

THE ISSUES OF INTERGRATION AND MARGINALIZATION IN A FEDERATION: SOUTH-SOUTH QUESTION IN NIGERIAN POLITICS

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ABSTRACT

One of the major problems of federal system is the issue of integration and marginalization. Nigeria has been battling with this problem right from independence because the country is one of the most ethnically diverse countries in the world with over 250 ethnic linguistic groups, some of which are bigger than many independent states of contemporary Africa, and this is not unconnected with the adoption of federalism because it is often believed that federalism is a remedy to manage a segmented society. With the adoption of federalism in Nigeria the problem of marginalization has become a reoccurring phenomenon. South- South question in Nigeria represents a high profile case in terms of minority marginalization, it became public knowledge with discovery of oil in Oloibiri in commercial quantity. Not only that, the South -South agitation in Nigeria is primarily based on quest for resource control as a result of oil discovery in the region while the conflict in Niger Delta has its roots in the increasing protest of the region against their political, economic and environmental disenfranchisement. The Militias have become increasingly violent both towards one another and towards civilians; kidnapping victims which include not just oil workers, but also children and other people who are not associated with oil industry. The main thrust of this paper is to historicize the crisis in the Niger Delta, find out the causes as well as their implications on Nigerian State through the secondary source data.

Keywords: Marginalization, Integration, Federalism, Niger Delta, Nigeria.

Introduction

One of the fundamental problems which seem intractable is how to manage a segmented society, a society that is pluralistic in nature and divided along ethnic lines. As noted by Kirk (1969:2) Nigeria has well over 400 ethnic groups. Suberu (1998:31), also buttressed this point when he

opined that Nigeria is of course, one of the most ethnically diverse countries in the world with over 250 ethnic linguistic groups, some of which are bigger than many independent states of contemporary Africa, and this is not unconnected with the adoption of federalism and this has not been a remedy to manage Nigerian society because minority agitation against marginalization still remains unsolved.

However, the South -South agitation in Nigeria is primarily based on quest for resource control as a result of oil discovery in the region while the conflict in Niger Delta has its roots in the increasing protest of the region against their political, economic and environmental disenfranchisement (Kelly, 2008:1). The Militias have become increasingly violent both towards one another and towards civilians; kidnapping victims who include not just oil workers, but also children and other people who are not associated with oil industry. An influx of small arms and more sophisticated weapons and international market has led to the increased arming of the militias, similarly, there has been increased exclusion of a segment of the elite and the bourgeoisie in the distribution of the spoil of office and an acute marginalization of the majority of the population from the benefit of development projects and social provisioning (Jega, 2003:27) certainly all these have led to an increased crisis of legitimacy of the state, as the state experiences a process of decomposition and re-composition and disengages with critical social provisioning. Only the constituencies and clients of those who control state power actually continue to have access to resources and patronage. Thus under these conditions, groups have tended to rely on identity based politics to struggle for access to the State resources that it controls in order to avoid exclusion and oppression as well as to demand basic rights and socio economic provisions.

More so, it must be noted that the quest for resource control has been at centre stage in the agitation of Niger Delta people, because Nigerian government has demonstrated high level of marginalization both politically, economically to the people of Niger Delta despite the fact that the region earns 80 percent of Nigerian Income through crude oil, however, when the problem of marginalization continues, nation building becomes unattainable (Ayoola, 2008:10)

Basically, the Niger Delta is strategic to Nigeria's socio-economic development because of the abundance of crude oil in the region. Crude oil in essence is the major exportable product and the

main source of revenue for the country. It is assumed that the region where the country's major earning is coming from should be well provided for in terms of development projects. The situation is however, not so in the region, the community is suffering from almost total neglect and the people are poor. Oil production in the region has translated into health problems and impoverishment for local inhabitants who have traditionally lived on fishing and agriculture. Oil spillages and poor industry practices have exacted a heavy toll in the Niger Delta area. (Femi, 2010:12)

Integration, Marginalization, Ethnic Militias, Federalism: Contextual Discourses

Integration is a concept of modern political system. It entails a situation whereby a conglomeration of groups with different socio-cultural and political background transfer their primordial loyalty to a single entity called state. (Yusuf, 2002:169) The aspect of nation integration is simply the process by which all inhabitants of a given territory irrespective of their tribal, religious background, irrespective of their differences in identity, want to be identified with that common entity called state.

