

Oil Conflicts and Arms Proliferation in Ogoni and Ijaw Region of Niger Delta, Nigeria: The Possible Solutions

ADETUNBERU Oludotun

Institute of Peace, Security and Governance, Ekiti State University,

Department of Peace and Security Studies

Ekiti State, Nigeria.

ABSTRACT : The Nigerian nation is presumed to be a rich country that derives most of its riches, treasures and revenue from crude oil. Unfortunately, this oil is endowed in one region from the several regions that make up the nation and, invariably, this oil becomes a source of conflict rather than peace, unity and stability of the nation. The people in the region, Ogoni's and Ijaw's especially claimed 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 as a result of oil activities affected their fish business and shattered their farmland. Most of this has, however, led and driven them to rise against the Nigerian government, hence oil conflicts. The militarization of the conflict is both a recipe for and a result of arms proliferation. This paper, having relied on the context analysis of the secondary data such as newspapers report, government white papers, articles and journals etc. recommends that government should systematically de-emphasized the use of maximum force, de-mobilized and engage the aggrieved communities in meaningful dialogue to enhance tolerance from both sides in order to allow for sustainable peace-building.

KEY WORDS: *Arms Proliferation, Oil Conflicts, Oil-Rich, Region*

I. INTRODUCTION

Nigeria, is positioned to be the most populous country in Africa continent. Even though, record shows that it is one of the most richly and endowed country around the world that were blessed with crude oil (Oyakorotu, 2008). Arising from this, Nigeria became a mono-cultural economy that depends mainly on oil and displaced other area or revenue income since 1970s. With this, one would expect the oil-rich capacity to blossom the image of the Nigerian state in all ramifications but it has thus been a catalyst for restiveness and security challenge. The longstanding feature of the oil-rich Niger Delta region of Nigeria which is being fueled by decades of economic neglect, environmental degradation and underdevelopment among others has given the state a bad image within the international community. In spite of the abundant wealth and economic potentials the region parades, the people live in a state of chronic squalor and abject poverty. Invariably, oil has become a source of conflict rather than peace, unity and stability. Oil exploration and exploitation has set in political, ecological and socio-economic conditions that generate abject poverty and backwardness in the region (Inokoba & Imbua, 2008).

One distinguishing feature that is mind boggling is the high rate of arms proliferation in Nigeria, specifically, the Niger Delta region. The rising profile of hostility in the region has thus created palpable tension within the oil-rich zone. The spate of arms and ammunitions within the region has proven that conflicts are inevitable since tools of war at the disposal of its inhabitant's thereby promoting insecurity for the Multinational oil corporations and those working in the zone. Anti-social vices like kidnapping and hostage taking for ransom, armed robbery, cultism, oil bunkering and electoral violence among others are already characterizing the Niger Delta region. Importantly, employing Adekanye's (2007) conflict causative analytical variables, threats and hostilities and outbreak of violence in the Niger Delta have predisposition and precipitating factors, accelerators and triggers. From this perspective, a major precipitant of conflicts in the region has been disputes over oil and territorial boundaries. Consequently, contestations over border resources remain a key question since Nigeria's independence.

Drivers and actors of militancy in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria

Generally, the Niger Delta has attracted considerable multidisciplinary attention and therefore has rich literature. Oyakorotu, (2008) argue that, the literature on the Niger Delta agrees that the oil industry has not promoted the development of the region, rather, it has undermined the region's development. However, the people's rights

have come under severe assault by the ecological unfriendly practices of oil Transnational Corporations (TNCs). In addition, state laws and policies, as they relate to petroleum resources, expropriate the indigenous people of the Niger Delta of their 'rights' to their natural resources. According to Brown (1998), the local economies of the oil producing region have collapsed and they are not integrated into the oil economy of Nigeria. The success of the oil economy has not promoted their own capacities. It has, indeed, increased environmental degradation and ethnic-based political domination which alienate the people from the use of their natural resources for their own development.

