

Minority Revolts and Uprising in the Niger Delta

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Abstract

The study examined the origin of minority revolts and uprising in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria in order to ascertain the factors responsible and the actors involved. The study observed that the foundation for revolts and uprising in the Niger Delta region were laid by the colonial masters during the pre-colonial and colonial era. The study relied on secondary sources of data and the basic human needs theory as its theoretical framework. The data obtained were analysed qualitatively. Findings from the study revealed that unequal level of trade, alienation, marginalization of the aborigines etc. accounts for minority revolts and uprising in Nigeria's oil-rich Niger Delta region. However, sustainable peace and development could return to the Niger Delta if conscious effort is made to review all existing development policies and programmes in the regions with a view to charting a new course for the people of the region. Policies and laws that will aid and accelerate development in the Niger Delta should also be given accelerated hearing and treated as an issue of national importance

Keywords: *Minority revolts, Uprising, Niger Delta Region, Policies and programmes.*

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Background to the Study

It is on record that conflicts such as the invasion of the Benin Empire, the Akassa raid etc. took place during the pre-colonial and colonial era hence, indicating that uprising and revolts in the Niger Delta has a long history. During the period, economic control of the resources in the area was a major source of disagreement. The situation continued even after independence in 1960 with the multinational oil companies dominating the oil and gas sector in Nigeria. Refusal to adhere to the demand of groups and organizations in the Niger Delta no doubt led to increased distrust between the Niger Delta people, the oil companies and the federal government thus, leading to constant protests and demonstrations including destruction of properties and oil installation facilities in the Niger Delta region. Minority revolts and uprising in the Niger Delta took a new dimension from 1999 – 2006 when arms struggle was introduced as part of the struggle in 1999 via the famous Kaiama Declaration. The consequent militarization of the Niger Delta further led to the proliferation of militant groups and camps across the Niger Delta. The nature of the Niger Delta conflict and the factors responsible for minority revolts and uprising in the oil-rich region forms the major thrust of this paper.

Theoretical and Conceptual Analysis

In every investigation, theory and methodology play a major role in driving the process of any research to its logical conclusion. Thus, the need for an analytical framework in an investigation was re-enforced by Lieber (1992) who contents that behind every concept or an analysis, there is a theory or view point, which make it possible for the presentation and interpretation of facts. Clearly therefore, for there to be reliability in an investigation, there is a need for scholars and researchers to come out with models, or the formulation of theories, for empirical theory seeks to create knowledge that is impersonal, retraceable and cumulative (Lieber, 1992, 12).

It is in the light of this that this study adopted the basic human needs theory in order to examine the subject-matter. Basic human needs scholars argued that certain basic human needs are fundamental and essential to the wellbeing of the individual and when these needs are not available, the human mind and body will not be at peace. The basic human needs theory posits that the absence of basic human needs such as shelter, water, food clothing, medical etc. can influence the conduct, attitude and character of the deprived individual towards crime and anti-social behaviour which can affect the society negatively. Burton (1997) also argued that when people are deprived or excluded from the decision making process in any society, unending conflict will be the order of the day hence, he cautioned that the basic and essential needs of individuals be identified and given top priority in the decision making process. According to Burton (1997) individuals are prepared to go to any height to defy governments, institutions and authorities in order to actualize their needs. The need for security, identity, recognition and self-actualization are crucial to the understanding of destructive social conflicts hence, failure by states and societies to recognise and satisfy such needs account for most community based conflicts in Africa today. This theory is relevant to the study because prolonged neglect and alienation of the people by the oil multinational companies and the federal government accounts for the conflict and revolts in the Niger Delta.

Policy measures that should address the basic needs of the people have also failed to address the fundamental problems facing the people. The basic human needs theory as applied in this study clearly argued that understanding the basic needs and real causes of any conflict helps the state and the society to address or minimise such conflict with ease hence, it is imperative for conflict scholars to examine the fundamental drives of any conflict before making efforts to resolve them. Proponents of the basic human needs theory include: Burton (1997), Maslow (1943), Galtung (1969) and Six (1990).

