

## **NIGERIAN FEDERALISM AND THE RESOURCE CONTROL CONFLICT IN THE NIGER DELTA**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The aspirations of the founding fathers of Nigeria at independence to build a stable and virile country were hinged upon the perceived efficacy of the federal principle. But within a few years of independence these aspirations and great expectations dissipated into national confusion and ultimately, crisis. The various crises of nation-building (the 1967 – 70 civil war being the gravest) experienced by Nigeria since 1960, coupled with current demands for a general redefinition of the Nigerian federation via a sovereign national conference all go to show that federalism has not worked successfully in the country. Clearly, the clamour for resource control by federating units has been a dominant aspect of the problematic federal system in Nigeria. Significantly, in the Niger Delta, agitation for resource control has given rise to another phenomenon, namely militant nationalism. We argue in this paper that the failure by successive Nigerian governments to abide by the core principles of federalism, especially those that concern control of resources by federating units in which such resources are domiciled, has been responsible for the various crises of nation-building, particularly the armed struggle in the Niger Delta. This essay therefore seeks to explore the historical roots of the resource control struggle and the attendant militant nationalism in the Niger Delta, with a view to determining its impact on socio- political and economic sustainable development and sustainability within the area itself, and Nigeria as a whole.

**Keywords:** Nigeria, Federalism, Resource Control, Conflict, Niger Delta, Sustainable Development.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Recent developments in various parts of Nigeria particularly the Niger Delta where there has been a resurgence of ethnic nationalism shows that there is need for a critical look at the structure and process of Nigeria's federal system. The origin and foundation of Nigerian federalism has received more than adequate scholarly attention overtime, so, that need not delay us here. However, it is germane to re-state that Nigerian federalism can be traced to the period of British colonial rule during which certain factors which were to influence Nigeria's federal system were already manifest (source). These factors such as tribalism, regionalism and structural imbalance merely acquired new strength and momentum after independence.

The aspirations of the founding fathers of Nigeria at independence to build a stable and virile country were hinged upon the perceived efficacy of the federal principle. But, within a few years of independence these aspirations and great expectations dissipated into national confusion, and ultimately crisis. The various crises of nation – building ( the 1967 – 70 civil war being the gravest) experienced by Nigeria since 1960, coupled with current demands for a general redefinition of the Nigerian federation via a sovereign national conference all go to show that federalism has not worked successfully in the country. Clearly, the clamour for resource control by federating units has been a dominant aspect of the problematic federal system in Nigeria. Significantly, in the Niger Delta, agitation for resource control has given rise to another phenomenon, namely, militant nationalism. We argue in this paper that the failure by successive Nigerian governments to abide by the core principles of federalism,

especially those that concern the control of resources by federating units in which such resources are domiciled, has been responsible for the various crises of nation – building, particularly the armed struggle in the Niger Delta. This essay therefore seeks to examine the origin of the resource control struggle and the attendant militant nationalism in the Niger Delta with a view to determining its impact on political, economic and social affairs in Nigeria within the context of sustainable development and sustainability.

## **FEDERALISM: A REVIEW**

The notion of federalism which originated with the concept of intergovernmental relations dates back to the Greek civilizations, during which efforts were made to describe the legal relationships between the leagues and the city states. But the leagues differed from modern federations in that while the various governments freely interacted, no direct contact between the citizens of the various governments was allowed (Mogi, 1931:21). He observed further that Jean Bodin takes credit for being the first proponent of modern federalism and was emulated by scholars like Hugo Grotus, Otto Cosmanus and Pufendorf who viewed federalism as a voluntary type of political union (which may be temporary or permanent) of independent authorities, for special common objectives such as defence against external forces, trade and communications, etc.

A new perception of federalism emerged in 1787 following the establishment of the United States of America (USA) constitution (Pamphal, 1979:xiv). Since then, the tendency among scholars has been to conceptualize federalism from the viewpoint of contact at two levels (Dual federalism, that is, at the governmental level between participating units and among the citizens of these different units. Subsequently, various conceptual positions on federalism became popular. Such include the classic or orthodox school (coordinate federalism) represented by Kenneth Wheare, the sociological and process school epitomized by William Livingstone and Carl Friedrich and the cooperative federalism school by which

scholars have, presently, focused more attention on how to make federalism work through cooperation between the various levels of government.

