AN ASSESSMENT OF THE INTERNAL THREATS TO NIGERIA'S PETROLEUM RESOURCES FROM OIL COMMUNITIES

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ABSTRACT

The importance of Nigeria's Petroleum sector to the nation's economy cannot be over-emphasized. Oil is the main stay of the country's economy. Though the oil communities produce the bulk of the nation's oil wealth, its people live in deprivation, squalor and abject poverty. Agitations from oil communities have resulted in little or no favourable response from the oil companies or government. The oil communities, especially the youths, took up arms against the government and oil companies as their last resort to draw attention to their plights. Accordingly, some objectives were stated which include: to examine the causes of the internal threats between host communities and oil Companies, to critically examine the security implications of the hostilities for oil producing communities and to determine the resolution efforts made by the government and oil Companies to reduce the hostilities to a tolerable friction. In the paper, frustration aggression was used as the theoretical analysis. It is recommended amongst others that government should deemphasize confrontation and military approach in handling disputes with oil communities, projects and programmes of the government should have direct impact on the oil communities, the multinational oil companies should address their corporate responsibilities to the oil communities.

INTRODUCTION

The importance of oil in the global energy sector cannot be over emphasized. Oil is undeniably the major contributor to Nigeria's economic growth and development. The country's petroleum industry is presently the greatest source of revenue and foreign exchange earner, and therefore the mainstay of the economy. Nigeria depends on the petroleum industry for economic, social and political development. At the international level, Nigeria has extensively utilized her oil wealth to accomplish her foreign policy objectives. It is contended that the increasing pauperization of the people of the Niger Delta in particular, amidst increasing windfall of revenue accruable from oil has pushed the people, especially the youths to the edge. The continuous marginalization, environmental pollution, pervasive poverty, and insensitivity on the part of the state and the failure of the nation's interventionist efforts at ameliorating the sufferings of the oil producing communities have consequently reinforced the option of violence as against peaceful engagement with the state. The paper argues that the crisis in the oil rich Niger Delta is economically induced. The protection of this useful strategic sector from all forms of threats cannot be compromised. Any threat therefore, that is capable of jeopardizing Nigeria's petroleum resources cannot, but attract stiffer and stronger

resistance of the country's security agencies. Some of the threats are from the host communities, who suffer pollution and environmental degradation.

The prospecting of petroleum activities in Nigeria started at Araromi area of the present Ondo State as far back as 1903. Thus, Araromi became the first oil exploration spot in the country. The Nigeria Investment Company also entered into petroleum exploration at that time, unfortunately, both companies had to close their operations on the outbreak of the 1st world war. [1]

Shell "D"Arey (now shell petroleum Development Company of Nigeria limited) embarked on oil exploration in Nigeria in 1937. The first discovery of crude oil took place in 1956 at Oloibiri now in Bayelsa State. The Success of shell B.P. spurred other foreign oil prospecting companies into the oil enterprise. These companies joined the then shell B.P. In Nigeria's offshore and on shore oil prospecting.[2]

Since the early 1960's, other companies came to Nigeria in search of oil. However before 1971, the major activities of the oil industry were dominated by the transnational corporations such as shell B.P, Mobil and chevron, while the Indigenous oil companies played the back roles. The Nigerian government started an active participation in the oil industry by a decree setting up the Nigerian National Oil Corporation (NNOC) as an integrated oil company. In 1977 by Decree 3, the NNOC and the then Federal Ministry of Petroleum were merged to form Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC). With the creation of NNPC, the country

was able to have a direct control of the oil industry from exploration production to refining of crude oil, distribution of natural gas and petroleum product to petro chemical products.

