

OIL-ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION AND HUMAN SECURITY IN THE NIGER-DELTA REGION OF NIGERIA: CHALLENGES AND POSSIBILITIES

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Abstract

The Niger-delta region has continued to attract scholarly attention in view of devastation of its environment and people due to failure to manage the negative consequences of oil exploitation and underdevelopment it has spawned in the region. The problem of oil environmental degradation and human insecurity it has elicits have not been lost to the federal government and its oil-petrol dollar partners. Yet, not much have been done to control the effect of oil exploitation in the region that has left the environment desecrated and the people in abject poverty. Also, development of the region has been almost non-existence in spite, of the enormous revenue accruing to the federal, state and local governments from the region. Recent oil spill and slow pace of development in the area have revived calls for human security in this part of Nigeria. The Paper submitted that although the present civilian administration has made major efforts to ameliorate the suffering of the people of the region, their conditions remain pitiable and unless the present government's efforts are directed towards improving the peoples' socio-economic and political conditions, the restiveness and violence in the Niger-Delta region in particular and Nigeria in general would continue unabated.

Keywords: Oil-environmental degradation, Development, Human Security and Environmental justice

Introduction

Every nation in the world desire peace to carry out its programmes of development. It is this imperative that has made many nations to invest stupendous sum of money on maintaining the peace within and outside their environment. While some nations have got their priorities right in this regard by creating first and fore-most, a conducive environment for human security that enable the people to thrive and co-exist peacefully, others have tended to undermine this process and only see such needs as peripheral to state and nation building projects. In countries where this is the norm, basic social services are neglected and where they are produced at all, they fall pitiously short of required quantity. This is the case in the Niger-Delta region where years of environmental neglect and injustice have led to deepened poverty. Years of Civilian and Military mis-rule in Nigeria have exacerbated this neglect of oil bearing communities causing in the process socio-economic and political emiseration.

While this palpable neglect can be said to be a common decimal in the country as a whole, the Niger-Delta region is particularly singled out here by reason of the resources it produces for the country and the magnitude of socio-economic and political deprivation it suffers. While the Niger-Delta is the “goose that lays the golden eggs”, its peoples and region are amongst the poorest in the country. After years of peaceful agitations, the struggle for environmental justice and equity in this region has since taken a violent dimension. Yet, the state tends to see the security threat this poses from mainly militarist perspective. This is why it mainly chooses military solution to the problem.

Yet, such threat to security should be socially constructed to properly situate the neglect of the Niger-Delta people in oil exploration that has rendered many homeless, without source of livelihood and social environment to recreate and procreate. Thus, it is more useful to look at threat to the people’s life and sources of wealth rather than security of the state and its custodian the ruling class.

It is against this background that the paper explores the nature of environmental degradation in the Niger-Delta, the threat it poses to people’s lives and efforts by the state – past and present to redress this abnormality. The people have responded to such perceived injustice by employing various strategies such as: seminar, fora and symposia to register their plight, political violence, pipe-line vandalization, oil bunkering and more recently hostage taking. While these measures may not be the best especially in the circumstance the nation finds itself, for the people of the Niger-Delta region, these responses are means of drawing the attention of government of the country and the entire world to their plight.

To this end, the paper seeks to explicate the subject matter of the discourse in the following sections: Section one; examined major concepts germane to the subject matter of this study. Some of these concepts would be operationalized to situate them within the ambit of the discourse. The second, discussed the nature and character of the Nigerian state and how these affect the production, distribution and management of human and material resources. The third, analyzed the politics of oil exploration in Nigeria and the conflict and crisis it generates in oil bearing and producing communities. The fourth, explored the interface between oil environmental degradation and human security in the Niger-Delta region. The increasing exploration and exploitation of oil in this region has left the people pauperized and their ecology devastated. As a result of this, there have been cases of violent conflicts between oil companies/government and their host communities. The fifth section discussed the way forward for major stakeholders in the oil-security nexus and then conclusion.

Conceptual and Theoretical Considerations

For a discourse of this nature, it is apt to clarify some major concepts which underpin the study. While in the management and social sciences, concepts hardly elicit conceptual agreement, nonetheless, concepts will be defined here against the subject matter of the paper.

