

# **CIVIL SOCIETY AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE MASTER PLAN**

**Being Notes of the Presentation**

**By**

**Ledum Mitee**  
**MOSOP President**

at the

**Niger Delta Stakeholders Network's Workshop on  
the Implementation of the Niger Delta Regional Development Master  
Plan,**

held at the

**Marina Resort, Calabar, November 11-13, 2007**

## **Introductory Overview of the NDDC**

The whole idea of the NDDC, a precursor to the defunct OMPADEC, was the desire to create a channel inhibited by the bureaucracy and inefficiency associated with the civil service, through which some proceeds from oil revenue could get to the oil producing communities in the Niger delta. It was therefore expected that its structure would be simple and its functions straight forward as a development gaps-filling intervention, not a substitute for the obligations of the various tiers of government.

Not only is the structural conception of the NDDC faulty ab initio, but its enabling law is defective in several respects. As I have stated several times in the past, the Niger delta suffers from two related but distinct problems. There is the enduring problem of the challenging terrain of the geographical Niger delta region requiring extra efforts and resources which has been compounded by years of neglect. The discovery of oil and gas in the region has now introduced related but distinct obvious problems associated with oil exploitation. Whilst the old OMPADEC made no pretensions in its mandate but specifically

targeted oil producing communities, the NDDC mixes both problems in a manner that now confuses to the extent that any oil bearing community now comes within its definition of the (political) Niger delta.

However, for reasons which are not very clear and thus apparently dubious, the enabling statutory instrument, the NDDC Act, establishing the Commission not only made provisions in Section 7, making the NDDC virtually an agent of the Presidency, more or less, but made the organization one of the most bureaucratic through endless maze of monitoring committees. The Commission's suffocating structure thus has a Board comprising appointees of the President who are nominated by their governors, a management, a Governors' committee, a presidential Monitoring team, a Ministerial Team, a Senate Monitoring team, and a House Committee.

To compound the situation, it has been convenient for the government to present and project the NDDC as its answer to solving the problems of the Niger delta. This attempt to deflect attention from failure of its obligations to the Niger delta region that produces the bulk of the nation's wealth is catching up also with the oil companies of recent who are now audibly complaining that the effects of its contributions to the Commission might not have been reflected on the ground.

This has helped to create and reinforce a crisis of frustration where in some sense; all sides to the region's conflict are frustrated. The youths are frustrated that years after graduation they have no jobs, communities are frustrated by years of neglect and valuable resources from their land are taken away whilst they continue to live in pristine conditions, the government is frustrated because they think they have 'done enough' through NDDC and 13% derivation. The oil companies are frustrated that their contributions to the Commission and community development have not secured them the expected social license. These frustrations reinforce perceptions- the communities see the NDDC as an agency of government dispensing patronage, whilst government see the communities as trouble makers.

Suffocating under these loads of bureaucratic and political meddlesomeness as well as inadequate funding, the NDDC has, in spite of its imperfections, managed to midwife the Regional development plan.

The Niger Delta Regional Development master plan project of the NDDC provided an important milestone in the quest for the sustainable development of the Niger delta region. Its main attraction was not just in its bold attempt to aggregate and synergize the various efforts of all the key development partners and stakeholders but also its genuine efforts at engaging all stakeholders including the civil society in the appraisal of the efforts. The role of the civil society in the master plan process was duly and gratefully acknowledged in the Preface to the master plan.

Now that the master plan has been produced, which in my view, is like the NDDC saying, to every body that we are missing our way in the development of the region and therefore providing us with a compass or road map that we could use, has civil society any further role? If so, what role should we as civil society play?

My view is that civil society has profound role to play in the actualization of the plan. Indeed the question of whether civil society has any role will be purely academic once it is realized that although produced by the NDDC, the regional master plan is not an NDDC document. Whatever our views of the cartographer and other experts that produce city road maps, we act to our peril if we refuse to follow the road map produced by them.

The first role I think we need to play therefore is to become proactive partners to the Commission in educating ourselves and our constituents about the plan. Civil society can credibly perform this role if the Commission sees them as partners not opponents and takes them into confidence. Here it will do the Commission a load of good if they partner credible civil society instead of joining the farce of creating its own version of civil society.

Civil society should and could advocate for the removal of the bottlenecks that could militate against the performances by the Commission. The cumbersome bureaucratic structures, political interferences, non release of funds to the Commission are areas where civil society can add voice to those of the Commission. The very process of constituting the NDDC board needs urgent review. The process by which state governors who have the derivation funds are those also nominating people to the board is absurd, to say the least. We would like to see an NDDC board that is appointed on the basis of merit and the constituency they represent instead of political patronage considerations.

As stated above, the plan is for the region and not just the NDDC. If it is to have any benefit in real terms to our communities therefore, then civil society need to be engaged to help in building the capacities of our fractured communities into viable receptacles for development. This process of capacity building can equip and make the communities to question the various development stakeholders' compliance with the master plan in their development interventions.

This leads me to the most important role which I think we need to play, and in my view, our main task which must begin here. The master plan, as we know, aims at a coordinated approach to the development of the Niger delta as opposed to the confusing and duplicated efforts of the past. It is for this reason that we find refreshing the oft repeated statement by the President that government was committed to development of the region in accordance with the plan. The diplomatic community has also been supportive of the efforts of the master plan.

Civil society therefore should try and unpack the plan and present to each development partner what their take should be. We should be able to dissect it and present to the local government, state government, federal government, NDDC, development agencies, Operating companies and the international community their respective bites into the master plan.

The obvious starting point on this will be to relate the quick impact projects which have been identified by the plan to the current budgets being presented by the various levels of government. It is for this reason that President Yar' Adua has been one the most voiciferous supporters of the master plan process, I am personally shocked by the lack of balance in the recently announced Federal budget between the spending on priorities of health and education and security services.

At 444.6 Billion Naira the vote to security services is massive and unprecedented since the Biafran War. We see the figure as extraordinary and needing the most detailed explanation as to how this will improve the welfare of people of Nigeria, not to speak of the Niger delta who we fear may become the target of renewed force. How does this seat with the master plan idea especially as the allocation to security services exceeds the vote to health (N138 Billion) and Education (up to N250 Billion) combined.

Furthermore, with the Federal Government writing budgets with the price of oil \$53 the excess crude account will reach new and almost ridiculous levels. We want to see a future where funds from this account are set aside for the future of Niger Delta peoples specifically and the nation as a whole rather than the arbitrary spending we have seen over the past two years.

In the days, ahead the states and local governments will be announcing their budgets and it is critical that we leave here with a toolkit on how to confront the various levels of government and the NDDC on how their budgets and actual expenditure is reflective of the master plan. The European Union has also announced its new Niger delta development intervention and it is important for us to also interrogate this against the master plan and relate this to the efforts of other development interventions.

It is my view that it is only if we are able to do this that the master plan will be a worthwhile, and not some sterile academic exercise.