

## TRUE FEDERALISM AND NATION BUILDING IN NIGERIA: FACTORS TO ENDING AGITATIONS IN THE NIGER DELTA, 1958 TO 2015

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### Abstract

The paper in examining true federalism and nation building in Niger Delta argues that the Niger Delta region has been very backward due to the unattended responsibility of the Nigerian State. The federal government has vowed not to yield to the pressure of resource control. The government of the state is dependent on the exploitation and expropriation of the resources of the “powerless” minorities of the region in what may be termed as domestic imperialism. The effects of these are environmental degradation, pollution, lack of infrastructure, unemployment, militarization of the region, loss of lives and property among others. The study established that these factors are responsible for the various agitations witnessed in the region over the years. Among the recommendations, the paper proffers that for the country to experience lasting peace, there must be true federalism where the control of the resources be carried out by the indigenes of the region. There should also be total infrastructural and human capital development where all the youths will be gainfully employed for genuine peace to return to the Niger Delta.

### Introduction

The Niger Delta as constituted today is a region that is strategic in Nigeria. The core Niger Delta (Rivers, Bayelsa and Delta States) is that area that falls within the lower Niger where the river splits into the Rivers Nun and Forcados. Politically, the Niger Delta has been recently associated with oil production that puts all the oil producing states into the Niger Delta such as Abia, Akwa Ibom, Cross River, Edo, Imo and Ondo bringing all the oil producing states to a total of nine.

In pre-colonial era, the Niger Delta was the centre of the trans-Atlantic trade, first in slaves and later in palm oil. The most inhabitants of the area according to Saro Wiwa cited in Jaja (2008:178) are “the Ijaws of Western Brass and Degema Division, Ogonis and Elemes of Ogoni Division, Ikwerre and other tribes in Port Harcourt Division, Etches, Ekpeyes, Ogbas, Egbemas, Abuas of Ahoada Division, Obio and Opobians of Opobo Division”. By 1900, the British had signed treaties with Delta Kings and Chiefs indicating that the area was sovereign and independent.

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Independent kingdoms and autonomous communities were conquered by the British and forcefully merged together to mean a Federal State. It follows, therefore, that the structural foundation of Nigerian federalism was faulty and defective and has been imported to recent times. The various independent kingdoms such as the Ijo, Ogoni, Ekpeye, Ikwerre, Ogba, Itsekiri among others were not consulted before the amalgamation of 1914 (Ajayi, 2012:2). Therefore, the British at independence was supposed to hand over power to the people the way they took it but the reverse was the case as the Niger Delta was integrated into the Nigerian federation.

Since the discovery of oil at Oloibiri and the subsequent discoveries of crude oil and gas in various communities of the Niger Delta, the federal government has refused or neglected to initiate policies that would transform the lives of the people. Oil industry activities have led to major oil spills which pollute the land, streams and rivers and have become a threat to the means of livelihood of the Niger Delta people. Thus, there have been continuous agitations by various groups and interests for resource control in order to be able to manage their God given resources and the difficult terrain associated with their environment. Agitations over resource control have led to series of confrontations against the oil companies and the Nigerian state due to many years of neglects, poverty, unemployment, poor infrastructure, pollution and militarisation of the region.

### **Literature Review**

In examining the theme of the study, the work of Ake (1981) *A Political Economy of Africa* portrays that material conditions are the decisive formative influences on social live. It means that material resources could be a factor for war or peace and that material conditions are the decisive formative influences on social life in line with the theories of sociology of conflicts as x-rayed by Marx. Tamuno (2011) *Oil Wars in the Niger Delta 1849-2009* posits that the establishment of consular jurisdiction in the two Bights (the Bights of Benin and Biafra) in 1849, to the granting of amnesty to militants in the Niger Delta by President Umaru Yar'Adua, in 2009, can be justified as the story of a protracted 160 years war in the Niger Delta.

The author posits that some communities such as Bonny, Opobo, Okirika, Nembe, Brass, Itsekiriland, Old Calabar and the kingdom of Benin resisted British intrusion in the internal affairs of the Niger Delta people. He notes that the discovery of crude oil at Oloibiri in 1958 and later abandonment of the community has continued to spoil relations between oil communities, corporations and state thereby fostering crises and conflicts in the Niger Delta.

Corroborating this view, Ofili (2012) "The Niger Delta Conflict: An Unending Dilemma" in Orji (ed.) *Icheke: Journal of Humanities*, 10(1) demonstrates that conflict of all sorts is a daily experience in the Niger Delta from the colonial period. There were conflicts for legitimacy and supremacy by King Jaja of Opobo, Nana of Itsekiri, Isaac Boro, Ken Saro Wiwa and lately the militancy activities by the aggrieved youths of the Niger Delta aimed at a better living condition for their people.

