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The Challenges of the Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP) in Nigeria: From Environmental Movement to Movement for Self-Determination

Adam Umar Musa[1] **and Idris Saminu**[2]

Abstract: The Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP) is Nigeria's most impactful environmental justice movement founded in 1990 to advocate for the indigenous Ogoni people's economic, cultural, and environmental rights. Despite years of pressure, their demands have seen limited success, prompting a need to assess their strategies and obstacles. Thus, this article aims to examine the mobilisation strategies and the challenges or barriers hindering MOSOP's success over the years. Through the lens of political opportunity structure theory, the article focuses on how political opportunities affected MOSOP's mobilisation and outcome. Methodologically, qualitative content analysis of scholarly articles, speeches, and relevant documents was utilised. The findings indicated that the leadership crisis was a major obstacle, and MOSOP's ethnic-based nature hindered its progress. Its shift towards more radical and violent strategies also proved to be another barrier to success. It also faced a major setback with the execution of its leader due to a shift in ideology and strategy. Despite previous successes, its violent approach was less effective than peaceful negotiation in achieving its goals. However, MOSOP deserves credit for its role in government interventions, such as the Niger Delta Clean-up programme and the UNEP environmental assessment report.

Keywords: Environmental movement, MOSOP, Niger-Delta, political opportunity structure, self-determination

Introduction

In the history of Nigeria, the hitherto strongest environmental justice movement has been the Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (henceforth MOSOP), especially during its heyday in the 1990s. Established in 1990, MOSOP is a social movement organisation primarily campaigning for social, economic, and cultural rights, as well as environmental justice for the indigenous Ogoni people of Central Niger Delta. The Niger Delta is strategically located in one of the largest mangrove forests in Africa and the third largest of its kind on earth. It is endowed with an ecosystem rich in biodiversity and abundant in natural resources comprising fertile

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arable land, extensive forests, rivers, fishery sites, and, most importantly, a large deposit of oil and gas (Mbikan & Israel, 2022).

Following the discovery of a significant amount of crude oil by the Anglo-Dutch Shell group in this area, Nigeria has emerged as a prominent global producer of crude oil. By 1970, Nigeria produced two million barrels per day of Bonny Light crude oil as the fifth largest producer in the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) (Duru & Uno, 2007). Since then, Nigeria has largely relied on the revenues of crude oil proceeds, contributing to at least 80% of the GDP and 90% of the federal budget (Mckague, 2017).

The Ogoni land is found within the Rivers State Niger Delta, spread across four of the 23 Local Government Areas, namely Gokana, Khana, Tai, and Eleme. It occupies only about 2% of the Niger Delta (404 out of 27,027 square miles). The Ogoni people are divided into six clans with their respective Gbenemene (King/Chief) and are roughly spread across 111 villages. According to 2006 national population estimates, the Ogoni people totalled approximately 830,000. Their major occupation is farming and fishing (Duru & Uno, 2007; Mmom & Igbuku, 2015; Osaghae, 1995).

The Ogoni territory spans an impressive 404 square miles and boasts a population of over 530,000. As one of Africa's most densely populated regions, the Ogoni land has seen significant changes over the years, with forests being cleared or altered for agricultural purposes (N-Ue, 2020). Given this reality, it is unsurprising that land holds tremendous significance for the Ogoni people (Osha, 2006).

For years, MOSOP has pressured the Federal Government of Nigeria (henceforth FGN) to respond to its demand, albeit with little success. Therefore, it is pertinent to understand the mobilisation strategies and challenges hindering MOSOP's success over the years. This is also essential for comprehending the complexities of environmental activism in Nigeria and beyond. This article examines the historical context, mobilisation strategies, and persistent barriers that MOSOP has faced in its pursuit of environmental and social justice. Accordingly, this article seeks to answer two fundamental questions: To what extent did political opportunities influence the mobilisation and outcome of the famous MOSOP protest in 1990? What challenges does MOSOP face in achieving its goals and objectives?

The significance of studying MOSOP lies in its role as a catalyst for change and its resilience in the face of formidable challenges. By examining the mobilisation tactics employed by MOSOP, as well as the obstacles encountered along the way, we can gain valuable insights into the dynamics of grassroots activism, coalition building, and resistance to environmental exploitation. Through a comprehensive analysis of MOSOP's mobilisation strategies and challenges, this article seeks to contribute to the understanding of the dynamics of environmental activism and grassroots movements in Nigeria and beyond. By analysing the achievements and failures of MOSOP, we can obtain useful knowledge about the intricacies of advocating for environmental justice and community rights in the face of significant challenges.

