Abstract
This paper examines the socio-political and environmental factors militating against the well being of Niger Delta states. It begins by portraying corruption as a serious problem hindering the progress of the Niger Delta and further identifies the reasons behind the series of protests by the Niger Delta States, by which they form militancy groups which they use to express their dissatisfaction, turning it into hostage taking, kidnapping, bunkering, bank robbery, assassinations, etc. The paper then looks at the amnesty policies and programmes and what has been the character of the Nigerian state since the discovery of crude oil. It examines whether it made the state become a rentier state and the measures put in place to resolve the crisis in the Niger Delta. It finally discusses whether the amnesty policy has been able to solve the militancy problem.

The genesis of militant terminology in the Nigerian political and socio-economic setup could be traced to the humble protestation of a collection of environmental crusaders such as Isaac Adaka Boro, Ken Saro Wiwa and his nationalistic associates of the Ogoni fame. In support of the above statement, the then Vice President, Goodluck Jonathan, noted that agitation in the Niger Delta was not new, as there had been the Isaac Adaka Boro revolt and the Kaima declaration in the past. (Adebowale and Taiwo, 2009)

The Niger Delta is the host to Nigeria’s vast infrastructure of 300 oil fields, 5,284 oil wells, 7,000 kilometers of pipeline, 10 export terminals, 275 flow stations, 10 gas plants, 4 refineries and a massive liquefied natural gas (LNG) sector (Watts, 2008). Despite these huge resources from the region that constitute Nigeria’s bulk of foreign earnings, the region still suffers from a gross neglect and abandonment in terms of development programme. National Development Programme (N.D.P) aptly describes the Niger Delta this way.

Ordinarily, the Niger Delta should be a gigantic economic reservoir of national and international importance. Its rich endowment of oil and gas resources feeds methodically into the international economic system. In exchange for massive revenue that carried the promise of rapid socio-economic transformation within the delta region, there are neglects and crumbling social infrastructure, and services high unemployment, social deprivation, abject poverty, and squalor and endemic conflict (UNDP, 2006).

Consequently, with the advent of oil and gas exploration on their farmland became disturbed by pollution from drilling and oil spillage. In return, the people are left with little or nothing to sustain their lives, as the abundant oil and gas deposits which should have been a blessing have had a very negative impact on the environment due to the activities of the multinationals which fail to take the people’s environment into consideration (Osarodion, 2009). Thus, these oil and gas deposits have been a blessing of the oil multinationals in the Nigerian state while on the other hand, they have been a curse to the people of the Niger Delta. Toeing the same line (Ikelegbe, 2008:132) opined that:

Since 50 years; ago, the oil company) Operations have become a threat to the Livelihood of the Niger Delta, because of the adverse effects of their operations ranging from Poisoned air, acid rain, destroyed roofing sheets, Odious gases and smells, poisoned water, declining Fisheries and wild life, dying forest nothing further, The multinational oil companies (MNOC’s) and the Nigeria state have carried away billions of dollar from the region while in return, the people have received nothing. This is basis the Niger Delta grievance. Similar views also held by (Cyril, 2002: 110) when he emphasized that the symbiotic relationship existing between the MNOC’s
The New York times better captured this in a recent editorial that “travelling through the Niger delta region”, it is d to comprehend that this is actually an area wealthy in natural resources, that despite generating billions of revenue, since oil was discovered, the area is one of the poorest and least developed parts of the country (Obia, 2006). This unfair treatment given to the Niger Delta region over the decades has thus provoked their peaceful protest and agitations for a fair package in Nigeria’s political equation. The struggle by the people of the region have been hinged on certain fundamental issues, such as their marginalization in terms of access to oil revenue, their struggle for greater access to resources sharing, environmental degradation and human rights violation (Odubu, 2009).

It was also asserted by Lukula that the insignificant responses from the Multinational corporations to these demands and economic expectations of the people provoked immense tension by way of massive youth restiveness and wild protests in the oil producing areas of the Niger Delta (lukula, 1994).

