THE CONSEQUENCES OF MILITANCY IN NIGERIA’S NIGER DELTA

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Abstract
The history of Nigeria is blighted by ferocious conflicts since her independence. While these conflicts are of varying degrees, durations, and intensities, conflict makers are also multi-dimensional and include historical animosities and colonial legacies over issues of ethnicity, religious, regional/state divisions, indigene/settlers syndrome within a locality, fears of domination/marginalization and more importantly struggles over what has become known in the Nigerian parlance as ‘true federalism’ or ‘resource control’, which will guarantee the ‘resource bearing’ states/communities or the ‘indigenous groups’ unfettered access to and control over their God-given natural resources. While the struggle for ‘resource control’ is not new in Nigeria, it has however, assumed different dimensions in the recent past in the Niger-Delta, therefore leading to the proliferation of militia groups and armed struggles against the State. This paper therefore examines the dynamics of the internal and external ramifications of the militant activities in the Niger Delta.

Keywords: Domestic, external, consequences, militancy

Introduction
At the heart of the armed militia proliferation and struggles are the issues and/or politics of crude oil exploration and exportation, which is found in abundance in the Niger-Delta minority areas of the country and is the mainstay of Nigeria’s economy and external earnings. Thus, despite the economic reforms that in fact date back to Obasanjo’s ‘belt tightening’ in the late 1970s, crude oil exports till today account for between 90 and 95% of Nigeria’s external earnings, and with the level of domestic economic activities dwindling by the day, crude oil accounts for over 80% of all national wealth (Ibeanu 2005). This over-dependence on oil revenues, which comes from the Niger-Delta, have focused demands on the system and inevitably sharpened contradictions among different communal grouping in Nigeria. As a result, the politics of oil inevitably locks into the politics of communalism (Ibeanu 2005).

While the over reliance on oil revenues has indeed exacerbated the politics of communalism and sharpened the debates on the best fiscal federalism practices and the onshore/offshore contradictions, it has also created paradoxes of the petro-state in the Niger-Delta (Ibeanu 2005). One of the most glaring paradoxes of the petro-state in the Niger-Delta is what Ibeanu (2005) has termed ‘the paradox of plenty’, which refers to the tendency for petroleum wealth to create enormous poverty within the Niger-Delta.

Although the civil unrest in Nigeria’s Niger Delta has reduced to the barest minimum, but the scars it left behind in Nigeria’s relations with the global world is still very fresh. Amnesty brought a very significant reduction to the struggle by various aggrieved Militant groups in Nigeria’s Niger Delta but it has not been able to heal up the wound sustained by expatriates from various countries of the world and several oil companies, and this situation still dictates the relationship of Nigeria with the international communities. In Nigeria, the Niger Delta militants’ activities have inflicted economic, social-cultural, financial and humanitarian tragedy on both Nigerian and non Nigerian.

More recently, the crisis has taken a new turn with an increasing criminalization of the conflict leading to questions as to why the problem is seemingly spiraling out of control. The spate of criminality (and possible external links to this phenomenon) has given rise to the
question around the implications that the Niger Delta militancy has for both international and regional peace and security. This study therefore focuses on the effect of Niger Delta militancy and its implication on Nigeria.

**Literature review**

Generally, the Niger Delta has attracted considerable multidisciplinary attention and therefore has a rich literature. The literature on the Niger Delta agrees that the oil industry has not promoted the development of the region; rather, it has undermined the area’s development (Ikein 1991; Brown 1998; Enyia 1991; Okoko & Nna 1997; Aaron 2006a). For example, Aaron (2006a:194) has noted that: Oil has meant for the indigenes of the Niger Delta, wrenching poverty. People’s Rights have come under severe assault by the ecologically unfriendly practices of oil Transnational Corporations (TNC’s). In addition, State laws and policies as they relate to petroleum resources, expropriate the indigenous peoples of the Niger Delta of their ‘right’ to their natural resources. According to Brown [1998], the local economies of the Oil Producing Communities have collapsed. And they are not integrated into the oil economy of Nigeria; the success of the oil economy has not promoted their own capacities. It has not promoted the social engine of the society. The point is that oil based environmental degradation and ethnic based political domination has combined to alienate the people from the use of their natural resources for their own development. Oil exploration and production is associated with a number of activities that devastate the environment, and impact negatively on economy and society.