This article is structured into five sections, beginning with the introduction section. The following section reviews relevant literature on environmental movements, focusing on Africa. The third section presents the theoretical framework for analysing the mobilisation and outcome of the MOSOP. The fourth section explains the background of the MOSOP protest and an analysis of the challenges faced by MOSOP. Finally, the article concludes with a summary of the findings.

Literature Review

Environmental Movement: Overview

According to several scholars of social movements, there has yet to be a consensus on the definition of environmental movement. However, Diani (1992) defined environmental movement as:

> a loose, noninstitutionalised network of informal interactions that may include, as well as individuals and groups who have no organisational affiliation, organisations of varying degrees of formality, that are engaged in collective action motivated by shared identity or concern about environmental issues. (p. 5)

Environmental movements encompass diverse individuals, groups, and organisations that come together to address environmental issues, ranging from local pollution to global climate change (Hu, 2023). Typically, these movements aim to influence governments and companies to adopt sustainable practices and promote environmental conservation (Nelson & King, 2020). Scholars have increased interest in studying environmental movements, resulting in a surge of sociological research over the past few decades (Johnson & Burke, 2021). Numerous environmental movements have gained recognition globally, each with unique goals and attributes. The Chipko Movement in India began in the 1970s and is renowned for its grassroots activism in forest conservation and community empowerment (Bandyopadhyay & Shiva, 1989). The anti-nuclear movement, characterised by protests against nuclear testing and power plants, gained traction during the Cold War era and remains active today (Harvey, 2016). Additionally, the global climate justice movement, exemplified by campaigns such as Fridays for Future, led by Greta Thunberg, has mobilised millions worldwide to demand urgent action on climate change (Spini, 2023).

The influence of environmental movements on policy-making has been noteworthy at all levels, be it local, national, or international. Through advocacy, lobbying, and direct action, these movements have successfully created environmental regulations, protected areas, and international accords, including the Paris Agreement on climate change (Falkner, 2016). In addition, these movements have been instrumental in raising public consciousness and engagement on environmental issues, which has led to shifts in consumer behaviour, corporate practices, and public discourse (Lele, 2023).

Mapping the Areas of Environmental Activism

O'Neil (2012) succinctly mapped out the areas of environmental activism into four broad areas. The first is wilderness and species prevention, which includes biodiversity conservation, park movements, and deep ecology. The forefront of activism is expanding to encompass the fight for access to natural resources and their responsible usage. The second area involves advocating for fair usage of land, water, forests, plants, and animals, as well as defending property rights and common pool resources. Additionally, it includes ensuring food security and promoting conservation practices based on community involvement. Lastly, it involves encouraging participation from multiple stakeholders. The third area of environmental activism is addressing

industrial and technological hazards. These hazards include mining and resource extraction, and constructing large-scale infrastructure such as dams, roads, power plants, factories, and waste disposal sites. It also includes handling nuclear weapons and power, genetically modified organisms, biotechnology, and the consequences of climate change. The fourth area of environmental activism is communitarian green movements, which focus on criticising free market capitalism, state socialism, and neoliberal globalisation. It is also concerned with the promotion of alternative lifestyles within the predominant system, as well as the promotion of alternative economic systems.

In his work, Dalton et al. (2003) outlined 13 types of activities done by 248 environmental groups across 50 countries to map out the pattern of action that green movements have adopted globally to influence government policy on environmental issues. Their research findings suggest that these movements primarily engage in activities such as contacting the media, mobilising public opinion, contacting other environmental non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and holding informal meetings with civil servants or ministers. On the other hand, they rarely engage in activities such as contacting officials of political parties and social unions and associations, resorting to legal action via the courts and other judicial institutions, and participating in demonstrations, protests, or direct actions. Additionally, these green movements tend to contact local government authorities and international environmental NGOs, participate in government advisory committees and commissions, and have formal meetings with civil servants or ministers. Finally, on average, they also tend to contact Members of Parliament or parliamentary committees.

Environmental Movements in Africa: Characteristics, Key Issues, and Impact

Environmental movements in Africa have emerged in response to several environmental challenges, ranging from deforestation and land degradation to water scarcity and pollution.

Before contact between Africa and Europe, the inhabitants of Africa revered the environment with some sacredness. Only a reasonable utilisation of the environment for subsistence farming, fishing, and wood for domestic energy was allowed for use. However, the industrial revolution in Europe necessitated contact with Africa in search of raw materials. Hence, the ecosystem in Africa was used to extract raw materials through mining, plantations, and even the dumping of toxic wastes. Currently, the continuous exploitation of environmental resources is being disregarded, leading to increasing degradation of the environment, thereby exacerbating conflicts over limited resources (Obi, 2005). Consequently, the conflict between the Imperial States, which had control over the environment, and the indigenous people, whose survival was endangered because they lacked control over the environment, intensified the cycle of repression, resistance, and conflict. Due to this inconsistency, marginalised communities were compelled to form environmental movements such as MOSOP, GBM, Niger Delta Women for Justice (NDWJ), and the Squatter Settlement Movement in South Africa (Obi, 2005).

