

Issues, Claims and the Challenges of Militancy Uprising on Security in Niger Delta Region of Nigeria: The Manifestation of Frustrations from Political Corruption

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ABSTRACT : The continued militancy activities in the oil-rich delta region is a future mirror of doomsday for Nigeria's peaceful atmosphere, political and economic settings. There are identified issues from the region, the claims by the governments of being rational and, the claims of neglect, deprivation and marginalisation by the people from the region. Based on this diverse point of views, this study observed the fundamental issues and the various claims upon which are regarded as a position and basis for the faceoff. The study relied on the context analysis of the secondary data such as newspapers report, government white papers, articles and journals etc. The study found that, the continuous and frequency of militancy uprising and security challenges in the Niger Delta region is a result of some aggressive youths who still felt that, they were being deprived and neglected despite several attempts made by the government to salvage the situation. The study outlined the approach adopted in solving the problem so far and indeed observed that the situation remains precarious as a result of political corruption. The study recommends the departure from the various amorphous programmes by the federal governments which many of the politician from the region see as a means to enrich themselves and do good only to their pockets rather than helping the Niger Delta region as a whole.

KEY WORDS: *Politics, Militancy, Security, Niger-Delta, Uprising.*

I. INTRODUCTION

The fallout of Nigerian civil war in 1970's gave birth to the emergence of different kinds of groups and anti-state establishments including militias, rebels, revolutionaries, territorial armies, extremist and fighting for identities ethnic grouping at one time or the other like Ijaw National Congress, the Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP), the Egbesu Boys, the Niger Delta Volunteer Force, Oodua People's Congress (OPC), Arewa Consultative Forum, Independent Peoples of Biafra (IPOB) and many more. Most of these groups used this opportunity to intensify their demands for recognition and reasonable portion from the distribution of revenues from Nigeria's mineral wealth; claiming neglect, deprivation, injustice, oppression, domination, exploitation, victimization, nepotism, and continued inequalities. This has been the issues and arguments all around Nigerian regions particularly the Niger Delta region which by the nature of its peculiarity persistently giving rises to various militancy groups that are characteristically aggrieved over certain fundamental issues claims to be affecting their region.

In 1956, before the discovery of oil in Niger Delta area, the region according to Ojo (2013) is one of the largest wetlands in the world that comprises number of ecological collections from sandy coastal ridge barriers, brackish and saline mangroves, fresh water, stable and seasonal swamp forests, low lands, rainforests, etc. This is widely traversed by creeks, rivers, streams, rivulets, and canals. Ojo (2013) further pointed out that, for generations, the rich vegetation and wildlife of the area have been the principal source of living for the people *ibid*. The area are natural with very beautiful gift of nature. Unfortunately, the discovery of oil changed the natural gift, the water was polluted; the biodiversity of the region were damaged, the ecological balance was halted and, the Niger Delta people claimed that the Nigeria government continue to tap the resources from the region without adequate recourse or sensitive to the plight of the ecosystem of the region.

The discovery of oil in the area and the believed of the people in the region especially the youths, that, they were being deprived of the gain from their resource, the resources that come from their region and soil; they claimed that there were no adequate care for their environment where water pollution affected their fish business and shattered their farmland. Most of this has, however, led and driven them to rise against the Nigerian government. A prominent indigene of the Niger Delta region and an environmentalist Ken Saro-Wiwa

became a vocal voice on this at a time and in particular; he co-opted others to call the local and international attention to the region but was eventually killed together with other activists by Gen. Sani Abacha's regime on "on 10th November 1995" (Otoghagua, quoted in Oscar B 2012). The killing of Saro-Wiwa and others further escalated the crisis of the region. Several anti-state activities started in form of rebels, militias and territorial armies to prevent oil companies from the oil field. This followed by criminal activities like kidnapping for ransom, oil bunkering, pipeline vandalization etc., and the region became unsafe. The Niger Delta people claimed that they were only demanding for adequate attention from the Nigerian government. Some of their claims according to Akintunde, Jide and Martins Hile (2016) was that 95% of the revenue generated through crude oil is being used to develop other areas while neglecting the development of the region and the goose that lays the golden egg suffers official neglect. He argued further that the principle of derivation which was the operative formula when groundnut, cocoa, palm oil and kernel produced by the major ethnic nationalities before oil discovery should not have been jettisoned (Akintunde et al 2016).

