena Naanen: Academic, university lecturer and first General Secretary of MOSOP December 1992-December 1999 – traveled abroad, escaped arrest and currently teaching at the University of Port Harcourt.
- Ledum Anazor Mitee: Lawyer, MOSOP Deputy-President, June 1993-December 1999 and currently MOSOP President – arrested, tried, acquitted and discharged.
- Goodluck Diigbo: Journalist, former President, National Youth Council of Ogoni People (NYCOP) – now lives in the United States.
- Benneth Birabi: Physician, former Senator of the Federal Republic of Nigeria – now a private citizen living in Port Harcourt.
- Muhammad Kobani: Former civil servant, currently chairman, Rivers State Pilgrims Board.

## **Chapter Six**

### **Reflections**

#### *Justification for the Struggle*

Having summarized the Ogoni story, it becomes appropriate to make some retrospective reflections. Are there certain issues, situations and development that could have been handled differently? Such reflections are necessary for other Niger Delta groups who feel aggrieved by the perceived injustice of their situation in Nigeria and would want to change it for the better.

First, were the Ogoni justified in protesting their condition? This question seems irrelevant, but it is one which has to be answered. This is because there are people who have commented at some point in the Ogoni crisis why the Ogoni should invite so much trouble on themselves. After all they are not the only people in Nigeria affected by such condition, such critics have said. To the extent that the Ogoni – and the other Niger Delta communities - felt the degree of injustice described above, they have a justification in rising up and demanding a positive change in their condition. The demand for justice, equity and fairness is inherent in human nature. We

should never be afraid to demand justice. For by silence and acquiescence in the face of glaring injustice we tacitly encourage perpetrators of injustice and degraders of human dignity. The exploitation and brutalization of the Niger Delta is as bad as it is unjust - and the nation has now come to agree with that verdict. In pursuing the demand for justice and equity, one should always be ready to make reasonable sacrifices. For as the late nineteenth century English preacher, Charles Hardon Spurgeon once wrote, nothing could be got without pain except dirt and poverty.

What is important, rather is the method used in pursuing justice and the level of sacrifice we are prepared to accept. As we have noted, a militant approach is likely to be counter-productive. Universally no government or authority likes to succumb to the use of force for fear of being thought weak and encouraging similar methods by other aggrieved groups. Although it is equally true that many governments – especially dictatorships - are insensitive to popular aspirations, the use of force should only a last resort. And when force is applied, it should be mainly symbolic and limited. Even limited violence can be dangerous when it is not organized, that is, when it does not come from an organized group that has a set of objectives and leadership and thus are able to control and limit the violence as planned. Violence always has the potential of missing its targets and making victims of the wrong, innocent targets. This causes the group to lose public sympathy, which is important in any struggle. Above all, there is always a good chance the political authorities in non-democratic societies would respond to acts of violence much more strongly than better trained and better armed security forces. Use of violence can prematurely terminate a struggle and bring about a lost cause. These are some of the reasons Ogoni adopted non-violence.

As for the insinuation why the Ogoni chose to pioneer such a struggle, this is also a question that borders on acquiescence in the face of injustice. Somebody needed an alternative and effective means of telling the government and the oil companies that they were not right the way they were treating national minorities and oil-producing communities. The usual protests through political channels and community leaders had failed to bring about a change. For it was always easy to “settle” these community leaders, to use a Nigerian parlance. The settled leaders without consultation with their people would then keep quiet, and the cycle of injustice and exploitation would continue, intensifying frustration especially among the youths who see their present and future being blighted by corrupt governments, corrupt community leaders and destructive oil companies and their corrupt officials. The Ogoni pioneered an alternative approach to these old problems – an approach which they felt would yield positive results by changing for the better the way the government and oil companies treated the Niger Delta peoples. The Ogoni were privileged to have men who thought deeply about these problems, had the intellectual capacity to articulate an alternative approach - and above all - the courage to embark on the implementation of the approach. Someone had to bell the cat - and the Ogoni people did it at a huge cost to themselves. Happily the Ogoni message has caught on – although the non-violent aspect of that message has not been quite similarly emulated.

### **Gains of the Struggle**

Regarding the achievements of the Ogoni struggle, this is as yet difficult to assess. For those who saw a short-term struggle yielding bounteous dividends, they are bound to be disappointed. Serious thinking MOSOP leaders knew it was not going to be an easy struggle that would assure immediate victory, a kind of tea party. They were aware that confronting an entrenched structure of injustice and ethnic domination, whether under a repressive military dictatorship that brooked no opposition or under a civilian government controlled as usual by the major ethnic groups - was going to be a costly struggle. Nor was anyone flattered that taking on the giant oil companies that have more financial resources and international clout than half of sub-Saharan African countries put together, was going to be an easy matter, modestly speaking. The struggle was rather seen as one that was going to be prolonged if its fundamental objectives must be achieved. It therefore needed great courage and perseverance, not only on the part of the leadership, but especially on the part of the mobilized Ogoni masses. Without their continuing support the struggle would collapse. To retain that support it was calculated that while pursuing the long-term objectives, short-term benefits also had to be made available. This called for flexibility and pragmatism, as opposed to dogmatism and rigidity of intermediate objectives and approach.

It is true that the long-term objectives are far from being achieved. The local autonomy option through a national restructuring, the control over the resources of the land, adequate representation in the government and other institutions of the Nigerian state, effective environmental protection – all of which were to result in the fundamental improvement in the social and economic condition of the Ogoni people, are yet to be achieved. Even the short-term objectives of poverty alleviation through job creation, scholarships and social amenities – are yet to be achieved.