Oil-Ecological degradation is the abuse of environmental rights. It demands that while the environment must be used to support human life in terms of exploration and use of its resources, such

endeavour should not be carried out in an environmental unfriendly manner that lead to resource depleted without any chance of replenishment or renewal.

While man must interact with nature, this should lead to a transformation of natural capital into socially and politically desirable goods and services (Ajort Af-ornas and Lundqvist, 1999). Yet, if such extraction and use of resources are higher than the rates of generation of natural capital, like fuel wood it may be less easy to collect, wells may run dry, and so on. Accesses to physical resources become socially and geographically stratified (ibid). Our concern therefore, is on how to sustain the environment from human depletion of renewable and non-renewable resources.

Environmental sustainability has been conceived of as a “condition which guarantees that the functioning of the eco-system is not impaired and that the quality of goods and services that emanate from the natural capital is not reduced or changed so as to increase the risk to human life and well being (ibid). Failure to adhere to these precautionary measures has led to conflicts and crises in oil producing areas. Also, in the context of the Niger-Delta region, of Nigeria particularly in Ogoni-land, there have been intra and inter community conflicts, hostage taking, seizure of oil platforms, pipeline verbalization and militant restiveness or resistance. Evidently, oil environmental induced conflicts and crises have created serious damage to life and socio-economic development of the nation. It has brought about security concern with serious implication for socio- economic growth and development in the Niger-Delta region in particular and Nigeria in general.

For some scholars (PEFs’ 2004; Onimode, 2007) this has created insecurity in areas affected and globally (see Dexon Homes, 1991). But for us, we are interested in security as it affects the peoples’ well-being i.e. social security. Therefore, beyond state security, we are concerned with security as it measures the capacity of the natural environment to sustain the physical needs of man, (Ibeanu, 1999). In other words, social security means overcoming poverty, diseases, ignorance, arbitrary power, etc (ibid).

Indeed, conflict and crises emanating from environmental abuses have become matters of grave concern to all stakeholders in mineral bearing communities. Conflict from the political angle can be seen as irreconcilable differences between two parties. In the words of Coser, conflict is a “struggle over values, claims to status, power and scarce resources in which the aims of the opposing parties are not only to gain the deserved values but also to neutralize impede or eliminate rivals (in Idowu, 1999). Also, crisis can be defined using the medical analogy of Gamble and Walton (1976) as “the point in the progress of disease of which an important development of change take place which is decisive for recovery or death”. Crisis is therefore, a critical stage in a conflict that requires drastic measures to resolve. Structurally, it can be said that crisis is different from conflict. When conflict situation persist on any given subject, it becomes crisis. The state of crisis is what comes to the fore when there is a persistent manifestation of moments or condition of conflict (Idowu, 1999). Thus, it can be argued that “it requires more manifestation of conflicts and violence to establish a state of crisis” (ibid).

Oil-environmental conflict and the insecurity it promotes have long being an issue of concern to governments all over the world particularly in the West where such concern has directed attention to population growth in developing countries and the threat it poses to state security (see Dexon – Homer, 1991; Obi, 1997; Ibeanu, 1999). Increasingly however, there has been a paradigm shift in the direction of social security which is seen as perhaps the more enduring solution to the general spate of insecurity in oil and other mineral producing areas. Scholars that promote this perspective (Ibeanu, 1999; Onimode, 1997) argue that the most important threat to the state is the failure to prevent environmental degradation caused by rapid depletion of renewable and non-renewable resources from the environment.

While this is going on, little efforts are made towards providing for the peoples’ welfare and well-being. This is one of the sources of insecurity in the Niger-Delta region in particular and the Nigerian state in general. The phenomenon of Boko Haram in the Northern part of the country has unleash violence on state institutions and individuals with properties worth millions of naira being destroyed! These issues however, cannot be properly understood without coming to grips with the nature and character of the Nigeria state and politics.

