The Reigns of Crude Oil, Politics, Poverty and Militancy in the Niger Delta Region

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Abstract
The Nigerian state is currently witnessing the rise in militant activities in the Niger Delta region. The failure of government to deliver the basic "deliverables" had exacerbated the conditions in the Niger Delta region. The inability of policy makers to tame the rise of militancy in the region has necessitated the pertinent question of what factors underpin the rise of militancy in the region. In attempting to proffer answer(s) to this question, the paper relies on the instrumentality of political economy to ascertain the correlation between crude oil, politics, poverty and the rise of militancy.

1. Introduction
The current political, economic and social canvass or conditions in Nigeria when calibrated for analysis has necessitated a key question - whither Nigeria? The Nigerian state has continued and still carries on like a ship without rudder. The nation has been drifting in a chaotic manner especially in government and

governance. The Nigerian state is now construed as a legitimization of "corruption" over "social justice", "human rights", "development and the rule of law". In addition, the colonial policy of "divide and rule", even after independence, has left the social, political and economic fabric of the nation greatly fractured, as the administrators of the Nigerian state improved on and perfected the British policy of "divide and rule".

The crude oil politics the Nigerian state witnessed during the first republic culminated in the civil war (1966-70) without lessons learnt. The civil war did jolt Nigerians to the realization that the elevation of the rhetoric of corruption, maladministration, ethnicity, over social justice were at the root of the war. Nigeria after the war has emerged as a key player in the global geo-politics of crude oil in the 1970s. The stupendous wealth that accrued to Nigeria from the sale of crude oil caused a great alteration and reconstruction in the social, political and economic composition and configuration of the country. The Nigerian state became progressively dependent on crude oil as the sole export commodity. The mono commodity economy meant the relegation of other endeavours that could earn the country some income to the background. Agriculture and fishery became an endeavour for the "unenlightened" and "rural folks".

Nigeria in the post war (1970s) years witnessed a new crop of quasi business elites and rogue politicians that see no good in their country other than the proceeds of petrol dollars and pounds. The stock in trade of these new "elites" is the bizarre looting of the country's treasury which has not relented till date. At the micro level of society in Nigeria, the politics of competition and control of the central government became intense amongst the different ethnic groups. The stupendous wealth that is associated with exploration and expropriation of crude oil never translated into the

rapid movement of the citizenry out of poverty, hunger and unemployment, thus, Nigeria became a "land of paradox". The United Nations Human development report on the Niger Delta (2006) attributed and noted that the progression of Nigeria into the "land of paradox" dates back to the formative 10-years National "Development plan" from 1946-1955 prepared by the colonial administration. But this styled "development plans" was carried over into the post colonial period (independence). In this vein, the UNDP (2006) noted that:

> …After political independence in 1960, successive post-colonial governments initially prepared mostly medium-term development plans, namely 1962-1968, 1970-1974, 1975-80 and 1981-1985. A series of two years rolling plans followed between 1990 and 1998. These efforts were often associated with the income-centered development paradigm. Short term and based on official convictions, they lacked essential civil society and grass root inputs or participations…

The UNDP report (2006) concluded by positing that all of those "developments plans" failed to be sufficiently far reaching to engender the all inclusive "goals of human development". In extending the frontiers of the logic of the UNDP report (2006) especially as it concerns human capital development, Johnson (2001) introduced the trajectory of the Niger-Delta into the discussion by arguing that "state legislations" during the colonial period and in post colonial period in Nigeria accounted for the disempowerment of the people of the region, thus the failure of the development of human capital in the region. The summation of the thoughts of UNDP (2006), and Nna-Johnson (2001) that the

fragility of the nation is anti-growth and development, anti-human rights, and rule of law equally runs through the analysis of Ibeanu (2008) Okowa (2008), Okaba (2008), Watts (2008) and Natziger (2008). All of these scholars agreed that Nigeria's "developmental plans" at the micro level of society in Nigeria were abysmal failures. This paper scrutinizes the role of crude oil, politics and poverty in this failure and how these all impact on Nigeria's development.