Several sources (Okoko 1998; Ikporukpo 1983; Aaron 2006a; Ikein 1991; Worika 2002; Salau 1993; World Bank 1995; Ibaba 2005; United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) 2006; Adeyemo 2002; Human Rights Watch (HRW) 1999; Ibeanu 1997; Niger Delta Environmental Survey 1997; Peel 2005; Clark et al 1999; African Network for Environment and 15 Ibaba S. Ibaba Economic Justice (ANEEJ) 2004; Naanen 1995; Opukri & Ibaba 2007) have demonstrated the impact of the oil industry on the economy and society of the Niger Delta. Oil spills kill fish and agricultural crops, in addition to reducing nutrient value of the soil (HRW 1999:5-12; Clark et al 1999). Studies have shown that gas flares diminish agricultural productivity. It has been noted that crops planted about 200 metres from flare sites lose 100 percent of their yield. Those planted about 600 metres from flare sites experience 45 percent loss in yield, and 10 percent loss in yield for crops planted one kilometer away from gas flares (Salau 1993; Adeyemo 2002).

But what are the impacts of this on the Niger Delta people? The results are productivity losses, occupation displacement/disorientation, and increased poverty (UNDP 2006; World Bank 1995). Development has stagnated, and no matter how hard peasants work, they remain at the same point, and sometimes their situation gets worse. This has caused frustration and, as psychologists have noted, conflicts are a response to the frustration which occurs as a result of obstacles against the actualization of set goals (Anikpo 1998:7). The frustration-aggression theory of conflict also supports this perspective (Faleti 2006:47). Certainly, this theory captures the Niger Delta condition where frustration has led to militancy and violence.

There are many theories that could be applied in this research but Frustration Aggression theory has a better capture on Nigeria’s Niger Delta militancy.

**Frustration aggression theory**

This theory explains why people become frustrated and aggressive when their goals and aspiration are not achieved. In 1939, researchers at Yale University Institute of Human Relation published a small monograph that has had a tremendous impact directly or indirectly, almost on all behavioral sciences. Led by John Dollard, Leonard Doob, Neal Miller, O.H. Mower, and Robert Sear (1939), the group attempted to account for virtually all human aggression with a few basic ideas. Most of the studies investigating the causes and consequences of aggression in the immediately following decades were oriented, to some
extent, at least towards issues raised by the Yale’s group analysis. Frustration can create aggressive inclination even when they are not arbitrary or aimed at the subject personally.

According to Maslow (1941), the usual definitions of frustration are in terms simply of not getting what one desires, of interference with a wish, or with a gratification. Such a definition fails to make the distinction between a deprivation which is unimportant to the organism (easily substituted for, with few serious after-effects), and, on the other hand, a deprivation which is at the same time, a threat to the personality, that is, to the life goals of the individual, to his defensive system, to his self-esteem or to his feeling of security. It is our contention that only a threatening deprivation has the multitude of effects (usually undesirable) which are commonly attributed to frustration in general.

Militants activities in Nigeria’s Niger Delta therefore is mostly motivated by frustration created by deprivation and a threat to the personality, that is, to the life goals of individual or a group of people in the region.

The region derives its name from being situated at the mouth of the River Niger. Before the creation of the Nigerian state, economic activities of the Niger Delta in pre-colonial days entailed mainly export of salt and fish to the hinterland. In the 18th century, when the slave trade was at its peak, the region was West Africa’s largest slave exporting area, and this was enhanced by its proximity to the sea. Slave traders, however, diverted to palm oil trade in the 19th century when the slave trade declined. The Niger Delta, the delta of the Niger River in Nigeria, is a densely populated region sometimes called the Oil Rivers because it was once a major producer of palm oil. The area was the British Oil Rivers Protectorate from 1885 until 1893, when it was expanded and became the Niger Coast Protectorate.