Okowa (1997) *Oil Systematic Corruption Absolute Capitalism and Nigeria Development Policy* affirms that much of the federal government resources are derived from oil revenue. He explained that oil is largely produced by the minority states which accounts for the earnings of the nation. He notes that oil producing areas which provide the revenues for the country are suffering from monumental ecological damages caused by the oil industries while the foreign exchange earnings are used for the development of non-oil producing areas, at the expense of the devastated oil producing Niger Delta region. The agitations by the youths over this type of arrangement has resulted to the blowing up of oil pipelines, destruction of flow stations, kidnapping of oil workers as well as insecurity of the region.

Okpaga (2009) "Peace Building in Conflict and Post Conflict Situation: The Nigeria and African Experience" in *African Journal of Indigenous Development* enumerated the causes of conflicts in the society which include

economic resources, power, leadership, environmental pollution, depletions, degradation, religious beliefs, ideological, racial prejudice and human nature. In peace building, the author appreciates the role of the civil society in encouraging, promoting, educating and supporting peace initiative, arbitration, mediation and transformation.

Alade (2012) “Youth Militancy as a Bargaining Tool for Challenging Structural Violence in the Niger Delta Region” in Albert, Eselebor, Danjibo (eds.) *Peace, Security and Development in Nigeria* posits that the Niger Delta has become an agitated, restive and conflict ridden region as a result of the failure of the Nigerian state and the oil companies to provide adequate social amenities for the people. The violent confrontation by the youths was fuelled by the frustration of many years of neglects, poverty and unemployment. The author affirms that the environmental degradation of the Niger Delta has greatly disempowered those who rely on land and water resources for their livelihood as well as lack of basic infrastructures like motorable roads, hospitals, schools and portable water. Frustrated, the youths of the Niger Delta took up arms against petro-business and its political allies.

Considering the plight of women in problems arising from armed conflict, Babatunde (2012) “Oil Exploration, Armed Conflict and their Implication for Women’s Socio-Economic Development in Nigeria’s Niger Delta” in Albert, Eselebor and Danjibo (eds.) *Peace, Security and Development in Nigeria* emphasizes the vulnerability of women and children as victims of violent conflicts in the world especially in the Niger Delta. The environmental degradation of the oil-bearing communities and the resultant armed conflict greatly eroded women economic livelihood such as farming and fishing. The lifeline of most of the women became impracticable and unprofitable as a result of incessant oil spillage which pollutes land, streams and rivers. This affected the women’s capacity to sustain themselves and perform their traditional role as care givers to their families.

The disaffection by the people with regard to poor infrastructure fostered violent conflict. The consequences of this conflict on women include sexual violence such as rape, physical violence such as beatings, maiming, murder, loss of lives and destructions of property.

Jaja (2008) “Underdevelopment and conflict in the Niger Delta: The Tragedy of Oil Exploration” in Derefaka and Okorobia (eds.) *The Future of the Niger Delta: The Search for a Relevant Narrative* espouses that oil exploration activities have wrecked havoc on the people of the Niger Delta since 1958. Environmental degradation has deprived them of their economic lifeline. The author admits that the problem is the total disregard of government and the multinationals in the development of the area. This attitude has made the Niger Delta people to realise that oil exploitation has become a curse rather than becoming a source of development. The only course open to the people is to struggle for emancipation and self-determination which gave rise to MOSOP and the Ogoni disturbances, the Kaima declaration, the Ijo uprising and the various militant groups in the Niger Delta.

Atemie and Akikibofori (2008) “Moral Decadence and Youth Restiveness in the Nigeria Delta Region of Nigeria: A Theoretical Analysis of Antisocial Behaviour” in Derefaka and Okorobia (eds.) *The Future of the Niger Delta: The Search for Relevant Narrative* explains that youth restiveness in the Niger Delta arose as a result of the oil exploration and exploitation activities by the multinational companies. He posits that the Niger Delta people are living in poverty while billion dollars worth of oil are being carted away from beneath their mud houses. This act has led to various crises in the region against the multinational and the state including the issue of hostage taking. The authors argue that the mode of production by the multinational companies divorced the families from their productive activities.

### **Conceptual Framework**

The definition of the key words will enable us to understand the study in the light of contemporary perception. Ajayi (2012:3) defines a “federation as a sovereign state formed by the union of several states that have given up their powers to the central government, while retaining for themselves control over local matters”. Scholars generally agree that a federation is an association of states which has been formed for certain common purposes and in which the member states retain a large measure of their original independence.

