

Chapter Nine

Strategies for Meaningful Reform in Global Governance Architecture: Balancing Ambition and Feasibility in the Niger Delta

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Introduction

The Niger Delta region, rich in natural resources and home to a diverse population, has long been a focal point for discussions on global governance reform. This region's vast oil reserves have made it a significant contributor to Nigeria's economy, yet it remains plagued by environmental degradation, economic inequality, and social unrest. These issues are not confined to national borders; they resonate globally, underscoring the importance of effective global governance systems that can address such complex challenges (Aghedo, 2021). Global governance refers to the cooperative problem-solving arrangements that states and other actors engage in to address issues that affect multiple countries or the entire globe. It encompasses a wide range of activities, including the creation of international norms, the establishment of multilateral institutions, and the implementation of policies at the global level. However, the effectiveness of global governance systems often hinges on the delicate balance between ambitious goals and practical feasibility. This balance is crucial in regions like the Niger Delta, where the stakes are high and the challenges are multifaceted (Biermann & Dingwerth, 2022).

The environmental issues, largely stemming from extensive oil extraction activities, have had devastating impacts on local communities and ecosystems. Oil spills, gas flaring, and deforestation have resulted in severe environmental degradation, affecting livelihoods and health. These environmental challenges are compounded by social and economic issues, including poverty, unemployment, and conflicts over resource control (Obi, 2020). One of the primary challenges in reforming global governance in the Niger Delta is striking a balance between ambitious reform goals and the practicalities of implementation. The frameworks for global governance reform often emphasize the importance of balancing ambition with feasibility. These suggest that while setting high aspirations is essential, practical strategies for achieving these goals must be grounded in the specific realities of the region. This involves prioritizing incremental changes, fostering multilateral cooperation and consensus-building, leveraging technology and innovation for enhanced governance, promoting inclusivity and diversity in

decision-making processes, and strengthening accountability mechanisms tailored to the region (Falkner, 2021).

Multilateral cooperation and consensus-building are also vital for effective global governance reform in the Niger Delta. Given the region's complex challenges, solutions require coordinated efforts from multiple stakeholders, including local communities, national governments, international organizations, and private sector actors. This approach can also help mitigate conflicts and promote a sense of ownership and commitment to the reform process (Söderbaum, 2021). Leveraging technology and innovation is another key strategy for enhancing governance efficiency in the Niger Delta. Technological advancements can provide new tools and platforms for monitoring and managing environmental resources, improving service delivery, and facilitating communication and collaboration among stakeholders (Florini & Sovacool, 2020).

Despite the vast natural resources and significant contributions of the Niger Delta to Nigeria's economy, the region remains afflicted by severe environmental degradation, economic inequality, and social unrest. These persistent issues are exacerbated by ineffective governance frameworks that fail to address the region's unique challenges and needs adequately. Global governance systems, which are crucial for tackling such complex and interconnected problems, often struggle to balance ambitious reform goals with practical implementation methods. This discrepancy results in reforms that either fall short of their lofty ambitions or are impractical and unsustainable in the Niger Delta's socio-political and economic context. Therefore, there is a critical need to investigate strategies that can facilitate meaningful reform in the global governance architecture, specifically tailored to the Niger Delta, by balancing ambitious objectives with feasible, context-sensitive approaches.

The objectives of the chapter are to, among other things, identify and analyze the primary challenges hindering effective global governance in the Niger Delta, including environmental, socio-economic, and political factors; examine case studies and successful strategies in global governance reform that can be adapted to the Niger Delta's context, focusing on incremental changes, multilateral cooperation, technological innovation, inclusivity, and accountability mechanisms; and assess the role and potential contributions of local communities in shaping and implementing global governance reforms in the Niger Delta.

Literature Review

Global governance refers to the collective management of international issues and challenges through cooperation among multiple actors, including nation-states, international organizations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and private sector entities. It involves creating and enforcing rules, norms, and institutions that

guide the interactions and behaviours of these actors on a global scale (Weiss, 2000). In the context of the Niger Delta, global governance is critical for addressing complex and interconnected problems such as environmental degradation, socio-economic inequality, and political instability. Effective global governance aims to promote sustainable development, peace, and security by fostering international cooperation, coordination, and compliance with agreed-upon standards and practices (Rosenau, 1995). Governance reform involves the process of improving the structures, policies, and processes of governance to make them more effective, efficient, transparent, and responsive to the needs of the people (Grindle, 2004).

