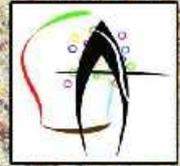




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L'Afrique et les défis du XXIème siècle
Africa and the Challenges of the Twenty First Century
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إفريقيا وتحديات القرن الواحد والعشرين

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**Hegemonic Competition and Civil Society Response
in the Gulf of Guinea in the 21st Century**

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Introduction: Significant Issues and Players in the Gulf of Guinea

The greater Gulf of Guinea with an area of nearly 3500 miles of coastline is one of the strategic regions of Africa which is also blessed with a variety of natural resources such as oil, gas, diverse minerals and human resources. Oil and gas reserves are heavily concentrated in the region including also North Africa. Its market size is about 300 million consumers which include the following countries; Angola, Benin, Cameroon, Cote d'Ivoire, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Ghana, Gambia, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Liberia, Nigeria, Republic of Congo, Sao Tome and Principe, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Chad, Central African Republic and Togo (Ibikunle et al, 2010: 2 and 7; Halleson, 2009: 26-27; Onuoha, 2010: 370). The countries are a mix of English, Portuguese and French speaking. Other attractions of the Gulf of Guinea include its relative closeness to the energy consuming countries of North America and Western Europe. The geographical closeness of the region to Western Europe relative to the Middle East and Asia makes it have a comparative advantage in the movement of goods and people by way of a reduced cost of sea transportation (Ibikunle et al, 2010: 8; Onuoha, 2010: 372).

The presence of resources like oil, gas, gold, manganese, timber and fish has created a deep seated disgruntlement among a majority of the inhabitants of countries of the Gulf of Guinea. This is because revenue from these resources hardly trickles down to the common people. The wealth is used to prop up dictators in several countries of the region through civil war and other forms of repression as was witnessed in Angola during the long drawn out war between the MPLA and UNITA in Angola from 1975-1991 and 1992-2002 (Halleson, 2009b: 49-50). Oil notwithstanding, there is a high rate of unemployment, environmental pollution and degradation as well as armed attacks like in the Niger Delta, Bakassi peninsular and piracy which has reached an alarming proportion making the waters of the Gulf of Guinea unsafe for navigation by large sea-going vessels.

The degree of inter-state strife in the Gulf of Guinea is alarming. At one time or the other, the DRC received support from Angola, Zimbabwe, Namibia and Chad and also from Sudanese and Rwandan Hutu extremist groups. Between 1998 and 2003, the northern part of the DRC was taken hostage by Ugandan troops which also controlled gold rich areas and forced gold miners to extract the gold for their benefits. They looted Congolese gold valued over 9 million (Halleson, 2009b: 57-58). Within the Republic of Congo there have also been scuffles between warring factions over the gains of oil. The greater consequence of internal bickering was the split along ethno-regional lines and the establishment of prominent three militias which included the *Cocoyes* of Pascal Lissouba, *Cobras* of Denis Sassou Nguesso and

the *Ninjas* of Kolela. Such a complex situation was further compounded by the support of the *Cobras* by Angola which helped them to secure Brazzaville and Pointe Noire (Halleon, 2009b: 61). There is generally a high circulation of small arms and light weapons (SALW) in the region (Onuoha, 2010: 373). This is a result of the struggle to control resources for the benefit a very few.

Other major problems of the Gulf of Guinea include piracy, maritime disputes, a negative governance balance sheet, weak state structures, absence of accountability, environmental spillage, pipeline vandalism, the absence of a sound infrastructure, non viable legal institutions, and ethnic clashes among others. A few years ago, piracy was a rampant occurrence in the Horn of Africa and not the Gulf of Guinea but in the past few years, the waters of the Gulf of Guinea are among the most unsafe for sea going vessels. The region between Cotonou in Benin and Nigeria has witnessed an upsurge in the number of pirate attacks recently. Since the coastline is craggy, it offers a variety of hiding places for potential attackers (<http://gcaptain.com/piracys-emerging-market-gulf?29024>; <http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Africa/2011/0804/Piracy-on-the-rise-off-West-Africa>; <http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Africa/2010/0115/Pirates-take-new-territory-West-Africa>; <http://www.businessweek.com/news/2011-08-04/piracy-spurs-insurers-to-extend-nigeria>; <http://af.reuters.com/article/commoditiesNews/idAFL6E7J32DM20110803>; Smith AFP, 2011; <http://www.afriquejet.com/benin-piracy-2011080219717.html>; Associated Press 11 August 2011; <http://af.reuters.com/article/topNews/idAFJ0E77B01820110812>; http://news.xinhuanet.com/english2010/world/2011-08/12/c_131046184.htm; English xinhuanet.com).