The situation has not been helped by the division within MOSOP and the divisive role which a company like Shell continues to play in Ogoni affairs. Although MOSOP has set up an Ogoni Development Board to actualize the long-term economic and social objectives of the Ogoni struggle, the success of the Board also depends to what extent the internal division of the organization is reduced. It also depends and its ability to bring about a partnership between the organization and the elected Ogoni people in power, who see themselves as “government people”. The two groups need each other. Perhaps the elected people need MOSOP more because an organized MOSOP which knows its politics can deny needed votes to a non-cooperating Ogoni political office-holder or aspirant

For its short- and long-term objectives to be achieved MOSOP also has to be able to sustain the struggle by sustaining the people’s support. The greatest strength of the organization is the power of peaceful social mobilization. Any organization that is able to put ten thousand people on the street at short notice in a single demonstration can always get the attention of government or any other target such as the oil companies. Every authority or corporate entity is afraid of the power of number. MOSOP will be finished directly it loses that power of mobilization.

It would, however, be wrong to count the gains of the Ogoni struggle only in terms of the benefits that have accrued or yet to accrue to the Ogoni people. The Ogoni struggle has contributed significantly in drawing national and international attention to the neglected tragedy that the Niger Delta is. Once that awareness has been generated a solution becomes feasible. The struggle has also brought to the fore the issue of environment in national discourse and policy. The polluting habit of the oil companies is being checked. What is more, although oil companies are like leopards which cannot easily change their spots as old habits die hard, these companies can no longer afford to take their host communities for granted.

As noted earlier Ogoni also contributed in no small measure in bringing about the international pressure that contributed to the end of military rule in Nigeria and brought about the emergence of the present civilian administration. Question may be asked whether without the inexplicable death – at least to most people – there could have been any democratic change in Nigeria. This is a conjectural question. But another conjectural question can also be immediately raised as to what extent an Abacha civilian government could have withstood domestic and international pressure had Abacha succeeded himself as a civilian president. Largely through MOSOP social movements in the country have discovered the power of the international community. Some of the movements have tapped into the international campaign structure established by MOSOP.

### **Mistakes**

Yet there are a few mistakes which MOSOP has made, some of them critical. One of the most damaging crises within the organization relates to the June 12, 1993 presidential election boycott. Although all the arguments advanced in support of the boycott – as those against it – were true, and although the publicity value of the action was also tremendous, it was perhaps necessary to rethink that boycott. A particular action may achieve great results, but if its long-term impact is going to be greater than its immediate results, it should be reconsidered.

The strength of social movements – as any organization – lies in their unity and cohesion. Any short term benefits that could undermine that cohesion have to be taken cautiously. In theoretical terms the boycott was certainly an important weapon of non-violent struggle. But the practical application of that weapon brought about an avoidable crisis that did lasting damage to the struggle. It caused the bitter resignation of Dr GB Leton and Chief E N Kobani – the President and Vice-President respectively. It also alienated the rest of the Ogoni elites not only in the leadership of the organization, but in Ogoni at large. That single action perhaps created more enemies among the Ogoni elites for Saro-Wiwa than he ever imagined. Whether they will benefit or not, Ogoni elites normally see great potential opportunities for themselves in the political arena. In a more or less centralized state like Nigeria where the central government virtually controls all aspects of life in the nation, to be excluded from participating in a presidential election is like destroying one's livelihood.

It is true that the youths whose support Saro-Wiwa depended on in the organization played a more active role than the traditional elites. Yet the value of anybody to a cause should not only

be seen in terms of the person's usefulness to the cause but also in the person's ability to cause varying degrees of damage to that cause. The humiliation and alienation of people like Kobani and Leton should not have been done lightly because of their tremendous influence in Ogoni. Kobani enjoyed the support of the elites because he was a great organizer and an indefatigable fighter. He could easily mobilize them into a formidable opposition force if he felt humiliated and marginalized – which is exactly what happened.

The victory of the pro-boycott faction at the crucial Steering Committee meeting vote was also a political victory for Saro-Wiwa. It clearly showed where power lay in MOSOP. Some people have argued that having achieved that victory, Saro-Wiwa had the opportunity of demonstrating reconciliation and damage control by being more accommodating when the Elders met him the following day to reconsider the boycott issue. The argument further goes like this: While it is true, as Saro-Wiwa argued, that it was wrong and dangerous for him to unilaterally undo such a crucial decision of the Steering Committee, there was room for compromise. Since he was about to leave for Europe within a few days after the vote, he could have invented an excuse why the boycott decision could no longer be implemented and then fly out of the country. Such an excuse would have been acceptable to the youths over whom he had tremendous influence. Some of the Steering Committee members who voted for the boycott expected that sort of compromise. The struggle could hardly have lost anything by such compromise.

The meeting between the Elders and Saro-Wiwa was expectedly turbulent. The Elders came out of it even more bruised than they had been by the boycott vote. They saw Saro-Wiwa as stubborn and arrogant, perhaps wrongly so. That meeting was analogous to the Biblical meeting of the Israelites with the young king Rehoboam who took the counsel of the young men at the expense of that of the elders and ended up dividing the kingdom of Israel irretrievably. The elders left that meeting fully determined to cut Saro-Wiwa to size. Their disappointment and anger was aggravated by the rough treatment some of them received in the hands of the youths on polling day when they individually attempted to participate in the election. MOSOP became permanently divided with the vast majority of the traditional elites on one side and the youths under Saro-Wiwa on the other. This development was to culminate in the Giokoo mayhem, which is the second great mistake that we have to talk about now.

