

THE NIGER DELTA MOVEMENT OF COOPERATIVE EXISTENCE: A THREAT TO THE NIGERIAN ECONOMY CUM DEMOCRACY

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Abstract

This article X-rayed the lingering conflicts and crises in the Niger Delta directly linked to the nefarious activities of the militants fighting for resource control and the liberation of the Niger Delta. It was discovered that this was borne out of the nonchalance of the custodian of state power in Nigeria, which have converted the entire Niger Delta into a wilderness of unconscionable kleptomania and epicenter of corruption resulting to lost of lives and economic resources and a threat to Nigerian economy and her nascent democracy. This article thus gave an overview of the entire Niger Delta, its enormous contribution to the Nigerian State, the crux of the problem, government effort and the prospects of the problem under investigation. This work thus recommends the need for the oil companies to take charge of their social responsibilities. And the need for the government on their own part to provide much needed infrastructural facilities for the oil producing communities

Keywords: Niger Delta, Cooperative existence, Economy and Democracy.

Introduction

The Niger Delta no doubt is glaringly significance in the socio-economic cum political life of Nigeria in lieu of her unquantifiable and enormous contributions to the economic growth and development of Nigeria. In addition to this, the Niger Delta generally played vital role in the extraction of cash crops for colonial profit.

Unfortunately, in spite of her abundant natural endowment and contribution to the growth and development of Niger it remains neglected, backward and poor. The reasons for this ugly development are not far fetched. The nonchalance cum lackadaisical attitude of the custodians of State power both military and Civilians alike had only succeeded in converting the Niger-Delta to a wilderness of unconscionable kleptomania and epicenter of corruption and death trap. Hence, it is rather tragic that in the 21st century we are still battling with the problem of the Niger Delta

generally which obviously would had been history decades ago, Sarowiwa 1992; and Akani 2002).

The Niger Delta An Over View

According to Akani (1992) the Niger Delta pre-dates the Nigerian. Social formation, with its unquantifiable asset and distinctive economic position, it become a Treasure Island for European capitalists and merchants. The economic potentials at its command equally helped in the expansion of its frontiers of influence even beyond the West African coast under colonialism.

There is no gain saying therefore that the pre-eminence in economic empowerment and endowment was not eclipsed in the Nigerian post colonial state. the Niger Delta which is comprised of the following villages/towns: Urhobo, Ijaw, Itsekiri, Kwale, Ogoni, Ikwere, Ndoni, Etche, Ibibio and Efik occupies a large expanse of land, bounded by the Benin River on the West and the Cross River

in the East, not excluding the Coastal areas where the Cameroon Mountains dip into the sea. Covering approximately 270 miles along the Atlantic Coast and 120 miles in depth. Till date the Niger Delta remains the greatest swamp region of the world. As a navigable water way with creeks, mangrove forest and rivulets, it has become the pivot and an important epicenter in the economic history of present day in Nigeria.

Darah G. (2001) the Niger Delta wet lands and mangrove territory remains the third largest in the world and the most extensive in Africa. The Niger Delta accounts for 77.4% of Nigeria wet land or 3.2% of the total landmark of the country.

The Nigeria colonial economic history can not be complete without the immense productive and contributive capacity of the Niger-Delta. This development was what made the then colonial office to Christian its water way the oil river. Palm oil was not the sole commodity of trade, but it was by far the most important, as the main object of every white merchant then remained the trade in oil (Onwuka 1956).

It is significant to state that it was the share desire to control the palm oil trade that dramatically put both the colonial and traditional potentates at loggerhead in the late nineteenth century as in the case of King Williams Dappa Pepple of Bonny, King Jaja of Opobo and the Oba of Benin to mention but a few. These struggles though to a large extent uncoordinated marked the genesis of the historical crises which has come to characterize the Niger Delta till date.

