

Militancy and the Dilemma of Sustainable Development: A Case of Niger Delta in Nigeria.

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Abstract: Nigeria is ranked sixth in the world as the largest crude oil and gas producer. It has a history of well over 50 years of oil and gas exploration and exploitation, but for many of the area's inhabitants, this discovery has brought a curse rather than blessing to the Niger Delta region, which contributes about 80% of the nation's wealth. In the past half a century, the area had been left devastated by unprecedented environmental degradation occasioned by oil activities. This dire situation has led to local unrest, spearheaded by the likes of Isaac Adaka Boro and Ken Saro -Wiwa in the late 1960s and 1990s, respectively, who campaigned vigorously, albeit peacefully, for a better deal for the region. This movement eventually deteriorated into armed struggle, obstructing the national economic and social developments. The paper discusses the dilemma of the militancy in the Niger Delta on sustainable development of Nigeria. It also proffers strategies for achieving sustainable development. The study utilizes the secondary data collection that was generated from journals, magazines, official publications, and the Internet. Findings are descriptively analyzed. The central argument is that militancy in the Niger Delta affects sustainable development in Nigeria.

I. Introduction

Oil has become a dominant element within the power capability profile of any nation. In spite of the huge funds accruing from the oil and gas sector of the Nigerian economy, the Nigerian state has not been able to meet up with the expectations of the citizenry. The Niger Delta region of Nigeria, reputed to be one of the most richly endowed deltas in the world, contributes about 80 per cent of Nigeria's national wealth. "Whereas the oil produced in the Niger delta is the life blood of the Nigerian economy, oil has failed to translate to regional prosperity and development in the Niger delta" (Kimiebi, 2010). Instead, the region has been rewarded with massive environmental degradation and political and economic marginalization. Despite the abundant oil wealth, there has been unimaginable mass poverty and negligible development in the region. The violent repression of peaceful dissent exemplified by Ken Saro – Wiwa and the Ogoni eight saga, has been the preferred method of the federal government in addressing agitations from the Niger delta over the years. This created an environment of anger, desperation and violence. Years of political and economic marginalization, environmental degradation, bad governance and policy inconsistency by the government, and the divide and rule policy of the oil companies led to emergence of militancy in the Niger delta in the early 2000s. (Nwogwugwu, 2012:1; Abraham, 2011:4). Efforts by the federal government and oil companies to improve the quality of human lives and to provide infrastructural development, have been insufficient to ameliorate the problems.

This paper examines the underlying factors responsible for the state of peacelessness in the Niger Delta; the effects or fall outs of the crisis; what should be done to arrest the crisis from degenerating and the way forward for the permanent resolution of the crisis that will bring about peace and sustainable development to the Region.

Frustration-Aggression Theory

The frustration-aggression theory is associated with works of John Dollard et al (1939), the core assumption of which is that "aggression is always a consequence of frustration" (in Amaraegbu, 2011). The authors argued that individuals are motivated to achieve life ambitions and fulfill destiny, but when these expectations are thwarted, frustration sets in. According to Afinotan and Agagu (in Agagu ed, 2008), when there is a gap between the level of value expectation and the level of value attainment, due to lack of capability to establish a congruence between both levels, tension builds up to the pressure of an unfulfilled aspiration or an unsatisfied urge or need. This when not arrested on time leads to frustration. Frustration when it builds up, leads to the rising up of suppressed emotion of anger which is often directed against the party considered to be the source of deprivation of satisfaction. This strong emotion finally finds an outlet through aggression and violent disposition towards the environment. (ibid.) The armed insurrection against military and civilian targets in the Niger Delta by militant youths, directed against government and foreign oil companies could be viewed from this perspective. By the way, it is important to note that the existence of frustration does not always lead to

aggression, given that frustration may have other consequences other than aggression. However, the argument may have failed to differentiate between instigation to aggression and the real incidence of aggression, but this paper acknowledges that frustration generates inquiries to various types of consequences, which may include instigation to certain kind of aggression. Aggression may develop as a consequence of having been exposed to an extremely frustrating condition sufficient to provoke the experience of hopelessness. It is true that schism exists among the region's various ethnic groups, but frustration occasioned as a result of a sense of despair and deprivation, environmental and developmental issues, transnational oil companies that neglect the ethos of corporate social responsibility are more like it. The response of Niger Delta youths to the Nigerian state's neglect and apathy of oil multinationals in the region radicalized them into violent militancy (Amaragbu,2011)