The circumstances surrounding the killing of Chief Edward Nna Kobani, Mr Albert Tombari Badey, Chief Samuel Ntete Orage and Mr Theophilus Orage at Giokoo on May 21, 1994, will for a long time remain one of the most difficult episodes of the Ogoni struggle to explain. There have been speculations about a possible role of agents provocateur or some other forces external to Ogoni. Whatever the case, whether those people who lay hands on those men were used by external agents or not, the killing of those Elders in the most gruesome manner by their fellow Ogoni people should have been avoided by any means. Saro-Wiwa preached at every opportunity the virtues of non-violence. He knew the consequences of shedding blood and it is hard to believe that he could contemplate such a barbaric event, let alone masterminding it. But

some of the youths - apparently out of exasperation and driven by rumour - at some point appeared to have lost their pacifist disposition.

As noted earlier, the killings should be seen against the background of the militarized condition created by series of attacks by Ogoni's neighbours and the common perception that those attacks were sponsored. It should also be viewed against the growing feeling among the youths that the internal opposition now created by MOSOP division was capable of derailing a struggle in which the people had invested so much hope, effort and courage. Gokana on the eve of the Giokoo mayhem was a tense place filled with hungry and angry displaced people from the ethnic attacks as well as conspicuously provocative and suspect security operatives. Wild rumours of the so-called "vultures" receiving incredible amounts of money from government and Shell filled the air. It was in that atmosphere that the crowd descended on the Elders who had gathered at Giokoo to sign the Giokoo Accord when yet another catastrophic rumour flew in that Saro-Wiwa had been arrested. The Giokoo Accord was supposed to be an alternative agenda for Ogoni.

The internal politics of Gokana also seemed to have played a role in the murders. The four men killed came from the towns of Bodo and Bomu which were at the time targets of rivalry with their neighbours. But like the other speculations, this one still has to await a more detailed and reliable investigation.

The killings, whatever the motives and the forces behind them, further polarised Ogoni and gave the needed opportunity to the military authorities to unleash a reign of terror on Ogoni with the intent of destroying MOSOP. The consequences of the killing were no less disastrous. The execution of Saro-wiwa and eight others is bound to leave an indelible impact on the history and internal relations of Ogoni for a long time. There have been allegations that the military authorities in Rivers State in the attempt to cover up their embarrassing failures in dealing with the situation in Ogoni and in protecting the murdered men, only wanted scapegoats, thereby arresting and executing the wrong people. Again only time can tell where the truth lies.

Still, in retrospect, it is tempting to ask whether the division in MOSOP was not inevitable at some point. In the days of class analysis the movement would have been seen as that of the downtrodden, the have-nots being led by an ethnic faction of the bourgeoisie – the Elders who were relatively comfortable and never used to their authority and claim to the leadership of Ogoni being challenged. There is no doubt that the Elders were well meaning, incensed by the grotesque social injustice that Ogoni has been forced to endure in Nigeria. But it may also be said that some of the Elders – like not a few of the youths - saw the struggle as an opportunity to enhance their access to the existing opportunity structure in the country. They thought once the Ogoni rose up some of the leaders could be settled with positions in government to call off the protest. On the contrary those of them who survived through government patronage now began to see that crucial source of support cut off by being associated with MOSOP. They were least prepared for a long-drawn and costly and risky class conflict.

Clearly, some of the Elders' perception of the struggle differed radically from that of the think tanks of the movement. They had a simplistic notion of the struggle to which they had wittingly or unwittingly committed themselves. It was not uncommon that some of them slept through Steering Committee meetings when important deliberations were going on. The complicated issues of international politics and diplomacy they hardly bothered about. It was only a matter of time for such men to disengage.

Most of the Chiefs – the group that was most dependent on the government - from the beginning of the struggle dissociated themselves by their action. The provocative and unwise manner in which this was done led to their being exiled from their domain by the youths. Some of them had to look for ways of atoning for their transgression. They had enthusiastically signed the Ogoni Bill of Rights, anticipating a reward and never at any moment expected a social revolution – and one led by the youths for that matter, who this traditional gerontocracy has always disregarded.

Further more, social mobilization, difficult as it is, is also delicate process which social movements should handle carefully. Once a downtrodden and exploited people have accepted a messianic message – the hope of abundant and blissful life if the oppressor can be overcome and delivered through a messiah figure – it is difficult to exercise full control over their behaviour. The Ogoni people have been exploited and marginalized for long. Making them to rise up against that oppression was not easy. To awaken them they were given a powerful message and very high expectations – a kind of earthly paradise which was only possible through the struggle.

Saro-Wiwa's opponents accused him of promising every Ogoni man a Mercedes Benz car if the struggle succeeded. What the man actually said was that the resources that have been expropriated from Ogoni was enough to pay for a Mercedes Benz for every Ogoni person. Which is true if one takes into account the amount of oil exported from Ogoni since 1958. The point is that the exploited, taunted, hungry and deprived Ogoni people were promised a dramatic improvement in their lives through the struggle. The military government and Shell stood in the way of that dream. They rose up with great determination and were very likely to take kindly to anyone who was perceived to stand in the way of that dream.