2. Crude Oil, Politics, Poverty and Nigeria's Development

The tread that runs through the summation of UNDP (2006), Nna-Johnson (2001) Ibeanu (2008), Okaba (2008) Watts (2008), Okowa (2008) and Natziger (2008) was that all the "Developmental plans" were abysmal failures thus failure of development. The failed developmental plans in combination with the relay of bad leaders that lacked the conviction in their abilities in resolving the fragility of the nation necessitated the scrutiny by Okowa (2005) of the polity. His damning verdict is that the political, social and economic arm of the Nigeria has collapsed. That is why he goes on to declare that:

> In the area of the polity, we have also seen the Nigerianized role of the state as a new and most important factor of non-productive production, with politics similarly contextually defined as an instrument for making money without-working. Here again the political arm of the tripod has been deformed. This kleptocratic deformity of the political system has rendered suspect before the Nigerian people, all public policy pronouncements by the government…

Okowa's (2005) damnation did not spare other parts of the tripod of the Nigerian state. His position and view is premised on the fact that "development" never got started or commenced in Nigeria, especially, when cognizance is given to the meaning and definition of development at the operational level of society in Nigeria. Development in its meaning and definition must capture the entire gamut of change in a political community like Nigeria. Thus "development" in definition and meaning must guarantee (i) Economic Empowerment (ii) Political empowerment and (iii) Social empowerment. But the worrisome fact brought to the fore in Okowa's paper is the fact that the "wealth" accruing to Nigeria from the sale of crude oil has not stopped, but it has remained the sole lubricant of the crude politics that has characterized the Nigerian state from independence till date. The crude politics of the Nigerian state is anti-development, anti-human rights, and against the rule of law. The Niger Delta region bears testament to this fact. The table and information from the central bank of Nigeria below corroborates this fact.

Table 1: Total Federal collected Revenue, Oil Revenue and Gross Domestic Product (1991-2012)

YEARS	TFER	OR	GDP
1991	100,991.60	82,666.40	312,139.74
1992	190,453.20	164078.10	532,613.83
1993	192769.40	162102.40	683869.79
1994	201910.80	160192.40	899863.22
1995	459987.30	324547.60	1,933,211.55
1996	523597.00	408783.00	2702719.13
1997	582811.10	416811.10	2801972.58
1998	463668.80	324311.20	2708430.86

1999	949187.90	724422.50	43,199014.99
2000	949187.90	1,591675.80	4582127.29
2001	1906159.70	1707562.80	4725086.00
2002	22316000.00	1230851.20	6912381.25
2003	1,731837.00	2,074280.66	8,487031.57
2004	2575095.90	2974880.00	1147106.91
2005	39220500.00	3894165.60	1,4572,239.15
2006	5,965101.00	47266.80	18564,804.56
2007	5,715500.00	5552770.20	20657317.67
2008	7,866590.38	6,530600.00	24296329.29
2009	4,8445925.42	3191900.00	24794238.66
2010	73036671.55	5396100.00	33984754.13
2011	11116900.00	88790000.00	37,409860.61
2012	10657724.84	802595348	40544099.94

Source: CBN Statistical Bulletin 2012

The salient fact revealed by the statistical data from the central bank is that the stupendous wealth accruing to Nigeria had never ceased, but the crude politics that gives pre-eminent position to corruption and the looting of state treasures have robbed it of its benefits to development. The operation(s) of the quasi-federal system as operated by both the military and political clan of civilians had further exacerbated the eminent position accorded corruption, as the federating units were clandestinely encouraged to rely on the statutory allocations (handouts) from the federal government. The federating units, for reason of "easy money", jettisoned and forgot their simple first line charge of developing their local economy (human and natural resources).

