

The 2012 Flood and Government Policy Response in the Niger Delta

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ABSTRACT

The paper examined the impact of incidents of flooding in Nigeria with a view to ascertain the level of implementation of government policy on mitigating the effect of this natural disaster in 2012. This is against the backdrop that the study of government policy response in Nigeria has become integral to extant development debate among scholars, policy makers and development practitioners. The focus has shifted from reactive to proactive measures in addressing incidents of natural disasters. It explained the policies of government towards addressing the problem of flooding in Nigeria, as well as if the strategies were implemented. The study focused on three (3) Niger Delta states: Rivers, Bayelsa and Delta. It examined the activities of federal and state agencies in the respective states. Agencies examined included the States Ministries of Environment, the States Emergency Management Agencies, and the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) in the South-South Zone. It observes that these Ministries and Agencies made frantic efforts to achieve the mandates for which they were established, but were constrained due to some external factors, particularly funding and lack of trained manpower and personnel.

The paper concludes with recommendations on the effectiveness of public policy response in the area under study.

KEYWORDS: *Flooding, policy response, Niger Delta*

INTRODUCTION

Incidents of flooding have become frequent in Nigeria. In 2012 alone, about 23 states were affected by flood. The number increased to 32 in the 2012 flood incident. In those natural disasters, families vacated their homes, properties destroyed in addition to the loss of lives. The 2012 floods in Nigeria have been described as one of the worst incidents in the history of Nigeria. As noted by Onyeleke (2014:30), the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) reported that the 2012 floods displaced over 1.4 million people, injured 18,000 and killed 337 in Nigeria. Over 350,000 homes were destroyed. She further avers that the estimates of the flood damage and losses on the environmental sector alone have been put at N23, 840 and N13, 464, respectively. In his argument, Ocheri (2014:117) citing Aminu (2013) asserts that the flood is the worst in 40 years. The Nigeria Red Cross Society also reported that the impact in terms of magnitude, intensity, duration, spatial dimension and consequent damages. According to the Director-General of NEMA, Nigeria lost N2.29 trillion to the flood. This is equivalent to 1.4% of Nigeria's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). The comprehensive Post Disaster Needs

Assessment conducted from November 2012 to March 2013 with the support of the World Bank and Global Facility for Development for Disaster Reduction and Recovery, United Nations Development Partner and relevant Ministries, Departments and Agencies put the estimated total value of infrastructure, physical and durable asset at \$16.9 billion. The total value of losses across all the sectors of the economy was estimated at \$7.3 billion. In all, 363 were killed, 5, 851 injured, 3, 691, 394 affected and 3, 871, 530 displaced.

Globally, there has been growing concern about the effects of natural disasters on the individuals. The United Nations in meeting with its obligations has made attempts to address the problem of natural disasters such as flood as they affect countries of the world. In this regard, the World Conference on Disaster Reduction held from 18-22 January in Kobe, Hyogo, Japan, introduced the Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015. At the Third United Nations World Conference on Disaster Reduction held from 14-18 March, 2015 in Sendai, Miyagi, Japan, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030 was adopted. The Hyogo Framework for Action stipulated that the international efforts to reduce disaster risks must be systematically integrated in policies, plans and programmes for sustainable development and poverty reduction and supported through bilateral regional and international cooperation including partnerships.

The Framework provides the following priorities for action:

- i. Ensure that disaster risk reduction is a national and a local priority with a strong institutional basis for implementation;
- ii. Identify, assess and monitor disaster risks and enhance early warning;
- iii. Use knowledge, innovation and education to build a culture of safety and resilience at all levels;
- iv. Reduce underlying factors;
- v. Strengthen disaster preparedness for effective response at all levels

The Sendai Framework presented opportunities for countries:

- i. To complete the assessment and review of the implementation of the Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015: Building the Resilience of Nations and Communities to Disaster;
- ii. To consider the experience gained through the regional and national strategies/institutions and plans for disaster risk reduction and their recommendations, as well as relevant regional agreements for the implementation of the Hyogo Framework for Action;
- iii. To identify modalities of co-operation based on commitments to implement post 2015 Framework for disaster risk reduction;
- iv. To determine modalities for the periodic review of the implementation of a Post 2015 Framework for disaster reduction (WCDR Report, 2015:2).

