

African Research Review

An International Multidisciplinary Journal, Ethiopia

Vol. 6 (1), Serial No. 24, January, 2012

ISSN 1994-9057 (Print)

ISSN 2070--0083 (Online)

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.4314/afrrrev.v6i1.16>

National Security and Sustainable Development in Nigeria: Challenges from the Niger Delta

(Pp. 198-211)

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Abstract

The symbiotic relationship between national security and sustainable development cannot be undermined. The Niger Delta Region occupies a strategic position in the political economy of the Nigerian nation in view of its oil-bearing status and dividends accruing from the explorations of multinational corporations to the detriment of host communities. The exploitation of crude oil and gas poses debilitating environmental consequences compounded by the wanton neglect of past administrations vis-à-vis sustainable development. An x-ray of palliative measures in the past leaves much to be desired. Statistical data on the toll of insecurity in our study area has reached an alarming proportion. The concept of violence and militancy both as an instrument of disempowerment on the one hand and as a tool of emancipation on the other, will be examined. The way out of this quagmire is the main focus of this paper.

Introduction

The security situation in Nigeria with specific reference to the Niger Delta calls for urgent attention. In recent times and even currently, the Niger Delta polity has been turned to a hostage economy with adverse implications for

our nascent democracy. The era of official ineptitude is past and the Federal Government has risen to the challenge by setting up a technical Committee and creating a Ministry of the Niger Delta Region. Both this attempt and the erstwhile efforts of Government have come under the crucibles of scrutiny in this paper.

Also to be examined are the historical antecedents responsible for the underdeveloped state of the region. The adoption of sustainable development model is against the backdrop that it provides a holistic approach in tackling the teething problems of our study area.

The national security question

Issues bordering on national security are very critical for the material progress of any polity. This assertion is against the backdrop of the truism that sustainable development is a function of an enabling environment. Many variables would be examined in this regard. Hutchful (2002:1) posits that pivotal to the survival of any society is its law and order which are predicated on national security.

Our discourse on national security is not limited to the protection of territorial boundaries even though it is implied. The concept of the security of any nation encompasses other vital areas such as environmental protection, social and food security and more especially the prevalence of internal peace. Lumumba–Kasonjo (2005:8) states that the role of government (the administrative tool of any nation) is (i) ‘to protect our freedom from the enemies outside our gates (ii) to preserve law and order’, inter-alia. The international community and indeed the operational apparatus of concerned nations employ these indices as a yardstick for measuring the success or failure of underdeveloped economies. Oyovbaire (2007:9) notes that the World Bank in February 2007 reclassified Nigeria alongside over fifty other developing nations like Sao Tome, Papua New Guinea, Djibouti as a ‘fragile’ state even though much earlier the same polities have been dismally branded as ‘failed’ states. These states have been stigmatized for their wanton inability to engage their citizens in productive ventures that would guarantee, amongst others, security of life and property, protection of human rights and the provision of basic public utilities for meaningful development, the lack of state apparatus to contain territorial assault and the possible outbreak of civil war. It is in the light of these realities that we are going to consider against leadership that we are going to consider the state of security in the Niger Delta region

The State of Security in the Niger Delta Region – A Historical Analysis

Scholarly debate on the Niger Delta question evokes some imagery. There are various definitions on the status of the Niger Delta. On the meaning of the Niger Delta region, Tekena (1999:2) while acknowledging the report of the Niger Delta Environmental Survey identifies three definitions viz (i) the scientific which conceives of the Niger Delta as that location associated with the Niger especially where the River splits into its major tributaries: Rivers Nun and the Escravos. It starts from the Benin basin in the West and goes up to Agbor in the North and then to Imo River (ii) the historical which views the region as a conglomeration of people who in 1958 canvassed for special attention that led to the inauguration of the Henry Willinks Commission. It incorporates the Ogoja, Rivers, and Calabar Provinces, (iii) the political creation which lumps up all the oil producing states of Abia, Akwa-Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Imo, Ondo and Rivers into the Niger Delta Region. These are the stake-holders in the Oil Mineral Producing Areas Development Commission founded by Gen. Ibrahim Babangida's regime and the Niger Delta Development Commission established by erstwhile President, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo in 2000.