In spite of the different conceptions of federalism (i.e the classical model, the sociological school, cooperative federalism etc), some basic characteristics and operational principles common to all truly federal systems according to Elazar (2004:357) can be identified to aid our understanding of the federal principle. First, the federal relationship must be established or confirmed through a perpetual covenant of union, embodied in a written constitution that outlines, among other things, the terms by which power is divided or shared in the political system and which can be altered only by extraordinary procedures. Second, the political system must ensure non-centralization, that is, diffusion of power among the constituent polities established by the federal covenant. A third element of any true federal system is the internal division of authority and power on an areal basis, known in the USA as “territorial democracy”(Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1997:712). Another basic requirement of federalism is that the constituent polities in a federation must be fairly equal in population and wealth or at least balanced geographically or numerically in their inequalities, if non-centralization is to be maintained. Permanence of the boundaries of constituent units is another characteristic of successful federal systems. Boundary changes may occur, but such changes are made only with the consent of the polities involved and as a matter of political policy are avoided except in the most extreme situations. Also, in a truly federal system, the constituent polities must have substantial influence over the formal or informal constitutional amending process (Diamond, 1963). Finally, a basic requirement of true federalism is a particular kind of environment that is conducive to popular government and has the required traditions of political cooperation and self restraint. Indeed most scholars of federalism conceive it as basically incompatible with authoritarianism or military rule (Wheare 1963; Vile; and Riker 1964). They contend that where there are no liberal democratic institutions and structures such as elected parliament, an open competitive party system and free periodic elections, there can be no federalism. From the standpoint of the aforesaid conceptual clarifications on federalism, this current study seeks to investigate the implications of the Niger Delta resource control conflict for sustainable development and sustainability in the Nigerian federation.

## **ORIGIN OF RESOURCE CONTROL STRUGGLE IN NIGERIA**

Natural resource connotes any material within the natural environment that can be harnessed for the benefit of man (Faniran & Ojo, 1981). Unfortunately, oil, the mainstay of Nigeria’s Mono – cultural economy has increasingly been a source of deep – seated acrimony, contradictions and crises since its discovery at Oloibiri, Bayelsa state in 1956. The issue of resource control in Nigeria has a chequered history. In the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, it was a struggle by the Niger Delta peoples to participate actively in trade especially palm oil and self- government in the region. This tendency toward self- assertion and a desire not to be dominated by any “foreign” group or government is best illustrated by the resistance put up by king William Koko of Nembe, Nana Olomu of Itsekiriland and king Jaja of Opobo. The struggle for participation and control in the palm oil trade eventually failed due to a number of developments including British indirect rule, revocation of the charter of the Royal Niger company and military conquests; as well as Christianity, and western education which led to the emergence of a new traditional elite (Douglas, 2001:1).

During the colonial era, concern for resource control were exemplified by fears of ethnic minorities particularly in the Niger Delta of domination by the majority ethnic groups. These majority groups demanded the creation of more states, and their agitations led to the formation of numerous political parties such as the Benin and Delta Peoples Party formed in 1953, Midwest State Movement (1956), Calabar – Ogoja River States Movement (1954), United Middle Belt Congress and the Borno Youth Movement among others (Ali, 2003:78). It must be noted that although the ethnic minorities cited

concern for an effective federal structure as justification for their demand for more states, their actual reason was the need to have direct control over revenue accruable from resources within their domain which would be made possible within the context of their own states.

The immediate post- independence era witnessed an attempt by Isaac Adaka Boro, a former student Union leader and ex-policeman to establish the Republic of Niger Delta (Douglas,2001:2). This followed the failure of the 1957 Constitutional Conference to resolve the problem of the minorities. Rather than resolve the problems the conference passed it on to the Minorities Commission headed by Sir Henry Willinks. The commission, while acknowledge the bases for Minority fears, however opposed the idea of creating new states at the time. Instead it recommended special councils for the Calabar and Midwest areas to supervise the activities of regional governments, while for the North it proposed a plebiscite on the fate of Ilorin and Kabba Provinces (Ali, 2003:2). Although the Adaka Boro – led rebellion of 1966 was short lived having been crushed by federal forces within days, it foreshadowed the dangerous dimension which minority agitations were to assume in subsequent decades.