The expected outcome of the Framework is the substantial reduction of disaster risk losses in lives, livelihoods and in the economic, physical social, cultural and environmental assets of persons, businesses, communities and countries. It stipulates that to attain the expected outcome, it must preview new and reduce existing disaster risk through the implementation of integrated and inclusive economic, structural, legal, social, health, cultural, educational, environmental, technological, political and institutional measures that prevent and reduce hazard, exposure and

vulnerability to disaster, increase preparedness for response and recovery and thus strengthen resilience.

It is obvious that the Framework provides the roadmap to developing programmes and policies by relevant governments in the implementation of strategies that are aimed at reducing the vulnerabilities of citizens through disaster risk management strategy. They enunciate the principles to engender actions and programmes that would promote policies which would enhance the living standards of the people, with regards to the negative consequences of disasters as already specified.

The study examines the response of various levels of government to one of these natural disasters- flooding in three states of the Niger Delta region. This will be achieved by explaining whether through strategies provided in the Frameworks, government is able to put in place mechanisms that would reduce the negative impact on the citizenry.

GOVERNMENT POLICY RESPONSE

That the major responsibility of any government is to meet the social and economic needs of the citizenry cannot be overemphasized. A government is deemed to have failed if it fails to provide the needed resources; facilities and infrastructure that would enable the citizens achieve their aspirations to have the basic necessities of life. Put other words, the citizens desire happiness and comfort and look up to the government to provide infrastructure that would make these possible. In the event of natural disaster and unforeseen circumstances which are beyond the capacity of the individuals and government fails in its responsibility to meet the people in their areas of need, the consequences would be negative on the part of the citizens.

The state is responsible to provide the needed social and economic infrastructure that would engender development and welfare of its citizenry. Construction of roads, houses, schools, hospitals, markets, power supply, utilities, amongst other municipal services are the basic prerogative of the state. This view apparently prompts Olashore (1989:241), to make a distinction between provision of social services for the generality and welfare of the citizenry and services that would boost the economic interest of private concerns that are profit oriented when he states that:

The major consideration of government in investing in infrastructural development is both social and political. Strictly therefore, the business community would rather invest in directly productive activities. These are activities that are profit oriented for which the returns to investment is normally high. For such activities whose social overhead is high or which are indirect productive activities, government comes to the rescue. This explains why a great proportion of investment in infrastructural facilities such as highways, railways, power stations, irrigation schemes, sea ports, air ports, schools and hospitals in Nigeria are built by the government. It is the responsibility of government to ensure that these infrastructures serve the needs of the people (1984:24).

Governments, adopt strategic measures to make its citizens lead a good life. To achieve this, the process of decision making and implementation must be just and fair in order to meet the aspirations of the people. This is brought about by good governance. Constantinos (2006),

identifies good governance as key to successful formulation and implementation of sustainable development policies in developing countries. This is quite instructive when considering policy response of governments, globally, particularly between developed and developing countries. It goes to stress how important this element is in addressing the myriad of developmental challenges faced by the citizens. This posture illuminates the views of scholars on the nature and character of politics in these countries. There have been arguments over the reasons for the backwardness of the underdeveloped countries of the world. Scholars have put forward divergent opinions on this debate. That really is not the subject matter of discourse. In this study, it is pertinent to point out that whether developed or developing, the States have laws and regulations which if strictly adhered to would enhance the fortunes of the people. However, we cannot lose sight of the fact that a major feature that distinguishes the developed and underdeveloped countries is that the former is characterized by a high level of responsiveness to the good and welfare of the citizens, while the latter is characterized by insensitiveness, lack of accountability, probity and transparency. On the other hand, it is followed by lack of the interest and power of the people to check the excesses and abuse of office of officials responsible for the implementation of public policies. The review of literature suggests that not much has been sufficiently studied in this regard. This gap in literature is what this study attempts to address.