Marginalization

Marginalization according to Ohan'ezendigbo (1999:7) is the deliberate disempowerment of a group of people in the federation politically, economically, socially and militarily, by another group or groups, who during the relevant time frame wield power and controls the allocation of materials and financial resources at the centre of the federation. It entails the apparent deliberate exclusion of any particular group(s) by another similar group of groups from either having access to and or taking due possession of common key positions and common resources, as manifested in the political, economic, military, educational, media and bureaucratic realm.

However, it denotes denials of something or obstruction from participating in what belongs to a group. In Nigerian politics it depicts neglect, noninvolvement or inequity in the distribution of the socio-economic and political resources of the state or indices of development (Obianya, 2003:66).

Ethnic Militia

Ethnic militias are essentially youth based group formed with the purpose of promoting and protecting the parochial interest of their ethnic group, and whose activities sometimes involve the use of violence (Adejumobi, 2002:12). Sessay et al (2003:23) defined militia as an irregular or paramilitary group usually made up of civilians who might have received some form of non-formalized or unofficial military training and are armed with small arms and light weapons. They resemble the regular professional arm in the manner of their operation and command structure does not fit neatly. Badmus (2006:3) defined it as extreme form of ethnic agitation for self-determination as various ethnic groups assume militant and gradually metamorphosed into militia groups each of which bear an ethnic identity and support to act as the machinery through which the desire of its people are sought and released.

Federalism

A federal state may be defined as an association of states formed voluntarily for certain purpose in which the component units are ideally independent but coordinate with one another (Francis, 1985:19).

However, federalism is a device for maintaining unity in the midst of diversities, the signs of federal system of government may be summed up as follows:

1. The power of government is divided between central and state authorities.
2. The central authority must possess exclusive competence over some defined matters
3. The state authorities must be entrusted with competence over specified matters.

In theory, the central and state authorities are coordinated not subordinate to the other in practice however; the state government is subordinate to the federal government that is, the takeover of the administration of the western region by the federal government which it declared a state of emergency in that region in 1962 demonstrates this contention.

Basically, it is a cardinal principle of federalism that one or two component unit should be powerful that they can dominate the other units or the federal government itself, it follows

therefore that they can dominate the other units or the federal government itself. It requires therefore that there should be some balance in the size, wealth and population of the component units. However, all the units must be economically viable otherwise they would neither be able to sustain themselves nor be in a position to contribute towards the running of the general or federal government.

The formation of a federal union may be spurred by many factors. The federating state should desire to be under a common government and that those states must want to be independent on some matters. Thus in the final analysis, every federation is a common mix between centrifugal and centripetal forces. Human beings normally do not willingly organize themselves into groups or union unless they expect some mutual benefit. It may also result from previous political association or common political objectives (e.g. the agitation for independence).

On the other hand, the desire for independence in certain areas may derive from dissimilarity of languages, nationalities, political institutions, economic interest or geographical circumstances. But all or most of these factors need not be before formation of a federation. A federation often arises when a number of distinct entities which have no independent or separate government may constitute themselves into federation. The component of the federation of India was jointly administered by the British before the time they formed themselves into a federation in 1935. Similarly, the components of the federation of Nigeria were administered together by the British for many decades before they were combined into a federation in 1954

In view of foregoing, federalism have some advantages, it helps the social and economic development of the federating states. The constitution of a federation can be organized in similar way that it will satisfy the units. On the other hand, the disadvantages aspect of federalism cannot be overemphasized, it usually increases the expenses involved in the administration of a country, federalism tends to encourage disparity in the rate of development of various sections of a country and the component of a federation usually disagree with one another, moreover, the federal government is not always in position to take quick decision. Basically, federalism in Nigeria has being characterized with a lot of shortcomings making the idea of integration unattainable because of the problems of marginalization.

