CRUDE OIL EXPLOITATION AND POLITICAL INSTABILITY IN NIGERIA'S NIGER DELTA: THE POLITICAL ECONOMY PERSPECTIVE

[1]Anthony B. Wilson and [2]Bassey Sammuel
[1]Department of Political Science
College of Education
Afaha Nsit
Email: abwilson65@gmail.com
[2]Department of Public Administration
College of Science and Technology
Nung Ukim, Ikono

Abstract
Oil exploitation in the Niger Delta appeared as a blessing that later turned out to be a curse due to the environmental degradation which results in poverty of the indigenous people of the region and the unfair resources allocation to the region by successive governments. This study noted that, oil which has become the major source of Nigerian income has emerged as a destabilizing mechanism in the Niger Delta Region. The conclusion is drawn from the intensity in the slope of violence that has remained a consistent paradigm in the oil-rich Niger Delta Region; which has kept the country on the fringe of collapse. Highlights on interventions by government have been made and their impacts on conflicts resolution. The latest aspect of ensuring equity, the much awaited Petroleum Industry Bill is also identified as a source of hope. The study recommends that for Nigeria to enjoy the oil wealth under the condition of stability, it is imperative for the multinational Companies (MNCS) and the Federal Government (FG) to discard the use of force and intimidation but resort to negotiating with the host Communities and States to determine their needs and be ready to honestly implement their proposal in the interest of peace and stability.

Introduction

The emergence of Nigeria as a country from the forceful amalgamation of diverse ethnic groups produced among others the basic problems of participation, distribution, authority and Nation building. (Elaigwu, 1998). As a result mutual suspicion, intolerance and uneasy compromise largely threaten National integration. The entities in the Nigerian States tend to co- exist on such a flimsy network that remains vulnerable to the slightest provocation. This situation explains the space of disagreements on Political, Economic, Social and Religious views which have emerged as the main cause of disharmony in Nigeria.

A good number of reasons could be held accountable for the National instability in Nigeria; prominent among these is the inequitable distribution of National wealth caused by the unchecked tribal and hegemonic pursuit of parochial interests by the majority and their leaders. (Weekend Pioneer, Jan. 12, 2001:19).

From the 1970s, when the federal Government decided to adopt a policy of fiscal centralism, the story of a country called Nigeria started experiencing instability, the era coincides also with the shift of emphasis from the cocoa, rubber, hide and skin, groundnut,

when regions controlled 100% or 50% of their revenue to an oil economy through crude oil, which resulted in the unexpected Naira rain in the Nation when oil producing states were made to beg for even increased revenue. The resultant effect and struggle lies on the sharing of the oil fortune which has thus emerged as the major causes of instability in Nigeria till date.

The turn-around in the Nigerian economy and its subsequent dependence on the oil sector came with the oil boom in the 1970s. Apart from the increased revenue which it yielded to the Nation, the oil fortune brought hope to the oil-bearing communities, in terms of increased employment opportunities, and indeed an improvement in the overall standard of living with the people. (Okonta. 2000). The reversal from agriculture and over dependence on oil immediately turned the country into a Rentier State, where the wealth of the Nation is being shared by people who do not contribute to that wealth. With the 1979 constitutional amendment which gave the federal government full ownership and rights to all Nigerian territory and also declared that eminent domain compensation for seized land would "be based on the value of the crops on the land at the time of its acquisition, not on the value of the land itself, the oil communities dwellers in the Niger Delta suspected foul play as such laws did not come when regions depended entirely on agricultural produce from their regions.

Accordingly, the majority non-oil producing ethnic groups who took the centre stage in distributing the oil values came up with revenue allocation principles designed to marginalize and deprive the oil producing areas of their natural wealth (Ating, 2005), as the Federal Government took ownership of all natural resources, the revenue allocation formula changed from 100

in 1950 to 50E §•≤Ø°¥ØŒin thc 1960s, to 45E ŒŒ˩˩ẄŒE ŒŒ˩˩ẄẏŒE ŒŒ˩˩ẄŒE Œ 1992 and the controversial 13E ŒŒ˩˩˩ 4®• ≥•ÆØŒ₩§•£ỳ˩˩Ẅ˩˩˩Ỳ˩ỳThe overall effect of the haphazard distribution is that the oil bearing areas continuously bear the brunt of injustice in the area of employment and participation in the oil business without any corresponding development. The oil-rich communities have engaged the state in an acrimonious struggle for power that could bring about their greater share in the profit of oil exploitation. (Adebayo in Olaniyan 1988).