The Niger Delta, as now defined officially by the Nigerian government, extends over about 70,000 km² and makes up 7.5% of Nigeria’s land mass. Historically and cartographically, it consists of present day Bayelsa, Delta, and Rivers States. In 2000, however, Obansanjo’s regime included Abia, Akwa-Ibom, Cross River State, Edo, Imo and Ondo States in the region. Some 31 million people of more than 40 ethnic groups including the Bini, Efik, Ibibio, Annang, Oron, Ijaw, Itsekiri, Isoko, Urhobo, Ukwuani, and Kalabari, are among the inhabitants in the Niger Delta, speaking about 250 different dialects.

As Nigeria began to prepare for independence, the search for oil began in the Delta in the 1950s and by 1956 it was discovered in commercial quantities. Less than two years later it was being commercially produced and sold on the international markets. Today around two million barrels of oil are extracted in the Niger Delta every day making it the world’s eight largest oil producer in a country that remains one of the world’s poorest as the oil revenues largely bypass those living and working outside that industry.

Foreign companies extract the oil and it has been alleged that they do so without regard for local cultures or the local environment which has been ravaged by oil spills, fires, pollution, deforestation and poor waste management.

**Causes of militants’ activities in the Niger Delta of Nigeria**

The Niger Delta, Nigeria’s oil belt, is home to much of the oil and gas reserves and the oil industry. There were 349 drilling sites, 22 flow stations and one terminal in the early 1990s. (World Bank, 1995) and about 10,000km of pipelines, 10 gas plants, 3 oil terminals and 1,500 oil producing wells by the mid 1990s (Egborge, 1999). As at 2007 there were over 600 oil fields, 5,284, on and off shore oil wells, 10 export terminals, 275 flow stations, 4 refineries and an LNG project (Lubeck, Watts and Lipschutz, 2007:5). It has been reported that the Niger Delta and its crude oil had a proven reserve of 17.8m barrels and natural gas with proven reserve of 2.5 x 102M by early 1998. Crude oil reserves as at 2000 were estimated at over 30 billion barrels.
Oil, as expected, has not brought prosperity, better living conditions and government attention and development. Rather, it has been accompanied by instability, insecurity, conflicts, violence, crime, and social tensions. The Niger Delta is characterized by the absence of infrastructure, social services, non-oil industries and even petroleum products. There is widespread neglect, social and economic underdevelopment. The region is one of the least developed in the nation. It has only 2% of the Federal roads and less than 30-40% of settlements have electricity. In some areas, existing primary health care facilities serve as little as 2% of the population. Educational facilities are inadequate in most communities. There is huge infrastructure underdevelopment. The prices of petroleum products are of the highest in the country. There is endemic poverty (NDES 1997a).

According to Ikelegbe (2004:490-516) rather than attract development, oil has actually devastated and underdeveloped the region. Oil exploration and exploitation has led to family, intra-communal, inter-communal and inter-ethnic feuds, conflicts and wars. The oil economy has disinheritied and dislocated the local people who are dependent on the primary economies of farming, fishing, and hunting. The region has been laid prostrate by massive oil based environmental degradation. As a regime of massive oil spillages and gas flares, their activities have destroyed or devastated enormous land and water which has led to soil fertility loss, agricultural decline, forest loss, fisheries decline and biodiversity depletion (Ikelegbe, 2008).

The region which only receives little resources as derivation based resource flow from the federation account had its resources decline from 50% in 1966, to 45% in 1970, 1% in 1979, 2% in 1982, 1.5% in 1984 and 3% in 1992. It was only increased to 13% in 1992. As Ikelegbe (2004: 490-916) has noted, the import of trickle resources flows from the Nigerian state and the oil companies and the consequences of gross degradation and socio-economic dislocation has been massive poverty, unemployment and malnutrition among the people. These have led to frustration, restiveness, anger, bitterness and aggression against the state and the oil companies through various means by militants’ groups.