This gave Ikelegbe (2002) the leverage or the basis to conceptualize the Nigerian state as arrogant, insensitive, deaf, non-consultive, suppressive, oppressive, non-consensual, exploitative, personalized, prebendalized arid even in some cases collapsing. The disruption and destabilization that have followed the spectre of militancy in the region have been extremely costly to the Nigerian oil industry, the MNOCs, host communities and the federal government. At a time, it became difficult for the federal government to meet up with the daily quota supply from the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (O.P.E.C). On realizing that its combative and military strategy of quelling the insurrection in the Niger Delta was not producing the desired result, the federal government was left with no other option than to proclaim on July 3rd 2009 a presidential amnesty for the militant youths of the region who have taken up arms against the Nigerian state. The proclamation gave an unconditional pardon to all and persons on trial for militancy or believed to be unlawfully carrying arms against the Nigerian state (Osazuwa, et al 2010). This measure by the federal government is meant to curb the menace of militancy in the region so as to address the developmental challenges facing the region as there cannot be development in an atmosphere of war and disorderliness. The amnesty programme is a palliative measure to curb the Niger delta militancy saga that has been characterized by pipeline vandalization, oil bunkering, hostage taking, kidnapping, bank robberies, assassination, and guerilla style warfare to usher in a peaceful atmosphere that will facilitate the development of the region.

The Niger Delta Region and Environmental Degradation

A publication by the defunct Oil Mineral Producing Areas Development Commission (OMPDAEC) defined the Niger Delta as follows:

The Willink’s Commission Report of 1958 also described the Niger Delta as follows:

To the end of the plateau lies the valley of Cross River, which is fed by streams from Cameroon’s as well as from plateau. These form broad vertical strips containing people who are not Ibos. These two strips of coastal belt and the Cross River valley together make a piece of country, the shape a rather sprawling reversal which encloses the Ibo Plateau. In the swamp sand creek country of the south west there is an area in which the predominant tribal group is that of jaws. Towards the mouth of the cross
In the same vein, the Niger Delta Development Commission (N.D.D.C) act defined the Niger Delta Producing Areas to include Cross River, Delta, Edo, Imo, Ondo, Bayelsa, Akwa ibom and Rivers states (Niger Delta Development Commission Act) also exists is the geographical Niger Delta which comprises six states, with the exclusion of Abia, Ondo and Imo (Naanen, 2001).

The Niger Delta has a substantial amount of oil and gas reserves which account for Nigeria’s oil production capacity currently estimated at 1.67 million barrels per day. (April, 2009 O.P.E.C Quota), but with the capacity to produce more than 3 million barrels of oil per day. With gas reserves of about 160 million cubic feet and about 30 billion barrels of oil reserves (Omene, 2003).

Inspite of these huge advantages wielded by the Niger Delta region that ought to have put her at the forefront of Nigeria’s socio economic and political space, the region is still at the mercy of the Nigerian state drivers, as it is apparently covered with darkness, gloom, regrets, oppression, suppression, intimidation, hunger, poverty, oil pollution related diseases, marginalization, exploitation, jeopardy, environmental degradation, military occupation, unemployment and even sometimes threats of extinction melted to it by the Nigerian state and Multinational Companies (Ayankola, 2009). In solidarity with the pathetic state of the Niger-Delta region, Rt. Hon. Dimeji Bankole, Speaker of the House of Representatives, at the Post Amnesty Summit in Kaduna stated thus:

*If we are to be honest with ourselves we have not been fair to the Niger Delta. The Niger delta has been producing the funds with which we have been running this country for so many years. The funds that we used to build Abuja where I came from this morning those bridges and offices that you see in Abuja came from the funds of the Niger -Delta. Until these roads and infrastructure come to the Niger delta, we will continue to put the request on the front burners of Nigerian politics (Bankole, 2010: 2).*

### Militancy in the Niger Delta

Many attempts have been made by scholars to understand and explain the spectre of militancy in the Niger Delta. Some have pointed to the character of the Nigerian state, the role of the elites multinational oil companies (MNOCs), environment, marginalization, politics of exclusion, militarization of the crises, a others (Orluwene, 2008). However, protests arising from communities, in the Niger delta predate the 1970’s but intensive activism, extensive prolonged and consistent community protests or struggles started with Ogoni uprising due to the degradation of their environment by the oil companies operating in their region (Muhammad, 2009).