This concept encompasses a wide range of activities, including institutional restructuring, policy adjustments, legal reforms, and capacity-building initiatives. In the Niger Delta, governance reform is particularly focused on addressing the region's unique challenges by enhancing the accountability and inclusiveness of governance systems. The efforts aim to reduce corruption, ensure fair resource distribution, and increase public participation in decision-making processes, ultimately leading to more equitable and sustainable development outcomes (Collier & Hoeffler, 2005).

Environmental degradation refers to the significant deterioration of the region's natural environment due to activities such as oil spills, gas flaring, deforestation, and illegal mining (Watts, 2004). These activities have devastating effects on the region's ecosystems, including the contamination of water sources, loss of biodiversity, and soil degradation. The impact of environmental degradation extends to the health and livelihoods of local communities, which often suffer from pollution-related diseases and the loss of arable land and fishing grounds (Okonta & Douglas, 2001). Addressing environmental degradation is crucial for the sustainable development of the Niger Delta, requiring comprehensive strategies that include stricter regulations, effective enforcement, remediation efforts, and the promotion of environmentally sustainable practices (United Nations Environment Programme, 2011).

Socio-economic disparities in the Niger Delta refer to the significant inequalities in income, wealth, education, healthcare, and access to basic services among different groups within the region (Iyoha, 2008). These disparities are often exacerbated by the unequal distribution of the benefits derived from the region's abundant natural resources, particularly oil and gas. The marginalized and impoverished communities in the Niger Delta face higher levels of poverty, unemployment, and limited access to education and healthcare services (Jike, 2004). Political instability in the region is characterized by frequent conflicts, violence, and ineffective governance (Obi, 2010). This is often driven by competition over resources, ethnic tensions, and inadequate representation of local

communities in decision-making processes. The region's history of marginalization and neglect by the central government has led to widespread disenchantment and periodic outbreaks of violence.

Participatory governance emphasizes the involvement of all stakeholders, especially local communities, in the decision-making processes that affect their lives (Fung & Wright, 2003). It involves creating mechanisms for meaningful engagement, ensuring that the voices and perspectives of marginalized groups are heard and considered in governance processes (Gaventa, 2004). This concept is particularly relevant to the Niger Delta, where historical exclusion of local communities has contributed to persistent socio-economic and political challenges.

Theoretical Framework

The Participatory Governance Theory developed by Fung and Wright (2003) was adopted for this study. The theory emphasizes the importance of inclusive and democratic decision-making processes in governance. The theory suggests that effective governance is achieved when diverse stakeholders, including marginalized communities, are actively involved in decision-making, policy formulation, and implementation. This leads to more equitable, responsive, and legitimate governance processes that address the needs and aspirations of all affected groups. The theory is based on three key principles - creating institutional mechanisms for broad-based participation, promoting deliberative democracy through informed debate, and decentralizing decision-making authority to empower local actors and communities. The theory is relevant where local communities have been historically excluded and marginalized because it identifies strategies that promote inclusivity and equity in governance processes. This involves exploring best practices for community engagement, such as participatory planning and decision-making tools, and building local capacities and leadership to sustain participatory governance practices.

Above all, the theory emphasizes the importance of socially legitimate and community-supported governance reforms, which are crucial for their success and sustainability. It highlights the transformative potential of inclusive governance practices, emphasizing the need to shift from top-down governance models to more participatory and community-centred approaches. It contributes to the broader discourse on global governance reform, providing valuable insights into how participatory governance can be effectively implemented in resource-rich but conflict-prone regions like the Niger Delta.

Methodology

The chapter adopted a qualitative research design and relied exclusively on secondary data sources. The approach allowed for a deep, context-specific

understanding of the issues by drawing on diverse sources of secondary data. Academic journals, policy documents, books, and reports from international organizations were reviewed to identify key themes, theories, and findings relevant to the Niger Delta context. The literature review served as a foundation for understanding the broader theoretical and empirical landscape of governance issues and reform efforts. Case studies of successful governance reforms in other regions were examined to identify best practices and strategies that could be adapted to the Niger Delta. These case studies provided detailed insights into the processes, challenges, and outcomes of governance reforms, offering valuable lessons for the current study. The selected case studies included regions with similar socio-economic and environmental challenges, ensuring relevance to the Niger Delta context.