An Overview of the Nigerian State and Politics

Nigeria is a multi-ethnic and deeply divided country. There is no consensus as to the number of ethnic groups in the country. Otite (1991) put the number of major ethnic groups at 370. Apart from these major ethnic groups, there are equally large numbers of minority groups which Suberu (1995) put at over 280. The World Bank figure put the country’s population at over 170 million people.

The entity call Nigeria emerged out of British economic expedition. Through gun-boat diplomacy and force, they subdued the various kingdoms and empires which they met in the territory call Nigeria today. The British then foisted a system of indirect and in some areas direct rule on the people under a political philosophy; the first Governor General of Nigeria calls the “**Dual Mandate**” (Adamolekun, 1993). But British rule in Nigeria was not a benevolent exercise. It came to Nigeria for economic reasons, that is, to exploit the natives’ resources for the benefit of Europe. Little wonder, therefore that no serious economic foundation and structure were laid down or left behind on the eve of their departure from Nigeria. However, it founded and left behind the legacy of a monoculture economy. First it was agriculture and in the present times oil is promoted as the main-stay or lifeblood of the economy (Osaghae, 2002).

This has made it possible for the Nigerian economy to remain a distributive economy. Lack of diversification of the economic base means that the economy is easily manipulated from outside the country. As Graf put it:

Once the flow of the country’s product is disrupted under this structure, the West gets glittery as it presently does over the flow of oil from the Niger-Delta region. Any thing that will disrupt this flow of oil poses security risk to the Western interests.

Yet, the colonial political economy has continued to subsist more than five decades after flag independence. The achievement of political independence has not changed the structure of the economy. This structure allows the economy to be dependent not on its internal dynamics but on external stimuli. As Mkandiwire (1995) has rightly noted, the structure of the Nigerian political economy:

Compromised the position of the state as the bastion of National sovereignty and has revealed the state's weak and dependent character vis-à-vis foreign powers and institutions. It has raised the question as to whom the state is accountable. The assumption by foreign experts of key functions that have long been "indigenized" is the most dramatic manifestation of this process.

Nigerian politics has followed similar track. Its political system is fashioned alongside that of the West (Liberal Democracy). Indeed, it's political and other related policies are borrowed from Europe and America. But these institutions are largely disembodied of the logic, norms, values and morals which make them functional in the West. Unfortunately, many years of the practice of liberal democracy have very few lessons to be internalized by the people and their ruling elite. The result, like in the case of the economy, has been catastrophic! Political instability, social dislocation, cultural disequilibrium and national insecurity, have been quite pronounced. The military that came, as it were, to correct and revamp the nation's political-economy only succeeded in moving the nation into greater crisis.

In the absence of any strong ideological base, ethnic dominant politics has tended to prevail in the country. The three major ethnic groups in the country Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo alternates in political power since independence, leaving other groups (the minorities) to wonder if they have any stake or sense of belonging in the country (Ekeh, 1989).

While the country has come up with impressive innovations in its federal system, such as multi-tier federal structure, comprehensive list of human rights in the constitution and powers sharing arrangement (Suberu, 2004), it is still governed as a Unitary State or what many would call Unitary-Federalism (see Suberu, 2004; Guardian 6th March, 2006; Osaghae, 2006). Since oil is the mainstay of the country's political economy, how has it been managed over the years? This is the subject of analysis in the next section.

The Politics of Oil Exploration and Exploitation

Prior to the discovery of oil in Nigeria, agriculture was the main stay of the country's economy. It accounted for over 70 percent of the foreign exchange earnings of the country. The discovery of oil in Oloibiri, a town in Bayelsa State in the Niger-Delta region in 1958, brought about structural change in the economy. Oil displaced agricultural produce as the chief revenue earner of the country. Presently, oil accounts for over 90 percent of the nation's revenue and there is no reason to believe that this will change in the foreseeable future. Interestingly, since the discovery of oil, the politics of the country has also changed. It has become very combative, intense and zero sum. The

threat of succession by Biafra (Saro-Wiwa, 1992), the constant threat of military coup, agitation for self-determination by ethnic nationalities, the frequent call for review of the revenue sharing formula, among others all seem to stem from the presence and significance of oil in the country's political economy.