Most environmental movements in developing countries have objectives that extend beyond environmental concerns. They often manifest a wider concern, typically of a political nature. Such movements tend to attract minority or marginalised communities who cannot often address their problems more conventionally. Such examples include India's Chipko movement,

Kenya's Green Belt Movement, the National Council of Rubber Tappers (NCRT) of Brazil, and MOSOP.

Haynes (1999) has aptly articulated six main characteristics of an environmental organisation in the Third World, as follows:

> First, they aim to mobilise local people to defend the environment against outside interests, usually the state or big business. Second, environmental action groups are usually rurally-based. Third, women often form the core of their memberships. Fourth, while some groups have a narrow conservation focus, others have wider socio-economic and political concerns. Fifth, environmental groups are more likely to achieve their objectives when they can utilize democratic and legal channels. Sixth, it helps to enlist important foreign allies, such as Greenpeace International, although more is needed to ensure success. Finally, environmental groups often need to win their struggles; failures outweigh successes. (Haynes, 1999, p. 223)

African environmental movements exhibit diverse characteristics shaped by local contexts, socio-economic conditions, and historical legacies. Many of these movements are rooted in indigenous knowledge systems and traditional practices that emphasise the interconnectedness of humans and nature (Fairhead & Leach, 2003). They often employ a combination of traditional methods, such as community-based conservation and agroecology, alongside modern advocacy and activism strategies. Furthermore, African environmental movements frequently intersect with broader social justice and anti-colonial struggles, reflecting the intertwined nature of environmental and socio-political issues on the continent (Beinart, 2000).

Several key environmental issues drive activism and mobilisation within African environmental movements. These include deforestation and land degradation, exacerbated by unsustainable agricultural practices and deforestation for logging and mining activities (Beinart, 2000). Water scarcity and pollution, intensified by industrialisation and urbanisation, equally form a significant part of the agenda of many African environmental groups (Hussain et al., 2020). Moreover, the impacts of climate change, including droughts, floods, and desertification, pose existential threats to communities across the continent, fuelling calls for climate justice and adaptation (Adger & Pulhin, 2014).

African environmental movements have made significant strides in raising awareness, mobilising communities, and influencing local, national, and international policy-making. Grassroots initiatives such as the Green Belt Movement in Kenya, founded by Wangari Maathai, have empowered women, restored ecosystems, and advocated for sustainable development (Death, 2014). Similarly, movements such as Friends of the Earth Africa and the Pan African Climate Justice Alliance have amplified African voices in global climate negotiations and campaigned for climate action and environmental justice (Benkenstein et al., 2020). Furthermore, indigenous and local community-led conservation efforts, such as community-based natural resource management initiatives, have demonstrated the efficacy of bottom-up approaches to environmental stewardship (Hotakainen & Rytkönen, 2020).

Environmental Movements in Nigeria

Just as anywhere in the world, several environmental organisations in Nigeria have different areas of interest. Among them include: the famous Nigerian Conservation Foundation (NCF) founded in 1980; the Environmental Right Action (ERA) established in 1993; the Centre for Social and Corporate Responsibility and Stakeholder Democratic Movement; the Nigerian Environmental Society (NES); the Nigerian Environmental Study and Action Team (NEST); the Green Environmental Movement of Nigeria (GEMINI); the Nigerian Society for the Protection of the Environment; the Niger-Delta Conservation Committee (NDCC); and the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP) (Agbonifo, 2013).

Most of these environmental movements in Nigeria are largely oriented towards promoting environmental awareness, management, and advocacy, as observed by Agbonifo (2013). He further categorised them into four groups based on their orientation. The first is conservative-oriented groups, which are mostly concerned with identifying environmental problems and suggesting solutions and policy advocacy. Groups of such orientation are peaceful and do not engage in protests or direct actions. The second is environmental and social justice groups, which largely focus on protecting minorities and vulnerable communities against environmental pollution. The third is peace-building environmental groups, which focus on identifying those who are harmed and those who can remedy the identified harms using a restorative approach to environmental issues. Such groups include the Centre for Social and Corporate Responsibility and the Stakeholder Democratic Movement. Lastly, local community groups protesting environmental degradation mostly connect between their environmental situation and national or global situations. They utilise the opportunity of a single case to establish the need for structural causes of socio-economic marginalisation and environmental degradation. MOSOP is exemplary in this regard.

