ECONOMIC RESOURCE AND POLITICAL STABILITY: THE NIGER DELTA QUAGMIRE

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Abstract
The issue of resource agitation has continued to generate serious concerns and discussions in Nigeria. In fact, the spillage emanating from this tends to spread across the boundaries of Nigeria as a result of the implications it bears on the oil industry and the industrial life line of western nations and their allies. The resource controversy in the Niger Delta is viewed by some as a paradox of poverty in the midst of plenty and as an issue exacerbated by Nigeria’s disabled federalism that tends to undermine the rights of the minorities. This paper tends to examine the linkages between resource disharmony and national survival with a view to highlighting the challenges it poses to political stability of Nigeria.

Keywords: Resources, stability, development, Niger Delta

Introduction
Economic factors have always played significant roles both nationally and internationally. Nations have been known to go to war over resources while domestically, attempts have always been made to narrow the gap between individuals and different segments of national societies. The federal system of government is normally accepted as a design that ensures that all diverse groups in a disparate entity-ethnic, small units and in fact, citizens of a country are entitled to their rights through a constitutional process within an enlarged national system. Consequently, this has led to various forms of typology of federalism.

The literature on federalism as it seems, has highlighted two contemporary challenges faced by federal systems of government the demand of nationalism and that of democracy. Amuwo and Heraut (1998:3) are of the opinion that these demands are crucial to federalism especially in ethnically segmented political systems. Federations that lack the both of them in the view of the writers will have to struggle at great pains to forestall disintegration. Federalism and democracy no doubt are interrelated concepts that enhance the operation of a federal system of government. Any attempt to split or negate any of the two have in many system led to difficulties in political stability or in some cases the atrophy of the entire political system. In Nigeria for instance, disaffection with the operating federal system of government has metamorphosised into a demand for restructuring the federation and control of natural resources.

The accumulated years of military inspired unitary rule in Nigeria is held accountable for distorting the federal system of government that the nation inherited from British colonial rule. It is a fact that at independence in 1960, Nigeria’s federalism was characterized by inter-segmental imbalance and asymmetrical power relations among the component units. This set up was worsened by series of military rules that centralized the revenue collection and distribution systems, abused the democratic set-up and strengthened the authority of the federal government against those of the federating units. A significance outcome of this intervention is the full evolution of a peculiar federal system of government characterized by ethnic based political domination and the denial of some sections from attaining equitable—access to resources. The combination of this variant of federalism and its attendant abuses this paper holds, have led to the developmental plight of the Niger Delta which in turn has triggered ethnic nationalism and self determination that are now anchored on two key demands the call to re-engineer the existing brand of the “Nigerian federalism” and the agitations for a revision of the national resource distribution pattern.

The resource agitations as we have experienced have transformed into militancy and hostage taking of local and expatriate oil company personnel and a threat to the survival of the Nigerian state.
Conceptual discussion

Ordinarily, there is a temptation to exclude the discussion on federalism from this paper for the fact that it is available in numerous literatures and probably may be conceived as common knowledge. However, the fact remains that the concept has continued to attract diverse discussions and perspectives. The omission of this segment in my mind may amount to the exclusion of some of the connotations surrounding the subject that may be of interest to some scholars. It is necessary for us to understand, therefore, that in the Nigerian political lexicon, we have federalism-the Nigerian variant and true federalism—the generally accepted type. On this basis, a brief rundown of the literature on federalism is necessary for us to understand the contextual implication of the concept.

Wheare (cited in Dare, 1979:27) which seems to be widely accepted, speaks of delimited and coordinated divisions of government functions as the criterion for a federal system of government. In this sense, the essential ingredients of federalism include the delimitation of powers among different levels of government which translates to the exercise of co-ordinate authority and financial autonomy. In addition to this, the equality of the component units and equity in resource distribution are aggregate features that constitute federalism. In Canada for example, section 109 of the constitutional act of 1887 (the British Northern America Act) states that:

All lands, mines and royalties belong to the several provinces of Canada, Ontario, Quebec, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick of the Union, and all sums then due payable, for such lands, mines, minerals or royalties shall belong to the several provinces of Ontario, Quebec, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick in which the same situate or arise.

Furthermore, subsection 92 A (1), a new section which followed the constitutional Act of 1882 which amended section 92 of the British Northern America Act of 1867, provides that in each province, the legislature may make laws in relation to:

i. Exploration for non-renewable natural resources in the province.

ii. Development, conservation and management of non-renewable natural resources and forestry resources in the province, including laws in relation to the rate of primary production there from, and

iii. Development, conservation and management of sites and facilities in the province for the generation and production of electrical energy (cited in Lazarus, 1997:37)

In furtherance to the principle of non-subordination of one government to another, the powers of the governments are clearly divided. The central government which is stripped of sole resource ownership and control is limited to issues which are of common interest to all the component parts of the federation. The practice of federalism in Nigeria as evidenced is a sharp contrast with the above. Federalism in Nigeria dates back to 1954, when the Littleton’s constitution delimited powers among the central and regional governments. The then constitution transferred all legislative and executive powers to the regions and other residual powers to the central government. (Akinboye and Anifowose, 1999:242). Thus in the immediate post independence era, Nigerian federalism approximated the philosophy and principles of federalism. However, the structure of government was distorted, leading to the centralization of power and national resources in the federal government.