Nigeria is Africa's leading oil producer and ranked among the top 10 oil producing countries in the world. Current production is almost two million barrels of oil a day which is about 1% of the total production of Organization of Oil Producing and Exporting Countries (OPEC) output. While oil revenue accounts for 80% of the Gross Domestic product (GDP), it contributes 95% of the Gross National Product (GNP). Most of the oil production comes from the Nigeria Delta Coastal Belt, both offshore and Onshore, with the Nigerian government holding a major share of between 55 and 60 percent through the Nigerian National Petroleum corporation (NNPC), Shell and chevron being the leading oil companies. [3]

Oil is the life wire of the nation's economy, but the infrastructural facilities for the production of these vital resources which are located both off shore and onshore in the main area of production are faced with serious threat. Some of the oil communities are involved in various acts of sabotage and subversive measures against the oil installations. Their complaints arise from the non – responsiveness of the various oil companies and government to their legitimate yearnings and aspirations. The acts of sabotage are targeted at production facilities like oil platforms, rigs, terminals, crude pipelines covering hundred kilometers and their related equipment. Their grievances range from insufficient financial benefits from

oil revenue, absence of community development projects, environmental degradation, denial of political participation, deprivation of economic activities and pollution. As a result of the activities of crude oil production, valuable farm lands are made unproductive as a result of petroleum activities, hence they resort to some unwholesome sabotage activities such as:

a. Wanton destruction of oil production equipment to force the relevant authority to pay money

b. Kidnapping of expatriates and Nigerian oil workers for ransom

c. Indiscriminate and frequent destruction of crude pipes to cause pollution and attract compensation from oil companies.

d. Intra and inter communal fight for compensation monies paid by the Multinational Oil Companies. This is apart from what the oil communities get from the Niger Delta Development commission (NDDC) and Ministry of Niger Delta Affairs. They still harbour resentment against the federal government, as they feel that they deserve more than what is currently given to them.

Though, more attention should be placed on the internal threats to Nigeria's petroleum oil resources, it is also important to give urgent security attention to the petroleum industry from external threats, as the nation can be crippled by external enemies, by destroying her oil wells and refineries, due to its oil rich coastal belt during external aggression and war.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

a. What are the causes of the internal threats between host communities and oil Companies?

b. What are the security implications of the hostilities for oil producing Communities?

c. What efforts have the government and oil Companies made to manage the hostilities to a tolerable level?

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

a. To examine the causes of the internal threats between host communities and oil Companies

b. To critically examine the security implications of the hostilities for oil producing communities

c. To determine the resolution efforts made by the government and oil Companies to reduce the hostilities to a tolerable friction

METHODOLOGY

a. Sources of data: This work will benefit from the combination of sources for the collection of data. These are oil Companies library, Ambrose Alli University library and Auchi Polytechnic library.

b. Method of data gathering: The research will be based on the use of secondary materials such as books, journals, Magazines, newspapers,

articles, Internet etc

c. Method of data analysis: In the light of the above, the analysis of the discourse will be historical

THEORETICAL ANALYSIS

Communities' violence particularly in the Niger Delta has been informed by deprivation, poverty, social injustices amongst others. According to UNDP report "the Niger Delta is a region suffering from administrative neglect, crumbling social infrastructural services, mass unemployment, social deprivation, abject poverty, filth and squalor, and endemic conflict"[4] It should be maintained that the unfortunate neglect is a means to aggression. While aggression is a means to an end and that end is violence. The wide gap between the expected standard of living by the youths in the Niger region and the actual poverty, oppression, unemployment, environmental degradation etc. all over the place led to frustration and aggression which according to Berkowitz and Yates appear to be the most common explanation for violent behaviour stemming from inability to fulfill needs[5]. Anifowose, in attempt to explain aggression, points to difference between what people feel they want or deserve to what they actually get[6]. In addition, Feierabends argued that the difference between "expected need satisfaction" and "actual need satisfaction" breed violence[7]. Davies in his assertion stated that where expected does not meet attainment; the tendency is for people to confront those responsible for frustrating

their ambitions[8]. Thus frustrations necessitated the formation of different youth violent groups in the Niger region.

CAUSES OF THE INTERNAL THREATS BETWEEN HOST COMMUNITIES AND OIL COMPANIES

The internal threats cover both the upstream and downstream sector. The issues of internal threats are in the form of sabotage, subversion, smuggling, communal terrorism, theft, gross mismanagement of resources etc. When prospecting for oil, there are inevitable adverse impacts on the communities. Sometimes, when compensation is politicized, there are widespread unrest and agitation resulting in incalculable damage to the economy. A classical example was the Ogoni uprising in 1993, by the Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP), led by the Environmentalist Ken Saro-Wiwa and his other Ogoni compatriots, against the oil companies and the Nigerian state. To this end, the communities react, agitate, prevent further activities and resort to destruction. Oil exploration and exploitation on communities lead to pollution, disruption of their means of economic livelihood as valuable farmland, fisheries and economic crops are destroyed.[9]

The exploration activities of petroleum companies have unfortunately resulted in agitation, confrontation and adversarial relationship between the oil companies and the host oil communities. Over the years, the environmental issues in the country's petroleum industry have come to be increasingly appreciated by the oil communities in which petroleum activities are undertaken. This is to ensure that oil

companies conform with the communities environmental expectations and thereby safeguard their future.

