



# Making Partnerships Work

By Sam Ogbuku, PhD

On Thursday, August 30, 2007, former President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua directed that all the budgets for 2008 related to the Niger Delta region must be cut according to the Niger Delta Regional Development Master Plan, which was facilitated by the Niger Delta Development Commission. He was speaking at the launching of that momentous strategic development blueprint, which was developed with the active collaboration of all Niger Delta stakeholders.

The collaboration and synergy which he recommended was to be implemented by the Partners for Sustainable Development (PSD) Forum, which had also been created as part of the Master Plan's implementation guideline. In response to that presidential directive, and in discharging that responsibility, key stakeholders in the region met several times under the PSD Forum, and worked out the best strategy for actualising the provisions and prescriptions of the Master Plan, across board.

For the first time in the history of the Niger Delta, Governors of the nine-member states, through their state officials, worked with other stakeholders to build a synergy with the NDDC, towards streamlining their 2008 Budgets for optimum delivery of development initiatives. As groundbreaking as it was, however, that very important collaboration did not last long, definitely not as long as the Master Plan itself, which expired in 2020.

Today, in this iconic Niger Delta city of Uyo, celebrated for its capacity to warmly receive every visitor, no matter his place or persuasion, with

open arms, we are gathered here, sixteen years after that presidential directive, to renew our commitment as a region and as a people, to work together for our common good, and shared prosperity. Today, under a new leader, President Bola Ahmed Tinubu, whose famed work in rebuilding Lagos State as Governor emboldens all of us to believe, once again, that there is hope for Nigeria and the Niger Delta region, in particular, we are laying a fresh foundation for the kind of partnership needed to facilitate regional sustainable development.

Our vision as Management is founded on this kind of partnership. In the past few months since our appointment, we have continued to erect a veritable platform upon which this partnership must thrive. As I have earlier noted, it is public knowledge that inadequate funding ranks very high among the numerous challenges of the Commission. Consequently, we are promoting the Public Private Partnership (PPP) model, in order to provide an alternative source for key development projects and programmes. This



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initiative aligns with the NDDC mandate, as well as the sustainable development goals 17, which focuses on partnerships.

Only recently, we have hosted two NDDC-PPP summits, and engaged with potential foreign partners in Houston, United States of America, as a strategic stakeholder initiative to launch the NDDC PPP model. This model is designed to communicate a new phase for the Commission that will create a gateway of opportunities for foreign and local investors, captains of industry and multilateral agencies. Working together, we will build a new Niger Delta that fulfils the mandate of NDDC, of a region that is indeed socially stable, economically prosperous, ecologically regenerative and politically peaceful.

That is why this conference is very vital. For one, it helps to revive the platform of the Partners for Sustainable Development (PSD) Forum, which was created as part of the regional Master Plan implementation guideline, to bring all service providers and project implementers to the same table, to fashion a common pathway, based on a shared vision, for the development of the Niger Delta region. For another, it affords all of us the incentive and opportunity to pool our resources together, initiate projects and programmes within the obligatory goal of building a better region, and empowering our people.

By so doing, we would, arising from this conference, galvanise our energies for a common purpose, eliminate duplications and institutional suspicions in the development process, reduce the incidence of working at cross purposes, as well as

reduce wastage of scarce resources allocated for regional developmental initiatives by all stakeholders. In the end, we all would be in a better position to achieve the different aspects and levels of the mandate to facilitate the sustainable development of the Niger Delta, into a region that is socially stable, economically prosperous, politically peaceful and ecologically regenerative.

To succeed, we must remain committed to doing things differently from the past. We must move from the era where we express a determination to making a difference in the Niger Delta, to actually **making that difference**. There is no better time than now. We are improving and strengthening our internal processes and institutional protocols. We are taking definitive and definite steps towards following due process in all our operations. We must become transparent in ways that build confidence among our partners and stakeholders. We must be more mindful in the allocation of funds to projects and programmes, and remove all areas of waste.

And we stand a better chance to succeed by building that synergy that propels our work and our region into that future we have always envisioned. That work continues here, with all of us, by reviving this forum and the strength in our unity, with all its important benefits. It is our belief that this new initiative will help build needed consensus among partners and across the Niger Delta, to ensure that we can, together, truly implement visible projects and programmes with far-reaching impact in our communities, in our shared and unwavering commitment to rebuilding the Niger Delta.

Ultimately, therefore, we would have found a common ground with President Tinubu's far-reaching vision of hope, our common heritage as a people and our known tradition of hospitality, equity, industry and common purpose, woven together in a fabric that proclaims: partnership for progress.