The oil sector is found mostly in the Niger Delta region which includes Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Edo, Delta, Rivers, and Cross Rivers. Others are Imo, Abia, and Ondo States. The area produces 95 of the total earnings from oil and gas and about 88 of Nigeria's foreign exchange earnings as at 23 April, 2019 (africacheck.org.) Despite the Wealth it has contributed to the Nation, oil has produced a number of negative effects on Nigeria and Niger Delta region in particular, one of these is the pollution of the environment, and the degradation of land. According to Emuedo (2010). oil exploration and exploitation activities have caused severe changes in the ecological environment; coastal erosion, flooding, sea level rise, water contamination fishing and rapid depletion of natural resources. Many indigenes of the Niger Delta region depend on the sea and coastal lands for their means of livelihood. With the continuous degradation of the coastal land and sea due to oil exploitation, they are left with no alternative than raising their voices against any form of marginalization from direct benefit from the oil drawn from their backyard. The deprivation and marginalization of the

people suffered by the oil producing communities has led to the formation of militants to fight the multi-National companies and the Federal Government for their fair share from the oil and infrastructural development. The resistance by the Federal Government authorities to address the problems of injustice had made the Niger Delta Region a seat of trouble (Okonta, 2000). This has been so because as Oyefusi (2007) noted, of all natural resources, oil has been found to have the highest risk of civil conflict because of the large rents it offers and the shocks to which the government and the national economy are exposed to (Collier and Hoeffler, 2005; Fearon and Laiton 2005). According to Collier and Hoeffler (2002), 23 percent of states dependent on oil exports have experienced civil war in any 5-year period, a figure that dwarfs the 0.55 for countries without natural resources. This scenario is not different in Nigeria.As stated by Ugoh and Ukpere (2010) youths of the Niger Delta region by way of various ethnic militia groups have become restive in their bid for greater control of their natural endowment which has manifested in activities such as kidnapping, pipeline vandalization, oil bunkering and other anti-social behaviours that are directly resultant of failed leadership.

Hostilities have grown from the 1990s through the 2000 and now in the 21st century, there appear no end in sight. With Nigeria's economy depending on the oil derived from the Niger Delta region, Federal Government has no alternative than apply all political maneuverings to ensure that the economy is not stifled. However, while the experiences of oil exporters across the globe show that oil-dependence is most often a perilous development path, it is also evident that the negative outcome of oil (and other resource) booms can be avoided (Oyefusi 2007).

Various approaches have been adopted and are still being generated. The sincerity of government in implementing these approaches is still suspicious thus threatening the current peace experienced in the region. Whenever the peace is threatened, oil output falls and as the people lose sleep, government and investors in the oil sector lose the much expected income from this very precious "black gold". Government approaches to sustaining the oil output in the region over the years will also be highlighted in this paper.

Theoretical Framework

This study relies on two theories to buttress its argument. These are the Resource Curse and the Rentier State theories. The Resource Curse theory alludes to the failure of resource-rich countries to use their wealth to fully benefit the development of their country and that of their people, (Burgis 2015) due to the failure of their institutions to effectively live up to public welfare needs. Resource curse hypothesis, also referred to as „paradox of plenty" or „adverse effect of abundance" (Mähler 2010), mainly claims that natural resources abundance in general encourages civil war for they offer motive and opportunity for conflict and create and enable indirect institutional and economic causes of instability. Drawing on political and economy theories about why some resource-rich countries do not do as well as expected, political scientists and economists put forward that mineral wealth, particularly hydrocarbons, is different from other types of wealth due to its large rents, scale price, production volatility, its non-renewable nature and the secrecy of the industry (Beblawi and Luciani 2016). This has played out in a state like Nigeria where oil has brought

a paradox of plenty which according to Emuedo (2010), the contradictions of the Nigerian state however, are not resolved but treated in ways that are inimical to social and economic development. Such contradictions include 'oilification' of conflicts, (the tendency of the state to treat every conflict even those devised or abetted by it, as oil conflict in the Niger Delta) is one of such contradictions (Emeudo 2010). The term *resource curse* was first used by Richard Auty in 1993 to describe how countries rich in mineral resources were unable to use that wealth to boost their economies and how, counter-intuitively, these countries had lower economic growth than countries without an abundance of natural resources. An influential study by Jeffrey Sachs and Andrew Warner found a strong correlation between natural resource abundance and poor economic growth (Sachs & Warner 1995 in Oyefusi 2007).

