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## **Rethinking the Public Sphere and Social Order in the Niger Delta: The Polycentric Planning Approach**

**Shittu R. Akinola**  
Covenant University



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## **Abstract**

*This paper is a product of many years of experience and research on the Niger Delta. It identifies some of the reasons for the failure to transform rhetoric into reality by the Nigerian-state, multinationals/shadow-state and NGOs in the region. The structurally-defective and centralized governance arrangements in the Niger Delta has engendered increasing deprivation, neglect and orchestrated politics of exclusion by the Nigerian-state against the people of the Niger Delta. The public sphere is dominated by the few elite with “particularistic” concerns at the exclusion of the people. The consequent stiff resistance, violent reactions, militancy and hostage taking triggered by this politics of exclusion in the region have confirmed that people matter in politics. The trend of insecurity, corruption among public officials, the loss of life and property as well as the failure of military option by the Nigerian-state in the region clearly point at the failure of centralized governance arrangements.*

*Using the Institutional Analysis and Development (IAD) framework, this paper identifies and discusses repetitive missing links as well as the areas that are neglected by scholars and policymakers in the governance of community affairs in the Niger Delta. The point of departure of this paper, therefore, is in problem solving and solution seeking. This paper provides case studies in the Niger Delta to demonstrate principles and practices needed to make polycentric planning, self-governance and adaptive development strategies resolve socio-economic and political crisis. It argues that in some ways, the weakness of centralized and structurally-defective governance in the Niger Delta provides an opportunity for community self-governing institutions to play the role that governments and their agencies have abandoned.*

*In view of this, the failure of structurally-defective governance in the region calls attention to polycentric planning and decision making arrangements whereby community self-governing institutions could play critical and indispensable role by bringing the Niger Delta people into the main stream of socio-economic and political decisions, thereby synergizing the efforts of the state, oil companies and community institutions through bottom-up and integrative planning. It is in the light of this exigency that this paper develops an African Public Sphere Restructuring Model (APSRM) that derives inspirations and workability mechanisms from eleven (11) African development models that cut across several sectors of the economy in the Niger Delta. It is imperative for African scholars, using CODESRIA Initiatives, to apply these models for implementation so as to demonstrate examples of how to address the challenges in the Niger Delta.*

## **Introduction**

In spite of the fact that Nigeria relies on oil as the main source of its revenue, the Niger Delta communities where the crude oil is extracted generally suffer poverty, neglect, environmental degradation, denial of fundamental human rights and transport bottlenecks (Naanen 1995; Obi 2004:450; Akinola 2008b). The public sphere is dominated by the few elite with “particularistic” concerns at the exclusion of the people. The affluence exhibited by many workers of the oil companies and political office holders in Nigeria sharply contrasts with the social deprivation of most residents of oil communities whose livelihoods are threatened (Akinola 1992, 1998, 2000, 2003a, 2005d, 2008b; Obi 2004:448). In response, the people of oil communities resisted this oppression of the federal government in various ways (Douglas and Ola 1999:334; Obi 2000a:281). Consequently, four major groups, as identified by Akinola (2008b), with diverse interests have emerged strategizing for different reasons.

The first two groups belong to the elites, while the other two are the non-elites. In the first group are the politicians and bureaucrats who are mostly corrupt. The other group of the elites, though very few, identify themselves with the ordinary man in the oil communities. In this group were people like Ken Saro Wiwa and other eight Ogonis who were hanged by the military regime of Late General Sanni Abacha in 1995. Similarly, the non-elites “organize” themselves into two camps. The first group of non-elites adopts crude approach of violence, hostage taking, vandalization of oil installations, etc. in making pressure to bear on the Federal Government and oil multinationals/shadow-state. In the second group of non-elites are the grassroots who invest their sovereignty horizontally in one another through collective action and self-organizing arrangements to address infrastructural problems at the community level.

The orchestrated politics of exclusion in the region breeds resentment and aggression. Consequently, the challenges in the region have become complex, complicated and hydra-headed with various dimensions – social, economic, political and technological. These alienating divisions between stakeholders in development are legacies of colonialism which were adopted by successive post-colonial Nigerian governments. As expected, most economic and political decisions in the region do not reflect the aspirations of the people. The problem is largely a case of institutional dilemma which confirms the problem of “disconnect” caused by the absence of appropriate institutional mechanisms that could motivate the people (elite and non-elite) to work together as partners in development in the region. Without the citizens playing active role in decision making, governance process would continue to exclude and marginalize them. If citizens (at the community level) are excluded from rules making, how can the elites who make and impose rules on citizens interpret such rules in favour of the latter? The argument is that both

elite leadership and the people would need to work together as colleagues with equal standing within the public sphere and governance arenas.

This paper identifies the missing links as well as the areas of neglect by scholars and policymakers in the governance of public sphere and community affairs in the Niger Delta. It uses the Institutional Analysis and Development (IAD) framework in engaging empirical data to discuss repetitive missing links between and among the stakeholders in the governance of public sphere in the Niger Delta. According to some Tocquevillian analytics, the public sphere as one of the four terrains of the public landscape is the central axis of public life where deliberation according to “universal rules” exposes citizens to competing viewpoints through public debates, teaches them to become critical, tolerant and enabling them to transform their “particularistic” concerns into “universal” ones. In addition, the public sphere, more than any of the other domains, provides women, as well as racial, ethnic, and other marginalized groups, a way of broadening the public agenda and therefore a way of gaining access and entry into public life (Mansbridge 1983; Habermas 1989; Warner 1990; Colas 1997; Alger 1998; Forment 2003:16-17).

The point of departure of this paper, therefore, is in problem solving and solution seeking. The paper found that the bane of governance and development in the region is the problem of disconnect, hence Master Plan and dialogue alone are insufficient to resolve the problems in the region. As long as the stakeholders in development – governments, oil companies, other agencies and the Niger Delta people – operate on parallel lines, instead of as colleagues with equal standing within governance and development arenas, the crisis in the region may be difficult to resolve.

If we understand society as a system of human cooperation, the Hamilton ([1788] 1961:33) puzzle can be formulated as two questions: Are people of the Niger Delta capable of cooperating with one another to organize people-oriented government that will produce accountable leaders of their choice? If the answer is affirmative, under what conditions can they cooperate to achieve such a goal? Since elites leadership in the Niger Delta could not respond appropriately to the needs and aspirations of the citizenry, it is imperative to search for alternatives. Incidentally, recent findings confirm that the local people through self-governing institutions in the region have been able to respond to some challenges by exploring pre-colonial governance heritage and to certain extents have been able to address their daily needs (Akinola 2008b). How did these peoples cope and how are they coping? What lessons can we learn from these people-centred creativities and adaptation strategies? How can we reconstruct and reconfigure the public sphere

in the Niger Delta to synergize the efforts of the people through their institutions and that of governments to resolve the lingering socio-economic crises and poverty in the region?

In view of this, the failure of structurally-defective centralized governance and decision making calls attention to polycentric planning and decision making arrangements that regard community self-governing institution as a major player in crisis resolution and development in the region. Polycentric planning is a deliberate act of setting up multilayered and multcentred institutional mechanism that regards self-governing capabilities of local communities as foundation for reconstituting order from the bottom up. It can also be described as the process of ordering the use of physical, human and institutional resources as well as engaging the citizens in contractual relations with the public authority.

This paper is concerned with how to reconstruct the public sphere through appropriate institutional mechanism that could bring the Niger Delta people into the main stream of socio-economic and political decisions, thereby synergizing the efforts of the state, oil companies and community institutions through bottom-up and integrative planning. It also suggests adaptive planning strategy, using multi-layers and multi-centres institutional arrangements, to connect the stakeholders in a polycentric manner in order to resolve the crisis in the region. In the light of this exigency, this paper develops an African Public Sphere Restructuring Model (APSRM) that derives inspirations and workability mechanisms from eleven (11) African development models that are problem-solving and solution-seeking in several sectors of the economy in the Niger Delta.

## **Conceptual Clarifications**

### **The Public Sphere**

According to the Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (2007), the public relates to all the ordinary people in a country, who are not members of the government. It also relates to services provided for the people as it relates to the officials that provide services as in the case of public servants. The public is also seen as a political state (Dewey 1954:35). It is the community as a whole, and a-community-as-a-whole is supposed to be a self-evident and self-explanatory phenomenon. But a community as a whole involves not merely a variety of associative ties which hold persons together in diverse ways, but an organization of all elements by an integrated principle (Dewey 1954:38). On public space, Wole Soyinka (1994) warns:

Let all Nigerians understand that the public space means space that belongs to all of us and no group has the unilateral authority to impose and attempt to enforce its own (dress) codes on the rest of us (Soyinka 1994).

Based on these definitions, the public sphere can be defined as activities or events that citizens or officials are capable of, and/or should be able to carry out in order to influence changes.

### **Governance**

Governance focuses on the state and institutions, and the relationship between them. It also emphasises how rules are made in a society, and their acceptance. Governance also embraces the values that are sought by individuals and groups within the society (Akinola 1992; Olowu and Akinola 1995). Good governance accords the welfare of the citizens top priority. Adebayo Adedeji (1997) emphasises that good governance promotes political accountability as it establishes a new partnership and effective relationship between the government and the people.

According to Olowu and Akinola (1995), governance focuses on state and institutions crafted by the people, the relationship between them and how rules are made in a society which are accepted as legitimate by individuals and groups within the society. According to these analysts, governance could be viewed from two perspectives. The first dimension is made up of the governor(s) or leadership(s) whose responsibilities are derived from the principles of effective governmental organisation. The second dimension focuses on the governed i.e. the citizens, whose responsibilities are to participate in the socio-economic and political affairs of their society. The key elements of good governance in any modern society include: (a) managerial and organisational efficiency; (b) accountability; (c) legitimacy and responsiveness to the public; (d) transparency in decision-making; and (e) pluralism (diversity) in policy options and choices.

Relating the public sphere to governance, 'governing the public sphere' then means circumstances whereby the people and the public officials are able to synergise their efforts, knowledge and thought towards enhancement of socio-economic and political goods for the betterment of the society.