Factors responsible for militancy in the Niger Delta

Scholars have focused on oil production, the poor state of development in the Niger delta and the resultant militancy in vogue for some time now. The literature blame this on federalism and the politics of revenue sharing in Nigeria (Ejibunu,2007; Ibaba, 2008); environmental injustices and human rights violation (Abraham,2011;Ojakorotu, 2010), the failure of corporate social responsibility on the part of Multinational Oil Companies (Akinola,2005); accountability and transparency failures in governance (Akinola,op cit) and the obnoxious laws that govern the oil industry (Ibaba, 2005). It is this prevailing reality in the Niger Delta that has given birth to an environment of perpetual agitations, youth's restiveness, insurgency and general insecurity. Different reasons have been given as the *raison d'être* of the Niger Delta crisis; it is germane at this juncture, to examine the underpinnings of the growing insurgency.

The discovery of oil in Oloibiri, and subsequent production since the 1970s, has been causing severe environmental damage in the Niger Delta. "Nigeria is considered as one of the biggest gas flarers in the world". Expectedly, this gas flaring "harms wildlife, farmland, and human beings through air pollution, acid rain, noise, and increase in temperature" (UNDP in Bagaji et al,2011). In 1978, about 120 children died within a week as a result of gas flaring from refineries. As a result of environmental damage, reports of birth deformities and complications during child birth was a common experience that Awoye community had to be shifted about seven times.(Akinola,op cit.)

The unfavourable revenue allocation is another important factor that escalated the violence in the Niger Delta. The Delta states are angered that they are deprived by the central government that is dominated by a segment of the Nigerian ethnic group from benefiting a substantial income that are generated in their immediate environment. Prior to 1999, the allocation to the Niger delta from the federation account of revenues from oil, decreased progressively as Nigeria became more dependent on oil. In 1960, the allocation was 50%, then down to 45% in 1970, declining to 20% in 1982, down to 3% in 1992. It was raised to 13% following persistent agitations from the Niger Deltans (Nwogwugwu et al, 2012; Bagaji, op cit).

It is ironic that environmental regulations which are common practice in developed nations are often not followed due to the lack of power, wealth and equity of the affected communities. As a result, oil companies often evacuate inhabitants from their homelands, further marginalizing them.(Ejibunu,op cit.;Abraham,op cit :446).

Violations of the human rights of the local populace can be cited as one of the factors responsible for the militancy in the Niger Delta region. For instance, In January 1993, the crisis over environmental pollution and economic marginalization from the oil industry reached its peak when 300,000 Ogoni protested against Shell Oil. This organized protest was followed by repeated harassment, arrests, and killing of Ogonis by the Federal government troops .(Ejibunu,op cit:16)

The Niger Delta region is riddled with bad governance/corruption on the parts of government officials, both at the state and local government levels. The gross financial misappropriation of money meant for redressing the problems created by the exploration has not helped the matter despite agencies and commissions established for the area (Akinola,2005). It has been argued that if government officials in the region have utilized judiciously their monthly allocations, to better the lots of the ordinary people, through the creation of jobs, and embark on infrastructural development of the region, the situation would have been better than this current sorry state. Rather, the jumbo monthly allocations are spent on frivolous things that have no corresponding bearings on the life of the people.

The Niger Delta communities have remained grossly socio-economically underdeveloped and pauperized amidst the immense oil wealth owing to systematic dis-equilibrium in the production exchange relationship between the state, the Trans-national companies and the people. Enormous money had been derived from oil export but the area has been subjected to severe land degradation, socio-economic disorganisation, increasing poverty, misery, military occupation and bloody violence (Nwogwugwu et al, op cit).

Divide and rule tactics and exclusive benefits for few saboteurs is another factor fuelling the violence in the Niger Delta. The oil companies rather than involve themselves in the development of their areas of

operation prefers to give financial gains to some vocal local chiefs which usually result in crisis. In 1995, for instance, the youths in Ogoni land lynched four chiefs of Ogoni for taking side with Abacha military dictator and disowned their people. This resulted into retaliatory hanging of Saro Wiwa and other eight Ogonis. (Akinola, *op cit*; Nwogwugwu, *op cit*:28).