Niger Delta are nothing to but an avenue to poverty, underdevelopment, insecurity and crisis (Oyakorotu, 2008). Adeyemo, (2002) submitted that, productivity losses, occupational displacement and increased social unrest, loss of farmlands to oil spills and death of aquatic organisms are the reoccurring issues. (Adeyemo, 2002) sees the efforts of the peasant work as being the same and continuously getting worse. These have resulted into frustration which is the resulted effects of the inability to accomplish their desired goals.

The starting point of militancy in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria is notably the earliest post-independence armed resistance led by Isaac Jasper Adaka Boro. It started in order to have a full grasp of Niger Delta resources and self-determination for the inhabitants of Niger Delta. Isaac Adaka Boro was a celebrated Niger Delta nationalist Nigeria civil war hero, he was one of the pioneers of minority right activists in Nigeria (Agbo, 2008a). He campaigned against the injustice perceived in the Niger Delta through his deep-root experience as a union leader at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. He, however, left school to lead armed protest against the exploration and exploitation of oil and gas resources in the Niger Delta areas (Agbo, 2008b). He believed that the Niger Delta inhabitants deserved a fair share of proceeds of the oil wealth and he formed Niger Delta Volunteer Force (NDVF), an armed military with members consisting of his fellow Ijaw ethnic group. They eventually set up a military camp at Taylor Creek and gave training to the recruits in the usage of fire arms and explosives and later managed to assemble about 150 fighters which were split into three divisions (Adeyemo, 2002). They engage in series of rebellion acts against the Nigerian state via a 12 days revolution, thereby attacking police station at Yenagoa and stealing of weapons at the police armory (Agbo, 2006c).

Again, during General Sanni Abacha military regime, Ken Benson Saro-Wiwa, an activist devoted his time to human rights and environmental causes, especially, in Ogoni land. (Agbo, 2008c). He was one of the earliest members of (MOSOP) which advocated for the right of the movement for the survival of the Ogoni people. MOSOP struggled against environmental degradation of Ogoni lands by Shell Oil Company. Ken Saro-Wiwa was in 1992 imprisoned for months without hearing by the Nigerian military government. He was the Vice President of Unrepresented Nations and People Organization (UNPO) General Assembly from 1993-2005.

In January 1993, MOSOP organized peaceful marches of about 300,000 Ogoni people, and drawing international attention to their plight. That same year, the government occupied the region with military and Saro-Wiwa was arrested again and detained in June 1993 but was released after a month. On May 21 1994, four Ogoni chiefs were brutally murdered and Saro-Wiwa was accused, arrested and detained for inciting the chiefs against the government. He denied the charges but was imprisoned for over a year before being found guilty by the special convened tribunal. He was subsequently sentenced to death with his other MOSOP activists (Agbo, 2008d).

Mujahid Asari-Dokubo was born in 1964 (whose former name was Melford Dokubo Goodhead Jr.) into a Christian family (Gilbert, 2010a). He received both primary and secondary education in Port-Harcourt and was admitted to study Law at the University of Calabar, but dropped out after three years in 1990, citing problems with the University authorities as his reason for doing so (Gilbert, 2010b). He made other attempts to complete his education but activism caused him to quit his degree at Rivers State University of Science and Technology for reasons similar to those in Calabar (Gilbert 2010c). After dropping out of school, Asari Dokubo converted to Muslim and changed his name to Mujahid Asari Dokubo. He spent most of the 1990s attempting to become involved in local politics, running for two offices in Rivers State in 1992 and 1998. However, he was unsuccessful in those attempts.

In 1998, the Ijaw Youth Council (IYC) was formed and he became the Vice President and later President in 2001. The Ijaw Youth Council (IYC) pledged to agitate their struggle peacefully for freedom, self-determination, and ecological justice, and prepared a campaign of direct action called "operation climate change" beginning on December 28, 1998. The Nigerian Government responded with an immediate crackdown on the group. As the IYC's President in 2001, he led the group to pursue an agenda for resource control and self-determination by every means necessary (Gilbert, 2010).