Historical Overview of Niger Delta Crisis in Nigeria

The Niger Delta Region with an average population of not less than 30 million people became a reference point in 1956 with the discovery of crude oil in commercial quantity in Oloibiri Ogbia Local Government Area of Bayelsa State. The discovery of oil in the zone enhanced the migration of multi-national oil companies to the region to commence exploration of crude oil. Between 1956 and 1957, the nation began to export crude oil to other countries of the world.

More so, between 1956 and 2008, the country had generated so much money from oil exportation, but this, according to the people in the region, only translated to nothing when compared with the level of development in the region. Indeed, today over 90 percent of the people in the region live below the poverty line.

It must also be noted that, in the agitation to take the destinies into their hands, youths from the region resorted to all manners of vices, including abduction of expatriates, and vandalizing of petroleum product pipelines to the detriment of not the region but the entire country.

Moreover, the reaction of these people was a result of the perceived neglect by the successive governments in the country, the insensitivity of the multinational oil companies to the plight of host communities and non-implementation of memorandum of understanding (OU) by the respective companies.

However, historic wrongs and official insensitivity to the rights of the minority people of the Niger Delta throw up and sustain bloody agitation and insecurity in the region.

Today is a great day, not only in your lives but also in the history of Niger Delta. Perhaps it will be the greatest opportunity that we are going to demonstrate to the world that and how we feel about oppression. Remember your 70 years old grandmother who still farms before she eats, remember too, your petroleum which is being pumped out daily from your home and then fight for your freedom.(Nayochukwu Agbo 1996)

However, with those electrifying words 27 years age “Isaac AdakaBoro” general officer commanding the Niger Delta volunteer service DVS, declared an independent, Niger Delta People’s Republic (NDPR), February 23, 1966, 40 days after the historic January 15 coup, it was 3pm and three division of DVS made up of 15 troops were going into action at 5pm with objective of dislodging the federal police and taking over Yenagoa at 12 midnight it was code-named “operation zero” it marked the beginning of the 12 days Revolution during which Boro an ex-police inspector, former president of student union government of the Univeristy of Nsukka, called attention of the world to the fact that the inhabitants of Niger Delta were feeling uncomfortable with their plight in Nigeria.

To some observers of the time, it was an understatement; it was the culmination of injustice, political frustration and suffocation that the Ijaw and the Niger Delta people suffered in an independent Nigeria. However, Boro and other Ijaw students watched with bewilderment as the Ijaw politician failed to break into top echelons of Nigerian politics. According to Boro (1963) he lamented that most of the youths are so frustrated with the general neglect that they were ready for any action led by outstanding leader to gain liberty. In view of foregoing, it must be noted that, the crisis in the region is not a new phenomenon, several organizations were formed to enhance the agitation of Niger-Delta people, notable among them are: Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP) launched in 1990, was the first group to gain international attention for their grievances against the Nigerian government and regional oil companies. MOSOP goals include increased local control over resources and more equitable development. MOSOP also sought the resolution of fishing and farming issues that arose from the environmental effects of oil extraction, such as oil spills, acid rain and soil degradation, protection of human rights became another demand after peaceful protests by Ogoni people were met with arrest, repression and violence from military regime of General Sanni Abacha. The Ogoni movement inspired a host of similar organizing effort in the region, particularly among the Ijaw.

More so, the Ijaw in particular demanded accountability from the regional political officials and greater voice in the region’s affairs. Their demands were outlined in the Kaiama declaration, released in December 1998 which called for the immediate withdrawal of the military from Ijaw

areas and cessation of oil production if equitable control over these resources was not returned to the oil producing community. Clashes between Ijaw groups and the Nigerian government led to the imposition of emergency rule in late 1998.

In the final analysis, several methods or mechanisms put in place by Nigerian government to solve the problem of the Niger Delta, ranging from the creation of the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC), establishment of Niger Delta Summit which was supposed to be headed by professor Ibrahim Gambari before it was later concealed, the latest effort under this administration could be seen in the area of establishment of federal ministry of Niger Delta, it must be noted that, with all these mechanism, the problem in the region still remains an endless exercise, and the crisis in the Niger Delta has become a major problem.