Osutokun (1979) cited in Ejituwu and Enemugwen (2008:75) sees federalism as “a system of government which allows people of different ethnic origins or cultural diversity who congregate in one geographical area, to be governed by a common authority”. Some of the countries that practiced it include Canada, Australia, India and the United States of America.

Another term trajectory to our discourse is nation building. Nation building connotes the idea of people of different culture and language living together and administered under one political entity. Nwabughuogu (2004:1) defines nation building as “a process of developing national consciousness among individuals and groups to cultivate a sense of love for a given nation and to accept their commitment to a nation state. He luminously adds that nation building involves the creation of a favourable environment that will sustain the sense of love developed by the individuals and groups for the nation state. Therefore, nation state should evolve good elements of organization that will make the citizens develop love for their country such as good roads, water supply, electricity, education, health and employment opportunities.

He was apt to say that nation building would not normally be a problem if the peoples of the world live in nations in the original sense. Thus, it will amount to constituting a body of people with the same language, culture, common historical experience and inhabiting a geographically contiguous territory. In Africa, most countries including Nigeria were not nations but rather nation states brought together by accident of colonialism.

As a corollary, Oguagha (1994:1) sees nation building as “a process of nationhood where cultural differentiation hinged on distinctive language, religion, habits and memories are fused together by colonialism which arose from the nature of the partitioning of Africa at the Berlin conference of 1884-1885”. This meant that colonial state did not evolve out of their historical experience with regards to the language, customs and culture of the people. There is bound to be problems of national integration and nation building for the people with different cultures and customs as well as different languages and even different kingdoms that suddenly saw themselves as members of the same political administration.

### **Nigerian Federalism**

At present, Nigeria is practicing a federal system of government where people of different ethnic origin, language and culture are governed as one. This was made possible by 1914 when the north and south were amalgamated into a political entity called Nigeria. The name "Nigeria" was derived from "Niger Area" which Flora Shaw (the Wife of Lugard) used in her London Times Publication of 8th January to call on the British Government to colonise the territory (Ejituwu, 1986) cited in (Ejituwu & Enemugwen, 2008:76).

From the 1st October, 1960 when Nigeria gained independence under a constitution which established federalism, each region had its own constitution attached as a schedule to the federal constitution. The 1960 and 1963 constitutions made the federal government superior to the regions as issues connected with mines, minerals, including oil fields, oil mining, geological surveys and gas were domiciled in the Exclusive Legislative List.

Subsequent constitutions have done nothing to alter this imbalance. The constitutional independence of the federating units is dependent on the federal governments. Ajayi (2012:4) posits that between 1954 and 1956, Nigerian Federalism put in place what was lost by placing mines, minerals, oil fields and oil mining in the Exclusive Legislative List through the strict adherence to the principle of derivation in the revenue formula. The structural imbalance inherent in the Nigerian federation favoured the Northern region which is much bigger than the rest of the country and has been a major trigger of conflict. The North has the majority in the Local Government with a total number of 419 councils out of the 774 councils in Nigeria.

This implies that the bulk of the 20 percent of the direct funding from Abuja that goes to Local Governments ends up in the North. At the end of Buhari tenure during the military regimes, 49 percent of Federal revenue went to the North, 10.9 percent to the East, Oil producing states got 18.8 percent, Lagos and South-West got 18.9 percent while FCT got 2.4 percent (Ajayi, 2012:12). This formula of sharing allocation only ends up generating strife and crises in the federation. It simply means that the Niger Delta region whose crude oil generates about 95 percent of the total federation earnings gets very poor allocation compared to the amount that went to the North.

Again, during Babangida's 8 year rule, 52 percent of all federal revenue accrued from oil derived in the Niger Delta went to Northern Region who contributes lesser to federal purse but has larger inhabitants, expanse of land and monopoly of federal power. Even under the civil rule, the workings of federalism are not different from what was obtainable at other periods. Up till date, the inequitable revenue sharing formula introduced by the military continued to be the standard for revenue allocation in the federation. This has in turn created severe militant confrontations and agitations for a new revenue sharing formula, resource control as well as the issues of succession and ethnic minority crisis. The continuous crises thus indicates that the structural foundation of Nigerian is faulty and defective unlike that of the U.S. and Germany.