Yet, the domination of the oil industry by foreign multi-nationals such as: Mobil, Shell, Chevron, ELF and Agip (the big five) have continued to dictate the trend in the oil industry, within the ecological hazard their activities pose to people of oil producing areas and the Nigerian State. While the exploration of oil and other finite resources are going on in a frantic manner in the Niger-Delta region, the people are deprived of basic social amenities to protect and promote their welfare. Worst still, their environments are desecrated and degraded by excessive oil exploration and exploitation. In the course of exploiting oil, farm lands are destroyed, aquatic lives are eliminated and drinkable water is polluted. As Ogbogbo (in POFs, 2004) puts it:

The lack of infrastructure, portable water, electricity, road, hospital, etc. in spite of the huge revenue derived from its bowels has led to conflictual relations between the inhabitants and the Federal Government of Nigeria. Furthermore, the negative consequences of exploration and exploitation of crude oil from the Niger-Delta environment has resulted in pain, misery and abject poverty. This has resulted in considerable disquiet in the Niger-Delta to the extent of threatening the economic livelihood of the nation and by implication its existence as a state.

While these activities are going on, the security of life and property of the people are hardly protected by the state and its petrol-dollar partners – the oil companies. Ordinarily, it is the people that are supposed to be the prime concern of the State not its institutions and oil installations. But this has not always been the case. Yearly recurrent expenditure of government as against capital ones tend to take a large chunk of its budget. Although, there are laws to guard and regulate oil exploration and exploitation in Nigeria, they are not often strictly applied and complied with. The problem it would seem lies in the inability of the state to enforce its laws particularly to regulate oil production in favour of oil producing areas and the nation at large. This is perhaps because oil cabal appears to have taken over, pillaging state resources and feeding fat on the loose regulatory framework of the government in the oil industry.

Perhaps, another angle to the problem the oil-ecology means is the attempt by the ruling class to protect their interests which is in sometimes dissonance with that of the people. Their interest remains the expansion of oil production for the interest of the capitalist class rather than for the benefit of the generality of Nigerians. Because the interest of these rulers and the governed do not converge, their social concern is not the essence of governance. In this circumstance, security at whatever level is compromised. It is in this regard we must analyze the present security concern in Nigeria. Where the people suffer neglect and deprivation, security of life and property is impinged

upon. Commenting on the security threat to human existence posed by oil exploration in the Niger-Delta region, Ake (1994) notes that:

As much as the percent of all the natural gas from petroleum in Nigeria is flared compared to 0.6 percent in the United States, 4.3 percent in the UK, 21 percent in Libya; the flaring is a serious hazard. At temperature of 1,300 to 1,400 degree centigrade, the multitude of flares in the Niger-Delta heat up everything causing noise pollution and producing CO₂ VOC-CO-NO and flaring in Nigeria release 35 million tons of CO₂ a year and 12 million tons of methane which means that Nigerian oil fields contribute more to global warming than the rest of the World together.

It is clear from the above observation that oil and gas flaring and oil spills have a debilitating effect on the ecosystem and the lives of the people. This practice has continued without any serious effort by relevant authorities to either redress such environmental injustice or regulate its occurrence. But since the enabling laws are often breached by those concerned in the industry, the people in response, take laws into their hands. Furthermore, major threat to security of lives and property in oil producing areas is in the area of Sabotage of oil installations by restive youths in oil bearing and producing communities. This can be seen as protest action against the state and its petrol-dollar partners in Nigeria which have failed to provide for the people. Sabotage of oil installations may be seen as a coping strategy by the people. It has been on the increase because they also want to earn a living. As Ikporukpo argues:

On a World scale, sabotage which accounts for three percent of total spillage is not important. Only three countries: Nigeria, Nicaragua and USA – recorded spills due to sabotage. That four of the seven sabotage caused spills were in Nigeria underscores the importance of sabotage in the country. Indeed, over thirty three percent of spills in the country in 1983 was due to this cause (Ikporukpo, 1996)

Also, with high rate of unemployment and poverty in the country, this may continue in recent years pipe-line vandalization has been the vogue in areas in the South-South where oil pipe-line run through. In an attempt to snoop fuel from holes drilled into oil pipes, many villages, farmlands and human lives have been lost to fire outbreak emanating from such activities. This is besides the enormous economic lose such practice cost the nation as a whole in terms of repairs of damaged pipes and financial loses suffered by the relevant authorities. Quite a number of these incidents have occurred in recent years and it would seem more are likely to take place because policies of successive governments in the oil and gas sector have not changed to bring about a change of attitude and behaviour of the people and those in the industry.