The problems of governance, the environment, infrastructure, poverty, insecurity, weak institutions, volatility of world oil prices and currencies of trade, climate change, transnational criminality, protracted separatist insurgent conflicts, countless attempted *coups*, unconstitutional change of government, mismanagement of electoral processes, drug trafficking, terrorism, maritime piracy, illiteracy and environmental degradation (Souaré 2010: 1-2; Goldwyn and Morrison 2005: Pham 2007: 19; Gilpin 2007 and Mane 2004; Ploch 2010:17; Oyeranmi 2011:47-49; Hall: 2011; Vaughan, guardian.co.uk; Edo 2010: 117; Boaduo FRC 2010: 168-169; West Africa 2011; McCullum, www.africafiles.org/atissueezine.asp?issue=issue3) have created tension between government officials who feed fat on oil money and the poor masses who have had to pay the price of being located in areas of oil exploitation.

Most countries of the Gulf of Guinea have potentials or huge reserves of oil, gas and minerals. The entire region is one of the most promising oil exploration areas of the world and it is estimated that by 2020 the energy potentials of the region will surpass the total production of the Persian Gulf nations with 25% of global production as against 22% for the Persian Gulf (Halleson, 2009: 28). Angola which is richly endowed with oil and diamond is the second largest oil producer in the Gulf of Guinea after Nigeria and the fourth world's largest producer of diamond having estimated reserves of about 180 million carats (Halleson, 2009: 29). In Cameroon, the mining sector offers huge potentials and at the moment, the country is the sixth largest oil exporter in Africa (Halleson, 2009: 31). For Nigeria, she is the largest producer of crude oil and she also has huge reserves of natural gas estimated at about 184 trillion cubic feet. She is the eighth largest oil exporting country in the world (Halleson, 2009: 32; Oyeranmi, 2011: 47). The economy of the Republic of Congo relies heavily on oil and the country is the fifth largest oil producer in sub-Saharan Africa (Halleson, 2009: 33). Gabon is amongst sub-Saharan Africa's biggest oil producer and its economy like that of Congo is dependent on oil production (Halleson, 2009: 34). She is the third largest producer of manganese and holds a quarter of the world's known reserves (www.estandardsforum.org).

Other countries of the Gulf of Guinea like the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) are also great producers of oil. Newcomers into the petroleum business include Chad, Equatorial Guinea, Sao Tome and Principe and the CAR. Following the discovery and exploitation of oil in Equatorial Guinea, she is now the third largest oil producer in sub-Saharan Africa after Nigeria and Angola. The CAR is the seventh largest producer of diamond in Africa and is tenth largest producer in the world (Halleson, 2009: 37-38). Sao Tome and Principe has hope for the benefits of oil in the same measure like other countries of the Gulf of Guinea. The richness of the resource potentials of the Gulf of Guinea is glaring as Nigeria, Angola and Equatorial Guinea have increased their production potentials to the extent that they are leading producers of oil not only in the Gulf of Guinea and Africa but the world. Behind these rich energy potentials are hegemonic activities within and between countries.

Conceptualising the Study

The concept of hegemony or a hegemon is applicable in everyday interaction of people, societies and countries. This is especially so because of the quest for power, political dominance and influence in a world governed by the maxim of the survival of the fittest.

Different authors have examined this concept empirically in relation to their experiences in different societies of the world. The concept was first developed by Gramsci who attempted to explain how a state managed to assert its power over a population living in a given territory. Gramsci argued that the means of repression at the disposal of a state were the most visible element of its power. He also highlighted what he called the 'war of position' which is often pursued by competitors in a subtle and non-violent manner (Gramsci 1957). Meanwhile, Doyle argues that hegemony takes place when a metropole controls much or all of the external but not the internal policy of other states (Doyle 1986). Wallerstein enlivens the debate further arguing that hegemony is a situation where one state succeeds to impose its set of rules on the interstate system leading to a temporal creation of a new political order (Wallerstein 2002: 3-4).

