

THE NIGER DELTA CRISES: A THREAT TO SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The Niger Delta no doubt remains significant in the socio-economic cum political life of Nigeria in lieu of her unquantifiable and enormous contributions to the country's economic growth and development. In spite of her contributions it has remained backward, poor and neglected. It was discovered that this was born out of deliberate nonchalant attitude of the custodians of state power in Nigeria. Environment degradation and pollution including criminal marginalization and neglect remains the genesis of the crises which had gradually led to the proliferation of terrorist groups within the various Niger Delta communities currently fighting for liberation and resource control, thereby turning the entire region into a battle ground where hostage taking, kidnapping and violent killing of innocent citizens has become a regular feature, by the Niger Delta Youth coupled with huge losses on the part of the government. These developments no doubt remain a threat to sustainable development in Nigeria. Hence, this paper recommend the need to educate the youth of the Niger Delta to shown violence while government on their own parts should provide infrastructural facilities and stop environmental degradation in the regions, to mention but a few as a panacea to the problem.

Keywords: Niger Delta, Crises and sustainable development

Introduction

The strong dependent on crude oil as the major source of revenue no doubt has made the Niger Delta obviously indispensable in the socio-economic cum political life of the nation, Nigeria. This is in lieu of her enormous contributions to her economic cum political growth and development.

Significantly, in spite of her abundant natural endowment and contribution to the growth of Nigeria, it remains, neglected, backward and impoverished. This is precipitated by the nonchalant and lackadaisical attitude of the powers that be both military and democratically elected governments alike who had only succeeded in converting the entire Niger Delta into a wilderness of glorified theatre of corruption.

This development has systematically culminated to the gradual proliferation and expansion of terrorist groups and armed militias within the various Niger Delta communities. There have been several cases of incessant abduction, kidnaping blowing up of oil flow stations coupled with other social vices which by sheer implication has become a threat to sustainable development in Nigeria. Thus, no country can achieve even development; nay sustainable development without an enduring peace. Hence, the need to find lasting solution to the crises in the Niger Delta remains obviously significant, See (Akani 1992), Mamneni (2016) and Uguru and Michelle (2016).

Theoretical Framework

The theory of dialectical materialism states

that conflict is part of human relation conditions particularly economic factors as popularized by Karl Marx and other Leninist philosophers.

Thus, in the study of any society either past or present, the following discoveries abound:

1. Those who are rich tend to be better educated and more cultured, with ample opportunity to be more successful both professionally and politically.
2. Those who are economically privileged tend to be interested in preserving the existing status quo.
3. In as far as economic inequality exist in a society i.e. “the haves” and “the have nots” the society cannot have political democracy hence: political power will tend to revolve around economic power. Consequently, economic inequality will make repression inevitable in attempting to curb the demand of “the have nots” for redistribution of wealth and;
4. The moral values of any given society tend to support the preservation of the existing division of labour and the distribution of wealth.

Thus, the importance of this theory as the basis for our present analysis is therefore most desirable. The colonial capitalist mode of production imposed on Nigeria emphasizes the exploitation and suppression of the productive class and the promotion of the interest of the bourgeoisie, in such a situation, a perpetual conflict and antagonistic relationship is developed. This explains the conspiracy cum relationship existing between the various multinational companies and the custodians of state power in Nigeria in one hand and the various ethnic groups in the Niger Delta in the other.

Understanding the Niger Delta

According to Akani in Nwanekwe (2008) the Niger Delta tentatively predates the present day Nigeria social formation with its unimaginable and unquantifiable asset and distinctive economic resources at its command helped immensely in the expansion of its frontiers of influence even beyond the West African coast under colonialism. There is no gain saying therefore that her pre-eminence in economic empowerment and endowment was not in any way eclipsed in the post independent Nigeria.

The Niger Delta is made up of the following

major villages/towns; Urhobo, Ijaw, Itsekiri, Kwale, Ogoni, Ndoni, Etche, Ibibio and Efik, it occupies a large expanse of land, bounded by the Benin River on the west, the Cross River in the East, Imo River in the North including the Southern areas where the Cameroon mountains retired into the sea. It covers in the whole, about 270 miles along the Atlantic Coast with a depth of 120 miles. Historically, and till date, the Niger Delta region remains one of the greatness swamp regions of the world. As a navigable waterway, with beautiful creeks, rivulets and mangrove forests; it has become the pivot on which the economic history of present day Nigeria revolves. It is important to note that, the Niger Delta swamp region and mangrove territory remains the third largest on earth and the most extensive in Africa. Summarily, it accounts for 77.4% of Nigeria with land and 3.2% of the entire landmark (Darah 2001).

Onwuka, (1956) aptly noted that the Nigeria economic history cannot be complete especially under colonialism without mentioning the immense productive and contributive capacity of the Niger Delta region. he stated that it was the prevalent situation then that made the then colonial office to call its waterways; the oil river. Though the trade in palm oil was not the sole commodity of trade, it remained glaringly the most import as the trade in oil at that point in time was the major concern of every white merchant. The trade in oil was very important and significant, thus it was the struggle and fight to control the palm oil trade that systematically put both the colonial and traditional potentates at dagger points in the late nineteenth century especially King Jaja of Opobo, the Oba of Benin and king Williams Dappa Pepple of Bonyi to mention but a few.