The Niger Delta region has occupied a significant position in the historiography of Nigeria's evolution as a state. Prior to British occupation, the area was at the centre of mercantile activities of Old Imperialism of Spain and Portugal. According to Alagoa, (2004:16) the region was an integral part of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade from the 16th century through the 19th century when it was a significant portion of what was termed the Slave Coast of West Africa and later the Oil Rivers supplying a great deal of the palm oil and palm kernel required by Britain to maintain its leadership position in the Industrial Revolution.

British conquest and eventual domination led to the amalgamation of the diverse ethnic groups under what came to be known as Nigeria. The ethnic communities that made up the Niger Delta region felt marginalized in the new arrangement. In fact, Olaniyan and Alao (2003:19) note that amalgamation was adopted as a colonial policy to perpetuate British mercantile interest in Nigeria with no reference to the peculiar nature of its lands and peoples. In a similar vein, Okon (2005:361) opines that the grouse of marginalisation in Nigerian politics with specific reference to resource control could be traceable to the shortcomings of the amalgamation blunder. With the creation of the nation-state, Nigeria, these minority ethnic groups felt shortchanged in the power equation. In what Bolade and Adelemo

(1986:41) described as ‘internal colonialism’ the people of the Niger Delta Region, right from time, felt not only marginalized but alienated in the national development process. Ejituwu & Enemugwem(2007:80) decry the wanton neglect of Niger Delta peoples by the Federal Government in its lopsided revenue sharing formula. The criticism against the amalgamation formula does not in any way obfuscate what could be termed the merits of the entire political arrangement. At least Nigeria’s large size in population of more than 140,000,000 and an expansive geographical landmass has won her the enviable position as the ‘Giant of Africa’.

To orchestrate their deep-seated disillusionment arising from perceived alienation, some prominent traditional rulers and elders of the Region took their position to the Constitutional Conference of May 23, 1957 in London. The delegation yielded some dividends as in 1958, the Conference recommended the creation of the Niger Delta Development Board. Azaiki (2003:48) states that the 1958 Nigerian constitutional provision for the Niger Delta amongst others states that to allay the fears of the minority indigenes of the Niger Delta and address the development needs of the peculiar terrain of the Niger Delta before granting independence to Nigeria, the British Government proposed that the Niger Delta be declared a Special Territory (Dappa Biriye 2003:20-21). Even at independence and the subsequent creation of twelve states (currently thirty-six states in addition to a federal capital territory, not much has changed in the area of national integration vis-a-vis the minority ethnic groups of the Niger Delta. Nna & Ibaba (2011:47) attribute this to the limitations of the 1914 amalgamation which they conceive was enshrouded endemic artificiality void of cohesion.

Oil exploration and the genesis of security crisis in the Niger Delta

The exploration and exploitation of crude oil in Nigeria has some antecedents rooted in the Niger Delta. As far back as 1908, a German firm under the company nomenclature of Nigeria Bitumen Corporation began the search for oil in Araromi of Western Nigeria, even though this effort was short-lived because of the outbreak of the First World War in 1914. But then in 1937, Shell D’Arcy, which paved the gateway for Shell Petroleum Development Corporation, dominated the entire scheme. It was only in 1957 that crude oil was discovered in commercial quantity at Afam in Rivers State and Oloibiri in the Ogbia area of Bayelsa State (Azaiki, 2003:78). Other multinational companies like Mobil Nigeria Unlimited, Nigerian Agip Oil Company, Totalfina Nigeria Ltd (formerly known as Safrap and later ELF) etc gained entrance into the oil business. Angaye (1986:52) notes that the first cargo of

Nigerian crude oil was shipped from Port Harcourt by Shell-B.P in February 1958 with production then at four thousand barrels a day and by 1979, it had increased to 2,305846 bpd.

For the purpose of this paper, it must be succinctly observed that right from the 1970s, crude oil formed the mainstay of the Nigerian economy. Anyaye (1986:65) posits that ‘the over-dependence on a single source of revenue and foreign exchange assets is factors fraught with danger’. It is revealing to note that prior to independence, the Nigerian economy was sustained by viable revenues accruing from the production of cocoa, groundnut and palm oil/kernel at commercial quantities. But with time, the revenue accruing from oil began to dominate budgetary allocations. It is common knowledge that the Third National Development plan of 1975 – 1980 depended largely on oil revenue for its implementation and same for Fourth National Development Plan of 1981 – 1985.