In 2004, Asari-Dokubo retreated into his hideout to form the Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force (NDPVF), which later emerged as a major catalyst for the unrest in the Niger Delta region. The NDPVF, a militant group founded in large part by local and regional politicians who sought great profit from the region's oil revenue (Gilbert, 2010; Okafor, 2011). The NDPVF initiated an armed conflict with a rival group known as Niger Delta Vigilante (NDV) led by Ateke Tom, who was also seeking to control Delta's oil resources. Both group engaged in oil bunkering and other illegal forms of local resources extraction (Gilbert, 2010). The threats to attack oil wells and oil pipelines by the NDPVF caused companies operating in the area to withdraw most of their personnel from the Delta region, resulting in massive drop in the oil production of 30,000 barrels per day (Gilbert, 2010). Due to the constant crisis predicated by NDPVF and NDV, the government wanted to intervene but failed due to Asari's public support for self-determination of his native Ijaw people and independence for the Niger Delta. He was arrested and charged with treason by the state, but released on bail on June 14, 2007 as part of large plans to try and bring peace to the Niger Delta struggle, there are other leaders of many militant organizations in the Niger Delta. Notable among them are Henry Okah; Government Ekpemupolo (a.k.a Tompolo); Ateke Tom 'General John Togo, and Dagogo Farah.

Militancy and Arms Proliferation in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria

The sudden upsurge in the number of small arms and light weapons in the international system is basically a by-product of the Cold War during which the major powers blindly supported different belligerents in developing countries in Africa and elsewhere. Similarly, the dysfunctional of state structures in countries that comprise the former Soviet blocs as well as the course of globalization increased the supply of small arms and light weapons in conflict zones of Africa. It is worrisome that, in recent years, especially since 1990s, major conflicts all over the world have been fought with both small arms and light weapons. And in most cases, internal wars are not fought by trained soldiers but by civilians in cities, towns and villages (Amu, 1998).

The transfer of small arms and light weapons among non-state actors within the state has become big merchandise in Africa. The implications of these for national security as well as its cross-border effects have heightened the possibility of many other security challenges and undermined the ability of governments to fulfill their constitutional security. However, the relationship between small arms and insecurity has been the object of contentious debate among scholars. Meanwhile, some scholars have argued that small arms are the direct cause of insecurity, others maintain that small arms are merely trigger of insecurity or precipitating factor. Despite this seeming apparent disagreement, both scholars commonly agree that the proliferation of small arms poses serious challenges to the sustenance of peace and stability of any society. The Niger Delta crisis encapsulates the various violent clashes between the ethnic groups in the region on the one hand, and the Federal Government with its business partners, the multinational oil corporations (MNOCs) on the other (Obi, 1999:433). Minority ethnic groups of the region have consequently challenged the state and foreign oil multinational policies and attitudes since the early 1990s. The Ijaw ethnic group, in particular, has appeared the most violent, aggressive and war-like when one considers how it has engaged other major ethnic groups and oil multinationals in the Niger Delta. The military prowess of the Ijaw militia has proved a hard nut to crack, as state forces are faced with the herculean task of curbing the excesses or hyper-nationalist tendencies of the Ijaw militant youths. This has given rise to the militarization of the region by both sides to the conflict, the Federal Government/oil multinationals and the people. Of course, the militarization of the conflict is both a recipe for and a result of arms proliferation. State security forces and (ethnic) militias alike have procured weapons in bids to neutralize each other. At times, multinational oil companies have been indicted for their role in the militarization of the Niger Delta through their procurement of weapons for state security forces.

The Nigerian Government's neglect of the South-South region's development despite the huge sum of revenues accrued from the region with the sales of crude oil over the years. The incessant oil exploration has spurred the youths in the region to take up arms against the government and innocent citizens (Adeyemo, 2002). The inhabitants of the region believed that the Federal Government cares less about their plights, so long as oil flows as they constantly campaign for more attention and development. Also, the continuing environmental degradation of the region poses another major threat of devastation to local indigenous communities. Oil corporations deposit wastes of varying toxic levels with impunity and are unchecked which resulted to reduction in fishing activities in the region.