Instructively, when a state initiates programmes and policies, they are geared towards ensuring the good of the citizenry, those who are charged with the implementation of these policies have the responsibility to discharge their duties in line with public interest and good. The review of literature shows that there is a gap in studying the relationship between formulation and execution of climate change related disasters such as flood in Nigeria. This study attempts to fill this gap.

This nexus between policy formulation and implementation is what Achebe (1981) in his much celebrated social commentary described as bad leadership. Perhaps, it is this position that influenced Akinirade (2011:53), to describe leadership, good governance and sustainable development as likened to the 'Trinity concept' that are inextricably interwoven such that obeisance to one is genuflection to the other.. It shows how closely knit and inseparable they are. Good governance, according to Akinirade (2011:57), is a general term used in development literature to describe how public institutions conduct public affairs and manage public resources in order to guarantee growth and development. It is a critical element that ensures public good. Citing the United Nations, he argues that good governance has eight characteristics which were developed by the Agency's Independent Commission on Good Governance in Public Services. Accountability, transparency, responsiveness, equitability and inclusiveness were amongst others identified.

Further explanations on these characteristics show its link with the fundamental elements of democracy. In other words, it would not be out of place to say that the concept of good governance and democracy are interwoven. Obviously, the link will become clearer when we examine the view of scholars and critics about the concepts. This might have influenced the assertion by Allen (2010) citing the argument of Pellegrini and Gerlagh that democracy influences the outcome of sustainable development policies. Democracy, as practised the world over, is considered a form of government that considers the interest and welfare of the citizenry and ensures the responsiveness of government. This is achieved through citizen participation in the decision making process of the state. He also argues that the role of democracy in the implementation of public policies is commendable in the literature of sustainable development.

Several features characterize democracy as a concept. One common concept that runs in the views of scholars and critics on democracy is that it must be responsible to the citizenry. This is attributed to the fact that those in position of authority derive their powers from the people and so it is logical and ethical to have their interest and welfare considered in any decision making in the state. In other words, the people take central position in a democratic setting. Obasanjo and Mabogunje (1992:13), Nwabueze (1993:74).

The underlying factor here is that these elements are essential in ensuring the efficiency of public policies that are directed towards enhancing the living standards of the individual and that are what is of interest to us in this study. All the elements identified point to the involvement of the citizenry hence making them prominent stakeholders on issues that involve decision making in the state. Accountability and responsiveness of those who hold political power in trust of the people is a hallmark of this system of government.

STUDY AREA

The study area is the Niger Delta Region which comprises of six states. Three states – Rivers, Bayelsa and Delta were selected for this study. The reason for the choice is based on the fact that they form the core states of the Niger Delta region and given the topography of the region, the release of water from the Lagdo Dam in Cameroon which was the major cause of the 2012 flood emptied itself into region with these states largely affected.

METHODOLOGY

Ministries/Agencies responsible for addressing environmental issues/incidents such as flood were assessed. A structured questionnaire was designed to obtain the relevant information needed in the study. The questionnaire was designed to explain the nature of government policies on the problem of flooding and the extent of implementation, as well as to ascertain whether the policies, if any, made meaningful impact on the socio-economic lives of the citizenry. The Ministries/Agencies investigated were:

- Rivers State Ministry of Environment
- Rivers State Ministry of Special Duties
- Bayelsa State Ministry of Environment
- Bayelsa State Emergency Management Agency
- Delta State Ministry of Environment
- Delta State Emergency Management Agency
- National Emergency Management Agency.

