

Natural Resource Curse Theory and Crude Oil Exploration in the Niger Delta: A Contemporary Analysis

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Abstract: *This study attempts to situate the contemporary Niger Delta crises and its socioeconomic problems which lead to the underdevelopment status in the region, to the exploration of crude oil deposits, using the Resource Curse theory as a focus. The study argued that the discovery of oil and its exploration in large quantity over the years has generated so many conflicts than it has brought peace and harmonious relations among the host communities, the multinational corporations (MNCs) and the Government; and has generated intra and inter-communal crisis as well. The study questions these social realities and relates same to the activities of the Nigerian government and its practice of quasi-federalism in the country since independence. The study adopts the historical and analytical design as its methodological component. This means that relevant data for the study were derived from secondary sources via textbooks, journal articles, official documents, and internet sources. Most importantly, the study proffers useful recommendations which will be of benefit to the Federal Government, the host crude oil producing communities and the MNCs. The study also suggests a radical approach to be adopted by the government, to eliminate the underdevelopment status of the country through proactive measures such as a well planned and coordinated program for infrastructural development across the regions of the country.*

Keywords: *Resource Curse, Dutch Disease, Natural Resources, Oil Exploration, Niger Delta, Nigeria, Conflict, Economic Development, Underdevelopment.*

I. INTRODUCTION

The discovery of crude oil deposits in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria has been considered in some quarters by scholars to be a curse. The discovery, in huge and commercial quantities, first made by the Shell British Petroleum in the 1956 in Oloibiri, present day Bayelsa State, soon led to further discoveries of other oil wells in neighbouring towns and cities of the Niger Delta region. However, going by the scores of untoward events surrounding the exploration of crude oil in the region in the last sixty years, and counting, many now believe that the discovery is neither a blessing to the region nor to the country at large. In this respect, Tumbo (2011) argued that Nigeria's Niger Delta region was the source of early contact between the country and European mercantilist traders in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries; a relationship which later led to the establishment of local ports by the European traders, including the trading ports in Forcados, Koko, Burutu, Port-Harcourt and Calabar which were very busy prior to Nigerian independence in 1960. In spite of this, the region of the Niger Delta, from independence up to the present time, has been grossly marginalized in the sharing of what, in Nigerian local parlance today, is regarded as the *national cake*. The expression signifies partaking in the gains of the surpluses from oil revenues from the region. However, the attention of the central government has since shifted to other areas outside the region since independence, the discovery of crude oil and its exploration in commercial quantities since 1958 has, more than ever before, dragged the Niger Delta region backwards, and the attention hitherto enjoyed by the region in the period of its direct trade with Europeans has grossly diminished compared to the present. Rather than enjoy the tremendous benefits of the natural oil rich deposits and the continuous exploration of the resource endowment in the region, on the contrary, the region continues to experience intractable environmental degradation and pollution occasioned by neglect from the Federal Government and the multinational corporations. This has further compounded the problems of poverty; marginalization and unemployment in the region (see Tumbo, 2011).

Before the discovery of crude oil in the region, the Niger Delta was blessed with a rich agricultural environment which was highly profitable for local extensive farming practices like fishing and crop production. But the discovery and subsequent exploration of crude oil in the region did change the narratives and took a turn for the worse. While agricultural processes reduced to a more perturbing situation, oil exploration led to the pollution of rich rivers and clean water sources as fertile soils hitherto used for cultivation of crops were