II. THE PROBLEM

Niger Delta region is known for a crisis-prone area where state forces and militant groups persistently fight at diagonal battles (Ojo 2013). Accordingly, the region is believed to be the goose that lays golden egg but the goose is claimed to possess unseen, unfed, malnourished and abandoned. The claimed was that the region had been destroyed and the territory whose main sources is subsistence farming and fishing is now hardly sustaining such (Akintunde 2016). And, this is in the face of major revenue driven from the region by Nigerian government, they believed that they were not favoured by the distribution of mineral wealth and resource management. Then, sadly, anti-state uprising and violent agitation have been the approach and the means they constantly engaged in to send signals to the governments where many groups sprang up and claimed to be fighting for the liberation and freeing their people and taking the opportunity to commit dastardly and criminal activities. These activities according to Ejibunu (2007) has impacted negatively on the peace and security of the region and which has also affected the economic activities of the communities located in the region such as agriculture, education, health, etc. Though, Nigeria government have also claimed that adequate attention had been given to the area through several programmes instituted in the area, but most often there were claims too that some people and actors in the corridor of power do institutionalize this measures to allocate cash profits for themselves, and still neglect the plight and the wishes of the people of the region and therefore, resulting in frustration that most of the time trigger violence acts through militancy.

III. THE ISSUES

Utebor (2016) reveals that the continual rounds of militancy activities and violent attacks at the Niger Delta Region is a manifestation of the deep frustration, the negligence, and insensitivity on the part of the government and multi-national oil corporations over the plight of the region *ibid*. Though, most often, as part of the preventive measure by the government against militancy, the region is being militarised and any action put up by the people to speak to the government is also, and always being criminalized. With this, the inhabitants of Niger Delta see it as marginalisation and denial of human right because even with the decades of protestation and appeals to the levels of governments concern, the oil firms and also the international communities; the core issues with the region were claimed to have remained and mostly unattended to where activist including Ken Saro-Wiwa, died within the course of peaceful agitation for the region. Some of the consequent factors to the continued staging of militancy groups include:

- i. Deprivation to the means of living: The resident of the region were said to have been underprivileged to the means of their livelihood because of the oil exploration activities which had forced them to abandon agriculture and fishing, their primary occupation they were known for due to the contaminated water, polluted air, and loss of fertile land.
- ii. Environmental damage: The oil activities along this region have caused several environmental injuries such as destruction of natural ecosystem, flooding; erosion; land degradation; fisheries depletion from dredging; toxic water from industrial waste into the rivers among others (Ejibunu, 2007)
- iii. Unemployment: Arising from the results of environmental injury caused by oil exploration, the people around the region were being excluded from their major and principal occupations (fishing and Farming) in the face of oil exploration (Ajodo-Adebanjoko, Angela 2016). And even though, what is most worrisome is that, the oil corporations in most cases don't rent their workers from the area.
- iv. Human rights violation: In spite of unquantifiable hardship brought on the Niger Delta people through exploration of oil, the government has continually suppressed all manners protest or demonstration either peaceful or violent ones. The region remained militarised and any agitations are being criminalized and, each time forcefully put to halt.

Drivers of Militancy in Niger Delta

The emergence of social movements claiming to be fighting for the common interest and identity of their people has persistently led to armed militia groups in the Niger Delta region which trajectories through four modes of movements known as social networks'. According to Adejumobi cited in Oladoyinbo (2012), the four modes of action which define social networks' overall characters includes:

- i. Movement diffusion and minority activities at the elite level (i.e. temporary interactions that generate similar movement);
- ii. Territorial issue networks and local community agitations (i.e. interactions between groups that shared similar visions and ideals);
- iii. Social exchange and the formation of political social coalitions groups (i.e. the networking of social groupings in a number of similar societies); and
- iv. Transnational social movements and the emergence of different lobbies, (i.e. powers and information exchange between main actors within the social movement circle).