Alleged insincerity of the Federal Government is another factor that has been attributed to be one of the reasons responsible for the crisis, is the alleged insincerity of the Federal Government of Nigeria to fully develop the region in partnership with the state governments. Commissions like Oil Minerals Producing Area Development Commission (OMPADEC) and the Niger Delta Development Commission (NNDC), created by the regime of General Ibrahim Babangida and Obasanjo respectively, for the development of the area did not achieve its aims due to poor funding on the part of the Federal Government, in spite of the huge dollars made from the area from crude oil. This gradually led to some leaders in the region to begin agitation for resource control. The insincerity of the Federal government made the people want to result to militancy. (Abraham, *op cit*:445)

Unemployment is very high among the people of the Niger delta. The youth from the Niger delta do not benefit from the presence of the transnational corporations especially the oil companies operating in their communities. Less than 5% of the people from the Niger delta work in the companies, while women from the region working with the oil companies are less than 1%. Those who benefit through employment by the oil companies are from the non-oil producing parts of Nigeria (Bagaji, *op cit*; Nwogwugwu, *op cit*).

Effects of militancy in the Niger Delta on sustainable development

Shortfall in production

The Niger Delta conflict has worsened with increased pipeline vandalism, kidnappings and militant takeovers of oil facilities since 2005. The consequential instability has caused a significant amount of short fall in production. The Nigeria's effective oil production capacity was estimated to be around 2.7 million barrels per day (bbl/d) but ranged between 1.8 million to 2.1 million bbl/d as a result of the crisis. (Akinbobola in Ojatorotu, *op cit*; Nwogwugwu, *op cit*:29).

Capital Flight

The militant uprising in the Niger Delta equally encourages capital flight. Capital flight no doubt has a multiplier effect on any economy. It impedes business investment, economic growth and productivity, spurs inflation, etc. This ugly scenario leads to low economic activities and have even swelled up the unemployed army in the country. Put differently, it inhibits the creation of multi-million naira projects that will inject fresh capital to the polity, create jobs and improve the standard of living of the citizenry. (Kimiebi, 2010; Ejibunu, *op cit*:21).

Unemployment

Although the region is well endowed with intelligent human resources, it has the highest illiteracy and unemployment rates in Nigeria. Statistics show that while 76% of Nigerian children attend primary school, this level drops to 30-40% in some parts of the Niger Delta. Unemployment rate in the region is reported to be 30% (Uyigüe and Agho, cited in Odoemene, *op cit*: 129). This is because of the low skills syndrome leading to the un-employability of the region's people. Again, change in means of livelihood from natural sectors to non-natural sectors due to the degraded and devastated environment has equally affected the people adversely (Odoemene, *op cit*).

Poverty

The region that produces this amount of wealth has nothing but poverty to show for this huge contribution to the economy. The cost of goods and services in the Niger Delta are quite high compared to other parts of the country because of the presence of oil business activities thereby birthing a high cost of living in the region. This is at the detriment of the local peoples because the more costly the prices of goods and services, the more the local people are impoverished. An unfortunate aspect of this situation is the fact that Niger Delta indigenes are seldom employed by the oil businesses operating in the area, save for menial/low cadre positions (Odoemene, *op cit*:128).

Insecurity and emigration

Insecurity itself breeds divestment as nobody will be prepared to risk his life-saving in ventures which he is not sure to be alive to reap the fruits of his labor. (Epelle in Ojatorotu, *op cit*.)

With divestment also comes emigration. Most European governments have declared Niger Delta a high-risk area and evacuated its citizens living there. Due to the continuing and festering crisis situation in the Niger Delta, numerous foreign companies are pulling out daily from the region and foreign workers are retreating to their native countries. A notable example is the case of Julius Berger, one of the foremost foreign construction firms in the country, which has abandoned most of its contract jobs due to the persistent cases of kidnapping and abduction of its staffs. (Agbo cited Kimiebi, *op cit*.) Foreign tourists no longer consider the region a veritable

attractive spot in their itinerary. Even the indigenes themselves especially the high net-worth types now live in Abuja and Lagos preferring to visit the area unannounced (ibid.)