Theoretical Framework

Social theories entail a wide range of theoretical literature that "seeks to explain the emergence, organisation, and impacts of collective action by civil society groups, including environmental movements" (O'Neil, 2012, p. 116). In other words, social theories have primarily "generated strong claims about the role of collective identity in movements' emergence, trajectories, and outcomes" (Pollettal & Jasper, 2001, p. 284). Different social movement scholars have put forward several theories, the most popular of which are the resource mobilisation theory, the political opportunity structures, and the collective identity theory.

Collective identity theory focuses on individual and group identity to explain why collective actors come together, what motivates individuals to participate in collective actions, as well as the cultural effects of group action on society at large (Pollettal & Jasper, 2001; Snow & Corrigall-Brown, 2015). Conversely, the resource mobilisation theory dwells on how material resources are used to organise and mobilise collective actions, and measure the material outcomes of such actions.

However, this study is neither interested in understanding MOSOP's cultural identity nor in how it utilised its resources for action. Rather, it intends to discuss the successes and challenges facing MOSOP in actualising its goals and objectives. Therefore, both collective identity and resource mobilisation theories are relegated in this article, though only partially.

Since MOSOP's agitations are within the context of environmental justice from multinational oil companies and the FGN, it is most convenient to analyse the group's challenges through the lens of political opportunity structures.

Political Opportunity Structure

The Political Opportunity Structure (henceforth POS) theory, or political process theory, emerged as an alternative explanation to resource mobilisation theory by specifying external factors referred to as "political opportunities" to explain social movements' mobilisation, form, and outcome. In other words, POS comprises "specific configurations of resources, institutional arrangements and historical precedents for social mobilisation, which facilitates the development of protest movement in some instances and constrain them in others" (Kitschelt, 1986, p. 58). Since POS is originally developed to explain social movements in a democratic context, it is based on the assumption that "political contention is facilitated or constrained by aspects of the political environment, regardless of the type of regime in which it occur" (Schock, 1999, pp. 360-361).

There are four core dimensions of POS, namely increased political access, influential allies, divided elites, and declining repression. "Political access" refers to the avenues through which movements meet with relevant policymakers, such as legislatures, judiciary, executives, and bureaucracies. These access points are often more available in open regimes and less in closed regimes, though the latter system could be open to a certain extent to gain legitimacy (Schock, 1999). In other words, "the access of social movements to the public sphere and political decision-making is also governed by institutional rules, such as those reinforcing patterns of interaction between government and interest groups, and electoral laws" (Xie & van der Heijden, 2010, p. 54). The "declining repression" of social movements enhances their mobilisation capacity and success, while increasing repression narrows the chances for mobilisation and success. Overall, "authoritarian regimes are inclined to repress social movements, whereas representative ones facilitate them. A country's democratic past heavily influences the prevailing elite strategies" (Flam, 1994). Non-democratic regimes tend to fear political protest and also have police forces or sometimes the military, which remain immersed in the authoritarian values of the preceding regime, with a tendency to use indiscriminate force (Schock, 1999). The dimension of "influential allies"—such as professional associations, labour unions, political parties, and others—facilitate social movements' mobilisation and success by supporting them with leadership, organisational expertise, and money. However, in a closed system, these allies often come from religious, intergovernmental institutions, and transnational social movements outside state control. Moreover, the mobilisation potency for protest of social movements is occasionally contingent upon the emergence and dissolution of other social movements (Schock, 1999; Xie & van der Heijden, 2010). Lastly, "elite divisions" in a formal democracy usually manifest in party differences based on economic and social policies and not based on the system of governance. Conversely, the elite differs in the type of political system, coupled with differences in social and economic policies that could significantly impact societal transformation.

In addition to the four POS dimensions, Schock (1999) considered "press freedom/flow of information" as another dimension of political opportunity not considered by POS since it is democracy biased. The flow of information may significantly impact non-democratic or closed regimes. Political opportunities are aspects of the "external political environment that facilitates

or constrains collective action and influences movement outcomes, [thus] press freedoms and information flows can be considered a relevant political opportunity" (Schock, 1999, p. 362).