Movements and organizations should also be mindful of rumours and outright falsehood. For a society like ours where most people are poor and are used to brazen financial corruption by those who claim to be leading them, rumours assume extremely dangerous dimension when they involve money. Such rumours have an infinite capacity to destroy organizations and individuals. When rumours arise, the leadership of the organization should take immediate steps to dispel them. For rumours and falsehood assume the toga of truth when they are repeatedly told without a strong and credible challenge. The crisis in MOSOP and the death of the Ogoni Four were largely attributable to carefully orchestrated rumours to which the response by the leadership of the organization did not appear as prompt and as decisive as necessary.

Did the death of the Ogoni Four bring to question the non-violent credential of the Ogoni movement? Not in any material sense, one would say. The killings –tragic as they continue to be – constituted an isolated incident, which in our present state of knowledge can best be regarded as mob action. Whether that mob action was masterminded or provoked by some external agents or remote grievances is a different matter. Those deaths did not indicate any particular pattern of sustained and organized violence directed at state targets or any other group as a means of achieving the objectives of the Ogoni struggle. The same argument applies to the state of insecurity that pervaded certain places in Ogoni resulting from the activity of criminals between June and December 1994. As elsewhere, it is not unusual for criminals to hide under the cover of popular protest to operate. From January 1993 when the struggle was launched to this day not a single state security personnel or law-enforcement agent has been willfully hurt. Not a single oil company personnel either. It is not as if the Ogoni youths did not have the opportunity or courage to waste such targets. Rather it was the result of a deliberate policy of non-violence tirelessly articulated through indoctrination by a leadership that knew and upheld the virtues of non-violence.

In fact MOSOP had turned down offers of military assistance from sympathetic radical groups abroad. On a number of occasions at the height of the repression in Ogoni this writer was approached in Europe by such groups which promised linking MOSOP to external sources of weapons, that could be smuggled into Nigeria using their international contacts. Also, the groups offered to help train MOSOP activists in subversive operations. The offers were politely turned down with an explanation why MOSOP would not resort to arms. Certainly the young activists who were always angling for action would have been delighted to be empowered to launch an armed struggle. Following their brutalization by the army some of them saw the security personnel themselves and strategic economic installations such as the two refineries, the petrochemical complex and NAFCON – all on Ogoni soil at Eleme - as legitimate targets of attack. But they were always prevailed upon never to try. The easy availability of arms and training could have made it difficult to control the hotheads and the struggle itself.

## **Chapter Seven**

### **Effective Non-Violent Options for the Niger Delta**

We have seen the Ogoni experience of non-violent struggle. One critical question we have not addressed is how the people should respond when a peaceful struggle is met with violent

response by the state, or any entity that is the target of the struggle. That question shall be addressed later but, for now, let us consider the basic thrust of the principle of non-violence and its relevance to the Niger Delta situation, bearing in mind the Ogoni experience.

The acknowledged father of non-violence was Mahatma Gandhi who used various methods of non-violent protest to drive the British from India. His most famous heir is perhaps Martin Luther King who employed various Gandhian techniques in fighting racial discrimination in the United States. In both cases tremendous, fundamental results were achieved. The British eventually decolonized India while far-reaching civil rights victories were won for Blacks in the United States as a result of King's non-violent movement.

Non-violence requires a high degree of discipline, patience, intellect, careful planning and an effective organization and leadership. Although nearly two hundred techniques of non-violence have been identified, the key weapons are passive resistance and civil disobedience whereby protesters deliberately break specific oppressive laws to force their abolition. Gandhi used it in changing several legislation which enslaved Indians in South Africa. He also used it to the same effect in India. In the United States, King-led movement used it to change several discriminatory laws which violated the civil rights of African-Americans.

Basically non-violence represents a moral superiority over the forces of coercion and violence. It presupposes that violence cannot bring about justice and peace in a state of oppression and injustice. That the violence of the oppressor should be rewarded with love by the oppressed to make the oppressor realize the foolishness of his action and help him change. It also presupposes that in a situation where the oppressor is in control of a greater infrastructure of violence, violent reaction from the oppressed will only encourage the oppressor to respond with greater violence, prolonging and compounding the oppression and injustice.

Gandhi had reasoned that no amount of force would make the British leave India and that the British, being in control of power in India and all the instrument of state violence that ensures that power, would always respond to any act of violence by Indians with much greater force. Let us imagine one specific instance when violence was spontaneously applied by an Indian mob and see the outcome in order to appreciate Gandhi's position. In response to mounting tensions in India, the colonial government assumed emergency powers in certain parts of the country in 1919 under what was called the Rowlatt Act. One of the areas was the state of Punjab. Gandhi called for a campaign of passive resistance in the attempt to have the law abolished. Indians were to close down all places of work and business and spend a day in fasting and prayer. Certain books which were banned by the government were deliberately printed and distributed in mass as an act of civil disobedience.

Gandhi was also banned from entering the state of Punjab to promote civil disobedience. He deliberately flouted the banning order and was arrested – which is what he wanted. The arrest sparked off public demonstrations and rioting, to which troops responded by opening fire on the demonstrators in the town of Amritsar in the Punjab. A number of people were either killed

or wounded. The deaths outraged Indian mobs which, in retaliation, killed about five Europeans in the town. Troops were drafted to the town to restore law and order. The British commander of the troops immediately placed a ban on public meetings and processions.