In 1990, via the Ogoni Bill of Rights, the Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP) led by Ken Saro-Wiwa demanded resource control and self – determination for the Ogoni people. The Ogbia charter of demand of the Ogbia people of the central Niger Delta followed two years later. However, the Kaiama Declaration of 11<sup>th</sup> December 1998 represents the sharpest articulation and presentation of resource control. By that declaration, the Ijaw people proclaimed, sharpened and popularized the term resource control and therefore prepared the grounds for the current debate on the issue (Douglas,2001:2). The Kaima Declaration has since been trailed by many proclamations, bills of rights, resolutions and charters of demands from various Niger Delta ethnic nationalities like the Itshekiri, Ibibio, Egi, Oron, Ikwere and Urhobo. Generally, Niger Delta agitations for resource control and self – determination can be categorized into two broad phases, namely (i) era of peaceful demonstrations and externalization of demands, and (ii) emergence of armed struggle.

#### **ERA OF PEACEFUL DEMONSTRATIONS AND EXTERNALIZATION OF NIGER DELTA AGITATIONS**

Minority Agitations for resource control and self – determination during this period were characterized by immense confidence and reliance on peaceful means of seeking redress even under colonial rule. As noted earlier, in 1957 testimonies were presented before the Willink Commission of Enquiry into the problem of minority fears in the emergent Nigeria state. Afterwards, many protests and demands for justice and equity were registered without success. Similarly, the people of the resource bearing areas often resorted to litigations, which usually ended in unfavourable verdicts (Jimoh 2008:15).

Letters were also written to the colonial government as well as the post – independence Nigerian administrations on the Niger Delta problem. Following the failure of this approach, the agitators moved further by making representations to government at all levels to make their letters effective. But in most cases, aside the warm reception and empty promises no meaningful achievement was recorded (Saliu, 2008:348). During this period also, demonstrations were staged in the Niger Delta and other places during which pamphlets and banners were displayed to further draw attention to the increasing crisis in the region. Letters were delivered in the affected state capitals, Abuja and Lagos in order to inspire government interest.

Externalization of Niger Delta agitations soon evolved largely due to increasing centralization of the ownership and control of oil, and the politicization of the revenue allocation system by the federal government to the detriment of the oil-producing minority states. As Obi (2008) aptly puts it:

*In seeking to fund the war and sourcing money for running the economy, the federal government (still dominated by the now transformed Northern and Western factions of the ruling class) legislated, via decrees, the collection and sharing of oil revenues to itself. Since Nigeria came to rely totally on oil revenues the hegemonic factions of the majority nationalities now had control over the fiscal basis of the state, to the exclusion of the oil minorities.*

In utter contradiction of the principles of fiscal federalism, Decrees 51 of 1969 vested upon the federal government the complete ownership of all petroleum resources in Nigeria. In addition, the Offshore Oil Revenue Decree No. 9 gave the federal government total control over the entire revenue accruable from offshore oil wells in the coastal waters adjoining the oil minorities, an action that finally cut them off from direct oil revenue, and deepened their dependence on the majority groups for a share of the oil wealth. Thus, the oil minorities became alienated from their own products, and this intensified the struggle between them and the Nigerian state which through its over-centralization of political and fiscal power sought to exploit and dominate them alongside their strategic resources.

Furthermore, the federal government jettisoned Derivation as the principle of revenue allocation (which benefited the major ethnic groups during the days of cash crop exports) in favour of the principles of equality and population of states, obviously in response to the change of the country's source of wealth from agriculture to petroleum, and the desire of the majority nationalities to continuously dominate national revenue (Obi, 2000). Odi Ofeimun's observation on the fluctuating and diminishing fortunes of the derivation principle in Nigeria's revenue allocation system is quite revealing. According to him, from 100% in 1946, it dropped to 50% between 1951 and 1960. By 1970, it dropped further to 45% under General Gowon's regime while under the Murtala/Obasanjo government it wavered between 20 and 25%. Shehu Shagari's government cut it drastically to 5% while the Buhari – Idiagbon regime brought it down to its lowest ebb of 1.5%, while the present 13% emerged only after extensive agitations (The Guardian, 17 July, 2005).