The Nigerian state does not deal with the development of the Niger Delta region with the most needed attention. The federal government is still controlling the oil and gas resources of the Niger Delta. But if the people are allowed to control their God given resources, they would have developed the area by providing the needed infrastructure. Orji (2006) cited in Ejituwu and Enemugwem (2008:80) notes that the quest for resources control has plagued the Niger Delta with violent confrontations and conflicts, indeed, the Land Decree which appropriated all lands to the Federal Government including the oil and gas was not for the interest of the Niger Delta and what the region gets is so meagre to fully carry out major construction on the difficult terrain of the Niger Delta. The alienation of the oil and gas resources of the area by the Nigerian state amounts to the castration of the region and as long as it continues any so called development by the State will be seen as castrated development. The Niger Delta wears the shoes and so should be able to know where the pains lies as to deal with the situation effectively.

By independence, the ongoing British administration produced reports on revenue allocation which were built into the Nigerian constitution. It was recommended that 50 percent derivation should be given to the region of origin, 20 percent to the central government and 30 percent to the federation account (Akobo, 2008:54). But in the exploitation of the Niger Delta oil and gas the reverse was the case, the Federal Government took 60 percent of the profit with 40 percent domiciled with the oil companies as their own share. Worse still is that the operations of these companies is being controlled from Abuja or Lagos and they would prefer to import their workers from the homes of the three ethnic majors, Hausa/Fulani, Yoruba and Igbo even to the junior staff.

This is therefore a "cat and mouse" federalism in which the cat dictates the rule of life making it impossible for the mouse to survive and develop. It is also a case of internal colonization and domestic imperialism that our



resources are expropriated and exploited for the benefit of all without adequate attention to the region (Okowa, 2008).

### **Resource Control and Revenue Allocation**

In the colonial era, there was the principle of devolution in 1947, which allocated revenues to the regions according to their level of production. The northern region got 46 percent, western region 30 percent and eastern region got 24 percent. At that time, there was no revenue from crude oil but the revenue sharing formula displayed even distribution and equity (Orji, 2019:77).

Following the oil boom, Nigeria became a mono-economy depending on crude oil and gas for its income. This alone has remained a major contribution and has also made the Niger Delta region crucial to Nigeria's survival. But the people feel marginalized as oil exploration is causing environmental damages which have destroyed their means of livelihood without adequate compensation. Their water is being polluted with the fishes all dead while their farmland is being devastated. This has brought untold hardship, poverty and sufferings to the people. The federal government through petroleum and Land Use Act has denied the Niger Delta adequate control of revenue accruing from their land.

The centralization of oil revenues has given rise to derivation as a revenue allocation model which over the years led to unjust and inequitable sharing method to the advantage of the northern Region. The revenue allocation formula came into effect in July, 2002 and was further adjusted in 2004, it provides that the Federal Government gets 52.68 percent of federation account, the states governments 26.72 percent and local government 20.60 percent. The constitution only allocated 13 percent derivation formula to the states concerned. This allocation arrangement obviously lacks justice, equity and fairness as well as the hallmarks of a true fiscal federation (Ajayi, 2012:21). These acts of deprivation have led to continuing crises in the Niger Delta. The region is now being associated with militancy, violent crises, agitations and militarization over the control of the revenue coming from the region.

However, the struggle for resource control by the Niger Delta people has not yielded any result so far. But it is clear that for any serious development to occur in the area, the people must be allowed to control their resources so that the communities who suffer from the direct negative environmental impact of the activities of the multinationals be in control of such companies. It follows that since the Nigerian state has not alienated the other regions from their vast land and agricultural resources then it becomes disheartening that they should deprive the people of Niger Delta from their God given oil and gas resources (Okowa, 2008:48).

The funds derived from the exploration and exploitation of the oil and gas resources have brought much fortune to Nigeria while the Niger Delta region has indeed faced underdevelopment with the indigenes pauperised and have suffered, oil spillage, pollution and other consequences of oil explorations which are daily occurrence.

The Nigerian state has employed force by militarising the area and to press down on the people for the government and multinationals to smile to the bank. Darah (2002) cited in Jaja (2008:184) has this to say; "The government of Nigeria will not bother about what happens to the people for as long as the flow of revenue from oil exploitation is not disturbed. Profit is the supreme God of the company and they do anything including the use of force to ensure they get it". The Umuechem incident in Rivers State in 1989, the Odi incident in Bayelsa State in 2005 are all indications of the methods employed by the Federal Government to use force to ensure that they adequately exploit the oil and gas resources of the Niger Delta.

