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Resource Control and Youth Restiveness in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria

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Resources Control and Youth restiveness in the Niger Delta is a contentious issue in Nigeria. The exploitation and exploration of petroleum in the Niger Delta is posing great threat to the life of the people. Hence, the peoples reaction in the form of hostage taking, vandalization of oil pipelines which results in destruction of farmlands, pollution of water, fish, etc., as well as reduction of revenue from oil. Even with oil coming from Niger Delta, the area remained poorly developed in terms of infrastructural facilities. This paper highlights the above issues as well as Niger Delta agitation for 50 % derivation as it was in 1963 and 1966 in the era of cocoa. The paper, however, recommends that in order to curb Youth restiveness, there must be a mechanism through which the issue of resource control will be resolved amicably. This would be through a round table discussion between the Federal State, Local government, full representation of the oil companies and their surrogates abroad and the masses, especially the youths in Niger Delta, aggressive development of the areas to provide infrastructure, provision of technological education for the youths and subsequent employment.

Keywords: Resource control, Youth restiveness, Oil exploration.

Introduction

Resource control has become a contentious issue in Nigeria to the extent that it dominated discussions in the National Reform Conference held in 2005. The work-out of the southern south delegates from the conference on Tuesday June 14, 2005 is an indication that the unity of the country is being threatened by the issue. The people of the southern south are nursing the mind of a betrayed region within the confines of Nigeria; where they are supposed to be a part. They not only felt cheated but also felt dejected, as there is no remorse feelings by their fellow Nigerians from other parts of the country

(mfyai@yahoo.com). The parochial view of most Nigerians is that they have nothing to do with other regions problems no matter the pains and agony the people are passing through. Thus, there is need to have reorientation of our past feelings concerning our fellow citizens, knowing that the unity of the country cannot be compromised for anything else. However, it is also worthy to note that the image from the seventies has been that of a continent of conflict and violence. Thus, Africa stands out as a continent of uniquely violent and conflictual politics, a continent where force and conflict make the everyday life of the people (Chabal, 1994). The argument here is that Nigeria

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of a truth consists of this political conflict, and the conflict in Nigeria is all about identity. The root cause of the conflict in Nigeria is location of identity and how far one can go in protecting, upholding and sustaining that identity. The identity in question relates to that of citizenship i.e. conflict over citizenship values and ideas. Nigerian citizens in the Niger Delta want to be known of, want to be heard and want to be given an opportunity to express their ideas. And their only option since the others have failed is to let out the boost of violence.

The issue of resource control

The 1999 constitution provides that at least 13% of the revenue derived from natural resources should be paid to the states where it is produced (The New Nigeria Republican constitution). However, there have been substantial delays in calculating and paying these sums. In short, Uwhejevwe-Togbolo reported that the Federal Government only started making payment in accordance with the increased allocation in January 2000. However, the main oil-bearing states in the Niger Delta, namely, Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Delta and Rivers are not satisfied with the allocation considering the effect of oil exploration on the life, property and existence of the people of the states. Thus, they demanded to obtain “full control” over their natural resources and pay tax from this revenue to the federal government or at least 50% as it was in 1963 and 1966 in the cocoa era. They also demanded the repeal of a number of laws that give control over land and minerals resources to the federal government (Vanguard 12/7/2002).

Youth restiveness, on the other hand, is a follow up to the above request. There are historical records of the people of the Niger Delta, mostly by the chiefs and elders, attempting to dialogue with the government in Nigeria, but the result of such dialogues has not yielded any fruit. Thus, the

Youth came on stage because the government has failed to listen to their respected chiefs and elders (Ogele Club 2006). The Youths took laws into their hands to salvage their land from complete degradation. Initially, their activities were for economic gains and limited to communities, individuals and criminal cartels. The criminal cartels also include government officials. Recently, the members of the government’s Presidential Task Force on Pipeline Vandalization were arrested for vandalizing oil pipeline (Vanguard 29/3/06). However, there are Youth groups whose aim is to salvage their society, foremost of which is the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND). The others are Martyrs Brigade and the Coalition for Militant Action in the Niger Delta (COMA). The activities of these groups do not have economic motives but purely altruistic. Their actions are rooted in the fact that despite the presence of these companies in the Niger Delta, the area is still poorly developed in terms of infrastructural facilities. According to one of the reports, the federal government has not built any company in the area since the discovery of oil in the area (Guardians 5/11/2001). They lamented that the plastic chairs they use in the houses and churches are products of crude oil and rubber. Yet the chairs are not produced in the Niger Delta they are rather brought from Lagos (Guardian 16/12/2001). These and other such reasons led them to violence against the government and the oil companies.