In addition, Simon's perception of hegemony is tested on a social group. According to him, a social group can become dominant and gather state power in its hands only if this group succeeds in developing its hegemony within the civil society through persuasion of subordinate groups to accept the values and ideas that it has adopted and by also building a network of alliances based on these values (Simon 1999: 18). In addition, Keohane's (1989:234) discussion about hegemon centres on the one that is powerful enough to maintain the essential rules governing interstate relations and willing to do so. He contends that the theory of hegemonic stability has two central propositions. Firstly, the order in world politics is typically created by a single dominant power which implies that the formation of international regimes normally depends on hegemony. Secondly, he posits that the maintenance of order requires continued hegemony which suggests that cooperation also depends on the perpetuation of hegemony (Keohane: 31).

From these discussions about what hegemony is, it is clear that although the authors are not agreed on a common perception of the concept, there is however convergence of views. This has to do with the ability to manipulate or lead others partially or wholly with the aim of reaping maximum benefit from such action. While the exercise of hegemony is not limited to different social classes, groups or within countries, it embraces the international arena especially as far as the struggle for the control of geographical regions and resources are concerned. As far as the Gulf of Guinea is concerned, several western countries notably the United States, Britain, France, and China have each tussled at one time or the other for exclusive spheres of influence for their natural and human resources. Such a tussle can be conveniently described as competing hegemonies over a strategic region of the world and the abundance of resources found therein.

Western Hegemonic Activities in the Gulf of Guinea

The Gulf of Guinea in time and space has witnessed the arrival and departure of different powers depending on who had influence over the world at any given time. The first countries that sailed to this region were Portugal and Spain. This was because of the advances they had made in the voyages of discovery in the 15th century. Thereafter other countries like Holland, Prussia, England, France and Sweden made their presence felt during the over four centuries of the trans Atlantic Slave Trade. They competed with one another and from time to time the different forts constructed along the West African coast to facilitate the slave trade were controlled by one country or the other. This was the beginning of the hegemonic completion in this region of Africa. During the scramble for Africa, most of the Gulf of Guinea came under the colonial control of Britain and France including also Spain and Portugal in Equatorial Guinea and Cape Verde and Guinea Bissau respectively. For a long time, the British and French carved out hegemonic spheres of influence after their merchants clashed in several trading areas of this region. This did not last for long as after the Second World War, the United States of America emerged as a powerful player in geopolitics in the world. The eventual emergence of China and then other third world countries like India and Brazil including also Japan was to lead to another wave of the scramble for Africa and especially the Gulf of Guinea. This was also facilitated by the fact that the Middle East that use to provide most of the energy needs of the capitalist countries became a dangerous zone to rely on if these super-powers were to continue to expand their industrial base and increase their demand for sustained supply of energy.

The major players in the Gulf of Guinea today include America, China, Britain and France. Other countries have been occasionally felt in some sectors and countries in the mad rush for the numerous natural endowments of the region. These countries include but are not limited to Japan, Malaysia, Germany, Brazil, Belgium, Switzerland, Russia, India, Netherlands, Pakistan, South Korea and North Korea. Within the region, some countries have preyed on others for the control of their resources such as Rwanda's and Uganda's support for insurgent groups in the DRC in exchange of control for gold, diamond and other precious minerals and Nigeria's control of large oil reserves which are within the territorial confines of Sao Tome and Principe. This is a clear indication of the fact that while there is external hegemonic competition over the Gulf of Guinea and its resources, there are also hegemonic activities within this region orchestrated by other states over others. Such has only compounded an already volatile situation for the entire region, its resources and people.

The competition for control of resources and countries of the Gulf of Guinea is informed by the official policies of China and the United States of Africa. China's Africa strategy is generally to invest in its resources and to create jobs to stave off the country's permanent unemployment crisis. This is facilitated by the Exim Bank which offers strategic overseas investors an interest discount (Bosshard 2008: 2-3). Officially, China wants to build solidarity with African governments, present itself as a reliable interlocutor between developing countries and the developed West. She also pledges large amounts of aid and investments in Africa's infrastructure and other sectors with no political strings attached, except a withdrawal of diplomatic relations with Taiwan (The Impact of the Chinese, 2). This giant in Asia is also concerned about a "return to global multi-polarity in which milieu Africa and the developing countries will have a greater role on the global stage than they currently do (Le Pere 2007: 6)." China has also made use of 'soft power' and 'oil-for-arms deals' to win oil concessions in the Gulf of Guinea. This and other measures have been taken by the Chinese government to counter US antics in the Gulf of Guinea (Onuoha 2010: 378).