The formation of federal government is normally designed to afford the federating states certain advantages (political, economic, etc) which each state expects to derive from the union. In addition to this, the formation of a federal union is also expected to be a voluntary association. Thus for example, the United States emerged as a federation of 13 states, which acted voluntarily. On this, it is significant to note that the power to own and control resources is not given up by the states and therefore, resource ownership lies with the people.

The main advantage of the voluntary path to federalism, also known as the Aggregation method is that the central government is created by the component units. Thus, the interests of the component units are adequately protected in the division of powers.
This explains why resource ownership lies with the people in federation, such as the United States and Canada.

This is at variance with the disaggregate method adopted by Nigeria, where federalism was forced on the people by British colonialists. With the 1914 amalgamation, Nigeria operated a unitary state. This was later split into units to form a federation, following a series of constitutional development that began with the Richard’s constitution of 1946. Federalism in Nigeria, therefore, followed the disaggregate method where the central government created and continues to create the component units. The fallout of this is that, the central government also acquired the tendency to own and control all resources. This largely explains why resource ownership and control have always been with the central government ever since the country was created. It is instructive to note that federalism is a constitutional government that works efficiently in a democracy; Nigeria has been governed by military dictatorship for a better part of its history. This has also added to the distortion of the principles of democracy which in essence has continued to promote national discord.

Federalism and Democracy as the adage goes are the same bed fellows. Some commentators do claim that Democracy is actually the spice of federalism. Democracy as a system of government, places ultimate authority of government in the people, so that public policy is made to conform to the will and interests of the people (Gauba, 2003:421).It is acclaimed to be the best form of government. Essentially, however, the strength of democracy is predicted on elections, especially the conduct of free and fair elections. This fundamental requirement enables the citizens to choose leaders who can properly direct the affairs of government for the benefit of all.

The rights of the people to choose their leaders at elections is guaranteed by factors which include: respect for the rule of law and fundamental human rights, unhindered intra and inter-party politics, independent judiciary and elections in which every citizens vote has an equal weight (Heater, cited by Enemuo, 1999: 144).

Consequent on this, it should be noted that when elections are rigged, the freedom and right to choose leaders are denied. Given that free and fair election are the basis of consent in democracy, it is proper to argue that a government that results from rigged elections is not found on legal consent since it undermines popular sovereignty and promotes the enthronement of incapable leadership. Leaders in this situation tend to be irresponsible to the aspirations of the people. This perverts the ‘end of government’ which is the good of the people. Thirdly, given the fact that the people see the government as illegitimate and, therefore, withholds their co-operation, the government is prone to be authoritarian; a condition that promotes instability and negation of development.

The success of any democratic system rests on the character of the state and the dominant/ruling class. When a state is independent, the rule of law and the constitution are guaranteed. Accordingly, political leaders are subordinated to the law if the ruling class is disciplined, patriotic and honest. These are the attributes that define the requisite character of politics that in turn promotes collective interests and politics of moderation. (Ake, in Alapike, 2001:33). These principles have not been established in Nigeria. Rather, the doctored federal system has continued to enthron one a divisive and disoriented political class that oscillates between ethnic and narrow class interests that cannot promote and guarantee equitable distribution of resources among the federating units.

The politics of natural resources in the Niger Delta

The table below demonstrates the fact that oil contributes over 70 percent of Nigerian national revenue (Ikporukpo, 1996, Okowa, 2007). The controversy, however, is centred on why the Niger Delta region from where the bulk of the oil and gas are mined and distributed has nothing to show in terms of economic development, infrastructure and the upgrading of the lives of the people of the area.
An adjunct to this is the fact that oil exploration/exploitation is destructive to the Niger Delta ecology and economy. The devastating effect of oil spillage, gas flaring and other activities of the oil industry is well documented (Okoko, 1998; Ikporukpo, 1983; Aaron, 2006, Ikein, 1990; Worika, 2002; Salau, 1993; World Bank, 1995; Ibaba, 2005; UNDP, 2006, Adeyemo, 2002; HRW, 1999; Ibeanu, 1997; NDES, 1997; Peel, 2005, Clark, etal, 1999; ANEEJ, 2004; Naanem, 1995, Opukri and Ibaba, 2007).

The induced environmental degradation has resulted to economic productivity losses, occupational displacement/disorientation and increased poverty and frustration among the people of the area. As noted by psychologists, conflict is a response to frustration which occurs as a result of obstacles against the actualization of set goal attainment (Anikpo, 1999:7). Understandably, this explains the frustration that has led to group restiveness in the Niger Delta.

Coupled with these is the widespread view that links the wretched state of development in the Niger Delta to the country’s perverted federal system. The thinking is that placement of oil and gas resources under a federal government that is ethnicized has led to the transfer of the accruing wealth from the producing region to the development of non-producing regions. Consequently, this has resulted to the demand in some quarters for total ownership and control of oil and gas resources. Those holding this view are of the right to legislate over the exploitation, development and opinion that the component units of a federation where resources are found should have the right to legislate over the exploitation, development and appropriation of the resultant wealth that accrue from such ventures.