Conceptual Analysis

This section of the study examined the views and opinions of scholars and researchers on the subject-matter. Nigeria's Niger Delta crisis can be linked to the pre-colonial and colonial era when legitimate trade replaced slave trade. It will be recalled that the 1884/1885 Berlin Conference which partitioned and bastardized African boundaries and territories in favour of colonial interest led to the influx of British Naval gun boats and merchants into the pre-colonial marginalization through trade and missionary activities and the signing of treaties which in turn compelled Niger Delta chiefs to transfer trade and the resources in the hinterland to the British colonial masters/agents. Failure or refusal to sign trade treaties led to the annexation of Lagos in 1861, dethronement and imposition of warrant chiefs in different part of the Niger Delta as well as other parts of the nation (Preboye, 2005, 116). From when oil was discovered in 1956 at Oloibiri community in Ogbia local government area of Bayelsa state, the level of alienation of the Niger Delta people and other minorities in Nigeria became intensified and more sophisticated. IKporukpo (2011) captured the plight of the Niger Delta people when he stated thus:

The Ogoni are embattled and imperilled since oil was discovered in the area in 1958, they have been the victims of deadly ecological war in which no blood is spilled, no bones are broken and no one is maimed. But people die all the time. Men, women and children are at risk, plant, wildlife and fish are destroyed, the air and water are poisoned and finally the land dies. Today, Ogoni has been reduced to a waste land (cited in Sarowiwa 1995, 131).

While explaining the reasons for continuous agitation and protests in the Niger Delta Etekte (2007) argued that certain policies of the Nigerian government has been a calculated attempt to perpetually undermine the Niger Delta and other minorities in Nigeria. According to him, even when federal development agencies and boards are set up for the Niger Delta, loyalists for destabilization (non-Niger Deltans) are appointed at the management level. He argued further that constituting development agencies/boards with members from non-oil producing communities/states as members was detrimental as such members or group will always work against the interest of the Niger Delta region and people. This development is no doubt responsible for the in-fighting and frequent dissolution of boards like the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC). On the need to review and re-examine the laws and policies that constitute hindrance to minority ethnic groups in Nigeria, Prince Tony Momoh, stated that the Petroleum Industry Bill (PIB) and the Land Use Act will make it difficult for the Niger Delta people to manage their resources. In a publication captioned "No justice no peace in the Niger Delta" published in the Newswatch Magazine of August 4th 2008, Prince Tony

Momoh proposed that laws that denied the general population of the control of their resources ought to be investigated or revoked in order to reduce the hardship faced by the Niger Delta people. Arugu (2013) however contended that multinational oil companies have contributed to the growth and development of less developed countries but that their unethical practices designed for exploitation and profit maximization have also injured the economy of developing countries. Arugu (2013) listed the following as unethical practices carried out by multinational oil companies against their host communities: Gas flaring, environmental pollution, refusal to transfer technology/expertise, recapitalization through over invoicing, under invoicing, tax evasion and intrusion and interference in local politics etc.

Analysis Showing the Reasons for Minority Revolts and Uprising in the Niger Delta

In spite of international and local legislations on gas flaring, multinational oil companies in Nigeria have failed to adhere to laid down rules and regulations on gas flaring hence, life expectancy and fertility is slow in the Niger Delta region. The data on gas flaring below clearly shows that the activities of multinational oil companies have further impoverished the people of Niger Delta who are often under compensated whenever oil spills and pollution occur in the region.

Table 1: Flaring of Natural Gas in Major Oil Producing Countries (% of Gross Production in 1991)

Country	% Flared
USA	0.6
Holland	0.0
Britain	4.3
Ex-USSR**	1.5
Mexico	5.1
OPEC Countries	
Nigeria	76.0
Libya	21.0
Saudi Arabia	20.0
Iran	19.0
Algeria	4.0
OPEC TOTAL	18.0
World Total	4.8

Source: Adapted from Defining an Environmental Development Strategy for the Niger Delta (vo. 1) World Bank Report, 1995:59).

Table 2: Perceived causes of oil spills in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria

Sample Location	Sample Size	Percentage Response			
		No. of Spills	Oil companies carelessness	Sabotage	Both
Ogboloma (Elelebou)	30	0.0	86.7	3.3	10.0
Oporoma	30	0.0	76.7	0.0	23.0
Okwuzi	30	3.3	93.3	0.0	3.3
Afam-Ukwu	31	0.0	100.0	0.0	0.0
Obri kom	34	0.0	91.2	2.9	5.9
Aggregate for East	155	0.6	89.7	1.3	8.4
Afiesere	40	2.5	35.0	7.5	55.0
Olomoro	38	0.0	36.8	13.2	50.0
Oweh	42	0.0	19.0	0.0	81.0
Ozoro	41	0.0	26.8	14.6	58.5
Uzere	45	0.0	60.0	11.1	28.9
Aggregate for West	206	0.5	35.9	9.2	54.4
All locations	361	0.6	59.0	5.8	34.6

Source: Ikporukpo (1995, 28)

The exploitation of mineral resources in the Niger Delta region coupled with under assessment and under payment of compensation benefits by multinational oil companies and their Nigerian collaborators no doubt contributed to high level of poverty in the Niger Delta as reflected in the table below.

