

INTRODUCTION

Nigeria, the most populous country in Africa, is undisputedly one of the most richly endowed countries on the continent. It boasts of immense resources – human and material-which provide opportunities for national development. The country's potentials for rapid industrialization and development have long been recognized even before independence in 1960. The resources at the country's disposal as well as the political structure bequeathed by the British were then regarded as factors that would make for economic prosperity and political stability. The availability of these mineral resources in commercial quantities and their potential for high foreign revenue yield as well as the political structure (with the pre-eminence of regionalism) and its constitutional guarantees reinforced such optimisms. In many respects, regionalism created a hub of economic activities centered on the export of the main commodities in which the regions had comparative advantage. Indeed, the regional structure allowed each region to maximize its developmental potentials through commodity export. The items which dominated the export trade were mainly agricultural.

The above was the scenario prior to the discovery of crude oil. This was a period during which agricultural produce and other mineral resources accounted for national wealth in Nigeria. Each region was associated with a particular agricultural commodity: cocoa was prevalent in the South-west, palm oil and coal were the main produce in the South-east whilst the North produced groundnuts and tin. During this period i.e. pre and immediate post independent Nigeria, appropriation of national wealth was done by the respective regions (later states) contributing a certain percentage of their income to the national coffers. When crude oil was discovered, precisely in 1956 at Oloibiri, the parameters for the sharing of national revenue were not only shifted, the economic fortune of the whole country experienced a watershed. As will be demonstrated, crude oil was subsequently put on the exclusive legislative list in favor of the Federal (central) Government with concomitant effects on the ecology and the people of the Niger Delta.

Occurring as it were under a military regime (General Yakubu Gowon, 1967-1975), there was little that the people could do in terms of protest. Also, unlike the pre-crude oil years

when the major ethnic nationalities were synonymous with the aforementioned sources of national wealth (Yoruba in Southwest, Igbo in Southeast and Hausa/Fulani in the North), this time the wealth came from minority communities, which had little or no voice in national issues.

Whereas involvement in agriculture and mining activities of the earlier period had little or no adverse impact on the environment, crude oil exploration and production had immediate negative effects on both the environment and the people living near the Oloibiri and subsequent oilfields. Initial complaints by the local communities and their leaders fell on deaf ears, which this led gradually to affirmative action through recourse to militancy. Inevitably, the response of government and the multinational oil corporations further angered the people and set the stage for a bitter struggle. This situation was exacerbated by a sense among Niger Deltans of growing political frustration and marginalization not only nationally but also within their respective regions. Forced to cooperate around lines of ethnic and cultural affinities, they formed political parties such as the Mid-West State Movement and the Niger Delta congress to facilitate their challenge to the anticipated tyranny and hegemonic ambitions of majority ethnic groups.

However, given the nature of the Nigerian tripodial federal architecture, which fostered regionalism, the Niger Delta people found themselves in a political quagmire. Although their interests were largely submerged and weakened within regional structures by political arrangements that minimized their effective representation, they were not at liberty to walk out without seriously rendering themselves completely irrelevant. As such, coaxed, co-opted, scared, and obliged to work with, and integrate into, regional political structures of the dominant parties, the Niger Delta people – like other minority groups – attempted to adjust. While this was not necessarily bad in principle, it was an historical marker for the Nigerian state: arguably, it was one of the most ill-fated developments in Nigeria's political history. This was because the country lost a crucial opportunity to develop a more accommodative political culture that is not only sensitive but also positively responsive to the social and political yearnings of some of its weakest

cultural groups. Instead, the ersatz compromise, which had the net effect of building fragile majority political hegemonies and pecking order while smothering legitimate minority interests and a pluralistic political culture, worked to encourage parochialism and ethnocentrism and to undermine the growth of genuine cooperative politics at both the national and regional levels.

The Niger Delta became a hotbed of violent socio-political and economic protests occasioned not only by political marginalization and economic deprivation but also by the degradation of the environment owing to oil exploration and exploitation and the state's inability to respond appropriately to the challenges posed by the accompanying effects. Hence, Nigeria, a major oil producing state in Africa, with its oil constituting two percent of world oil reserve and accounting for over eighty percent of its Federal Government revenue¹ and ninety percent of foreign exchange² is today seeking ways to address the protracted violence in the Niger Delta.

Historically, the Niger Delta crisis came to a head in the early 1990s with the emergence of social movements and militant youth groups that came up to challenge the corporate policies and attitudes of the oil multinationals and the state in the region. This was a consequence of accumulated frustrations brought about by long periods of political and economic negligence and the destruction of the region's ecology, the foundation of the people's economic wellbeing. The grievances of the region were predicated on some fundamental issues of denial of access to oil revenue, struggle for greater access to resource sharing (popularly known in Nigeria as resource control), environmental degradation, and human rights violations.

