THE DYNAMICS OF RESOURCE CONFLICT: LESSONS FROM NIGERIA AND MALAYSIA

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ABSTRACT

Since the emergence of environmental resource conflict on the international political discourse in the early 1980s, there has been growing concern that, resource conflicts in developing countries is likely to exacerbate conflicts originating in strenuous struggles over scarce resources due to population increase. The apparent manifestation of conflicts in the oil rich Niger Delta region in Southern Nigeria and Farmer-herder conflicts in Northern Nigeria to the lingering forest logging controversy in Malaysia is an upsurge of the coming resource "crisis" in these countries. The focus of this paper is to discuss issues on management of resource conflicts in developing countries like Nigeria and Malaysia. The paper suggests that, there is the need for commitment from the states and all stakeholders through institutionalization of proactive conflict resolution and peace building strategies, instead of resolution through the grave yards. Discussions are based on secondary data with examples from recent experiences from farmer-herder conflict, and Niger Delta crisis in Nigeria, and forest logging in Malaysia.

Keywords: Resources, Scarcity, Conflict, Conflict Management.

INTRODUCTION

Both Nigeria and Malaysia are products of colonialism, contrived and constructed by the British in 1960 and the later 1957. Since independence, the Nigerian state has experienced periods of political and economic turbulence which threatens the existence of the state as one indivisible entity in the last three decades. The re-emergence of democratic rule in 1999 heralded a renewed conflicts and convulsions, ranging from ethnic crises, religious intolerance, political instability, proliferation of renewable and non-renewable resource conflicts and the challenges of good governance and development. Indeed nation building continued to suffer from strong divisive forces of ethnicity, religion and natural resources conflict, which presupposes the weakening of national cohesion and integration (Maiangwa and Ahmadu, 2007).

Nigeria has earned reputation in renewable and non-renewable resource conflicts, ranging from the protraction of hostilities in the oil rich Niger Delta Region in Southern part, to frequent violent clashes between farmers and herders over renewable resources such as land, forest and fodder in Northern part of the country. Though, social conflict between these communities in Sub-Saharan Africa has existed since the beginning of agriculture (Fratkin, 1997; Shettima and Tar, 2008). However, the existence of these social conflicts is not in question. But the transformation of the

conflicts into violence against the backdrop of resource scarcity, increase in the population of resource users, unequal resource distribution and the consequent failure of neo-patrimonial states, the region has been susceptible to antecedents of Robert Kaplan's "the coming anarchy".

Comparatively, Malaysia has achieved relative peace and economic development through tolerance and robust painstaking development plans in the last two decades, after the darkest days of violent conflict between the Malays and Chinese in 1969 which claimed many lives and properties. Coutts, (2007) summarized that, 'From the time of British colonial rule, the Malaysian economy has involved the expansion of commodity and production. The country has had notable economic growth since 1956. This expansion led to the exploitation and development of natural resources and variation of cash crops. The exportation of the products from the agriculture and forestry business became a major part of Malaysia's economy ....' At the wake of 21st century the Malaysian rich rain forest resources are been continually threaten by destruction of natural fauna and flora through logging, with looming controversy between the state, logging companies and the host communities. This has obscured vehement protest by some communities especially from the native host communities in Sabah and Sarawak.

The growing literatures on environmental resource conflicts engaged its readers with threatening prophecies in anticipation of upsurge of resource conflicts in developing countries including Nigeria and Malaysia due to rapid population increase and lack of technical ability to combat the menace of environmental decadence. Thomas Homer-Dixon has earlier predicted in 1991, that developing countries are most likely be severely affected by environmental conflicts than rich or developed countries. By definition, they [developing countries] do not have the financial, material or intellectual resources of the developed world. Furthermore, their social and political institutions tend to be fragile and raven with discord. World Resource Institute [WRI] has intermittently predicted in 1986; 1992 and 1998 that by the year 2050 the world's population may exceed 9 billion and economic industrial output will quadruple (Maxwell and Reuveny, 2000). They argued that this

will trigger unprecedented pressures on renewable resources and environmental decay will become more severe in the future. United State Census Bureau also prophesized that, by the year 2042 the global population will rise by another 3 billion people, with much of the growth occurring in developing nations where the resources to support such growth are scarce (Gale, 2008). Natural resources scarcities are most severe in developing countries that lack well-defined or enforceable property rights, cannot allocate much wealth to Research and Development [R&D], and rely heavily on the ecosystem. In these societies resource scarcity may prompt civil unrest and conflict (Maxwell and Reuveny, 2000).

