



The consequences of ethnic minorities agitations in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria

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Abstract

This paper examines and explores the consequences of ethnic minorities' agitations in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. The paper reveals that the ethnic minorities in the Niger Delta were forced to agitate and made several demands from the multinationals oil companies operating in the area and the federal government who paid deaf ears to the yearnings, aspirations and existence of the host communities. The people lacked basic necessities of life, such as good roads, portable water, electricity, good hospitals etc. and are faced with environmental degradation as well as flaring of gases at close proximity to human habitation. This legitimate agitation and non violence protest led to intense crises and conflicts. This led to the death of so many people while communities were razed down and properties worth million of naira destroyed by the police and army operating in the area. More importantly, so many militia groups sprang up (unemployed youths) in anger and in reaction to the long years of neglect and exploitation. This also deepened the crises, and led to economic sabotage which is the direct result of kidnapping, illegal refineries, vandalisation of oil facilities etc. All these affected our foreign earnings. I therefore strongly recommend that the federal government should initiate a sustainable programme that will re-integrate the ex-militants, as well as given them the opportunity to access loans from the banks so that they can establish their businesses and become self reliance. Again, constant flaring of gases at close proximity to human habitation should be stopped while proper cleansing of the environment should be carried out (international standard).

Keywords: ethnic minorities, agitations, consequences, government legislation, oil producing communities

Introduction

Nigeria is a multi-ethnic nation state made up of previously independent nationalities which is extrapolated to be between the range of two hundred and fifty and four hundred with variegated cultures, interest, and size, distribution of power, influence and resources. Nigeria is said to have more than five hundred and ten local languages. (N-ue, 2011) [8]. However, before the advent of colonialism, the minority question, agitation, demand and the development crisis associated with it were relatively dormant. This was because fears of political domination and economic exploitation were almost not in existence. Each ethnic group was capable of managing its people in consonance with the inherited customs and traditions of its progenitors. But with the amalgamation of the heterogeneous ethnic groups without consultation in 1914 by Sir Frederick Lord Lugard, and the imposition of the various constitutions such as the Clifford constitution of 1922, Richard constitution of 1946, which led to regionalism and ethnic consciousness, the Macpherson and Lytleton constitution of 1951/54 respectively as well as the establishment of the Henry Willink Commission of 1957 which failed to address the fears of the minorities; all culminated into the enhancement of conflict, dissatisfaction, disenchantment, demands and minorities agitations.

The genesis of ethnic minorities' agitations in the Niger Delta could be traced to British imperial activities in Nigeria. The minorities felt dejected and inappropriately represented in the various regions and under the three political parties, this prompted them to demand for a separate state in the 1950s. The resultant effect was the establishment of a colonially appointed commission of inquiry into the fears of the minorities, and the means of

allaying them (Henry Willink Commission, of 1957) [5], (Nwiyor, 2004) [9]. According to Ekekwe (1986) [4] "the commission's proposal fell short of the demands of the minorities, hence its recommendations were widely denounced for its failure to proffer adequate and timely solutions for accommodating and resolving ethnic agitations and disenchantment that penetrated into the newly independent country in the 1960s and beyond. The anger and sufferings of the minorities, in the Niger Delta of Nigeria intensified as a result of oil exploration and exploitation by different foreign multinational oil companies that are supported by the federal government, which enacted several draconian and obnoxious laws to support and marginalize the minorities in the region. Having realized the political interest and the unquenchable desires to exploit and amass the wealth of the Niger Delta, coupled with the incessant changes in the revenue allocation since the discovery of oil as well as the brutal and extra-judicial murder, which is a common characteristics of the region, the ethnic minorities in the Niger Delta resolved to agitate, Make demands and protests against internal colonialism, change in revenue allocation formulae, stoppage of flaring of gases and proper compensation for oil spills on their land etc.