I make right to assert that from 1958 till date, the Niger Delta has remained the economic epicenter of Nigeria in lieu of its enormous contribution to the national treasury. Emphatically, in the production of crude oil and gas, there is no gain saying that the earning from crude oil and gas is enormous and it is equally estimated that Nigeria by 2010 will still have about 40 billion barrels of oil and 120 trillion cubit feet of gas reserve, though it is regrettable that about 80% of all associated gas production is flared. This by implication represents about 25% of all gas flared in the world. (Ikein 1990).

The Causes of the Niger Delta Crises

The causes of the Niger Delta crises can be d

traced to the echoes from the wasteland Oloibiri in perspective vis-à-vis, environmental degradation and pollution, criminal neglect and marginalization coupled with the nonchalant and pretentious attitude and the inability of providing a minimum government to the people especially those of Niger Delta by the powers that be in Nigeria. Oloibiri in the present day Bayelsa State was the first place oil was struck in commercial quantity by Shell Petroleum Development Company. Today, Oloibiri is history; the unholy alliance it entered into with Shell has left the community not only battered, down and out. It has been raped, abused, exploited and sucked dry of its natural resources due to serials of oil spillage and pollution occasioned by poor environmental habits by the multinational oil company. What happened in Oloibiri remains the first reference point by militants fighting for the Niger Delta course.

According to Ero (2008) Oloibiri is nothing but a tragic fate that awaits any oil producing community in the Niger Delta. Thus, while the Federal Government in Abuja counts its revenue from sales of the Niger Delta crude oil in trillions of naira, the people whose land bears the black gold bemoan the loss of the land and their means of livelihood. He stressed that Oloibiri as a metaphor for environmental degradation and neglect may have provoked the growing militancy in the Niger Delta communities and the common resolve to resist any similar fate being foisted on them.

In Gelegele, a rustic predominantly Ijaw community in Ovia South West local government area of Edo State, life is but a grave misery. The activities of Philips Oil Company had sentenced the people to hell without experiencing death. The people have been dying from the harsh and gruesome living environment caused by gas flaring while the government look the other way unperturbed, and in return, stern looking soldiers are sent to protect the lives and properties of the multinational companies by the Federal Government to ensure undisrupted flow of oil against the interest of her own citizens, who most often are killed in their thousands, some maimed, while some reasonable number are rendered homeless.

Worthy of note was the event that took place in Nov, 1990 in Umuechem in Etche ethnic nationality of River State. There was a peaceful demonstration carried out by the villagers to protest

against the destruction of their farmlands and environmental degradation by Shell Petroleum. What came as a swift response by the federal government saw the death of 90 villagers, while 500 of them were rendered homeless. In yet another tragic incidence, for asking for pipe borne water, electricity, job opportunities and socio-economic projects, and a cleaner environment, more than 2000 indigenes of Ogoni were brutally killed, 8,000 were forced into exile while more than 27 villages were burnt down and a good number secretly detained (Onyeagucha 1997 and Turner 1997).

It is important to note that although the government has tried in the past to tackle the Niger Delta crisis. Such attempt includes the establishment of the Niger Delta Development Board (NDDDB) based on the recommendations of the Sir. Henry Willinks Commission of 1957, which died a natural death due to lack of fund and official corruption.

NDDDB was replaced by Oil Mineral Producing Areas Commission OMPADEC in 1992, and the demise of OMPADEC led to the emergence of Niger Delta Development Commission in the year 2000. It was expected that the NDDC will fill the vacuum created by OMPADEC.

Unfortunately, a thorough analysis of the situation on ground has shown to a large extent that all these Commissions were designed to fail from inception. Hence for more than three decades, no conscious effort was made to ameliorate the problems of the Niger Delta.

The NDDDB was suffocated from inception, thus, in spite of its 3% allocation, it received a meager sum of N13,154.29b from 1992 – 1996. Within the period in question, the actual allocation was N85,489,56b, thus, a short fall of N72,335,27b.

According to Saro Wiwa, (1992) OMPADEC is an illogical, an insult designed precisely to destroy the will of the Niger Delta people to resist injustice. The fifty year of oil activities in the Niger Delta has been more of the devils excreta.

Apart from official corruption and conspiracy from government quarters, there are equally obvious act of sabotage directly linked to the members of the various commissions set up by successive governments who incidentally are of Niger Delta extraction. Most of the fund either coming from the government or the multinational oil companies meant for projects in the area were never

spent judiciously. Outright embezzlement of funds had become obviously endemic. The Ministry for the Niger Delta has just been created by the present administration of Musa Shehu Yaradua. The question remains, can it make a difference. See Jerre H., Libby, Simon, (2016) and Elena (2016).

In summary, the Niger Delta crises revolves around the political economy of a state that does not provide the people the ample opportunity of effective participation in the decision,, distribution and consumption of the common wealth on equal terms. Thus, while the wealth yielding centre of the country swims in squalor, penury and disease, those who control the State and their cronies cum lackeys on the other hand grow fat and affluent.