**Development and socio-cultural implications of the crisis**

The crisis has had major implications for development and socio-cultural relations in the Niger Delta in particular and in Nigeria as a whole. As a general principle, it is a fact that development and crisis cannot go hand in hand. This means that the generalized crisis in the Niger Delta has severe negative implications for the development of the area and Nigeria as a whole.

More specifically observable are the following development and socio-cultural consequences.

1. The crisis has cracked relations within and between communities and various social groups in the Niger Delta. The crisis has broken relations between the communities in the Niger Delta and the Nigerian state.
2. The crisis has fractured relations between the communities in the Niger Delta and the oil companies.
3. The crisis has affected jobs and job creation in the Niger Delta as oil companies withdraw from areas of operation and shut down production activities and new businesses consider the area one of high risk.
4. The crisis has affected the security of oil workers, members of their families and areas of work activities.
5. The crisis has resulted in huge revenue losses for the country (shut down of production activities, vandalization and damage of oil facilities, bunkering, etc).
6. The crisis has been used to sponsor other types of crisis, especially at the political level where as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Rivers State has shown, politicians hide under the general crisis in the Niger Delta to settle personal scores.
7. The crisis has also affected the image of the people of the area; (they are seen as crisis and conflict prone).
8. The crisis has contributed to global increase in fuel prices.
Economic implication of Niger Delta militancy
Economically, as at January 2006, Nigeria lost 211,000 barrels of crude oil daily which equals 8.4% of Nigeria export of 2.6m (punch Jan18, 2006). Shell Nigeria shut in 455,000 bpd by March 2006 due to militant attack (New Age, March 28, 2006). By April, of the year, it got to 650,000bpd (New Age April 28th). New Age calculated that facilities producing about 25% of the nation’s crude oil remained under lock and key in Niger Delta region. The effect of this on budget implementation is not farfetched. As to sales, earnings from crude oil export fell by 702m US dollars in February 2006 from the previous month. As at June 2006, export has been cut by 20%. National power generation had reduced by more than 25% as a result of shutting off of gas to 3 major power stations.

Effects on human resource
Punch (Feb. 12, 2006) reported the refusal of most expatriates to be posted to Riverside field location but on shore. It also reported low morale among workers and the fear of mass resignation by the management. Nigerian oil workers were also afraid and were not ready to venture into offshore location. The oil workers unions, PENGASSAN and NUPENG were forced to call on oil companies to device measures to safeguard the lives of their members since the feelings of apprehension and insecurity pervaded the air (New Age May 15, 2006).

Of significance is that the oil companies engaged private security outfit apart from the ones in the companies’ establishment. Also, the number of police deployed to and are on the payroll of these companies is believed to be more than the total police that exist in the Delta region. The implication of this on the total cost outlay of these companies is enormous and may engendered cut down in some other headings. The human resource is always the first to be so affected.

In 2006, 2007 and 2008 Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC) threatened retrenchment of workers. This is likely to be in connection with both the total withdrawal of its operation from Ogoni land and the Niger Delta youths and communities disruption of its oil flow stations. In effect, the Nigerian state, the oil companies, communities in the Niger Delta and the international community have all been affected by the crisis.

On casualties many policemen and soldiers were killed so were arm carrying youths and innocent souls that were caught in cross fire. Punch (Feb 12, 2006) reported that hostage taking caused panic within the government and the oil companies planned to suspend operations.