## **The Problematics of Governing the Public Sphere in the Niger Delta**

The Niger Delta crisis is emblematic of the bigger crisis pervading African continent. The causes of these crises resonate around contention of power over the allocation, distribution and control of human, financial and material resources. The Niger Delta crisis is a typical case study in Africa for other cases in crisis-ridden regions in the continent. The challenges in the Niger Delta arising from structurally-defective pattern of governance are summarized as: (a) A large sum of money flowing to the Niger Delta region regularly but with little or no impact on the lives of the people; (b) Party patronage, clientelism, godfatherism and winner-takes-it-all predominating the political system in the region; (c) The failure of local governments in the Niger Delta to meet the demands and the aspirations of the citizenry which made the present political system irrelevant to the grassroots; (d) The result of all these is that a widespread gulf is created between the leaders and the rest of the society in the Niger Delta; (e) The ‘problem of disconnect’ and symptom of alienation manifested in various sectors of the economy in the Niger Delta and culminated into crisis and high level of insecurity; (f) The local people through self-organizing arrangements, shared strategies and problem-solving interdependencies are more effective in responding to community needs and aspirations than governments and their agencies.

The general clamour for the Niger Delta is for government to increase the percentage from federation account accruable to the region. The question is: What has happened to the 13% derivation already being released to the region since 1992 when the percentage deduction from the federation account to the development of Niger-Delta was increased from 3% to 13%? The gross financial misappropriation of money meant for redressing the problems created by the oil exploration has not helped the matter. The critical question is this: Is the structure that plunders most of the 13% capable of spreading the effect of higher percentage to the people in the region? The socio-economic and political events in the region within the last fifteen years confirmed that the governance structure in the Niger Delta is grossly incapable of actualising the dreams and aspirations of the citizenry. The governance structure is highly centralised, and lacks the mechanism and inspirations to rally people-oriented institutions in the informal sector around socio-economic and political projects of the state. This makes the Nigerian-state to be predatory and overbearing on the Niger Delta and invariably makes it to be far from democratic society in all ramifications.

The failure of the so called elected representatives to deliver dividend of democracy confirms the problem of disconnect as there is no common-thought between the elected officials and the electorate in the region. This, invariably, calls for change in political forms by the public. Already there is a high level of apathy among the citizenry who feel marginalised by the operations of

governments and multinationals/shadow-state in the region. The public which generates the political forms is withering away but the power and lust of possession remains in the hands of the officers and agencies which the dying public instituted. In order to adequately analyse the challenges in the Niger Delta, Tocquevillian analytics is employed.

### **Tocquevillians and Public Life in the Niger Delta**

A Frenchman, Alex de Tocqueville's (1966) constructive response to the question where do people turn following the failure of State institutions is contained in his *Democracy in America*. Instead of turning to the State as the fundamental basis for the constitution of order in human societies, Alex de Tocqueville turned to what he referred to as the village or the township as the basic foundation of society. The foundation upon which American democracy rests is the people at the local level, and the picture is captured in the words of Alexis de Tocqueville:

The township is the only association so well rooted in nature that whenever men assemble it forms itself ...the community is the basic unit of collective organization...the people through experience of living together through successive generations work out arrangements among themselves for meeting the requirement of life (Tocqueville, 1966).

He further declares: "In democratic countries the science of association is the mother of science; the progress of all the rest depends upon the progress it has made" (Tocqueville, 1966). Further, he found this type of association to be universal among mankind. They exist among all nations.

Alex de Tocqueville (1966) argues that if societies were to govern themselves for themselves, they would have to develop the art and science of association – the fundamental issues of political design. It is important, however, to note that some African scholars have effectively employed Tocquevillian analytics in their works (Ayittez 1991; Olowu 1999, 2006; Ayo 2002; Akinola 2005d, 2007a,f, 2008b). These Tocquevillians in Africa, through their works, confirmed that many peoples of Africa have exercised considerable entrepreneurial capabilities both in creating private enterprises and public facilities and in governing their own relationships with one another.

Based on Tocquevillian analytics, Forment (2003:18) divides the public landscape into four terrains: civil society; economic society; political society and public sphere. Tocquevillians are currently debating the relative importance of each of the four public terrains in the development of democratic life (Walzer 1995; Forment 2003:15). Four views predominate. Scholars in the first group grant primacy to civil society (Sennett 1978; Putnam 1993; Bibic and Graziano 1994; Wuthnow 1998). According to them, membership in religious, work-based, neighborhood, educational, ethnic-racial, recreational, and other types of associations provides citizens a stable

place in which to forge ties of solidarity and to recognize each other as members of the same community. In these groups, citizens also acquire the practical and deliberative skills they need to become competent citizens. These views are confirmed by recent findings in Nigeria both in the Niger Delta and Yorubaland (Akinola 2003a, 2005d, 2007a, 2008a). However, the works of Tocquevillians in the West show that civil society is fast unraveling as a result of efforts by state officials and economic managers to “colonize” it. Thus civil society’s demise has undermined the moral and social foundations of democratic life (Forment 2003:16). The reverse, however, is the case in Africa as exemplified in Nigeria as well as in Senegal (Gellar 2005). For instance, in the Niger Delta, some civil society organizations have assumed the status of self-governing institutions (Akinola 2008b).

Self-governing institutions (SGIs) are institutions crafted by the people, without external interference, in an attempt to solve their common problems within their locality or community. They are also called people-oriented, people-centered or community-based institutions (see V. Ostrom 1994, 1997, 2000; E. Ostrom 1990, 1999; E. Ostrom, J. Walker, and R. Gardner 1992; E. Ostrom and V. Ostrom 2003; Wunsch and Olowu 1995; Mc Ginnis 1999c; Ayo 2002; Olowu and Wunsch 2004; Akinola 2005d; Sawyer 2005). Akinola (2008b) attests to the fact that rather than waiting for the government and oil companies, the local people in oil producing communities, through self-organizing and self-governing capabilities, have planned and executed several social services that directly enhance the lives of the people.

Sheldon Gellar’s work (2005) on *Democracy in Senegal: Tocquevillian Analytics in Africa* provides us vivid examples of associational life in colonial Senegal (1885-1945), civil associations in the postwar era (1945-1960), community-based urban associations, associational life in the countryside, resilience and adaptation of indigenous associations, democracy from below – grassroots community-based associations, etc. In Senegal, pre-colonial institutions were adapted to the present day realities (Gellar 2005). For instance, Senegalese did not define poverty in terms of material assets but in terms of social relationship. Membership in associations widened the potential resources that individuals could tap when in need by expanding one’s social network beyond friends, family and neighbours (Gellar 2005:107).

Scholars in the second group ascribe similar importance to political society (Lipset 1963; Huntington 1968; Janowitz 1983; Diaz 1993; Harbeson, Rothchild and Chazan 1994; Norton 1996; Sandel 1996; Schudson 1998; Diamond 1999). According to their findings in the West, participating in elections, political parties, interest groups, and mass movements provide citizens an opportunity to influence government officials and to use the institutional resources they have to improve their life chances, enabling them to redistribute socioeconomic and cultural power

from the privileged “few” to the “many.” Acting collectively enables even the poor and marginalized citizens to use political power to democratize public life. However, according to scholars in this group, the wealthy and powerful have been far more successful in gaining control of the political arena. They have accomplished this by organizing themselves into lobby groups and by using their economic resources to support one or another congressional or presidential candidate, undermining the capacity of all other citizens to do the same. The result is that the electorate at large increasingly becomes apathetic and, thus many citizens abandon political society (see Forment 2003:16).

The same pattern exists in most parts of Africa especially, in the Niger Delta and this position is confirmed by the works of African scholars. The elite leadership that constitutes African political society dominates electoral process by using state resources to consolidate their position in power. Electoral administration is monocratic, non-people-oriented and politicised to guarantee a monopoly of the political market-place, while African leaders see no reason to develop strong, independent and people-centered electoral administration that would only serve to undermine or subvert their hegemonic drive. Hence, elections in most African countries do not contribute to the processes of democratisation in the continent (Jinadu 1997:2; Ake 1996). Because of the divorced nature of the people from the governance process in Africa, politics in the continent has significantly become warfare. The inability of the people through their civil society to serve as a moderating influence means that politics assumes a lawless disposition, such that ‘every one seeks power by every means, legal or otherwise, and those who already control state power try to keep it by every means (see Ake 1992, 1996:7; Chole 1995:3; Callaghy 1988; Chabal 2002; Olaitan 2004:18; Fawole 2005; Akinola 2003a, 2004, 2006g).

There is also the problem of politicisation of criminality in the Niger Delta. There are several cases where politicians employed and armed thugs and hooligans to campaign for them during election later to abandon them after winning elections, while the ammunitions used are not withdrawn from these miscreants. Without jobs and any means of survival, these political thugs later transformed themselves to untouchable criminals who harass their fellow citizens on regular basis.

The third group of neo-Tocquevillians claims that economic society is the foundation of democracy (Novak 1982; Berger 1986; Hann 1990; Hirst 1994; Gellner 1994; Fukuyama 1996; Kuttner 1997; Mitchell 1997). Market capitalism, they argue, contributes to decentralizing wealth, thereby providing citizens the power they need to defend themselves against state officials and to preserve liberty in the modern world. Market-driven societies are also unique in their unmatched capacity to soften racial, ethnic, and religious differences by compelling citizens

to respect the laws of “supply and demand.” The argument continues that, even when the market fails to accomplish all of this, it has its own built-in mechanisms that lead it to correct its own imperfections automatically. But according to critics, the proliferation of large corporations and multinational firms throughout economic society has led to a centralization and monopolization of wealth and other types of material and symbolic resources, making it impossible for citizens to practice democracy in economic society or any other public terrain (see Forment 2003:17).

The high rate of unemployment and poverty in Africa, invariably, place the people at the fringe and periphery of economic stream. Market forces are incapable of decentralising wealth. For instance, the present privatisation drive in Africa is redistributing and concentrating wealth in the hands of the few bourgeoisies who are mostly in the political society, while the people are incapable to feed not to talk of investing by purchasing shares. The argument is that for economic society to accommodate the local people in the Niger Delta, it has to be restructured through polycentric privatisation.