depleted by crude oil exploration in the region. Sad and unfortunate as the situation is to date, the trajectory “story of crude oil exploration in ... [the] Niger Delta ... is one of a reckless and persistent, yet seemingly deliberate decimation of crops, field animals and aquatic population, as well as forests, mangroves and rivers by the oil companies who pollute the land, water and air with crude oil pipe blowouts, spillages and decades of continuous gas-flaring. The companies enjoy the protection of the ... [government] which, in its own antics to remain in power, causes, in addition to the environmental problems, socio-political and economic woes in the land” (Adagbonyin and Ativie, 2011: 226), in the bid to control the oil wealth. Dode (2012: 239) corroborated this when he argued that the problem of the people of the region was complicated by a seemingly unending oil spillage, brought about by damaged oil pipelines leading to the eventual disappearance of aquatic and marine life which was the major source of income of the indigenous peoples in the region. Also of immense concern in the region is the fact of farmers’ diversion of interests from local agricultural farming to taking up of the supposed more lucrative, quick and better money-yielding white collar jobs offered by the oil exploring and producing companies. Although it is alleged that the white collar jobs, because of their juicy nature, are hardly sufficient to go round the indigenous peoples of the region who, more often, are qualified for employment, it is ironical, however, that the jobs are more than sufficient to go round expatriates and contracting firms owned by foreigners. Tumbo (2011) argued that:

Beneath the buildings, farms, rivers, streams, and ponds in the Niger Delta are locations of one of the world’s largest oil and gas deposits, and that which limited the availability of fertile lands for crop farming and fishing which ... [are] the major occupation of the people in the region. In other words, the important mineral that was supposed to provide corporate livelihood to the people has ironically continued to cause violence, conflict, distrust and underdevelopment in the region, and continues to threaten the economic and political virtues of the people (Tumbo, 2011: 51).

The above, representing the view of many in and around the country and beyond, has given vent to the belief that the region of Nigeria’s Niger Delta suffers from the notion of the **resource curse**, also known as **resource trap** or **the Dutch disease affliction**.

Akpotor et al. (2012) reiterated this stand point when they argued that the overarching problem of oil exploration manifests in the ecological devastation and disequilibrium of the host community; a consequence of the destructive activities of the oil companies through pollutions arising from gas flaring and oil spillage, and the resultant phenomena such as loss of farmlands and rivers, the onset acid rain and contaminated air, as well as the spiritual desecration and mindless decimation of the flora and fauna, leading to a general exploitation in the region. Asika (2012) argues that the callous and unjust situation in Nigeria’s Niger Delta has triggered off a series of violence, civil unrest, protests, guerrilla wars and other forms of revolution, and has also claimed the lives of some prominent indigenes of the region such as the extrajudicial execution of the *Ogoni Nine* which involved Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight others. Furthermore, he stated that the rich mineral deposit in the region, which is considered as a resource for the Federal Government of Nigeria, has not helped the country to sustain maximum peace and security. This, he said, is because many lives have been lost, and on their blood, the economy has failed to boom in spite of the huge oil revenue accruals. He reiterated this stand point when he opined that the Niger Delta has, unfortunately, enjoyed an unenviable reputation of being the poorest region in the country, the most neglected and the most ramshackled and decrepit area of the country despite the fact that it generates the highest proportion of the wealth for the county. Niger Delta rivers, farmlands and environment are in serious ruin because of the activities of the oil rich multinational companies in the region (see Asika, 2012: 126). This precarious and perturbing situation was what Darah (2010) saw as the root cause of what has bred the several revolutionary groups, activists or the emergent militant groups who are hell bent in defending and upholding the sanctity of the people of the region and their environment. Ohwofasa et al. (2012: 241) argued that though the federal government has established several agencies including the Niger Delta Basin Development Authority (NDBDA) and the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC), formerly the Oil Mineral Producing Areas Development Commission (OMPADEC) in 1992, to address the problems of poverty, conflict and underdevelopment in the region, the government is yet to fully address her stated goals in these bodies because of corruption, mismanagement and lack of accountability by government and agency officials. Akpotor (2016) argued that in spite the fact that crude oil accounts for 90% of the country’s exports, 70% of the federal revenue and 15% of the country’s GDP, the commodity seems to be a *curse and a wasting asset* to the country. In a related manner, Duruji and Dibia (2017), while citing Tamuno (2011), argued that despite the region’s position as the host to oil companies and oil deposits as a source of the nation’s revenue for export, as little an amount of 13% derivation is shared to the oil producing Niger Delta states, a situation which the people receive with discontent and maximum aggression in the form of militancy, pipeline vandalization, kidnapping of foreign expatriates for ransoms and other forms of anti-social vices. Since the 13% derivation is not enough to develop the area, the people of the region see it as unjust treatment from the Federal Government. The