Constitutional Provision and Environmental Safety

The constitutional drafters in Nigeria were not unmindful of the hazard that can be caused by human use of the environment for different purposes. Based on this, the constitution requires that “the state shall direct its policy towards ensuring that the material resources of the community are harnessed and distributed to serve the “common good” (Ikhardale, 1997). It further states that “exploitation of human and material reserves in any form whatsoever for reasons other than the good of the community must be prevented” (ibid). On a face value, this provision of the constitution appears vague in terms of its ability to regulate oil production in Nigeria. Yet the major handicap is in enforcing the law by making sure that those directly and indirectly involved in the oil sector are made to comply with it. In other words, it is imperative that there should be certainty of the law and punishment where it is violated.

However, this has not always been the case. As Amu (1982), a former NNPC director rightly notes “under the concession era, the oil industry was dominated by oil multi-nationals and government’s role was limited to collecting rents and royalties from oil companies and making laws to regulate the activities of the industry” while there has always been laws, their enforcement is what is problematic. The reason for this state of affairs in the Nigerian oil industry is perhaps not obscure. The nature of this palpable powerlessness is made manifest in the inability of Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) to match the sophisticated technology and knowledge of the global oil industry which the oil multi-nationals enjoy (Obi, 2002). Thus, the point can be made that beyond the conventional justice mechanism (Ikhariale, 1997) which in any case has been ineffectual in regulating environmental abuses in the country, government is not proactive enough in its handling of environmental issues particularly as it affects oil exploration and the environmental hazards attendant to it. This is much more important today because of the increased international and local concern over environmental resource scarcity and abuses.

Oil-Environmental Degradation and Human Security

Saving the environment from excessive human exploitation is critical to human security. The environment is naturally made to ensure maximum enjoyment by all its habitats. And this has to be protected in order to maintain ecological balance. But in recent years, this balance has been seriously threatened by excessive demand of oil by international oil companies operating in the Niger-Delta region of Nigeria, to feed as it were the global hunger for oil. Unfortunately, the environment has been left to the mercy of this oil multinationals and its Nigeria counterpart. With their increased activities, the ecosystem has been seriously depleted and the peoples’ welfare and well-being put in serious jeopardy. Yet, the environment should be sustained.

Environmental sustainability has been conceptualized to mean “condition which guarantees that the functioning of the ecosystem is not impaired, and that the quality of goods and services that emanate from the natural capital is not reduced or changed so as to increase the risk for human life and well-being” (Ajort Af-Ornas and Lundqvist, 1999). Indeed, how to preserve the environment at

the same time explore its natural endowment for human use and enjoyment have always been the challenge to modern technology and institutional arrangements put in place to manage the environment. But from all indications, policy thrust in this direction has not been successfully implemented.

Presently, the depletion of both finite and non-finite resources is therefore, creating greater dangers to human life and survival than the threat of war. At the global level, this threat is clear. As Homer Dexon (1991) has observed:

Scarcity of environmental resources in particular, cropland, fresh water and forest are contributing to mass violence in several areas of the World. While these environmental scarcities do not cause war between countries, they do sometimes aggravate stresses within countries, helping to stimulate ethnic clashes, urban unrest and insurgencies.

The above view did not mention the health hazard oil exploration and production activities pose on the people in particular and their communities in general. Besides, the conflict and crisis they elicit, security of life is also immensely challenged. Apart from Homer Dexon (1993) worries “over growing scarcity of renewable resources – which may spill over into social instability and Civil Strife, one could paint a grim picture of how resource scarcity, among other things could destroy the social fabric of our planet. Oil spills, gas flaring and oil pollution have deleterious effects on human lives, climate change and global warming (The Punch, 20th March, 2012).