The fourth group of scholars argues that the public sphere is the central axis of public life (Almond and Verba 1965; Mansbridge 1983; Habermas 1989; Warner 1990; Tismaneanu 1995; Colas 1997; Alger 1998; Lomnitz 2001). Deliberating in public according to “universal rules” exposes citizens to competing viewpoints and in doing so, teaches them to become critical and tolerant. Public debates enable citizens to transform their “particularistic” concerns into “universal” ones. In addition, the public sphere, more than any of the other domains, provides women, as well as racial, ethnic, and other marginalized groups, a way of broadening the public agenda and therefore a way of gaining access and entry into public life. These changes in the West have democratized the public sphere, but they have also contributed to the decline of critical deliberation and to the spread of “mass entertainment.” On their account, democracy has been turned into a “spectator sport” to be viewed in the privacy of one’s home (see Forment 2003:17).

This position is reinforced by experiences in Africa and especially in the Niger Delta. For example, the structure for public debates among public officials and citizens in the oil region are non-existent. Since the political and economic societies have been captured by the elite, they and their surrogates as well as their cronies are the ones that dominate kangaroo and authoritarian “public debates.” Whereas citizens in the Niger Delta under the aegis of self-governing institutions constitute the fulcrum of socio economic activities and local development, these citizens at community level are excluded from political realm and rules making by the elites who make and impose rules on citizens to feather their parochial and selfish interests.

Analysis so far confirmed that the economic society, political society and the public sphere in the Niger Delta are dominated by the elites leaving the self-governing institutions as the only institutions that are people-concerned. This situation in the Niger Delta is highly problematic as there are four major groups operating on parallel lines as earlier indicated (see Akinola 2008b). The first two groups belong to the elites, while the other two are the non-elites. (1) The elite indigenes that have captured economic society, political society and the public sphere, described as ‘all-government-in-power (AGIP) are politicians and bureaucrats who adopt clientelism and constantly adjust their strategies to romanticize with and benefit from all governments in power, whether military or civilian regime. Some of these elites are allegedly involved in oil bunkering. (2) The other group of the elites, though very few, condescends to the level of ordinary man in oil communities and continue to champion the course of freedom from oppression, exploitation, injustice and poverty. In this group were the likes of Ken Saro Wiwa and the Ogoni eight, who were hanged by the military regime of the Late General Sanni Abacha on 15<sup>th</sup> November 1995. Similarly, the non-elites “organize” themselves into two camps. The first group of non-elites adopts crude approach by using violence in making pressure to bear on the Federal Government and oil multinationals. This group is not interested in any orderly manner and has been responsible for most pipeline explosions, hostage taking, vandalization of oil installations, etc. In the second group of non-elites are the grassroots people who invest their sovereignty horizontally in one another through collective action and self-organizing arrangements to address infrastructural problems at the community level.

In the opening paragraph of *The Federalist Papers*, Hamilton ([1788] 1961:33) posed the fundamental puzzle in human societies, “whether societies of men are really capable or not of establishing good government from reflection and choice, or whether they are forever destined to depend for their political constitutions on accident and force.” If we understand society as a system of human cooperation, this Hamiltonian puzzle can be formulated as a question: Are human beings capable of cooperating with one another to organize a free, peaceful, and prosperous society? In relation to the Niger Delta, this puzzle can be formulated as two questions: Are the people of Niger Delta capable of cooperating with one another to organize people-oriented public sphere that will produce accountable leaders and basic goods and services of their choice? If the answer is affirmative, under what conditions can they cooperate to achieve such a goal?

Are there some roles citizens should play in the process of reconstructing the public sphere and participating in public debates? What are these roles? How can the public space be planned and reconstructed to allow citizens at community level to be involved in decision making, rule-

monitoring and enforcement of sanction on rule infraction? What role should citizens at community level play in electoral rules making, for example? The argument is that until the public sphere in the Niger Delta is reshaped, reconstructed and reconfigured, governmental system as well as goods and services will not be people-focused and democratic; tyranny of the majority will continue to predominate; and peoples of the Niger Delta, regardless of their endowment and entrepreneurial capability, will continue to suffer, while violence, insecurity and poverty will be heightened.

It is the disappointment that the local people in the Niger Delta have met over the years that has made them to turn away from the Nigerian governments (federal, state and local) and invest their sense of sovereignty horizontally in each other rather than vertically in government institutions. This is one of the reasons this paper pays great attention to direct and participatory democracies that the Niger Delta people practice on daily basis at community level through institutions they designed by themselves.

The argument in this section is that the structurally-defective pattern of governance in the Niger Delta region makes it difficult for the region to be governed even if the governors are sincere and adept in the act of governance. The way out of this crisis is to fashion out alternative governance structure that could enable these groups (and others that would be identified) to engage themselves in community assembly. At this point, it is important to go into the theoretical framework on which this argument is anchored.

### **Theoretical Underpinning**

In order to contextualize the line of analysis in this paper, Public Choice Theory (PCT) is adopted. The PCT recognizes the fundamental defects in the centralist model of governance and the persistent failure of the state to meet the collective yearnings and aspirations of the citizenry. This view focuses on the polycentric approach to the constitution of order in a human society where people share a community of understanding in proffering solutions to their own problems of daily life in a rule-ordered relationship (V. Ostrom et. al.; 1988:51). The Public Choice scholars emphasize the development of an alternative institutional paradigm by calling attention to the self-governing and self organizing capabilities of the people. Though this alternative paradigm was originally conceived within the context of American experience, it has become a potent alternative effectively employed by African scholars in their works (Ayittez 1991; Olowu 1999, 2006; Ayo 2002; Akinola 2005d, 2007f, 2008b). These scholars have confirmed the resilience and effectiveness of institutions designed through shared norms and managed by the people through collective action. This is the fundamental of the Institutional Analysis and

Development (IAD) framework, developed over the years by Vincent Ostrom and Elinor Ostrom and colleagues at the Workshop in Political Theory and Policy Analysis, Indiana University, Bloomington, USA. The IAD believes in institutional arrangement designed by people who cooperate based on rules and constitution of their choice, and thereby able to resolve socio-economic and political problems which other people (external to their conditions) are not capable of doing for them.

Broadly defined, institutions are the prescriptions (rules) that humans use to organize all forms of repetitive and structured interactions including those within families, neighborhoods, markets, firms, sports leagues, churches, private associations, and governments at all scales. Institutions are essentially contained in a shared language to specify the action that are required, prohibited, or permitted, and the sanctions authorized against rule-infractions. They may facilitate or militate against stable relationships that make interdependence possible and productive for most individuals in the political economy (Commons 1968; E. Ostrom 2005:3,18).

Institutions are crafted by participants within action arenas in response to their particular exogenous variables. This normally starts when participants within an action arena respond to exogenous variables or context (biophysical/material conditions, cultural and other attributes of a community, and rules-in-use) and when outcomes are positive the participants will increase their commitment to maintain the structure as it is or to another set of exogenous variables and then on and on like that. However, if outcomes are negative, participants might raise some questions on why the outcomes are negative. They might then move to a different level and change their institutions to produce another set of interactions and consequently, different outcomes.

Since society is a system of human cooperation, people in any society should collectively relate to and deal with their exogenous variables. Exogenous variables are those conditions that affect human livelihoods and which humans have to work upon through appropriate planning and institutional arrangements to better their conditions of existence. However, there are some fundamental imperatives of collective action within development arena. These are collegiality, mutual trust, reciprocity and shared community of understanding. It is the realization of these imperatives through constitutional reforms, effective planning and institutional arrangements that can enable Africans (leaders and the peoples) to work together to achieve redemptive development for the continent.

The failure of past development paradigms and state-centered efforts requires a rethink on alternative ways of addressing African socioeconomic and political problems. In view of this, scholars have recommended a paradigmatic shift from the centralist model to that of “self-governance” in solving problems emanating from the adoption of centralist model of governance.

It is on this basis that a new school of thought has emerged and is fast gaining currency. The self-governance principle was closer to pre-colonial systems of community governance in most parts of Africa. Several experiments in local self-governance were embarked upon in the early 1950s across Africa. The most important contribution of these institutions was their remarkable success at building basic infrastructure and services – roads, clinics, bridges, markets, parks, water supply, forestry, agricultural extension, police etc – some of which still exist today. The important thing is that most of these services were financed from locally generated revenue sources (Hicks 1961, Wunsch 2008).

Shortly after independence, however, the pendulum swung to the other extreme. The post-colonial African political elites conceived the state as the prime mover of development and this placed the state as the main provider of goods and services required by the people in all spheres of development, including agriculture and industrialization (Edigheji 2004:92). Unfortunately, African state is unable to articulate a transforming project or mobilize society around such a project, it is not equipped to respond to the needs of the people. In spite of the failure of the African state in governance of the affairs of its people, African people have resorted to trusted institutional arrangement by building confidence and trust in one another, thus collectively decide to create a new organizational structure for the common good (Olowu and Wunsch 2004). Similarly, Ayo (2002) emphasizes the role of indigenous structures of governance, as exists in the various communities across Nigeria, which the people have come to refer to as *de facto* in ordering their lives and solving their problems.

In Senegal, different occupational groups – traders, farmers, artisans, transporters, etc. form different types of associations that include: tribal associations, women's associations, burial societies, neighbourhood society associations, youth associations, etc. It has been confirmed that urbanisation sparked a sharp rise in associational life in Dakar and other towns in Senegal. Several associations emphasised social and recreational activities, the provision of mutual assistance and credit to finance important life-cycle events, and a safety net to help the needy (Gellar 2005:94). Similarly, in the rural economy of Senegal, traditional age-grades organised themselves into work groups to earn money. There are village-level youth associations that incorporated all members of the same age-grade or several age-grades. These village-level youth groups evolved into the most dynamic and effective associations and constituted the base for a strong peasant movement in many parts of Senegal. Rural Senegalese successfully adapted and expanded pre-colonial institutions (Gellar 2005:98).