Starting from 1958 and presently the Niger Delta has remained the economic nerve of Nigeria in lieu of its enormous contribution to the National treasury. This is not in the production of cash crops, but in crude oil and gas. The earnings from crude oil and gas is enormous. It is estimated that Nigeria still have about 40 billion barrels of oil reserve and 120 trillion cubic feet of gas reserve presently. Regrettably, the country flares about 80% of her associated gas production which accounts for about 25% of all gas flared in the world (see Ikein (1990) and Akani (2002) and Elena (2016) and Darah (2001).

Nigeria provides a total of 3% of the world's supply of oil. The low sulphur content of the Niger Delta oil is so good that it can power automobiles even without being processed. All these natural potentials have made the area significant in the

accumulative calculation of the ruling class.

Unfortunately, the wettest region on earth, with its vast stretches of wetlands and a natural complex network of rivers Greeks and lakes, gigantic reservoirs of fresh water oxygen sanctuaries and topical rainforest biodiversity, comparable to the ecosystems found only around the River Amazon had been allowed to grain, grind, neglected, backward nasty and poor. According to Akani (1992):

“from the Atlantic to the trans Atlantic slave trade through the period of the lucrative palm oil to the present exploitative of crude oil, the Niger Delta has remained the goods that lays the golden eggs. Despite the contribution of the Niger Delta it remains neglected and poor”.

The 1995 World Bank report drove home the point by stating emphatically that:

The Niger Delta has been blessed with an abundance of physical land and human resources, including the majority of Nigeria's oil and gas deposits, good agricultural land, extensive forest, excellent fisheries as well as with a developed industrial...

It is important to note that it was this ugly development in the Niger Delta that led to the establishment of the Niger Delta Development Board (NDDDB) based on the recommendations of the Sir. Henry Willink's commission of 1957. Worthy of mention equally is the problem of environmental degradation and pollution in the Niger Delta, resulting from the unrestrained criminal oil exploration of the multinational companies operating in the area especially Shell Petroleum Development Corporation; Exxon Mobil Producing Company Unlimited; Chevron Nigeria Limited etc. the situation is so disheartening hence the majority of the people that inhabited the area have been socially, economically and culturally devastated.

The Contentions Issue among the Niger Delta in Nigeria and Government Response

There is no gain saying that the inhuman treatment and exploitation of Niger Delta in Nigeria have not only systematically dethroned the peaceful

co-existence in Nigeria but have apparently become a threat to the Nigerian economy and her nascent democracy. There have been several cases of terrorism, incessant abduction of innocent citizens coupled with other social vices which basically circumstantial perpetrated by the militants whose actions are precipitated by none positive response by the custodians of state power in addressing the numerous problems in the Niger Delta. The issue at stake is obviously outstanding and all effort to bring the situation under control proved abortive and consequential. Thus, the situation no doubt remains a serious threat not only to the Nigerian economy and democracy but equally to her corporate existence (Tell Magazine Feb. 18, 2008).

It is unfortunate to state that as far back as 1957 when the Sir Henry Willinks commission recommended the establishment of the Niger Delta Development Board (NDDDB) up to 1990, for more than three decades no conscious effort was made by the Nigerian government to ameliorate the problems of the Niger Delta. What later came as government reaction to the crisis was precipitated by the gradual proliferation and expansion of terrorist groups within the various Niger Delta communities which by implication has become a threat to the excessively disorderly use of the crude oil wealth by the Nigerian ruling class whose present response was not borne out altruistic feelings and empathy for the suffering of the people, but to hypocritically and selfishly offer a simplistic and pretentious solution to protect and strengthen the exploitative and dehumanizing violent prone status quo though at the expense of the masses. Thus the closure of oil operation in Ogoni land in 1990 remains huge loss to the Federal Government (Lenin 1976 and Ikein 1990).

Consequently, the nembe crises which disrupted oil activities led to a huge lost to the government estimate to be over N7.32b.

It is not an overstatement that the commission so established (NDDDB) saddled with the responsibility of extending infrastructural development to the Niger Delta and oil bearing communities was suffocated from inception. Suffice to say that, in spite of its 3% federal allocation it received a meager sum of N13,154,29b from 1992 to 1996. Within the period in question the actual allocation was N85,489,56b thus a short fall of N72,335,27b. This shows to a large extent

that the commission was completely denied the most desired fund, to carry out its projects coupled with the problems of internal corruption that bedeviled the commission.