Arms Proliferation and the Oil Conflict: Ogoni and Ijaw Region of Niger Delta

Since the early 1990s, there has been a remarkable presence of many resistance movements fighting in the Niger Delta region. Notably among these are the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP), the Ijaw Youth Council (IYC), the Ijaw National Congress (INC), the Egbesu Boys of Africa (EBA), the Niger Delta Volunteer Force (NDVF), the Ijaw Nationality Rights Protection Organisation (INRPO) and the Ogoni Patriotic Union (OPU), to mention but a few. However, these movements are either Ijaw or Ogoni people's movements of Niger delta region. These are the people believed to been badly affected by the oil activities in the region. The vibrancy and militant tendencies of these groups are fundamentally due to the hardships engendered by

economic and environmental crises, and state repression (Obi 2001:6). These groups, with militant leaders, have been able to place their demands on the national agenda as well as before the international community, attracting massive support at both the local and international levels (Obi 1999:433). An analysis of the relationship between the Nigerian state and the Ogonis and Ijaws, two prominent ethnic minorities in the Niger Delta, will provide a useful illustration of state violence and armed local resistance by ethnic militia.

II. THE Ogoni STRUGGLE

The Ogoni struggle typically exemplifies the nature and dynamics of the crisis as well as local resistance in the Niger Delta region. It is an ethnic struggle championed by MOSOP to protect the interests of the Ogoni ethnic group (Ojakorotu 2000:81). The Ogoni struggle assumed phenomenal dimensions in 1990 with the declaration of the Ogoni Bill of Rights (OBR), which the Ogoni leaders presented to the then military junta of General Ibrahim Babangida. As enclosed in the OBR, the Ogoni people demanded:

- Political control of Ogoni affairs.
- The right to control Ogoni economic resources by Ogoni people and for Ogoni people.
- The right to defend the Ogoni environs and ecology from degradation.
- Adequate and direct representation in all Nigerian national institutions (Sha'aba 1998:79, MOSOP 1992).

In August 1991, another section was added to the OBR. This authorized MOSOP to internationalise the struggle by the Ogonis, and it affirmed MOSOP's methods and commitment to non-violence. In December 1992, the Ogoni people presented an ultimatum to the oil companies operating in Ogoni land (including Shell and Chevron) and the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) to pay back royalties and compensation within 30 days or quit Ogoniland. After the expiration of the ultimatum, on 4 January 1993, about 300 000 people staged a peaceful demonstration to give vent to their demands. This unprecedented demonstration was a milestone in the Ogoni struggle in two important ways. First, it transformed the Ogoni question into a national issue. Second, it attracted the sympathy and attention of the international community to the plight of the Ogoni people. However, what followed this historic demonstration was a spate of arrests and detention of MOSOP leaders by the state security forces.

Between January and December 1993, Ken Saro-Wiwa and other prominent Ogoni leaders were arrested and detained several times, with criminal charges brought against them (Human Rights Watch 1995). Meanwhile, the government had devised a method of 'divide and rule' in order to weaken the Ogoni struggle. This tactic had a number of dimensions. First, it 'encouraged' violent conflicts between the Ogoni and their neighbours, which resulted in ethnic and communal clashes. There was an attempt to dub the clashes as purely ethnic, thereby indicting the MOSOP leadership in the process. The use of sophisticated weapons and standard military tactics in all these ethnic clashes was evidently enough to prove the involvement of military (Sha'aba 1998:82). For instance, it was reported by Human Rights Watch/Africa (HRA) that soldiers were recruited from Liberia to fight and kill Ogoni people under the pretext that they were going to fight in the Cameroon (The Punch 1997). Second, the Giokoo Accord of March 1994, which called for the Gokiana people to pull out of MOSOP, is another case in point. Government had allegedly induced some conservative Gokiana chiefs to sign this Accord. However, Gokiana people demonstrated spontaneously against this Accord in many Gokiana villages on 19 May 1994.