These groups, since 1996 have come together to establish their own local development committees that engage in a wide range of economic activities, to evaluate their neighbourhood's

needs and to develop plans to improve the level of public goods and services. The rising participation of grassroots organisations in local governance in Senegal has been accompanied by a heightened sense of citizenship on the part of their members (Gellar 2005:105). These developments in Senegal are slowly changing the nature of local politics by undermining patron-client relationships and party control of associational life and making local government officials increasingly accountable to their constituents rather than to their party (Gellar 2005:106). However, this remarkably successful institution received relatively little attention from government decision makers and donors largely because they were not part of national programmes and donor projects (Gellar 2005:98).

Government's apathy notwithstanding, there is evidence that civil society – i.e. occupational, community-based, and religious organizations – exists at localities all over Africa, and in some circumstances can be an important participant in service delivery and in enforcing accountability (Olowu, Ayo and Akande, 1991; Olowu and Erero, 1997; Adedeji, 1997; Coulibally, 1999; Akinola, 2000, 2003a, 2004, 2005d, 2006h). This self-governing arrangement empowers citizens, protects individual choice and allows for polycentric institutional arrangement that permits citizens to join with one another to take collective action (Wunsch and Olowu 1995:274). These patterns of self-organising and self-governing capabilities of the local people in resolving their daily challenges are described as polycentricity.

According to Vincent and Elinor Ostrom (2003:12), polycentricity simply means a system where citizens are able to organize, not just one, but multiple governing authorities, as well as private arrangements, at different scales. Each unit may exercise considerable independence to make and enforce rules within a circumscribed scope of authority for a specified geographical area. In a polycentric system, some units are general-purpose governments, whereas others may be highly specialized. These are nested in several layers of general-purpose governments that also provide civil equity as well as criminal courts. Polycentric planning and decision making system enhance the capacity of citizens to talk, discuss, dialogue and engage in contestation in an assembly, whether at local or national level. It deals with multiple units of governments (multi-layers and multi-centers) and a way of working with one another among citizens with complementary arrangements for formulating, using, monitoring, judging, and enforcing rules (Elinor Ostrom 2005). If such institutions are granted autonomy, it will enhance effective collaboration, self-regulation and accountability (Wunsch and Olowu 1995:123).

Though there is a growing awareness of the need to strengthen community institutions which have existed and have facilitated self-reliant development at the local level, these institutions in oil communities of Nigeria exist at grassroots without official connection with the state-based

institutions. They operate on parallel line with governments, their agencies (oil commissions) and oil companies. Under normal circumstances, these people-oriented institutions, governments, NDDC and oil companies should operate in synergy as stakeholders in development and colleagues with equal standing within socio-economic and political arenas in oil communities. This, however, has not been the case. What has been happening is that governments and oil companies dominated decision making arena and decided for the people who have a well established structure of community self-governance (see Akinola 2008b). This is likely to have accounted for unresolved crisis in oil producing communities. If these institutions are viable (though not perfect), the question then is how do we connect them to the formal government structure? The major concern of this paper therefore is to design multi-layered and multi-centered institutional arrangement to ensure community self-governance in the Niger Delta. If this is achieved, the emergence of community self-governing institutions in the Niger Delta can be regarded as the new effort at creating an alternative model of the Niger Delta region built from the grassroots.

### **Methodology**

Oil communities in Nigeria comprise nine states and they are Abia, Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo, Imo, Ondo, and River States. Six of these states formed the area referred to as the Niger Delta while three states (Abia, Imo and Ondo) do not belong to the Niger Delta region but they are called oil producing states. The states within Niger Delta area are Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo, and River States but with several minority tribes such as the Ijaws (mostly found in the riverine area), the Ilaje, the Itsekiri, the Urhobo, etc. In this paper, for the purpose of uniformity, all the nine states will be referred to as oil producing states while the communities where oil is extracted will be referred to as oil communities. However, the Niger Delta is used as a common currency for all these areas. In the course of generating data for this paper, seven Local Government Areas (LGAs) from three of nine oil producing states were surveyed between 2003 and 2004. They are Gokana, Tai and Khana LGAs, Rivers State; Yenegoa, Sagbama and Brass LGAs in Bayelsa State and Ilaje LGA in Ondo State. Data were collected from seven community-based associations across the seven local governments. At the community level, community leaders and leaders of community development associations (CDAs) were interviewed using interview guide to ascertain the degree of social services provision by these associations. Data were also collected on resources mobilization strategies of the selected community development associations and the cost the associations expended on projects. At the local government level, financial statistics were collected from local government

officials to determine the contributions of these local governments to social services development at the grassroots. Similarly, financial statistics were extracted from official documents in the office of the Accountant General of the Federation in Abuja.

The next section of this paper discusses findings of series of studies on the performance of community self-governing institutions under which the local people operate in the Niger Delta.

### **The Resilience of Community Self-Governing Institutions in the Niger Delta**

The local people in Niger Delta have no confidence in those who run Nigerian government, hence, they invest their sovereignty horizontally in one another through collective action cum self-organizing and self-governing capabilities and thereby, to an extent, addressing daily challenges – education, health, community hall, postal service, security services, road repairs and other essential services.

### **Self-Governing Institutions in Oil Communities of Nigeria**

Two examples of self-governing community-based institutions in the Niger Delta discussed in this paper are community development associations (CDA) or town development unions (TDU) and age grade societies. These institutions are charged with the task of mobilizing people and their material resources for community projects. While some social groups have violent orientation, community development associations and age grades function as non-partisan umbrella for rallying community members together in addressing community problems. Membership is a symbol of identity and belonging. The age grade is organized along gender and age lines, while CDA is gender and age neutral. The CDA/TDU as well as age grades societies at the grassroots level perform some functions. These include: (a) infrastructural development of the village or community; (b) settlement of individual and inter-village disputes; (c) promotion of community relations; (d) maintenance of socio-cultural functions; and (e) overall local governance of the community, including the formulation and execution of policies and laws.

The community development associations or town development unions or village development committees are found in every community/town and village respectively. The officers of CDAs/TDUs are elected by members through an open ballot system during annual meetings. While some of these institutions have written constitutions, others depend on oral method. It is, however, instructive to note that oral constitution is very common among these institutions and as a matter of fact, very useful because it is usually ‘designed’ and amended through community assembly that received adequate participation of members that are endowed with sharp memory.

Each age grade is social but also has political implications as its functions make the structure and processes of local indigenous government diffuse to involve everybody.

All the people participate in the conduct of their own affairs through free discussion, and act as the final arbiters in the government processes directed by the elders. Generally, age grades, in healthy competition, undertake specific projects such as construction of wooden bridges, culverts, new roads, building of village/community halls and squares. CDA or town union is an umbrella organization for all the various associations in the Niger Delta. It then becomes easier for decisions taken at the community level to be passed down to all members of the community through the age grades and other associations that constitute communication channels.

In the light of this, three key overarching factors central to self-governance are discussed: the democratic conditions underpinning self-governance; resources mobilization and public accountability and the contributions of Community Development Associations (CDAs) vis-à-vis that of the local governments in oil communities of Nigeria.

### **Democratic conditions in Self-Governing Institutions in oil communities**

The organizational structure and management of these self-governing institutions in the region is unique. The configuration of relationships that bind the people together in these institutions is cultural value. Cultural values of the people play an important role in the operational performance of the institutions. In spite of the socio-economic deprivation the people of Niger Delta were subjected to, the local people still demonstrated commitment to the development of their community. What could have accounted for this? The reason may not be unconnected with their culture. Their contact with the Western culture, notwithstanding, the local people still rely on pre-colonial traditions and experiences of social organization and cooperation. An important aspect of the culture of the people is the system of trust and reciprocity that enable them sustain cooperation. People with good track record easily secure the confidence of their people in daily interactions. This has tremendously helped these community institutions to build and sustain trusted institutional arrangements. Consequently, these arrangements serve as incentives for leadership in these institutions in rallying their members around community decisions and projects so as to combat challenges of daily life where government efforts had faltered.

Although the intervention of Western influence on the culture of the people tend to weaken the people's culture, especially among the urban-based people of Niger Delta, the people have resorted to utilizing certain elements of their culture such as naming and burial ceremonies, rotatory fund (financial assistance) etc. to strengthen their culture and secure the loyalty of their people. For instance, an individual that defaults in payment of community contribution and levy

is considered a free-rider. Consequently, such a person (that is found guilty of rule infractions) will find it difficult to get his people to attend his naming ceremony, burial ceremony or secure fund for business assistance. To the people of Niger Delta, these ceremonies and events are very vital. To be deserted by one's people in such occasions signify societal stigma and disgrace to the entire family and relations. As expected, these cultural values have tended to secure and reinforce rules compliance and the cooperation of community members towards community tasks and at the same time reduce free-riding tendency. This cultural factor, invariably, has generated and strengthened amazing patriotic attitudes that the local people in self-governing institutions have demonstrated over the years.

Another important aspect of the culture of the people is courtesy. Once a decision is taken and supported by the elders, community members abide by such a decision. This is because people have respect for their elders, community leaders and leaders of various community institutions, especially those with good track records. This, however, does not mean that such elders/leaders are immune from sanctions if and when they err. The case of the four Ogoni chiefs who were lynched for their perceived collaboration with Shell and Nigeria's military government is a clear testimony that political consciousness is gaining ascendancy over traditional power that tends to oppress the people.

### **Resources mobilization and public accountability in oil communities**

The Niger-Delta people depend on their cultural values to harness resources from their sons and daughters whether at home or abroad. Families constitute the units of contribution within each ward. At the community level, once a project is decided upon, the money for the project is allocated on the basis of the number of the families in each quarter or ward. Each quarter representative goes back to his quarter and divides the money on the basis of the number of compounds in the quarter and then the money is mobilised according to the number of adults in each compound. In most cases, people at home do pool their labor during construction of projects to reduce the total cost of the projects, at least, in financial terms.