Table 3: The Niger Delta human poverty index 2005

S/N	State	Probability Birth of Not Surviving to age 40	Adult Literacy Rate	Un-weighted Average	HP I – 1
1	Abia	26	26	34	29.169
2	Akwa Ibom	27	28	35.5	30.649
3	Bayelsa	30	31	39	33.826
4	Cross River	26	28	33	29.3
5	Delta	20	18	27	22.355
6	Edo	22	18	28	23.399
7	Imo	25	29	32	28.949
8	Ondo	30	31	42.5	35.442
9	Rivers	24	24	30.5	26.53
10	Niger Delta	25.556	25.889	33.4	28.847

Source: Vanguard, August 26, 2007: 4 oil exploration actions and their impact on the Niger Delta environment

The data on table 4 below also shows that minority revolts and militia uprising in the Niger Delta occur frequently before the proclamation of the presidential amnesty policy by the federal government of Nigeria in June 2009.

Table 4: List of Militant Camps and Commanders in the Niger Delta Region as At 30th June 2009

S/N	Name of camp	Location	Stats of Camp	Leader(s)
1	Olugbobiri	Southern Ijaw (SILGA Bayelsa State)	Major	Joshua Mckiver
2	Korokorosei	SILGA Bayelsa State	Major	Africa Owei
3	Okiegbene/Ebrigbene (Ikebiri I and II)	SILGA Bayelsa State	Major	
4	Robert Creek	Nembe, Bayelsa State	Major	
5	Cowthorne Channel	Nembe, Bayelsa State	Major	
6	Camps	Warri South Delta State	Major	Government Ekpemupolo (Tompolo) and Henry Okah
7	Okerenkoko	Warri , Delta State	Major	
8	Opuraza	Warri, Delta State	Major	
9	Azuzuama	SILGA Bayelsa State	Major	Jackson
10	Gbekenegbene	SILGA Bayelsa State	Minor	Not available
11	Ezetu	SILGA Bayelsa State	Minor	Victor Ben Ebikabowei (Boyloaf)
12	Agge	SILGA Bayelsa State	Minor	
13	Kurutiye, Forupa and Okubie	SILGA Bayelsa State	Minor	Not available
14	Ken Camp	Odi, Bayelsa State	Minor	Ken
15	Egbema camp	Warri, Delta State	Minor	Kem Agbakara
16	Ubefan	Warri, Delta State	Minor	John Togo
17	Berger Camp	Warri, Delta State	Minor	Inilo Sinite
18	Niger Delta People Volunteer Force (UNFVF)	Akuku-Tori, Rivers State	Major	Alhaji Asari Dokubo
19	Niger Delta Volunteer Movement (NDVM)	Okirika, Rivers State	Major	Tom Ateke
20	Borokiri (Icelanders/Outlaw cult)	Borokiri, Port Harcourt, Rivers State	Minor	Soboma George
21	Yeghe	Bori, Ogoni, Rivers State	Minor	Solomon Ndigbara (Osama Bin Laden)

Source: Adapted from Etekpe, 2009.

Affirming the fact that prolonged neglect and marginalization of the Niger Delta people in the decision making process in Nigeria is responsible for the crisis in the region, Ibeanu (2008) captured the Niger Delta contradiction inside the setting of prosperity and burden clarifying how the abundance of a district has in comprehensively turned the instrument of abuse and neediness. According to him, the result of government inaction is youth anxiety, militancy, hostage taking, pipeline vandalism, oil burglary and different types of culpability and brutal showdown. The failure of the Nigerian state to address veritable requests of the general population in the range fortified a long time of conflicts and showdowns between a few youth gatherings and security agencies and also oil multinational oil companies. Also commenting on the economic impact of minority revolts and uprising in the Niger Delta, Ibeanu (2008) and Okonta (2005) stated thus: amidst 1999-2005, the nation (referring to Nigeria) witnessed high level losses in oil earnings due to agitations by citizens of Niger Delta and this affected the nation negatively. Table 5 below clearly shows that economic factors and the struggle for the

control of trade in the Niger Delta hinterland was the major underlying factor responsible for minority revolts and uprising in pre-colonial, colonial and post-independence era in the Niger Delta region.

