UNDERDEVELOPMENT AND MARGINALIZATION OF NIGER DELTA: A CASE OF DISCRIMINATION IN THE CHOICE OF MANAGERS IN PETROLEUM SECTOR, PRESIDENT OF NIGERIA

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Abstract

Underdevelopment and Marginalization of the Niger Delta region of Nigeria: A case of discrimination in the choice of managers in the petroleum sector and office of president was examined. The examination revealed a paradoxical situation as the crude oil wealth of Niger Delta, instead of being a blessing to the people of the region has become a curse. The paper frowned at the poor treatment of the Niger Delta by the Federal government of Nigeria for over two decades, despite its position as the major income earner for the country. The study discovered with dissatisfaction the negative tendency of the northern hegemonic forces to frustrate the development of the Niger Delta region in the provision of infrastructure, social amenities, choice of indigenes of the region to managerial positions in the petroleum sector, and president of the country as well as manipulation of population census figures in their favour during national population census exercises to enable them benefit more, from resource allocation to the northern states. Recommendations were made that the federal government of Nigeria should take the overall development of Niger Delta as a priority, provide infrastructural facilities in the region, choose indigenes of the region to managerial positions in the petroleum sector, provide opportunity for them to ascend to the office of president of the country from time to time and compensate fishermen and farmers for loss of land and fishing waters due to oil spillage. In conclusion, the Nigerian government should not concentrate only on exploiting the regions natural resources but provide commensurate developments in the interest of peace in the Niger Delta and Nigeria as a whole.

***Keywords*:** Underdevelopment, Marginalization, Choice of Managers, Petroleum Sector, President.

Introduction

It is an incontestable fact that the Niger Delta region which comprises of Akwa Ibom, Abia, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo, Imo, Ondo and Rivers States account for more than 80% of the total output of crude oil in Nigeria. This implies that the region is the financial life-wire of the country, but unfortunately, it is the most neglected and underdeveloped, especially in the areas of infrastructure, social amenities and general rural conditions.

Underdevelopment and marginalization of the Niger Delta region of Nigeria has been exposed to global knowledge over the years and has remained a recurrent theme in the literature of contemporary academic discourse both at local and international fora. It has been argued, and rightly too, that the Niger Delta region is the economic hub of the country which should have been celebrated before now in terms of significant development but the reverse has continued to be the case. What exists in the region is hunger, environmental degradation unemployment, poverty and pollutions which often-times become unbearable and trigger revolts by the people, leading ultimately to crises.

Despite these noticeable problems, the federal government has continued to remain insensitive to the sufferings of the people. It has, from the standpoint of practical politics refused to restructure the country federal system and address the dissatisfaction and frustration of the oil producing states of Niger Delta. It has consciously and systematically hidden under the so-called exclusive legislative list in the Nigerian constitution to control the resources of the Niger Delta with impunity and disregard. The federal government of Nigeria has subjected the oil producing minority states to a condition of dependence through fiscal centralism with negative effects on the affected states, (Bassey 2002).

Against this backdrop, the paper seeks to inquire into underdevelopment and marginalization of the Niger Delta region of Nigeria to ascertain the level of discrimination against the region in the choice of managers in the petroleum sector from the genesis of the fourth republic till date (1999-2023) and president of the federal republic of Nigeria since independence in 1960 till 2023.

Statement of the Problem

It is arguably true that any discussion about the Nigerian economy and overall development of Nigeria is indeed a discussion about oil and its components. This is because the country depends on revenue from oil in the Niger Delta for national development but the Niger Delta Region that is endowed with oil wealth is suffering from underdevelopment, marginalization, unemployment, poor infrastructure, poverty and neglect, especially in the choice of indigenes of the region to positions of responsibility in the country's oil industry and the presidency. It is these identified problems that motivated the study.

Theoretical Framework

Scholars in the social sciences, in their various publications, conferences and seminars have attempted to discuss underdevelopment and marginalization. Among such scholars are; Walter Rodney (1972), How Europe underdeveloped Africa, Samir Amin (1972), Underdevelopment and dependence in black Africa, Gunder Frank (1976), Capitalism and underdevelopment in North Africa, Richard Auty (1993), Resource curse and Joan Mowat (2015), Towards a new conceptualization of marginalization. This study adopted the underdevelopment theory of Gunder Frank (1976), the resource curse theory of Richard Auty (1993) and Joan Mowat (2015) theory of marginalization.