PRESENTATION OF DATA AND DISCUSSION:

The data obtained indicated that the Ministries under study were established between 1999 and 2001. From the response within the Ministry of Environment in the states under study, there are Departments responsible for erosion and flood control. The aggregate functions of this very important Department are the formulation, execution and review of environmental and ecological programmes of the states; environmental assessment, conservation, protection and oil spill management. These responsibilities enable the Ministries of Environment respond to incidents of flooding and erosion whenever they occur and advise government appropriately. Part of the functions of the Ministry is to adopt proactive measures of mitigating flood in the state. These are achieved by engaging in Environmental Impact Assessment of projects, as well as sanitation

and waste management. The blockage of drainages in cities and towns has been attributed to result in flash floods and has caused immense destruction of lives and property including public utilities and infrastructure such as roads.

The Ministries carry out their activities through routine inspection of facilities and sites impacted by flood incidents. They also ensure the compliance and monitoring of facilities that are prone to flood. Environmental planning, early budgetary provision to tackle the challenges associated with flood incidents, deployment of relevant and capable personnel to address the problem, public enlightenment, research and flood and erosion control studies are also strategies the Ministries adopt to carry out their activities.

It is also deduced that when the 2012 floods occurred the Ministries under study were aware of the incident, they immediately mobilized themselves, inspected the areas, assessed the situation and began resettlement of victims. This was done by the setting up of camps for Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs). Public facilities such as schools were used for the purpose. This was to ensure effective and efficient coordination of relief materials to the people. The process commenced with the documentation of those affected. Relevant personnel from the Ministries were deployed to carry out these responsibilities. The Ministries under study were not alone in this assignment, they were carried out in conjunction with other Ministries/Departments and Agencies such as Ministries of Health, Agriculture, Special Duties. The State Emergency Management Agencies, as well as other non-governmental organizations such as the Red Cross were also involved. Relief materials such as temporary shelter, food stuff, clothing and medical care were provided as a stop gap measure to mitigate the effects of the disaster.

In the process of carrying out these activities, challenges were encountered. There were challenges of inadequate funds to carry out proper relief response and logistics. There was also the issue of lack of capacity to manage such magnitude of emergency that occurred. This stems from the assumption that there was not state of preparedness by relevant authorities in terms of management of such incident of natural disaster. There was also the challenge of institutional conflicts amongst MDAs with overlapping functions related to addressing emergencies from such natural disasters. This in no small measure affected the activities of the Ministries in carrying out their activities in the states under study.

Addressing the adequacies of the strategies adopted by the respective Ministries, it was observed that the flood incident had immense negative impact on the environment, thereby affecting the citizens significantly. There was loss of lives and property that ran into billions of naira. With a major segment of the population under study engaged in farming as a means of livelihood, the takeover of land by the flood tremendously affected their livelihood and thereby caused increased poverty of the people. In other words, the consequence was that their standard of living reduced significantly. The fishing folks were not left out as the flood also affected the aquatic habitat. There was also loss of revenue by various governments, particularly those at the local level in the area of collection of tax and rates from economic and commercial activities. The impact also affected the health condition of victims as water-borne disease became manifest in the affected areas. The situation prompted the nature of response by the Ministries through the various mechanisms adopted.

After all the activities, the Ministries cannot say that the policy of government towards response to natural disasters such as flooding was adequate. The Rivers State Ministry of Environment was of the view that it was not adequate because as at the time the incident occurred, there was

lack of preparedness from relevant authorities, while at the Delta State Ministry of Environment, it is believed that the policies are adequate but there is need for more institutional collaboration among the relevant MDAs. It is also asserted that Nigeria has a policy aimed at addressing the negative effects of natural disasters such as flooding with the provisions of the National Policy on Environment, National Policy on Climate Change, National Erosion and Flood Control Policy, the establishment of the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA), amongst others. Public enlightenment of ways to mitigate and prevent flood incidents has been carried out by the Ministries. The various mass media, banners, billboards, posters, stickers were used to sensitize the populace on the dangers of activities that would expose the environment to flood. Such negative activities as indiscriminate dumping of refuse and deliberate blockage of drainages were campaigned against by Ministries and Agencies. In all, the Ministries have been able to meet the objectives for which they were established. Routine inspection, assessment of impacts and proffering mitigation measures are ways they believe that the objectives have been satisfactorily carried out.