In other to comprehend the effects, the exploratory activities of the petroleum industry have on the environment of the host oil communities, it is important to consider the major processes involved in oil activities. These include geological survey, drilling, piping and storage. At every phase the socio economic life and physical environment of the oil communities are affected.

Geological survey is the initial step, which the search for the underground trap in which oil and gas could be found. From the result of the seismic survey, possible areas of petroleum accumulation can be identified. Next is the drilling stage, production facilities and pipelines are installed and crude pumped to the flow stations where it is separated into liquid crude (oil water) and gas. The gas is flared off or re-injected. The liquid crude is separated and stored. The affluent water is released into the surrounding land and sea, which is quite dangerous. The consequences are harmful, hence the oil communities resort to agitations and demand for compensation. The oil exploration has effects on the host communities in their areas.[1]

(a) Effect of oil pollution of water on aquatic life

(b) Effect of oil pollution on soil and plants

(c) Effect of gas flaring on atmospheric gaseous content

(d) Effect of gas flaring on vegetation

(e) Effect of flaring on livestock and humans.

The importance of the petroleum industry can be fully comprehended when one realizes the dominant role it plays on our economy. Oil is one of the major components of the Nigerian national power and economic vitality. It is the bedrock of the nation's Industrial, economic, military and diplomatic strength. Oil is the leading sector that generates the highest revenue and is largely responsible for the successes recorded by all the developmental strides so far recorded in Nigeria. Oil as a component of Nigeria's strategic mineral resources has been a tremendous influence on our international politics; for instance, Nigerian membership of Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), ECOWAS, Africa Union etc, as Nigeria has used its oil power in realizing its diplomatic goals.

While appreciating the enormous contribution of oil to the Nigeria's economy, it must be asserted that the activities of the oil Companies in their host communities have been very unwholesome. It is this aspect of environmental degradation that provoked agitations and confrontation on the petroleum companies by the oil communities in Nigeria.[12]

The antagonistic relationship between the oil producing communities and their host communities are fallouts of complaints from devastation of land and environment without adequate returns from oil companies. From the economic perspective, disruptions in oil production can also endanger the security of the

Nigeria state. Similarly, Shell and its other counterparts in the Niger Delta have also had their own fair share of losses prompted by the crisis in the region.[13]

The consequences of socio-economic deprivation, seismic survey, drilling and production are so much on the host communities to cause agitation and demand for compensation. Oil pollution has effect on water and aquatic organisms. Oil kills surface organisms, contaminate water, which are toxic to aquatic organisms. Petroleum activities also affect the soil and plants. When soil is polluted by oil, there is increase water retention capacity, loss of soil structure, introduction of reduced conditions by exclusion of air from the soil. Plants are destroyed or their growth considerably retarded.[14] Carbon monoxide which is a very poisonous gas may have a high concentration in the atmosphere resulting in acid rain. Gas flares are known to have effect on the vegetation. The intense heat and light from the flora affects the biochemical process in plant. Livestock and human are exposed to light intensity and temperature. The adverse effect on livestock leads to reduced feed intake, poor growth and performance, and consequently economic returns form the stock. The high temperature and intense heat also cause physiological disorder to man. The perpetual exposure to deafening noise from flares may impair hearing. The negative effects of the environmental impact of petroleum operations on the oil producing communities through pollution and environmental degradation are indescribable.