consequence of this has been the occasional demand for resource control; fiscal federalism and self-determination (see Duruji & Dibia, 2017: 61). It is in the light of these problems that this study situates the *natural curse or resource trap* to the problem of Niger Delta development and to Nigeria's backwardness in spite of the enormous revenues that accrues from crude oil sales for the country.

1.2 Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of this study is to examine the link between the conflict of underdevelopment and the discovery and exploration of crude oil in Nigeria, a situation which scholars and political analysts describe as **a curse rather than a blessing** to the people. However, the specific objectives of research are to:

- i. Ascertain if the discovery of crude oil deposits in the Niger Delta areas of Nigeria is a curse or a blessing to the region in particular and to the country in general, and
- ii. Suggest ways by which a balance is created between oil exploration and economic development to achieve sustained peace and security in the Niger Delta in particular and, Nigeria in general.

1.3 Research Questions

The following questions are raised to guide this study:

- (i) Is the discovery of crude oil and its exploration in the Niger Delta a curse or a blessing to the people of the region and the country as a whole?
- (ii) What are the possible solutions to Nigeria's Niger Delta conflict and the problems of underdevelopment brought about by the discovery of crude oil in commercial quantities the region?

1.4 Research Method

The study adopted the historical research method to view the link between the discovery and subsequent exploration of oil and gas in commercial quantities in the region. This method helps to examine the conflict situation in the Niger Delta region and in the country at large. It helps to ascertain if the oil-find in the region is a curse or a blessing. This presupposes that relevant data for the study were derived from existing literature via textbooks, journal articles, official documents and Internet materials.

1.5 The Resource Curse Theory: Empirical and Theoretical Review

To justify the facts of this study, it is necessary for us to provide the empirical and theoretical reviews of the *Resource Curse theory* which was originally coined by Richard Auty (1993). Auty studied economics and geography, and he investigated the reasons why some resource-rich countries underperform and remain undeveloped in spite of the abundance of natural resources in the country as in the case of Nigeria. In other words, Auty defined the term *natural resource curse* as the perverse effects of a country's natural resource wealth on the country's economic, social, or political well-being (see Rose, 2014 Cited in Mehrdad, 2017: 2).

Azarhoushang and Rukavina (2014), and Mellissa (2017), in their respective studies of the *resource curse theory*, lumped the term with the *Dutch Disease*, an idiom used in association with a 1960 crisis in Netherlands after the discovery of natural gas in the North Sea region of the country. They saw the phrase as the appropriate word to describe what happens when an event, like a commodity-boom, makes a country's currency more expensive and its other goods less competitive. Akpotor (2016) stated that the *Dutch Disease or Resource Curse theory* is used to examine the negative effects that rich natural resources bring upon the economic growth of a resource rich country. To him, it is paradoxical for countries with the abundance of non-renewable natural resources to experience stagnant economic growth and contraction often associated with conflicts or crises of marginalization of the host community. For Duruji and Dibia (2017: 63), *Resource curse* also known as the *Paradox of Plenty* describes the failure of many natural resource-rich nations to benefit fully from the wealth of their rich natural endowment following the inability of their governments to respond favorably and effectively to public welfares and needs. In a more elaborate manner, Azarhoushang and Rukavina (2014) argued that rich natural resources such as oil deposits and a significant others which are located in abundance in some countries have become a trap or a curse rather than being a blessing to the countries. The reason can be traced to the way and manner in which the resources are managed right from the exploration stage by the multinational companies, through to the attitude of the home governments of the countries in which the resources are located, made worse by the activities of the local elite class as influenced by foreign and external forces of the developed nations of the world. According to Azarhoushang and Rukavina, the actions of these individuals and institutions have, in most cases, resulted into regular weak economic performance, the creation of long-lasting ineffective institutions, socioeconomic stagnancy and political backwardness, they argued. Venables (2016) argued that most of the oil rich nations, rather than cultivate the culture of diversifying their economic system to a macro-economic based system, they embrace a mono-economic policy which has resulted into over reliance of crude oil exports which is detrimental to the country's economic growth as evident in Nigeria.