Following the above, "the Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP) insists that oil royalties and rents must be paid to them by the oil companies since 1958" (Guardian, 17 March, 1993). Therefore, the resolution to attack on oil companies' installations and to protest non-violently all culminated and provoked violent confrontations in the Niger Delta with the law enforcement agencies protecting oil installations of the multinational oil companies. This ugly scenario, led to negative consequences

on the ethnic minorities of the Niger Delta and even the nation at large. Ofili (2012) ^[17] asserts that: "it is therefore not surprising to observe that conflict of all sorts is a daily experience in the Niger Delta. From the days of the colonial master (colonial rule) to date, unending conflicts (agitations/revolts) have become the main language of the people who are clamoring and desirous of a better Niger Delta. Will there ever be a Niger Delta? Will there ever be a Niger Delta devoid of conflict? Will the people of Niger Delta be ever pacified and giving a sense of belonging and identity? Will they ever be given their due place in the nation state call Nigeria? Will their struggle for a better Niger Delta ever be rightly perceived and interpreted? These are 'no rhetorical questions, rather, questions demanding for answers.

Definition of terms

The following terms are clearly defined to enhance clear understanding

Ethnic Group: According to Jordan and Rowntrie (1979) "an ethnic group represents a group of people possessing a common ancestry and cultural tradition with a strong feeling of belongingness and cohesiveness".

Agitation: This has to do with the process of demanding and protesting against injustice, neglect and marginalization meted on a group of people.

Environmental Degradation: This is the outright (total) decline, neglect, alteration and exploitation of the national environment resulting from the activities of oil exploration which exerted negative consequences on the living thing and the environment.

Under-Development: This simply means backwardness in the socio-economic condition of a set of people, and it is easily determined when comparing the state of development with another group of people.

Development: According to Schumpeter, it is a continuous and spontaneous change in the stationery state which forever alters and replaces the equilibrium state previously existing (Nmon, 2002) ^[8].

Ethnic Minorities: Gurr (1993) ^[15] defines ethnic minorities as communal groups which experience systematic discrimination in a state, and have taken political action in support of their collective interests. On the other hand, people are regarded as ethnic minorities because their populations are small compared to the population of other ethnic groups in the same state or nation.

Statement of the problem

The living condition of the various ethnic groups in the Niger Delta changed tremendously as soon as oil exploration and exploitation began in 1957 in Oloibiri, Bomu, Yola etc. With millions of barrels of oil harvested per day, and over 90% income to Nigeria, the Niger Delta provides economic strength to sustain the country. Yet, the ethnic minorities are neglected in terms of employment in to these oil companies. The multinational oil companies also failed to carry out their corporate solid responsibilities to the oil producing communities in the area.

The amnesty that was granted by the federal government is short term palliative measure to solve the hydra-headed problems of kidnapping, piracy, vandalisation of oil pipes including construction of illegal refineries etc. This is because the various militant groups and members that were trained in various skills and paid monthly stipends are not

employed and are unable to access loans from the banks so as to establish their factories, shops and become entrepreneurs (self reliance).

On the long run, the insecurity emanating from kidnapping/hostage taking, vandalisation of oil pipes etc are still with us because the actual problems that led to insecurity in the region and a sharp fall in the nation's income had not been addressed.

The government responded to the demands and agitations of the ethnic minorities by establishing OMPADEC, Niger Delta Development Commission, Ministry of Niger Delta etc. unfortunately, the above organizations failed to properly address the needs of the common man in the region. NDDC and the Ministry of Niger Delta were established to pacify some few elites and leaders who are their colleagues in the Niger Delta. Nwankwo (2012) asserts that Niger Delta Development Commission had never exhausted its annual budget since it was set up, neither had it implemented all the projects outlined for a year. What one sees, are abandoned and uncompleted projects scattered around the length and breadth of the Niger Delta. The agitation continues because the government used the police and army including the judiciary to suppress, kill, arrest, torture and even razed down communities like the case of Ogoni, Opia, Odi, Umuechem and Okijan in Delta State etc. The current report of UNEP in Ogoni land posed threat to the existence of the minorities, since it was concluded that they will suffer the consequences till the next 30 years.

This led us to certain pertinent questions

In spite of all the efforts of government to solve the problems of the Niger Delta, why are the problems still persisting in its intensity? In spite of all the agitations and efforts of the minorities in the Niger Delta to improve their condition, why is their condition and environment pathetic? The study shall address these questions In course of this study.

