Augustine A. Ikein; D.S.P. Alamiyeseigha, and Steve Azaiki (Eds.), *Oil, Democracy, and the Promise of True Federalism in Nigeria* (Boulder, Co.: University Press of America, Inc., 2008); 494 pages; \$60.

Oil, Democracy, and the Promise of True Federalism in Nigeria examines the inter-section between the quest of Nigerians for democracy and the illusion of federalism in the socio-economic as well as political landscape of the West African nation. As discussed in Chapters 26 and 29, respectively, of the book, the pitfall of Nigerian democracy and federalism is used to underscore how lack of national unity and peace influences ongoing environmental problems, for example, in the Niger Delta region. Geographically, the publication thematically focuses on the Niger Delta region to show how the wealthiest region of Nigeria remains one of the most under-developed terrains of the country.

The thirty-five-chapter anthology covers a wide range of themes and issues, including – but not limited to – the historical development of oil and gas production in the Niger belt; the role of science and technology; and how the abundance of resources, or lack of basic resources in local communities shapes the socio-economic and political dynamics of the Nigerian environment. With a meticulously underpinning, *Oil, Democracy, and the Promise of True Federalism in Nigeria* underscores how oil and gas contribute to a number of issues: religious and ethnic tensions, aspects of politics and governance, security, economic growth and poverty, social disasters and ecological problems, sustainable development and democratization processes, all of which is part of the efforts to establish a coherent meaning to ongoing conflicts in the Niger Delta region.

Generally, the book looks at political and social democracies of the oil-rich region from unique perspectives in the sense that about two-thirds of the authors and contributors are directly connected to the Delta area either through birth or as leaders in the Delta at various levels. It simply means that the contributors are mostly Nigerian scholars, intellectuals and experts on the subject. However, they have provided an in-depth analysis to explain how oil and gas are handled on the local, national and international levels. The other contributors also have some experiences with the Delta region. The former group might seem to present a one-sided view, but this leaning, if anything at all, is not obvious. However, there were attempts to show how the cultural and spiritual beliefs of the people of the Niger Delta made them good stewards of the environment. This was before the oil boom that made others richer and the inhabitants of the Delta poorer. Structural contradictions at the advent of colonialism and the emergence of neo-colonial economic projects occupies a portion of the introductory chapters as Augustine Ikein and others probe different components of oil and gas exploration.

The early chapters establish historical events, geographical factors and environmental trends in the Niger Delta. At the same time, they show how local communities and their leaders negotiated space and power with colonial officials and, more recently, multinational corporations. The birth of grassroots resistance is also highlighted by Sam Ebiye (211-214), who traces a long history of local resistance to oil and gas exploration, exploitation, and unequal distribution of wealth to show how debates about this contentious subject dating back to pre-colonial Nigeria has evolved over time. Gender dynamics is not the focus of the book but the role of women in the Niger Delta is given reasonable coverage (pages 188-189).

The second half of the book documents causes of human rights' violations, and how lack of economic as well as educational opportunities for the youth in the Niger Delta region

have affected and shaped the politics of resistance. This portion also highlights growing disparity between wealthy oil tycoons and companies and the local people. The latter part of the 494-page book, indeed toward the end, admirably explores such issues as environmental degradation and sustainable development; the political, economic and legal implication of the Niger Delta crisis; and proposals not only for forging national unity with the aid of politicians, trade union leaders and others, but also for solving day-to-day problems and restructuring the political economy of the Niger Delta people on the road to establishing a "true democracy" (page 417).

Of the thirty-five chapters of the book, seven center on sustainable development issues of the Niger Delta and major impediments to regional development. Most of the other chapters also look at developmental issues, from resource allocation and environmental perspectives but not necessarily tied to sustainable development. To get a better appreciation of these chapters, perusing the preface is very much necessary, as it sheds more light on the issues.

To communicate to a wide spectrum of readers that include the local public, the international community, stakeholders, policy makers and the federal government, simple language is used with ample illustrations to explain various concepts. A few comparisons are made with other oil extraction regions: i.e., comparing the Niger Delta's underdevelopment with China's progress, which was attributed to 60% self-dependence in contrast to the operations in the Delta, which is less than 10% dependent on local human capital and inputs. Attempts were also made to show how what happens in the Delta affects the world's energy security and in particular the U.S., which currently depends on Nigeria for 16% of its crude oil imports with 25% dependence projected for 2015 (page 276).

Although the authors differ over which factor is most responsible for promoting the underdevelopment and oppression of the people of the Niger Delta, some common factors become obvious, including: 1) capitalistic governance. In the words of one of the authors, "it is difficult for political parties built on capitalist ideology to think green" (page 283); 2) then, in Chapter 24, we read about the "faulty strategy of oil extraction" and "contemptuous attitude of oil companies"; and 3) from Chapter 22 comes the "insensitivity of the federal government to the dangers the people face" and the "perverse assignment of revenue acquired from the Delta.

Then, Chapter 25 of the tome highlights one of the toughest challenges, which is dealing with beliefs and perceptions of people together with such a human vice as greed. As the author rightly points out, sustainability is "pivoted on awareness of needs" (page 310); but these needs are defined and shaped by beliefs, culture and perceptions. The belief in the role of destructive powers or demonic forces that hinder progress leads to "assignment of blame and lack of responsibility for one's action," which the author seems to transpose as the lack of will and power for cooperative action and responsibility needed to achieve sustainability in the midst of poverty. Examples supporting this claim underscore the human and social element of sustainability that is often ignored or scarcely appreciated from the 'beliefs and psychological' perspective, and which needs to be addressed if the other elements – environmental and economic –, must be successful. It would be necessary to recognize that these socio-psychological constructs are 'realities' to the people before they can be deconstructed, and cannot simply be discarded as the author seems to suggest.

Meanwhile, a common contention of the authors is the impossibility of achieving sustainable development in a poverty-riddled society without first alleviating poverty. These

opinions only serve to stress the struggle and, in some cases, the complexity presented by sustainable development and the difficulty in carrying out its 'simple' principles. The concept of "poverty trap" (page 125), which is a manifestation of complex factors that uphold the vicious cycle of poverty and the interdependence of poverty alleviation and sustainable development in our opinion present a 'chicken-and-egg' situation.

One of the striking elements of *Oil, Democracy, and the Promise of True Federalism in Nigeria* is that the story of the Niger Delta shows that sustainable development can only begin with the recognition of the rights of the people, the understanding of the true needs and social demands of the people, the need for political institutions that promote peace and fairness as well as the appreciation of the interconnectedness of systems. Although the authors incorporate a wide spectrum of issues, a few flaws stand out as well, namely: 1) unfortunately, in examination, it becomes clear that some of the illustrations did not achieve their intended clarity and sometimes distracted from the main point; and 2) that although there are a number of theoretical formulations, there is very little in practical terms on how sustainable development can successfully be applied to the Delta. Despite these omissions, this book could serve as good case studies for those studying sustainable development as it provides challenges for the operationalization of sustainability, and also different platforms for analyzing and evaluating sustainability metrics or indicators. *Oil, Democracy, and the Promise of True Federalism in Nigeria* is a very useful book that we recommend to researchers, students and companies alike.

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