Days later, a large crowd gathered for the meeting, most of the people unaware of the ban. Without warning the commander ordered his troops to fire on the crowd. An estimated 1,200 people were killed. The incident has since been referred to as the Amritsar Massacre. The death of five Europeans in the hands of an Indian mob had resulted in the massacre of about 1200 Indians. The commander boasted about his action and was even exonerated by the British parliament and rewarded financially by some of his countrymen. The commander admitted that he wanted to teach Indians a lesson in the name of the Crown. The implication of the massacre was that European lives were more valuable than Indian lives.

When the British eventually vacated India it was not in response to Indian militancy but to a campaign of civil disobedience which was making it increasingly untenable for the British to continue governing India. The truth is whether in South Africa or in India, the authorities would have been delighted if Gandhi had resorted to violence. For that would have given them the opportunity of using disproportionate force to wipe out the protests or freedom movement.

Martin Luther King also felt that in his own American society where violence had been consistently applied to check violence only to end up with a spiral of violence, only non-violence will eventually bring about lasting peace, unity, love and social harmony. The non-violent campaign in the United States that restored civil rights to African-Americans has since been known as the civil rights movement. It began in 1955 in the city of Montgomery in the southern state of Alabama when a Black woman, Rosa Parks, refused to surrender her seat on a bus to a white person. The state's racist segregation law required black people to surrender their seats on buses to any white person without a seat.

The imprisonment of Mrs Parks provoked protests across the country, not only among Blacks but also among liberal whites. Martin Luther King Jr rose out of that protest to be the leading apostle of non-violent civil rights movement. The 27-year old King championed the passive resistance act of boycotting the segregated buses, leading to the abolition of the law by the Supreme Court which ruled as unconstitutional Alabama state laws which required segregation in buses. His influence dominated the civil rights movement until his assassination in 1968.

Other laws against blacks were subsequently targeted. By law lunch places in much of the southern United States were segregated. The movement to abolish the segregation of lunch counters began in 1960 when four black students quietly walked into a lunch place in the city of Greensboro, North Carolina and refused to leave until they were served. Although the students were swiftly dragged out by the police, their symbolic action reverberated across the country. The sit-ins, as this civil disobedience action was called, quickly spread to other southern states as about fifty thousands black students and their white sympathizers participated. City after city, the segregation of lunch counters was abolished.

The segregation of inter-state buses and terminals, though abolished by the Supreme Court in 1946, continued to be practiced in the South. In May 1961, a group of thirteen persons, black and white, later known as Freedom Riders, set out from Washington DC for an integrated ride through the South. In spite of brutal attacks by white supremacists, the Freedom Rides continued and generated so much controversy that the John Kennedy Administration abolished in November 1961 laws allowing segregation of public facilities. That was another milestone for the non-violent civil rights movement.

The civil rights which the present generation of African-Americans may take for granted could not have been won through violence. For White America has greater control of instruments of violence than Blacks. Violence between blacks and whites could have best been unequal violence in which blacks would have been greatly disadvantaged. Besides violence could have alienated potential sympathizers and supporters of the black cause. The Kennedy Administration that put paid to segregation laws in 1961 could not have so responded to violent outrages by blacks. In fact its reaction could well have been the opposite unless the violence got to a level that the American establishment could no longer contain it. Which would have been most unlikely, given the virtually limitless coercive power of the American state.

One way of gauging the potential impact of a violent approach to civil rights is to look at the Black Panthers model. The Black Panthers emerged basically in response to the violence of white supremacist groups such as the Ku Klux Klan. This militant protest movement of angry and alienated black youths could hardly create the kind of impact registered by the non-violent civil rights movement. As expected, the militant movement was rapidly destroyed largely through arrests, trials and convictions and as much by the revulsion and alienation which the activities of the militants generated among some potential supporters.

### **Non-Violence and the Niger Delta**

How now do we relate the known techniques of non-violence to the Niger Delta situation? On face value, it is quite possible to argue that there is little relationship and hence such model unworkable. The obvious reference point which most people would raise is to look at the nature and temperament of government in Nigeria vis-à-vis that of the countries where the non-violent approach succeeded. Nigeria's recent history of repression can easily be cited in defence of such a position. How about if for example the British or South African government had thrown Gandhi in jail and kept him there as long as it pleased them. Or in a worse case scenerio contrived his assassination one way or the other? Would the non-violent movement not have collapsed? Government response to the Ogoni movement can always be an excuse for skeptics to question the workability of non-violent struggle in Nigeria.

The situation, however, is not as simple and straightforward. Such argument presupposes that these societies maintained certain levels of civilized norms which made abhorrence to violence and the violation of the human rights of others a universal virtue in those societies. And that the non-violent movement did not encounter any strong measure of opposition from those who had

benefited from the oppression of others and were determined to maintain the *status quo ante*. Quite the contrary, as we have seen, in the case of the 1919 Amritsar massacre in India, to cite one of the uncountable cases of British high-handedness in India during Gandhi's time.

Even in the United States, the acclaimed bastion of human freedom, the civil rights movement went through a difficult time. In the first place it was the law that was used in robbing blacks of their inalienable rights and humanity. When these oppressive disabilities were to be removed, also by law, some of those who had benefited from the oppressive system reacted violently in their failed attempts to maintain that system. Supremacist groups such as Ku Klux Klan almost lynched the first batch of Freedom Riders on their arrival in Alabama. The church in which black protesters had gathered to pray when the Freedom Riders were endangered was almost burnt down together with the protesters. The civil rights movement was met with violence almost everywhere in the South. The Palestinian variant of civil disobedience, the *intifida* uprising in the Israeli-occupied West Bank, which began early 1988, registered a considerable number of casualties.