Indisputably, the discovery of natural resources, particularly crude oil deposits, has made countries pay less attention to other sectors of their economies. For instance, agriculture, which was the mainstay of the Nigerian economy before the discovery of oil in commercial quantities in the country, has attracted little

attention from the previous administrations in Nigeria until as recent as the last quarter of 2019 when the Buhari-led government adopted a protectionist policy which encouraged the cultivation of farm produce and did discourage excessive imports such as rice importation and a significant other imports into the country. Stewart (2012) argued that among the many frustrations in developing countries, like Nigeria, none looms larger than the resource curse which is a deliberate attempt by the multinationals and their local allies to undermine the interest of the people for selfish gains. However, despite the abundance of natural resources, much of poverty, inequality, deprivation, as well as corruption still prevail in some of the resource rich nations of the world. Rather than contributing to economic freedom, broadly shared growth, and social peace, rich deposits of oil and minerals have brought tyranny, misery, and insecurity to the nations concerned. Stewart (2012), Akpotor (2016) and a significant others, have had to argue that the nations afflicted by the curse on crude oil do find it very difficult, indeed, to escape from the circle of the resource curse or disease. This is evident in the case of Nigeria, and more particularly, in the case of the region of the Niger Delta which suffers immeasurably from laying the golden egg far more than it gains from being itself the golden goose. In other words, the Niger Delta region suffers from exploration and exploitation despite the fact that crude oil is extracted from the region; and, in the case of Nigeria, the soul of the country, till date, remains anaemic in spite of the fact that crude oil, for decades, has had to account for over 90% of the country's exports!

II. CONTEMPORARY NIGER DELTA AND RESOURCE CURSE CONFLICT

The Nigeria's Niger Delta, like other delta regions of the world, such as the Amazon in Brazil, Orinoco in Venezuela, Mississippi in the United States of America and the Mahakarn in Indonesia, is famous for its abundance natural oil and gas resources, and is ranked the sixth largest exporter of crude oil in the world. Since the pre-colonial days, this region has been playing crucial roles in the Nigerian economy. In the heyday of European adventurism into the coast of West Africa, the Niger Delta rivers and ports provided foreigners, especially British intruders, access to palm produce, timber, rubber, groundnut and cotton from the distant northern region of the country (Agbagbedia, 2012). The Niger Delta area has been strategic to the country economically and politically, both in the colonial and post-colonial eras. Yet, this bulk advantage has not in any way been of benefit whatsoever to the region either economically or even politically. Up to this moment, the Niger Delta region is economically backward, politically marginalized and highly underdeveloped. Scholars and political analysts have had to argue that the predicaments of the region increased with the discovery and exploration of crude oil resources which is the country's main source of revenue over the years. Environmental degradation through oil exploration, exploitation, pollution and spillage, as well as poverty, unemployment, violence and social miscreants have continued to be the culture and norm since the discovery of crude oil in commercial quantities in the region (cf. Adagbonyin and Ativie, 2011). Furthermore, Dode (2012: 236) argued that the expectations of the people of the oil rich Niger Delta was very high after oil was first discovered at Oloibiri in 1956, and later, in larger quantities in 1958. In the thinking of the people of the Niger Delta at that time, the foreign exchange to be earned from the export of the *black gold* (or the petro-dollar earnings) would change their lives for the better, and they had, therefore, to live in El Dorado. Unfortunately, the reverse has been the case. In the thoughts of Agbagbedia (2012), the marginalization of the Niger Delta, coupled with its environmental degradation and impoverishments have led to the increasing waves of violence in the region. The Shell Petroleum Development Corporation, Chevron Corporation (formally Texaco Oil), ExxonMobil Corporation, Total Oil (later TotalFina, and TotalFinaElf) and Agip Oil Company, etc.; these MNCs, in joint ventures with the Federal Government of Nigeria, at points in time, damaged the environment of the Niger Delta in the last several decades in which they were involved in the exploration and production of crude oil, and they have brought about poverty and disease in the region. Rather than being a blessing to the people who had lived on a promise of utopia, oil-find in the region became a curse to them. The problem is further espoused in frequent hostage-taking, kidnapping, militancy and other criminal vices which have since become the last resort to arrogance displayed towards the Federal Government for being nonplussed over the exploitation and poverty in the region; an act, exhibited by a select aggrieved members of the host communities over foreigners and other law abiding people living and working in the oil producing areas. Akpotor (2016: 17) argued that the abundance of oil in the country has turned the leaders into *gluttonous beggars* who share the *national cake*, the consequence of which has brought impoverishment and untold hardship to the people living in oil rich communities of the Niger Delta. This situation, he argued, is what the resource curse theory perceives as a curse to the people and definitely not a blessing. In affirmative reaction to the situation, Tumbo (2011) noted that the oil prospecting companies operating in the region inherited the capitalist system of the colonialist government which also met their business interests. Shell British Petroleum of old, a subsidiary of the Royal Dutch Shell Group, which began full exploration and production of oil in Nigeria in 1948 after her initial contact with the country in 1937, took the lead in the legacy of becoming one of the corporations which, indirectly, helped to establish a colonial administration in Nigeria in her dealings with the people. In addition, the enactment of the 1914 Act by the British colonial government, which saw to the amalgamation of Nigeria, has not help the