However, we conquer with the assertion that population increase and lack of technological capability to combat resource scarcity in developing countries poses threat to peace and security. We also argued that limitations to population and technology are inadequate in analyzing the rationale for resource conflict in the developing world. Because resource scarcity and environmental decadence is not always natural, actions like bush burning, overgrazing and over cultivation of land among others, are man-made factors. The paper concludes that the existence of neo-patrimonialism in developing states, interact in tandem with growing population, weak technological base and other socio-economic and political factors cumulatively combined to exacerbate resource scarcity and conflicts therein. The fact that neo-patrimonial states exist in most developing world, grave yards may probably be the ultimate conflict management system rather than mitigating the effects of climate change and other environmental threats through proactive strategies such as good governance, mass education, effective information and communication etc.

Our discussion for this paper covers the introduction; contextual framework; resources scarcity and conflict in developing countries; farmer-pastoralist conflicts in Northern Nigeria; oil crisis in the Nigerian Niger Delta; forest logging in Malaysia; alternative proposal for resource conflict resolution and peace building strategies; conclusion.

CONTEXTUALIZING RESOURCE CONFLICT

Social conflict theorists found it difficult to identify one major factor as being responsible for order or the emergence and escalation of conflict, whether violent or otherwise in the society. Conflict in most parts of the world, including resource conflicts are perceived as something abnormal, dysfunctional and therefore, detestable. Yet, conflict is a fact of live and sometimes can be a precursor of positive change (Otite, et al 2004:1). Moore, (2005:6) summarized that: 'conflicts, per se, are not bad; rather, they are viewed as necessary if society are to evolve and developed'.

The development of neo-Malthusian theorists in the late 1960s and early 1970s, uphold that, rapid population growth will lead to per capita scarcity of natural resources such as cropland, freshwater, forests, and fisheries, increases the risk of violent conflict over scarce resources. In the words of Tietenberg, (1996) 'when society's demand for resources suddenly exceeds their availability, rather than anticipating a smooth transition to a steady state—system will overshoot the resource base precipitating a collapse.' Kahl, (2002) has further moderated the neo-Malthusian theory. 'He argued that conflict might also arise under condition of "state exploitation" when powerful elites exploit using scarcities and corresponding grievances in order to consolidate power'.

The growing political science literatures predominantly referred to African states as neo-patrimonial (see Chabal and Daloz, 1999; van de Walle, 2001; Moritz, 2005). According to Moritz, (2005) in a neo-patrimonial state the state is an empty façade as the real business of politics is done informally through clientelistic networks … The African state is labelled neo-patrimonial because patrimonial practices coexist with the modern bureaucracy of Weber's legal-rational state.

In developing countries such as Nigeria and Malaysia, neo-patrimonialism concentrated the benefits of resource extraction to small group of elites who controls the state apparatus. Such regimes devolve much power and discretion over a large share of state's resources focused on the leader. The power to allocate land and its resources in Nigeria for instance, are concentrated in the hands of the Governors and Local Government Councils through bureaucratic laws and policies of the state.

RESOURCE SCARCITY AND CONFLICTS IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

The global world is experiencing increasing depletion of the atmospheric ozone layer, gradual warming of the earth temperature, increasing destruction of the tropical rain forest, major oil spills, contaminated beaches, polluted harbours and acid rain impacted forest and lakes, the depletion of fossil fuel reserves, the lost of arable land and green belts to urban and industrial expansion and waste disposal sites (Weisskopf, 1996).

There is no general consensus among environmental conflict researchers on the links between resource scarcity and conflict. But several researches on some specific case studies concluded that, strenuous struggles and competition over access to and control over natural resources arising from its decrease in quality and quantity; population migration; weak political institutions among others are responsible for resource tension and conflicts (Galtung, 1982; Brundtland et al, 1987; Opschoor, 1989; Brock, 1991; Gleick, 1993; Homer-Dixon, 1991, 1993, 1995; Shetima and Tar, 2008). According to Renner et al (1991) 'throughout human history but particularly since the system of sovereign nation states, struggles over access to and control over natural resources have been a root cause of tension and conflicts'.

When there is decrease in the quality and quantity of natural resources, causes tension over claims to shrinking natural resources largely attributed to declining economic activities. For instance, the riparian states that share the Lake Chad, (Chad, Niger, Cameroun and Nigeria) in West and Central Africa are still grappling with farmer-pastoralist conflict over claims and ownership of land and forest resources arising from increase in the number of users, receding lake water, and desertification that heated the region since 1980s. The conflict in Philippines is attributed to deforestation, land degradation and high population growth and population displacement (Hawes, 1990; Maxwell and Reufeny, 2000). Bangladesh is experiencing same since 1970s, (Homer-Dixon, 1991). In the Senegal valleys, conflict over natural resources degenerated into boarder conflicts between Senegal and Mauritania in 1999, (Homer-Dixon, 1999:76-7; Schmitz, 1999:32-35). In

South-west Burkina Faso, conflict between *Fulani* pastoralist and *Dagora, Birifor and Lobi* farmers has been a recurring decimal (Tonah, 2002:5). In Sudan, there is still conflict over natural resources in Northern and Southern *Kordofan*. Ethiopia is also grappling with farmer-herder conflict in *Quowet Wareda* of *Amhara* region resulting from increase pressure on land (Daniel, 2003:2). More worrisome is the killings, kidnappings and destructions perpetrated by the militant Niger Delta youths over oil resource control in the region.