Many authors have written on the political and economic structures of the state at independence³ and emphasis had been on the issues related to the post-independence

¹ See World Bank, Report No. P1011440(2002) p.1

² See T. A. Imobighe *et al*, *NIPSS Studies on Nigeria's International Borders: The Coastal Border*, Vol. Five (Kuru: NIPSS Press, 1998) p. 2

³ There are numerous works on Nigeria's early history and various challenges that the state encountered at post independence. These challenges ranged from Western Region election crisis, the crisis that followed the national census, the fear of the minorities, the Nigerian civil war (1967-1970), the Niger Delta

development of the state. One of these issues was the minorities' question and to highlight how serious the issue was, the government set up the Willink Commission in 1956 to look into the issue of minorities in the country, with special brief for their agitation, even in terms of party formation processes at independence and access to power. State structure and power relations were skewed in favor of the dominant ethnic groups of Hausa/Fulani in the North, Yoruba of the West and the Igbo (Ibo) of the East. This background of ethnic bias informed the formation of political parties on regional basis to wit the Action Group (AG) in the West, Northern Peoples Congress (NPC) in the North and the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroon (NCNC) in the East. The regionalization of political parties in the immediate post independence era was the major cause of the great crisis that erupted in the early 1960s.⁴ As a result emerging groups sacrificed the national agenda on the altar of ethnic interest and dominion. The amalgamation of these ethnic groups into one political entity without due consideration to the socio-economic, political interests and aspirations of the other numerous distinct ethnic groups was partly responsible for the severe negligence and cold shoulder about the plight of the local people of the Niger Delta. The response of the people of the region over the years has been overwhelmingly alarming. They have been demanding that their rights and aspirations be factored into the Nigerian project.

Historically, the assumption at independence that every ethnic group in the arrangement would have access to national wealth and political power unhindered was a mirage from the outset. The colonial enterprise had made equitable access to the resources of the country by all ethnic groups almost impossible in view of the disadvantaged position of the minorities. In significant respects, colonial Nigeria was very powerful and very arbitrary in nature. The managers and the elite the Nigerian system threw up are not

revolution by Adaka Boro and the protracted military incursion into politics. Some of these works are: J.S. Coleman, *Nigeria: Background to Nationalism*. University of California Press, 1958; E.O. Awa, "Federal elections in Nigeria, 1959" *Indian Journal of Political Science*, XXI (April-June, 1960), pp. 101-113; Sklar and Whitaker, "Nigeria" in Coleman and Rosberg, Jr, *Political Parties and National Integration in Tropical Africa*, University of California Press, 1964, pp. 597-691; Sklar, *Nigerian Political Parties: Power in an Emergent African Nation*, Princeton, 1963; and many other modern scholars like Ade Ajayi, Obaro Ikime, Akinjogbin and host of others.

⁴ Sklar and Whitaker, *African Politics and Problems in Development*, Lynne Rienner Publishers, USA, 1991, pp. 160-161.

dissimilar in character. Their opinion on economic issues, politics and society were totalitarian and highly statist. As a consequence, the Nigerian state could not mobilize itself for development largely because the character of the state and those of the leaders were at variance with developmental aspirations. The state should have been a liberating force and a shining light; rather it became an instrument in the hands of politicians for the purpose of furthering private and sectarian agendas. There was no clear cut effort at putting the Nigerian state in proper shape for development. If at all this was done, it lacked focus and its intentions were amorphous.

The Niger Delta, located in the South-South and South-Eastern parts of Nigeria, is richly endowed with natural resources particularly crude oil. It has equally witnessed a long and tortuous history of resistance against state machinery as well as the oil multinationals that operate in the region since the discovery of oil in 1956. The consequence of oil company operations includes ecological degradation, negligence and political ostracisation. The Niger Delta had been a strategic trading outpost connected to global mercantilist capitalism before and after the 17th century, when the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade gathered momentum. At the end of that inglorious era the region provided the much-needed palm oil that lubricated the machinery of the emergent industries of Europe and North America. This partly explains why the region was named the Oil Rivers. However, the collapse of cash crop prices in the mid-1960s compelled the state to search for a new lifeline: fossil fuel.