A familiar code of social justice is applied and there is prudent management of public matters and financial accounts when one considers the impact of resources that were mobilized (as is shown later in this paper). The moral pressure surrounding the public expectation of prudent spending of public resources is a living source of public accountability. Embezzlement is very rare because of the social stigma it attracts. When this occurs, however, the culprit is made to refund the money and also fined, suspended, or has his property confiscated and sold to recover the funds. The

CDAs/TDUs, however, did not accomplish their goals and objectives without employing certain degree of sanctions on defaulting members. The sanctions, however, vary from community to community.

Another factor that enhances the successful achievement of these institutions is lineage consciousness. Everybody wants to protect the name of his/her father by paying the amount due to him/her. Individuals, depending on their status are usually tasked to contribute some amount of money. Wealthy people in the community are specifically consulted for fund donation. Above all, launching is organized and funds are raised for specific projects. Unlike governments, these institutions are not in the habit of securing loan from banks or other financial institutions. Although local governments also contribute money, their percentage contribution is nothing to write home about when one considers their regular monthly allocation from federal government.

### **Socio-economic activities of Self-Governing Institutions in oil communities**

Table 1 shows that the selected institutions, over the years, have initiated and provided public goods and services worth over ₦83 million, an amount that constituted 77.4 percent of ₦107.3 million, the total cost of the projects. The Local Governments (LGs) in the selected communities contributed ₦24.2 million that accounts for 22.6 percent of the total money spent on the same projects.

Table 1: The Activities of Self-Governing Institutions (SGIs) in Oil Communities

S/N	Self-Governing Institutions	Projects Executed	Contribution by SGIs	Contribution by LGs	Allocation to LG (June 2002)
1	SGIs in Gokana and Khana LGs, Rivers State	Roads, bridge, water supply, health, and market	₦35.3 million (73.2%)	₦12.9 million (26.8%)	₦29.9 million
2	SGIs in Tai LG, Rivers State	Water supply, health, bridge, and market	₦21.8 million (82.15%)	₦4.1 million (17.85%)	₦29.9 million
3	SGIs in Yenegoa, Sagbama and Brass LGs in Bayelsa State	Water supply, bridge, transport, education and health	₦18.5 million (82.2%)	₦4.0 million (17.8%)	₦32.9 million
4	SGIs in Ilaje LG in Ondo State	Town hall, water, transport, education and market	₦7.5 million (70.0%)	₦3.2 million (30.0%)	₦30.1 million
Total/Average			₦83.05 (77.4%)	₦24.21% (22.6%)	₦30.7 million

Source: Akinola (2008b).

Analysis shows that the pipe-borne water projects in Nonwa Tai community in Tai Local Government was initiated and executed by the Gbogbara Development Association with eight water projects in 1994 and was increased to 55 in 1999. Consequently, the social impact is immeasurable, as the frequent death caused by pollution of stream water from the activities of the oil companies is drastically reduced through the efforts of these self-governing institutions. Similarly, the health care project in Tai Local Government Area (LGA) was initiated in 1994 by the women, popularly known as Kawa's Forum and in 1995 three bungalows of 8 rooms each were completed. The cottage maternity clinic now serves the purposes of child delivery and primary health care service in the LGA. Findings also show that Bunu Tai community in Tai LGA confronted the challenge of construction of a bridge to connect the community with farm settlements and fishing ports. Between 1994 and 1998, the five community development associations (Yugudam, Waadam, Gboko, Piatam, and Gbomene) in the community contributed ₦11,243,874.00 which accounted for 91.8% of the total cost of the project, while the percentage contribution by the local government was considerably low (8.2%). The project was successfully completed in May, 1998 within the expected time simply because the project was monitored by these institutions. Consequently, the ease of accessibility has greatly increased the rate of production, thus enhances the standard of living in the community. This type of accomplishment

is very rare among the officials, whether government or oil multinational companies in the Niger delta.

The activities of community-based institutions in Bayelsa State (1975-1986) confirm the pattern in Rivers State. The five associations (Yenegoa CDA in Yenegoa LGA, Kuma Youth Association in Kolo Kuma LGA, Fisherman Association in South Ijaw LGA, Sagba Elele Association in Sagbama LGA, and Local Professional Association in Brass LGA) like their counterparts in other Niger Delta communities focused on water supply, bridge, water transport, education and health. The summary shows that the contributions of these institutions in Bayelsa State accounted for 82.2%, while that of the LGs was 17.8%, confirming that grassroots represent the prime mover of socio-economic development at the community level. The same pattern exists in Ilaje LGA of Ondo State where community institutions contributed 70% towards community development, while the figure for the LG was 30%. Analysis also confirms that from time to time, these communities organize themselves into cooperative and social groups that undertake different community based projects such as: manual grading of earth surface roads; hiring and payment of casual health workers for the community and dispensary centers; and building of bus-stops or sheds at strategic points of the community.

The discussions so far confirm that self-organizing and self-governing institutions have impacted positively on the development of grassroots in oil region. Unfortunately, the sampled local governments that received an average of ₦30.7 million per month from the Federal Government in 2002 and ₦83.8 million per month in 2005 (*Tell*, No. 42, 17 October, 2005, pp. 29-44) performed less than expectation in terms of service provision for the people at the grassroots in oil communities. This appalling performance confirmed what several observers and analysts have identified as the major source of the rising waves of militancy and insecurity in the region.

From the above analyses, it is clear that mass mobilization strategy provides answers to most local development questions which the state has been dodging over the years. Rather than waiting for the local government authorities, that are closest to them (and with a lot of money), the local people in oil producing communities, through self-organizing and self-governing capabilities, have planned and executed several social services that directly touch the lives of their people. It is only at this level of common pool resources that some achievements have been realized. This is the doctrine of polycentricity which provides alternative strategies to address problems of daily existence at the grassroots level in the face of dismal and appalling performance of the modern state institutions.

The existence and operation of these self-governing and community-based institutions, however, does not replace the role of government; rather it redefines it. The most important role of

government, in a polycentric order is to help local people resolve their conflicts of interest in a way that remains consistent with societal standards of fairness. In other words, government should not be involved in too many things; rather it should play the roles of facilitator and supervisor to ensure fairness and justice.

The lesson we can learn from these institutions is how they are able to mobilize and use resources judiciously for the provision of social services. The concern is that if these institutions are so accountable to their members, we should begin to conceptualize how they can be used to re-constitute socio-economic and political order from the bottom and to serve as alternatives and/or complementarities to the modern state institutions. In order to reconstruct the public sphere and democratise social relations in the oil producing communities, an important task that needs to be accomplished is to build on the existing self-governing structures in the region. This places enormous challenges on the Niger Delta and African scholars to play a critical role in order to resolve the crisis in the region.

## **Reconfiguring the Public Sphere for Self-Governance Through Polycentric Planning in The Niger Delta**

### **The Challenge on the Niger Delta and African Scholars**

Given the peculiar attitudes of Nigerian leaders and that of the Niger Delta region, speaking the ‘truth’ to the power by African scholars is not enough to resolve the complex and hydra-headed problems in the region. What is required is that African scholars should go the extra mile in applying knowledge to the Niger Delta problems – taking theories to the streets. In my own opinion, the Niger Delta crisis is an acid test of Africans capability in resolution of challenges facing the continent. The question is: How capable are Africans to resolve their internal crisis without recourse to external assistance? While some African leaders do not know what they are doing innocently, others are ignorantly ignorant of their ignorance. On the other hand, some African leaders are despotic and authoritarian; and they have nothing to offer their people. They are highly apathetic to changes but only to maintain the status quo. In view of the apathy of African leaders to effectively govern African public sphere, the only hope of the continent is for African scholars to rise to the challenge and ignite necessary changes the continent needs. How will they do these?

This section sheds some light on the role of African scholars on how they can demonstrate their intellectual capability in resolving the crisis in the Niger Delta. Ideally, political leaders and scholars should work together when there is a problem to resolve rather than apportion blame

when things go wrong. In my own view, there are two options. While in some instances both scholars and governments should work together, in other cases scholars should also be concerned with how to take theories to the streets to proof and test their knowledge. It is not enough to critique the governmental system without offering an alternative workable strategy of how to solve the problems at hand. As the late Michael Manley said:

Those who have to face the challenge of action may make mistakes. Meantime, those who reside permanently in the world of ideas, alone and untested, do not help anyone when they refuse that reality is more complex than theory (Michael Manley cited in Kari Levitt 2005:302).

In essence, African leaders and African scholars as well as governments and universities should find a mix of their operations so that their threats can be converted to opportunities. However, since it seems that African governments are not interested in harnessing African knowledge, potentials and skills towards socioeconomic and political development of the continent, it is the contention of this paper that African scholars should be prepared to go the extra mile by fashioning out the possible way forward for the Niger Delta. The critical questions are: Do we (African scholars) continue to generate knowledge for knowledge generation sake and fold our hands on application of knowledge? For how long are we going to maintain this intellectual aloofness? This paper calls the attention of African scholars to this urgent assignment of making their scholarship problem-solving, solution-seeking and relevant to their community. This paper argues that it is possible for Africans to use their entrepreneurship and work together as colleagues with equal standing within development arenas to redeem the continent from the clutch of Western hegemony and liberate the people from poverty and oppression.

On the Niger Delta, scholars should use their intellectual capacity to further the interests of their people, and to help create a living socio-economic, political, cultural and liberating environment. The Niger Delta intellectuals should critically study indigenous and endogenous impulses that diverse peoples of Niger Delta are exploiting in surmounting their daily challenges. This means that Niger Delta scholars and other scholars in Africa need to rethink their analytical tools, jettison failed models of development, and discreetly focus on those that can yield enduring socio-economic and political liberation for the Deltans. The fundamental questions include the following: How are the people surviving regarding basic needs like food, housing, clothing, health, education, transport, security, etc.? What lessons can be learnt from peoples' creativities and the adaptive strategies they evolved over the years in addressing problems of daily existence? These are some of the questions that scholars need to answer through empirical surveys in their

various disciplines. Findings from such studies will help us come to terms with the resilience and robustness of local people in the Niger Delta as well as their vulnerability, exclusion and marginalization. Four tasks need to be performed and these are: (i) The need to come to terms with the fact that citizens are sovereign. (ii) The need to pay close attention to the self-organizing and self-governing structures the people have built and sustained over the years. (iii) Identification of what needs to work upon or filter in order to ascertain what to modify, adopt or reject. (iv) Designing institutional mechanism that can bridge the gap between the ruling elite and the local people.