The wrong definition of Nigeria did give impetus to every national policy to be interpreted along ethnic lines, as the Nigerian

state had continually struggled to deal with the sectional interests that have assumed "larger than life status". Corruption in governance and government that several scholars see and consider as systemic, had followed a well known pattern of sectionalism. (Okowa 2005, Nna-Johnson 2001; Ikelegbe, 2008, Natziger, 2008, Tombofa, 2008) The systemic logic and analysis is worrisome in the sense that it ropes in every Nigerian citizen into the web of corruption; hence, the question whether every Nigerian is corrupt or whether the ordinary Nigerian that has not taken any paid public employment is corrupt? Though the canvass of corruption in Nigeria is wide, it is elitist and remains elitist in nature. Giving a pointer and clarity to this line of thoughts, Ikelegbe (2008) noted thus:

> The nature and character of the Nigerian state has underpinned the nature of relations with oil and the MNOCs. Firstly being a neo-colonial capitalist peripheral economy, the state controlled by a dependent comprador ruling class, which is accumulative parasitic, violence, exploitative, clientelist, corrupt, profligate and unproductive. The Nigeria ruling class has dependent on oil since the 1960s for accumulation. The mentality, outlook, methods, orientations and activities of the ruling class has determined the predatory relations to oil and crass and amoral plunder that has occurred…

Ikelegbe (2008) came to the conclusion that oil did create a large system of patronage, clienteles and corruption. The import of his conclusion is that corruption at the level of society in Nigeria is elitist and the consequence of the elevation of "corruption" over "social justice" is the enormity of oil base leakages and frittering that had seen revenue of over 400 billion naira been looted and

wasted. This had further situated and position Nigeria as a well endowed nation yet tottering as one of the most corrupt-and poorest countries. The statistics from the statistician - general of the federation (2010) did give a pointer and corroborated the high incidences of poverty in Nigeria in the midst of the huge proceeds from the sale of crude oil. Nigeria's relative poverty measurement stood at 54.9% but increase to 69% (or 112, 518,507 Nigerians) in 2010. The north-West and North-East geo-political zones recorded the highest poverty rate in the country with 77.8% and 76.3% respectively in 2010, while the south West geo-political zone recorded the lowest at 59.1%.

Amongst the states, Sokoto had the highest poverty rate at 56.4%, while Niger had the lowest at 43.6%% in the year. Whatever the year under review, especially from 2010 upwards, the statistics and contractions in the current Nigerian state had not changed or altered drastically, as the incidences and index of poverty had continued to rise without signs of slowing down. The increasing rate of poverty especially in recent years (2000-2016) has caused the citizenry to ask if they do have a stake in the Nigerian state. All of these contractions are indeed a reflection of the planlessness, failure, and the sorry state of Nigeria's development and developmental plans.

The failure of Nigeria's development and developmental plans is intricately woven into the Niger Delta oil, as the oil proceeds from the region have remained a curse on the Nigerian state. Oil is a curse and will remain a curse on Nigeria's political economy, as long as the Nigerian state continues with a crude politics that gives legitimacy to corruption, ethnicity, nepotism, and mal-administration over social justice and the rule of law.

3. The Rise of Militancy in the Niger Delta

The Niger Delta region of Nigeria is both a geographical and a geological term. Furthermore, it is a political zone in present day Nigeria. It is a region with rainfall of 4.0 mm. Its fresh water alluvial zone is estimated at 2,730sq meters, saline (Mangrove) zone at 2,460sq miles, Beach ridge zone 5,556sq miles, Sombrero-Warri Deltaic Plan-30sq miles and Ogoni-exclusive saline soil-36p0sq miles (Ekpenyong and Dienye, 2010). As a geographical zone, the Niger Delta region is known to be made up the following states (ii) Bayelsa (iii) Rivers (iv) Akwa-Ibom and Cross River (vi) Imo, (vii) Ondo (viii) Abia. The Niger Delta region and political zone of Nigeria is the hub of the petro-chemical industry and exclusively accounts for the oil resource that had helped place Nigeria at No 6 position amongst the major oil exporters of the world. Whatever benefits the Nigerian state had enjoyed and still enjoys as a result of exploitation and exploration of oil has translated to nothing in terms of better lives in the Niger Delta region. The region is famous for poverty, diseases, lack of educational facilities, roads, and environmental degradation.