Theoretical orientation

All mainstream or traditional explanations of violence begin as “ad hoc” explanations that try to account for the observed regularity of various forms of isolated and self-contained violent events in such singular entities as gender, class, or ethnicity as these are, in turn, related to differences in biology, psychology, sociology, culture, and mass communication. Accordingly,

most conventional explanations of violence remain partial and incomplete as they separately emphasize different, yet related phenomena of violence, without ever trying to provide a comprehensive explanation or framework that encompasses the full range of interpersonal, institutional, and structural violence. In fact, most of these one-dimensional explanations of violence underscore the behavioral expressions of persons to the relative exclusion of the institutional and structural expressions (Barak 2003).

These “interpersonal” explanations of violence can typically be classified into one of four kinds, based not only on the etiology of individual violence as either *internal* or *external*, but on the particular focus or orientation assumed about the relationship between the *human nature* and violence. Traditionally, these explanations of general violence are associated with theories that locate the origins of violence within the person or within the social environment. Concurrently, some ad hoc theories maintain that humans are naturally inclined to act violently, requiring little in the way of stimulation or motivation, and that violence is, ultimately, the product of a failure of constraint or control. Other ad hoc theories maintain that humans are naturally inclined to conform to the rules of custom and order, requiring much in the way of stimulation or motivation, and that violence is, ultimately, the product of unusual or “deviant” impulses. From this dualistic (either/or) non-critical perspective, violence is “normative” in one case and “aberrant” in another case. Dialectically, however, it may very well be the case that various forms of violence are normative and aberrant at the same time; depending on whether or not they are sanctioned or unsanctioned as culturally and socially appropriate or inappropriate.

Whatever the case, the problems associated with ad hoc interpersonal theories of antisocial and violent behavior, as well as with both the

behavioural motivations and cultural constraints existing inside or outside the person. When compared to the earlier and more traditional, ad hoc and one-dimensional explanations of violence, life-course and integrative explanations of violence constitute the models that are conceptually (more) dynamic, developmental, and multi-dimensional in nature.

Life-course models of violence focus attention on the developmental trajectories of persons towards and away from specific courses of behaviour. Integrative explanations focus attention on the dynamic relationships between the internal and external influences of violence and, in some instances, nonviolence, and the pushes (motivation) toward and pulls (constraints) away from violence/nonviolence. The application of these pathways to violence and/or nonviolence recognizes the accumulative natures of these behaviors, the reciprocal consequences of abusive and non-abusive behaviour, and the integral relationships between events, situations, and conditions in the course of one’s personal and social experiences.

The Niger Delta experience could be located in the life-course model of violence. The youths are motivated to violence by the fact that the source of their livelihood is being threatened. The elders also do not show concern either because of lack of proper knowledge on how to handle the situation the best, or because they were compensated privately. Thus, their future is not threatened. On the other hand, the youths are young and their future is at stake. Thus, there is need to fight and salvage their land from complete degradation.

Consequences of oil exploitation in the niger delta

Oil and gas pollution are the major environmental challenges in the Niger Delta. Ajienska, Jaja and Ugbebor (2007) reported that

between 1976 and 2000 a total of 6,141 incidents resulted in the spill of approximately 3,019,465.90 barrels of oil into the environment. Also between 1991 and 2002, 3544 incidents were reported, which resulted in spilling 355,809 barrels of crude oil. This is a regular occurrence in the Niger Delta. This resulted in the people living in abject poverty. There is acute unemployment because farmlands and fishponds which were the people's source of livelihood were polluted. Not only that, their farmlands were taken and given to the oil companies without compensation (This Day 10/9/02). Thus, the people suffer from degradation and poverty.

The peoples reaction

Based on the above mentioned, the people decided to make it difficult for the government and oil companies to go about their own usual business since dialoguing with the government did not yield any result. In order to make their voice be heard, they attacked the federal government, the economy and the oil companies. They did this by taking the oil company workers as hostages and vandalization of oil pipelines. The Nigerian Punch Newspaper of May 22, 2002 reported that five oil company workers were kidnapped in the town of Odioma, in the Niger Delta. This was in reaction to the inversion of the village by the armed Nigerian Policemen who were called in to stop further actions by violent Youths who shut down one of the oil wells to prevent further encroachment into their farmlands by the oil company workers. This and other such occurrences have adversely affected the economy of the country.