The author, having performed these four tasks, to an extent, attempts at designing African Public Sphere Restructuring Model (APSRM) that could help in restructuring the public sphere in the Niger Delta.

### **African Public Sphere Restructuring Model**

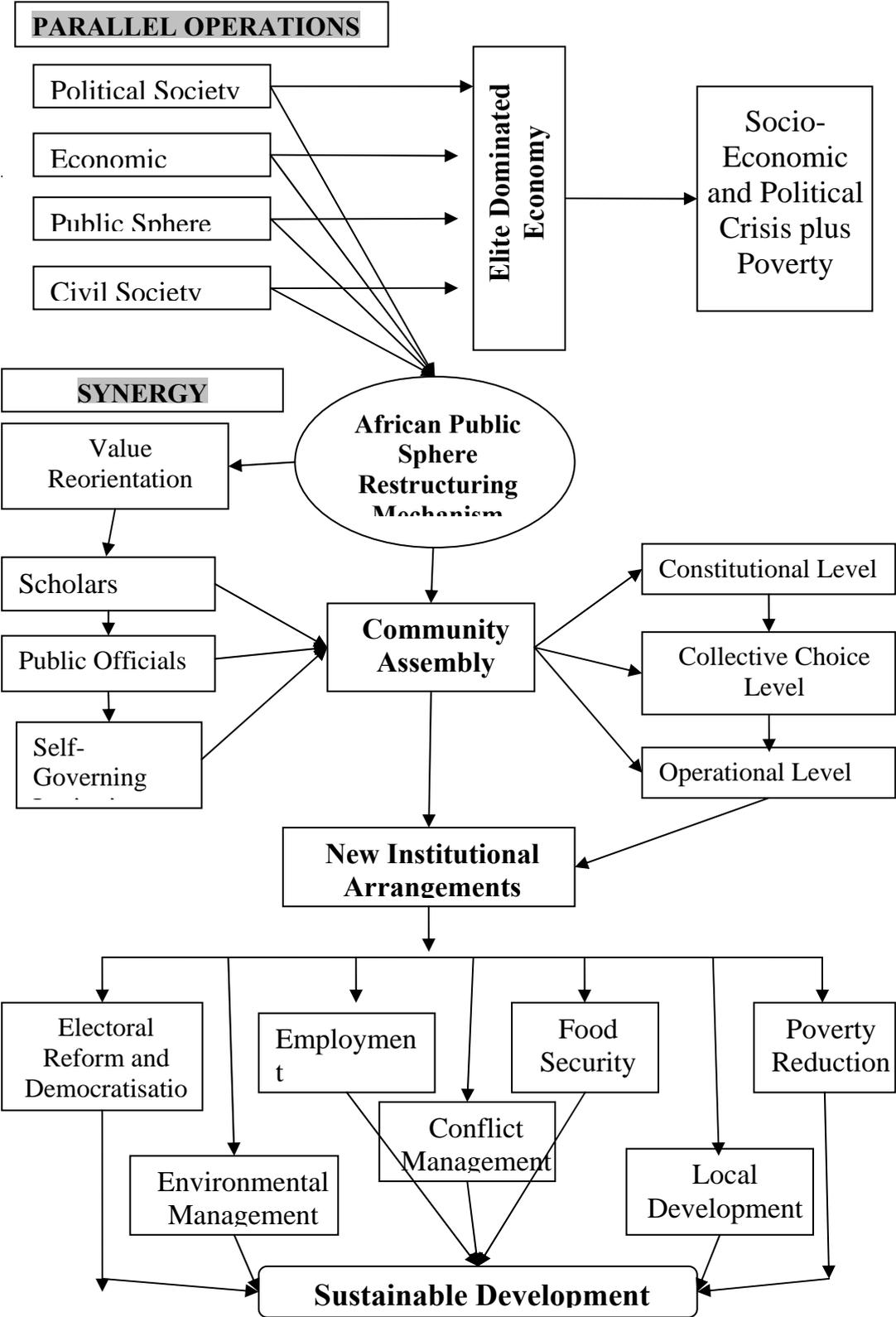
African Public Sphere Restructuring Model is conceptualised as a deliberate act of setting up self-governing community assembly (SGCA) for deliberation, collegiality, mutual trust, reciprocity and shared community of understanding. APSRM emphasises two elements – deliberation and deliberateness/action. It derives inspirations from eleven (11) African development models (Akinola 2007f,g,j; 2008f,m,o). The eleven models are: (1) African Intellectual Gap Measurement Model (AGIMM); (2) African Development Institutional Mechanism (ADIM); (3) African Polycentric Information Networking (APIN); (4) African Food Security Model (AFSM); (5) African Employment Generation Model (AGEM); (6) African Conflict Prevention and Peace Building (ACPPB); (7) African Sustainable Environment Model (ASEM); (8) African Road Triology (ART); (9) African Community-Initiatives and Development Model (ACID); (10) African Electoral Reform and Democratisation (ARED); and (11) African Local Economic Development Strategy (ALEDS). These development models would help in: (i) measuring intellectual potentials and relevance of African universities as well as intellectual gap(s) among African scholars with the aim of reforming African educational curriculum and making African scholarship problem-solving and solution seeking; (ii) connecting all the stakeholders in development at various levels of decision making; (iii) creating networks between the leaders and the people for effective information sharing and communication; (iv) enhancing economic growth through local industrialization and polycentric privatization; (v) distributing the benefits of economic growth among the citizenry; (vi) empowering the people economically; (vii)

detecting and preventing conflict as well as building peace; (viii) reducing poverty; (ix) conserving and protecting environmental resources; and (x) sustaining development.

African Public Sphere Restructuring Model (APSRM) is diagrammatized in Fig. 1. The first part of the diagram displays the failure of structurally-defective public landscape and public policies in Africa as exemplified by parallel operations of the four terrains of public landscape (civil society; economic society; political society and public sphere) that has resulted into elite dominated economy and socio-economic and political crisis, which have, in turns deepened poverty and heightened human misery in Africa. This failure calls for a paradigm shift in governance structure to a new institutional arrangement whereby the efforts of the participants in the public terrains – politicians, bureaucrats, technocrats, multinationals and citizens – are synergized through public sphere restructuring mechanism (the second part). APSRM suggests that the first step is a value re-orientation among African scholars and then among other participants. This new orientation, invariably, determines: (a) the ability of African scholars to take theories to the streets and applied them for the benefit of the citizenry; (b) the synergy between and among African scholars and public officials in executing socio-economic and political projects; (c) the relevance and indispensability of community self-governing institutions in socio-economic, political and technological decision making; and (d) the centrality and imperativeness of community assembly for the resolution of socio-economic and political crisis.

The outcome of the restructuring is in three parts: (i) rule making at all levels of decision-making (constitutional, collective choice and operational) at the community assembly; (ii) new institutional arrangements would reflect integrative constitutional order in socio-economic and political realms; and (iii) deliberateness – joint action and synergy by the three groups (scholars, public officials and representatives of community self-governing institutions). After the institutional arrangement has been designed, operational strategy for implementation of any programme/project (e.g. employment generation, food security, poverty reduction, etc) can then be fashioned out (see Akinola 2007f,g; 2008b). It is at this stage that any of the eleven models can be applied to specific action situation. For example, African Electoral Reform and Democratisation (ARED) could be applied for connecting all the political stakeholders in development and governance at various levels of decision making for enhancing public accountability. Similarly, African Local Economic Development Strategy (ALEDS) could be applied for enhancing economic growth through local industrialization and polycentric privatization as well as empowering the people economically and reducing poverty at local level. The application of African Food Security Model (AFSM)

would ensure food security for the citizens, while African Employment Generation Model (AGEM) would generate employment opportunities for unemployed youth, etc. The result of restructuring as shown in Fig. 1 is sustainable development.



## **Fig. 1: African Public Sphere Restructuring Model (APSRM)**

### **Implementation Strategy and Polycentric Planning**

In Niger Delta, real democracy, through self-governing institutions, exists in a distinctive manner in several ways. First, the self-governing institutions operate separately with each organization focusing on its own survival objective(s). Citizens invest their sense of sovereignty horizontally in each other rather than vertically in government institutions. Second, it is asymmetrical. Citizens practice democracy more readily and intensely in these institutions than in any of the other public terrains (economic society, political society, and the public sphere). For example, the Niger Delta people across all ages, in self-governing institutions practice self-rule (democracy) by participating in meetings, voting for officials, making those officials accountable to the other members of the group, deliberating about common concerns, paying their dues in a timely manner, and serving on juries that were responsible for enforcing the norms and statutes of the group. The significant aspect of these institutions is that they never went into extinction; rather, they are resilient and constitute the tools of survival among the local people in the region.

In the light of the above, it is clear that the social disparity between the Nigerian state, its oil partners, and the oil communities could be addressed if a new institutional arrangement and planning mechanisms capable of bringing all the stakeholders together for regular discussions and decision making are designed and implemented. Such public sphere restructuring mechanisms should regard the existing self-organizing and self-governing arrangements that have proved effective as building blocks for re-constituting order from the bottom up in oil region. The self-governing institutions can act as checks and balances on the local government officials. Much might be made of community-level government both to enhance “voice” and to improve local governance. A community assembly that comprises officials of governments and oil companies as well as representatives of various groups and associations (including the warring factions) in the Niger Delta should be established.

In self-governing systems, citizens, interacting through appropriate institutional arrangements, engage in rule making at all levels of decision-making (operational, collective choice, and constitutional) and within all scales or domains (neighborhood, township, local government and state). Boundaries between the three decision making levels are blurred. Depending on the activity at hand, two or all the three actions can take place within a particular scale or domain. The IAD framework, however, differentiates between three levels of interaction – constitutional, collective choice and operational – that function concurrently.