Revenue from the region became the backbone of the newly emergent nation's economy. In a short while, due largely to subjective state policies that put an end to the derivation formula (by which system revenue from regions accounted for their share of federal revenue allocation practiced when the larger units -- Yoruba-Cocoa, Hausa-Fulani, and Groundnuts -- accounted more to state funding), local resistance to this unwholesome arrangement went up by several notches. This was a clear sign that the dominant ruling majority tribes were driven by ethnicity rather than nationality and it created untreated wounds that intensified grievances at all levels in the ethnic minority structures. The grievances of the oil-bearing communities was centered on four key points namely,

environmental degradation, human rights violations, political marginalization and lack of access to oil wealth generated by the region. Therefore, the oil producing communities have struck out for self-determination, insisting on a “new” Nigeria constructed on the basis of true federalism, equity, justice and negotiated cooperation between its constituents namely the ethnic nationalities.

The 1990s witnessed a sudden resurgence of violent confrontation and protests against the state and oil multinationals, which attracted global attention. This coincided with the end of the Cold War and the de-emphasis of ‘high politics’ for ‘low politics’. In essence military issues gave way for economic or ‘soft’ issues. Therefore issues such as the environment, gender equity and equality, human rights, democracy and good governance, even international drug network and HIV/AIDS not only came into limelight but also asserted themselves in the international agenda. As far as the people of the Niger Delta were concerned, the Nigerian government had reneged on its commitment to the region. The minorities argue that the Nigerian Government had during the civil war tantalized the people of the oil producing states about its resolve to allow for local participation. Not only this, it had equally promised that substantial percentage shall be reserved for the oil producing areas among other promises. Unfortunately these promises turned out to be figment of the imagination and soon afterward, they became forlorn ideas.²

The internationalization of the Niger Delta crisis derives partly from the systematic publicity and struggle of the environmentalist, Ken Saro-Wiwa. He drew the attention of the world community to the plight of the Niger Delta and which allowed for the entrance into the debate of so large a movement of NGOs and INGOs. Some of these bodies are, Amnesty International, Green Peace Movement, the Geneva-based Un-represented Nations and Peoples Organization (UNPO), the London-based Rainforest Action Group and eventually the United Nations and Commonwealth of Nations. The list also includes Bodyshop, Friends of the Earth, Committee for Writers in Prison of International PEN, sections of the Western Media, and a host of others. With the acceptance of the Niger

²C. Obi, “Rope of oil: Ethnic Minority Agitation and the Spectre of National Disintegration in Nigeria”. Paper presented at the conference on Nigeria in the Twentieth century, University of Texas, at Austin, March 19-31, 2002.

Delta plight by international human and environmental rights groups, the Nigerian state and multinational oil companies could no longer contain the crisis as a local issue. That the government would react to the various agitations by both domestic and international NGOs and INGOs was not in doubt owing to the colonial character of the state. The extent of this reaction and the machinery to be deployed as a result were amazing.

Main Questions

The research will seek to provide answers to the questions below:

1. What are the circumstances that precipitated conflicts in the Niger Delta and what is the character of such conflicts?
2. How has the trend of globalization helped to internationalize the Niger Delta crisis?
3. What are the impacts of both local and international civil society activities in dealing with the grievances of the people of the Niger Delta?
4. In what significant way(s) did the internationalization of the crisis engender policy and attitudinal changes on the part of both the Nigerian state and the oil multinationals?

Added to the above is that the research will explore all means using constructive and unbiased arguments in arriving at an objective conclusion, one that would be relevant to both levels of policy and contribution to knowledge.

Main Arguments

The irony of oil and gas production in Nigeria lies in the fact that whereas it has brought benefits to both the Nigerian state and the multinational oil companies (MNOCs), it has brought a lot of woes and suffering to the oil-bearing communities in the region. This situation has induced stresses which more often than not lead to frustration, which in turn lead to serious agitation. As the research would make us see later, agitation by the people of the Niger Delta has taken various dimensions. More often than not, they have been violent and destructive.

The thesis argues that the interests of the state and the foreign oil multinationals were at variance with the aspirations of the local people of oil-bearing communities of the Niger

Delta. The clash of interests informed the emergence of social movements such as the Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP) and the Ijaw Youth Council (IYC), both of which strongly challenged the state and foreign oil companies especially Shell Petroleum Development Company (Shell).

The thesis contends that the globalization of the international system paved the way for the intervention of the international civil society in a local issue of this nature i.e. the conflicts between the state/oil multinationals on the one hand, and the oil-bearing communities on the other.

Finally it argues that the eventual internationalization of the domestic crisis greatly exerted pressure on the state and the multinational oil companies forcing them to re-assess their operations in the region. Similarly, the factor accounted for the state's change of attitude towards the local people. However, it must be stated that despite all these changes, the demands of the people of the region are far from being satisfied.