However, (Segun and Ayankola 1998:15) have stated that:

*In a bid to register their grievances due to ill - treatment from both the Nigerian state and MNOCs several communities such as umuechem (1990), Obia (1992), Diebu (1992), Igbide (1992) and Irri 1992, in the same period Ijaw Youth Vanguard of Burutu and Bomadi protected against Shell in1993. Other communities such as Ojobo Ozoro in Delta state, choba and Eleme in Rivers state have conflict with MNOCs. In October 1993, about 600 residents of Obaji in Rivers state closed down the Elf station while in December 1993, about 30 residents of Brass town demonstrated outside the Agip terminal. Also recorded at that time were Sukebolu, Ogongbene and Omoku demonstrations.*

However, the Nigerian state response to these protests and demonstrations has been violent, repressive and militaristic in nature. Tracing it from the early 1960’s when Isaac Adaka Boro secessionist agenda was forcefully quelled down to Ken-Saro-Wiwa’s judicial execution and eight others over their international awareness and agitation created over oil, the 1999 Odi massacre in...
Bayelsa State to the latest Joint Task Force (JTF) Gbaramatu saga in Delta state has worsened the restiveness and criminalization of the struggle (Ike 2005)

Amnesty in the Niger-Delta

The late President Yar’Adua on July 3, 2009, proclaimed a presidential amnesty for the militant youths inclusive of an unconditional pardon to all militants and persons on trial for militancy or believed to be unlawfully carrying arms against the Nigerian state. He set up a presidential amnesty committee headed by the then Minister of Defence, Gen. Godwin Abbe (Rtd) with other disarmament committees at the state levels of the region.

The amnesty proclamation expired on Sunday 4th October, 2009. Exactly 3 months from the July 3rd when it came on board. The Niger Delta militants were expected to use the 3 months of grace to disarm and enlist at designated centres for purposes of rehabilitation, empowerment, reintegration and proper documentation (Vanguard, 2009).

At the expiration of the amnesty proclamation, a total of 12,685 militant youths had surrendered their arms to the federal government. The federal government was shocked at the quality, sophistication and quantum of classified military arms and ammunition unveiled by the amnesty programme. President Yar’Adua announced at the close of amnesty, a “Presidential Derivation” of 10% equity of production of petroleum resources to the host communities, N65,000 each being the monthly allowance for the militants while the rehabilitation process lasted. He also directed the NDDC to enlist unemployed graduates from the region from a National Technical Aid Corps (NTAC) where after a month of training such graduate applicants (Degree and HND Holders) will be posted to various accredited institutions/employers for two years, earning N30, 000 from NDDC and a minimum of ₦15, 000 from the employer simultaneously amounting to ₦45, 000 minimum monthly pay (The Nation Newspaper, 2009).

Another startling view and comments on the proclaimed amnesty posted to Guardian.Co.Uk by Moses Eloka on January 24, 2010 read thus:

*The deception of Niger-Delta people by the Nigerian state did not start today. If Niger-Delta Development Board (NDDB) formed in 1960 did not yield any fruit, if presidential Task Force on Niger Delta formed in 1980 did not yield anything, if OMPADEC formed in 1992 did not yield anything, if NDDC formed in 2000 by Obasanjo did not yield anything, and if the Niger Delta Summit formed in 2003/2009 did not show any positive sign how can we expect the so-called package., Amnesty to yield something? Please, be informed that all these programmes since 1960 were meant to create a partisan peace necessary for oil companies to operate. It is a strategy deal between the oil companies and the Nigerian government against the Niger-Delta people. The name of this arrangement is called NEO-COLONIALISM."

It will suffice to state that these unpleasant memory lanes of government and ill-fated developmental efforts in the Niger-Delta have pointed to Amnesty if the government does not handle it with caution, commitment and sincerity of purpose. Although since the expiration of Amnesty proclamation of 4th October, 2009, crimes like kidnapping, hostage taking for ransom and even the recent October 1st 2010 bomb blast that claimed the lives of 14 innocent Nigerians among others have continued to rear their heads making one to wonder whether the Amnesty policy is equal to the task of getting rid of the spectre of militancy that has spread beyond the Niger-Delta to other parts of the country (Nigerian Tribune, 2010).

Conclusion

Judging by the consensus of comments and assessments so far on the amnesty, there is no doubt that relative peace and security have returned to the region. However, the fundamental issues of development of the region that awoke the agitations in the first place are still not in place or addressed. Lasting peace and security in the region are hinged on the effectiveness of developmental factors, initiated in the Niger Delta.
Recommendations

1. In spite of the Amnesty, a great number of Niger-Delta agitators are still in detention. There is the need for Government to free all those militants who are in custody to avoid double standard of peace and war.

2. Government should rebuild those communities and set up skill acquisition centres for the beneficiaries of those communities that were affected.

3. The state of institutions for the training centres should be improved and upgraded, and those militants that have undergone training should be awarded certificates and recognized.

References


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