At the constitutional level lies the system that determines how rules are made and can be modified. At the heart of effective governance of Niger Delta is the imperativeness of constitutional reform which can be accomplished through polycentric privatization and local industrialization. The effectiveness of this strategy has been proved in an experiment performed in Irepodun Local Government area of Osun State, Nigeria between 2005 and 2006 by the author (Akinola 2007f:230). Based on the Irepodun experience, the adoption of polycentric privatization strategy could avail the citizens in the Niger Delta the opportunities to dialogue in community assembly and jointly take decision on how resources are to be allocated and utilized.

At the collective choice level, rules that define and constrain the actions of individuals and citizens have to be established. At the operational level, concrete actions have to be undertaken by those individuals most directly affected, or by public officials (McGinnis 1999a). This can then be applied to different sectors of the economy in the Niger Delta – employment generation, food security, poverty reduction, road development, environmental management, electoral reform and democratisation, conflict detection, prevention and resolution, etc.

It is believed that when the participants and stakeholders at the community assembly are able to sit together, discuss their common problems and craft working rules together, a shared community of understanding would be established. The interactions between the governments, oil companies and self-governing institutions would eventually produce new working relations that will be people-oriented. For governance to benefit the people it has to proceed from the people, be guided by them, and they should be able to modify the governing institutions as their situations change. The argument is that if Nigeria wants to address the problem of infrastructural deprivation, corruption and poverty in the oil communities, it needs to learn how to make efficient use of her physical, human, and institutional resources. Experiences of community-based institutions in oil communities through self-organizing and self-governing capabilities in meeting common challenges in the delivery of common goods and social services need to be taken into consideration in policy formulation in the region. It is these people-designed and people-oriented structures that can be regarded as building blocks for the emergence of people-centred and self-governing public sphere capable of reconstituting order from the bottom-up in the Niger Delta.

In order to address the hydra-headed and complicated challenges in the Niger Delta, African Public Sphere Restructuring Model (APSRM) is applied. It is suggested that some communities are selected for practical implementation of polycentric strategy for pilot projects. The model adopts eleven (11) African development models that are problem-solving and strongly applicable to the Niger Delta region (mentioned earlier).

**Pilot Projects by African and Niger Delta Scholars**

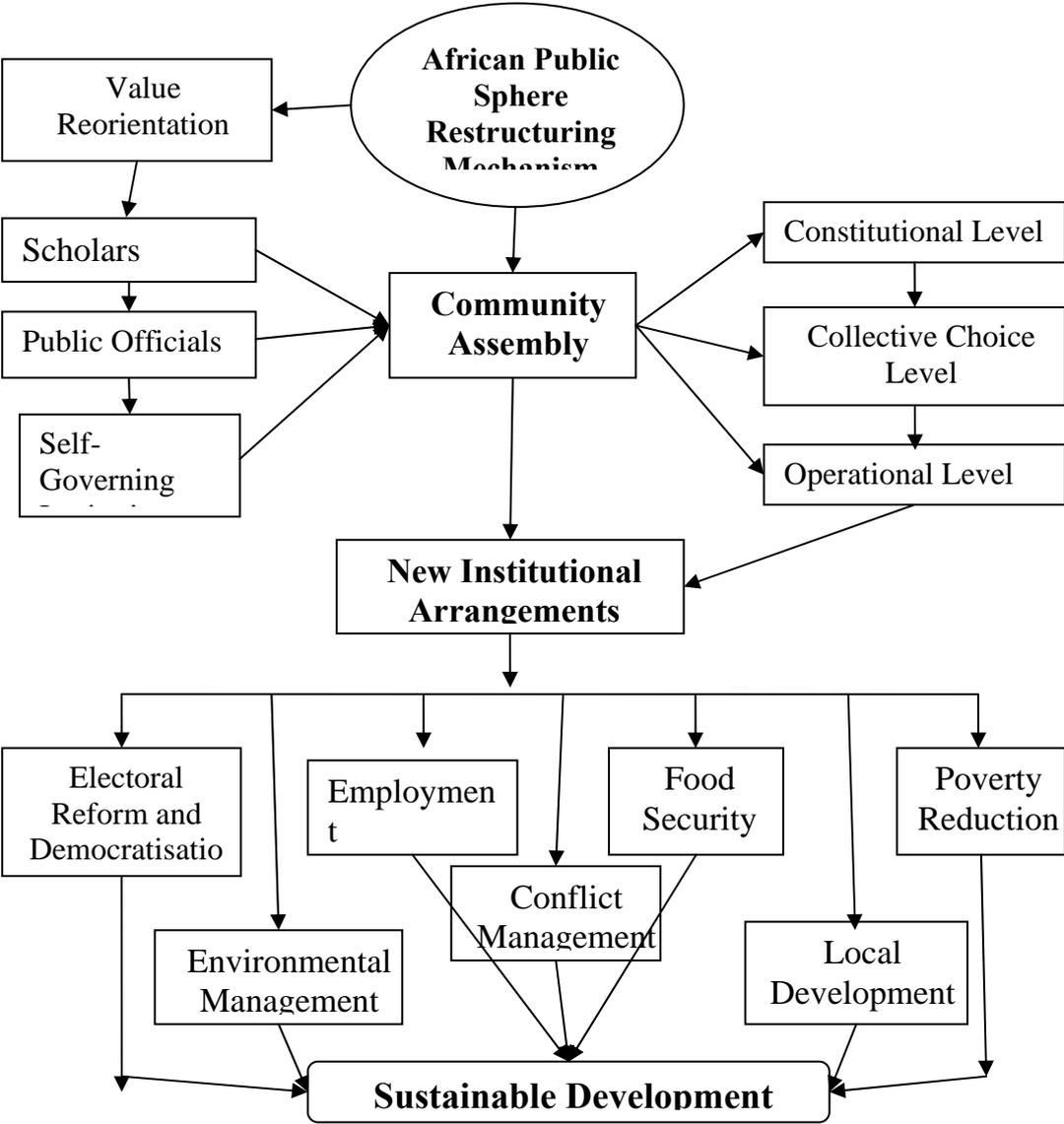


Fig. 2: Application of African Public Sphere Restructuring Model (APSRM) to the Niger Delta.

### **Pilot Project at CODESRIA Level: Food Security and Employment Generation**

This section focuses on how African scholars through the CODESRIA platform could kick start food security and employment generation programmes by applying AFSM and AGEM through the implementation of Polycentric Planning and Poverty Reduction Strategy (PPPRS) in the Niger Delta. It is, therefore, suggested that CODESRIA adopt this strategy for implementation in the Niger Delta. Using CODESRIA Initiatives, the proposal is designed to experiment food security project in specific food related areas and provide job opportunities for people at the community level. In doing this, the CODESRIA will:

- (i) demonstrate how to develop entrepreneurial capability by combining factors of production (land, labour and capital) toward food production and employment generation in the Niger Delta;
- (ii) establish university/industry partnerships in translating innovative ideas into machines that are capable of enhancing agricultural productivity; and
- (iii) establish a strategic and robust corporate social responsibility by utilizing vast agricultural resources in agro-based industry to provide affordable food and generate employment for people at the community level.

Within the academia, agricultural engineers, food scientists, and food technologists would have to be involved in the design of machines<sup>1</sup> for food pressing, food storage and food packages. The implementation strategy of the proposed project spans five stages (see Akinola 2008f,o). Food-related activities and employment generating ventures that could be embarked upon include:

- (i) Large-scale mechanized farms in the cultivation of yam, cassava, maize, guinea corn, fruits, etc.
- (ii) Food processing plants – yam flour, cassava flour, maize, guinea corn, fruits, etc.
- (iii) Animal husbandry section – fishery, poultry, rabbitry, pigry, goatry, cattle and other ruminants.

During the first phase of the programme, the public officials, multinationals and NGOs should be invited as observers, while the representatives of self-governing institutions are participants directly involved in the programme. For some reasons, it is important to exclude these state-based agents at the initial stage of the programme. However, during the second phase after the programme might have taken proper shape, the state agents could be regarded as participants if they so desired.

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<sup>1</sup> Import, understudy and adapt the machines to our ecological and socio-cultural settings.

The eleven models that would help in actualizing restructuring the public sphere in the Niger Delta are discussed in turn briefly here.

### **African Intellectual Gap Measurement Model (AIGMM)**

It is obvious that the institutional mechanism and technical know-how of how to take theories to the streets in Africa have not been adequately explored, hence, the persistent gap between theories and realities in the continent. It is in the light of this exigency that African Intellectual Gap Measurement Model (AIGMM) is designed to measure intellectual potentials and relevance of African universities and other higher educational institutions in Africa (Akinola 2008m). The starting point is to determine what is missing in African scholarship by measuring intellectual gaps. The result of the measurement would determine the type of models that need to be designed to fill the identified gap(s). It is then imperative to test the models and refine them to ensure they fit into realities and become problem-solving.

Knowledge management tools and techniques as well as effective planning and institutional framework that can make knowledge generated by African scholars relevant to the needs and aspirations of the peoples of the Niger Delta would need to be employed. Such home-grown development models developed by African scholars would need to be applied on pilot scale so that findings and experiences gathered from these pilot cases would help in refining and modifying the models for full replication across the Niger Delta. The findings and experiences gathered from these exercises would, invariably, be part of what could be used to reform African educational curriculum at university level (see Akinola 2008m for details on this model).

### **African Development Institutional Mechanism (ADIM)**

African Development Institutional Mechanism (ADIM) could be applied to enable primary development players (scholars and public officials) in the Niger Delta to operate in synergy at regional and state levels. Applying ADIM to the Niger Delta, scholars should view the Niger Delta realities with intellectual lenses through exogenous variables by factoring exogenous variables into their study and understanding of the Niger Delta realities; otherwise, such studies will be repeating the error of the past – illusion. Scholars should generate knowledge through relevant applied research and analysis of existing scholarship focused on overcoming the Niger Delta's problems. Then scholars should pass knowledge on to the political sector (public officials). And public officials, along with scholars, should implement policies (Akinola 2007f:230-231).