Social deprivation

The following could be regarded as the peculiar condition of the Niger Delta child:

a. Impoverished, hungry and unkempt b. Malnourished and neglected c. Mostly out of school as a result of incessant crises and street hawker. d. So depressed as a result of the sense of being hated by other federating units. e. Insecure in the face of invading forces. f. Patriotic but sees no reason to be nationalistic g. Grossly unhappy with his fatherland h. Molested i. Potentials of being recruited into militant groups j. Cannot compete favourably with his counterparts from other zones (Okafor et al in Ojatorotu op cit 120).

Abuse of cultural values and mores

The legendary 'respect for elders' in African societies has also been largely truncated in most Niger Delta communities. As a result, the typical Niger Delta youth sees the elders as corrupt, inept and the epitome of colossal failure: who have nothing to show for the resources from the region while the resources were ferreted to build skyscrapers and overhead bridges in Lagos and Abuja, ...an era where a massive oil spillage with untold environmental consequences could be hushed up with a paltry compensation sum of N5,000 (5,000 naira/U.S. \$25) and a bottle of gin. This is the quintessential era of the elder that is best forgotten... [It] also explains why in every conflict, particularly in the Niger-Delta, the youths are more likely to hold on to a viewpoint that contrasts with those of their elders (Jike in Odoemene, 2011),

Towards peace in the Niger Delta

In view of the strategic importance of the region to the world's supply of crude oil and energy, and coupled with the fact that, the crisis, if not checked, could have serious debilitating effects on Nigeria and the stability of the West African Sub-region, there is the need for its swift resolution. The recommended solutions are categorized into two, viz: Nigerian Government and Oil Companies

Nigerian Government

(i) Upward review of the derivation accruable to oil producing states: the people of the Niger Delta have long been agitating for upward review of derivation paid to oil producing states from the present 13 per cent arguing that there was precedence, pointing out that 50 per cent of revenues from oil and minerals were officially allocated to areas from which those resources were derived during Nigeria's First Republic- 1960-1966.

(ii) Introduction of the Alaska Model through Direct Distribution of Revenue to the people: This approach being suggested is used in Alaska, USA, where one-half of oil royalties is channeled into the Alaska Permanent Fund, and one half of the fund's investment earning is distributed to the state's residents in the form of annual checks (Shakleman cited in Ejibunu, op cit.). This will make the Niger Delta have the feeling of the oil revenue, thereby assisting in no small measure in resolving the Niger Delta crisis, and stem some vices like oil bunkering and pipeline vandalism.

iii) Instituting Internal Mechanisms at the State and Local Government Levels to Curb

Corruption: The Federal Government should step up the war on corruption and make it more effective, especially in the Niger Delta region.

(iv) Implementation of Developmental Programmes: there is the need for government, through the established Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC), to tackle the problem of underdevelopment of the region.

(v) Consolidation of Yaradua amnesty programme: The federal government should take every step necessary to consolidate the gains of amnesty in the Niger Delta and execute the post amnesty programme. There should be equitable distribution of revenue derived from the region, a determined effort towards massive infrastructure development, job creation and confidence building measures (Egwemi, op cit: 140).

Oil Companies

The Multi National Oil Companies must turn a new leaf, and discharge their corporate social responsibilities to oil-bearing/producing communities with honesty and sincerity.

i. This they must begin by ploughing back directly to these communities a reasonable part of oil proceeds in making the environment safe and habitable.

ii. As a long-term measure for solving the problem of militancy and youth restiveness, functional education is sine qua non. Therefore, the MNOCs must build and equip primary and secondary schools in the region to international standards, pay some reasonable allowances to teachers in the region to avert their attraction to their sectors. These will raise quality of education in the region, and youths will become adequately equipped to compete for jobs in the oil sector. The only legacy that will subsist is Human Capital Development.

II. Conclusion

The Niger delta crisis is not only a national problem; it is a global problem that deserves serious attention. The world has long seen Nigeria as a non-stable economy and a sinkhole that could swallow their investment. Crude oil is an important material input in the production of goods and services. Any disturbances in the flow of oil in Nigeria (as the mid-1970s Middle East oil crisis) will impact negatively on the world economy. As we know most of the world's oil supply originates in the oil fields of the Niger Delta (and the Middle East). The political leaders should work harder for peace in the Niger Delta, because peace is germane to growth. In conclusion, unless the discontent that leads to the crisis are resolved, the crisis could hinder sustainable development in Nigeria.

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