

History of Conflict and Insurgency in Nigeria's Niger Delta Region

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The study strived to examine the history of conflict and insurgency in Nigeria's Niger Delta region and observed that the ongoing conflict in the oil rich Niger Delta can be traced back to the pre-colonial and colonial era. The study adopted the basic human needs theory in analyzing and explaining the subject-matter while secondary sources of data (text books, published articles, journals, the internet etc.) were relied upon hence, data from these sources were analyzed through the qualitative descriptive method otherwise known as content analysis. Findings also revealed that prolonged neglect and marginalization of the Niger Delta people by the colonial and successive governments in Nigeria accounts for the violence and insecurity in the Niger Delta region. However, to ensure sustainable peace and development in the Niger Delta region, there is urgent need for political, economic and electoral reforms that will ensure good governance, rule of law and even development. Conscious efforts should also be made to ensure that all anti people and undemocratic laws and policy actions that give undue advantage to multinational corporations are completely reviewed and repealed.

Keywords:

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Conflict, Colonial,
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Background to the Study

The current tension and insurgency in Nigeria's Niger Delta region can be traced to pre-colonial and colonial activities in the oil-rich Niger Delta region hence, scholars have argued that the ongoing conflict and instability in Africa was inherited from the colonial masters who after the post-colonial era adopted neo-colonial strategies and methods to further alienate the Niger Delta people as reflected in the Akassa Raid of 29th January 1895, the Benin massacre of 1897 etc. the activities of the multinational oil companies and the selective actions of the Nigerian government have also helped to promote and escalate conflict in the Niger-Delta region of Nigeria. Despite the fact that oil was first discovered in commercial quantity at Oloibiri Community in Ogbia Local Government Area at Bayelsa State in 1956, the people still live in abject poverty hence, the agitations and protests in region.

However, failure on the part of the Nigeria State to implement the Kaiama declaration, the Ogoni Bill of Rights and several other legitimate demands of the people, coupled with the hanging of Ken Sarowiva and other Niger Delta activists no doubt, changed the face of the struggle (agitation) from nonviolence to arms struggle which led to the proliferation of militia groups and camps in the Niger Delta region. Government's initial policy action based on force which led to the militarization of the region was counterproductive as it led to increased violence in the Niger Delta region between 1995 and 2007. This development compelled the Nigerian Government to review its hardline position hence, the proclamation of amnesty for Niger Delta youths by the Umaru Musa Yar'Adua-led administration in June 2009. Thus the study relied on secondary data (text books, journal articles and materials from the internet etc). Data from these sources were analyzed through qualitative method otherwise called content analysis. To further give direction to the study, the basic human needs theory was applied to explain the reasons for continuous violence, insurgency and conflict in the Niger Delta region. Emphasis was however placed on the history of conflict and insurgency in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. This study therefore examined and evaluated the impact of colonial and post-colonial laws, actions and policies on the past and present day Niger Delta region and its people in order to address the challenges confronting the oil-rich Niger Delta region.

Theoretical Framework

This study adopted the basic human needs theory in order to unravel the reasons for conflict and insurgency in the Niger Delta region. Several scholars have argued that certain basic needs are fundamental to the survival of human beings and when these needs are absent, the human mind and body will be restless hence, Dexit (2004) posited that human needs are issues creating the conflict and violence in the first place thus, ignoring such fundamental issues no doubts makes the interest-based model and others limited and contradictory. Burton (1997) also argued that when an individual or group is denied its basic need for identity, security, recognition or equal participation within the society, protracted conflict becomes inevitable hence, to resolve such conflicts, it is imperative that needs that were threatened be identified and placed at the front burner. In addition, Burton (1997) stated that the needs of all individuals and groups must be

accommodated in any decision making process. Basic needs according to Burton (1997) can influence our beliefs, the values we place on them. These needs appear to be more important than food and shelter hence, Burton (1997:19) maintained that individuals are prepared to go to extreme heights to defy authorities and systems in order to pursue their deeply felt needs even through death by suicide bombing or by hunger strike. The needs for security, identity, recognition and personal development are indeed salient to the understanding of destructive social conflicts and the failure of existing state systems to satisfy the needs for identity is the primary source of contemporary ethno-nationalist struggles. Sandole (2001) added that deterrence cannot deter and coercive methods are not effective to modify behavior when individuals and groups are compelled to act on the basis of imperative needs. John Burton's basic human needs theory is relevant in this study because decades of frustration, alienation, and marginalization of the Niger Delta people contributed to the escalation of the conflict in the region. On the other hand, initial policy actions of the Nigerian government also did little to recognize the plight of the people hence, the bloody confrontation between the Niger Delta youths and the Nigerian armed forces.

However, using unsatisfied needs as an independent variable, John Burton's basic human needs theory also help to explain why ruling class manipulation or cultural differences sometimes degenerate into conflict in some societies and systems (Rubenstein and Crocker, 1999). While corroborating the above position, Gunning (2000) observed that political violence does not appear in a vacuum but that there are usually a very long history of contestations, group formation and increased hostile interactions among the parties before violence becomes an inevitable option. Gunning's position clearly describes the Niger Delta situation and where decades of neglect and, marginalization led to conflict and insurgency in the region. In all, the basic human needs theory as applied in this study clearly states the fact that understanding the real causes (basic needs) of any conflict helps the group or state to resolve such conflict without much difficulty. Proponents of the basic human needs theory include: John Burton (1997), Abraham Maslow (1943), Johane Galtung (1969) and Six (1990).

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This section of the paper examined the nature of interactions and relationship that existed in pre-colonial and colonial Niger Delta between the early aborigines and the colonial masters and their agents. Thus, the experiences of king Jaja of Opobo and others were also x-rayed.