CONTRIBUTION TO KNOWLEDGE

The literature is replete with a substantial volume on the subject of Niger Delta. Most deal with the environmental effect of MNOCs' policies and those of the government.⁵ Some examine the Niger Delta in regard to national security⁶, while others explore the subject of human rights⁷ as it relates to the Niger Delta.

⁵ Scholars in this category are Obi, C., (2002), *The Politics of the Nigerian Oil industry: Implications for environmental governance* in A. Osuntokun (ed.), *Democracy and sustainable Development in Nigeria*, Friedrich Ebert Foundation, Lagos. Obi, C, (2000a), "Globalized images of environmental security in Africa, review of African Political Economy, No.83, pp. 47-62. Obi, C (1999), *Globalization and Environmental conflict in Africa*, African Journal of POLITICAL SCIENCE, Vol. 4 (1), Pp. 40-62. Aworawo, D (2000), *Ethnic crisis and political instability in Equatorial Guinea*, The Journal of Cultural Studies, No.2(1), Pp.119-132

⁶ Under this group we have scholars like Obi, C. (2005) "Environmental Movements in Sub-Saharan Africa. A political Ecology of Power and Conflict. Civil Society and Social Movements Programme Paper Number 15, United Nations research institute for Social Development. Oyerinde, O., (1998), *Oil Disempowerment and Resistance in the Niger Delta* in Olorode, O, et al (eds) *Ken Saro-Wiwa and the crises of the Nigerian State*, Lagos: CDHR, 1998.

⁷ Most of the local activists fall under this group like, Ashton-Jones, N, *The ERA handbook of the Niger Delta: The human ecosystem of the Niger Delta*, Environmental Rights Actions.1998.

This research seeks to fill the lacuna created by many of the other researches on the Niger Delta, especially as it has to do with the factors responsible for the internationalization of the various conflicts in the Niger Delta. Second, it would come across as a tool for examining the shape of Niger Delta agitation in a democratic Nigeria.

Much of the literature reviewed has revealed that various schools of thought regarding the subject matter of this research have done a great deal of academic work on the Niger Delta. However, one striking feature of the reviewed publications show that little attention had been paid to the involvement of the international civil society in and/or the internationalization of the Niger Delta crisis. This glaring lapse goes a long way to lending credence to the fact that the involvement of the international civil society in local conflicts is a new phenomenon in international politics.

Therefore, this study fills the gap left unattended to by available literature on the Niger Delta crisis. It also establishes the fact that the region's crisis cannot be divorced from the impact of oil exploration, environmental management, and oil pollution and other known environmental hazards engendered by the multinational oil companies' operations on the environment and the people of the region. The study equally states that the alliance between global forces and social movements was made possible due to the availability of modern means of communication.

Methodology

The approach of this research is mainly historical and empirical in nature, while qualitative approach was adopted in sourcing the data for the study. This approach inquires into experiences, opinions, views and interpretations of social phenomena through guided and focused research instruments. It is advantageous that the approach lacks rigidity. Thus, this study was conducted on two complementary sources of data, namely primary and secondary sources.

Primary Data Sources

Two basic methods will be employed for our primary data collection. These are the questionnaire and in-depth interview methods.

1. The Questionnaire Method. This involved the administration of a combination of structured and unstructured questionnaires. This was done through a guided, purposed sampling technique. This method will be appropriate for the fact that a good percentage of the target population can be reached and various shades of opinions could be heard as well. In addition, it reduces the difficulty involved in terms of reaching out to both genders.

However, questionnaires were administered among social groups and organizations including community leaders, youth activists, community-based organizations (CBOs) and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in some selected communities in Delta, Rivers and Bayelsa states. The choice of respondents was determined, among other things, by social status; involvement of the individuals, group or organizations in the Niger Delta crisis; professional background or job description; as well as the nature of the CBO or NGO involved. Other variables considered include age, gender, socio-economic background and status, and community.

2. In-depth Interviews. This entails detailed interviews with key informants, namely individuals who are experts in the field of study and other individuals who, by virtue of the nature of their work, have gathered wealth of experience that will be relevant in the research. Thus, this method, based on several advantages, recommends itself to our study. Among these include the fact that it draws detailed information from informants and gives the researcher the opportunity to learn the facts first-hand. It is both flexible and interactive in the sense that it affords the researcher the opportunity to frame and reframe questions on the spot. Also, it enhances each respondent's participation.