Non-violent movement has never been an easy ride anywhere for the simple reason that it seeks to bring about the recovery of the rights or empowerment of groups that have been disempowered. The fact that it is non-violent does *not* rule out that opposition. It only *reduces* the opposition and increases the possibility of success.

Perhaps the most telling testimony of the degree of risk borne by the apostles of non-violence and peace is the good chance of their being killed (the ultimate violence) by those who cannot accept their message. Martin Luther King, like Gandhi, paid the supreme sacrifice for his message of peace and love. This brings us to the conclusion that no matter the path we take in seeking change, justice and equity, we must be prepared to make sacrifices, for no struggle is exactly a Valentine party.

The fact that no path to change is a bed of roses should not diminish our faith in non-violent approach. For as we have just observed, it is superior to force to the extent that it stands a better chance of yielding success more than the violent path. Let us pause for a moment to remember that the militant approach has hardly worked in resolving the Niger delta problem. The injustice has continued to this day as in the days of Isaac Boro whose desperate desire to confront the problem drove him into taking up arms. As in the case of every oppressive system, the oppressors had more violent power than the oppressed. If Boro's death sentence for treason was executed immediately, his struggle would have ended in vain.

The escalation of violence in the Niger Delta in recent times has not solved the problem either. Although, admittedly, the violence has drawn national and international attention to the problem. But beyond that, not much has been achieved. In fact in several respects the Niger Delta has been worse off for the violence. A situation where people who have been living together in relative peace for centuries suddenly become deadly enemies killing each other wantonly over oil wells that they do not control is saddening. So is intra-communal strife over every flimsy

issue such as sharing of compensation money from oil companies. Even more disturbing about the Niger delta situation is that the violence has been largely misdirected and tending to divert attention from the real problem. The problem has even been compounded with tragedies such as Odi.

If the existing methods have not solved the problem it behoves us to find an alternative strategy that works. The chances of fruitful results with a creative non-violent approach seem exceedingly attractive. Taking a cue from our discussion of non-violent techniques above, the Niger Delta people could target specific laws that have to all intents and purposes enslaved the people and make these laws object of civil disobedience or mass non-violent action. Such laws include fundamentally the petroleum decree of 1969 and the Land Use Decree. The issue is not whether these laws should be abolished, but how to bring about the abolition.

It is necessary first and foremost to identify the issues that constitute the Niger Delta problem. Then we identify how to approach these issues. Although every community has its own local grievances, we have seen the central fundamental issues above as espoused by the Ogoni movement. In summary, these central issues are underdevelopment and poverty in all their ramifications in the face of enormous oil resources produced by the region, political marginalization manifested through ethnic domination, and environmental degradation.

What do we perceive as the solution to these problems?

1. **Self-determination:** This is a very elastic concept that stretches from local autonomy through confederation to outright sovereignty. Although the recent Sharia-related political violence in Kaduna has made certain sections of the country to renew and strengthen the call for confederation, most Niger Delta groups seem to favour some form of local autonomy that would give them some political space to ensure their control over certain areas of their affairs that have been taken over by the central government. Natural resources is one of the issues over which the groups are seeking control. Such advocates take as their model a country like the United States, a federal entity where natural resources – including minerals - found on any land belong to the land owner. Such local control can also include jurisdiction over environment, health, education and other forms of social service.
2. **Land Use Act:** The need to have local control over resources has naturally led to the call for the abolition of such laws as the Petroleum Act and the Land Use Decree which have been used by the central government to expropriate the resources of the Niger Delta.
3. **Sovereign National Conference:** The desired autonomy, some believe, can only be achieved through a sovereign national conference that would restructure the country and establish the basis for lasting association of the component parts of the country. This would entail the abolition of the Land Use Decree and the Petroleum Decree

- 4. Development:** The need to ensure a rapid development of the Niger Delta by the government in collaboration with the oil companies has been central to the agitation in the Niger Delta. That need is partly responsible for the call for local autonomy and even the sovereign national conference. The people have come to believe that the desired development is not possible under the existing structural arrangement which, would continue to ensure the transfer of resources from the Niger Delta to other parts of the country while the main source of that wealth remains neglected and poor. It is argued correctly that the present social and economic condition of the Niger Delta more than forty years after the commencement of oil exploitation in the region remains a national scandal.

Having identified the central demands of the Niger Delta people, how do they set about pursuing them? This can be approached through formal and informal channels. The formal channels include political institutions while the informal channels include the whole array of non-governmental organizations of which social movements are an important part with which we are concerned here.

Approaches: (1) Political (constitutional) by working through the National Assembly.  
 (2) Mass approach – civil disobedience, passive resistance  
 (3) Peaceful occupation of oil company locations and offices  
 (4) Effective negotiating skill

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### **Political (Constitutional) Institutions – The Dividends of Democracy**

One serious problem created by prolonged military rule in Nigeria is the stifling of people's aspirations – the blocking of channels for the free articulation of grievances and legitimate protests. The lack of democratic representative institutions of government caused widespread alienation. Government was seen, especially by the people of the Niger Delta and other politically marginalized groups as "their government". Military governors or military administrators, more often than not a non-indigene, were posted to the states principally to execute law and order and ensure that the plethora of anti-people, and repressive decrees, were implemented.