Challenges to Effective Global Governance in the Niger Delta

The literature review and document analysis revealed several critical challenges hindering effective global governance in the Niger Delta. These challenges span environmental, socio-economic, and political dimensions, each deeply interconnected and contributing to the region's complex governance landscape. The Niger Delta faces severe environmental degradation, primarily due to extensive oil extraction activities. Oil spills, gas flaring, and improper waste disposal have resulted in significant land, air, and water pollution, adversely affecting local ecosystems and human health (UNEP, 2011). The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) report on Ogoni land highlighted the severe contamination of water bodies with benzene levels 900 times above the World Health Organization's guidelines, illustrating the extent of pollution (UNEP, 2011). The pervasive environmental degradation stems from both operational negligence and accidental discharges during oil extraction and transportation (Nriagu, Udofia, Ekong, & Ebuk, 2016).

The environmental damage has profound consequences for the region's biodiversity and agricultural productivity. Polluted water bodies have decimated fish populations, a critical food and income source for local communities. Soil contamination has reduced agricultural yields, undermining food security and livelihoods (Nriagu et al., 2016). Moreover, gas flaring contributes to air pollution and climate change, emitting greenhouse gases and toxic pollutants that cause respiratory problems and other health issues among the local population (Osuji & Onojake, 2004). The lack of effective regulatory frameworks and enforcement exacerbates these environmental problems. Multinational corporations often operate with minimal accountability due to weak governance structures and corruption, allowing environmental standards to be disregarded (Okonta & Douglas, 2001). Regulatory agencies tasked with monitoring and enforcing

environmental laws are often underfunded and lack the necessary resources and political support to carry out their duties effectively (Watts, 2004). This regulatory failure perpetuates the cycle of environmental degradation and social discontent.

Socio-economic disparities in the Niger Delta are stark, despite the region's wealth in natural resources, particularly oil. Local communities experience high levels of poverty and unemployment. According to the Nigerian National Bureau of Statistics (2019), over 70% of the population in the Niger Delta lives below the poverty line. This paradox of resource wealth and local impoverishment is partly due to the inequitable distribution of oil revenues. The majority of profits benefit federal and state governments and international corporations, while local communities receive inadequate compensation and investment (Watts, 2004). The socio-economic challenges are further exacerbated by the lack of basic infrastructure such as clean water, electricity, and healthcare. Government failure to provide these essential services has led to widespread disenchantment and mistrust among the local population (Ibaba, 2010). The inadequate infrastructure limits economic opportunities and social development, trapping communities in a cycle of poverty and deprivation (Ibaba, 2010).

The region's socio-economic challenges are interlinked with environmental issues. Environmental degradation reduces agricultural productivity and fishery yields, further impoverishing communities that rely on these sectors for their livelihoods (Nriagu et al., 2016). The health impacts of pollution, such as increased respiratory and waterborne diseases, reduce the workforce's productivity, exacerbating poverty and economic stagnation (UNEP, 2011). Political instability and corruption are significant obstacles to effective governance in the Niger Delta. The region has a long history of violent conflicts fueled by ethnic tensions, political marginalization, and competition over resource control. Militant groups such as the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) have engaged in armed insurgencies, targeting oil infrastructure and personnel to press their demands for greater resource control and equitable development (Obi, 2010). These conflicts disrupt economic activities, deter investment, and contribute to a climate of insecurity and instability (Francis, LaPin, & Rossiasco, 2011).

The political landscape is further complicated by corruption at various levels of government, which undermines policy implementation, diverts public resources, and erodes public trust in governmental institutions. It manifests in the misappropriation of oil revenues, bribery, and patronage politics, which hinder effective governance and equitable development (Human Rights Watch, 2007). The lack of political will to address the underlying causes of conflict and underdevelopment perpetuates the region's problems. Government initiatives, such as the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) and the Ministry of Niger

Delta Affairs, have been criticized for their inefficiency, corruption, and failure to deliver meaningful development outcomes (Idemudia, 2010). The absence of inclusive and transparent governance mechanisms fuels grievances and alienates local communities from the political process. The interaction of environmental degradation, socio-economic disparities, and political instability creates a complex governance challenge in the Niger Delta.

Case Studies and Successful Strategies in Global Governance Reform

The analysis of case studies and policy documents revealed several successful strategies in global governance reform that could be adapted to the Niger Delta context. These strategies focus on incremental changes, multilateral cooperation, technological innovation, inclusivity, and accountability mechanisms, each offering a pathway to enhance governance and sustainability in the region. Incremental changes involve the implementation of small-scale, progressive reforms that collectively lead to significant improvements over time. One notable example is the Brazilian Amazon Fund, which supports sustainable development and reduces deforestation through small grants and projects aimed at community-led environmental restoration (Nepstad et al., 2014). The success of the Amazon Fund demonstrates the potential of gradual, community-focused initiatives to achieve substantial environmental benefits. In the Niger Delta, a similar approach could be adopted, focusing on community-led projects that address local environmental issues such as oil spills and deforestation.