On the other hand, the official policy of the United States towards Africa and the Gulf of Guinea in particular has been stated again and again over the years. America's concerns in the Gulf of Guinea are informed by the need to manage security and also to do 'ring fencing' so that Nigeria, Africa's largest oil producer, can secure the energy needs of the United States of America (www.hesperian.info/assets/GHW2_c6.pdf). During Obama's campaign for the presidency of the US he had as one of his key policy objective towards Africa, the restoration of American leadership in the world. He pledged to continue a struggle to reclaim and guarantee US imperial hegemony in a world that had grown increasingly hostile to American domination. America is really concerned about the domination of the world and its resources (Bangura 2010: 16-18). In short, both China, America and other Western countries are absolutely concerned with control over Africa and its human and material resources (Alemazung 2010: 62). This is where the Gulf of Guinea with an abundance of these resources has been 'invaded' in a sort of 'resource war' for the benefit of those industrialised and technologically advanced countries.

The race for control of large resource reserves in the Gulf of Guinea is largely between America and China and from time to time France and Britain as well. China has since the turn of the century established a stranglehold over Angola and has also made significant in routes into Gabon, Nigeria and Cameroon in diverse fields of economic activities. China's link with Angola, the second largest oil producer in sub Saharan Africa and owner of promising oil reserves has since 2003 taken the form of extended large

concessional loans. This has made China to since 2006 to overtake the US as the major trading partner of Angola. Prior to this year, the US had been Angola's major trading partner for most of modern history (Alves 2010: 5-8). In concrete terms, in 2008 Angola's imports from China was worth 14.8% but from America and France her imports was only 12.4% and 4.2% respectively. Her exports on the other hand to China worth 33.5% surpassed those of America, France, Canada and the Netherlands worth 27.3%, 5.7%, 3.9% and 3.4% respectively (Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU), Angola Country Report 2009, <http://www.eiu.com/>).

Chinese hegemonic activities are also felt in other economically rewarding sectors of the other countries of the Gulf of Guinea. In the DRC, she has a great influence in the mining sector and she is increasing its investments in cobalt and copper mines there as well (Alves 2010: 16; *The Impact of the Chinese*, 12). Meanwhile in 2004 following the visit of the Chinese President to Gabon, three on shore licences for the exploration of oil were awarded to a Chinese oil company UNIPEC, a subsidiary of SINOPEC. Two years later, the Gabonese government granted a Chinese consortium, headed by the China National Machinery and Equipment Import and Export Company (CMEC) sole rights to mine for iron ore at Belinga and build a rail link to reach the deposits in an area covered by a tropical forest situated 500km east of Libreville (Country Brief Gabon, 10). In the present dispensation, China has increasing stakes in oil in Equatorial Guinea, Gabon and Nigeria thereby invading territory which once was predominantly under the control of America, the EU and France. Prior to July 2005 when China and Nigeria signed an \$800 million crude oil sale agreement which set in motion an annual purchase by China of 30,000 barrels a day for five years, American, British and French oil companies enjoyed a virtual dominance of Nigeria's oil industry. In order to effectively compete in Nigeria with other western powers, China has also won a licence to operate four of Nigeria's oil blocs. This is part of an incentive to build a hydropower station and other agreements (Onuoha 2010: 376).

The Chinese are also playing a central role in the retail sector in Gabon and Cameroon (Alves 2010: 16). In the forestry sector in Liberia, Equatorial Guinea, Cameroon and Congo, the Chinese are competing in the felling of trees for timber. This has been shipped to some of China's state owned sawmills in places like Sichuan. Meanwhile in Nigeria and Ghana, China's insatiable demand for minerals opened up new markets for their own products (Alden 2007: 3). The forestry sector is however a free for all fight in the Gulf of Guinea considering the number of countries concerned with logging and transportation of timber to their own countries. In Gabon for example, the foreign firms engaged in logging

include Thanry and Rougier from France, Rimbunan Hijau from Malaysia and Glunz from Germany (Country Brief Gabon, 10).