The Niger Delta Crises and Sustainable Development in Nigeria

The impacts of the lingering crises in the Niger Delta cannot be over emphasized in lieu of its attendant characteristics. Hence, it has become a threat to the country's sustainable development and its efforts at achieving greater height, both politically, socially, economically and otherwise. Crises and sustainable development no doubt are strange bed fellows in all its ramifications, thus, in an attempt to ascertain the depth of their relationship, a look at their conceptual meaning becomes imperative.

Conceptualization Crises

This is usually characterized by fear, uncertainty and danger to life and property. The New Websters Dictionary of the English Language International Edition (1997) defined crises as the decisive moment especially in a tragedy, a time of danger or suspense in politics. It equally defines sustainable to mean "prevent from falling or giving away, for a time, to sustain tension, or sustain the conversation".

Development

Development is a many sided process, thus it involves a structural transformation of the economy, society, politics and the culture that enables the re-direction of science and technology. Self perpetuating and generating overall development of the citizens potentials and the improvement of not only the machinery of government and productive institutions to meet the rising demand of society and

equally involves widespread education and literacy, relative freedom from bondage and elimination of exploitation including a fair and equitable distribution of social wealth (Okoye 1985).

Rodney (1972) explained that development in human society implies increased skill and capacity, greater freedom, creatively, self discipline, responsibility and material well being. He stressed that development is indisputably used in exclusively economic sense in all its ramification.

Sustainable Development

Sustainable Development entails the maintenance of a steady growth and improvement in the people's ability and capacity for greater creativity, discipline responsibility and overall material well being, relatively free from bondage and the elimination of exploitation. All these are guaranteed with an existing machinery of government and productive institutions to meet the rising demand of the people.

In lieu of the above dictums, it is apparently clear that achievement of sustainable development in Nigeria with the lingering crises in the Niger Delta is nothing but a travesty. There is no gain saying that history has no recording any of state or country which did achieve even development not even sustainable development in the face of an existing crises especially the types being witnessed in the Niger Delta. Most crises has been identified with death, loss of property; destruction of social amenities, disruption of social order and lawlessness, insecurity, anxiety and tension with their attendant characteristics.

Thus, with the present proliferation and expansion of terrorist groping within the Niger Delta communities fighting for resource control and the liberation of the region in what has been described as the Hobbesian situation, life in the entire Niger Delta has become nasty, brutish, poor and short. Hence, the region is nothing but a hot bed of crises and conflict, and a battlefield for armed militias where blowing up of oil pipeline and flow stations, hostage taking, kidnaping for ransom which is already having a spill over effect in other parts of the country especially in the Southeastern States of Anambra, Abia, Enugu and Ebonyi to mention but a few and killing of innocent citizens has become regular feature, (Daily Independent, Jan. 30, 2007, Guardian Jan. 29 2007; Saro Wiwa 1992; Ikein 1990; Ikwere Rescue Charter Sep. 4th 1992), Akani

(2002).

The disruption of oil operations due to the activities of armed gangs in the Niger Delta is simply tragic especially in Ogoni, Etche, Ikwere, Ndoni etc., to mention but few resulted to huge losses monetarily to the federal government running into hundreds of billions and so many of such cases abound. The loss from Nembe crises alone was estimated to be over N7.32 billion when oil activities in the area was disrupted by armed militias whose activities with their attendant characteristics has remained a threat to sustainable development in Nigeria. See The Economics May – June, 2016.

Recommendation

All that is needed in the region is provision of minimum government nay massive development with its attendant characteristics. To make for a lasting peace in the Niger Delta, which will significantly give vent to sustainable development in Nigeria, the following recommendations were made:

1. There is need for an enlightenment campaign for the Niger Delta youths on the need today to say no to violence at all times and imbibe the spirit of dialogue as a viable option to achieving their objective.
2. The Federal Government should be brave enough to tackle the Niger Delta problem especially in the following areas:
 - i. The provision of portable pipe borne water.
 - ii. Provision of access roads.
 - iii. Establishment of functional schools and hospitals, and most importantly provision of gainful employment for the Niger Delta Youths.
3. Altitudinal change on the part of the multinational companies operating in the area with strong emphasis on environmental pollution and gas flaring. Gas flaring must be de-emphasized.
4. The increment from the present 13% allocation to 40% no doubt will help in reversing the Hobesian situation in the Niger Delta.

Conclusion

In this study, we have discuss the lingering crises in the Niger Delta. We gave an overview of the entire region and the major communities involved and noted with regret that, despite the

enormous contribution of the region to the overall development of Nigeria, it has remained backward, poor and neglected due to the deliberate non positive response by the powers that be. This remains the brain behind the activities of armed militias fighting for resource control and liberation of the Niger Delta, thus, turning the entire region into a hot bed of crises resulting to loss of lives and enormous economic recourse which by implication is inimical to the achievement of sustainable development in Nigeria.

This article thus calls for an end to the crises by advising that the government reverse as a matter of an urgency the existing status quo by tacking the Niger Delta problems head long. The establishment of any commission might not be necessary.

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