Underdevelopment makes sense only when it is seen as a means of comparing levels of development. A more indispensable component of modern underdevelopment is expressed in a relationship of exploitation as is the case in the Niger Delta oil producing area of Nigeria.

Rodney (1972) states that underdevelopment is a paradox since many parts of the world that are naturally endowed and rich are actually poor and parts that are not naturally wealthy are enjoying the highest standard of living. The Niger Delta region is rich in oil resources which cater for the entire country, but it is the most underdeveloped, especially, in infrastructure, social amenities and overall living conditions of people.

Development in one area, according to Frank (1976) is a direct consequence of underdevelopment in other areas. Metropolitan countries develop by expropriating the economic surpluses of the satellites and making them to perpetually maintain their stagnating and periphery status. Dependent states maintain the position of satellites and watch as their surpluses are carted away by multinational corporations through the help of internal comprador bourgeoisies.

The core-periphery relationship put the majority peasants in a condition of poverty. This type of relationship extends beyond countries of the world to affect intra-country relationship too, where the hinterland supplies to the city and are exploited by it. This is precisely what happens in Nigeria where the Niger Delta region produces oil which is the foundation and life-wire of the country's economy, but at the same time facing neglect by the same federal government it is sustaining. The indices of poverty in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria, despite its wealth could be seen as a curse arising from the rich natural resources of the people.

The resource curse theory by Richard Auty (1993) is apt in explaining the state of underdevelopment of the Niger Delta region. The founding fathers of this theory state that in countries of the greatest plenty, the poorest are found in large numbers. This observation is precisely what obtains in the oil producing states of the Niger Delta. The resource curse is a paradoxical situation in which a country, despite being in possession of valuable natural resources cannot perform well economically .It is a situation whereby a country with an export-driven natural resources sector that generates much revenues for government paradoxically experience economic stagnation, political instability and overall lack of development (Ross 1999, Watts 2004, Watts 2008, Ross 2012).

The Niger Delta axis of Nigeria is experiencing a "resource curse" as the region has not been able to use its wealth to boost economic growth (Uzoma, Agbona and Anyanwu 2016).The implication is that the natural wealth of the Delta has become the people's woe. It has created poverty, illnesses, some of which are difficult to diagnose, infrastructural decay, environmental pollution and degradation which scholars have continually describe as the paradox of plenty (Karl 1997;Udosen, Etok and George 2009;Koutou & Ondoa 2023).

The theoretical concept of marginalization is a historical reality and context specific phenomenon. It is characterized by domination of some groups and individuals; especially the minority. Marginalization goes hand in hand with injustice and inequality.

The Niger Delta region of Nigeria is suffering from Economic and Political marginalization. The region is experiencing disparity in wealth distribution and employment for its teaming population. Communities in the region are excluded from participating in active political activities and cannot gain access to their political representatives for assistance (Mowat 2015). The oil wealth of the Niger Delta is enjoyed by the majority non-oil producing states in Nigeria while the minority oil producing states wallow in abject poverty. They are excluded from holding key political offices in the country commensurate with their contributions to the commonwealth. The depth of injustice and inequality faced by the region is inexplicable.

Methodology

Methodology is derived from the Greek word methodos which means methods and logos (logy) meaning study. A person who observes 'method' is often referred to as a 'methodist'. Methodology is the science of method and procedure used in any given analysis or activity. It is a set of related principles which are adopted to specify how to reach a particular conclusion or achieve a given goal (Ndiyo, 2005). The intention of methodology is to draw a map showing the researcher a way to follow in conducting a study. As observed by Odo (1992), methodology is the authority-base for any research as it charts a course for the researcher to follow in carrying out a research.

This study adopted the survey method. It made use of secondary sources of data which included literature review of publications, newspapers, magazines, textbooks, journals, internet materials and reports on oil production in the Niger Delta. These presented an opportunity for the researcher to have names of group managing directors of the NNPC, their states and regions of origin from 1999 to 2023 and names, states and geopolitical zones of heads of states and presidents of Nigeria and tenures of office from 1960 to 2023.

Area of the study

The Niger Delta region is situated in the Gulf of Guinea between longitudes 5^0E to 8^0E and latitudes 4^0N to 6^0N. The region comprises of the area covered by the natural delta of the Niger River and the areas to the east and west. It covers approximately 25,900 square kilometers (Opafunso 2007; Uzoma, Agbona & Anyanwu 2016).