As a counter to Chinese presence and control of vital sectors of the Gulf of Guinea, America has carved out exclusive spheres of influence. This has been done by stepping up its military presence in the Gulf of Guinea through increased visits and the establishment of the African Command (AFRICOM) since 2007. The US offers military assistance to the Nigerian military to enhance its capacity to protect the oil industry and also secure the strategic and energy needs of America in this area. The donation of the US Coast Guard NNS THUNDER to the Nigerian Navy is also intended to serve US strategic interests in the region. (Onuoha 2010: 398; Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2010: 107; United States 2011). In Equatorial Guinea, American ExxonMobil, US Marathon and others have invested over US \$3 Billion (McCullum, www.africafiles.org/atissueezine.asp?issue=issue3).

This intimidating presence in a country of a little over 500,000 people is a way to secure a permanent foothold on the oil resources of Equatorial Guinea and also effectively control the Bight of Biafra and Benin, all located within the Gulf of Guinea. In addition, the US is paying for a new airport in Sao Tome which will be able to take the biggest military aircraft. She is also in the process of developing a deep sea port large enough for its warships. All these are because the US has a treaty making Sao Tome a strategic regional base which is expected within ten years to provide large amounts of oil to the US (McCullum, www.africafiles.org/atissueezine.asp?issue=issue3). American role in the Chad-Cameroon pipeline project was also crucial towards the promotion of American energy needs in the long term. In Cameroon, an exploitation permit has been attributed to a US based company GEOVIC Cameroon SA to exploit cobalt and nickel in the East Region (Halleson 2009: 30-31). Through all these, America has strategically positioned itself in the Gulf of Guinea to checkmate the excesses of the Chinese and other emerging countries like India and Brazil in the region.

Apart from the US and China, other countries are in competition for resources in Africa's Gulf of Guinea. In the forestry sector in Gabon the Malaysian Rimbunan Hijau, French Thanry and Rougier and German Glunz are in competition with others for forest exploitation. Meanwhile in the mining of uranium and manganese the French firm of Areva and Eramet, Brazilian Vale are in competition. On the other hand, over 33 companies from Germany, Belgium, Rwanda, Malaysia, Tanzania, Switzerland, Russia, India, the United Kingdom, Netherlands and Pakistan are engaged in the importation of minerals from the DRC through Rwanda. The South Korean National Oil Corporation recently obtained 65%

oil and gas production rights in two Nigerian off-shore blocs (Halleson 2009: 56; Onuoha 2010: 376). What obtains therefore is a situation where the fittest survive over the weak in the struggle for resource control in the greater Gulf of Guinea area. As different contending powers try to have an edge over each other, they do everything to ensure that their local allies gain political power usually by unfair methods (Timah 2007: 17). Those who emerge as leaders have often served the interests of those countries that supported them in the rigging of elections and bother very little about their own citizens.

Although the EU was the first to assemble most of the early oil companies to tap black gold from the Gulf of Guinea, it now trails behind Asia as the third largest destination of West African oil. The entire EU receives about 7.1% of its oil from the Gulf of Guinea. Among the EU oil majors operating in the Gulf of Guinea are British Petroleum (BP), Total and Agip. In Nigeria, the Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC) accounts for roughly half of Nigeria's oil production (Onuoha 2010: 375). In spite of the presence of oil majors from the EU in the oil sector in the Gulf of Guinea, China including other countries of Asia like Malaysia, India and South Korea and the US have a greater hegemonic influence in this region today than member countries of the EU. This goes to confirm the saying that the first shall be the last and the last the first. While the French are among the most active of the EU member states in the region, Britain and Germany are still to be very actively seen when compared to the other countries of this region of resource abundance.

The hegemonic competition in the Gulf of Guinea also involves some countries of the region or neighbouring countries to those of this region. Between 1998 and 2003 in Northern DRC, Ugandan troops took direct control of gold rich areas and forced gold miners to extract the gold for their benefit and looted Congolese gold which was valued at over \$9 million (Halleson 2009: 57-58). Nigeria on the other hand has been in conflict with Sao Tome and Principe over oil reserves and now controls most of the oil of this island (McCullum, www.africafiles.org/atissueezine.asp?issue-issue3). These are simple examples of hegemonic activities within the Gulf of Guinea which have created tension between some countries which has been fully exploited by the US and other western powers for their own security and other strategic interests. Until there is synergy between countries of this region for their collective good and survival, the resources of the region like other regions will remain a curse rather than a blessing. The existing fragmentation in energy and other issues is what the western countries want because it makes it easy for them to sign favourable treaties for the exploration and exploitation of oil. It is against this background that a viable civil society will serve a very useful purpose for the collective good of the people of the Gulf of Guinea.