PROBLEM OF MARGINALIZATION IN NIGERIA: AN ASSESSEMENT OF SOUTH- SOUTH QUESTION IN NIGERIA.

Basically, the crisis in the Niger Delta is not unconnected with the problem of marginalization in terms of economic resources and political affairs. Despite the fact, the region produces 80% of Nigerian income; the region suffers seriously from poverty and low economic empowerment. However, the state further suffers legitimacy crisis as excluded groups emerge to demand their own portion of the national cakes. Jega (2003:27) put it thus:

Under conditions of economic crisis and subsequent structural adjustment there has been a swift decline in the ability of the Nigerian state to provide for the basic socio-economic needs of the people. Similarly there has been increased exclusion of a segment of the elite and the bourgeoisie in the offices, and an acute marginalization of the majority of the population from the benefit of development projects and socio provisioning. All these have led to an increase crisis of legitimacy of the state. As the state experience a process of decomposition and composition and disengages from critical socio provisioning; only the constituent groups have tended to rely on identity based struggle for access to the state and the resources that it controls in order to protest exclusion and oppression as well as to demand basic right and socio-economic provisioning.

It is in this context that the problem of marginalization in the Niger Delta can be fully examined. The people of the Niger Delta in Nigeria are one of the worst abused, exploited, and wantonly killed group of people in the whole Africa today (Inemo 2008:1). Oil export from

Nigeria began in the 1950s and now account for about 90% of the foreign exchange earnings and 80% of the federal government revenue, over 40% of these come from the Niger Delta. Yet, the Ijaws and all the other tribes from the Niger Delta live in abject poverty and inhuman conditions, with no potable water, no hospitals and clinics, sewage system and tarred roads. More so, their farmland, rivers, streams and creeks are being polluted causing unimaginable illness.

Indeed, a report by the international organization, friends of the earth which was published in the financial time Newspaper recently wrote that the Gas flaring in the Niger Delta causes more greenhouse gases than all of sub-Sahara Africa combined. The giant's orange flares then burn across the delta region, where most of Nigerians oil is produced, causes respiratory diseases and premature deaths and pollute crop lands close to village homes in the delta's vast network of swamps and creeks.

However, other problems include resources control, the oil spillages, devastation of environment, lack of development, army and police brutality and many more. Over the years there has being an ongoing struggle by the people for a better deal, a fair share of the huge wealth generated in their land, basically, the rising cost of the world's oil also being blamed on the unrest in Niger Delta as a result of this, popular ethnic leader from oil producing Niger Delta who called for the disintegration of Nigeria has been arrested and charged with treasonable felony carrying a penalty of life imprisonment certainly people of Niger Delta are an oppressed and exploited people and all these constitute the problem of marginalization in the region.

Similarly, it is expected that between 1960 and 1975 when the principle of derivation favored the oil producing region, there should have been some remarkable social and economic transformation of the region (Aghalion 2006:305). This was not the case; however, a clear point to disaffection in this period was the aggressive clamor for compensation from the government and the oil firms as epitomized by Isaac 'Adaka Boro Insurrection'. The lack of development of this region could be explained further in the area of power configuration in

Nigeria.

Be that as it may, the statutory distribution of revenue from the federation account has been controversial as well as contentious. The Political Bureau of 1987 observes that the issue of revenue is contentious to the extent that “None of the formula evolved at recent time by a commission of decree under different regime since 1964 has gained the component unit of the country”.

It must be noted that the issue of revenue allocation had been essentially a political rather than economic tool as a result of this; the problem of marginalization becomes an endless problem. Surprisingly, information coming from the ministry of finance and the senate committee on account indicates that even the 69 billion budgetary allocation made to NDDC in 2008 may have been reviewed downward to 35 billion Tell (2008:20) when compared to the government priority clearly point to another direction. That is why the militants are saying they have been proved in the end that the target is to exterminate the people. They find it easier to spend over N446 billion to save lives and secure the all-important oil drilling (Dayo 2008:19). All these problems inherent in the region and the poor approach of government to handle the issue in a peaceful manner have enhanced crisis in the region. This has marginalized the region. The Late President employed new approach to ameliorate the challenges in the oil producing states through the instrumentality of different amnesty programs and subsequently the former President Jonathan who hailed from Bayesa State one of the most influential states in the region also encouraged them to drop their guns and embrace peace..