In the same vein, the State Emergency Management Authority is the Agency responsible for emergency response of unforeseen incidents and natural disasters. The Agency is established in line with the National Emergency Management Agency Act. It is observed that despite the fact that operational structure of SEMA was designed to be uniform across the country; there were significant differences in the administrative structure in the states under review. For instance in Rivers State, the Agency is a unit under the Ministry of Special Duties. In Bayelsa State, the Agency stands alone with a Board and an Executive Secretary as Head of Administration, while in Delta State, it is a parastatal under the Ministry of Special Duties with a Permanent Secretary and an Executive Director overseeing the Agency. The Agencies established between 1999 and 2000 have the responsibility of monitoring and ensuring safety standards, preparedness for contingency, training for response activities, response measures taken to protect lives, provision of emergency care to victims, rehabilitation of victims, enforcement of policies for emergency/disaster management; to issue emergency management assistance to the society; to develop risk assessment programmes and emergency plans that focus on disaster preparedness. The modalities adopted in carrying out these responsibilities are through the inspection and assessment of the magnitude of disasters and properly advising government on strategies of implementation, engaging in public enlightenment programmes in the media; engage in workshops and seminars aimed at stimulating discourses on disasters prevention, mitigation and management.; the use of town criers, social media, hand bills and billboards to sensitize and give the citizens orientation. When the magnitude of the disaster is beyond the capacity of SEMA, the Federal Government is involved through NEMA to address the problem.

It was obvious that the parastatals were aware of the occurrence of the disaster in 2012. In line with the objectives of the Agencies, the evacuation of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) was carried out, documentation was done, medical and relief materials such as food, clothing were provided for the victims while the flood lasted. Victims who were critically ill were taken to the hospital for proper treatment. In the course of carrying out their activities, there were challenges encountered. For instance, in Rivers State, there was the problem of understanding the terrain for smooth evacuation of affected persons; there was also the challenge of crowd control in the IDPs camps, language barrier between the officials and victims as well as security challenge. The biggest challenge was that of funding as a result of the non preparedness of the authorities for

disaster of such magnitude. Delta State SEMA had the challenge of lack of adequate funds as well as trained personnel and infrastructure.

As parastatals deeply involved in emergency services during the 2012 flood due to the sudden occurrence of the flood, there was the sudden obstruction of economic and social activities which ultimately affected the livelihood of the people. The standard of living reduced drastically as a result of the flood incident. There was also the issue of health challenge as a result of epidemic that loomed at the time. The flood also led to the loss of lives, destruction of property, displacement of persons, robbery and rape of victims. There was a high level of psychological impact on victims as a result of the trauma caused by the incident. Setting up of camps for Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), providing relief materials and medical care was the priority for SEMA in Rivers State, while that of Delta State set up various committees for flood relief and rehabilitation. The Committee provided relief packages, shelter and health care for victims.

Having carried out the emergency services, SEMA in Rivers State avers that the adequacy of government policy towards responding to natural disasters such as flood was averagely okay, but a better funding was needed; with more aggressive awareness campaigns as well as provision of permanent preventive measures. It was same for Delta State SEMA with the inclusion that more experienced and technical personnel be involved in emergency response when the need arises.

Following their activities, the agencies agree that Nigeria has a policy aimed at addressing the negative effects of natural disasters such as flooding. These policies are provided for in the environmental sanitation laws; National Emergency Management Agency Act; National Inland Waterway Authority Act, Rivers State Water Board Law, Rivers State Environment Guidelines and Standards, amongst others.