The net effect of the federal takeover of the control of oil, and the stifling of the Derivation principle was that the oil minorities increased their opposition to domination by the major nationalities, and devised new strategies aimed at externalizing their claims and grievances against the Nigerian state. Agitation movements like MOSOP, Ijaw Youth Congress (IYC), Ethnic Minority Rights Organization of Africa (EMIROAF) and Chikoko developed a clear national agenda and solid organization at the popular level. Above all, Mosop, IYC and Chikoko through the avenue of various global bodies and conferences successfully pushed the Niger Delta case to the front burner of global discourse by raising awareness about the environmental hazards caused by oil mining companies and highlighting the lack of representation of the Niger Delta peoples (Obi, 2000: 87–88). The arrest and subsequent execution of Saro Wiwa alongside eight of his Ogoni compatriots by the Abacha government in 1995 drew public outrage and brought substantial international attention to the pathetic condition of the people (Asuni, 2009:1).

## **EMERGENCE OF ARMED STRUGGLE IN THE NIGER DELTA**

The Adaka Boro rebellion of 1966 represents the first significant use of arms in Niger Delta agitations, and nothing of sort occurred again until the 1990s that witnessed the emergence of ethnic militias and the attendant violent protestations against economic and political marginalization by the federal government (Asuni, 2009). The new wave of violence is traceable to two developments: Gen. Babangida and Abacha regimes chronic intolerance for public discourse and the Odi massacre executed by the Obasanjo civilian regime. The character of the regimes, particularly those of Babangida and Abacha deepened the contradictions and crises of the Nigerian state, resulting in the rise of ethnic militias. The Niger Delta people reacted by increasing the tempo of militancy, and adopting armed struggle in their demands for justice from

both the government and the oil companies. There is need to emphasize here that ethnic militia is the extreme form of ethnic agitation for self – determination, in that the agitation groups adopt a militant character and eventually metamorphose into militia groups, each with its own ethnic identity and agenda to act as the medium for the actualization of its people’s desires. These ethnic movements are characterized by ethnic identity affiliations, the use of violence, predominant youth membership, and the nature of being popular movements seeking fundamental change in the status quo (Agbu, 2002). Prominent ethnic militias in the Niger Delta include the Niger Delta Peoples Volunteer Force (NDPVF), Niger Delta Vigilantes ( NDV), Greenlanders, Egbesu, Ijaw National Congress, Urhobo National Union, Martyrs Brigade, Niger Delta Liberation Army(NDLA), Chikoko Movement, Coalition for Militant Action in the Niger Delta (COMA), Joint Revolutionary Council, and of course the Movement for Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND).

Although the origin of the Niger Delta armed groups vary across the various Niger Delta states, certain generalizations are possible. Recent studies have shown that many of these groups were established on university campuses, veered into street gangs, entered illegal activities like oil bunkering and illicit drug dealing, and from time to time served as political thugs. As Asuni (2009:8) noted:

*One of the most notorious and feared figures to emerge from the Niger Delta, Ateke Tom, cut his teeth in the bunkering trade, amassing a fortune in the process. Formerly an impoverished mud brick salesman, he transformed his fortunes in the oil business, initially by providing protection for an oil servicing company before turning to bunkering. As the enterprise developed, so did its capacity to attract violence, as rival groups battled for control of the market; aided by an influx of firearms purchased with bunkering profits. Street gangs such as the Icelandos and Bermuda Boys engaged in bloody feuds in their attempt to dominate the market in the Okrika region of Rivers state. One of Ateke’s main rival was Mujahid Dokubo – Asari, who later went on to found the Niger Delta People’s Volunteer Force. Asari was quite open about his involvement in bunkering, claiming he had a legitimate right to lay his hands on the resources of the Niger Delta, on the grounds that they belong to the local people rather than the Federal Government. Most of his profits, however, were spent on funding his own-armed group and buying weapons. Ateke responded to this threat to his business empire by forming his own-armed group, the Niger Delta vigilantes (NDV). On Ateke’s side were Vikings, Icelandos, and some captured Greenlanders (another armed group) to form Niger Delta vigilantes. Full war broke out between these warlords and their followers. The state was hot for six months ‘till ... people were brought before the President for peace talks on October 1, 2004.*

The lengthy quote above exemplifies the complexities that surround the origin, nature, motives and membership of the Niger Delta armed groups as well as the knotty challenges their activities pose to the Nigerian federation.