Although the Ogoni had lost faith in formal political channels, there can be no doubt that much of the punishment meted out to them could have been ameliorated if not disallowed under a democratic government. The international community that supported the Ogoni struggle did not do so for the sake of Ogoni *per se*, but to use Ogoni to get at the Nigerian military government to bring about democratic change. The argument was that the kind of grievances that the Ogoni represented could best be addressed by a democratic government and that no democratically elected government would promote such level of repression. Ogoni and the Niger Delta

problem generally were, therefore, seen as a symptom, an expression of some of the worst vices of a military dictatorship. To solve the problem, the enabling political atmosphere consisting in a representative government that derives its legitimacy from the people, had to be created. For it was only such government that is accountable to the people that would strive to find solution to the problems bring about development. This is the main reason the West supported the struggle for democracy and minority rights in Nigeria.

Now that the necessary institutions of democratic representation are in place, it is expected that aggrieved groups would make effective use of these channels in pursuing their demands. For this to be possible there has to be constant communication between the people and the various levels of government through their representatives. It also means the people have to have faith in their government and believe in constitutional approach to issues. Is this really working? It is still too early to pass judgement. What can be said for now is that democracy requires patience. The consultations, debates, horse-trading and compromises that constitute the processes of a democratic government ensure that it takes time before a law is made or changed. The good thing about that process is that the consultations and debates ensure that as many people as do care are carried along. And the final product – the legislation, is likely to be more acceptable than a military decree hastily cobbled together without popular consultation, often to serve some capricious motive.

We have to bear in mind that there is limit to the level of patience, which can be exercised by a people that have for long been deprived and aggrieved. They would naturally expect an expeditious solution to their problem with a change of government, especially one that is elected. Even if the process of making law to bring about the needed change is going to be prolonged, the government has to set in motion without delay the process of that legislation to sustain people's hope. People can afford to be patient when they realise that something is being done about their condition even if the intended action is yet to be consummated. Procrastination and worse, inaction, can be dangerous.

However, there are measures that could be taken by a responsive government to solve immediate problems that touch people's lives daily, which may not require such a long legislative process. Take for instance when the present government came to power some of the state governors that had done some measure of political homework before the elections, immediately embarked on certain projects aimed at dealing with certain basic social problems that affected people's lives daily. A case in point is the construction of housing projects and improvement of urban transportation, especially for school children and workers by one of the governors shortly after he was sworn in. Such quick actions that address people's daily basic problems contribute to helping people build up confidence in government and democracy, especially if such measures can be sustained.

To see the prospective impact of the present democratic government on the Niger Delta situation let us take the Niger Delta Development Commission Bill as a case study. The President knew that the stability of the new democratic experiment to a large extent depended

on how well the Niger Delta problem is handled. He had campaigned, promising to make the solution to that problem a priority if voted to power. Shortly after his assumption of office, he sent the NDDC Bill to the National Assembly. The Bill, which the President proffers as the solution to the Niger Delta crisis, was widely debated by the public and the National Assembly. The debates produced in the National Assembly a compromise document substantially different from what the executive arm presented. The NDDC, when it becomes law, may not be exacted what each group wants. It certainly has its potential shortcomings and may not go as far as the people might have expected. But at least it could touch the affected groups in some positive way. And above all, the swiftness with which the executive acted in bringing up the bill demonstrates a case of priority which has tended to raise hope of some measure of positive change in the Niger Delta. That is the beauty of democracy. Democracy is not about having it *all*. It is about having *something* of value. It is about participation and compromise.

The NDDC is the present government's idea of developing the Niger Delta. It may not meet the expectations of the people. But at least the idea is being given a chance. To that extent it could be said that the development problem – one of the four fundamental demands of the Niger Delta people - is being addressed.

The three remaining issues – autonomy, Land Use Act, SNC should now be pursued by the Niger Delta legislators in the National Assembly. They have to introduce bills that will address these issues and lobby for their passage into law. For this to be possible, the Niger Delta legislators themselves have to believe in these issues and must be willing to commit themselves to their achievement. If they do not believe in them and are not committed they may do nothing about them.

What happens if an elected legislator does not share the popular aspirations of his people? It could easily be argued that such a situation would hardly arise as such a representative must have been elected on a certain platform of popular or populist issues. That is the ideal view. Our democracy is still in its cradle, lacking all the sophistication and personal political integrity associated with advanced democracies. People can “win” election here without the electorate knowing what they stand for. Electoral victory can be bought and sold – and it has been happening. In which case a particular representative or senator may not feel obliged to commit himself to a particular cause which may be dear to his people.

It is also possible that even with the best of intentions and hard work by Niger Delta legislators, all the core issues may not be achieved in the desired form – just like the NDDC. As democracy involves compromise and it is the rule by the majority. The majority may not want the abrogation of the Land Use Act or the SNC in the form being advocated or in whatever form at all. However, if we are making compromise it should be a principled compromise and one that does not completely obliterate a fundamental issue that is of critical concern to a significant number of people.

There is no doubt whatsoever that the Niger Delta communities want some degree of restructuring that will ensure some form of autonomy or political space – including some degree of control over the resources of their land. The Niger Delta legislators have to bear this in mind when engaging in legislative compromises or trade off. Without these core issues being addressed one way or another the essence of democracy will be lost on the people and those who favour violence may have the last laugh.

**Communication:** However, it does not appear that the constant communication that is needed between the government and the people through their representatives has as yet become the rule rather than the exception. The elected and appointed representatives have to make themselves readily available to their constituents, briefing them regularly and providing leadership. The constituents have to lobby for changes. This is where pressure groups come in.