These are approximate characters of social movements and activities in the Niger Delta regions. Generally, the emergence of this social movements together with the moves to forge relationships across frontiers in order to institutionalise activities; according to Omotola (2009) were stemmed from a number of factors. Some of these factors were being driven by the urge for agitation against social change and justice in political, economic and environmental terms *ibid*.

The Peculiarity of the Niger Delta Region

“Those who make peaceful revolution impossible will make violent revolution inevitable”-

John F. Kennedy, 1962

Though, the ideological underpinnings militia uprising in the Niger Delta and even anywhere across the globe could be attached to the urge by the oppressed to reverse the unjust and the status quo to pave way for change that is satisfactorily enough. With special reference to the third world countries, Dukor (2003) pointed out that members of the public are not necessarily wished to resort to and go into violence in expressing their grievances but history has often shown that forms of protest like civil disobedience, legal challenges, strikes etc. are either not always effective or enough to speak to the government or addresses issues; instead, militant/violent demonstrations and armed resistance *ibid*.

Against this standpoint and with particular emphasis on the Niger Delta region, Osuoka (2003) argues that the resistance of the nationalities in the Niger Delta area like the Ogonis', Isokos', Urhobos', Itsekiris', and Ijaws', among others are the peoples' responses ranges from expression of grievances to the simple protest but successive governments were claimed to have always criminalized and often condemned these reactions, hence the endemic outburst of militant grouping and uprising against the state and multinational companies. The effects of oil around the Niger Delta communities and its environment have been massive. Local indigenous people were suffering from serious damage to their natural environment. The clean-up of the region becomes an issue in one hand and, restoration of swamps, creeks, fishing grounds in another hand. The region witnessed the gentle and gradual poisoning of soil, waters and the destruction of vegetation together with agricultural lands, all as a result of oil spillage which take place during extraction of petroleum resources and this had negatively impacted ecosystem and biodiversity of the region.

The Approaches adopted by governments in Solving the Problems so Far...***Establishments of Ministries and Agencies***

Subsequently, by the way of responding to the problem of the regions by Nigeria government, agencies were established for the region such as Niger Delta Development Board (NDDDB) in 1960 to consider the problems of the region. The board was mandated and required to promote its physical development and prepare schemes to effect this. In 1976, NDDDB was reviewed, and equally, the review changed the name of the agency to Niger Delta River Basin Development Authority (NDBDA); and continually, it was reviewed again in 1992 to become the Oil Mineral Producing Areas Development Commission (OMPADEC) and to the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) in the year 2000.

As part of the efforts to address the claimed marginalization and militia uprising in the region the government in 2008 established Ministry of Niger Delta and one of the sons of the soil ' Chief UfotEkaette ' was appointed as a pioneer Minister (The Punch, Thursday, 1/1/2016). And, between 2009 and 2017, the ministry received hundreds of billions of naira (The Punch newspaper January 2018). Even at this, the prevailing socio-economic and environmental challenges confronting the region were still obvious. Nothing was changed.

Governments' Fiscal Responses to the Region

The rule here is that in addition to whatever amount of regular federal government statutory transfers, a certain percentage of the proportion of the revenues collected from a federating unit is being returned to the region where the resources were gotten from. By principle, this means that the states within the Niger Delta region would in addition to the statutory monthly allocation from the Centre or federal government, entitled to a certain percentage from Nigeria's oil revenue.

The continue application and allocation of principles of this 'give back' is that Niger Delta region are benefiting additional allocation of funds with percentages from Nigeria revenue-sharing system within the region. At present, the country uses 13% derivation and this percentage is being deducted before the sharing to the states and the federal governments. The distribution of this oil-generated revenue in Nigeria illustrates financial gaps in-between the oil-producing states of the country and their non-oil-producing states counterparts. This application of derivation principle has indirectly made the oil-producing states become comfortable than the non-oil producing ones but there is nothing to show for this from the region.