Okaba (2008:26) posits that Nigeria is the largest exporter of oil in Africa with a production figure of over 2.3 million barrels per day and accounts for over 85% of the nation’s revenue and about 90% of export earnings. He further notes that the general indices of what he termed ‘petrodollar economics’ of sub-Saharan Africa portray the following characteristics viz primitive accumulation of capital, dumping of erstwhile viable sources of national income, repression by the ruling power cliques to their perpetuation in governance, kleptocracy, wanton corruption and prevalence of abject poverty.

We may pause to x-ray on a balance sheet the implications of oil (and currently gas) explorations and exploitation in the Niger Delta. A gloomy portrait of the Region is painted by the UNDP report of 2006 cited in Nafziger (2008:149) and states thus ‘the critical issue in the Niger Delta is not only the increasing incidence of poverty, but also the intense feeling among the people of region that they ought to do far better. This is based on the considerable level of resources in their midst and the brazen display and celebration of ill-gotten wealth in Nigeria, most of which derives from crude oil wealth. In addition, the oil and gas industry has damaged farmlands and fishing grounds, which have harmed traditional occupations such as fishing, farming, lumbering, crafts and small-scale agro-based activities – moreover the Region has been excluded from tapping into modern infrastructure.

Many problems, indeed, are associated with the oil business in the Niger Delta. Angaye (1986:65) notes that oil spillages, land, water and air pollution

have produced debilitating effects on the economy of the region. It need not be stated that this has posed a great danger to the security of lives and property. As early as 1981, oil spillages were reported in Sangama, Koluama, Akassa and Brass in old Rivers State with serious environmental implications.

Apart from the issue of wanton neglect by the Federal Government over the years, Inokoba and David (2008:654) observe with dismay the lacklustre performance of both the state and Local Governments. The Federal Government under Chief Obasanjo resolved to increase the derivation revenue of oil producing to 13% but there is no significant development efforts by most State and Local Governments in this regard. Senators on a five day Retreat from 6th – 9th November in Port Harcourt were shocked to discover the level of worrisome underdevelopment in the Niger Delta Region as they embarked on an assessment tour of some selected communities in the creeks (Orji 2007:12).

The grievances of the Niger Delta communities have given expression to different shades of youth restiveness and violent protests. Ukeje (2002:340) points out that the suffering of the people, in spite of the colossal economic endowment of the people is inexplicable. Apart from intra-ethnic factors, most times, the oil companies are at the centre stage of youth restiveness. Most communities have come to what seems like a logical conclusion that the only way to extract settlement from multinational corporations is by engaging them in running battles. For example in 1998 an estimated 5,000 Ijaw youths at Kaiama swore to the tenets of the Kaiama Declaration, which culminated in the formation of the 'Egbesu House' in Bayelsa. The Federal Government responded with reprisals that witnessed the decimation of Odi town. The Movement For the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP) also had similar experiences with oil companies like Shell Petroleum Development Corporation (SPDC) which led to the hanging of the Ogoni Nine (i.e. the environmentalist and human right vanguard Ken Saro-wiwa and eight others). These violent protests and many more were not isolated to the Niger Delta. Baker (2002:240) reveals that one of the leaders of the Bakassi boys that terrorized Anambra and the Eastern States was from Ogoni. Nwosu(2010:81) associates youth restiveness with the consequences of political violence in the larger Nigerian polity

In the light of the obvious fact that the Niger Delta region is embroiled in socio-economic cum geo-political crises, it is the main thrust of this paper

that no meaningful development effort can yield any tangible dividend in the circumstance. We now turn our attention to the critical issue of sustainable development and the Niger Delta Region.

The concept of sustainable development and an X-Ray of Niger Delta economy

The political economy of sustainable development provides the fulcrum for an enduring material progress of the people concerned. This brand of development theory adopts a holistic approach that is mindful of the future implications of economic solutions formulated in the present. Arokoyu (2004:17) traces the origin of the concept of sustainability to development debates of the 1980s, which arose out of the environmental revolution of the 1980s. There was increased awareness when the United Nations' General Assembly resolution created a World Commission on Environment and Development in autumn of 1983 with Mrs. Cro Harlem Brundtland, Prime Minister of Norway chairing the commission. Her input has been popularly known as the Brundtland Report of 1987 on World Commission On Environment and Development.