King Jaja of Opobo-British Relations in the 19th Century: Born in 1821, Jaja of Opobo rose from a slave boy to a king who founded the Opobo Kingdom from where he controlled the better part of the oil market in the hinterland. His unrelenting struggles to preserve his sovereignty and the integrity of his people against encroachments by British traders and imperialists no doubts pitched him against colonial agents in the Niger Delta. It is on record that king Jaja was among the very few African chiefs who refused any treaty of protection but demanded to know the full meaning of treaty (protection). In the words

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5. 2000 Act of the National Assembly established the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC).
6. 2002 LT. Gen. Alexander Ogomudia, special security committee report on oil producing areas – Not implemented. 2003 presidential committee on peace and reconciliation headed by Major General A. Mohammed (rtd) chief of staff to the then president.
8. April 2004 standing committee on good governance and corporate responsibility headed by Dr. Edmond Daukoru, former minister of state for petroleum.
9. July 2004 presidential standing committee on the Niger Delta headed by former Governor James Ibori of Delta State.
10. 2006 presidential committee on the Niger Delta headed by former President Olusegun Obasanjo.
11. 2007 President Umaru Yar'Adua's 7 Point Agenda (listed the Niger Delta security issue as the primary focus of his administration).
12. 2008 Establishment of the Ministry of Niger Delta Affairs by the Umaru Yar'Adua's administration.
13. July 2009 proclamation of amnesty to armed Niger Delta youths who had engaged in armed struggle against the Nigerian state (by the Umaru Yar'Adua – led administration).

Source: Authors Field work 2015.

Table 1: 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 Ethiope River (Gallwey, British Vice Consul for the Benin-Ethiope 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

Analysis of Findings

The study clearly revealed that economic factors and the struggle for the control of trade in the Niger Delta hinterland was the major underlying factor responsible for conflicts and insurgency in pre-independence Niger Delta. The scramble for Africa which led to the partitioning of African territories by Europe in 1884-1885 further helped to destroy the culture and language of Africans including the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. The table above further revealed that effective direct colonial intervention in the Niger Delta region was carried out systematically and indirectly through trade, Christian religion and

humanitarian activities by early missionaries and agents of the British Government. Thus the introduction of discriminatory trade policies and the use of force through gun boat diplomacy eventually set the stage for resistance, violence, insurgency and conflict in pre-independence and post-independence Niger Delta. Post-1960 witnessed institutionalized form of marginalization and alienation of the Niger Delta people through conspiracy between neo-colonial agents (multinational oil companies) and the Nigerian State which provide security cover and the other services to aid oil exploration and exploitation in the Niger Delta region. The picture below shows Niger Delta children in Tungbo Community in Sagbama Local Government Area of Bayelsa state, learning without modern facilities.

Fig. 1: Niger Delta children in Tungbo Community in Sagbama Local Government Area of Bayelsa state, learning without modern facilities



Source: Researcher/ Authors' Field work 2016

Fig. 2: Out of school children from Burutu Community in Delta State who could not afford the cost of primary education.



Source: Adapted from Kalama 2012

Conclusion

The above analysis clearly indicates that the Niger Delta crisis has a long history of pre-colonial and colonial exploitation and marginalization which was intensified and institutionalized from 1960 and 1980. The use of neo-colonial agents and multinational oil companies to facilitate exploitation and extraction of mineral resources in the Niger Delta region without adequate compensation and integration of the people no doubt further escalated the conflict in the oil rich region. The inability of the Nigerian government and multinational oil companies to provide development and basic social amenities explained why the conflict in the region degenerated into arms struggle against the Nigerian State with its attendant socio-economic and political consequences.

However, it is important to state that the pre-amnesty era witnessed the setting up of committees and commissions whose reports never saw the light of the day hence, the refusal to pass the petroleum industry bill after several years, the failure of the 2005 national political reform conference to reach a consensus and the criminal retention of several obnoxious laws and policies further indicate that the post-colonial conspiracy and marginalization of the Niger Delta and its people have become institutionalized and more sophisticated from all fronts.

This further explains why the study adopted the basic human needs theory as its theoretical framework. John Burton's basic human needs theory argued that individuals and groups are prepared to go to extreme heights to defy authorities and systems in order to pursue their deeply felt needs even through death by suicide bombing or by hunger strike. In the words of Burton (1977): The needs for security, identity, recognition and personal development are indeed salient to the understanding of destructive social conflicts and the failure of existing state systems to satisfy the need for identity is the primary source of contemporary ethno-nationalist struggles. Within the context of this study, the continuous social and economic neglect of the rights of the Niger Delta people including failure of the Nigerian state to promote equity and fairness in the distribution of resources and political responsibilities accounts for the unending conflicts and insurgency in the Niger Delta region.

Recommendations

The task of developing the Niger Delta is enormous hence, the following recommendations are hereby proposed:

1. All existing Niger Delta committee reports should be collated and analyzed 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.
2. The ongoing amnesty programme in the Niger Delta region should also be reviewed and restructured to ensure that the disarmament, demobilization and re-integration (DDR) exercise truly transform ex-combatants and agitators back to the civil society as productive and resourceful citizens. Thus, the current

- monetization of the amnesty programme should be de-emphasized while community development and skills acquisition should be the driving force of the programme.
3. There should be complete withdrawal of 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. The withdrawal should be accompanied with peace and confidence building measures such as the relocation of the Maritime University and other projects back to the Niger Delta region.
 4. Obnoxious policies and laws that promote inequality and underdevelopment 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 withdrawn.
 5. The issue of environmental justice for communities in the Niger Delta should be given top priority while the cleanup of Ogoni land and other impacted communities should be done as stipulated in the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP).

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