According to Sarowiwa (1992) OMPADEC is an illogical, an insult and injury if you have your money why should government set up a commission to run your money he emphasized that OMPADEC was designed to destroy the will of the Niger Delta people to resist injustice. Summatively, 50 years of oil exploration in the Niger Delta has been more of devils excreta. (See also Tell Feb. 2008).

The death of OMPADEC led to the emergence of the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) in the year 2000. It is expected that the commission which is divided into two directorates, the Niger Delta and oil bearing communities will fill the vacuum created by OMPADEC. But unfortunately, the corrupt character and undemocratic nature of the Nigerian State might not guarantee the achievement of the desired objectives.

Nevertheless, the federal government being aware of those stumbling blocks instituted a committee to look into the 1999 Nigerian constitution that has been disdained, criticized and rejected mostly because of its objectionable features. Significantly, the bulk of the problems and conflict in the Niger Delta emanated from the political economy of a state that does not provide the people the opportunity to participate in the distribution and consumption of the common wealth on equal terms. While the wealth yielding centres of the country swim in squalor and penury those who control the state and their cronies grow fat and affluent.

Consequent on the above assertion, the enduring relationship remains exploitative, antagonistic and violent in nature. This development as I earlier stated is highly facilitated by the character of the Nigerian State which is fascist, porous in productive activities, and economically subservient to what has come to be known as the Washington consensus.

Just as the ruling class consolidate their material base through predatory capitalist consumption and militarization of the state and civil society, the oppressed people passing through bouts of ash mouthed poverty and immiserisation processes, reacts violently to advance their feelings and interest.

In what has been described as the Hobbesian situation life in the Niger Delta has become nasty, brutish poor and short, the Niger Delta has become a hot bed of conflicts and battle field for armed militias where hostage taken and kidnapping of innocent citizens had become a regular feature. (See Daily Independent, Jan. 30 2007; Guardian Newspaper Jan. 29 2007; Sarowiwa 1992; Ikein Rescue Charte Sep. 4th 1992). Maneni (2016) and Uguru and Michelle (2016).

The Prospects of the Niger Delta Crises

The lingering conflicts in the Niger Delta have an economic undertone that are historically determined. Once those inhibiting socio-economic impediments are phased out, conflicts in the Niger Delta would be positively mediated. This is important as there seems to be a nonchalant attitude on the part of other Nigerians and powers that be to get to the root of the Niger Delta crises.

Naturally, it is an injustice to the core on civility and against natural justice to give a meager thirteen chances to the Niger Delta communities in the \$3.8b project undertaken by the Nigerian liquefied Natural Gas (NLNG) out of the hundred and eighty chances available.

Consequently the glaring inability of the Nigerian state to fulfill its historic responsibility to the population by providing minimum government, particularly those of the Niger Delta has led to unimaginable conflicts which most often have paralyzed government activities, claimed thousands of lives, reduced communities to shreds and imposed a cycle of confusion and unimaginable fear on the entire region. It is important to state that inspite of the crises, the Nigerian State and its controllers seems passive and at home, while people groan and wail in poverty and pretends nothing consequential has happened. This remains the root of the Niger Delta Crises. And the only panacea to the Niger Delta crises remains reversal of the existing status quo. (Tell April 10, 2006; Ikein (1990); Lenin 1976 and Ikwere Rescue Charte 4th Sep. 1999). And Simon (2016)

Conclusion

So far in this article, we have discussed the lingering crises and conflict in the Niger Delta. We noted with regret that despite its enormous contribution, the region have remained backward poor and neglected due to the nonchalance of the powers that be and the

fight for survival by the Niger Delta militants turning the entire region into a hot bed of crises and conflict resulting to loss of lives and enormous economic resources. The article therefore calls for an end to the crises by advising that government reverse as a matter of urgency the existing status-quo. By insuring that the oil companies operating in the religion take charge of their social responsibilities and the government should provide the region with social amenities

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