Role of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs)

Following the intense activities of the super-powers in the Gulf of Guinea today, the civil society is expected to play a very important role to regulate their activities and ensure that these activities benefit a broad spectrum of society. The problems of the region like bad governance, corruption, a poor legal and administrative framework and environmental pollution calls for the civil society to play an important role in correcting these evils (Le Pere 2007: 6). In fact, a common African response is more likely at the level of the civil society where in spite of differences, there is often more mutuality of concerns about human rights, democracy, labour and trade issues (Mani and Marks 2007: 49). Ndika contends that shortcomings of the Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) notwithstanding, they have been able to take advantage of a structured format for engaging the government in order to hold it accountable for how oil money is spent (Ndika, www.africafiles.org/atissueezine.asp?issue=issue3). The civil society is expected to be alive to its responsibility for ensuring proper governance of Nigeria's oil resource, not only by monitoring the activities of multinational oil companies, but also by ensuring that governments at all levels fulfil their part of the social contract with the people to whom oil should be bringing enduring benefits (Garuba, www.africafiles.org/atissueezine.asp?issue=issue3). This takes place at a time when there are reports that the civil society remains weak and lacks the information and resources to hold governments of the Gulf of Guinea accountable for their actions (McCullum, www.africafiles.org/atissueezine.asp?issue=issue3).

In the Gulf of Guinea, the civil society has on several occasions lashed out at injustice, discrimination and exploitation even if these measures are still to yield significant fruits. Arsene Guelélé of the Action for the Environment and International Solidarity, a Congolese Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) argued recently that some five or six years ago the Chinese fishermen caught fish without respect even for fish fry which made them fear that no fish could be left in the waters for the Congolese people. Another civil society activist Donatien Animiyo of the Fishermen's Group of Mpila condemned the use of explosive devices at the end of the civil war in 1997 which went a long way to destroy the ecosystem and prevent fish from reproducing. The consequence was the scarcity of fish in the market (<http://allafrica.com/stories/201108091275.html>). The reaction of both civil society activists was a clear indication of the fact that the internal hegemonic activities of the different groups in the Congo and Chinese exploitation of fish resources were a problem if measures were not taken to checkmate this.

The civil society in Chad raised a voice about the Chad-Cameroon pipeline but the World Bank did not hearken to their call. It demanded for a delay in the financing of the project until the emergence of a responsive political order that would ensure that Chad's oil wealth was sustainably managed. Similarly, the Nigeria Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (NEITI) in collaboration with a coalition of a civil society the Publish What You Pay (PWYP) have argued that to tame the curse of oil, Nigeria must begin to make better developmental use of the huge revenue accruing from oil (Garuba, www.africafiles.org/atissuezine.asp?issue=issue3). Other civil society groups in Nigeria's oil and gas region under the banner of the Niger Delta Civil Society Coalition (NDCSC) are very concerned that the Gulf of Guinea Energy Security Strategy (GUESS) is leaving issues of peace and security as they relate to the oil region to the state alone (Sampson, http://elendureports.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=580&Itemid=33). This organisation of over 80 community-based, human rights, women's human rights, minority/ethnic movements and professional organisations work in the core geographical area of the Delta region. According to the Chairman "the NDCSC is very concerned that GUESS is leaving issues of peace and security as it relates to Nigeria and the Niger Delta region in particular, to the state alone." This organisation is concerned about the protection of national borders, prevention of inter-state conflict, security, peace, protection of the environment and the improvement of the quality of life. The NDCSC strongly maintains that the main source of insecurity in the Gulf of Guinea today are the unelected power holders and the activities of the oil majors and calls on GUESS to urgently provide action space for civil society participation in its security processes. Effective networking by civil society groups shall enable new oil societies within GUESS areas that have yet to experience resource curse to learn firsthand from the experience of their counterparts, and move quickly to block the leakages.

In addition, the civil society in Cameroon has been critical of the agreements signed between the government and foreign partners such as China. Following the signing of a deal between Cameroon and China for the construction of roads and infrastructure like stadia and sports fields, the Chinese brought labour from their own country. The African Youth Diaspora Forum (AYDF) in Cameroon was disappointed that instead of employing Cameroonian youths, Chinese citizens came in to execute the contract there making Cameroonian youths unemployed. Accordingly to the spokesperson of the AYDF Marie Tamoifo Nkom "Everyone was happy, first of all because Cameroon is in great need of sports facilities for the youth. Second of all, this project would mean job creation.