Following the shooting and killing of about eleven Ogoni people by security agents at Brass, old Rivers State, in April 1993, the military junta of Babangida passed a decree, which stipulated the death penalty for all acts of treason. The Ogoni responded with increased mobilisation and a media campaign, with a possible option of violent resistance. However, this strategy later became a divisive factor in the rank and file of MOSOP and its leadership. After the controversial MOSOP boycott of the 12 June 1993 presidential election, it became clear that there had been a division of its leadership into two – the moderates led by Dr Leton, and the militants led by Ken Saro-Wiwa. Apart from accusing Saro-Wiwa of being too confrontational, militant and authoritarian, the moderates also alleged that he was planning to kill thirteen Ogoni leaders, of whom four were indeed killed in May 1994. It is instructive to note that Saro-Wiwa had campaigned from village to village on the need for redress from the government, based on the marginalisation of the Ogoni ethnic group in the national scheme of affairs. This campaign took him to Giokoo village on 21 May 1994, where some conservative chiefs (allegedly being sponsored by government) were meeting. Violence erupted during his visit and during the ensuing mayhem the four chiefs were killed.

Subsequently, Ken Saro-Wiwa and several other Ogoni activists were arrested and detained in connection with the murder of the four prominent Ogoni chiefs. They were later arraigned before a special military tribunal, which sentenced Saro-Wiwa and eight others to death by hanging. Eventually, the execution was carried out on 10 November 1995 despite all entreaties both from within and outside the country. This development sounded the death knell of the Ogoni struggle. However, this is not to say that the struggle atrophied, but it certainly lost the vibrancy and militancy associated with it in its early stage. This was not only due to state repression but also to leadership bickering

III. THE IJAWS

The Ijaws are another set of tribe of people of the Niger Delta, the Ogoni people however gave way to the Ijaws in the struggle, these tribe of people increasingly taken the center stage. Since 1997, when Ijaw youths called for an end to Shell activities in the Niger Delta, Ijaw people have resolved to fight to the last man until the Niger Delta is liberated from the pangs of exploitation, neglect and marginalization (The Guardian on Sunday 2000:38-39). Bayelsa State, which is inhabited by the Ijaw people, was a hot bed of Ijaw militancy between 1998 and 1999. The militant and invincible Egbesu Boys came into limelight in 1998 when they set free their detained leader from Government House in Yenegoa, having disarmed the guards. The emergence of the Egbesu warriors since then has demonstrated the militarisation of local conflict in which sophisticated arms have been freely deployed by militant youths.

After the death of General Abacha in 1998, the new political climate made it possible for Ijaw youths to be more vigorous in their demands. To drive home their grouses, they added a new twist to the struggle, namely, the hijacking of oil installations. On 11 December 1998, Ijaw youths at Kaiama town made a landmark declaration, now known as the Kaiama Declaration. In the document, they requested greater local control of oil revenues and better environmental policies. More importantly, the statement gave a December 30 ultimatum to both the government and the oil companies to respond positively to their demands. It added that if the deadline was not met, all multilateral oil corporations operating in Ijaw land (and territorial waters), and indeed in the larger Niger Delta, should close their operations and vacate the region (Niboro 1998). To actualise their threat, Ijaw youths and other people who joined them marched in peaceful demonstration to the Government House in Yenegoa. Their main purpose was to convey their grievances through the state governor, Lt Col Paul Obi to the Federal Government. However, state security forces opened fire on the protesters, leaving some of them dead and many others injured in the pandemonium. This marked the beginning of armed hostilities between Ijaw youths and the security forces which have continued till today. The unfettered access to small arms which are readily available has contributed to escalating the conflict.