Background of the Ogoni Protest: From Environmental Justice to Agitation for Self-determination

As mentioned earlier, the basis of MOSOP's agitation lies in the fact that the Ogoni communities live in vital oil-producing areas in Nigeria, yet have long suffered environmental degradation due to oil exploration, gas flaring, clearing of farms, and the like for over four decades by mainly the Social Democratic Party (SDN) under the authority of the FGN. Since the discovery of oil in commercial quantity, multinational oil companies operated the Oil Mining Lease (OML 11), interfacing with 47 Ogoni land communities (Mckague, 2017). It was claimed that about 634 million barrels of oil worth approximately USD30 billion had been generated from its land by Shell, Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC), Agip, and Elf over the years (Maier, 2000). Worse still, there has been no fair allocation of oil revenues and no adequate compensation on farms, land, and polluted water bodies, all of which constitute the basis of livelihood and sustenance in the Ogoni land. In essence, the Ogoni people "have suffered from land scarcity, oil-based ecological degradation, which has severely undermined Ogoni's traditional peasant and fishing economy, and the failure of the Nigerian state to integrate them into the non-traditional oil economy" (Naanen, 1995, p. 64).

A watershed in the Ogoni protest could be traced to an oil spillage incident in 1970 at the Bomu (Dare) oil field, famously known as the Bomu blow-out. For over two months, the "blow-out kept emitting crude oil, sand, water, gas and fire, which not only destroyed farmlands in the area but also left a heavy veneer of crude oil within a three-mile radius" (Osha, 2006, p. 28). During this devastating period, the affected communities were neither compensated by Shell nor provided with relief materials by the FGN. Consequently, the relationship between the oil companies and the local communities further deteriorated (Osha, 2006). Earlier in 1968, Ken Saro-Wiwa had expressed the growing hostility between the Ogoni people and the oil companies in his pamphlet entitled "The Ogoni Nationality Today and Tomorrow", in which he called on the Ogoni people to organise and assert themselves (Saro-Wiwa, 1995, p. 52–4).

In the aftermath of the blow-out in 1970, "complaints about oil pollution came from conservative and influential Ogoni chiefs who sent a protest letter to the Rivers State military governor, demanding a greater share of oil revenues extracted from Ogoni land and a programme to reverse environmental destruction" (Duru & Uno, 2007, p. 81). In 1973, another oil spill occurred at Ibobu.

It is pertinent to mention that the agitation of the Ogoni community was not limited to environmental degradation. There were equal economic agitations symbolised by continuous demand for increased revenue allocation from oil proceeds, cultural dimensions indicated by complaints of ethnic marginalisation and domination, and, of course, political agitations symbolised by the quest for autonomy and self-determination. Coincidentally, this was catalysed by the fundamental social ideology of MOSOP, referred to as ERECTISM (Ethnic Autonomy, Resource and Environmental Control). Regarding revenue allocation, the derivation principle has been utilised since Nigeria's independence. Half of the revenue extracted was given to the extraction regions, only 20% went to the FGN, while the rest went to the distributable pool, which was shared equally among the federating units. During the

military intervention between 1966 and 1969, the distributable pool was cancelled and a 50/50 sharing formula between the producing states and the FGN was maintained. By the end of the Civil War, the enactment of the Petroleum Decree (No. 31) of 1969 resulted in transferring all lands and resources to the FGN, leading to a shift in the ratio of 45 to 55 between 1969 and 1971.

In addition, the 1978 Land Use Decree further reinforced the 1969 decree. Thus, between 1979 and 1981, 100% of revenue went to the FGN. It was later from 1982 to 1992 that 1.5% was given to the producing states. By 1999, the ratio settled at 13 to 87 (Duru & Uno, 2007; Watts, 2003).

Consequently, the corresponding agitation of the Ogoni people steadily increased by the day. The Ogoni people thought that participating in governance would abate their plight. As such, prominent Ogoni individuals became involved in politics. For example:

> … since the creation of Rivers State in 1967, every clan in Ogoni has produced one minister or more at the federal and state levels and other top political appointments. The most significant of these include Ken Saro-Wiwa's appointment as Administrator for Bonny during the civil war and later as commissioner for education in Rivers state; Garrick Leton's appointment first as commissioner for health in Rivers state and later federal commissioner for education; Kenneth Birabi's election as senate minority leader in the short-lived National Assembly of the Third Republic; and I. S. Kogbara's appointment as secretary for industries in the interim national government of 1993. (Osaghae, 1995, p. 331)

Similarly, Ken Saro-Wiwa contested for membership to the Nigerian Constituent Assembly in 1977 and lost to another candidate who was believed to be under the patronage of Chief Edward Kobani, an Ogoni elder statesman. Similarly, another Ogoni named Kernte Giadom was chosen as the gubernatorial candidate in 1983 by the Nigerian People's Party, which competed against the National Party of Nigeria (NPN), the ruling party at the national level, for control of Rivers State. However, Giadom was defeated by another candidate (Naanen, 1995; Osha, 2006).