The various parastatals agree that they were able to meet the objective for which they were established through the setting up of measures to impede the occurrence of a disaster or to prevent such a disaster from having a devastating effect on the citizens, infrastructure and the economy were the major thrust of the gains of Delta State SEMA. The Rivers State SEMA believes that it has met the objectives by carrying out its responsibilities with the facilities at its disposal, the use of public enlightenment to ensure that the causes of flood were prevented. As a matter of fact, it asserts that the flood that ravaged parts of Rivers State in 2012 was managed and controlled by SEMA.

From the foregone, it is obvious that the policy adopted by government in response to the 2012 floods was reactive rather than proactive. This is a far cry from the current trend in flood and erosion management across the world. The current trend adopted in Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR), which is a proactive measure aimed at tackling disaster worldwide. This had the capacity to save the government more time, resources and reduce the rate of casualty suffered during the incident. For instance, the construction of dykes, levees, dams has over the years become a veritable means of controlling flood and reducing its damaging effects on the people. Hence policies aimed at implementing these programmes are priority to government.

CONCLUSION/RECOMMENDATIONS

It is obvious that there was a high level of lack of preparedness by relevant authorities with regard to the flood that ravaged the Niger Delta in 2012, although there are policy frameworks provided to take care of such development.

From the observations made in the course of this research, the following recommendations are proffered:

There should be a restructuring of the relevant Ministries responsible for the implementation of natural disaster policies so as to avoid the neglect that characterized the 2012 flood. It is a major indictment to the Nigerian government of its inability to adopt proactive measures of mitigating the flood incident, despite an early warning to this effect. Even when the Nigeria Metrological Agency also predicted increased rainfall that year, many State governments did not take it seriously. Rather when the rains came and submerged the entire environment that they began to make desperate moves to address the situation. At the receipt of the information regarding the heavy rains and the release of water from the Lagdo dam, the areas that lay on the flood plain would have been declared disaster areas and persons living with the areas evacuated to avoid the level of catastrophe that occurred.

The Federal Government should adopt a comprehensive plan to add ecological structures to complement engineering infrastructure- specifically to expand wetlands and reactivate flood plains so as to mitigate future flood risks.

Local government authorities should be directed to set up Local Emergency Management Agency as prescribed by NEMA. This would go a long way to addressing the problems suffered by victims at the local level. Since the local government is the government nearest to the people, they stand at a better position to addressing emergencies arising from natural disasters. Their proximity makes them the first point of response in the event of emergencies.

There is the need to enlighten the citizenry on ways of preventing and mitigating the effects of flood in the environment. Most citizens, particularly those in the urban areas do not reckon with the fact that the blockage of drains would be detrimental to the environment as it would not make way for the free flow of water during the rains. When the water is unable to find its cause, it overflows and results to flood.

There is the need to critically examine how the Ecological Fund provided by the Constitution is managed by both the Federal and State Governments. There should be laws and regulations that should guide the operation of the Ecological Fund accounts and clearly spell out the purposes for the release of the funds as well as how it was used. This would go a long way to stem the practice in which the Fund is left solely at the discretion of the President as to how the Fund is to be used.

There should be strict implementation of government policies and laws regarding the environment. Citizens who deliberately block drainages should be prosecuted and punished for their actions. This would serve as a deterrent to others.

There should be the political will to construct dams in areas that are necessary as well as maintain them in order to stem the tide of increase in water released from the Lagdo dam.

As the government agency with the primary responsibility to address issues of natural disasters in the country, the Federal Government should increase the funding appropriated to the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) to carry out its responsibilities.

Government should also engage and strictly abide by the town and urban planning. By this issues regarding the regulation and supervision of constructions in order to prevent the environment from being overrun by flash floods would be checked.

In the event of future occurrence, the Federal Government should be able to seek assistance from the international community to address the situation.

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