The Federal System Operative in Nigeria is Faulty no doubt and in need of urgent restructuring as suggested by the Former Vice President, Atiku Abubakar. Ibeanu (2000:19) cited in Alade (2012:248) posits that ecological devastation and neglect arising from crude oil pollution have left the Delta region dissolute, uninhabitable and

poor. Frustrated, therefore, the youths of the Niger Delta took up arms against petro-business and the Nigerian State. He argued that unemployment, the minority question and a badly structured federalism is the bane to Niger Delta's development and if the government does not rise up to expectation, violence will continue indefinitely. Militarisation of the region has been a major reason for high incidences of criminality and agitations in the region. Thus, for a successful nation building and integration, the Federal government should be restructured and the regions should be allowed to control their resources.

### **The Niger Delta Oil Conflict**

Niger Delta is a deltaic environment but sustains Nigeria economically and yet the area has backwardly been undeveloped. Due to the neglect and marginalisation by the government, Isaac Adaka Boro, Sam Owonaro and Nottingham Dick led a group of armed Ijaw youths under the banner of the Niger Delta Volunteer Service (NDVS) and declared the Niger Delta Peoples' Republic.

In calling for commitment and loyalty of his men, Boro has this to say; "Today is a great day, not only in your lives but also in the history of the Niger Delta. Perhaps, it will be the greatest day for a very long time. This is not because we are going to bring the heavens down, but because we are going to demonstrate to the world what and how we feel about oppression... Remember, your 70 years old grandmother who still farms to eat, Remember also your poverty stricken people and then remember too your petroleum which is being pumped out daily from your veins, and then fight for your freedom" (Iroju, 2012:77). The main aim of Boro was to liberate Niger Delta people from the yoke of the federal government. Their twelve day revolution failed due to the federal might through the military and was later sentenced to death.

But the then Head of State, General Yakubu Gowon released them on state pardon. The incidences of oil conflicts were witnessed in several places including the Odi and the Ogoni. The razing of Odi showed the brutality and highhandedness that has become a feature of governance in Nigeria. The Massacre in Odi and the destruction of the town sent a message by the government that it would not tolerate any disruption of oil production in the Niger Delta.

The Ogoni Case was not different. Up till 1990 when Saro-Wiwa started leading his people to fight for resource control through the platform of the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP) he confronted the Federal Government against oppression. Saro-Wiwa used the MOSOP platform to represent the entire Niger Delta region over resource control or else secession will remain the only answer. The threat from MOSOP destabilized the Nigerian state from siphoning the oil in Ogoni. The resultant effect was the militarization of the area. He was later executed by hanging with eight others by the Abacha regime.

In less than one decade after the death of Saro-Wiwa, the mantle of leadership for the struggle of resource control fell on Mujaheed Asari Dokubo. Like Isaac Adaka Boro, Asari in 2004 declared war against the Federal Government and all oil and gas exploring and exploiting companies to immediately quit from the Niger Delta or become victims of his agitation. The government underrated the strength of Asari and even with the combined force of army, air force, navy and mobile policemen and for a period of about three months could not capture and bring Asari dead or alive as directed by President Olusegun Obasanjo. Asari ravaged the area with his guerrilla tactics of hit and run and later won the support of the Niger Delta people and thus became more courageous as he gave all multinational oil companies in the area an ultimatum to vacate the Niger Delta on or before October 1, 2004 or face dire consequences. This threat created a negative impact on oil market as Shell and other oil companies in the area did not take Asari's ultimatum lightly (Daminabo, 2008). The various agitations witnessed in the Niger Delta has been over resource control. However, true federalism, nation

building and integration will definitely be achieved if the Nigerian federation will yield to restructuring, which will give the regions the right to control their God given resources.

### **Conclusion**

This is a study of true federalism and nation building and its application to the Niger Delta as means of ending violent agitations in Nigeria's federation. The Niger Delta who owns the oil unlike other federalism in the world such as Canada, Australia, India and USA should be made to control their resources. The ethnic majors through the instrumentality of the Nigerian State employed measures used in controlling their own meagre resources and other people God given resources. This will always generate agitations that can lead to full blown crises and the only way of avoiding these crises is by restructuring where each region will control their resources and not through allocation and derivation. If the present arrangement on federalism continues, then genuine peace will become a chimera in the Niger Delta. Endemic violence will continue and probably increase, fuelled by the crises of poverty, unemployment, frustration, anger among others.

### **Recommendations**

The study after careful examination of the subject matter recommends that;

- The Federal Government should embark in restructuring. This will guarantee true federalism as the various regions will control their resources.
- There should be creation of more states and Local Government Areas in the South so that no region becomes more powerful than others.
- The Federal Government should ensure that about 80 percent of skilled and unskilled labour within the region be given gainful employment.

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