Population migration is another outlet, as group seeks replenishment to replace resources that have been depleted, immigrants and indigenes fight. For example, natural scarcity cause migration from El Salvador to Honduras and eventually led to soccer-war in 1969 (Durham, 1979 in Maxwell and Reufeny, 2000). Feeble political institutions combined with resources scarcity erode the people's confidence in their government and generate more conflicts as the case in Somalia, Sudan among others. This does not mean that the developed societies are not susceptible to resource conflicts. Available literatures reported among others, conflict over fishery between Canada and Spain (Maxwell and Reufeny, 2000); Border conflicts between China and its various neighbours (Gleditsch, 1998).

THE CASE OF FARMER-PASTORALIST CONFLICT IN NORTHERN NIGERIA

Since Nigeria returned to democratic rule in May 1999, violence between farmers and herders are unrelenting. The last three decades witnessed migration of *Fulani* pastoralists from other ecological zones in West and Central Africa to Northern part of Nigeria especially around the shores of Lake Chad basin, precipitated by "push and pull factors". Their transhumance movements in search for vital pasture to mitigate the effects of desertification and other climatic conditions that heated their original ecological zone brought them in close contact with farming communities in the Lake Chad basin. This led to several conflicts between native farmers and newly arrived pastoralists over crop damage by cattle and, also access to land its resources.

Recently, the print media in Nigeria have engaged its readers with screaming captions on exploding conflicts between these two production communities. Some of these headlines includes 'Nigeria: Fulani-banish by desert, rejected by their countrymen' (DailyTrust, May 25, 2009); 'Nigeria: Farmer-herder clashes increase as pasture shrinks' (IRIN, June 8, 2009). 'Nigeria: Two killed in Farmer/Herdsmen clash' (DailyTrust, December 20, 2009); 'Borno Herdsmen, Farmers unending feud' (DailyTrust, January 18, 2009).

The two pastoral corridors of North-east and North-western Nigeria has earned prominence in conflict between Farmers and Herders (Shettima and Tar, 2008). This is not just simply the outcome of competition over the dwindling renewable resources due to population growth as perceived in many cases. But it is also a reminiscent competition between different socio-cultural groups as is the case in West Africa where farmers and pastoralists generally belongs to different ethnic groups. As such, farmer-pastoralists conflicts are mostly envisaged as ethnic and are easily articulated into ethnic or indigene-settler conflict. The current mind-boggling violence in *Jos* between *Fulani* nomadic pastoralists and ethnic *Birom* farmers has been transformed into ethnic conflict with attack and reprisal attacks on both ethnicities which claimed several lives and properties.

THE OIL RICH NIGER DELTA CRISIS

Nigeria's oil resource which was discovered in 1956, are mainly found in the Niger Delta Region of the country (Bayelsa, Rivers, Edo, Delta, Cross-River and Akwa Ibom states). Nigeria is one of the leading oil-producing/exporting in Africa and the eighth in the world (Ebeku, 2008). Eventually, Nigeria's crude oil political economy which begun with export earnings of 1 per cent in 1958 gradually increased to 98 per cent and currently constitute more than 90 per cent of the government's total revenue earnings (Akande, 2008). Paradoxically, while the state and oil companies have continued to profit enormously from oil production, the rural population from where oil is produced has benefited the least from its wealth (Oluwaniyi, 2010).

Several years of oil exploration and exploitation in the region led to environmental depletion and pollution, of swamp forests and rivers, depletion of agricultural land resources, death and extinction of aquamarine resources, gas flares, and acid rain. This has been impacting negatively on the health and physical lives of the region's inhabitants. Communities became dislocated and dislodged culminating in the impoverishment of the populace and insecurity of the environment from which they gain their livelihoods (Adetula, 1996; Obi, 1997; HRW, 1999; Olojede, et al., 2000; Okonta and Douglas, 2001; Hazen and Horner, 2007; Oluwaniyi, 2010. Similarly, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) report concludes that 'the Niger Delta is a region suffering from administrative neglect, crumbling social infrastructure and services, high unemployment, social deprivation, abject poverty, filth and squalor' (UNDP, 2006).