### **Informal Approach – Pressure Groups**

There are certain institutions and forces that make democracy work. These include a free press, an independent judiciary and enlightened pressure groups. They all help to provide the necessary checks and balances for a democratic system. The following discussion will largely be devoted to the role of pressure groups in ensuring a non-violent pursuit of popular aspirations in the Niger Delta.

Pressure groups could take many forms – political associations, community organizations, professional associations, student organizations, women groups, etc. In current terminology they are collectively called non-governmental organizations (NGOs) Since the 1970s or thereabout NGOs have constituted some of the most effective pressure groups increasingly played various vital roles in mediating the relationship between state and civil society both at domestic and international levels. They are involved in various activities on behalf of civil society. Generally they provide various kinds of service to complement government activities – development activities, education, etc. They also undertake campaign and advocacy work especially for marginalized groups, trying to promote change.

As far as change orientation is concerned, social movements stand out as the most effective channels. The main difference between social movements and other pressure groups or NGOs consist mainly in mobilization. And this is where their strength lies. Any organization that is able to mobilize people on the basis of a common ideology or grievances, rallying them for a common cause under a clearly defined leadership must always have the attention of the government of the day, for good or bad. If the organization takes the form of a mass movement, the better. This is the contribution of Ogoni to Nigerian political sociology.

No government can afford to ignore an organization that is able to put thousands of people on the street for non-violent protest at short notice. The better if the organization is strongly

connected to the international community. This is the strength of an organization such as MOSOP.

Social movements play vital roles both under dictatorships and in a democracy. Under a military regime they are one of the few channels for interest articulation in the absence of formal democratic structures such as political parties and the accompanying representative institutions. Under elected governments they continue to be relevant, in many cases, pursuing vital interests or issues which tend to be ignored or inadequately addressed by formal political establishments. In other cases they complement the role of existing representative institutions, bringing about stronger demands for change on behalf of their constituents. This is where social movements in the Niger Delta come in under the present democratic dispensation.

Social movement organizations and the people in government, elected or appointed, should work together for effective actualization of the aspirations of the people of the Niger Delta. By such partnership which uses the existing democratic channels, the tendency to resort to violence becomes tremendously diminished.

What has become evident at this point is that the existence of an elected government with its coterie of representatives does not invalidate the role of social movements. Nor can social movements substitute the role of elected representatives. Rather, the people that these two groups collectively represent will be better served if the two groups are able to work together, complementing each other, instead of operating as two parallel and competing power blocs within the same entity. In fact, the people in government are very likely to have greater clout in government if they are backed by strong movements outside the regular political parties.

This point is important in explaining the situation in Ogoni since the advent of the present elected government. MOSOP as a mass movement had established itself as the beacon and defender of the Ogoni people during the military era. There has never been any doubt about the role of the organization as representing the Ogoni people. However, with the new government, Ogoni representatives in the government have been complaining that MOSOP continues to operate in the same manner as under the military and have no regard for them as the representatives of the Ogoni people, elected or appointed. There clearly has been a silent power struggle in Ogoni.

Matters came to a head in March 2000 when Shell in response to MOSOP's campaign decided to execute certain road projects in Ogoni. The company held discussions with MOSOP which insisted on certain conditions which it felt were in the long-term interest of Ogoni people. The people in government encouraged Shell to go ahead with the project without any conditions. They provided armed military personnel to provide security cover for the construction workers and equipment. MOSOP operatives mobilized protesters to block construction work. It was again the gun versus the people. Ogoni, especially Gokana – the flash point of the Ogoni struggle - was divided and charged. Violence seemed inevitable.

The governor of Rivers State attempted to broker a peace deal between MOSOP, Ogoni people in government and Shell. This was to no effect until MOSOP decided to hold a joint meeting with the government people in which the two parties decided to compromise in the interest of peace and development in Ogoni. While allowing the road project to continue, MOSOP ensured that both the contractor and Shell agreed to certain conditions in regard to the road project and future projects in Ogoni. Both MOSOP and those in government also pledged to work together henceforth in the interest of Ogoni development.

The important point about this incident is how rivalry between MOSOP as a social movement representing Ogoni people and those in government, who also have equal claim to representing the Ogoni people almost resulted in a conflict and how the situation was resolved. And how the agreement by the two parties to work together – if this is actually done – has tremendous potential for actualizing the objectives of the Ogoni struggle. The incident also demonstrate the differing perceptions of those in government and the leadership of a social movement.

for effective pressure groups in the Niger Delta to benefit from. **(democracy and bring about change. Then proceed with the informal groups – social movements, also as pressure groups that stand out on their own. Go on to discuss the need. Gap between representatives and their people have to be bridged.**

Someone has identified about 198 techniques of non-violent protest.

- LOOK AT SOME OF THE SPECIFIC MEASURES OF NON-VIOLENT PROTEST USED IN INDIA/SOUTH AFRICA BY GANDHI AND IN US BY KING

- EXAMINE THE GENERAL METHODS OF NON-VIOLENT PROTEST AS APPLICABLE TO NIGERIA AND THE NIGER DELTA ESPECIALLY.

- Non-violence as a moral struggle against the forces of coercion and violence.
- The need for a vanguard, disciplined organization
- The need for a disciplined, enlightened and committed and trusted leadership free of compromising ties to the target of the struggle
- The need for popular involvement and social mobilization
- The need for compromise when necessary and the avoidance of extremism
- The need for capability for patient, negotiating process
- The critical role of government – confronting poverty and the creation of political space for local communities to control certain aspects of their own affairs
- The need for transparency and demonstration of social responsibility by oil companies