According to Prince Isaac Preboye in Kalama (2012) "the term Niger Delta Region has been over-politicized and extended beyond the core delta for selfish reasons. States in the actual core Delta includes the present day Rivers State, Bayelsa, Delta, Akwa Ibom and parts of Ondo States". But for administrative convenience, political expedience and development objectives as contained in the Act that established the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) in 2000, the Niger Delta Region has been extended to cover nine (9) states of Abia, Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo, Imo, Ondo and Rivers States with approximately 75,000 square kilometers and a population of 31.3 million people according to the 2006 Census (Uzoma, Agbona and Anyanwu 2016). The area comprises of many ethnic groups like the Ibibios, Efiks, Annangs, Oron, Yorubas, Urhobos, Ijaws, Andonis, Itsekiris, Ogonis, Ikweres, Kalabaris, Ika-Igbos, and Binis.

Conceptual Explication

Underdevelopment and the Niger Delta

Underdevelopment does not necessarily mean absence of development, but rather a means of comparing levels of development. Underdevelopment is not the direct opposite of development since the direct opposite of development would be absence or lack of development.

As Akpan (2014) points out:

> *The questions to ask about a country's development are: what has been happening to poverty; what has been happening to unemployment; what has been happening to inequality. If all three of these have declined from high levels, then beyond doubt, this has been a period of development for the country concerned, but if one or two of these central problems have been growing worse, especially if all the three have, then it would be strange to call the result development, even if per capita income has soared.*

Underdevelopment describes an economic situation in which there are persistent low levels of living in conjunction with absolute poverty, low income, high death rates, high birth rates and limited freedom to choose among activities that satisfy human needs. Above all, underdevelopment indices are ubiquitous in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. The Delta case is a component of modern underdevelopment which expresses a particular relationship of exploitation by the multinational corporations in collaboration with the comprador bourgeoisies in the country. The people of the region have been abandoned by successive federal governments while focusing attention on satisfying the whims and caprices of the national bourgeoisies.

Reacting to the poverty status and poor condition of the Niger Delta people, Akpan (2018) laments:

> *Where a country is poverty stricken, where there is almost total absence of the resources that could be used to promote the public good, then the leadership cannot be totally blamed, but where a country is well-endowed with abundant wealth as Nigeria is, and a greater percentage of the population is immersed in abject poverty, then there is lack of honesty and commitment to the sacred responsibility of leadership.*

The Niger Delta people had been fishermen, farmers and hunters in a very clean environment for years before the invasion of their privacy by the Seven Sisters namely: Shell, Mobil, Chevron, British petroleum (BP), Texaco, Gulf and Esso or Exxon.The executives of the oil multinationals formed a sort of world government and flew by air between Pittsburgh and Kuwait, San Francisco and Saudi Arabia as causally and freely across their own states. They were constantly pre-occupied with watching the New York stock market, calculating their profit margins, increasing discounts, and redirecting their tankers in mid-oceans from one busy loading port to another. This seemed as to confirm and uphold the Biblical dictum of "to those who have, more will be given and to those who do not have, even the little they have shall be taken away". The multinationals plundered the oil resources of the Niger Delta people for years in the most despicable, ravenous and ruinous way, leaving in its trail sweat, blood, death, pain and misery (Assibong 2002).

The sad and frustrated experience of the people caused by crude oil in their soil is unimaginable. The oil, instead of being a blessing has become a curse. This confirms Akpan (2015) assertion that poverty in the Niger Delta is caused by crude oil in the region.

The Niger Delta produces the black gold for the country while indigenes of the region are languishing in poverty, without good air to breath, good water to drink, good roads to walk and fresh water to carry out their fishing activities to keep body and soul together. This is high level insensitivity on the part of government to the poor conditions of the people who have made enormous sacrifices and contributions to the development and sustenance of the country.

Marginalization and the Niger Delta

The concept of marginalization was first introduced by Robert Park in 1928. It is a process whereby something or someone is pushed to the edge of a group and accorded lesser importance. It is a social phenomenon in which the minorities or sub-groups are excluded from satisfying their needs. Marginalized groups of people lack control over their resources and are handicapped as they cannot contribute to the development of society. Marginalization is the social process of being confined to a lower social level. It has to do with denying people their fundamental rights which consequently bring down their social and economic status, leading ultimately to inequality and discrimination. Marginalization disallows a person or community to enjoy privileges, rights, opportunities and resources available to them. It is an experience that millions of people globally are passing through and Nigerians and communities in Nigeria are not immuned to it (Akpan 2023).