The WCED 1987 concluded that economic development and environmental conditions were inextricably intertwined. The commission defines sustainable development as a new form of development perspective, which integrates production process with resources conservation and environmental enhancement to tackle the need of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs(Oyeshola 2008:161).

Viewed against the backdrop of the Brandtland report, its application to the peculiar condition of the Niger Delta territory becomes critical. The exploration and exploitation of crude oil in the Niger Delta poses great environmental hazards. Numerous environmental problems are associated with the exploitation of oil. Inyanga (2007:172) highlights some of the ugly consequences of Multinational Corporations involved in drilling oil. They include water pollution, solid and hazardous waste, deforestation, soil degradation and loss of bio-diversity. In the process of oil prospecting and exploitation, some dynamites are detonated with adverse impact on the earth's crust.

Onuoha (2008:1031) observes that gas flaring, which represents a significant source of global warming, is one of the most sensitive environmental problems associated with oil mining. Nigeria alone flares about 24 billion

cubit meters of associated natural gas every year and the November 2007 report of the Department of Oil Petroleum Resources claim that more than 70% of oil fields in Nigeria are culprits. Although the Nigerian Government acknowledges the environmental hazards posed by constant gas flaring, her non-committal approach becomes a source of concern.

It is disheartening to note that various elusive dates have been set to end gas flaring in Nigeria. Inyanga (2007:176) observes the Federal Ministry of Environment targeted 2004 while the former Vice President later extended the date to 2008; later the ex-President Olusegun Obasanjo shifted the date forward to 2004 with the Nigeria National Petroleum Corporation (N.N.P.C) reinstating the 2008 deadline. What appears worrisome is the level of vacillation in such an environmental risk that calls for urgent attention.

Oil spillage is another source of environmental degradation in Nigeria. Onuoha (2008:1032) cites the report of the United States' Department of Energy which reveals that over 4000 oil spills discharging more than 2 million barrels of crude oil occurred in the Niger Delta since 1960. The statistical data further reveals that corrosion accounts for 50% of the oil spills, sabotage is responsible for 28%, 21% arises from normal oil production operation while engineering drills is responsible for 1%. These oil spills impact negatively on the environment as it depletes the mangrove trees and pollute the streams and rivers with grave implications for aquatic life and portable water.

It has been observed that one of the landmarks of the New Partnership for the Development of Africa (NEPAD) has a clause which aims at the 'implementation of natural strategies for sustainable development to reverse the loss of environmental resources by 2015, Fawole (2003:78). With Nigeria as a committed member of this organization, it is hoped that she will expedite positive action in this regard. We now turn to the role of Government and the way forward.

The role of government and the way forward

Having analyzed the security state of the Niger Delta, and the challenges arising therefrom, the critical question is 'what has the Government done? In highlighting the cardinal objectives of NEPAD, Nabudere (2003:23) identifies one of the priority areas as 'creating peace, security and stability including democratic governance, without which it is impossible to engage in meaningful economic activity. It is the inalienable commitment of any democratic government to undertake viable public projects like road

construction, adequate generation and distribution of electricity etc that are clearly of general value to the whole society and cannot be readily undertaken under private auspices. Lumumba –Kansongo 2005:11 is of the opinion that the machinery through which a government stays close to the people and the people close to their government will differ according to the history, the demographic distribution, the traditional culture (or cultures), and the prevailing international and economic environment in which it has to operate.

There is no doubt that the sordid state of socio-economic development in the Niger Delta had attracted Government attention. On the eve of independence, the Niger Delta Development Board, thanks to the Willinks Commission, was created by the colonial government to chart the course of development. The creation of the Oil Mineral Producing Area Commission and the Niger Delta Development Commission was to address the peculiar development challenges faced by the Niger Delta. In the face of internal and international pressure, the then Yar'Adua led government has recently created a Technical Committee headed by Barrister Ledum Mitee, an Ogoni born Human Rights Activists and had equally created a Ministry of the Niger Delta. In creating the Ministry on Thursday September 11, 2008, President Musa Yar'Adua announced that the new ministry will serve as the primary vehicle for the delivery of his administration's agenda for the rapid socio-economic development of the oil rich but long neglected region with special focus on infrastructural development and youth empowerment (The Nation, September 12, 2008). With the demise of late President Yar'Adua, his successor in the person of Dr. Goodluck Jonathan has demonstrated an enviable spirit of continuity in policy formulation and implementation as encapsulated in Seven- Point Agenda with the development of the Niger Delta region as one of its arrowheads

Government reaction was provoked by the state of insecurity that had reached an embarrassing height in recent times. There were rampant cases of kidnapping and armed assault against prominent citizens and Multi-national Corporation officials. The aftermath of these brigandries was the exodus of some MNCs key players. Companies like Julius-Berger Construction Company had to relocate to Abuja and Uyo respectively for security reasons.