THE SECURITY IMPLICATIONS OF THE HOSTILITIES FOR OIL PRODUCING COMMUNITIES

Petroleum is the leading source of external revenue of the government of the federation of Nigeria. The bulk of the petroleum resources are located in the Niger Delta, creeks, and swampy areas of the nation adjoining the Atlantic Ocean. Among the states of the federation.[15]

Where oil is exploited in large quantities are Delta, Ondo, Rivers, Bayelsa, Akwa-Ibom, Edo, Cross Rivers and Imo States. There is a huge concentration of oil producing corporations and their subsidiaries in these places. These include Shell Petroleum, Chevron, Mobil, NNPC etc.[16]

These industries attract large labour force to these areas. The impact of these petroleum companies and their effects on the host oil communities cannot be sidelined. The threats by the oil producing communities to the petroleum sector and national security need to be adequately evaluated and possibly suggest way to curb the ugly dimension.

The fact that the nation has not experienced another insurgency campaign since the Isaac Boro's case of 1966 is not to be taken that, the threat is not there to underscore the necessity for a precautionary plan to meet such level of threats. The activities of MOSOP led by the late ken Saro-Wiwa could be said to be the beginning of the modern Oil Communities struggle for resource control and sustainable management of the Niger Delta ecology. More groups started to emerge

in various parts of the oil producing communities, such as Niger Delta volunteer force (NDVP) led by the Ijaw leader Asari Dokubo, Ilaje concerned citizens (ICC), Ijaw youth council etc. Prior to the discovery of oil in these communities, they lived in relative peace and harmony among themselves and their adjoining neighbours. Now, the entire region is crisis ridden and violent, requiring the intervention of troops to enforce peace between them and their neighbours, as well as the petroleum producing companies. Oil exploration and production brought in ecological damage to the oil producing host communities, resulting in oil spillage, pipeline leakages, gas flaring water pollution, contamination of rivers and portable water, loss of aquatic life leading to cessation of fishing activities, loss of agricultural production due to land pollution, and dislocation of economic activities in these places leading to lower standard of living of the indigenes. The government has not done enough to alleviate the plights of the people. The threats posed by oil communities are as follows:

(a) Indiscriminate damage of crude bearing pipes to cause pollution on in order to attract compensation from oil companies

(b) Wanton destruction of oil production facilities so as to coerce the relevant authorities to pay money.

(c) Kidnapping of Nigerian and expatriates workers in demand for ransom.

(d) Inter-communal fight for oil companies compensation monies, normally paid to the communities.

The effects of sabotage on petroleum installation are diverse, but these includes.

(1) Deferred production

(2) Expenditure on post spill clean up

(3) Repairs/replacement of destroyed facilities, loss of revenue and lives

(4) Further strain on oil companies/communities relationship,

The Niger delta is replete with encounters of the sort described above. In October, 1990 for instance, the Umuechem community in Rivers State organized a non-violent protest against Shell's destructive activities in their environment. The company's response was to request the presence of the notorious and much-dreaded mobile force, better known as "kill and go", under the pretext that it was under imminent attack. Over five hundred houses were destroyed and more than a hundred lives were lost. Sometimes the federal government and the oil companies engage the services of Joint security outfits comprising the Navy, Army, Police and Air Force to keep security and quell uprising. Some of the oil companies also use private security outfits/organized criminal gangs, which are in turn resisted by the oil communities, which in turn leads to proliferation of arms, small and light weapons in that region.[14]

RESOLUTION EFFORTS MADE BY THE GOVERNMENT AND OIL COMPANIES

The Nigeria state has not been passive to the crisis in the oil communities. Indeed successive regimes have taken steps aimed at addressing the crisis. In an attempt to resolve the lingering problems in the Oil Communities, the federal government set up the Oil Mineral Area Development Commission (OMPADEC) in 1991 and the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) in 2000, which administer part of the oil revenue accruing to the Federal Government from Petroleum operations for use in the development of oil producing communities.

