

The greatest burden, in my opinion, the Niger Delta people bear today is that of upturning the negative and fixated hostile ideas in the minds of our brother Nigerians about the region and her people. At various forums and occasions, we have found it difficult to get many Nigerians appreciate this glaring issue of neglect and injustice that have made Nigeria a laughing stock in the eyes of the international community. Many Nigerians still prefer to turn blind eyes, wish the people of the region away and call them unprintable names. The new trend is to see the poorly funded Niger Delta ministry and NDDC as adequate federal attention and therefore those who are still calling for more presence are greedy and on their own. That is sheer arrogance. I am from the Niger Delta. I feel the pains and see the agony of my people daily in a free country that should oppress no one. Those of us in the media will not let the question of Niger Delta die without victory for the people no matter the intimidation or the reckless utterances of unpatriotic Nigerians. I know that nobody including Dimeji Bankole can permanently shut the doors against us. We must live a decent life in our land and enjoy the resources that God has blessed us with. Nigeria must discuss with us irrespective of what any temporary god thinks.

At the risk of repetition, the region called Niger Delta of Nigeria indeed has many enemies. Many of them masquerade as friends but a lover is known when interests clash, when understanding is needed, and when justice needed to be dispensed. Today, the people of the troubled Niger Delta region must take a second look at the man, Dimeji Bankole, Speaker of the Federal House of Parliament.

First, who are the Niger Delta people of Nigeria? It is the region that was known as the Oil Rivers, bordering the coastal boundaries of today's Cross River, Akwa Ibom, Rivers, Bayelsa, Delta and Edo States. It is today politically known as South-South geo-political zone, and some upland states in Imo and Abia states. It houses about 40m Nigerians in over 7000 communities, producing over 80% of Nigeria's income with over 90% of the country's foreign exchange.

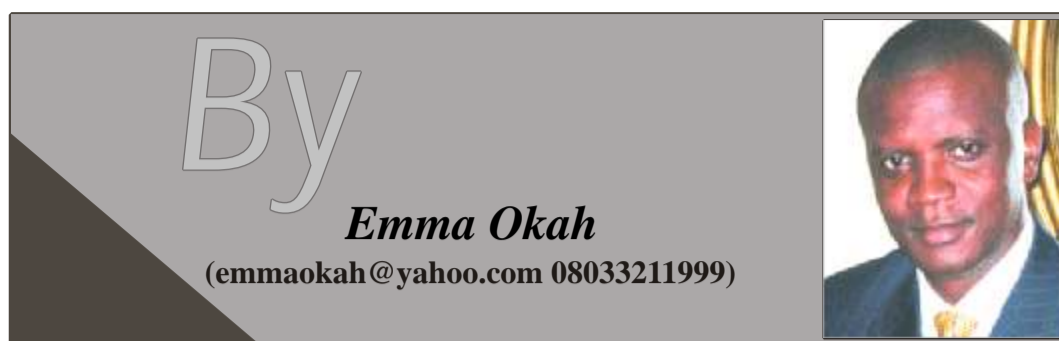
What Bankole and other enemies of the region hate to realize is that the Niger Delta people had begun agitation far before Nigeria was born in 1914. The Akassa Raid and the Opojobo crisis are raw in our memories. The fear of cheating in the Republic did not start in Bankole's era, if he can study the Sir Henry Willink's Commission's Report of 1957/8. The people of the region had never depended on the rest of Nigeria for survival and had feared any union as one country.

They agitated the coming together in 1960 and expressed these fears. There, it was clearly admitted that the region had peculiar environmental challenges and that if the country would stay together in peace through justice, a separate development fund be established to carry out special projects while the region would still benefit from the rest development efforts of the Federal Republic as well as regional government. The Report did not entrust the development of the Niger Delta on the regional government or on lack of corruption on state governors.

What the Niger Delta has got over the decades since the 1958 Report is debates and prevarications by the enemies of the region and rulers of the nation from Lagos and Abuja, on whether or not to implement that Report. When they agree to do so, it is with half hearts. Often, they give with one hand and take with the other.

What the region wanted and what the British had in mind in the Willinks Report was a situation where such projects that would conquer the environment would be handled by a huge commission. The commission would have handled, with dedicated funds from the first schedule, such projects as canals, reclamation, coastal railways, massive fish ponds, good roads to link the region, etc. When God supported the Willinks Report 10 years later with the discovery of crude oil in the region, it was expected that the source of wealth in the region being agriculture and aqua-culture would have been developed and modernized so as to introduce alternative income as oil and gas exploration.

This is what has been left undone over the decades and this has caused environmental degradation, pollution, destruction of aquatic life and displacement of the living style of the people. Political injustice over the years ensured that ameliorative policies were never taken and that political power stayed away from those who made wealth for the nation. The result is anger and collective resistance that later produced heroes such as Adaka Boro and Ken Saro Wiwa, and later those who took up arms like Asari Dokubo, Ateke Tom, Boyloaf, Osama bin Laden, General Africa, Soboma George, Tompolo, etc.



## Bankole! Enemy Of The Niger Delta People?

The FG over the years had made half-hearted admittance of past errors, the present administration has come up with Amnesty to cause a ceasefire and go back to the drawing board. Well-meaning Nigerians are supporting this strategy and I believe that Mr President means well, but while the people of the region cannot really remember what Bankole has said in support of this effort, the speaker has spoken twice to show who really he is an insensitive and biased leader, speaking without facts.

Before we point him out, let us remind ourselves that the lower chamber of the legislature developed from the Tribune system of the Roman Empire. Before then, the commoners were regarded as not qualified to have an opinion or a stake in the polity. At a time, the nobles alone could win the war that confronted the Empire and the commoners helped to win victory. Upon return from the war, the commoners demanded for some form of recognition and to have some voice. This was conceded and they were to nominate some Tribunes who formed a lower chamber. This developed over the years from Rome to Germany and Britain and when it came to the US some 500 years ago, it assumed a more serious dimension.