For instance, small grants could be provided to local communities for the restoration of mangroves and other critical ecosystems. This strategy aligns with the need for sustainable development that balances environmental protection with the socio-economic needs of local communities (Ibaba, 2010). The success of incremental changes depends on sustained funding, capacity-building efforts, and strong community involvement, ensuring that projects are both effective and sustainable in the long term.

Multilateral cooperation is essential for addressing transnational governance challenges and enhancing accountability in resource-rich regions like the Niger Delta. The Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) is a global standard for the good governance of oil, gas, and mineral resources, requiring participating countries to disclose information on tax payments, licenses, contracts, production, and other key elements around resource extraction (EITI, 2020). Nigeria's implementation of EITI principles has led to greater transparency in the extractive sector, although challenges remain. Strengthening Nigeria's adherence to EITI principles and enhancing regional cooperation among Niger Delta states could significantly improve transparency and accountability. The success of EITI in other countries, such as Ghana and Norway, highlights the potential benefits of robust

multilateral cooperation and stringent adherence to transparency standards (Hilson & Maconachie, 2009). Enhanced cooperation could also involve regional initiatives that address cross-border environmental impacts and coordinate responses to oil spills and other transboundary environmental issues.

Leveraging technology for governance can enhance efficiency and transparency, particularly in environmental monitoring and management. The use of satellite monitoring and geographic information systems (GIS) for environmental monitoring, as implemented in the Brazilian Amazon, provides real-time data on deforestation and land-use changes (Asner, 2009). Such technological innovations have proven effective in tracking environmental changes and facilitating timely interventions. In the Niger Delta, adopting similar technologies could improve the monitoring of oil spills, gas flaring, and other environmental impacts. For example, satellite imagery could be used to detect oil spills and assess their extent, while GIS could map affected areas and track restoration efforts. These technologies would enable more effective enforcement of environmental regulations and enhance accountability by providing transparent, publicly accessible data (Ibaba, 2010).

Inclusive governance ensures that all stakeholders, particularly marginalized communities, have a voice in decision-making processes. The participatory budgeting process in Porto Alegre, Brazil, where citizens directly influence budget allocations, serves as an exemplary model of inclusivity (Wampler, 2007). This process has led to more equitable distribution of resources and increased public trust in government institutions. Adopting participatory governance practices in the Niger Delta could empower local communities and enhance the legitimacy of governance reforms. For instance, establishing platforms for community consultation and participatory budgeting would enable residents to influence decisions on resource allocation and development projects. Such practices not only ensure that local needs and priorities are addressed but also build a sense of ownership and responsibility among community members (Wampler, 2007). The success of participatory governance hinges on the creation of inclusive structures that facilitate meaningful engagement and the provision of necessary support to ensure effective participation.

Strengthening accountability mechanisms is crucial for effective governance, ensuring that government officials and institutions are held accountable for their actions. The establishment of independent oversight bodies, such as the Ombudsman offices in Scandinavian countries, provides a model for holding government officials accountable and addressing public grievances (Linde & Erlingsson, 2013). These bodies have been effective in reducing corruption and enhancing transparency in governance. In the Niger Delta, implementing similar

oversight bodies tasked with monitoring government and corporate activities could enhance accountability and reduce corruption. These bodies could be empowered to investigate allegations of misconduct, enforce compliance with environmental and social regulations, and ensure that public funds are used effectively. Additionally, the establishment of community monitoring groups could provide grassroots oversight, fostering a culture of transparency and accountability at all levels of governance (Human Rights Watch, 2007). The integration of accountability mechanisms with technological innovations, such as digital platforms for reporting and tracking corruption, can further enhance their effectiveness. Public access to information and the ability to report grievances anonymously can empower citizens to hold their leaders accountable without fear of reprisal (Transparency International, 2021).

The Role and Potential Contributions of Local Communities

The literature review underscored the significant role that local communities can play in shaping and implementing governance reforms in the Niger Delta. Understanding the importance of community involvement is crucial for designing effective and sustainable governance strategies. Community-Based Natural Resource Management (CBNRM) involves the devolution of control over natural resources to local communities, enabling them to manage and benefit from these resources sustainably. This approach has shown success in various regions, particularly in Southern Africa, where it has led to improved conservation outcomes and socio-economic benefits for local communities (Roe, Nelson, & Sandbrook, 2009). For example, Namibia's communal conservancies have allowed local communities to manage wildlife resources, leading to increased wildlife populations and enhanced local incomes through eco-tourism (NACSO, 2016). Adapting CBNRM principles to the Niger Delta could enhance community stewardship of environmental resources and reduce conflicts over resource control. The region's complex socio-ecological dynamics require strategies that empower local communities to manage resources sustainably while also benefiting economically.