Apart from the above measures taken by the government to resolve the crises, state repression and violence have also been a prominent strategy utilized, most especially by military regimes in quelling uprising in the oil communities. Specific instances of state violent repression against oil communities include: Egbena crisis (1989 – 1991), Umuechem massacre (1990), Odi massacre (1999) Ugborodo case (2005).[18]

The peculiar developmental challenges of the oil communities were recognized well before political independence in Nigeria with the establishment of the Wilikins Commission in 1958, to look into the fears of the Minorities. Based on the recommendation of the commission, the Niger Delta Development Board (NDDB) was set up in 1961[19]. The Niger Delta Basin and Rural Development Authority in 1976 and in 2000, the Niger Delta Development Commission. The

Commission began operation in 2001 and is funded by the federal government and oil companies. The present administration of Yar Adua created the ministry of Niger Delta Affairs and also came up with Amnesty programme for the militants in the oil communities, which have not yielded much success. The agitations are still there due to the continuous neglect and deprivation of the oil communities. Not only has the inability of successive Nigerian government to mediate in the matter. But the crisis in the oil communities has also created a huge legitimacy problem for it. This is evident by sporadic eruptions of ethnic based conflicts across the federation [20]

It was only after the 1988 Koko toxic waste saga that the government decided to create the Federal Environmental Protection Agency (FEPA) to apply legal sanctions on oil companies (as well as other companies and industries) for environmental offences. The oil communities are unhappy that they are being exploited and abandoned. When there are oil spillages, there are no compensation, so the people become enraged.[21] In spite of the plundering of their land, oil communities lack basic social amenities like portable water, electricity; rather they get government harassment, intimidation and insensitivity for their demands. From the above, certain developmental efforts by the government, NDDC and oil companies etc are in place, though not sufficient. The various oil companies, e.g. Shell and Chevron, are involved in community development, vocational training center, establishment of schools, appointment of agricultural extension offices for

the communities, provision of rural water supply, good road network, laboratories, scholarship schemes, loans for business enterprises, transport support schemes etc.

Only on 16th day of March 2010, the post amnesty conference organized by the federal government in conjunction with the south-south states government (of the Niger Delta region) to re-enforce the amnesty programme was disrupted due to bomb blast that rocked the venue, leaving loss of lives and wanton destruction of property. There is no gain saying the fact that several mechanisms have been adopted by government, aimed at addressing oil communities problems in the country. This part focuses on responses/strategies which government has put in place to address the problem.

What is notable about militants in oil communities is that, they have no formal military training and their members carry and use arms illegally. This has been the main cause of the frequent frictions between them and the government. Their activities are not the product of common agreement or general ethnic consensus among the people of the oil communities whose interests they claim to represent or defend. Rather, they were organized and foisted upon the people who had no choice but to acquiesce. Consequently, their existence and activities could not be legalized by the government. They have also been known to oppress members of the same oil communities whose interest they claim to be defending. The OPC and Egbesu Boys, for example, have been known to use extra-legal means in their activities such as

operating illegal detention centers, committing extra-judicial killings etc, all in the name of instant justice.

To this end, government has responded in various ways to quell oil communities uprising. A good example is outright military invasion. For example, early in the life of President Olusegun Obasanjo's administration in 1999, the President gave approval for military action to be taken in Umuechem and Odi, a small community in Bayelsa State where twelve policemen were allegedly killed by the Egbesu Boys of Africa, representing the militant wing of the Ijaw Youth Movement. This movement has been resisting the exploitation of Petroleum resources from the oil communities by the Nigerian State and oil multinationals. When the army moved in, they leveled the entire communities. As government deployed troops to arrest the situation, former Defense Minister, Lieutenant General Theophilus Danjuma (rtd), outlined the mode of deployment of troops and the troops' mandate, "this operation, Hakiri II was initiated with the mandate of protecting lives and property particularly oil platforms, flow stations, operating rig terminals, pipelines, refineries and power installations in the oil communities.

At a security meeting in Aso rock villa, Abuja, after that incident, a thoroughly rattled Obasanjo was reported to have declared that "those who killed my soldiers must be fished out" The President challenged security chiefs to go on the trails of the murderers who murdered and disemboweled soldiers who had come to keep the peace between the warring factions of oil communities. After the expiration

of the deadline given to the culprits to own up and return service riffles seized, the army again moved in and left in its wake, an untold number of dead and collateral ruination of the people.[22]

Another measure taken by the government is the deployment of truck loads of security personnel to patrol affected oil communities constantly in order to calm frayed nerves and warn potential trouble makers. The instructions to the troops were to dislodge perpetrators of violence, restore law and order and apprehend suspected murderers. [23]

It is very obvious that the militaristic response from government in this regard has not totally resolved the problems of agitations from oil communities in the country. Stationing, an army of occupation in troubled communities to keep at bay restive youths, individuals and associations, through the force of arms only make such disputes to become more violent, with the youths acquiring more sophisticated weapons and youth gangs becoming more powerful and more willing and able to protect their villages. The above would only lead to cycles of revenge and violence.