In the American Congress, the lower house is stronger than the senate because they respect the commoners a lot and they expect the lower house to carry the fire of democracy and the bag of liberty. They expect the lower house to feel what the people feel and to pass it on, and to stand more fiercely on the side of the commoners. That is why today Democrats' Nancy Pelosi (Speaker) is more feared, trusted and remembered by the American masses than the senate president.

What do we get in Nigeria? Bankole emerged after the woman who really loved Nigeria (Mrs



in-cheek. The people thought it was wisdom on display, not knowing it was hatred on mask. He made the point that the region was carting away a huge percentage of the nation's resources through the NDDC, Ministry of Niger Delta, 13%, etc, and wondered what was left for the rest of the country. The people have continued to chew Bankole's strange calculus on a day when the region had more

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Patricia Eteh?) was removed in an orchestrated scandal Nigerians mistook. Now, Bankole's true colour soon emerged when, under his nose and watchful eyes, a bigger rip-off in Billions of Naira for purchase of official cars occurred. Since Bankole claims innocence, why has he not come out to righteously tell Nigerians what happened in the car scandal in the same way he prefers to deride the Niger Delta people and their leaders. Since he has become judgmental, why has he not come out to assist Lagos State to have some local governments? Is it right for the Ibos to have the least number of states and LGA in Nigeria and yet Bankole says nothing?

The people of the region began to suspect him when he spoke at the First South-South Economic Summit in Tinapa, Calabar, in April 2009. He smiled, made faces, and decided to speak tongue-

serious matters on hand.

Now, safe in Kaduna cocoons, he came out smoking, joining the few northern elites who hate the face of the Niger Delta to argue that the region had enough allocation and only that the governors of the region were stealing it. This is the position of Babagana Kingibe who was the head of administration of this government as SFG before he was removed, this is the position of certain ministers from northern Nigeria, this is the position of a cabal round President Obasanjo and now, President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua, and this is why resolving the Niger Delta question has been questionable.

Bankole and his ilk will never care to calculate what is made from the region, but what is given to them. If every region were to contribute half of what the Niger Delta contributes, would there be

poverty in the land? If some other regions were to contribute what the Niger Delta is contributing, they would have since seceded or enthroned resource control policy in the constitution. These we know. Bankole must be some of those who ensured that the Petroleum Bill that came to the House with 25% to the oil region was miraculously changed to zero, until one of the governors raised eyebrows.

Bankole is the number four person in Nigeria and must know the true situation of our accounts. He ought to know that the volume of tasks in the Niger Delta cannot be matched with these little allocations. God gave huge challenges to the region, but also gave huge resources to solve them. It is just that the resources have been hijacked by a ruling elite including Bankole to ensure that God's intention is subverted.

The FG set up the NDDC years ago to fight the environment and create a new economy for the people, but when N436bn accrued to the NDDC, the FG then under Bankole's brother, kept back N326Bn and released a mere N110Bn. Now, answer us Bankole, would the released amount be enough to make any impression? Did the House react?

The 13% now being released, is it not being used to fight security problems created by the same FG? The FG sends soldiers and police but the states fund them, yet Bankole watches when states take over federal responsibility. The FG is already panting for trying to spend a mere N50Bn on Amnesty, just one single event, but this is what the states have been doing every day, spending on security, spending on what the FG ought to do, etc. Was it not Obasanjo who admitted that the cabling system to send power to the creeks had been on the minds of the FG but that possibility and huge costs had scared the FG away? Odili attempted it. Has the Bonny Road project not been on the drawing board since 1965, has the coastal rail system not been on the proposal board for 30 years? There are several projects that could have changed the fate of the riverine people but they have been on the drawing board for decades while new towns such as Abuja and huge irrigation projects and dams to give rivers where none existed have been executed in the north to make them food zone. Our people know all this!

Now, almost all the governors in the Niger Delta are executing federal projects just as Dr Odili did in Rivers State. Now, N50Bn FG projects are currently being handled by the present administration, and Bankole, the supposed voice of the people, is not using the House to press the FG to begin refund in every budget. See the international airport in Akwa Ibom, power projects in Uyo, PH, Yenagoa, airports coming in Yenagoa and Asaba, etc. yet, Bankole sees nothing done by these governors. Most of the airports Bankole flies in the Niger Delta are being repaired by states such as the PH International airport, new ones coming up are state projects, most of the roads, etc he is traveling on are federal roads built with state funds. The hospitals, universities, etc are federal but being kept alive with state funds.

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If all the states are corrupt-free except the six in the Niger Delta, then Nigeria is a heaven. Instead, we know that corruption is more monumental in the FG than in the states. See the revelation of the power projects with \$16Bn gone, see the Electricity Regulation Commission Report, and other huge losses everywhere. See what Bankole lost in just one massive car deal, yet everyone who cried out is being hunted down. His tenure will come and go yet the only bill for the masses, the Freedom of Information Bill that represents the soul of any democracy will remain in the cooler. His tenure will come and go and Nigerians will remember how he tried to secure permanent immunity from prosecution and litigation for members of the House of Reps. against the wishes of Nigerians. His tenure will come and go but no single law will be made to give resources and power to the people of the Niger Delta, or to people of any region. This is how to know the real friends of the people. Bankole is too arrogant to be a friend of ordinary Nigerians.

Bankole, you may see no wrong and see nothing wrong about the injustice in the Niger Delta but going to Kaduna to celebrate the injury of a people, to mock the people in their pain is wrong and morally unjustifiable. It is ungodly.