It is difficult to determine the number of people involved in ethnic militancy in the Niger Delta, but a research carried out recently shows that there are at least forty eight groups in Delta State alone, having over twenty-five thousand members with a military arsenal of about ten thousand weapons. All the groups enjoy the tacit support of local communities in solidarity against the exploitation of their region by oil companies and federal and state governments. In addition, several groups rely on patronage from politicians who use them to attack and intimidate their opponents, while many others are engaged by military officers and politicians to prop their criminal activities such as arms importation and oil bunkering. It is further suggested that there are about sixty thousand armed militants in the Niger Delta altogether

(Asuni 2009). These figures speak volume about the magnitude of the problems and challenges facing the federal government and the Niger Delta States governments in terms of disarmament, demobilization and eventual reintegration.

Ethnic militancy in the Niger Delta is continually fuelled by various issues and grievances against the government and oil companies. Perhaps the strongest grouse of the oil minorities is that the federal government, dominated by the majority ethnic groups is using Nigeria's oil wealth to develop other areas at the expense of the oil producing minorities. The huge oil revenue from the oil producing communities of the Niger Delta has continuously being deployed by the Federal government towards the development of states, towns and villages of the Hausa – Fulani, Yoruba, and Igbo majority ethnic groups to the neglect and consternation of the oil communities. This lopsided developmental approach is evidenced by huge federal funding of extensive dam and irrigation projects, as well as heavily subsidized agricultural and social development programs in northern Nigeria. In addition to these are the geo-politically motivated state-owned socio-economic projects like the Kaduna Refinery and many educational, administrative and military institutions with their headquarters in the territories of the major ethnic groups (Ovwasa, 1999:89).

Consequently, the oil minorities continue to live in abysmal poverty amidst abundant oil wealth. As an illustration, Ogoniland, considered to be the “luckiest” of the oil-producing communities in Rivers State, is reported to have provided Nigeria with a total oil revenue of about 40 billion dollars between 1958 and 1992 (Ogoni Bill of Rights, 1992). In addition, between 1999 and 2004, Nigeria made a whopping ninety six billion dollars from oil (The Guardian, 18 April 2006). Despite this massive contribution to the country's revenue base, Ogoniland, presently can only boast of seven oil fields, a large petrochemical plant, several oil servicing companies that are closely located, Nigeria's only major fertilizer plant and fourth largest ocean port (Naanen, 1995:1). The case of Urhoboland in Delta State is even worse. In forty-one years of the petroleum industry in Nigeria, Shell, Pan-Ocean and the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) have gained up to 2.2 trillion naira, an average of 56 billion Naira yearly (Ovwasa, 1999:89). The whole budget of Delta State is about Four Billion Naira per annum, whereas the state accounts for at least, 36% of Gross National Product (GNP). Moreover, everyday of the year, Urhobo natural gas worth about 68 million Naira is wasted through wanton flaring (The Guardian, 19 Aug. 1998). Yet, Urhoboland does not have any significant federal industry apart from the epileptic Warri Refinery and the inactive Aladja Steel Complex. In addition, Delta State as a whole has no federal higher institution except the Petroleum Training Institute (PTI) established to train skilled man power for effective oil extraction, whereas almost all the ethnic majority states have one form of federal institution or the other (Ovwasa, 1999:89).

The Niger Delta people are also aggrieved by environmental degradation and the attendant disruption of farming and fishing which are their major occupations. Due to oil exploration, oil spillages onto land, swamps and offshore areas over the decades have had serious adverse effects on the economic welfare and health of the inhabitants. Oil explorational activities often results in the destruction of the environment, erosion, destruction of aquatic life, extermination of some important soil organisms, promotion of malaria infestation due to the accumulation of water in the pits which serve as breeding grounds, and lastly general ecological disturbances (Jimoh, 2008:11). The Jesse, Delta State, tragedy of 1998 in which about 1,200 persons were burnt to death by petrol explosion while attempting to glean a living from the gushing and wasting petrol is an illustration of the horrible situation faced by the oil minorities in their daily lives.