Our sources in this regard were derived essentially from academics, human and environmental rights activists, government and private oil companies' officials,

environmental journalists, environmental lawyers and community leaders. Data was sourced from the following organizations: oil companies (Shell, Mobil-Exxon, Chevron, Texaco, Agip and Total-Fina-Elf); Environmental Rights Action (ERA); Constitutional Rights Project (CRP); Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP); Ijaw Youth Council (IYC); Niger Delta Human and Environmental Rescue Organization (ND-HERO); and the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC). It is important to note at this juncture that respondents, ostensibly owing to fear of repercussions that could arise from expressing strong sentiments regarding the problems of the Niger Delta, demanded anonymity in order to guarantee their personal safety. This author has therefore complied with the wishes of the respondents by concealing their identity. The names of respondents have therefore been substituted with initials where needed. Most of the interview sessions were conducted in local languages (of the Niger Delta) whilst a number were conducted in the English language and recorded on audiocassettes. These were later transcribed and edited by the author. The content analysis of the interviews was presented as ethnographic summaries in the description and discussion of different aspects of the subject-matter under scrutiny.

Secondary Sources

This method also provided useful information involving an extensive use of library sources. Data sourced from books, academic journals, relevant periodicals, magazines and newspapers were related to the subject matter. Others will include original documents, official government publications, gazettes, archival materials, company reports/newsletters, press releases, seminar papers, unpublished theses and the electronic media (relying extensively on the Internet).

All data so collected through our adopted methodology were subjected to thorough comparism and scrupulous analysis for the purpose of a qualitative based research. All data were crosschecked as well.

Expectedly, this study will provide useful insights into the origins and dynamics of the age-long Niger Delta crisis. It is also expected that this study will not merely address

certain anticipated questions, but also raise a host of thought-provoking questions, which will advance further research in the Niger Delta.

Chapter Summary

The thesis is subdivided into three parts. The first part focuses on the background to the study. Chapter One examines the history of the people of the Niger Delta in the colonial era until the period of the discovery of crude oil in the region in the late 1950s. Though the primary focus of the thesis is to illuminate the international dimensions of the crisis, it is pertinent to understand the relationship between and among the people of the region before oil entered the socio-political and economic equations of the region. This chapter will, therefore, also examine how the advent of oil has repositioned the region within the framework of the Nigerian state.

Chapter Two attempts an analysis of Nigerian federalism in relation to the minority question (the struggle for and the preponderance of power sharing which has been more with the 'majority' Yoruba, Hausa-Fulani and Igbo power brokers!), and with special focus on the people of the oil-bearing communities of the Niger Delta. The chapter explores the national question in Nigeria in relation to the position of the minorities vis-à-vis the notions of revenue allocation, oil wealth, regionalism and the basis of the struggle in the Niger Delta. The dominant causalities and structural factors that modulate the contestation between the estranged actors in the region are also discussed in this chapter.

Part Two (Chapters Three and Four) is centered on oil exploration and its impact on the environment and its people. It also examines the three-prong conflictual relations between the communities and the oil multinationals and the state. The focal points of analysis in Chapter Three are the main actors in the Niger Delta crisis. These are the Nigerian state, the multinational oil companies and the social movements as well as international non-governmental organizations. The chapter discusses the specific roles of each of the actors in fuelling and attenuating the crisis in the oil-rich region. Also, the underlying reasons for each actor's actions or inactions are highlighted.

Chapter Four specifically examines the effect of oil exploration on the ecosystem of the region with emphasis on human existence. The impact of oil production is examined with cognizance to human rights standards, economic, social, and environmental factors.

Part Three (Chapters Five to Eight) covers the resistance and agitation of various groups used as case study and the internationalization of an otherwise domestic issue. Chapter Five is devoted to the analysis of the two foremost social movements as vehicles for resistance namely the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP) and the Ijaw Youth Council (IYC). The chapter also furnishes the reaction of both the state and the oil multinationals (especially Shell) to local resistance in the Niger Delta.

Chapter Six, flowing from the discourse in the previous chapter, investigates the roles of local non-governmental organizations in the Niger Delta crisis since the 1990s. It probes the relationship between these local NGOs and the social mobilization groups in the region. It also examines relations between local NGOs and the state on one hand and between local NGOs and Shell on the other.

The *raison d'être* for international civil society involvement in the Niger Delta crisis is the focus of Chapter Seven. Specifically, this chapter unearths MOSOP and IYC strategies for entering the international arena, or put differently, their action plans for internationalizing the crisis in the Niger Delta crisis. One significant incident in the internationalization of the Niger Delta issue i.e. the extra-judicial execution of Ken Saro-Wiwa is equally treated in this chapter. The reaction of the international society to this incident is a high point in the internationalization of the crisis. Chapter Seven concludes with the impact of the process of internationalization of the crisis on the main actors. The final chapter makes policy recommendations aimed at resolving the Niger Delta crisis.