The Niger Delta Crisis and the Quest for Resource Control

It must be noted that, the agitation of Niger Delta people is primarily based on resources control, the oil spillages, and devastation of the environment. Niger Delta has also been excluded from active participation in the oil industry. Oil well in their backyard is awarded to non-oil producing states, who exploit the land without regard for its owners. This is perpetuated by what they believe in their exclusion from power. Ordinary, the demand of the Niger Delta is 50% but this has not been realized. The region is still receiving 13% as against

the 50% which they demanded. If Nigeria wants peace, it is a challenge it must confront, if not, the agitation will continue Okoro (2008:2)

Against the backdrop of this agitation over resource control, the land use decree of 1979 has made all land to belong to government as a result of this the agitation over resource control remains unattainable in Niger Delta. Though it is truly dehumanizing for the kind of rot and penury that subsists in the delta of Nigeria. Coming from agitation and armed struggle, which led to various interventions, it is heart wrenching to still see most of the states that make up the Niger Delta in complete squalor and without hope for any improvement. As a result of this former president Olusegun Obasanjo in a bid to improve the economic and social situation in that region created the Niger Delta Development Commission, NDDC, as to ameliorate the dire realities after he took office in 1999. He was applauded but the people waited in baited breath. Prior to this time, military ruler, Gen. Sani Abacha by fiat created a 13 percent special allocation to oil mineral producing states. (National Pilot, 2015:13), this was to bolster the basket of funds made available to the nine oil producing states.

By the time Umaru Musa Yar'Adua of the blessed memory took over office as the President in 2007, militancy in the Niger Delta had reached disproportionate levels. Kidnapping, mugging, sabotage of oil installation, killings, arson, despoilation of the environment had reached alarming levels. Former President Yar'Adua created a ministry of Niger Delta to work in concert with the already existing NDDC. He also created the Amnesty Office, which operated directly under the President. The quantum of money so far pumped into the Niger Delta since 1999 till date runs into several trillions of naira but you will need a microscope to see the impact viewed side by side with other states that have no such luxury.

Causes of Niger Delta Crisis

It is fundamental fact that the specter of violence in the Niger Delta is attributable but not limited to the following:

The skewed structure of the Nigerian federalism - It has been observed that federalism as practiced in Nigeria has failed to take into account the fears, needs and aspiration of the minorities that make up the Niger Delta region. The weak nature of the Nigerian state has

precipitated fiscal centralization in favor of the federal government has made it difficult for their recourses have led a wave of agitation for greater control of their resources.

Perceived/ real marginalization of the Niger Delta Region - At the heart of the persistent crisis in the region is the perception of oil minorities that they have been created, neglected, marginalized and alienated in the distribution of the wealth of the oil produced from their lands and water, benefit of development has naturally contributed to the tensions, violence and conflict within the region

Activities of oil and gas companies- the exploration and exploitation unleash for contestation in the Niger Delta, Ethnic identities have assumed the character of a mobilizing factor for contesting access not only to oil wealth but also to political power. Ethnicity has also been staked in organization social forces for the struggle against received injustices.

The retention of legislations widely perceived as obnoxious - It is widely held that the people of the Niger Delta have been disempowered and disinherited of their land through the instrumentality of legislation such as land use Act, the petroleum Act and some sections of the petroleum Act. These legislations vest ownership and control of lands, water and the resources found therein in the hands of federal and state government.

The role of government- Many people in the region believe that there exists an “unholy alliance” between the federal government and the oil companies, they contend that the government almost always identifies with and defers to the interest of the oil companies. Thus far, the Nigerian government has displayed indifference when it comes to resolving the conflict in the Niger Delta indeed, Abuja has shown little interest in launching a serious political dialogue process that will address the fundamental issues.