While issues of environmental abuses and resource scarcity have been well discussed and expanded in the literature, fewer attentions have been given to the oil - human security nexus. There is need to zero in or factor this aspect into the discourse on environmental sustainability. The tendency to see (in) security from the political and militaristic terms is insufficient without incorporating the human security angle.

Hitherto, security was seen as state capacity to defend itself or values from individuals, groups or states. For the realist security is part of national interest. Yet as Walzer (cited in Ibeanu, 1999) suggests, security should be viewed heuristically. In his words:

Security in an objective sense measure the absence of threats to acquire values, in a subjective sense, the absence of fear that such values will be attacked. In both respects, a nation's security can run a wide gamut from almost complete insecurity or sense of insecurity at one pole, to almost complete security or absence of fear at the other.

The ability of the state to create a context where the people can actualize their potentials: to recreate their environment, to sustain their livelihood and improve their well-being is the essence of governance. Over retification of state security has proven to be inadequate in understanding the threat to state security because it tends to over-look class and other social forces which define or underpin security. Thus, there is need to de-emphasize state security in favour of social security. This means

“security from poverty, diseases, ignorance, arbitrary power, etc. (Ibeanu, 1999). Security further pertains to the “carrying capacity of the natural environment to sustain the physical needs of man. In this respect, two issues are important in measuring the security of a society: the extent to which members of the society understand the laws of nature (science) and uses this understanding to create tools (technology) thereby enhancing their capacity to derive their physical needs from nature (ibid).

From all indications, the people of the Niger-Delta region have not been able to carry out a reproduction of the environment they live in to their benefit. Rather, they have watched in bewilderment and dismay years of rapid exploitation of natural resources in their environment without much dividends in terms of improved conditions of living and or physical development of the region. Moreso, the country’s fiscal federalism has not helped matters as it has tended to focus more on balanced development as criteria for revenue sharing from the federation account than on derivation as was the situation in the 1950s. This development has created the basis for the clamour among the peoples of this region, for self-determination and environmental justice.

Oil-Environmental Degradation and Development

Since the return to civil rule in 1999, government at the federal level in Nigeria has made frantic efforts to ameliorate years of neglect of the people and communities in the oil rich Niger-Delta region. These steps include: the passing into law of 13% derivation for oil producing areas, the establishment of Niger-Delta Development Commission (NDDC), the creation of the ministry of the Niger-Delta at the Federal level, among other innovations. While these measures in themselves are necessary, the political will to translate them into concrete realities have been lacking. Evidence from reports on human development in the Niger-Delta region suggests to us that not much have been achieved to change the sorry state of development in the region.

While there are mounting challenges of governance in the area, this contrast sharply with the enormous wealth being extracted from the region. A World Bank Report (in PEFS, 2004) observes the level and pattern of poverty in the Niger-Delta thus:

Despite its vast resources, the (Niger-Delta) region remains poor in Gross National Product (GNP) per capita is below the national average of US\$280. Unemployment in Port Harcourt, the capital of River State is 30 percent and is believed to be equally high in the rural areas. The rural population commonly fish or practice subsistence agriculture and supplement their diet and income with a wide variety of forest products. Educational levels are below the national average and are particularly low for women. While 76 percent of Nigerian children attend primary school, this drop to 30 – 40 percent in some parts of the Niger-Delta. The poverty level in the Niger-Delta is exacerbated by the high cost of living. In the urban areas of Rivers State, the cost of living index is the highest in Nigeria.

The forgoing account of the socio-economic situation in the Niger-Delta region, paints a gloomy picture of poverty in the region. Where such level of social insecurity exists, development

would certainly be far-fetched. As rightly pointed out “the poverty indicators are manifestation of the existence of a complete low level of development that has also resulted in high degree of dissatisfaction” (PEFs, 2004). Development in its contemporary usage, involves the empowerment of the people to make informed choices which could transform and translate into better welfare and well-being for the inhabitants and communities where oil exploration and exploitation take place. These aspects of social security appear far-fetched and inconsequential for government and its patrol-dollar partners – the oil companies. This explains the neglect this region has suffered over the years.