Apart from Federal government responses to activities of oil communities, State governments do also put in place control measures. Delta state for example, as tension mounted in the area because of the activities of people in oil communities, the state government imposed a dusk to down curfew in Warri and environs. The state authorities directed security agencies to shoot at sight hoodlums who violated the curfew order. [24]

The increasing incidence of crime since the end of military regime in Nigeria, coupled with the ineffectiveness of the governmental policies to combat crimes, has favoured the proliferation of heavily armed vigilante groups of various conditions and interests in nearly every nook and crannies of Nigeria especially in the oil communities. There is no pattern for or the methods they employ, and most importantly, there is neither a clear code of conduct binding them, nor an official register of such groups. Armed vigilant groups in oil communities of Nigeria are reported to carry out extra-judicial executions and killings of suspected criminals and perpetrate acts of torture, cruel inhuman, degrading treatment, unlawful detention and disappearances. Allegations of extortion, harassment, arson, destruction of public properties or armed robbery are often made against them by the oil communities, the government and the general populace.[25]

The federal government has acted towards armed vigilante groups operating in the oil communities compelling those state governments, who officially or tacitly endorsed them, to discontinue their supports and to effectively direct the police to take on these groups and put an end to the human rights abuses and violations they commit on a daily basis. In August and September, 2002, the police carried out a series of raids against the armed vigilante groups in the oil communities mainly in Rivers, and Balyelsa States, known as Egbesu boys, arresting at least a hundred of them and releasing scores of illegally held detainees.[26]

It was not surprising therefore that erstwhile, President Olusegun Obasanjo, during his administration had to read the riot act to all armed groups in oil communities when he pronounced a blanket ban on their activities and sought to dissolve all oil communities militia groups by sending a bill to the National Assembly. The bill entitled "Prohibition or certain Associations Act" clarifies the position of the federal government towards armed groups and lead to firm action from the federal authorities. The bill stated that: "No group of person, association of individuals or quasi-military group shall retain, organize, train or equip any person or group of persons for the purpose of enabling the group of persons or association of individuals to use or display physical force or coercion in order to promote any political objective or interest; ethnic or cultural interest, social, occupational or religious interest"[27]

The bill made provisions for the dissolution and proscription by the President of "any group of persons, association of individuals or groups which in his opinion, is formed for the purposes of furthering the political, religious, ethnic, tribal, cultural or social interest of a group of persons or individuals contrary to the peace, order and good governance of the federation and the provisions of the Act"[28]

In 2005, as a result of oil communities' activities across the Niger Delta and the threat they pose to national unity, the federal government appeared to curb their excesses and activities with the trial of their leaders.

Asari Dokubo, the leader of the Niger Delta Volunteer movement (NDVM), was on trial in Abuja in October 2005, facing a five count charge of treasonable felony.[29]

All these were indications that the administration of former president Olusegun Obasanjo was becoming increasingly intolerant of the oil communities groups in the country. The trial of leaders of the oil communities groups, such as Henry Okah of Movement for the Emancipation of Niger Delta (MEND) was seen as part of a grand resolve by the then federal government to tackle the menace of oil community nationalism head-on.[30] The action of the government was a welcome development to the armed forces that have been concerned about a development they thought poses a challenge to the security forces of government. A military source said that it was because the authorities in countries like Somalia and Rwanda did not act fast that such groups there grew in strength and might and became a threat to the unity of the nation state. The same source says "the federal government does not know the volume of weapons in circulation. Within its first seven months, the special Task Force on Recovery of Firearms in 2004 recovered 1,972 arms and 111,582 ammunitions" [31]. The military source said that there were fears that if not checked, the oil communities groups could bring down the government of the country. Perhaps, that was why a former Minister of Information in Obasanjo's administration said:

It was in attempt to prevent a situation of anarchy that government has risen up to the challenge of holding leaders of oil communities militia groups accountable for activities considered inimical to the unity of the country.... It would have been irresponsible for the government to ignore what has become a rising and continuous threat to the sovereignty of our country and to the security of lives and property of citizens... the role of government is to ensure that these oil communities don't pull down the country.[32]

Since 1999, the federal government has initiated or supported several major policy options in the Niger-Delta, South-South geopolitical zone aimed at stemming oil communities agitations. Notable ones include the followings:

(i) Implementation of 13 percent derivation (excluding offshore) in 2002. The revenue allocation based on derivation got reduced from 50 percent in 1968 to 1 percent in 1988/89 and up to 1999.