When the "Ogoni's pursuit of economic and political empowerment through the use of formal channels such as political parties (when these were allowed to exist), petitions to the military government, and agitation for a separate state yielded little tangible benefit", according to Naanen, the people resorted to another strategy that ultimately led to the protest in 1990. In the words of MOSOP's general secretary:

> Events of this kind reinforced the growing feeling among the Ogoni that an alternative strategy was necessary for a successful prosecution of their cause. Their problem came to be seen as structural. As long as the existing constitutional arrangements remained, there was little that even an Ogoni governor could do to change the situation fundamentally. (Naanen, 1995, p. 64)

Before the creation of MOSOP, there were several professional, youth, women, and religious organisations all over the Ogoni kingdom, such as: the Federation of Women Associations (FOWA), National Youth Council of Ogoni People (NYCOP), Council of Ogoni Churches (COC), Council of Ogoni Professionals (COP), Council of Ogoni Traditional Rulers

(COTRA), National Union of Ogoni Students (NUOS), Ogoni Students Union (OSU), Ogoni Teachers Union (OTU), and the Ogoni Central Union (OCU) (Barikor-Wiwa, 1996). Thus, when MOSOP was ultimately established in 1990, it functioned primarily as a collective organisation encompassing multiple interest groups (Obi, 2001). It then became the task of some leaders such as Ken Saro-Wiwa to harmonise these groups for an articulate and united action. Therefore, rigorous ideological framing based on the ethos of ethnic extension attempt and marginalisation, coupled with the heroic rhetoric of the Ogoni people, was adequately utilised to campaign for action against the FGN and multinational oil companies. The founding of MOSOP occurred under the tutelage of Chief Edward Kobani with Dr Garrick Leton as president, Ben Naanen as general secretary, and Ken Saro-Wiwa as publicity secretary.

Furthermore, MOSOP under Saro-Wiwa persuaded the Ogoni stakeholders, including the intelligentsia and most of the Chiefs across the kingdom, to draft the famous Ogoni Bill of Rights to serve as articulated demands and standpoints of the Ogoni nation. This Bill was issued to the military regime of General I. B. Babangida, and mainly requested the following rights:

> (i) Political control of Ogoni affairs by Ogoni people; (ii) The right to the control and use of a fair proportion of OGONI economic resources for Ogoni development; (iii) Adequate and direct representation as of right in all Nigerian national institutions; (iv) The use and development of Ogoni languages in all Nigerian territory; (v) The full development of Ogoni culture; (vi) The right to religious freedom; and (vii) The right to protect the OGONI environment and ecology from further degradation. ("Ogoni Bill of Rights," 1990, p. 6)

In June 1992, at Umuechem village near Port-Harcourt, the mobile police brutally attacked unarmed protesters at Shell facilities, leading to several deaths and over 400 houses burnt. The situation worsened within a short span, and there were pockets of protests across the Niger Delta—the affected included the Ogbia, Igbide, Uzere, Diebu, Burutu, and Bomadi communities in 1992, and the Irri community in 1993 (Obi, 2001).

In December 1992, MOSOP leaders wrote an addendum to the Ogoni Bill of Rights to Shell, NNPC, and other oil companies operating in the Ogoni land, demanding:

> (1) payment of US $6 bn for accumulated rents and royalties for oil exploration since 1958; (2) payment of US $4 bn for damages and compensation for environmental pollution, devastation and ecological degradation; (3) immediate stoppage of environmental degradation and in particular gas flaring in Yorla, Korokoro and Bomu; (4) immediate covering of all exposed high-pressure oil pipelines; (5) initiation of negotiations with Ogoni people 'to reach meaningful and acceptable terms for further and continued exploration and exploitation of oil from Ogoniland and to agree on workable and effective plans for environmental protection of the Ogoni people. (Osaghae, 1995, p. 336)

Upon hearing no response from either the FGN or the oil companies, MOSOP, in early 1993, mobilised about 300,000 people for the Ogoni day rallies in which Shell was declared persona non grata in Ogoni land. Moreover, a clarion call was made to other minorities in Niger Delta to rise and fight for their rights. The demand of USD10 billion in damages for the destruction of the environment and in payment of taxes and royalties was also made to Shell (Duru & Uno, 2007).

By April 1993, Shell contracted an American company, Wilbros, to dualise the Trans-Niger pipeline that distributed oil from Niger Delta via Ogoni to the Bonny export terminal. At a village near Biara, a disagreement happened between Wilbros workers on the field and a woman farmer who claimed that her crops were destroyed without any notice. The soldiers denied her people's attempt to halt the activities of the Wilbros workers on guard. The next morning, the villagers mobilised to stop the project but were repelled by the soldiers on duty, which left one person dead and several injured. Shell finally withdrew its operations in the Ogoni land in October 1993 after an attack by the Ogoni people on its facilities that led to the deaths of its staff.