The Niger Delta Region of Nigeria has been a victim of marginalization for many decades. It started initially with the signing of treaties and trade agreements, which compelled niger delta chiefs to transfer trade and resources in the hinterland to the colonial masters and their agents. Non-compliance or refusal to endorse their deceitful treaties resulted in the annexation of Lagos in 1861 as well as dethronement and imposition of Warrant Chiefs in different parts of the Niger Delta and indeed the whole country. Marginalization and alienation of the region from the resources of their land gained momentum and became more sophisticated in terms of scope and methodology with the discovery of oil in 1959 and attainment of independence in 1960. Agents of the Nigerian state and their collaborators introduced inimical and frustrating policies such as quota system and other draconian decrees/legislations which technically excluded people of the region and other minority groups from the Nigeria federal civil service, the military and other governmental agencies, boards and Parastatals. (Kalama 2012; Akpan 2023).

Notwithstanding the discovery of oil in large commercial quantity in Oloibiri, Ogbia Local Government Area of Bayelsa State on Sunday January 15, 1956, the current condition of Oloibiri community and the entire Niger Delta region cannot be discussed without evoking annoyance and agonizing the mind. The Niger Delta people, out of frustration and neglect demanded for equity and justice in the distribution of the commonwealth in their soil. The federal government as a response established the Oil Mineral Producing Areas Development Commission (OMPADEC) in 1992 and in 1999 changed the name to Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) with more powers to cater for the welfare of the people. This notwithstanding, the situation has not changed as the condition of the region and people continues to worsen by the day. This is indeed one of the major causes of unending crises in the region (Kalama 2012; Akpan 2023).

National Population Census and the Northern Agenda

Census according to Aniah (2003) is a sort of social photograph of certain conditions of a population at a given moment which are expressible in numbers. The United Nations (1954) defines a census as the simultaneous recording of demographic data by the government at a particular time, pertaining to all the persons who live in a particular territory. The usefulness of a census cannot be overstated. It is designed to provide information needed by government, public and private institutions, business organizations and individuals generally to plan for the welfare and economic development of the citizens of a country.

In Nigeria, almost all censuses have faced serious drawbacks. These could be traced to an inexplicable revenue sharing formula as contained in the Nigerian constitution (1999) which places premium on population and extent of constituent states. This is the major reason states and local governments deliberately falsify population figures in order to garner larger chunk of the country's revenue (Adeniyi 2001; Aniah, 2003)

The last national population census in 2006 and figures allotted to states exposed the determined efforts to perpetually control and dominate the minority oil producing states. The census figures of that year showed that the hotter desert region of northern Nigeria was more populated than the favourable and weather-friendly coastal region of the south. This tantamounts to a demographic paradox that the unfavourable and weather-unfriendly Sahara desert is thicker in population than the favourable, weather-friendly and hospitable coastal region of the south. It is a clear case that the 2006 population census figures, like others preceding it were manipulated in favour of some parts of the country for more states, more local governments and more resources. (Akpan 2009; Akpan, 2014; Akpan, 2023).

It is by a calculated act of creating, and proliferating more states and local government areas in the non-oil producing geographical majority ethnic zone that the systematic transfer of oil resources to their benefits became a major feature of inter-governmental fiscal relations (Bassey 2002).

Multinationals and the Niger Delta

From the standpoint of radical literature, multinational corporations as one of the central mechanisms which reproduce the core/periphery hierarchy in the global system has been an extensive subject of analysis in recent time. Multi-national corporation is oligopolistic in nature. Its ownership, management, production and sales activities extend over several national jurisdictions with head office in one country and with a cluster of subsidiaries in other countries. The principal aim of multinational corporation is to secure the production of goods for world market at low cost to the disadvantage of the host countries. Multinational corporations operating in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria create internal colonialism in the region and transfer resources of the exploited backward rural areas in the region to sectors of the economy linked to the international system thereby worsening income distribution in the host country (Amin, 1994; Amin 1999; Bassey 2002).