Objectives of the study

The following objectives are set to be achieved:

1. TO investigate the causes of ethnic minorities agitations in the Niger Delta.
2. To identify the strategies adopted by the federal government to pacify the people of Niger Delta.
3. To explore' the strategies by which ethnic minority groups have sought to overcome their position as subordinate and vulnerable groups within the Nigerian federal system.
4. To examine the consequences that emanated from the relationship with the host communities and the oil companies including the government.
5. To explore arid, suggest the best ways of managing the crises that emanated from the agitations of the ethnic minorities.

Ethnic minorities agitations and its consequences on development in the Niger delta

Historically, this conflicts and agitations in the Niger Delta dates back to the relenting battle for legitimacy/supremacy by King Jaja of Opobo, Nana of Itsekiri, indomitable Isaac Boro, undaunted Ken Saro Wiwa, and lately the militancy activities by the aggrieved youths of the Niger Delta aimed at (rightly or wrongly) a better living condition for their people" (Ofili, 2012) ^[17].

The agitation of the Niger Delta people in the past three decades was a reaction against environmental degradation as a result of oil exploration and exploitation, neglect and marginalization in terms of employment, provision of social infrastructure, payment of royalties for land and compensation for spillages, non application or adoption of the principle of derivation as an instrument for revenue allocation, the adoption of true federalism, the corporate responsibilities of the oil prospecting firms to their host communities etc. Naanem (1995) ^[20] "asserts that evidence of environmental disaster is conspicuous throughout the area where vast area of terrestrial and aquatic vegetation has been destroyed by oil spills, marine life for which the vegetation provides a life support system has largely disappeared: with the vegetation". In line with the above, Opuiyo (2005) ^[21] observes that these foreign companies and their Nigerian agents and collaborators are living in unbridled affluence, the aborigines of the Niger Delta, from under whose land the oil and gas are extracted, wallow in demeaning poverty, having been neglected, abandoned, and excluded from enjoying the proceeds from stupendous wealth the nation and the multinational oil companies derive there from. Evidence of the maltreatment and deprivations of the Niger Delta abound everywhere. And briefly, this is the crux of the people's protest, which the heartless and insensitive exploiters portray as "restive" and "violence" in the Niger Delta.

It was based on the above, that the people of the Niger Delta protested, through writing, peaceful protest and demonstrations, and also used confrontational means to actualize their aims. These fell on deaf ears and therefore resulted to violent conflicts, which claimed the lives of so many people, while property worth millions of naira had been destroyed. One of the most outstanding negative consequences of the agitations is that it paved way for the formation of several militia (militant) groups, such as Deygbam, Deywell, Iceland, Greenlanders, Germans, the movement for the emancipation of the Niger Delta, Niger Delta people's volunteer force, Egbesu, Niger Delta vigilante etc, these groups engaged in illegal oil bunkering, vandalisation of oil pipes and facilities, kidnapping and hostage taking, armed robbery, illegal refineries as well as serving as (thugs) specialists for election rigging.

The activities of the militants had devastating effects on the economy and security of the nation. Several oil wells were closed and expatriates kidnapped while many others fled to their home countries for safety.

Henry (2012) ^[5] "succinctly puts that the conflict between the Niger Delta people's volunteer force (NDPVF) led by Asari Dokubo and Niger Delta Vigilante (NDV) led by Ateke Tom culminated into broad day light shooting on the streets of Port Harcourt in 2003-2007, which resulted to the death of so many people. In spite of the amnesty granted to the militants of the Niger Delta, the region is threatened with sophisticated weapons and ammunitions used for vandalisation and killing, even the traditional ways of life is under threat as leaders cannot do certain things without the input of the (youths) ex-militants in their respective communities.

Government legislations and oil producing minorities in the niger delta.

According to Nna (2001) ^[8] "repressive laws or legislations against oil producing communities in the Niger Delta started

in the colonial era, and was only copied by the various government of Nigeria' that succeeded them after independence in 1960 till date. He emphasized that the colonial government adopted draconian laws, legislations and policies to structure the colonial economy in such a way that the balance of rewards was overwhelmingly in favour of the metropolis. Some of the ordinances and, legislations passed by the colonial government and the federal government are as follows:

1. Mineral oil ordinances, 31st December, 1914
2. The mineral ordinance of 1946.
3. Petroleum decree, no 51 of 1969
4. The petroleum production and distribution (Anti sabotage) decree of 1975.
5. The miscellaneous offences (anti sabotage) decree 1994.
6. The land use decree 1978
7. Treason and treasonable offences decree of 1993.