Although, several methods have been taken by the successive administration to resolve the crisis in the region ranging from establishment of (NDDC) Niger Delta Development Commission, the act which was signed into law on July 12, 2000 replaced the all mineral

producing Areas Commission Decree 1998 in search for more effectiveness in management and service delivery.

However, former President Olusegun Obasanjo organized CONFAP during his administration where the issue of Niger Delta supposed to be addressed but at the end of the day there was not any meaningful output.

More so, the recent effort by President Umaru Yar'Adua who set up Niger Delta summit which was supposed to be headed by Professor Ibrahim Gambari was later canceled. Another recent measure to address the crisis in the Niger Delta could also be seen in the area of establishment of federal ministry of Niger Delta. Despite all these measures to resolve the crisis in oil producing state, the problem still remains unsolved

The Crisis In Niger Delta And Its Implication On Nigerian Socio-Political And Economic Development

Basically, the conflict in the Niger Delta has posed a fundamental domestic challenge to Nigeria security for more than a decade despite the pledge to address continued instability in the region, the problem still remain unsolved. The oil production continues to diminish as a result of militants attack, and is currently 20 to 25 percentage below capacity. Meanwhile, militia members in the Niger Delta continue to engage in criminal activities such as kidnapping and oil bunkering to maximize profit for themselves and their political patron (Kelly 2008:9).

More so, oil bunkering and general instability in the region compound energy problems abroad, reducing supply and driving up the cost of oil in global markets. Nigeria is currently the fourth-largest supplier of oil to the United States. In March 2008 alone, the US imported 1.154 million barrels per day from Nigeria.

The militias have become increasingly violent, both towards one another and towards civilians. Kidnapping victims now include not just oil workers but also children and other

people who are not associated with oil industries. Arms and more sophisticated weapons into the Niger Delta from regional and international markets has led to the increased arming of the militias.

They are now nearly even matched with the Nigerian military. Politicians in the Niger Delta find that the militias retain the lion share of illegally sourced wealth and are able to sustain their activities with minimal losses. Basically, the crisis in the region has discouraged foreign company or multinational corporation to settle down in the region. The crisis has caused serious problems in the country politically, socially and economically. As a result of this successive government have embarked upon different strategies to ameliorate the problem, although the problem still remains unsolved and this cannot enhance the democratic utilities in Nigeria.

Concluding Reflections

The crisis in the Niger Delta is not a new phenomenon, its emerging trend has posed serious fundamental domestic challenges to Nigerian security for more than a decade, despite the actions of government to ensure peace in the region, the problem still remains unsolved, because of ineffectiveness inherent in governmental policies. However, in Nigeria, oil holds a unique place and position in national development. The effect of exploration of oil in the country has brought smiles to some people, on the other hand, is the cause of misery, particularly for the oil producing communities. Surprisingly, the crisis in the region took new dimension with the effort of late President Yar'Adua. He took it upon himself to organize amnesty program for the Niger Delta militants as well as the establishment of Ministry of Niger Delta.

–Government must leave the oil community from depth of underdevelopment that is government must change their hostile approach. They must win the confidence of the people in the Niger Delta especially the youth by providing human development.

–Government must embark upon credible peace process that must involve all parties to the conflict, including representatives of the government in the communities of the Niger Delta,

the militants and the leading oil companies in the region.

- The international community particularly the US and UK could do a great deal to support the legacy of government
- The federal government’s ability to play a more constructive role in establishing security and making governors more accountable is equally important.
- The federal government should try as much as possible to consolidate and sustain the recent ministry of Niger delta which was recently established to make it as a mechanism to ensure peace in Niger Delta.

Militarization/Proliferation of arms: the militarization and proliferation of arms in the Niger Delta have been the causes and responses to the situation in the region. Successive governments have sought to contain the impasse in the oil producing region through troops and weapons deployment. The aggrieved communities have in turn, taken up arms against the security forces to dislodge what they have long regarded as an unwarranted stage in their communities. However, the manifestation of crisis in Niger Delta has resulted into different socio-political and economic problems in the country. Not until recently the late President Umaru Musa Ya’Adua put in place different frameworks to ameliorate the problems but that alone is not enough, the current administration must also consolidate on the existing legacies.

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