The Rentier State theory suggests that mineral-dependent regimes rely on resources revenue, through the use of patronage, significant distributive policies and real violence, to buy off peace. Politically, it is arguable that such rentier states tend to be more stable and less exposed to conflict (Habiba 2018). The proponents of Renter State theory was Hossein Mahdavy in a 1970 and was further developed by economists Hazem Beblawi and Giacomo Luciani in an edited volume published in 1987 (Meliha 2014). The relevance of the political Economy approach lies in its ability in explaining the pattern of value extraction and allocation in which the politically powerful members of the society deprive the owners of the Oil resource of their fair share of the wealth derived from it, hence the Perpetuation of conflict in the Niger Delta.

Historical Background of Instability in Niger Delta

The onset of instability in the Niger Delta due to oil exploitation in the area dates back to 1966 when Isaac Boro, an Ijaw leader opposed the domination of the "Eastern Region" by Igbos and declared a Niger Delta Republic. The detention, jailing and suppression of Isaac Boro was an attempt to stop any dissent against exploitation of the oil resource that was discovered about ten years earlier. This has been the case for every other attempt at gaining fair share of oil revenue by the land owners.

It continued with the establishment of the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People by Ken Saro Wiwa in 1990. According to leaders of die Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP) and traditional heads of various Ogoni clans presented the Ogoni Bill of Rights to the federal military government. In that bill, after lamenting the sufferings of the Ogoni peoples on account of oil exploration activities, the neglect of their area by successive Federal and Rivers state governments and the consequent lack of amenities and social services, as well their political marginalization in the country and defining themselves as 'a separate and distinct ethnic nationality', the Ogonis demanded political autonomy to participate in the affairs of the Republic as a distinct and separate unit (Osaghae 1995). This, no matter how well articulated and peaceful it appeared, threatened the beneficiaries of the Rentier State and the onl option was suppression which ultimately resulted killings in Ogoni and eventual sentencing and hanging of the leader of the movement in 1995.

Other such groups which were irked by the killing of a frontline leader of Niger Delta sprang up which include the Ijaw Youth Council (IYC) Chikoko Movement and Movement for the survival of Ijaw Ethnic Nationality in the Niger Delta (MOSIEND) and Supreme Egbesu Assembly. In 1998, the Ijaw Youth Council issued the Kaiama declaration of the right

to ownership and control of their lives and resources. The formation of these militant groups in Niger Delta has given the Federal Government a nightmare.

The Niger Delta People's Volunteer force (NDPVF) anchored by Asari Dokuba and the Niger Delta Vigilante force led by Ateke Tom were of the Opinion that the armed Struggle was necessary to receive a better economic deal from the Federation (Vanguard, July 20, 2004:20). A number of factors could be said to be responsible for the Struggle for the resources, hence the unfair and politicization of the sharing of the revenue accruing from the oil sector. (The Sensor, Dec 30, 2002:8).

The second factor responsible for instability associated with oil is the failure of the multi-National Companies to respond to the yearnings and developmental needs of the oil - bearing communities, to compensate the people for environmental hazards done by oil spillage which has affected agricultural activities of the areas, and to clean up the environment (The Punch, July 15, 2004).

Government has always reacted to the issues in the Niger Delta in many ways so as to continue to harness the rich resource of the area. From outright suppression by use of force, killings and maiming to lopsided negotiations and placating the citizens and unto dangling of carrots intended to calm frayed nerves for the sake of allowing peace for the exploitation to continue. Government intervention in the area dates back to 1961 according to Ibaba (2005) cited in Paki and Ebienfa (2011), when the Federal Government established the Niger Delta Development Board (NDDB). The main function of the Board was to advice the Governments of the Federation, Eastern and Western Region, with respect to physical development of the Niger Delta. According Jack-Akhigbe (2013), from 1980, government of Shehu Shagari set up a presidential task force to use 1.5% of oil revenue for the development of the Niger Delta area which was replaced in 1987 with the Presidential Implementation Committee by the Babangida administration. This meant that further pressures by Niger Delta leaders can yield dividends. The agitations escalated to sustained hostilities until government decided to set up the Oil Mineral Producing Area Development Commission (OMPADEC) in 1992 with most members drawn from states within the Niger Delta area. Coupled with shortfalls in the budgeted revenue and actual revenue released to the agency,; and the perceived corruption by the operators, the commission failed to achieve the desired objectives. As Paki and Ebienfa (2011) observed, the Commission was entangled by structural defects, financial imprudence, contract proliferation, and lack of goodwill from major ethnic groups in Nigeria, faulty project ideas, maladministration and lack of funding, nepotism, corruption and faults in implementation strategy.