However, the ugly incident, where the Egbesu Boys regrouped and apparently ready for war, having been in possession of sophisticated weapons of war. They engaged both the navy and the army in fierce battles, with heavy casualties on both sides. In some cases, the militant youths ransacked military formations, terrorised fleeing soldiers and policemen and became warlords in strategic locations. Indeed, the towns of Kaiama, Odi, Ekeki and others had become battlefields where the Egbesu Boys and military forces engaged in heavy crossfire. Apart from this, the militant youths were able to close down a number of oil installations in the Niger Delta, thereby grounding oil production. In response to the events in the Niger Delta, General Abdulalami Abubakar read the riot act on 1 January 1999 in which he reiterated government's intolerance of the scenario developing in the Niger Delta. This was followed by further reinforcement of the navy and the army with heavy artillery and armoured tanks. Rather than halting the spectre of war in the Niger Delta, increased deployment of armed forces to the Niger Delta has continued to aggravate the situation. And, in apparent continuation of government's militarisation process, President Olusegun Obasanjo in November 1999 ordered an army invasion of Odi, a town in Bayelsa State in response to the killing of about eleven policemen who had earlier been sent to the area to quell riots. The police convoy was ambushed and the policemen were killed. The reprisal and destruction of Odi was so enormous that former Bayelsa State Governor, Diepriye Alamiyeseigha, once stated that it would require about twenty-five billion Naira to reconstruct the town (The Guardian 2000c:6).

Despite the increasing deployment of government forces to the Niger Delta, Ijaw militant youths have not relented in their armed struggle against the government and oil companies operating in the oil region. For instance, they have continued to attack and shut down oil installations, and hold oil workers hostage. In June 1999, Ijaw youths hijacked a helicopter belonging to Shell at Dokolaba, Delta State, and kidnapped its pilots (The Guardian 1999b:3).

In September 2000, about twelve Shell workers were kidnapped at Ogoda, Delta State, by aggrieved youths (The Guardian 2000b:64). As indicated earlier, the Ijaw wars have not been limited to oil-related issues alone. The wars being fought by the Ijaws against some of their neighbours have much to do with politics, land ownership and ethnic nationalism. In all of these wars, access to self-determination was crucial to their demands.

In 1997, when General Sani Abacha's military junta created more local government areas in the country, the Ijaws placed a paid advertisement in daily newspapers, in which they complained severely about the injustice they had suffered from the Olu of Warri (the traditional ruler of one of the cities in the Niger Delta) and the Itsekiris in general (The Guardian 1997:40-41). They narrated the various ways in which the Itsekiris had prevented them from having their own local government that would incorporate all Ijaws. Their grouses were born out of the spirited attempts by the Olu of Warri and the Itsekiris to relocate the headquarters of the newly-created Warri South Local Government from Ogbe-ijo (an Ijaw town) to an Itsekiri locality. Corroborating their suspicion, the headquarters were eventually relocated to Ogidigben, an Itshekiri town. This unstatesmanlike act (as the Ijaw saw it) by the then military governor of Delta state, Colonel John Dungs, was the last straw that broke the camel's back. Armed confrontation ensued between the Ijaws, (who were on the offensive), and the Itsekiris.

Many lives were lost and property worth several millions of Naira destroyed during the conflict. The feud between the two ethnic groups persists till today. At present, the Ijaws are still embroiled in armed confrontation with the Itsekiris over land ownership. Just recently, it was reported that some militant Ijaw youths struck at Ogbe-ijoh, the headquarters of the newly-created Warri South-West, and abducted the chairman, that is the executive head, of the local government (The Punch 2003:5). They carried out their mission by shooting sporadically to scare people away. As the war between the Ijaws and their neighbour still rages on, government is unrelenting in its efforts to bring sanity into the oil-rich region. Government troops have been deployed to the areas with sophisticated combat weapons. Since most of the fighting takes place on water, the navy has brought in sub-marine artilleries. However, all these have not achieved the desired result, namely, peace in the Delta region. The armed confrontations between government forces and Ijaw militant youths have rendered the Niger Delta a battle ground. Casualties are being recorded on both sides, and it seems as if government forces are not yet capable of overcoming the Ijaw military prowess. For instance, the dexterity with which the Ijaw fighters confront the navy and mount blockades on water against naval forces shows that they are die-hard warriors who have adequate and sophisticated arms at their disposal.