The argument is tenable in the case of the Niger Delta oil producing communities because, while huge revenue derivable from the oil industry is used by the Nigeria federal government and oil companies to build super-highways, railways and costly architectural edifices in far away cities like Abuja, Kaduna, Kano and to reconstruct the Boko Haram destroyed state of Borno, such infrastructural facilities are nowhere to be found in the oil producing communities of niger delta. All efforts of the Nigerian federal government to develop the niger delta region begin and end on the pages of newspapers, radio and television broadcasting. Very unfortunately and pitiably too, it is the poor farmers, fishermen and peasants in the region who brave oil spillage, pollution, health hazards and other environmental disasters in the region to produce food for the rich multinationals and comprador bourgeoisies at cheap, cheated and poverty induced prices are "the wretched of the earth" (Fanon 1993; Akpan, 2023). These are pointers to the fact that crises in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria would not end through the use of military might by the federal government, but by conscientious commitment to the development of the region and improvement in the lives of the people of the region. There is no place in the world where superior military power could be successfully used to quell a morally positioned discontent.

As Alagoa (1999) rightly states: When a community is driven to the wall and in a situation of crisis where they have to fight for their rights, they always fall back on the past, to whatever resources they can mobilize. The depositing of crude oil in the soil of the niger delta people was in the interest and benefit of the people. Just as the saying goes "soup should not finish in the pot when the family has not eaten", charity indeed begins at home. This is an old adage which has stood the test of time, but the Nigerian federal government has ignored this truth in the Niger Delta case.

Choice of Managers in the Petroleum Sector

An investigation into the regime of the military junta, President Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida (1985-2023), which covers a period of 38 years reveals that it was only thrice that we had Professor Tam David West, Chief Don Etiebet and Senator Dan Etete from the South-South as ministers of petroleum resources for a brief period of six (6) years for three of them. Throughout Chief Olusegun Obasanjo's eight years tenure as president of Nigeria from 1999 to 2007, he did not appoint any Minister to oversee the Petroleum Ministry. He acted as Minister of Petroleum resources and assisted by the Minister of State. President Muhammadu Buhari 2015 to 2023 followed the same line with the Minister of State for petroleum resources reporting directly to him. This implies that they were presidents of Nigeria and ministers of petroleum resources. If the action of the duo was to avoid heating up the polity, if persons from outside the oil producing minority states were offered appointments as Ministers of petroleum resources, then the presidents' action was a serious blow and disservice to the oil producing states and tantamounts to high level marginalization and neglect, since the region is blessed with qualified man-power that could run the petroleum ministry successfully, with integrity and in the national interest.

The choice of Group Managing Directors of the Nigeria National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) between 1999 and 2023 (23 years) reveals serious marginalization and ethnic bias against the oil producing states of the Niger Delta. The table below captures the distribution in the choice of group managing directors of the NNPC according to states of origin and geopolitical zones for the period 1999-2023.

Table 1: Choice of Group Managing Directors of the NNPC

S/N	NAME	PERIOD OF SERVICE	STATE OF ORIGIN
1.	Jackson Gaius Obaseki	1999-2003	Edo (South-South)
2.	Funsho Kupolokum	2003-2007	Ondo (West)
3.	Abubakar L. Yar'Adua	2007-2009	Katsina (North)
4.	Muhammed Sanusi Barkindo	2009-2010	Adamawa (North)
5.	Shehu Ladan	April 2010 – May 2010	Kaduna (North)
6.	Austin Olusegun Oniwon	2010-2012	Kogi (North)
7.	Andrew Yakubu	2012-2014	Kaduna (North)
8.	Joseph Thlama Dawha	2014-2015	Bornu (North)
9.	Ibe Kachikwu	2015-2016	Delta (South- South)
10.	Makanti Baru	2016-2019	Bauchi (North)
11.	Melee Kyari	2019 to date	Borno (North)

Source: Field work (Akpan and Ukpai 2019).

Table 1 above shows that for a period of twenty (20) years, only three appointments were offered to indigenes of the Niger Delta Region who served only for a period of nine years. Out of the three appointments, two were from the core South - South region. They served for only five years while the appointee from Ondo state served for four years. The table reveals marginalization of the oil producing states at the highest level and underscores the reason for conflicts and crises that oftentimes erupt in the region. This is not good for a multi-ethnic state like Nigeria in dire need of unity, oneness and peace. Inability on the part of Nigerian leaders to remember the history of the country from pre-independence to date is a contributory factor to their mistakes in the process of governance. The government has actually failed in this regard since those who cannot remember the past are proned to repeating it.