As a result of the incessant attacks by militants, the nation lost not less than 631,000 barrels per day with Shell (SPDC) all accounting for 405,000 bpd,

Agip 75,000 and others 12,000. All these figures run into billions of Naira leading to a palpable decline in oil revenues.

While the giant stride of the Government in setting up a Technical Committee and a Ministry of the Niger Delta acknowledged, it is hoped that these institutions will not be afflicted by the scourge of the 'Nigerian factor' that has been the bane of our development initiatives. Both OMPADEC and NDDC have squandered huge allocations with marginal performance. Not less than 70% of the citizenry are still living in squalor. The roads are in pitiable conditions. A trip to all the Niger Delta States provokes a feeling of disillusionment.

On the part of militants, they see hostage taking and violence as a tool of emancipation. Virtually in every case of kidnap there are levels of ransom settlement even though in most cases, it is never acknowledged. The militants, enoneously, claim that they want a better share of the national cake. This still boils down to what Bolade and Adelemo (1986:41) describe as the negative offshoots of internal colonialism in the national development process. One of the militant groups goes by the name 'Movement for the Emancipation of Niger Delta (MEND). Hutchful's (2001:5) analysis views violence both as a tool of emancipation and disempowerment. What the militants need to realize is that their hardline stance will remain futile because the federal government is a formidable might. Besides, their approach is not well articulated. The idea of kidnapping and demanding ransom, questions the sincerity of their objective. The Federal Government's resolve to grant amnesty to the militants in October, 2009 seems a step in the right direction as most ex-militants have not only disarmed but have enlisted in various skills acquisition programmes both within and outside the country.

To effectively tackle the challenges of development in the Niger Delta, we recommend a stakeholder's approach. It is now very obvious that the economic survival of nascent democracy in Nigeria revolves, to a large extent, around the maintenance of law and order in the Niger Delta. The Federal Government, this year, proposed a Niger Delta Summit and this was vehemently opposed. In a special interview with *Tell* August 2008, Kimse-Okoko, the current Chairman of the Ijaw National Congress, remarked that the Federal Government saw the need to change the summit to a 'dialogue'. The fall out of this dialogue approach was the formation of a Conference of Ethnic Nationalities, which will bring all the Ijaw, Itsekiri, Urbobo, Oron,

Ogbah, Ikwerre, Ogoni, Etche, etc together as a socio-cultural organization representing the rest of the people. In addition, the objectives of the amnesty programme should be pursued to its logical conclusion

We also recommend that both the three tiers of Government should pay living wages to all Nigerian workers in general and those of the Niger Delta in particular. This will be seen as one of the surest means or mechanism of the Federal Government to ensure that fiscal allocations to all the organs of governance are well utilized.

Another critical area is the rural development of the Niger Delta Region. Nkom (2000) sees rural development as the springboard for the most orchestrated poverty alleviation programme of the Federal Government. The state of rural environment of the Niger Delta leaves much to be desired. Yero's(2010:166) work on rural development initiative in Ghana appeared result-oriented and impacts positively on sustainability.

Finally, the fight against corruption must be seen to be result oriented. Features of corruption that manifest in the abuse of public trust for private gain must be crushed. The studies carried out by Benson (2008) and Seun (2008) reveal that trillions of Naira have been looted by prominent public figures in this report through the instrumentality of official corruption.

Conclusion

An insight into the state of security in Nigeria reveals that the Niger Delta region poses a great danger. Right from colonial times, the people of the area have felt marginalized and alienated arising from years of neglect and abandonment. To further compound the problem, various development efforts by Government merely paid lip-service to the situation leaving much to be desired

The recent wave of 'hostage' economy has taken sordid tolls on lives and property with grave implication for sustainable development. It is hoped that the recent creation of a Federal Ministry of Niger Delta will tackle the hydra-headed monster of underdevelopment from a holistic perspective by creating jobs for teeming number of unemployed youth and providing public utilities for the hapless masses

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