IV. CONCLUSION

The increasing spate of armed violence in the Niger Delta crisis and the continued militancy activities is a future mirror of disaster for Nigeria's peaceful atmosphere, political and economic settings because the oil conflicts has resulted into a major threat currently facing Nigeria in general. This prevailing situation of militant conflicts has been a serious security challenges in this area to the extent that the successive governments in Nigeria has always criminalized anymilitia uprising in the region.No doubt, the consequences of violent acts of the militants in the region under discourse have been so devastatingly considering the invaluable human and material resources that had been lost to the crisis coupled with further damage it had done on the environment. It has also aggravated political instability, complicated economic disorder and dented the image of the nation at the international community. The continued conflicts in the region which has been regarded as a threat includes hostage taking for ransom, human trafficking, electoral violence, political assassination and economic sabotage through vandalism of pipelines among others. The chaos and trauma created by militia conflicts has seen an increase in arms proliferation, banditry, and a general breakdown in social cohesiveness across the region hence, puts acute strain on traditional, economic and social systems, while the security situation in the region remained volatile, unstable and unpredicted.

Possible Solutions and Recommendations

Guns in the hands of militant youth will continue to exacerbate the problem until more basic solutions are found. In view of this development, some solutions can be suggested as policy options for policy makers and other stakeholders.

The recent national conference is a giant stride towards addressing the incessant violence in the region because all stakeholders in the polity came together and discussed the future of the Nigerian state. But it was limited in scope as it was masterminded by the state executive. Although both the majority and the minority put heads together to fashion out a workable machinery for restructuring the country in such a way that each section of the country would have its own fair share of available opportunities, it fell short of addressing the fundamental

problems of Nigerian federalism. The fundamental questions of Nigerian federalism still stand unresolved, and can only be addressed in a sovereign national conference. At present, Nigerian federalism is skewed, and it does not adequately cater for the interests of the minority. This question of federalism must be an integral part of the project to create a true democracy, good governance, an enhanced position of ethnic minorities and transparent fiscal control.

Government should devise a workable environmental policy that would regulate oil operations in the Niger Delta. The destruction of the ecosystem of the region by the activities of oil companies has for years remained an important issue in the Niger Delta question. Setting up environmental agencies is not enough. If government could enact laws that would protect the environment from being degraded the problem can be reduced. In addition, effective machinery should be put in place to ensure the strict enforcement of such laws. In the case of the MNOCs, they should be made to be responsible to the local people in their operations. Government should not compromise the welfare and survival of its citizens because of its profit-motivated partnership with the oil companies. A situation whereby government protects the oil companies against its own citizens, and oil companies cast themselves as neutral in the conflict between government and the people, does not help matters. Local people continue to associate oil companies with government, either in a good or a bad light. This is why it is necessary for the oil companies to review their relationship with government and be closer and accountable to the local oil-bearing communities.

Besides, adequate compensation should be paid to the (affected) local communities as a continuous exercise. However, compensation in this sense does not mean putting money into the pockets of the people. Recent events in the Niger Delta have shown that persons in leadership positions in many oil communities have compromised their struggle for selfish motives or monetary gains. Some elites and leaders in these communities have become compensation entrepreneurs, who devise different methods in claiming compensation or grants from government, oil companies and international relief agencies. At times, government and oil company officials collaborate with these greedy leaders in this 'compensation game'. The tragedy of this development is that monetary compensation collected in such a way only ends in certain private pockets excluding the majority of ordinary local citizens. Monetary compensation to individuals and middle men should be de-emphasized. Instead, government and the oil companies should embark on community development projects, which are agreed on by the local residents. Schools, scholarship schemes, hospitals, a good transportation system, electricity, gainful employment, good telecommunications, and a drinkable water supply should be adequately provided in the communities. This is the only way by which the ordinary people in the Niger Delta could benefit from compensation.