Other intervention opportunities came with the conversion of OMPADEC to Niger Delta Development Commission in the year 2000. The NDDC was given the mandate of facilitating "the rapid even and sustainable development of the Niger Delta in to a region that is stable, ecologically regeneration and politically peacefully" (Yishan, 2008). However, Paki and Ebienfa (2011) observed that again, like other intervention agencies, it has equally failed to constitutionally address the fundamental issues of exclusion, marginalization and deprivation in the region.

The regime of Obasanjo resorted to force to suppress agitation by Niger Delta youths. The Federal Government on November 20, 1999, ordered military invasion of Odi, an oil rich

town in the Niger Delta area. According to Human Rights Watch (2000),

> "the troops demolished every single building, barring the bank, the Anglican church and the health, and may have killed hundreds of unarmed civilians. While the soldiers reportedly shot and killed some of the armed youths who brought trouble to the town, most of the gang is reported to have fled. Shortly before the military operation at Odi, Nigerian soldiers were also deployed in the nearby community of Choba, in Rivers State, in order to disperse protesters outside the gates of Willbros Nigeria Ltd, the subsidiary of an American pipeline construction company. Community members reported that the soldiers killed four people, and raped a large number of women. Photographs which appeared to show soldiers in the act of raping several women were published in the Nigerian press".

This led to escalation of hostilities in the area. With escalation in hostilities that resulted in oil production plummeting, the Federal Government, according to Imongan and Ikelegbe (2016), proclaimed on 25 June, 2009, the Amnesty programme, which included forgiveness and automatic freedom from any form of prosecution whatsoever for militants who voluntarily surrender their arms and were willing to be integrated into the society. This was a welcome development. Many appreciated the gesture of government and it appears to have been the most favoured response to the agitation of the people of the region.

This was followed by the establishment of the Ministry of Niger Delta Affairs on September 10, 2008 to promote and coordinate policies for the development, peace and security of the Niger Delta Region. The creation of the ministry was a second plausible attempt by the government of President Musa Yar'dua to douse the series of agitations by the people of the Region on the perceived sense of exclusion, environmental degradation, poverty and unemployment facing the Region. After the declaration of Amnesty, according to Igini (2011), during the period 2010 – 2014 Federal Government policy and programme on the development of the Niger Delta region so as to reduce or eliminate conflict and violence in the Niger Delta focused on what has been termed Disarmament, Demobilization, Rehabilitation and Reintegration (DDRR).

With the apparent failure of the Niger Delta Development Commission to live up to the expectations of government and the citizens, and equally the Ministry of Niger Delta Affairs to attain the objectives which it was set, the region and infact Nigeria is sitting on a keg of gunpowder. Renewed hostilities would be more dangerous than before as there would be proliferation of diverse militia groups defying negotiations.

The Political Economy Perspective

With the Resource Curse leading to the failure of the Nigerian state to practice federalism (Ko 2014), there can be politically motivated approaches of 'give and take' to sway the Niger Delta areas to continue to sustain the economy of the nation without the breakdown of peace and order. The polity depends on the revenue generated from the Niger Delta area for

survival and the area has repeatedly agitated for its resource to be managed from within. A balance need be struck. This, among other failures in the industry, gave rise to the idea of a law that will make the industry more beneficial to both the government and the Niger Delta region. This culminated in the presentation of the Petroleum Industry Bill (PIB) which again like other intervention policies is becoming over politicized.