The Canadian system is usually cited as the best examples of a federal state where the component units actually own and control resources in the manner demanded by some agitators in the Niger Delta. Agitation mobilized under this view were

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YEAR</th>
<th>TOTAL FEDERALLY COLLECTED REVENUE (N BILLION)</th>
<th>OIL REVENUE (N BILLION)</th>
<th>(B/A X 100%)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>15.2</td>
<td>12.4</td>
<td>81.6</td>
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<td>1981</td>
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<td>11.3</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>73.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>15.0</td>
<td>10.9</td>
<td>69.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td>12.6</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>64.3</td>
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<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>25.4</td>
<td>19.0</td>
<td>74.8</td>
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<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>27.6</td>
<td>19.8</td>
<td>71.7</td>
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<td>53.9</td>
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<td>98.1</td>
<td>71.9</td>
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<td>101.0</td>
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<td>2,231.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>1,731.8</td>
<td>1,20.9</td>
<td>71.1</td>
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Source: Adopted from Okowa, 2007:9
initially peaceful but later took a violent course as a result of federal government nonchalant attitude and repressive response. The situation progresses to security forces clamping down on demonstrators and activists responding by taking oil workers hostage. In 2006 for instance, a total of 112 workers of different oil companies operating in the region were taken as hostages by different militant groups in a total of 19 attack (africanmasterwe.com). These attacks tend to endanger human lives, the country’s existence as a corporate entity and a dent on the country’s sovereignty.

Resource distribution and national survival
This paper is of the view that the survival of Nigeria as a nation and the protection of its sovereignty and corporate existence can be guaranteed among others through an equitable distribution of available natural resources among the component units of the Nigerian federation. Whereas, the parts are subordinated to the whole, the survival of the whole depend on the survival of the units, vice-versa. In this regard and to avoid an atrophic political system, there is a need for an adequate resource management and distribution pattern between the centre and the various federating states.

In the case of oil and gas resources in Nigeria four perspectives have been suggested by various groups to accomplish this.

1. The producing areas (states, local governments, or communities) should have exclusive right to petroleum resources;
2. The federal government should have the exclusive right;
3. The producing areas should have more rights than the federal government and other non-producing areas; and
4. The federal government should have more rights than the producing areas (Ikporukpo, 1996:170).

It is clear that the call for total resource control by the Niger Delta is a reflection of the first viewpoint and this could endanger national existence, in the sense that it could strangle the survival of some states that are economically weak or unviable. In a system where a section that is in the minority accounts for about 70% of the nation’s revenue, it is obvious that excluding others from the share could result to cataclysmic consequences for the nation as for now. It is proper to argue that given the Nigerian realities – culture of politics, oil induced environmental degradation and instability in the Niger Delta, the third perspective appear to be the most likely option. This means giving more rights to the Niger Delta region in the share of oil and gas based natural resources while also providing for the other states.

In post independence Nigeria, derivation had been used as primary criteria for revenue allocation. At independence in 1960, the derivation share of revenue allocation was 50%. This was later reduced to 45%, 20%, 2% and then 1.5%. It later rose to 3% before the present 13%. These reductions are widely perceived to be a deliberate attempt to alienate the Niger Delta from its resources, particularly oil and gas reserves.

Concluding remarks
The Niger Delta agitation for a fair share of its resources and the resultant violence and hostage taking, tend to endanger the country’s corporate existence or survival. This paper has examined the linkages between federalism, democracy, resource agitation and national survival and noted that the absence of a true democratic system and the operation of an ill-defined federalism among others, have economic and political implications on the policy. The resultant backlash is what we are experiencing in the Niger Delta area.

It may be necessary to add here that previous steps taken in the past to solve this problem, including attempts bordering on constitutional tinkering like creation of additional states and local governments in the country, constitutional provision of a section on federal character commission that is designed to distribute all posts in the federal public service equitably among the states of the federation, and the establishment of the Niger Delta development commission (OMPADC) for oil producing areas have all failed to end the agitations.

It is the view of the paper that the latest approach of granting a general amnesty to militants and the creation of a ministry for Niger Delta Development may not constitute the desired effects – a crisis free Niger Delta area.

For instance, despite the declared amnesty, pipeline vandalization and kidnapping of oil workers, although, reduced have not been totally eradicated. Moreover, the talk of training militants for job
situation is already perceived by some as misdirected since many of the militants may not be willing to enter institutions of learning as swap for the money they are being paid. Further, the ministry for Niger Delta Development is another bureaucracy that going by experience and the long time it has taken to come on board may not meet the people’s aspirations.

On the basis of the above disposition, this paper submits that for the survival and stability of Nigeria, the oil producing Niger Delta should be entitled to 50% derivation as provided in Nigeria’s earlier constitutional history. This proposition may save the Federal Government from culpable responsibility since by this proposal, the development of the area will fully reside in the hands of the people of the area.

References