Furthermore, there should be a master development plan for the Niger Delta. Interestingly, government has taken a giant stride in this direction. When General Abdulsalam Abubakar took over the reins of power in 1998, he set up a 22-member committee headed by Major-General Oladayo Popoola. This committee was to appraise various recommendations made to the government on how to tackle the festering crisis in the Niger Delta and produce practical plans for their implementation (The Guardian 1999a:20). In its report, a total financial outlay of about fifteen billion Naira was to be devoted to the building of basic infrastructure such as marine transportation, telecommunications and electricity supply (The Guardian 1999a:20). Apart from this, the present democratic regime of President Olusegun Obasanjo has gone further in addressing the Niger Delta question. In 2000, the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) was set up to replace the Oil Minerals Producing Areas Development Commission (OMPADEC). In addition, the revenue derivation formula of the Niger Delta and other oil-producing areas outside the region has been increased to 13%. However, these measures have not gone far enough in dealing with the more fundamental demands for the control of oil resources by the oil minorities. At present, there is raging agitation in the Niger Delta for control of local resources. The agitators have posited that Nigeria is the only country in the world, which has so cruelly plundered its oil-producing districts without any policy of compensation and repatriation of profits (The Guardian 1999a:20). In view of these recent developments in the Niger Delta, government needs to appraise its policy in tackling the problems in the region. Dialogue should be embarked upon by both government and the oil communities in the Niger Delta. The present crisis in the region is partly being fuelled by the lingering militarist disposition on both sides. The Nigerian political life has been militarized for several years since independence, mostly by military rule. The frequent deployment of military forces to the Niger Delta to quell local riots in recent years has equally militarized local ethnic militia. Even, the present democratic government has continued in that destructive militarist path, as the recent invasion of the Niger Delta by military forces has shown. Therefore, in order to stem this tide of violence and armed confrontation in the region, government should systematically de-emphasise the use of maximum force, and engage the aggrieved communities in meaningful dialogue. However, this could only be achieved by tolerance from both sides.

There is also the serious question about the leadership in the Niger Delta struggle. As noted earlier, some leaders in the oil-bearing communities have compromised the interests of their own people in order to achieve selfish ends. The opportunism and greed of such leaders tend to destabilize resistance movements or weaken collective agitations. This factor was responsible for the destabilization of the Ogoni struggle. Ogoni leaders were essentially interested in personal power and money. As a matter of fact, some Niger Delta leaders, like some leaders at other levels of national life, are greedy and compromised. They find it easier to line their pockets with compensations from the oil companies than to fight a principled and courageous battle for repatriations that would make a real difference in the lives of their people. It is not surprising then that youths in several communities have come out publicly to denounce their leaders, saying that they represent themselves, not the people. Therefore, in order to appear realistic, determined and resolute in their struggle, the people of the Niger Delta should lay their trust in the hands of leaders of proven integrity and good records.

Another part of the conflict in the Niger Delta has to do with the creation of viable local political entities. Three main ethnic groups in the region – the Ijaw, the Urhobo and the Itsekiri – are engaged in nearly constant armed confrontations with one another over land ownership and the creation of local government. Therefore, government should ensure that separate local governments are created to reflect the composition and origins of these warring ethnic groups in order to stem the tide of politically motivated conflicts in these areas.

Finally, the rate at which small arms flow into the country is alarming. This increasing spate of illegal trafficking in arms not only suggests that the borders are porous, but also portends a great danger to the corporate existence of the nation in future. Government should take up this issue as a matter of national concern. It should ensure that the borders, both on land and sea, are effectively monitored and well policed. All loopholes that may favour illegal trafficking in arms should be plugged.

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