An unbroken span of almost fifteen years of military rule, from December 1984 to May 1999, ended with the inauguration of Nigeria's Fourth Republic and a democratically elected civilian administration under President Olusegun Obasanjo. Even after this long overdue transition, the pervasive effects of prolonged military rule remained evident in virtually every part of the Nigerian society. Economically, the military presided over a merciless looting of public resources. The signs of this were the emergence of 'overnight millionaires', an uncontrollable inflation, huge public and external indebtedness and the near-collapse of the national economy. Politically, military rule led to the shrinking of the space for any popular expression and democratic participation in governance. The military tinkered endlessly with every transition programme so as to exclude the radical opposition elements with whom they felt so uncomfortable. There was a deep and pervasive mentality of force, as authoritarian social behaviour percolated the order that had previously characterised social transactions in the civil society.

The present political dispensation has not improved the state of governance associated with several years of military role. Significant aspects of this phenomenon have endured and assumed even worse forms in some cases. There has been a dangerous resurgence of violent conflicts over ethnicity, religion and resources, with the attendant insecurity. The violent conflict in the Niger Delta has been in many ways a microcosm of the wider crisis that bedevilled Nigeria in the heyday of military role. Such conflict among the oil-producing communities in the Niger Delta reflect the widespread collapse of public order in the country. The conflict attests to the depth of social frustration and anger harboured by the ail communities, directed first against dements they consider to have sold out communal heritage; secondly, against the. all companies, whose years of exploration and production have so fat yielded little positive devdopment; and thirdly, against the 'distant' Nigerian State, more concerned over what it accumulates than caring about the proverbial goose that lays the golden egg. Like most of the violent conflicts in contemporary Nigeria, those in the oil-rich Niger Delta reveal the inherent weakness of the State institutions. These cannot effectively resolve social conflicts. The State has demonstrated strong preference for military coercion to suppress militant groups, whose activities threaten ail production in the Niger Delta, the country's main source of foreign exchange earnings.

The primary focus of this paper is on the tale of youths in the violent conflicts plaguing the Niger Delta ail region of Nigeria since the early 1990s when a small but homogeneous ethnic group, the Ogonis, embarked on a mass protest against an alliance between the Nigerian State and foreign oil companies, especially Shell Petroleum Devedopment Company (SPDC). The Ogonis accused them of polluting d1eir environment, marginalising and disfranchising d1e local community. Around d1e same period, several non-Ogoni communities of d1e Niger Delta, such as the Ijaws, Nembe, Itsekiri, Urhobo, Okrika and Kalabari, also engaged in mass political protests and civil disobedience over similar issues. The experiences of youths in the Ogoni and other Niger Delta ethnic communities
have been largely ignored in literature, even though there is evidence that they played an important Role.


Contact: Africa Development CODESRIA
BP 3304,
Dakar – Senegal
Tel.: (221) 825 98 22/825 98 23
Fax: (221) 824 12 89
E-mail: publication@codesria.sn