Nigeria is a country in constant crises ranging from political, economic and social. The crises in Niger Delta are partially, if not fully created either consciously or unconsciously by the country's political leadership through wrong policies and poor implementation. Nigeria is a country where policies are formulated and executed without thorough analysis and due regard to unintended consequences. For example, if we may digress a little, the recent financial crisis in the country arising from currency redesign is a clear case of unintended consequences arising from non-clarity of goal and thoughtlessness in policy formulation and implementation. The Nigeria Central Bank is the lender of last resort and represents the hope of the common man, but fumbled in its naira redesign policy. The number one bank in the country declared some denominations of the country's currency illegal and reversed itself after some weeks by announcing that the already declared illegal and newly printed legal currency should circulate pari-passu. This was indeed a national embarrassment arising from formulating a policy without profound analysis and consultations. It is precisely what plays out in almost all aspects of Nigeria's socio-political and economic life including developments in the oil producing areas of Niger Delta. This underscores inability on the part of government to make effective use of its manpower such as academics in tertiary institutions who have carried out researches in many areas and who can assist effectively if they are called upon to serve. Policies should not be made based on dreams as was the case in Uganda during the reign of General Idi Amin Dada if grave consequences are to be avoided.

The South-South Region and Office of the President

The South-South Region of Nigeria has found it very difficult to have access to political power at the national level since the country attained self-rule in 1960.The few years Goodluck Jonathan from the South-South occupied Aso Rock Villa as acting and later substantive president was to complete the tenures of late Umaru Musa Yar'adua. The position was not deliberately zoned to the South-South.

Table II: Distribution of heads of state and presidents of Nigeria according to states of origin, geo-political zones and tenure of office from 1960 - 2023.

S/N	Name	Tenure	State of Origin	Geo-political Zone
1.	Abubakar Tafawa Balewa	Oct.1,1960-Jan.15 1966	Bauchi	North East
2.	Gen. Aguiyi Ironsi	Jan.1966-July 1966	Abia	South East
3.	Gen. Yakubu Gowon	July 29, 1966 -July 29 1975.	Plateau	North Central
4.	Gen. Murtala Mohammed	July 1975-Feb.1976	Kano	North West
5.	Gen. Olusegun Obasanjo	1976-1979	Ogun	South West
6.	Alh. Shehu Shagari	1979-1983	Sokoto	North West
7.	Gen. Muhammadu Buhari	1983-1985	Katsina	North West
8.	Gen.Ibrahim Babangida	Aug.27,1985-1993	Niger	North central
9.	Chief Ernest Shonekan	Aug.26, 1993-Nov 17, 1993	Ogun	South West

10.	Gen. Sani Abacha	1993-1998	Kano	North West
11.	Gen. Abdulsalami Abubakar	June 8, 1998-May 29, 1999	Niger	North Central
12.	Chief Olusegun Obasanjo	1999-2007	Ogun	South West
13.	Umaru Musa Yar'adua	2007-2010	Katsina	North West
14.	Goodluck Ebele Jonathan	2010-2011 2011-2015	Bayelsa	South-South
15.	Muhammadu Buhari	2015-2023	Katsina	North West
16.	Asiwaju Bola Tinubu	2023-----	Osun	South West

Source: Authors' Compilation from Secondary Sources .

Since the attainment of political independence in 1960 (63 years ago), the Niger Delta region, for the first time produced an executive president in the person of Dr. Goodluck Ebele Jonathan in 2011. This was made possible by the death of President Umaru Musa Yar'adua during his first term in office. Dr. Goodluck Ebele Jonathan, then Vice president was not permitted to act as president and commander-in-chief of the armed forces of the federal republic of Nigeria throughout the period President Yar'adua was receiving medical attention in Saudi Arabia. The president, for whatever reason did not transmit any letter to the National Assembly intimating it of his absence. The Northern Cabal used subterfuge to hide the critical nature of the president health from Nigerian citizens. When it became apparent that the crisis of succession was becoming complicated, the then Senate President David Mark, after series of consultations agreed with a former chief justice of the federation, Alfa Belgore that the logical thing to do was to make Dr. Goodluck Ebele Jonathan acting President to avoid national crisis since it was a constitutional matter. Justice Belgore and David Mark saw the "doctrine of necessity" as the best option in the circumstance since it is recognized by the constitution of the federal republic of Nigeria (Tell, 2010).