Creation of States in the Region

For administrative conveniences, proper attention and monitoring of the region, Nigeria governments created states governments around the region. These include the creation of Rivers and Cross River states in 1967, Ondo and Imo states in 1976, AkwaIbom state in 1987; Delta, Abia and Edo states in 1991 and Bayelsa State in 1996. Even at this, misappropriation of funds and mal-administration has continually kills the socio-economic developments of the region; noting to figure out from the region.

Amnesty Programmes

In 2009, the then (Late) President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua declared amnesty for the militants in the Niger Delta region. The programme was tagged "Presidential Amnesty Programme". The root of the amnesty programme is to capture the militants within the context of demilitarization, disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration. The programme also includes urgent improvement of infrastructure and welfare services to the region where institutions that could bring long-term developments were actualized in the region (Ogundiya, 2011). This idea was to discourage militia uprising in the region wherethe amnesty programmes stands in for granting unconditional state pardon to the militants and opening a new page of developments with the view to improve on previous attempts at addressing the Niger Delta problem; and, for the interest of sustainable development and national integration, the amnesty programme was staged. However, Albert (2011) put that the 'amnesty' programme in the Niger Delta should have provides one of the most laughable dimensions of handling the problem. Even at this, Ogundiya (2011) observes that poor coordination together with corruption and mismanagement, the inflation of militants' registers pose threat for effective implementation of the programme. For instance, as pointed out by Ogundiya (2011) only 20 per cent of the estimated cost for running the programme actually get to the reach of the ex-militants, the supposed principal beneficiaries of the programme while, whopping 80 percent of the estimated goes to consultants, supervisors, and contractors who are strategically involved in the programme to represent the interests of certain politicians and businessmen behind the scene; the power that be.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

Nigeria as a democratic federal state is only in principle and by model. This is being pictured from unending agitations and wrestled for resource control in a supposed federal system under a democratic administration. The testimonies all around Nigeria shows that Nigeria's treasure, prosperity, and affluence has not promoted or adequately benefited most Nigerians despites the measures and approaches put in place to achieve this. Even though, the supposed wealthy or prosperous region (oil-rich region) of the country, in the face of numerous positive programmes where colossal amount is being expended regularly; yet people lives inimpecuniousness while continuously complaining of deprivation and marginalization with poor socio-economic development. Since the situation remains precarious, there must be a departure from most of the programmes that do well only to the pockets of individuals and political cabal which would not help the region; also, most of these programmes were seen as a creation of indolence and lazy youths in the region like the practice of monthly federal allocation created lazy states and local governments in Nigeria. In addition, more power were observed to be tooconcentrated at the centre; that is why there are a lot of agitations in Nigeria. From Boko Haram, Odua Peoples' Congress(OPC), Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), Niger Delta Avengers(NDA), MASSOB, IPOB etc. All these groups arose over feelings of marginalization or feelings of being left out by the centre. If the people are allowed to controlor jointly involved in the processes of the resources within their region, no one will hold the centre responsible for any marginalization. And, how do we explain the case of a man who sets his own house on fire only to solve the problem of rats? The people of the Niger Delta region should also look at their yards very well and desist forthwith from the acts that could further destroy the already destroyed environment.

The position of this paper is that the vulnerability of Nigeria's internal and external disposition provides the enabling conditions for militancy uprising; the fact is that, the system is corrupt. Huge resources had been exhausted on the Niger Delta region by the successive governments but we cannot pointed out a reasonable success. Can we still blame the government for insensitivity? Rebels and militancy groups keep mushrooming and shouting our land our blood; and, the Nigeria national security is being threatening from this; do we wait until the nation degenerated into a collapsed state? Until the Nigerian government is ready to critically deal with political corruption, all these problems will continue to linger.

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