Meanwhile, MOSOP became increasingly militant in its approach and even boycotted the federal elections. MOSOP President Dr Leton and Chief Kobani defected from the organisation, paving the way for Ken Saro-Wiwa to be the next president. Besides, the organisation was now singing its anthem and flag and clamouring for self-determination. To contain any act of secession, the military government banned Saro-Wiwa and his secretary Mitte from attending meetings. On May 21, 1994, NYCOP attacked and killed Edward Kobani, Chief Samuel Orage, Chief Theophilus Orage, and Albert Badey in a meeting they perceived as a plot to sabotage MOSOP. This was the Waterloo that led to the persecution and subsequent execution of Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight other Ogoni individuals.

The period between 1993 and 2008 after the withdrawal of Shell and their partners marked the era of oil bunkering. Oil spills continued due to pipeline vandalisation, illegal refineries, and the waning of abandoned oil facilities of the oil companies. Several youths within the Ogoni land and across many areas of the Niger Delta participated in oil theft, running illegal refineries, and other illegal activities (Adamu et al., 2020). Consequently, insecurity due to rival competition between and among factions of the oil bunkering cartels increased.

POS, Mobilisation, and Outcome in the Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP)

Increased political access

Unlike previous military regimes, the Babangida regime (1985-1993) had more civilian involvement in governance than ever. For example, in 1993, at the executive arm, civilians were appointed as ministers: "there were two Ogoni commissioners in a cabinet of seven members; two of the three federal ministerial positions held by indigenes of the state were held by Ogonis; and the managing director of the state-owned Pan African bank was Ogoni" (Osaghae, 1995, p. 331). Chairmanship elections were held in 1987/1988 for the local governments in preparation for the transition to democracy. Again, several commissions, such as the Oil Mineral Producing Areas Development Commission (OMPADEC), had chairmen and other key figures from Rivers State. A one-year campaign, from September 1990 to September 1991, was allowed for the only two registered political parties in the upcoming democratic 1993 elections. Although it can be argued that MOSOP boycotted the election, it still did not negate that political activities were freer during the crucial moment of its mobilisation. Therefore, political access increased and aided the protest's success.

Declining repression

During the peak of MOSOP's agitations, Nigeria was under a military dictatorship. As expected, repressing protests and group agitations challenging the government's authority increased. Therefore, the tendency of protest success was narrowed, according to POS. The MOSOP leadership had been detained and intimidated severely. About five pockets of protests were brutally quenched around the Ogoni land in 1992 alone. However, the military regime was on the verge of transition to democracy and elections were to be held in June 1993. Logically, this period experienced declining repression, which gave MOSOP a political opportunity to match it peacefully without the military's corresponding repression.

Influential allies

MOSOP was able to co-opt influential allies within and around it skilfully. Within the Ogoni land, several professional, religious, gender-based, and trade unions mentioned earlier were incorporated into the MOSOP Movement. More fascinating was MOSOP's ability to secure even more influential allies internationally. Obi (2001) aptly described it as follows:

> 'MOSOP's 'complaints' were well packaged for the global audience through networking with human and environmental rights INGOs [international nongovernmental organisations] such as Amnesty International, FIAN International, Human Rights Watch Africa, Article 19, Inter-Rights, the Body Shop, Greenpeace, Friends of the Earth and others. (p. 185)

Therefore, these alliances helped to checkmate the military government's excesses towards any behaviour that would hinder the credibility of its transition to democracy. Meanwhile, the internationalisation of MOSOP's agitations equally restrained the extent to which the multinational oil companies could react, thereby giving MOSOP a political opportunity to advance its protest.

Notably, the military regime that allowed the protest did not hand over power to an interim civilian government after the annulment of the June 12 election. A few months later, another military regime intervened and subsequently prosecuted and executed Ken Saro-Wiwa alongside eight others.

Divided elites

Since the end of Nigeria's first republic (1960-1966), the country has been ruled by a series of military regimes, one toppling another. From 1966 to 1979, there were four military regimes. The second republic reigned only from 1979 to 1983 when the military intervened to stay for the next eight years by 1992. This is indicative of the deeply divided elite in Nigeria. The government of General Babangida succeeded two potential coups, the latest being in August 1990, and this was the peak of MOSOP's agitations. Possibly, therefore, this dividing elite at the military level and an even worse predicament at the level of the politicians might have given a political opportunity to MOSOP's activities.