Running side by side with the call for human-environmental justice, is the demand for distributional justice in terms of fairness in distribution of the resources from the region. While all stakeholders in the oil and gas sectors recognize the need for oil bearing States and communities to have a fair share of the resources coming from their area, the degree of such allocation is what is in dispute. The 13 percent derivation funds to the Niger-Delta States from the Federation account is considered a far-cry from more than 50 percent being demanded by States in that region of the country.

Conversely, the distributive nature of the Nigerian federalism has led to a situation in which inhabitants of the core Niger-Delta States – Rivers, Cross Rivers, Delta and Bayelsa have become “Oliver Twists” who seat at home only to go to oil companies in the area for monthly salaries. Failure to achieve their aim, they quickly resort to sabotage, oil thief, kidnapping, militancy among others.

Corruption among the ruling elite in the area has also robbed the area of development as they cannot account for enormous resources given to them over the years.

The recent arrangement, prosecution and conviction of former Governor of Delta State and influential figure of the ruling Peoples’ Democratic Party (PDP) James Ibori for stealing Billions of Dollars of Delta State funds, speaks volumes of the failure of even the ruling elite, in oil producing areas to use the resources from this region to develop the area. Therefore, it is no longer fashionable to blame the Federal government for mis-management and mal-development in the region. The people from this region should demand accountability and probity from their rulers as a way of check-mating their excesses and plaguing back resources from the area into developmental purposes.

Government at whatever level cannot do everything itself. Private foreign and indigenous investors in the oil and gas sector should embrace wholeheartedly their corporate social responsibility to the people and communities where they operate. There is so much money idling away in individual hands that ought to be channeled into programmes and projects which could make life more meaningful to the people and bring genuine developments to communities in the region. The restiveness of youths in the region can be attributed to this factor. The more companies and organizations deliver social services which touch on the people cum communities lives, the more they see them as partners in progress and the return of peace and development to the region.

The global movement in public management that is, Public – Private Partnership (PPPs) is a phenomenon that can fast-track the process of development: job creation and poverty alleviation in

developing areas of the world. Some States in Nigeria have embraced this imperative in the governance process and has began to yield positive dividends in areas where it is applied. If sincerely pursued, it would go a long way in accelerating the process of growth and development in the public and private lives of the people. Lagos State in Nigeria has started to reap its dividends. It is recommended to other states and private organizations in the country.

Oil-Environmental Degradation and Human Security in the Niger-Delta Region: Challenges and Possibilities

The impact of oil exploration and exploitation on the Niger-Delta region is multi-faceted. It has brought about displacement of people, families, farmlands, etc. This is besides its debilitating effect on human health and social well-being and welfare. In recent times, oil spills in the Niger-Delta communities have led to fresh calls for compensation from the oil companies operating in the region and application of environmental friendly approach to oil exploration. Surely, issues as vital as these cannot be left to the occasion wisdom of some gifted amateur in government, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) or among the oil companies which at any rate, see profit concern as more fundamental than community interests or their corporate social responsibilities. Only compensation given as at when due to those affected by oil environmental pollution can stem the tide of conflict and douse the ember of crisis in the region.

Another important step to finding lasting peace and effective resolution of disputes in oil and other mineral producing areas across the country is to train more personnel particularly in the areas where oil and other minerals are produced, in skills and techniques of oil production. Training of personnel from host communities will allow for effective diagnosis, policy initiation, formulation and execution in the oil producing areas of the Niger-Delta. In other words, such approach or strategies of management should take a bottom – top approach for it to be effective. Government amnesty programme training of ex-militants in various aspects of oil production activities and other matters are steps in the right direction.

In Nigeria as in other countries of the world, there are laws guiding the use of the environment by man. The problem in Nigeria however, is that these laws are hardly implemented. Yet, “as the legal owner of Nigerian Petroleum, the Federal Government should be able to lay down policies, make laws, rules and regulations to govern operations in the industry” (Sagay, 1997). But what we find is that the Federal Government has not been able to do this in any consistent way. The government must strengthen its abilities and institutions to regulate the industry in the interest of all Nigerians. Besides, many communities in the oil producing areas have suffered enormous damages, loss of life and properties due to wrong application of ideas, designs and methods in oil and other mineral explorations and exploitation.