The various ordinances and laws were enacted or put forward to suppress and disempowered the minorities in the Niger Delta from their entitlements as well as trampling on their fundamental human rights. Following this situation, Suberu (1996) ^[13] observes that "a much more drastic legal clamp down on ethnic movement and agitations was announced by the federal governments. The treason and treasonable offences decree of 1993, imposed death' penalty on advocates of ethnic autonomy who conspire with groups within or outside the country and profess ideas that minimize the sovereignty of Nigeria. The decree was promulgated in the wake of rising restiveness in Ogoni land and rumours of the declaration of Ogoni autonomy Based on this, so many Ogonis were raided, arrested, tortured and killed in respect of their agitations for a better condition of living".

Government reactions towards the minority needs in the Niger delta

According to Walter, (2010) [23] available accounts of the levels of underdevelopment in the rural communities in the Niger Delta region may suggest at a first glance that the actors in oil business and civil society organisation have done far from this, there have been attempts by governments, oil companies and civil society organizations to respond to the socio-economic needs of the people. As a reaction, the federal government in a number of ways has proved to the people of the area that it cares and ready to uplift the people from their numerous problems.

Nwagbo (2009) ^[10] asserts that the colonial government set up the Henry Willinks Commission of 1957 in response to the concern of ethnic minorities, over their perceived slim chances of survival in the Nigerian enterprises. There was also the Niger Delta Development Board Authority (NDDBA) through supplementary federal government gazette no 56 vol.46 of September, 1959. We have once had the Niger Delta Basin Authority (NDBDA) in 1979. A special task force for the development of oil producing areas was put in place, while in 1992, oil mineral producing areas development commission (OMPADEC) was established.

Walter (2010) ^[22] emphasized that the decline and fall of OMPADEC necessitated the rise and formation of (NDDC) in 2000 by president Olusegun Obasanjo. Nwagbo (2009) ^[10] put it succinctly that the Gen. Ogbomudia committee was formed in 2002 while the conflict resolution committee

was instituted in 2007. The technical committee on Niger Delta was formed in 2008. In the same year, (2008) ministry of Niger Delta was created. As all these were done, huge amount of money was spent, yet no fruitful result was achieved.

The truth remains that all these commissions and committees including boards have not done enough to ameliorate the problems of the Niger Delta people. It is this prevalent state of affairs that stimulated the genuine demands for redress, which later developed from peaceful to violent agitation, and most regrettably, its contamination, with criminality which appears to have overwhelmed an unarguably justified agitation.

Theoretical Framework

The frustration-aggression theory is used to provide the theoretical foundation for this study.

Frustration-aggression theory

The frustration aggression theory is a psychological basis of understanding and explaining individual, groups or organizations actions and behaviors. One major issue that elicits aggression behaviour and reaction is the inability to obtain set goals.

Nwiyor (2004) carefully describes it thus: Every frustrating event produce an instigation to aggression and the strength of the Individual's aggression drive is a function of the number and type of frustrating event he has encountered.

The catalogue of an individual, groups or an organization's frustration when put together generates a higher Instinct for aggression. Aggression has been the only and perhaps the major response to frustration, for some they "give up" or adopt a substitute goal.

Cohen (1973) examine frustration in the hand of an authority and noted that such frustration is deliberate and intentional, which is capable of eliciting more aggression than an accidental frustration. Frustration in the hand of the authority generates greater and massive provocation and aggression than an unintentional or accidental frustration. More importantly, frustration-aggression theory will provide a basis for understanding the causes of ethnic minorities' agitations and the adverse consequences that emanated from it.

It is the frustration suffered by the Niger Delta people that necessitated them to take their destiny into their own hands even in the face of opposition. The high level of neglect, marginalization, politics of exclusion, environmental degradation high level of unemployment and incessant flaring of gases at close proximity to human habitation that forced the minorities to be angry, hence they became aggressive against the multinational oil companies and the federal government who enslaved them for more than fifty years today. Aggressive action was the last resort since every peaceful negotiations, protests and court actions failed.