Table 5: Showing the nature of pre-colonial interaction between early Niger Delta leaders and the British colonial government/agents

S/N	Early Niger Delta Leaders	Nature/Purpose of interaction and the Colonial Agent Involved	End Result of the Interaction/ Transaction
1.	King Jaja of Opobo	Control of trade in the hinterland (Acting British Consul Harry Johnson).	Deportation, exile and the eventual death of king Jaja in the hands of his abductors.
2.	Nana Olomu of Itsekiri Kingdom	Control of trade in the Benin River (British Government).	Deportation and exile of Nana Olomu.
3.	King William Dappa Pepple of Bonny	Control of hinterland trade (British Merchants and British Consul Bee-Croft).	Deportation, exile and replacement with Prince Dappo Pepple (British Puppet) which marked the collapse of Bonny Monarchy.
4.	King Archibong of Old Calabar	Control of trade in the Qua-Ibo River (British Consul Bee-Croft).	Led to the death of King Archibong in 1852 and also marked the beginning of direct British control with British Consul Bee-Croft presiding over the election of a new king.
5.	Oba Ovonramwen of Benin Kingdom	Pursuance of British economic interest in the Benin and Ethiopie River (Gallwey, British Vice Consul for the Benin-Ethiophe River) and Acting Consul Phillip.	Arrest and detention of the Oba including the invasion and destruction of Benin Kingdom in 1897. The event also led to the bastardization of Benin culture and tradition and the massive looting of artifacts bronze plaques and other ornaments by the British invaders.
6.	King Koko of Brass	Introduction of harsh and unfriendly trade policies that excluded king Koko and the Akassa people by the Royal Niger Company and the British Government.	Let to the famous Akassa Raid of 29 th January, 1895 when the indigenous Akassa people shut down operations at the Royal Niger Company due to discriminatory trade policies which excluded the natives.

Source: Kalama 2015 (Fieldwork).

Conclusion

The study examined minority revolts and uprising in the Niger Delta with a view to ascertaining the impact of such revolts on the nation's economy and development. To thoroughly interrogate the subject-matter, the study adopted secondary sources of data and the basic human needs theory as the theoretical framework for the study. Since the study adopted the descriptive method, analysis was also done qualitatively. The study observed that minority revolts and uprising started during the pre-colonial and colonial era as a result of decades of marginalization and alienation of the Niger Delta people in the political and economic affairs of Nigeria. This development continued beyond the post-independence era and became more intensified from 1999-2008 hence, prompting the Nigerian government to adopt different approaches in dealing with the Niger Delta question. The study also revealed that the nonchalant attitude of oil multinational companies and the federal government no doubt helped to escalate the conflict in the Niger Delta region. Poor implementation of

government policies and programmes has made conflict in the Niger Delta a tradition despite the ongoing government amnesty programme and the existence of development agencies and boards such as the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC). The Fact that the Niger Delta region is strategic to the survival, growth and economic development of Nigeria, there is every need to continue the dialogue on the need for peace and political stability in Nigeria.

Recommendations

The following recommendations will no doubt help to promote peace and sustainable development in the Niger Delta and Nigeria in general:

1. Charity they say begins at home hence; political leaders in the Niger Delta from councillor, chairmen, state legislators, national legislators etc. should be held accountable and made to give account of their stewardship during and after their tenure. Such appraisals will compel leaders to be on their toes and be development conscious.
2. Community based conflict resolution frameworks should be encouraged to ensure sustainable peace and development in the region. In this way, the people especially community leaders and chiefs will be integrated in the entire process. The current system where development and peace proposals are imposed on the people from Abuja should be discarded.
3. It is imperative and fundamental that all previous Niger Delta committee/commission reports be collated and analysed with a view to implementing them without delay hence, the petroleum industry bill and other important development oriented bills pending in the national assembly should also be given accelerated hearing in order to give minorities in Nigeria a sense of belonging.
4. There is urgent need to also review and re-evaluate the ongoing federal government amnesty programme in the Niger Delta region to ensure that the disarmament, demobilization and re-integration (DDR) exercise truly transform and rehabilitate ex-combatants and agitators back to the civil society as productive and resourceful citizens.
5. It is imperative to also demilitarize the Niger Delta region by withdrawing all military task forces from the Niger Delta region. It is on record that Operation Delta Safe and Operation Crocodile Smile are currently operating in the Niger Delta region, causing more violence and human rights abuses in the region daily. Such actions will set a new agenda for peace in the region based on non-violent principles.
6. All outdated policies and laws that encourage inequality and retrogression in Nigeria should be repealed or discarded without further delay. In the same vein, multinational oil companies who fail to perform their social corporate responsibilities should be sanctioned and their oil prospecting license revoked.
7. The issue of environmental justice for communities in the Niger Delta should be given top priority while the clean-up of Ogoni land and other impacted communities should be done as directed by the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) report.

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