

## **Partnership for Environmental Justice in the Niger Delta: The Actors, the Options, Possibilities and Limitations**

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The environmental problems of the Niger Delta, ranging from the degradation of environmental resources through the pollution of the land, water and the air; denial of means of livelihood, particularly farming and fishing; and attendant health hazards, are already dominant and recurrent themes in the extant literature. The responses to these environmental, security and developmental issues, especially by the federal government of Nigeria, the oil multinationals and the local communities, have also been vastly documented. However, these accounts pay little attention to the importance of partnership in redressing the challenges of environmental insecurity in the Niger Delta. This paper basically seeks to address this concern, with the primary aim of highlighting the significance of partnership in the conceptualisation and execution of a sustainable environmental justice system in the region. The paper identifies the key actors in the process of forging such a partnership, most notably the federal, state and local governments; the oil majors; and the local communities. It also discusses available options, namely an all-inclusive, participatory, bottom-up approach that is people-driven versus the usual state-centric, top-down approach; and the possibilities and limitations of such a process. The paper submits that all these actors are of equal significance, but with different roles to play in the partnership, and that the bottom-up option offers better prospects of genuine partnership and success. Though the current existence of a Niger Delta presidency for the first time in Nigeria's history and the ongoing amnesty initiative of the federal government (and some states in the region too), offer some possibilities in forging such a partnership; the internal contradictions in the Niger Delta struggle, including pervasive official corruption at both the state and local government levels, and the opportunity for predation that the conflict environment offers for militants, pose serious limitations for the success of such a partnership.