### **African Polycentric Information Networking System (APIN)**

African Polycentric Information Networking (APIN) could be applied to strengthen linkages and interactions between individuals and self-governing institutions (Akinola 2007g). The beauty of polycentricity is in its multifarious connections and interactive links that all members of a particular community have to receive information, interact and make contributions to decision making and conflict resolution. For example, decision taken or information passed in a polycentric system has the possibility of reaching every member of a community through at least four of eight channels. Each of the eight associations (occupation, religion, neighborhood, cooperatives, women, youth, unemployed, and ethnic militia) is a channel for information dissemination. Since these institutions naturally draw their members without much difficulty, the linkages and interactions can then be connected to the state structure of governance. The networks once established can be useful at various domains of human interactions in the Niger Delta, from regional to state and then to local/community levels.

### **African Conflict Prevention and Peace Building (ACPPB)**

African Conflict Prevention and Peace Building (ACPPB) is designed to detect, prevent and resolve conflict, from national to local/community levels. It is believed that since members are from all associations that cut across the whole community, any action, information or rumor that may engender conflict would be detected earlier and necessary mechanisms at preventing crisis would be set up by the community through a committee. Appropriate steps at forestalling the crisis would easily be taken rather than fire-brigade approach that normally leaves a negative impact on communities. Regular dialogue and discussions would eventually revive shared communities of understanding that had been denigrated by Western practices across Africa. When people in a community have access to correct information, information asymmetry which usually causes misunderstanding and conflict would be minimal. Once this institutional arrangement is established, it can be useful for information flows from bottom-up and for enlightening the grassroots on governments' policies and programmes as well (Akinola 2007g).

### **African Food Security Model (AFSM)**

African Food Security Model (AFSM) is conceptualized as the combination of factors of production (land, labour, capital, entrepreneurship and technology) through appropriate institutional mechanisms that synergize the efforts of the key stakeholders (governments, universities, industrialists and farmers) in food production (process and storage). The model has two components. The first component displays the failure of conventional food security policies

in Africa as exemplified by parallel operations of the stakeholders that has resulted into food crisis. This failure calls for a paradigm shift in food security to a new institutional arrangement whereby the efforts of the stakeholders are synergized through food security mechanism (the second component). AFSM suggests that the first step is a value re-orientation. This new orientation, invariably, determines: (1) the utilization of agricultural resources; (2) the development of adaptive technology and (3) the ownership of local food industries through shareholding. The outcome of the new institutional arrangements is in two parts: (a) processed agricultural products, consumption of products, and exports of the products; and (b) employment generation, bonus and dividends to shareholders; and wealth creation. The overall outcome of all these is food security and poverty reduction (see for details, Akinola 2008f,o).

### **African Employment Generation Model (AGEM)**

African Employment Generation Model (AGEM) is conceptualized as the combination of factors of production (land, labour, capital, entrepreneurship and technology) through appropriate institutional mechanisms that synergize the efforts of the key stakeholders (governments, universities, industries and business sectors) in employment generation. AGEM see technology development as a practise of co-creation involving social and material aspects, social and natural sciences, and societal and technological developments (Akinola 2008f).

### **African Sustainable Environment Model (ASEM)**

African Sustainable Environment Model (ASEM) (Akinola 2007h) could be applied to reduce environmental degradation and poverty in oil communities where exploration activities are causing ecosystemic damages. Two major tools of ASEM are Public Complaints Commission for Environment (PCCE) and Environmental Cost Internalization (ECI). The adoption of this model in the Niger Delta will ensure stakeholders (oil companies, community members, environmental related Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs) in the environment to jointly take decisions, monitor industrial activities and ensure that oil companies comply with Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) standards. It is important that polluter pays legislation passed to generate revenues from oil industries. The PCCE should also ensure that part of revenue generated from oil industries should be used to provide health facilities and job opportunities for the affected communities. The process of implementing the strategy is in six stages as discussed elsewhere (Akinola 2007h).

### **African Road Triology (ART)**

African Road Triology (ART) (Akinola 1998) could be applied to overcome problems that are associated with lop-sided road development. This model would assist state governments and the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) on road projects in the region. The trilogy of road development - survey, construction and monitoring/maintenance (SCM) - pre-conditions durable roads and serves as efficacy for master planning in providing solution to road related problems. The model establishes that road development should be placed on a tripod stand of survey, construction and monitoring/maintenance (SCM). Each spatio-political entity – state and local government – should prepare road master plan for its geo-political area in the Niger Delta. At each level of road master plan, data relating to all roads should be generated, analyzed and projected into the future. The data, should of course, be updated in the light of some socio-economic changes that are bound to occur. The adoption of this model will, in no doubt, enable road projects to be constructed on sound footing, with ability to contain pressure of population growth in the foreseeable future (see for details, Akinola 1998; 2007g).

### **African Community-Initiatives and Development Model (ACID)**

Since it has been proved that community institutions possess requisite capabilities in mobilising the people and resources at the grassroots, the Federal Government and NDDC should relate directly with these people-oriented institutions. Using certain criteria such as (1) geographical location, (2) size, (3) completed projects, (4) on-going projects, and (5) future projects (in order of priority), government should identify active communities with self-help projects and pay them directly as suggested here. The model suggests that the federal government should start with communities with completed projects by paying such communities between 65.0% and 70.0% of the project cost. The proposed scheme of contribution between the people and the government is suggested by Akinola (2000:186-187). According to the scheme, if a CDA has completed a project using its own resources, situation report by community development officers at the local government level should be sent to the federal government. The federal government should give between 65.0% and 70.0% of the cost of the completed project, denoted by  $x$ , to the community. The federal government should release its contribution (i.e.  $x$ -value) directly to the concerned CDA's account. The community can then use the government grant in addition with locally generated resources for new project. The subvention/grant for the last project (on priority list) in a community can be used for the maintenance of already completed and functioning projects. To facilitate payment of grants to CDAs, each CDA should be required to open a bank account to that effect.

In order to solve the problems in oil communities, four things need be done (see Akinola 2000:187: (1) compensation for the affected people; (2) reclamation or renovation of derelict land; (3) control of mining operation. Financial allocation formula which will reflect/address the needs of the affected communities has been designed and can be found elsewhere (for details see Akinola, 1992:74).

The application of this model on pilot scale and its result would go a long way in enlightening decision makers on how to resolve the Niger Delta crisis. Similarly, it would help in resolving the resource control problems. This is because it is the actual amount of money needed at the community level that the federal government would be required to pay to each community. At the same time, this strategy would help in preventing pillage and plundering by state agents in the Niger Delta.

### **African Electoral Reform and Democratisation (ARED)**

African Electoral Reform and Democratisation (ARED) (Akinola 2007g, 2008n) could be applied to reshape, reconstruct and reconfigure democratic space to include diverse civil society, community institutions and interest groups at community and local level. ARED model could help to connect government structures with people-oriented institutions such that elected officials (leaders) and the electorate (the led) can engage in open discussions on their problems in their mother tongues at community forum/assembly. The application of this model in the Niger Delta would lead to the emergence of people-oriented electoral system that could constitute checks on the excessiveness of politicians. This emerging pattern of political order will invariably enable citizens and community institutions through civil society to play prominent and integral roles before, during and after elections in the Niger Delta (Akinola 2007g, 2008n).

### **African Local Economic Development Strategy (ALEDS)**

Food security and poverty reduction model designed by the author (Akinola 2006j; 2007f:233, 2007g) shows the relationships between the federal government, academia and industrialists. In order to eliminate all sorts of exclusions in the Niger Delta, two domains of decision making – political and economic – would need to be reconstructed and reconfigured through African Local Economic Development Strategy (ALEDS). On the political level, in order to reconstruct public space, critical attention should be directed towards indigenous and endogenous institutions (i.e. self-governing institutions) that the people have evolved, over the years, in coping with the problems of daily existence within their locality. Representatives of these institutions with public

officials (politicians, bureaucrats and technocrats) will form Community Assembly, Local Government Assembly, State Assembly and Federal Assembly.

Major political decisions should be taken at Community Assembly as discussed under ARED. In a nutshell, screening of political candidates should not be the exclusive decision of political parties. Rather, it should be the joint decision of the citizens and public officials. It is suggested that Electoral Commissions in each state should establish information network with Community Assembly to source information on political candidates before registering them for election. The Commission should liaise with community institutions in order to ascertain candidates that have demonstrated commitment and loyalty to their communities. Information obtained from the community institutions would be used by the Commission to screen candidates. By so doing, political office holders at all levels of government would be drawing their legitimacy from these people-oriented and community institutions in the Niger Delta.

On economic dimension, the third tier of government should assume entrepreneurial roles so that they can generate both substantial revenues as well as employment opportunities at local level. In order to implement this model right from regional to local/community levels in the Niger Delta, there are fifteen (15) stages the model needs to pass through (Akinola 2008c). The adoption of ALEDS would help in actualizing food security, employment generation, wealth creation and poverty reduction in the Niger Delta by re-orientating values.

## **Conclusion**

This paper concludes that the failure of structurally-defective governance in the Niger Delta calls attention to polycentric planning and decision making arrangements whereby community self-governing institutions could play critical and indispensable role by bringing the Niger Delta people into the main stream of socio-economic and political decisions, thus synergizing the efforts of the state, oil companies and community institutions through bottom-up and integrative planning. It is in the light of this exigency that this paper developed African Public Sphere Restructuring Model (APSRM) that derives inspirations and workability mechanisms from eleven (11) African development models that cut across several sectors of the economy in the Niger Delta. The common denominator to all these models is polycentric planning and poverty reduction strategy that emphasizes the centrality of community self-governing institutions in reconstituting order from the bottom-up in the Niger Delta. It is imperative for African scholars to apply these models for the implementation of Polycentric Planning and Poverty Reduction Strategy (PPPRS) by kick starting food security and employment generation programmes in the Niger Delta. CODESRIA represents a robust platform for the implementation of this strategy.

It is strongly believed that community self-governing institutions are capable of valorising the restructuring process of the public sphere. In view of the resilience and robustness of community self-governing institutions in meeting the aspirations and yearnings of the citizens in the Niger Delta, any attempt to neglect them in the process of restructuring the public sphere would constitute a missed opportunity for the region.

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