Unfortunately, the latter did not happen as the Chinese brought [sic] their own labourers.” Still in Cameroon, over 30 CSOs have called on the Cameroon government to give them a chance in the fight against illegal exploitation of forests in the country. They condemned the illegal exploitation of the country’s forests which was a source of the underdevelopment of the local communities. They argued that since the issue of illegal logging was a complex one, it was imperative for the civil society to contribute towards a lasting solution. These CSOs want to be fully involved in the legalisation process of forest exploitation and other forest products that are being exported out of Cameroon (http://www.illegal-logging.info/item_single.php?it_id=1045&it=news). If these CSOs are concerned about the illegal exploitation of the forest and other resources in Cameroon, it is caused by the hegemonic French and other companies which want to keep the Cameroon forest to their exclusive control to the detriment of other competing countries of Europe and Asia.

The criticism of the ruthlessness of people like the Chinese goes beyond the Gulf of Guinea to include other African countries where the Chinese have an interest. In one of such scathing attack on the Chinese business concerns in Zambia, the Chairperson of the Zambian Civil Society Trade Network Stephen Muyakwa unequivocally stated that:

Last year [2010], operations at a Chinese-owned coal mine in the South of Zambia were suspended due to unsafe working conditions. Most labourers were half naked and did not have protective clothing, dust masks, hard hats or shoes. When a cabinet Minister attempted to visit the mine, Chinese managers prevented her from doing so. They said it was ‘their mine.’ In the end labourers were treated like animals. The mine was closed for a short while but then opened again (Mannak, <http://ipsnews.net/africa/nota.asp?idnews=42815>).

The Chairman of this trade network also cited an incidence which caused a stir in Zambia. This was the death of 50 Zambian miners in 2009 in an accident at an explosive factory. None of the Chinese employees got hurt which meant that Africans were exposed to very dangerous risk by their Chinese counterparts who would not do same. Similarly, the Chinese have employed the same business tactics in the Gulf of Guinea notably in Angola where they have a very strong presence.

Considering the impact of oil companies on the environment in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria, several CSOs have added their voices to urgent measures aimed at providing a lasting solution to the complex problems of this region. For example, the

international environmentalists from Friends of the Earth have joined with the people of the Delta region to prosecute the oil companies so that they can account for the pollution and leaks from shell's pipelines into farmlands and fishponds (Campbell, <http://pambazuka.org/en/category/features/64408>). There is also an increasing call from the PWYP for companies to 'publish what you pay' and for governments of the Gulf of Guinea to 'publish what you earn.' The national PWYP in Congo-Brazzaville and Nigeria are active in this call for their governments and the oil companies to publish what they earn and pay respectively (Parham, <http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/iez/02115/parham.pdf>). Similarly, a coalition of 22 Gabonese NGOs in 2007 criticised the country's Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) and argued that there was a mismatch of \$186 million between the figures provided by the government to the IMF and those provided by the EITI. In January 2008, the NGOs published a statement criticising the government's use of oil revenues and were suspended by the government and an international outcry made the government of Gabon to back track and lift the suspension (http://www.gppi.net/fileadmin/gppi/Ricardo_Soares_BBC_Oil_June_2008.pdf). Although there is still a lot of foot-dragging in this direction, the more other civil society groups join in this call, the more things will change for the better for all the people of the countries of the Gulf of Guinea which is naturally endowed with a lot of resources.

Besides, there is a kind of civil society umbrella organisation at its infancy concerned with the welfare of the people of the Gulf of Guinea. This organisation is the Gulf of Guinea Citizens Network (GGCN) and brings together a diverse group of civil society organisations and actors working to protect community and citizens rights and the national interest in resource extraction, trade and governance in the Gulf of Guinea Commission countries namely Angola, Cameroon, Congo-Brazzaville, Congo-Kinshasa, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Nigeria and Sao Tome e Principe. The activities of the GGCN are coordinated by the Social Action which is a Social Development Integrated Centre in Port Harcourt in Nigeria as well as the Citizens' Governance Initiatives in Yaounde Cameroon. If well coordinated, the GGCN will become a very strong force in the near future in controlling the excesses of unrepresentative governments and the major exploratory companies that have invaded the Gulf of Guinea for badly needed resources for their home industries in Europe, America and Asia where China is a great consumer. A few decades ago, such initiative from within the Gulf of Guinea could not have been envisaged considering the disruptive activities of the western countries and their companies as well as surrogate leaders. Now that such an initiative has seen the light and with the continuing exploitation of resources of the Gulf of