(ii) The Alexander Ogomudia Special Security Committee in 2001 which recommended amongst others, the training of Niger Delta indigenes for employment in oil companies, provision of infrastructure and industrialization in the region.

(iii) The Governor James Ibori Presidential Standing Committee on Niger Delta in 2004.

(iv) The Niger Delta Youth Standing Committee in 2004.

(v) The Major General Mohammed Gusau Presidential Committee on Peace and Reconciliation in the Niger Delta 2003/2004.

(vi) The Niger Delta Peace and Security Strategy –PASS.

(vii) The recent special recruitment of Niger –Delta Indigenes into the military in 2006.

(viii) The setting up of Mathew Kukah committee on environmental clean-up of the Ogoni land.

(ix) The establishment of the Niger Delta Development Commission by former President Olusegun Obasanjo on June 5, 2000 with the sole mandate of developing the oil-rich Niger Delta region of Southern Nigeria. To achieve its mandate, the NDDC board identified the following areas of focus: development of social and physical infrastructure, technology, economic revival and prosperity ecological/environmental remediation and stability human development.

(x) The employment of 945 persons by NDDC, the building and construction of over 50 bridges by the same organization linking different communities in the Niger-Delta during the past five years at a cost of about N176 billion and its presence in all the 155 local government areas in the south-south geo-political region.[33]

It is remarkable to note that as laudable as these government efforts are, there are major challenges in meeting the target population's aspirations by government. The NDDC for instance, is under funded. Stakeholders, namely government agencies and oil companies, do not pay their counterpart funds for NDDC as and when due. The Commission is therefore significantly hampered in the execution of its mandate. Besides, the above is the issue of corruption in government circles. Monthly Allocations are siphoned into private pockets while public office holders throw accountability to the wind and preside over public funds with reckless abandon.

Equally of note is the illusion or belief that the more the conflict resolution mechanisms (committees) set up, the higher the likelihood of achieving peace in the region. Much as government tries to make her impact felt, she needs to be tactical so

as to avoid duplication of functions. There is yet the issue of the "gladiators" who parade themselves as leaders of oil communities. Some of these self-styles leaders fall back to oil communities' platforms to seek relevance in the scheme of things. Sampson Mamamu, while condemning the inauguration of a 50-man Council by former President Obasanjo decried that the "President is not meeting with the true leaders of the region, rather, he is meeting with party stalwarts pretending to be leaders of the Zone"[34] The pertinent question that is now begging for urgent answer is whether government responses to the wake of oil communities across the country are yielding the desired results. As earlier noted, government has responded variously or adopted a militaristic approach by stationing an "army of occupation" in affected oil communities. Government has responded to violence in the affected areas with counter-violence, hence the crisis involving youth gangs is taking a frightening dimension. What it therefore means is that government response to oil communities agitations by deploying troops is counter-productive.

Talking about constructive dialogue, the federal government explored this option as regards the Warri crisis that erupted in 2002 among the Itsekiri, Urhobo and Ijaw ethnic groups over the creation of new local government areas and citing of their headquarters. The crisis which was championed by dangerous band of gangsters exploited their artillery sophistry to "kill, rape, kidnap, destroy and extort money from anybody available." On April 7, 2003, the Federal Government appointed members of a presidential committee to look and find lasting solution to the Warri Crisis. The committee made far reaching recommendations that would see all parties to the conflict making substantial concessions for peace to reign.