country in any manner. The consequence of this development is that Shell BP became the only oil company allowed to explore crude oil in the country until the emergence of other oil companies in later years.

After the initial successful drills of oil in Oloibiri in 1958, the story of the Niger Delta region began to change to a pathetic one. With further discovery and drill of crude oil in several offshore fields such as in Okon, in Western Niger Delta by Chevron Nigeria Limited; and the emergence of the Nigerian AGIP Oil Company based in Brass and Omoku in Rivers state as well as in Forcados, and in Kwale, both in Delta State, and other major oil companies that spread across the Niger Delta region, there began to emerge problems for the region and the nation in entirety as governments and stake holders in the business became fixated to the huge benefits that accrued from oil exploration and production while they lost the focus for governance. The recent emergence and development of oil exploration companies which are indigenous to Nigeria, in league with their foreign partners, have inherited the same European capitalist, imperialist and hegemonic traditions of not caring to give back to the society from where they do business and make profits. Be that as it may, successive governments in Nigeria seem to encourage this lackadaisical approach to caring for people in the region as each new government tows the line of the previous administration before it.

With these negative developments, the region has had to become the center of confrontation between the host communities and the Federal Government on the one hand, and the host communities, the oil companies and government security agencies, on the other hand. In addition to this situation, the host state government to the oil communities, in alliance with the oil companies, orchestrates inter- and intra-communal conflicts among the various oil producing communities within its jurisdiction in order to establish a divide and rule system among the ranks of the agitators for land use and/or land despoliation compensation. The aim is to sustain an overbearing control of the resources of the people in the minority communities and, thereby avoid carrying out its own corporate social responsibility to the host oil producing communities. Therefore, the pockets of crises in the entire region is further strengthened by the criminal marginalization, mistreatment and neglect of the people by the government and the oil producing corporations in the areas of development and empowerment despite the huge and enormous wealth realized from the region's oil deposits and hence, instituting a resource curse.

