

Corruption and Funding as Impediments to the Completion of Niger Delta Regional Hospital (Cardiovascular) in Port Harcourt, Rivers State.

By: Sowande Bukola Paul (Research Officer, PLSI)



THE NATIONAL HEALTH ACT 2014 “provides a framework for standards and regulation for health services (the National Health System) which shall (a) encompass public and private providers of health services; (b) promote a spirit of cooperation and shared responsibility among all providers of health services in the Federation and any part thereof; (c) provide for persons living in Nigeria the best possible health services within the limits of available resources; (d) set out the rights and obligations of healthcare providers, health workers, health establishments and users; and (e) protect, promote and fulfil the rights of the people of Nigeria to have access to healthcare services”.

Introduction

The Nigerian health system has been evolving over the years through various health care reforms aimed at addressing the public health challenges confronting it. Even so, the inability to effectively address the country's numerous public health challenges has contributed to the persistent and high level of poverty and the weaknesses of the health system. Corruption and limited institutional capacity are major factors responsible for the poor development of health services in Nigeria. Households and individuals in Nigeria bear the burden of a dysfunctional and inequitable health system. Nigeria's health care system has gone from being comparable to the rest of the world in the 70s and early 80s, to one of the world's most underfunded and least robust health care system and this is seen in the high mortality rate in the country.

Due to systemic issues, coupled with the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic, millions of vulnerable Nigerians do not have access to quality health care reducing the quality of life and their ability to lift themselves out of extreme poverty. Despite a 2001 declaration by African heads of State known as the Abuja Declaration to allocate at least 15% of their national budgets to health care, successive Nigerian governments since then have consistently allocated under 10% of their annual budgets to the health sector 4.75% in 2019, 8.4% in 2020 and 4.4% in 2021 even with the emanation of Covid-19 pandemic. Good health is a need for all and the choice of a particular healthcare system respond to the laws of demand and supply, the demand for health care facilities in all its forms is only possible when there is fully funded and access to healthcare services and in turn its effective utilization by citizens.

The burden of corruption in the health sector impacts the poor most heavily, given their limited access to financial resources. This is what informed this policy brief on the effect of the abandonment of the **Niger Delta Region Hospital (Cardiovascular)** in Port-Harcourt awarded by the **Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC)** in 2011 and contracted to **MESSRS. MX-MX HUGHES LTD.**

According to the special report on Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) 2013-2018 by the office of the Auditor-General for the Federation, the project as at 2018 was at 89% completion while 94% of the contract sum had been paid. Project visit by Paradigm Leadership Support Initiative (PLSI) team revealed the status of the hospital project was still at 89% level a decade after the contract was awarded. The special audit report on NDDC 2013-2018 also revealed the building is reasonably

completed, only the plastering and outside works such as the pavements and parking lots were outstanding. Being left unused for a very long time, the structure was seen to have started gradually deteriorating. Further investigation revealed that the contract is said to be abandoned due to lack of funds and the reason for this was that due diligence and feasibility studies were not carried out before the contract was initially awarded.

The Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) was established in 2000 by former president Olusegun Obasanjo for the purpose of facilitating and fostering rapid and sustainable development of the Niger Delta region. While there has been a yearly allocation to the Commission (now under the Ministry of Niger Delta Affairs) since inception from national coffers, the region is still under-developed and poor even by Nigeria's standard for quality of life.

International and national reports on social, economic, and infrastructural development in the Niger Delta have showed the unavailability, inadequacy, or poor quality of development infrastructure, as most of the population of the region still live in deplorable economic and environmental conditions. Some people in the region drink from untreated water wells, contaminated surfaces and rivers with very high risk of contracting water-borne diseases common to the people of the region. Others lack transport and telecommunication facilities with the attendant constraint on economic development. These have resulted in that Nigeria's Niger Delta, which was supposed to be a huge reservoir of both national and international significance, owing to its massive oil and gas endowments, is lacking basic conditions precedent to sustainable development.

The Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) had been engrossed in diverse controversial issues of corruption especially with the recent quizzing of the former Acting Managing Director Prof. Kemebradikumo

Pondei led committee by the House of Representatives. Those saddled with the responsibility of developing the Niger Delta are not fully committed to the task and are rather involved in fraudulent activities of siphoning financial resources meant for the development of the region. Duty bearers are preoccupied with manipulating to circumvent the rules to favor personal agenda above the collective growth and development of the region.

Although, Effiong Akwa, the NDDC sole administrator, on 12th February 2021 has ordered all contractors handling the commission's projects to return to project sites and complete the work for which they were engaged and gave the assurance on the abandoned strategic hospitals in the region emphasizing the need for financial inflow to enable resumption of construction works and completion. The administrator also noted that most of the affected projects in the region were initiated years ago, but contractors abandoned work only to show up each time a new CEO of the NDDC barked orders. He assured the commission would not go back on the regional hospital project because of its strategic importance.

Conclusion

Immediate completion of the Niger Delta regional hospital in Port-Harcourt will reduce dependency rate on Eleme General Hospital, Okrika General Hospital and University of Port-Harcourt Teaching Hospital by the people of Port-Harcourt (with a population of over 3 million) and Rivers State (population of over 5 million), this will also increase access to health care facilities. This project has not been beneficial to the people of people of Port-Harcourt in anyway. The sum of 980 million was expended on such important project with high potential for positive impact and it is non-functional.

Recommendations

- The unaccounted sum of 52.1 million should be recovered or the contractor should be ordered back to the project site for immediate completion of the hospital.
- All efforts must be put in place to ensure immediate completion of this project to avoid waste in government's scarce resources.
- Needs-based projects such as the hospitals, education and infrastructural projects should be of high priority to the NDDC. These projects addresses the needs of the communities and would alleviate the problems associated with community oriented projects.
- NDDC must take action to ensure that people of the Niger Delta region especially people in the communities of Niger Delta have access to good quality health care.
- There should be a concerted effort by the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) to limit mismanagement or diversion of funds allocated to infrastructural projects in the Niger-Delta region.
- Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) officials should adhere strictly to Financial Regulations and public procurement laws of Nigeria in the award and execution of contracts to improve transparency and accountability.

Images of uncompleted Niger Delta Regional Hospital (Cardiovascular) in Port Harcourt, Rivers State.