Guinea with reckless abandon and the conflicts and suffering that this has produced, there is a rising awareness among diverse civil societies to close ranks and protect the resources of the Gulf of Guinea from wanton exploitation. It is very likely that if the resource war remains the way it is now, these CSOs will become more vocal in the future than is the case today.

Future of the Gulf of Guinea

Considering the present cacophony in resource exploitation, conflict and competition in the Gulf of Guinea and the negative consequences these have produced as well as the reaction of the CSOs, there is hope and need for a future that will benefit the people and not a select few and companies that now operate in the region. One of the things to do for a better future for this region will be to put in place an integrated energy system to facilitate the networking of existing energy production capacity, develop a new integrated energy infrastructure and develop a robust system for off-shore oil and gas development (Ibikunle et al 2010: 11). This will strengthen the bargaining power of the Gulf of Guinea states in negotiating oil deals. It will also facilitate the sharing of ideas and the adoption of a common policy towards all oil exploratory companies which will be people centred and not necessarily profit and profit driven at a huge human cost.

In order to minimise the risk of insecurity and instability and maximise the opportunities for peace and sustainable development, there is need for measures to be put in place that could ensure consistent dialogue, good governance and greater investment in human development in the region which is unfortunately lacking today. Since some of the problems of the Gulf of Guinea are because of competition between America and China, there is need for these two super-powers to develop a political forum that would provide for serious respectful dialogue between them on the one hand and the Gulf of Guinea states on the other. Besides, the Gulf of Guinea Commission which was established in 2006 to strengthen cooperation and consultation among member states to prevent, manage and resolve conflicts linked to the economic and commercial exploitation of natural resources within the region needs to include other influential oil consumers like China. There should be room for greater dialogue and cooperation so that peace and security can be assured and healthy competition promoted among the heavy energy consuming countries.

In order to avoid conflict, there should also be an open and transparent oil bidding system in the states of the Gulf of Guinea. There should be mutually agreed oil policies and measures to respond to supply interruptions arising from domestic instability and trans-national crime like terrorism and the need to ensure that there is accountability in the oil

industry in the region. If domestic stability is assured in the region, it will ensure regional security and development and by extension the energy security of oil consuming states. It should also be noted that since deprivation and poverty often fuel rebellion, processes and institutions of good governance need to be nurtured and strengthened in the states of the Gulf of Guinea (Onuoha 2010: 380-381). It is imperative for African leaders to re-examine their priorities vis-à-vis the interest of the primordial regions so as to balance the political equation (Edo 2010: 117).

The CSOs must also be at the centre of an all embracing policy that will benefit the ethnic groups located in the areas of resource abundance. A vibrant civil society network as the one that already exist, needs to rise above partisan, sectarian and other parochial interests to play the role of an arbiter in oil deals. Community based organisations (CBOs), NGOs and other civil society groups like the churches should all be consulted and made to be signatory to treaties signed with oil companies. This will take into consideration all those risk factors and other concerns and create a convenient atmosphere for government, the local communities and firms operating in the region to be mutually helpful to one another.

Concluding Remarks

In this study we have examined the attractiveness of the Gulf of Guinea in terms of its strategic location and abundance of human and natural resources. This has over the centuries made world powers to scramble for these resources and the result has been hegemonic competition. This was accelerated by the crisis in the Middle East and the increasing wave of terrorist attacks and networks spread throughout the world. Apart from the need to secure America's future energy needs, the US is also in the Gulf of Guinea to fight terrorism, promote democracy and good governance. The Chinese have come into the region with more juicy offers and conditions which are less rigorous than those of the western countries. This is led to a kind of resource war and also increased piracy and other environmental problems of the region. This complex mix of problems has led to the emergence of militant groups and more importantly civil society groups. These groups are critical of some of the activities of their governments and foreign firms and are also offering to assist in the provision of problems to some of the problems of their countries. Although some people have criticised these CSOs as still very weak, there are hopes that the future of these organisations will do more than they are doing now.

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