Press freedom/flow of information

A pivotal strategy utilised by MOSOP was the press (print and virtual) to extend its agitations. Saro-Wiwa utilised his literary skills to write in newspapers and magazines (Aliyu, 2022). For example, he was a columnist in *The Sunday Times Magazine*. One of the earliest things the Babangida regime did was to release prisoners in detention by the previous regime. Thus, to project its case, MOSOP allies equally used "publications (books, newsletters, press releases, faxes and messages posted on the Internet and international campaigns), [following which] the world has come to be well educated on the poor state of human rights in the Niger Delta" (Obi, 2001, p. 75). In some instances, the release of "documentary films…showed the savage destruction of the Ogoni environment by Shell, and the ruthless repression of the Ogoni by the Nigerian military to shocked audiences in the UK, Europe and other parts of the world." *The Heat of the Moment* was the first of these films, followed by *Drilling Fields* and *Delta Force* (Obi, 2001; Okpadah, 2022).

The following information paved the way for MOSOP's story to be known and closely watched so that it could go against the "almighty" Shell and the military regime.

Challenges of the Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP)

Despite the successes recorded by MOSOP, the movement faced several challenges, including but not limited to the following.

Firstly, the leadership crisis became a fundamental challenge to MOSOP, especially after the demise of Ken Saro-Wiwa. Only Saro-Wiwa was able to utilise some of the dimensions of political opportunity, especially in creating and forging foreign and domestic alliances with institutions that could help actualise the movement's goals. Similarly, the rally efforts to persuade the different groups and organisations of the Ogoni land could have been extended to non-Ogoni communities within the Niger Delta (Osha, 2006; Watts, 2003).

Secondly, MOSOP was an ethnic-based movement that catered only to the interest of the Ogoni nation rather than the greater environmental emancipation of the Niger Delta. Consequently, other ethnic communities were somewhat suspicious of aligning with MOSOP and preferred to champion their course differently. For instance, after MOSOP's agitations, over 26 ethnic groups emerged, such as Ijaw (INCE, IYV), Isoko (IDU), Urhobo (UPU), Itsekiri (INP), and Ogbia (Obi, 2001; Watts, 2003).

Thirdly, the ideological shift in the grievances of the Ogoni people, which initially was environmental justice, became evident before the protest. The FGN never tolerated the controversial agitation for the new grievance—self-determination. As Duru and Uno (2007) rightly observed:

> The ideological bent of military autocracy is to defend and protect a state's national interest, sovereignty and territorial integrity and maintain law and order. This rationalisation motivates the military to intervene in governance and propel their action in government. Nigerian military authorities easily saw the clarion call for resource sovereignty, political autonomy, the boycott of the 1993 presidential elections, flying a flag, writing an anthem and violent

> demonstrations by MOSOP as pushing mass pressures and protests to the limits of subversion. (p. 82)

The Federal Government of Nigeria learned its lesson from the Biafra secession attempts in 1967. As such, it has always treated matters of self-determination seriously. Had MOSOP continued to mount pressure on seeking environmental justice, it would have recorded more success with minimal cost to lives and properties.

Lastly, the radicalisation of MOSOP's activities shifted from being a peaceful strategy to a radical one. The movement's youth wing became radical and almost uncontrollable by the elders. There was significant resistance, particularly from other elites within the Ogoni community (Mai-Bornu, 2020). For example, "the clan heads (Gbenemene) of Babbe, Ken Khana, and Nyo Khana, as well as other prominent leaders like Chief Giniwa and I. S. Kogbara, opposed MOSOP's strategy and were accused by the radicals of being state agents" (Osaghae, 1995: 335). For the fact that these youths were radicalised, it was obvious that MOSOP could not do much to stop the oil bunkering, theft, and pipeline vandalisation during the era of militancy, at least in the Ogoni land. Therefore, the radicalisation of youths turned MOSOP against its weight—rather than manage the existing ecological damage, the pipeline vandalism worsened it.

Conclusion

This article has discussed how political opportunities influenced the mobilisation and outcome of the famous MOSOP protests in the 1990s. Five dimensions were found to explain the success and failure of the said protests: declining repression, influential allies, political access, dividing elite, and the flow of information. Despite the successes recorded by MOSOP, the execution of its leader posed the greatest challenge to the movement. Besides, the change in its ideology from fighting for environmental justice to agitations for self-determination, as well as its shift in strategy from being peaceful to violent, was considered the Waterloo of the movement. Had MOSOP persisted peacefully and continued negotiating so that the world could see its exploitation by the oil companies to the bare, its success story would have actualised. Nevertheless, credit must be given to MOSOP for all the government interventions, ranging from the commissioning of the Oil Mineral Producing Areas Development Commission (OMPADEC), Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC), the Niger-Delta Amnesty Program, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) environmental assessment report, to its implementation through the Niger-Delta Clean-up programme. It is obvious that MOSOP could have achieved better results in democracy through negotiation and peaceful engagement with the FGN and the multinational oil companies than under chaos and rebellion.

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