Although Nigeria is a major exporter of crude oil, yet the country suffers more in terms of economic and infrastructural development. The nation experiences lack of performance in virtually all sectors of its economy, more sadly in the agricultural and manufacturing sectors; while its unemployment rate is all time high. This implies that the diagnosis of the *Dutch Disease* which is the major trade and industry ailment that frustrates economic development becomes prevalent in the country. In short, the country has been afflicted by *Dutch disease* which has no less enthroned a destabilized economic regime and impedes economic development in the country since the decades of oil exploration in the Niger Delta region (see Duruji & Dibia, 2017: 63). Indisputably, findings revealed that the country, for a long time, has been infected by Dutch disease or resource curse, and may, for a long period of time, continue to suffer from this affliction if radical or proactive measures are not taken by the government at the federal, state and local levels of administration. At the moment, the uncertainty and seeming inability of governments and the multinational oil companies in Nigeria to curb this menace of resource curse or trap, is the problem which should be tackled to revamp the political economy of the Niger Delta region and those of Nigeria alike, and hence, the recommendations of this study.

III. RECOMMENDATIONS

To find a long lasting solution to the Niger Delta regional issues and the country's problems at large, there should be a synergy between and among the government, the multinational oil companies operating in the Niger Delta region and the host oil communities. In other words, the Federal Government should collaborate with the oil companies operating in the country to ensure the following:

- i. That there is a well planned and coordinated program for socio-infrastructure development across the region. This will enable the government to provide the needed social infrastructures such as schools, health care facilities, public water supply facilities, bridges and good road networks across the region. Providing employment opportunities for the youths and qualified people of the region is also necessary. This will address some of the security challenges in the region.
- ii. Ensure that the Federal Government, rather than conniving with the oil companies operating in the country to exploit the people of the region, should provide the grounds for both the oil companies and the host oil communities to cooperate with each other and ensure compliance of the MOUs signed by the oil companies and the host communities. This, no doubt, will encourage the oil companies to perform and keep up with their corporate social responsibilities to the people. When this is carried out satisfactorily, there may no longer be any need for conflict between the oil companies and the host communities on the one hand, and the host communities and governments in Nigeria, on the other hand.
- iii. Ensure that the amnesty program initiated by late President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua and inherited by the succeeding administrations should be sustained. The program should be effectively implemented to avoid the resurgence of militancy and other forms of conflict between erstwhile oil community militant

- leaders and the Federal Government. This will no doubt promote social cohesion and understanding between the erstwhile combatant leaders, their ex-members and the Federal Government.
- iv. Ensure that government and the oil companies guarantee the indigenes that they are a part of the business of crude oil exploration and production in the communities. If the indigenes are partners in their own affairs and in the control of their resources, the vexed issue of regular vandalization of oil pipelines and other facilities of the oil exploration companies will reduce to the barest minimum.
 - v. Ensure that there is equitable sharing of revenue from the sales of crude oil, particularly by the Federal Government. In addition, the Federal Government's 13% derivation principle in the revenue sharing formula from the federation account which is already in place for the Niger Delta oil producing states should be increased above this level. This will definitely increase execution of development projects in the region and enable the regional or state governments to have sufficient funds, to accommodate eligible and qualified indigenes into the civil services in their respective states. If this is achieved, it may reduce anti-social vices among the youths in the Niger Delta region. Militancy and piracy will be checked in the region in particular and in Nigeria in general.
 - vi. Since the government and the oil producing companies operating in the region of Niger Delta do not have sufficient space to accommodate the teeming population in the region, there should be Niger Delta Development Bank which is empowered to give out short and long term loans to the indigenes in all the states which constitute the Niger Delta, to invest in other sectors of the economy. Areas of emphasis should be rural crop farming, fishing, as well as small and medium scale entrepreneurships.
 - vii. Ensure that there is no oil spillage and other forms of hazards. However, in the event of an accident, they must ensure that adequate and prompt clean-up exercises and proper compensations are made to the affected communities. This should not in any way be politicized.
 - viii. Job opportunities after tertiary education should be made available to graduates, to compliment the laudable amnesty program which is running in Nigerian universities at the moment. That is, successful graduate beneficiaries of the Federal Government's amnesty program should be provided with paid employments after school to avoid such graduates returning to the Niger Delta creeks which serve as base areas for community warfare over oil exploration marginalization and anti-social vices against the Federal Government.
 - ix. Also, as an alternative to these recommendations, constitutional amendments, including the political restructuring of the system of federalism in Nigeria, which some leading agitators have since been mooting for over several years, should be considered by the Federal Government. In other words, there should be political restructuring to ensure the practice of true federalism so that equity and justice would prevail in Nigeria as a whole. Therefore, to assure the survival of the entity called Nigeria, the issue of resource control by the federating states/regions in the country should be seriously re-considered by the Federal Government as a matter of urgency.