The Senate and House of Representatives in their separate sessions came to the conclusion that president Yar'adua, through his declaration which was transmitted worldwide on the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) furnished parliament with irrefutable proof that he was on medical vacation in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The president by that declaration complied with the provisions of section 145 of the 1999 constitution. This paved way for Dr Goodluck Jonathan to act as Nigeria's president and commander-in-chief of the armed forces. Some elites from the north misconstrued the invocation of the "doctrine of necessity" by the National Assembly as an affront on President Yar'adua and an insult to the northerners.

In an effort to put the records straight, the then senate president, in Adeniyi (2011) states;

> *For the avoidance of doubts, let me re-emphasize the import of prayer No.2 of our resolution. The president will automatically resume office as president and commander-in-chief once he is well enough, returns to the country and informs the National Assembly accordingly, pursuant to section 145 of the 1999 Nigerian constitution.*

The presidential election of 2015 which Dr Goodluck Ebele Jonathan flew the People's Democratic Party flag as presidential candidate and what happened proved that the South- South region of Nigeria is facing serious marginalization and neglect in the country. The refusal by the PDP to zone the office of president to the south-south in 2023 which generated heated arguments and exchange of words between Governor Nyesom Wike of Rivers State and former vice president, Atiku Abubakar and some top officials of the PDP was a consequence of the PDP's decision not to zone the office of president to south-south in 2023.

As Orubu (1999) and Akpan (2023) observe:

> *The view strongly held among many critics from the oil producing states is that the historical blow dealt upon the principles of derivation is the product of the political game-play and the propensity of the majority to play-down on the preferences of the minority. It happens that Nigeria's oil is produced in the minority states, where access to political power at the national level is impossible or difficult to accomplish.*

These are problems confronting Nigeria which has made national unity and integration not realizable.As Ndoma-Egba (2000) rightly points out Nigeria's unity is "forced unity" A marriage without equal sharing, love, trust and sincerity which cannot stand the test of time.

Recommendations

The paper observed that oil exploitation in the Niger Delta and its attendant negative effects has dealt a serious blow on the region. It is on this note that the paper recommends the following as a way forward:

1. The basic needs approach should be adopted by government to provide the people with basic necessities of life for peace and harmony to reign. The federal government should take the provision of infrastructure in the oil producing areas as a priority.
2. Fishermen, farmers and the entire rural population in the oil producing areas should be compensated in cash and kind to ameliorate their lamentations and weeping over lose of farms and fishing waters to oil spillage.
3. Indigenes of the oil producing area should be appointed to top positions in the oil sector to give them a sense of belonging and belief that they are actually participating in the management of what belongs to them. This will go a long way to douse feelings of neglect by the federal government.
4. The Niger Delta Region should be given opportunity to produce the country's president from time to time to strike a balance between it and other parts of the country. This will go a long way to bringing peace and unity to the whole country and remove the current wind of suspicion of one part of the country by another as parading a hidden agenda.

Conclusion

Underdevelopment and marginalization of the Niger Delta region are the major causes of constant crises in the region. The native economic activities in the area have greatly suffered, resulting in mental confusion and high level poverty of the people. The Nigerian political leadership concentrates more on exploiting natural resources of the oil producing areas without corresponding investment to generate further revenue and cushion the effects of oil exploitation and exploration. This is extremely rentier in character, and responsible for inability of the Nigerian leadership to relate well with the communities in the course of exploiting their God-given resources (Agbor 2015).

A European oil worker in the Niger Delta region who saw it all 23 years ago stated that the whole Delta is on a short fuse and that is growing shorter by the day. The tension there is worse than I have ever known (Bassey, 2002).

Marginalization of Niger Delta by successive Nigerian governments is the concern of the people. It has contributed to fanning the embers of crises in the region. The Niger Delta needs development that is holistic if conflict in the region must be averted (Akpan and Ukpai 2018). The onus is certainly on the Nigeria federal government as it alone, holds the key to putting an end to crises in the region. This can be achieved through overall development of the region and considering the Niger Delta people in the national scheme of things.

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