Political marginalization is another source of anger among the oil minorities. This marginalization depicted in their inadequate representation in government is most acute and evident in the appointments into oil related federal

government parastatals. Ordinarily, preference ought to be accorded indigenes of the oil communities in such appointments, but in utter disregard of the federal principle that requires a federal government to serve as a device by which the Federal qualities of the society are articulated and protected, major appointments are often monopolised by the three ethnic groups with the Hausa-Fulani claiming the lion share (Ovwasa, 1999:89). It is important to recall that the replacement of Professor Eric Opia of Delta State, with AIG of Police Alhaji Bukar Ali, a Northerner as head of the Oil Mineral Producing Areas Development Commission (OMPADEC) in 1988 was greeted by massive protestations from the Niger Delta region. That the Abubakar regime later rescinded the decision by replacing Bukar Ali with Rear Admiral Preston Omatsola of Delta State, is an eloquent testimony to the painful fact that the oil minorities cannot receive fair treatment from the Nigerian state without intense agitations.

Agitations over resource control and revenue allocation by the poor and underdeveloped oil producing communities of the Niger Delta now appear to have reached its peak, due to age long grievances. Consequently, decades of peaceful protests have now given way to violent militancy. In recent years, the agitations have become more militant and radical, including calls for self-determination and outright secession. On 8 November, 1999, the Egbesu killed a Policemen in Odi, Bayelsa State, following the kidnap and killing of policemen by Egbesu youths in retaliation for the killing of their members. The government deployed soldiers who consequently, liquidated the town. On 25 April 2003, Ijaw militiamen attacked the Army and Navy in Warri, Delta State leaving ten persons dead. The militants also intercepted the radio communication of the army and navy. Five days later, women were killed in a crossfire between Ijaw militants and the Nigerian security forces. The security forces intervened when the Ijaw militia attacked an Itshekiri town, killing five women. On 1<sup>st</sup> May, 2003, Ijaw militiamen attacked government forces and oil installations in Opumani, Tanke farm, Okerenkoko, Delta State while similar same action was replicated in Effurun the next day. In early 2004, the Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force under Mujahid Dokubo Asari threatened dissolution of the Nigerian State and outright war against the oil companies, and the federal and state governments (Crisis Group Africa Report, 2006:6).

Following the detention of Dokubo Asari in September 2005 on grounds of treason, other militias emerged, particularly MEND, known for its astute tactics and coherent strategies, and its contempt for the conservative local leaders it perceives as traitors of the Niger Delta cause. To drive home its demands for local control of oil wealth, compensation for environmental pollution, and the release of Dokubo-Asari, MEND launched a fusillade of attacks on oil installations in February 2006 causing reduction in Nigeria's oil output by about 25%. It also kidnapped nine foreign oil workers, released them in March and threatened fresh violence against oil installations. On 19 April, 2006, it detonated a car bomb in a military barracks in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, killing two people and seriously wounding six. MEND, more than any other militant group has executed its operations with considerable media and technical sophistication. Its threats of attacks delivered through email pushed crude oil prices to seventy dollars per barrel. The Port Harcourt car bomb which was its first incursion into urban areas was detonated by cell phone.

Widespread unemployment among the youths, the availability of large quantity of firearms and the persistent disaffection with the federal, and state governments in the Niger Delta have all combined to provide a veritable recruiting base for MEND, and other militias in furtherance of their militant demands and activities. For example, the Martyrs Brigade attacked the Benisede Flow Station of Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC) on 15 January, 2006 killing five army guards and nine other persons. The Niger Delta Liberation Army in June same year threatened to kill the former Chairman of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), Nuhu Ribadu for the continued detention of former Bayelsa State Governor, Diepreye Alamieyeseigha, who was on trial for corruption and money laundering.



Similarly, the Coalition for Militant Action in the Niger Delta in July terminated its alliance with the Joint Revolutionary Council on account of it being too soft and too tolerant with the leaders of Nigeria and then proceeded with a threat to resume hostage taking not only of foreigners as before, but also of local politicians and other prominent Nigerians. It is instructive to note that the scale and scope of hostage taking have recently become unlimited with no one completely free from the menace as foreigners, Nigerian state officials, children and even the aged are all now possible victims.