IV. SUMMARY/CONCLUSION

From the review above, it is evident that most of the sociopolitical and socioeconomic conflicts in the history of Nigeria can be traced to the abundance and exploration of the rich oil and gas resource endowments in the Niger Delta region of the country. Nigeria, no doubt, has recorded a lot of conflicts that were associated to the distribution of oil wealth and its control over the years. The country's civil war of 1960-1970 was attributed to the greed, desperation and quest of a section of the elite to seize and hold on to federal power, and to get a larger chunk of the *national cake*. This narrowed down, for instance, to the Ogoni crisis which led to the illogical and extrajudicial execution of Ken Saro Wiwa, a writer and environmentalist, and eight others who hailed from the oil rich Niger Delta.

Also worthy of mention are the incidences of pipeline vandalization and the emergence of militant groups armed with modern sophisticated weapons, fighting for the stoppage of exploitation in the region and its development. Prominent among the militant groups over time are the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger-Delta (MEND), led by Gideon Okah and Ekpomupolo Government alias "Tompolo"; the Niger-Delta Volunteer Force (NDVF), led by Asari Dokubo; the Guard Brigade Movement for the Survival of the Ijaws in the Niger-Delta (MOSIND); and in recent years, there appeared the Niger Delta Avengers (NDV) and other affiliate groups. Of interest are the following reasons adduced for the continued escalation of conflicts in the Niger Delta. These include:

- i. The direct and unsubstantiated political marginalization and near total exclusion of the people from the host communities of the oil rich region to rise to, and attain, higher political offices at the three tiers of governance in the country by successive administrations since independence.
- ii. The seeming inability of the Nigerian governments, over time, to eliminate the *divide and rule* policy adopted by the oil companies operating in the region in dealing with the peoples of the host communities. And what is more? It is often disheartening to hear government's distorted views and its

- tenuous responses to conflicts, when they arise, between the multinational oil companies and the host communities. This is because the government officials are hardly from the region where oil is taken while the government itself makes huge and enormous fortunes from the oil companies.
- iii. Refusal to honor the Memoranda of Understanding (MOU) signed between the host communities and the oil companies to adequately compensate the oil communities has also been identified as a problem. Rather than create palliatives and lasting measures to the agitations of the people of the region, governments neglect the people, and they are further marginalized and intimidated with the force of the military when they show remonstrations over their poor conditions of living, be it even of peaceful protests.
 - iv. The high rate of poverty, hunger, starvation, unemployment, and high mortality rate also escalate conflict scenarios in the region. The elite in the country also complicate the problems in the region and in the country in general by their monopoly of governance. Through privatization of public corporations, the Nigerian elite, especially from the other regions of the country, control the major means of production and distribution of goods and services for selfish reasons. It can be argued that one major obstacle to the country's economic growth and infrastructural development is the country rulers' lack in moral compass to manage state resources, as well as the lack of knowledge and critical understanding of the management of state institutions and firms which were tactically acquired by the same elite and their foreign collaborators.

From the foregoing, it is obvious that the country has always possessed all it requires to transform its economy and social infrastructure into one of the leading economies and industrialized nations of the world. However, the selfish desires of the leaders of the country and the elite class across the nation has, in no small measure, hindered the country's socio-economic and political growth and progress, and hence, the natural resource curse, resource trap or Dutch disease coinage.

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