Operation Restore hope and Warri Peace Forum among the three ethnic groups in Warri was a sure way of government determination to restore peace in Warri.[35]

Operation Restore Hope was a peace monitoring and enforcement outfit, saddled with the responsibility of bringing peace and security back to Warri so that economic activities can once again bounce back to Warri. It was also the function of this task force to disarm these oil communities, instill confidence in the people with a bid to prepare them to take up economic activities in Warri. On the other hand, the Warri Peace Forum was an attempt by government to bring the three warring factions, Ijaws, Itsekiris and Urhobos together and to chart a common course for peace and to undertake joint developmental programmes for Warri. It is also the function of the Warri Peace Forum to prevail on government to accelerate developmental programmes in Warri with the result that mutual trust and not mutual suspicion will be established[36]

As noted earlier the Yar Adua government came up with the Niger Delta Affairs Ministry and Amnesty Progrmame, so as to curb the restiveness in the oil communities. Only time will tell, if the programme will succeed or not, there are already signs of frustrations, mistrust, allegations of corruption, insincerity among the stakeholders resulting the aborting of the last post Amnesty peace forum in Warri in March 2010 due to bomb blast rocking the venue. With the Movement for the Emancipation of Niger Delta (MEND) claiming responsibility for the bomb blast.

CONCLUSION

The paper set out with the aim of examining the causes of the agitations against the oil companies by the host oil communities. The crux of the matter is the conflict between the federal government, oil companies and oil producing communities. It was seen that militaristic approach to resolve these conflicts, further aggravates tension in these places. That the host oil communities suffer from direct adverse effects of oil pollution due to oil exploration, exploitation and production. It was observed that there was no standard regulation to check the menace of environmental degradation by oil companies. Till date, there are still cases of oil spillage, gas flaring and lack of ecological preservation by the oil companies which have adverse and potentially dangerous effects on the oil producing communities, inhabitants and property. The on-going crisis in the Niger delta has grave security implications for the country and the people of the region.

The paper also dealt with the various threats posed by oil communities to Nigeria's petroleum resources and concluded with the examination of government responses to the various internal threats by the host oil communities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. In short the federal government should avoid mere "window dressing" measures towards the genuine agitations and legitimate demands of the oil communities
2. The federal government and other levels of governments need to de-emphasize confrontation and military approach in handling disputes with oil communities.
3. There should be respect for rule of law and prompt, independent and impartial, investigations of killings, torture and use of force by security agents.
4. Given therefore the strategic importance of oil and its place in the Nigerian economy and that of the oil communities, government policy relating to petroleum resources should be inclusive taking into consideration the peculiar problems and needs of the oil communities.
5. The various levels of government and the federal government need to embark on programmes and projects that have direct bearing on the oil communities through capacity building, implementation of community oriented developmental projects and use of dialogue.
6. The multinational oil companies operating in the oil communities need to address seriously their corporate social responsibilities to host oil communities. Agreements between oil companies and oil communities should

be respected and oil companies should carry out their business practices in accordance with international business norms and regulations.

7. In order to prevent and control environmental pollution in the Nigeria's petroleum industry, government should initiate policies to clean up oil spills, restore and rehabilitate polluted environment

8. There is the need for the revision of laws relating to oil and gas exploration in the oil communities, including the Land Use Act, the Petroleum Act, the Petroleum Production and Distribution Anti-sabotage Act etc. Such revision should be aimed at reducing to the barest minimum, practices that are harmful to the fragile ecology of the oil communities and to facilitate easy access to justice and compensation.

9. The NDDC, Federal Ministry of Niger Delta Affairs, and the Federal Government post Amnesty programme, as presently constituted, should be reviewed. These agencies and programmes need to be further strengthened, by committing more resources, effective project monitoring, implementation and accountability to ensure their direct and useful impacts on the lives of the oil communities, which they were designed to serve.

10. The new Ministry of Environment, which was created in place of FEPA should be granted more autonomy and empowered to enable it apply legal sanctions against non compliant oil producing companies in the oil communities.

11. Government petroleum policies should be more inclusive by allowing the oil communities to establish their oil companies, in addition to allowing host communities to acquire equity interest in the oil companies operating in their territories. The government should ensure stoppage of gas flaring and the monitoring of the petroleum industry by the Directorate of petroleum resources.

12. The government must ensure that oil companies are more socially responsible to the host communities.

13. The federal government should ensure that the judicial processes of the Nigerian legal system are protective of the interest of the poor and dispossessed citizens of the oil communities who are financially handicapped, to engage the highly affluent oil companies, in a long drawn out legal battle.

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