Meanwhile, agitations for resource control in the Niger Delta took a new dimension with the women joining the centre stage in the protest against the serious injustices meted out against them by the oil companies and the federal government. Around 2002, women and children from Ugborodo oil community seized Chevron's tank farm and terminal in Escravos. Similarly, women from Gbaramutu kingdom invaded NNPC/Chevron flow stations. In the same period, Itsekiri women in Warri under the umbrella of Warri Women Consultative Assembly emerged to speak on behalf of the Itsekiri people, threatening to seal off all oil wells in the Niger Delta. The involvement of women in militant agitations in the Delta is significant because they and their children are the greatest victims of the economic and health effects of oil exploration and extraction (Ugo, 2004:68)..

### **RESOURCE CONTROL AGITATIONS AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA**

The crisis engendered by the struggle, especially violent agitations, for the control of oil resources in the Niger Delta has affected Nigeria's development in many ways. The violent confrontations constitute a serious threat to personal freedom and security of lives and property in Nigeria. As earlier noted, the activities of ethnic militias have caused widespread killings and destruction of property, while government's responses to the crisis through military operations led to civilian deaths and the destruction of many communities with its attendant socio – economic consequences. The violent activities of ethnic militias are not new in Nigeria, but their frequency and intensity since the advent of the present democratic order in 1999 is indeed worrisome. Aside engaging state security forces in armed confrontation, killings, raids, murder and attempted murder of political figures, hostage taking has now become very rampant. The caliber and scale of hostage taking have now reached a point that no one appears to be safe. Presently, foreign and local oil workers, government officials, as well as their family members are variously being held hostage to press home the demands of ethnic nationalities in the Niger Delta.

Violent agitations in the Niger Delta have also affected Nigeria's economy adversely. This point becomes more critical given the centrality of oil to the national economy. Nigeria, being an oil – based economy relies heavily on oil exports, and whatever happens to the commodity will surely affect all the other sectors of the economy. One major effect of continued violence in the Delta is the huge loss of national revenue due to large-scale vandalization of oil installations, disruption of oil exploration and widespread oil bunkering. It is important to note that by September 2009, militant activities in the region had reduced oil production by about one million barrels daily. Such shortfalls in production have consistently diminished the income of government and the profit of oil companies. Violent agitations in the area have also reduced foreign investments in the country because credible investors require a reasonable degree of security to successfully conduct their business. Many prospective investors do not see Nigeria as an investment – friendly country especially in the light of satellite pictures of gun-totting youths made available to viewers worldwide.(Saliu, 2008:352). Festering islamist militancy epitomized in the Boko Haram insurgency across the Northern and central states have now worsened the country's security situation and image.

Ethnic agitations for resource control also constitute a threat to energy security, not only of Nigeria but also of the entire world. This is because some of the oil resources such as petroleum, diesel and gas form the basis of power supply to

some industries, and also for domestic consumption all of which are jeopardized by widespread violence and criminal activities in areas where these resources are located. The importance of Niger Delta to global energy security was underscored in a recent publication by the Council on Foreign relations:

*Insecurity in the Niger Delta is a problem not only for the Nigerian government. It is a problem for the United States and the wider world as well. It is in the United States interest to improve its energy security and reduce the flow of arms, illicit oil, and illegal money transfer from Nigeria. A stable Niger Delta producing a steady supply of oil would also help to moderate world oil prices. It is therefore imperative that the United States and other international partners offer Nigeria all the help it needs to confront its armed groups. Because one thing is clear: allowing the problem to fester will be a recipe for further violence, instability and energy insecurity (Asuni, 2009: 26 -27).*

One is not certain whether the Nigerian government itself holds a lucid perception of the Niger Delta problem as some outsiders do. Even if it does, it is yet to prove its seriousness and determination to resolve the problem in terms of sincerity of purpose and mustering the necessary political will.