Negative consequences and why the agitation persist

The people of the Niger Delta were adversely affected by the outcome of their agitations and demands because of the reactions of the federal government. They claimed to be protecting oil wells, installations expatriate and to stabilize the economy.

So many communities were razed down and hundreds of people killed e.g. Ikot-Abasi communities which had earlier

demonstrated publicly in 1987, 38 houses were destroyed by the police, because they demanded for compensation of ₦38 million from the federal government due to oil exploration that have devastated the area. The Itshekiris, Ijaws and Urhobos riots and killing arising from oil issue. (Benson, 2001) [23]. Nwagbo (2009) [10] asserts that was the issue of the murder of Ogoni four, hanging of Ogoni nine and execution of Ken Saro Wiwa intensified the crises and Niger Delta in general. Another uprising was the Kaima declaration in 1998, Oron people declaration, atlaka declaration, Ogoni Bill of Rights in 1990.

"The government responded by banning public gatherings and declaring that disturbances of oil production were acts of treason, Oil extraction from the territory were reduced to 10,000 barrels per day (1,600m³/d) (.5% of the national total). Minority repression and operation escalated in 1994 in Ogoni and brutal killing' was the order of the day, and the reduction in oil exploration affected the nation's economy greatly. (Johnson, 2009) [7]. "On January, 4th 1999 about one hundred soldiers from the military base at Chevron's Escravos communities attacked Opia and Ikiyan Pabiogba, the traditional leader of Ikiyan, who came to the river to negotiate with the soldiers was shot along with seven (7) year old girl and possibly dozens of others, approximately 1,000 people were still missing months after the attacks. The same soldiers set the village ablaze, destroyed canoes and fishing equipments.

UNEP Report (2010) unfolded that effects of oil exploration and spillages has negative effects on the people of Ogoni till the next 30 years. The report reveals that one of the most worrisome findings of this salient report is the health threatening situation at Ogale, where families were said to have drinking water from wells that is contaminated with benzene*UNEP warned that any further extended delay to clean up Ogoniland will result in the oil' pollution footprints spreading and exacerbating the conditions for the people and the surrounding areas.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are necessary and essential to address the consequences arising from ethnic minorities agitation in the Niger Delta.

1. The federal government should practice true federalism as it is practice in USA and Canada. Nigerian federalism, concentrated so much power in the hands of the federal government.
2. The revenue allocation formula that had been changed several times over the years owing to the domineering power of the majority ethnic groups should be revisited.
3. The federal government should initiate a sustainable programme that will re-integrate the ex-militants. They should be given starter-pack to establish their own businesses.
4. Some of the contentious laws that aimed at incapacitating the ethnic minorities in the Niger Delta should be repealed. Such laws include land use decree of 1978, the petroleum decree etc.
5. They should be adequately compensated for their land and oil spillages which has devastating effects on them.
6. Social amenities should be provided to the people to avoid future crises.
7. Proper environmental impact assessment should be carried out, after each spill.

8. The establishment of the ministry of Niger Delta contradicted with the functions of NDDC, and therefore has no direct bearing on the minorities in the region. It is located in Abuja and workers from all over the country including contractors have taken over the ministry. It should be scrapped.

Conclusion

This paper x-rayed the reasons that motivated the ethnic minorities in the Niger Delta to agitate and demand for better living conditions from the multinational oil companies exploring oil from their land, as well as the federal government who are insensitive to their sources of livelihood and existence. The ethnic minorities lacked basic necessities of life, such as good hospitals, schools, roads, electricity, pipe borne water, with high level of unemployment, environmental degradation as well as constant flaring of dangerous gases into the atmosphere at close proximity to human habitation.

An attempt to question the high level of neglect, marginalization, deprivation and politics of exclusion, led to intense conflict between the ethnic minorities on one hand and the multinational oil companies and the federal government on the other hand. The resultant effect of the above, was the formation of several militia groups that engaged in destruction of oil pipes, oil wells, kidnapping, oil bunkering and construction of illegal refineries.

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