Containment of the crisis
Given the major negative implications of the crisis for all interests involved, it is not surprising to find that a number of initiatives have been adopted by the Nigerian state and the oil companies to assuage the ‘anger’ of the communities in the Niger Delta. Among the initiatives, the following have been popular:

1. The projects approach (undertaking such projects as building hospitals, schools, etc)
2. The agency approach (establishing development agencies such as NDE, OMPADEC and NDDC)
3. The political empowerment approach (creation of local governments, States and geopolitical zones; appointment of prominent individuals from the Niger Delta to positions of national leadership)
4. Providing development frameworks (establishing Plans for development such as Master Plans, National / State Economic Empowerment Development Strategies – NEEDS, SEEDS, LEEDS, or enunciating national policies as in the National Policy on Poverty Eradication which are then passed on to other state institutions and agencies to implement)
5. The financial empowerment approach (giving cash or block grants to states and communities, providing micro credits to community members through third parties, etc)
6. The rule making approach (as in the Revenue Derivation Formula, making laws and
regulations for the ‘development’ of the Niger Delta or as part of some general legislation on property rights, environmental, etc.)

7. The talk-shop approach (convening National Summits on the Niger Delta; inviting leaders recognized by the state and the oil companies for discussions / consultations, etc).

Amnesty policy of Nigerian government on Niger Delta militancy

As the Nigerian Government unleashed its state terror through its violent repression, the social movement which has become violent at this stage became more violent in its approach as the number of militant groups increased, making it very difficult to explore and exploit oil in the region. Consequently, the 2.5 million barrels of oil production per day in Nigeria dropped to less than half of that number, making Angola which was the second highest oil producing country in Africa to become the first.

Faced with the reality of such a drastic drop in oil production and its implications on the country whose economy is heavily dependent on oil, President Yar’Adua took a non-violent path in resolving the crisis in the region in its bid to patch the bleeding economy. Thus, on 24th June, 2009 he announced the 60 day amnesty policy.

The policy which lacked much detail only stated that militants who lay down their arms within 60 days (6th August 2009 – 4th October 2009) will not be prosecuted for the crimes committed in the process of crippling Nigeria’s oil industry.

Since the announcement of the amnesty policy, thousand of ammunitions, machine guns and grenade launchers have been handed in. Many militants have turned themselves in as well though major militant groups like the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) which viewed the policy with suspicion promised cease fire but not disarmament of the group because according to them, the policy has no room for dialogue and it does not address the root issues that gave birth to the struggle. However, the policy seems to be a success because its announcement and the seeming compliance of the militants brought relative peace to the long troubled region for the first time.

Unfortunately, these initiatives have not and cannot work because they share individually and collectively some common weaknesses.

The first and most fundamental weakness is that they are based upon a wrong understanding of the essence of the crisis and hence challenge of development in the Niger Delta. A second weakness which they all share is that the adopted solutions are at best not sincere and at worst, constructed to maintain the status quo. This explains the deliberate subversion of the development programmes by the very state officials who approve them. Thirdly, they are usually commandist in nature. They are the ideas of those who are responsible for the crisis in the Niger Delta, rather than those of the people of the Niger Delta.

Conclusion

The terrible condition of the Niger Delta region is due to long term neglect on the part of both the government and the oil companies to invest in developmental activities in the region. Besides, the grievances of the people of the region are based on the environmental damages of the area by oil exploration and exploitation. This agitation has inflicted on the region and the country at large series of challenges ranging from developmental challenge, socio-cultural implications, economic setback and problem of human resources.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are required towards resolving the Niger Delta crises.

1. Nigerian government should return to derivative /resource control measure at resolving the crises in Niger Delta. The issue of resource control should be entrenched in the concurrent list to avoid over centralization in resource allocation. It should be well-established so that communities can negotiate for royalties on the resources located on their land with exploring companies.
2. The federal government should reorganize the state apparatus to reflect true federalism for component units.

3. Special attention should be paid to the investment in the development of people and delta region. The Niger Delta ministry and NDDC should not be politicized but encouraged to accomplish the goals for which they are established.

4. Severe measures should be taken against oil companies that do not stick to pollution free environment, carry out set corporate social responsibilities to their host communities or recompense adequately the host communities for oil spillage and properties acquired.

5. Regular discourse among the stakeholders is suggested to avoid cumulated aggression. The obligation is on all levels of government and oil prospecting companies to aid such dialogue and execute all agreements reached.

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