Implementing CBNRM would involve establishing legal frameworks that recognize community rights over natural resources, providing technical support for resource management, and facilitating access to markets for community-managed resources. Such measures can ensure that local communities are key stakeholders in the governance process, thereby reducing tensions and fostering sustainable development.

Participatory governance emphasizes the importance of involving local communities in decision-making processes. In the Niger Delta, initiatives such as the Community Development Committees (CDCs), established by the Nigerian

government and supported by international donors, provide a platform for local communities to engage in governance processes (Idemudia & Ite, 2006). These committees have been instrumental in involving communities in the planning and execution of development projects, thereby enhancing transparency and accountability. Strengthening and expanding these participatory platforms could further enhance local ownership and accountability in governance reforms. For instance, increasing the scope of CDCs to cover more areas and sectors could provide communities with greater influence over a wider range of issues, from environmental management to social services. Moreover, ensuring that these platforms are inclusive and representative of all community groups, including women and youth, is crucial for equitable governance. This inclusive approach not only legitimizes governance reforms but also ensures that they are more attuned to the needs and aspirations of the local population (Gaventa & Barrett, 2012).

Building the capacity of local communities is essential for effective participation in governance. In the Niger Delta, capacity-building initiatives could include training in sustainable environmental practices, conflict resolution, and community organizing. Such training would enable community members to effectively manage local resources, participate in governance, and advocate for their rights. Additionally, partnerships with NGOs and international organizations can provide technical assistance and resources to support these capacity-building efforts. For instance, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has successfully implemented capacity-building projects in the Niger Delta, focusing on improving local governance and promoting sustainable livelihoods (UNDP, 2019).

Summary of Key Findings

The following findings are derivable from the review of related literature and information from policy documents. First, the primary environmental challenges identified include severe pollution from oil spills and gas flaring, which have degraded land and water resources, impacting local livelihoods and health. The lack of effective regulatory frameworks exacerbates these issues, allowing multinational corporations to operate with minimal accountability. Second, despite its natural resource wealth, the Niger Delta suffers from high levels of poverty and unemployment due to the inequitable distribution of oil revenues and inadequate infrastructure. The failure to invest oil wealth into local development has left communities without essential services, contributing to widespread disenchantment. Third, the region's political landscape is characterized by instability, corruption, and violent conflicts driven by ethnic tensions and competition over resources. These issues disrupt governance and economic activities, further entrenching poverty and underdevelopment.

Fourth, several successful strategies that could be adapted to the Niger Delta include incremental changes demonstrated by the Brazilian Amazon Fund's small-scale community projects, multilateral cooperation as exemplified by the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative, technological innovations like GIS and satellite monitoring used in environmental management, participatory governance practices from Porto Alegre's participatory budgeting, and robust accountability mechanisms modelled by Scandinavian Ombudsman offices.

Conclusion

The analysis reveals significant challenges and potential solutions for effective governance. The primary challenges include environmental degradation orchestrated by oil extraction; socio-economic disparities exacerbated by inequitable revenue distribution; and political instability marked by corruption and violent conflicts, further complicating governance. Successful global governance reform strategies offer several adaptable approaches. Incremental changes, demonstrated by the Brazilian Amazon Fund, show the potential for gradual, community-focused initiatives to lead to substantial benefits. Strengthening multilateral cooperation, as seen with the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative, can improve transparency in the extractive sector. Leveraging technological innovations like satellite monitoring and GIS can enhance environmental monitoring. Inclusive governance practices, such as Porto Alegre's participatory budgeting, can empower local communities and enhance reform legitimacy. Implementing accountability mechanisms, modelled by Scandinavian Ombudsman offices, can reduce corruption and enhance public trust.

The study underscores the significant role local communities can play in governance reforms. Community-based natural resource management can enhance community stewardship of environmental resources and reduce conflicts. Therefore, strengthening participatory platforms, like community development committees can enhance local ownership and accountability. Building local capacity through training in environmental management, financial literacy, and leadership skills can empower community members to actively participate in governance processes and advocate for their rights. Achieving substantial reform in the Niger Delta requires a strategy that addresses the region's unique challenges while emphasizing the role of local communities in governance. By adapting successful global examples to local contexts, the Niger Delta can move towards more effective and equitable governance, fostering sustainable development and improving the quality of life for its communities.

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