

# In Focus: Niger Delta Development Commission

Transforming a region

The Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) is the brainchild of Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo. Shortly after being sworn into office, Obasanjo followed through with a key pledge he had made earlier during his election campaign. Upon election, he would “seek immediate solutions that would bring enduring peace and progress to the people of the Niger Delta.”

The new agency could potentially provide long-term solutions to the Niger Delta’s socioeconomic difficulties, the President-to-be said at the time. It should tackle problems in a region rich in natural resources but crisis-riddled and lacking infrastructural development before democracy returned to Nigeria in 1999. Sure enough, shortly after his inauguration, Obasanjo drafted and sent to the National Assembly the so-called Niger Delta Development Commission bill. The NDDC was born and then formally founded shortly after, at the end of 2000.

Its mandate was clear from the outset – and remains atop the agenda to this day: the NDDC fosters rapid, consistent and – perhaps most importantly – the sustainable development of the Niger Delta, transforming it into an “economically prosperous, socially stable, ecologically regenerative and politically peaceful” region.

## Broad scope of tasks

As crucial as the NDDC’s role is, its activities do not preclude other development programmes (normally under the supervision of the states) on state or local level. In fact, the contrary is the case, as officials are aiming to integrate the NDDC’s action with the work of other bodies and agencies.

To achieve its mandate, the NDDC focuses especially on developing social and physical infrastructures, with one particular emphasis being on technology. Other tasks include the facilitation of economic revival and prosperity, ecological and environmental remediation and stability. Human development and creating a peaceful environment – some 20 million of more than 40 ethnic groups live in the Delta region – round out a broad scope of tasks.

Although the NDDC is still a fairly young agency, it has already achieved substantial success and begun delivering on the benefits Obasanjo had in mind when he launched the NDDC. To date, the NDDC has overseen the construction of numerous projects in different areas, specifically in the sectors road construction, water, electrification, health, and especially education.

Another NDDC initiative, the Niger Delta Master Regional Master Plan, will build on these early successes and target some 25 areas, from agriculture to tourism and energy. Overall objectives of the plan include improved living standards in the region and generating sustainable technological and industrial progress in the Niger Delta.

Later this year, Obasanjo is slated to formally kick off the Niger Delta Regional Master Plan. The initiative is a regional blue-print devised by NDDC officials. The government support, especially the 2006 budget, is widely viewed as an important boost for NDDC, with the budget document describing it “as the commencement from poverty to prosperity.”

## Strong support from the government

From the outset, the leadership in Abuja ensured that the NDDC receives generous government funding for its ambitious goals. And the strong support continues until today: in summer 2006, Obasanjo forwarded to the National Assembly a 2006 NDDC budget proposal amounting to about NGN 57.4 billion. The 2006 budget proposal is specifically aimed at transforming the Niger Delta into Africa’s most peaceful and prosperous region by 2020.

In looking to the future, the NDDC says it will continue to emphasise “driving partnerships and operating as a catalyst to increase economic activities.” Ultimately, that is bound to help solve an urgent issue on the government’s agenda – raising incomes and living standards for the people in the Niger Delta Region.

[www.nddconline.org](http://www.nddconline.org)