Increased violence in the Niger Delta also affected Nigeria's foreign policy in a number of ways. It is common knowledge that in the contemporary world, the international image of a country is crucial in its efforts toward achieving its foreign policy objectives. Certainly, the unfortunate scenario in the Delta which is widely publicized by the world media has greatly undermined Nigeria's image abroad. Indeed, the general view outside Nigeria is that security has broken down in the country sometimes prompting some foreign governments to discourage their citizens from traveling to Nigeria and if they must, they should avoid the Niger Delta region (Saliu, 2008:351). Furthermore, stories of hostage taking have continued to magnify Nigeria's corruption at the global level. It is now well known that captives often times pay huge sums of money to their captors in return for their freedom, in the face of government's helplessness. It is believed that ransom money often goes into the unaudited accounts of the militants. Worse still, hostage taking appears to be compromising Nigeria's sovereignty because in recent times, foreign interests have been negotiating directly with militants over and above the Nigerian government. Finally, Nigeria's foreign policy has also suffered from the Delta crisis because it appears to be undermining the laudable peace-keeping roles which the country has consistently played across the world. Many people in some quarters continue to ponder over a scenario in which Nigeria cannot solve her little problem (relatively speaking) in the Niger Delta, yet she keeps exporting conflict resolution and peace – keeping mechanisms abroad (Saliu, 2008:353).

National insecurity and instability is by far the greatest threat posed to Nigeria by violent agitations for resource control in the Niger Delta. Escalating violence and attacks by ethnic militias in the area in this Fourth Republic pose serious threats to the country's democracy, security and stability. As one civil society leader noted "the commitments to federalism and democracy holds Nigeria together, and the lack of federalism and democracy threatens to tear Nigeria apart (Crisis Group Africa Report, 2006:1). In particular, the source of acquisition of weapons by the ethnic militias should be a source of serious concern for national security. There is reason to believe that some of the weapons used by ethnic militias come from government armouries, while others seem to have entered the country through her porous borders (Asamu,2006:131). Undoubtedly, increasing violence in the Delta region undermines the integrity of Nigeria as a state and present the dangerous possibility of attempted coups and other desperate actions by those who feel that their privileges are being jeopardized. It will also be recalled that in March 2005, an independent panel of experts on Sub –

Saharan Africa assembled by the United States government's National Intelligence Council declared "the outright collapse of Nigeria" as a potential destabilizing development in the West African sub-region within the next fifteen years. Of course, President Olusegun Obasanjo immediately dismissed the report describing its authors as "prophets of doom".(Crisis Group Africa Report, 2006:1) While a united, stable and viable federation should be desired by all Nigerians, ex- president Obasanjo failed to realize or acknowledge that the threats of the Niger Delta crisis to Nigeria's stability and sustainable development are stark realities which require urgent and sincere government attention, rather than shying away from them under the cover of patriotism.

## **CONCLUSION**

From the foregoing, it is very clear that the failure of federalism in Nigeria is at the root of the chronic national crisis engendered by the struggle for resource allocation and control by the oil-producing minorities in the country. Although Nigeria inherited a defective federal structure from the British, the Nigerian leadership at independence had ample opportunity to remedy the situation but failed to do so. Instead, successive Nigerian administrations adopted federalism in principle but in practice failed to constantly observe its true principles. These contradictions have given rise to various crises of nation – building of which the Niger Delta problem is currently one of the most challenging.

Various Nigerian governments did not successfully address the endemic crisis in the Niger Delta over the control and sharing of the region's oil revenue. Particularly, the federal takeover of complete ownership of all petroleum resources and the subsequent relegation of derivation as the principle of revenue allocation, deepened the oil minorities crisis and consistently alienated them from the Nigerian state. Subsequently, decades of fruitless peaceful demands by the Niger Delta peoples for a desirable revenue allocation system, and resource control degenerated into an armed struggle that became the greatest threat to the fledging Nigerian nation.

To save the Nigerian federation from perennial instability and the threat of state collapse, government must eschew its age –long approach marked by half measures, and promptly resolve the Niger Delta problem based on sincerity, justice and fair-play. Thus, Nigeria urgently needs to return to true federalism as it was before independence. To remove the contradictions which have fuelled the resource control crisis, the Federal government must immediately release its stranglehold on national resources, and allow sub-national governments' financial autonomy and self reliance. In this direction, we contend that the oil producing states, should control oil revenues and only pay taxes to the Federal government. This will effectively douse the tension in the Niger Delta, restore the region's confidence in the Nigerian project and prepare the grounds for swift and genuine reconciliation. Also, such measures will finally drive home the point to the federal government, non – oil – producing states governments and other stakeholders that there is the urgent need for alternative means of state funding and development instead of the retrogressive attitude of continuous and complete reliance on oil for survival .These are necessary conditions for sustainable development and sustainability in Nigeria.

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