Prolong militarization of the region under military dictatorship led to orchestrated anger and frustration, with violent dimension since 1990s. This culminated into radical youth militia groups becoming exogenous forces in the region, launching frequent violent attacks on oil installations and kidnapping of oil workers demanding for ransom, in order to subvert and mar oil exploration and exploitation at all cost. Some scholars like Watts concludes that, the peculiar nature of Nigeria's political economy as an oil dependent neo-patrimonial state, oil resources and oil rents are central in shaping national political discourses and the broad rhythms of accumulation and social conflicts, including security threats in the oil-producing region (Watts, 1999 in Omeje, 2006).

Despite the fact that oil has been central to Nigeria's political economy over three decades, the Nigerian state failed to articulate a constructive policy framework for the management of oil resources and the revenues accrued therein.

FOREST LOGGING CONTROVERSY IN MALAYSIA

The evolution of modern state with its bureaucratic arrangements has drastically altered the traditional forest management developed based on the sanctity of traditional values of most communities in developing countries such as Malaysia and Nigeria. Malaysia alongside Indonesia is

one of the leading tropical timber producers (Vincent and Gillis, 1998 cited in Coutts, 2007). Since 1990s, the Malaysian rain forest has been facing unrelenting human activities such as uncontrolled/illegal logging, land clearing for agriculture and other development programs which continued to threaten plants and animals. However, politicization of logging issue and the increasing negative human impacts on Malaysia's rain forest may exacerbate what Aiken and Leigh describe earlier in 1992 as "biodiversity crisis" in their book titled Vanishing Rain Forest: The Ecological Transition in Malaysia.

Apart from biodiversity, Ross, (2001) cited in Vincent, (2002) further analyzed that, 'politicians out of their desperation for power and personal aggrandizement tactically dismantled institutions that formerly protected forest in South East Asia. In the case of Philippines and Malaysia, rising international log prices induced politicians to erase the thin green line of foresters who stood between them and their countries. Politicians in those regions rewrote laws and regulation and reorganised government agencies to commandeer exclusive and discretionary powers over allocation of logging rights.'

This culminated into controversy between Government/logging companies on hand, and the rural populace in communities like Sabah and Sarawak. Government enjoys substantial revenues from logging unmindful of its long-term consequences on the environment and conflicts arising therein. While logging companies are licensed by Government they want to be enjoying unhindered logging exercise despite its environmental impacts. In 2009 the native people of Sabah and Sarawak vowed and peacefully protested in their own traditional ways widely publicized in the print and non-print media. They contend that excessive logging destroy their soil, invites deforestation and above all the use of heavy-duty machines by logging companies affect other economic trees that are critical to their livelihood.

PROACTIVE CONFLICT MANAGEMENT AS AN ALTERNATIVE STRATEGY

In most developing countries approach to conflict management end up in widely publicize forum to witness inauguration of committees (administrative or judicial) that compiled compendium of reports meant to advertise their commitment. These reports are mostly a mere dissipation of time, energy and resources because they are less attended to in government archives.

In order to effectively manage resource conflicts in developing countries such as Malaysia and Nigeria, the study argued and proposed that, the reactive instruments and approach institutionalized by the state though potentially relevant in aftermath of conflict situation, but is ineffectively in tackling conflict at its premature stage. Therefore, there is the need to adopt proactive approach such as education and youth empowerment, grassroots community-based activities, good governance, communication and enlightenment, collaboration and negotiation, among others, as pre-conflict management systems. Our argument in favour of proactive conflict management system as a panacea for resource conflict in developing countries was based on two factors. First, conflict prevention is cheaper than managing conflict after damage might have been done. Second, conflict prevention emphasize on behavioural change rather than apportioning blame or ascertaining who is right or wrong.

CONCLUSION

Malaysia compared to Nigeria has institutionalized better mechanisms for resource management particularly in the oil sector. Resources are equitably distributed and channelled towards infrastructural development, poverty reduction, job creation, entrepreneurship, agriculture etc. The inability of the Nigerian state to equitably distribute its oil wealth has been responsible for the economic and political instabilities.

Developing countries must urgently respond to renewable and non-renewable conflicts by exploring multi-faceted strategies to conflict resolution. This may require not only the usual reactive response

to conflict but also proactive programs that will create vertical and horizontal windows for dialogue between and within stakeholders, in order to promote peace-building mechanisms. The potential role of traditional conflict management systems need to be integrated into the modern system. Good governance, education, awareness, collaboration, communication, negotiation, community-based activities among others is necessary for conflict prevention.

It is therefore a challenge for developing countries like Nigeria and Malaysia to prove otherwise, the widely exaggerated claims of some environmental conflict theorists that developing countries may not adequately respond to exigencies of environmental degradation because they lacked the technical capacity to do that. As such, conflict over resources will exacerbate. This paper concludes that, the impacts of environmental degradation, land depletion and other climatic factors has really ravaged the African soil, but the conflicts over these resources can be surmounted through proactive conflict management and peace building programs.

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