Recently, there has been an increase in the international price of oil, which was attributed to the happenings in Nigeria, but ironically Nigeria did not benefit from this increase (This day 20/30/2005). It is not only the government that is complaining. The oil companies are complaining

as well. They complain of damage to their facilities, their workers and other financial losses that incur daily. Between December 2005 and March 2006, it was notified that oil industry in Nigeria recorded numerous casualties to its personnel and facilities in all the oil bearing states, it was reported that there were records of blown up oil pipelines, burnt or destroyed flow stations, attacked oil company premises and kidnapped and taken hostage oil workers (Vanguard 29/03/06). All these are reactions to the neglect by the Federal Government and degradation caused by oil exploitation and exploration. These reports can go on and on but the pertinent question now is: what could be done to curb this problem of Youth restiveness in the Niger Delta?

Suggested solutions to youth restiveness in the niger delta

Solution to the Youth restiveness in the Niger will be discussed from the viewpoint of Robert Dahl's Pluralist model (Kutrz 1999). The model suggests that various groups play a significant role in decision making. The model further stresses that many conflicting groups within a community can have access to the government, so that no single group is dominant. Dahl found out that the number of people involved in the most important decisions is rather small. Thus, community power was, nonetheless, diffused. Few political players exercised decision-making power upon all issues. But in this study, he asserts that one individual or a group might be influential in a battle over urban renewal, but at the same time have little or no impact over educational policy. Thus, there is a need for every group to take part in the process of decision-making. Though Dahl and other pluralist had failed to state how local elites participate in decision making impact where there is a larger national ruling class. This model could be used

in relation to the issue of resource control and Youth restiveness in the Niger Delta, because the issue had become a central topic in the nation's political agenda. Pluralism holds that there should be a round table discussion between the Federal Government, the State Government, the Local Government, the Niger Deltans in Diaspora, the oil companies in Nigeria and their surrogates, the Chiefs, Elders and Youths of Niger Delta. In such a conference, every group will have the privilege to air their views. The venue of this meeting should be in one of the oil-bearing states of the Niger Delta in order to make sure that there is no external influence. The key points of the discussion should be the following: the identification of the role each group will play in the oil and gas business, consideration of the percentage of the resources to be released to the oil bearing states, consideration of the question who runs the business, who will be responsible for distributing the resources accruing thereof and, finally, who will be in charge of allocating the benefits accruing from the business.

Alongside with this discussion, like the 'fire brigade approach', there will be an aggressive development of the area to provide infrastructure, building of industries to provide

employment for the Youths and provision of compensatory technological education for them. This will enable them to fit properly into the industries. Finally, all the decisions made, should be documented and enshrined into the Nigeria constitution, while immediate implementation follows up.

Concluding remarks

An issue, which has threatened the unity of a nation, needs an urgent attention. This paper suggests that at least 50 percent of the revenue derived from the natural resources should be paid to the states where it is produced. This is because they are the immediate recipients of the hazards from these natural resources, they should also be the first recipients of the blessings accruing from it. More so, it will encourage other states to explore and improve on their mineral deposits, and will also encourage agricultural production. By this, it will be clear that every part of the country has one type of Natural resources. This will reduce the economic pressure on oil; make other regions to focus on the development of their Natural resources, curb Youth restiveness in the Niger Delta and finally, Nigeria as a nation will benefit economically and socially.

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Управление ресурсами и сопротивление молодежи в дельте Нигера в Нигерии

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Управление ресурсами и сопротивление молодежи в Дельте Нигера является спорным вопросом в Нигерии. Разведка и добыча нефти в дельте Нигера представляет собой угрозу для жизни людей. В свою очередь это вызывает соответствующую ответную реакцию людей в виде взятия заложников, вандальных действий в отношении нефтепровода, что приводит к уничтожению сельскохозяйственных угодий, загрязнению воды, истреблению рыбы и т.д., а также сокращению доходов от нефти. Несмотря на то, что нефть добывается в Дельте Нигера, инфраструктура района плохо развита. В данной статье рассмотрены вышеуказанные проблемы, а также волнения в Дельте Нигера, связанные с требованием увеличить процент от дохода до 50 %, как это было в 1963 и 1966 гг. в эру какао. Несмотря на это, в статье говорится о том, что для усмирения противостояния молодежи необходим механизм, при помощи которого вопрос управления ресурсами будет разрешен мирным путем. Это может быть круглый стол между федеральными, государственными, местными органами власти, полном собрании представителей нефтяных компаний и их дочерних предприятий за рубежом, а также жителей, особенно молодежи, Дельты Нигера. Темы для обсуждения: динамичное развитие районов для создания инфраструктуры, обеспечение технологического образования для молодежи и ее последующее трудоустройство.

Ключевые слова: управление ресурсами, сопротивление молодежи, разведка нефтяных месторождений.