One way to mitigate the effect of oil-environmental degradation is to carryout out Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) before oil production activities is embarked upon. This will ensure that appropriate designs and methods are applied to a given location. Another angle to this is

that “host communities as stakeholders, ought to be sufficiently mobilized and involved in project design and execution” (Onosode, 1997). It is important that extant laws relating to oil exploration and production are strictly adhered to no matter the company involved. Adhering to international best practices in oil production holds the key to a healthy environment.

The need for greater involvement of the people of oil producing areas in oil production cannot be over-emphasized. Oil companies and the Federal and State Governments should build an “enduring relationship with their respective local communities” (Agim, 1997). The aim is to ensure that they are effectively mobilized to contribute to the oil producing processes with a view to “guaranteeing that reasonable margins and standards of safety and security are followed” (ibid). Partnering with the people of oil producing communities will create and sustain better understanding among stakeholders in the oil industry and make conflict resolution less cumbersome.

Furthermore, distribution of oil derived revenue in Nigeria is oppressive and unjust. Given the enormity of environment hazards in the Niger-Delta and other related problems, more resources need to be thrown into the Niger-Delta region to restore human dignity in the area and savage what perhaps is left of the environment. The present 13 percent allotted to derivation under the present administration is grossly inadequate. Something in the region of 25 percent to 50 percent could be realistic. In addition, a marshal plan should as a matter of urgency be drawn up for the Niger-Delta region to bring it back to what one would call “Civilization”.

It is surprising to note that at this juncture in the nation’s history, it still operate a monoculture economy. This is regrettable because no country can develop under this system. The economy need to be diversified in order to de-concentrate efforts in oil production which in any case is exhaustible. This will have a snow-ball effect on the entire economy and in particular increase the country’s revenue base. Prior to the discovery of oil in the 1950s, agriculture was the mainstay of the rural economy. Since the late 60s, however, oil has become the lifeblood of the economy with little complementary role for agriculture. This has to change if the country is to be self sufficient and reliant.

Nigerian State as presently constituted cannot guarantee justice and fairness to all because it is lop-sided in focused and structure. These are fundamental disabilities which have made the State in Nigeria an unnecessary burden. The state therefore, should be restructured to become a state for all and controlled by the people, further away from the present situation where it is privatized and put in the hands of some privileged few.

The present nascent democracy offers an auspicious opportunity for state managers to operate within the established rules. It holds the key also to effective conflict management in all spheres of government activities. The crisis and conflict oil related activities elicit can be address within institutional rules. This pre-supposes however, that democracy minded leaders should be in positions in various spheres of government. They are the ones that will turn the ideas of democracy into concrete realities and mitigate effects of the push and pull of centrifugal forces in the polity of

presently democratic leaders are considered transformational leaders. Making a break from the past requires such leaders to bring to bear values and principles of democracy in all facets of societal life which could bring about the required peace, stability and development in the country.

Conclusion

Oil-environmental degradation that results from oil production in the Niger-Delta region has inflicted serious havoc on human security in the region that if not checked, will unleash unprecedented hazard on the environment and people in the area. Such are effects of oil related problems on the ecosystem and human life that only thoroughgoing efforts on a tripartite level can effectively tackle and redress the problem. While the economy should be diversified to ease the over reliance on oil, the structure of the Nigeria State has to be addressed with a view to making it a state for all. Yet, it is expedient to appreciate the fact that a democratic system like ours has the magic wands to constantly and peacefully manage conflict of whatever shapes and colours in the country. Therefore, we recognize that in the final analysis democracy is the key to peaceful co-existence of all in the society. Application of international best practices in oil production activities should be emphasized. While oil spills and other forms of environmental hazards may be unavoidable in the course of oil production; respect for environmental rules and rights of the people will help cushion the effect of such activities on human life. In line with the tenet of participatory democracy, community participation in oil production activities will go a long way in attenuating the negative effects of oil exploration and production in the Niger-Delta region of Nigeria.

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