According to KPMG Advisory Services (2017), the Senate of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN), on Thursday 25 May 2017, passed the Petroleum Industry Governance Bill (PIGB or the Bill). The Bill, which still needs to be passed by the House of Representatives and assented to by the President of the FRN before it becomes law, seeks to establish a framework for the creation of commercially-oriented and profit-driven petroleum entities, to ensure value addition and internationalization of the petroleum industry, through the creation of efficient and effective governing institutions with clear and separate roles for the petroleum industry. This is laudable and mouth watering but as Sayne (2011) puts it, if the final Petroleum Industry Bill (PIB) contains strong transparency and accountability provisions, Nigeria's oil sector performance has real opportunity to improve. Transparency encourages competition, discourages illicit behavior and attracts investment. Accountable institutions reassure investors, improve regulation and revenue collection and result in higher production and earnings. There is need for this transparency and accountability to reduce the very high level of suspicion held by the populace in the area against government, oil companies and even workers in the companies who have faced series of kidnappings.

The National Assembly has started deliberations again on the bill as **Kennedy, Brauch, Toledano and Mebratu-Tsegaye (2021)** noted that with Nigeria's National Assembly debating the proposed Petroleum Industry Bill (PIB) in the first quarter of 2021—after nearly two decades of attempted reform of the country's petroleum sector—Nigeria has a unique opportunity to rethink the role of the oil and gas industry in Nigeria's economy and build out the country's energy sector and economic capacity for the long term. This will be to the benefit of all parties and there would be permanent peace for further exploitation. However, there have been demands for oil communities to be adequately catered for in the bill. Proshare (2021) presents this aspect of the bill thus:

> *"PIB proposes that the host communities receive a 2.5% fund based on the actual operating expenditure of the oil companies for the preceding year. The bill also seeks to end the flaring of gas, a major source of waste and environmental pollution, particularly at oil exploration areas. The fund will be used to support the development of healthcare facilities in the host communities, and enhance environmental protection and local initiatives, which are favorable for the overall socio-economic development of the host communities".*

According to Oil and Gas 360 (2021), a new version of the Petroleum Industry Bill, PIB, which removes the strategic *Host Community Development Fund* as proposed in the botched PIB is set to commence legislative deliberations in the next few days. This portends danger and indirectly another invitation to anarchy and restiveness in the Niger Delta. The removal of the *Host Community Development Fund* as envisaged in the original PIB is, however, set

to reawaken ethnic and geopolitical fractures in the country given the immense support for the proposal in the country's oil producing regions in the Niger Delta (Oil and Gas 360 2021). The first salvo was fired by governors of states in the region. According to Energy Voice (2021), Rivers State Governor Nyesom Wike has called for a 10% allocation for host communities in the Petroleum Industry Bill (PIB). The contending issue is the percentage to be allocated to the host communities in the bill. Proponents of the bill are tinkering with removing it or giving only 2.5% but the host communities are clamouring for an increase. Since the legal framework approach can stand the test of time, there should be a mutual understanding for peace in the Niger Delta to persist.

Recommendations

In order to reduce the rate of injustice and eliminate crisis in Niger Delta and Nigeria as a whole, the following recommendations are made:

(a) The multi-National oil Companies should be constitutionally compelled to observe the necessary environmental standard in the course of their exploitation and exploration to avoid accidental spillage, if any prompt attention and adequate compensation should be paid to the affected areas.

(b) Both the Federal Government and the multi-National Companies should always dialogue with the host communities rather than resort to the use of force.

(c) The people should be allowed greater participation in the control and management of their resources through the passage of the Petroleum Industry bill after 20 years.

(d) Local Content Policies should be enforced to create employment opportunities for indigenes.

Summary/Conclusion

The paper examined the effect of oil exploitation on the political instability in Nigeria: Niger Delta Experience. Since the discovery of oil in Oloibiri in the present day Bayelsa State, emphasis has shifted from agriculture to the oil sector driven economy, the country has not known peace. It has embroiled with conflicts between the multinational Companies and the Federal Government on the one hand, and the oil bearing communities. The reason is the devastating environmental impact of the process and product which have caused huge collateral damage to both aquatic and terrestrial life thereby depriving the host communities of their sources of livelihood, hence increase in poverty rate among the oil communities.

The unwillingness by both the Federal Government and multi-National Companies to respond to the developmental needs of the areas has led to the formation of militant groups, whose violent activities to wrestle for the fair share of the oil wealth from the Federal Government are the harbingers of instability in Niger Delta and Nigeria as a whole. Government interventions have been either positive or negative in dousing the tensions which have affected production volume of the only source of Nigeria's revenue.

The latest salvo which is the Petroleum Industry Bill, with its perceived advantages, still remain a mirage 20 years after being proposed and the regular differences in the inclusion of percentage for the host communities need be addressed for common good.

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