The immediate cause and the rise of militancy in the region is traceable to the treatment meted out by of the Nigerian state to the environmentalist anmd activist, Ken Saro Wiwa, and his friends; the consideration of the region as "service station" to the nation and its citizens as second class citizens. The activist had brought to the notice of the administrators of the Nigerian state and the international community the hazard and the systematic elimination of the people of Ogoni and by extension the people of the Niger-Delta region through environmental degradation that is primarily due to the activities of the oil companies in the region. The activism of Ken Saro Wiwa and its friends brought them on a collision path with the government of Nigeria led by Sani Abacha.

The government, not wanting to give in to the superior logic and arguments of Ken Saro Wiwa and friends, resorted to clandestine tactics and politics through a quasi-judicial trial that led to the killing of Saro-Wiwa and friends. This event sent a message to the people of Niger Delta region that the area is seen and considered only a part of the Nigerian State for the reason of her natural and economic resources.

The consequence of the killing of Ken Saro Wiwa and friends caused grievances that cut across the region to be driven underground, but only to resurface as militancy. The purpose of militancy or militant activities in the region was for the administrators of the Nigerian state to have a rethink towards the Niger Delta region. This fact was acknowledged by the late president Umaru Yar-Adua in his amnesty speech declaration in 2007. The crude politics of the Nigerian state did situate and cause the region to be treated as a conquered region The effect of the crude politics, together with the woeful economic development of the region, is captured in Ibojes quotation of Owugah (2009) who noted inter alia that:

> The oil which brought so much wealth to the nation and those in power, brought much poverty, diseases, death, loss of livelihood etc. to the people …

Following on this trajectory, the UNDP (2006) report on the Niger Delta region is more explicit in its assertion and opinion on the Niger Delta:

> Ordinarily the Niger Delta should be a gigantic economic reservoir of National and International importance. Its rich empowerments of oil and gas resources feed methodically into the economic system in exchange for massive revenues that carry the promise of rapid socio economic transformation within the delta itself. In reality, the Niger

> Delta is a region suffering from administrative neglect, crumbing social infrastructure, and services, high unemployment, social deprivation abject poverty, filth and squalor and endemic conflict.

A tint of the summation of the Owugah (2009) and UNDP (2006) can also be seen in the works and analysis of Okowa (2008) Ibeanu (2008) Okaba (2008) and Natziger (2008). The summation and viewpoints of these scholars put together did necessitate this paper asking whether the current Nigerian state is fair in its treatment of the region as a "conquered territory" and its citizens as "second class". The spectrums of answers to the question raised are wide and broad. But the answer(s) of Dukor (2005) to the question did introduced a new strand of logic to the entire discuss, as he attempted eclipsing the entire uproar, agitations and responses that had manifested in militancy in the region as belonging to the 'state of nature' especially if cognizance is given to democracy in this modern world. Dukor (2003) had noted inter alia that…

> The ascription of natural rights to the oil communities is a reasoning in the state of nature without civil societies, an argument which is out of context with the present dispension. Much as natural rights may exist in a society without government, that is where might is right, the natural rights of a moral man begs the question…

The pitfall in Dukor's (2003) analysis and logic is his failure to recognise the fact that Nigeria is not an ideal democracy. Nigeria is a quasi democracy in theory and practice. Whatever the grouse against Dukor's (2005) logic, what is pertinent to note is that, the maltreatment and neglect of the region by the administrators of the

Nigerian state did cause the rise of militancy in the region. The following groups are either involved in both militancy and none military agitations or in just one aspect. The groups include;

- Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP)
- Association of Minority Producing Areas of Rivers State (AAMPARS)
- The association of Minority oil state (AMOS)
- The Ethnic Minority rights organization of Nigeria (EMRON
- The Ethnic Minority Rights of Africa (EMIROAF)
- The Nigerian Society for the Protection of the Environment (NDOPEN)
- The Movement for Reparation of Ogbia and Olobiri (MOREIO)
- The Ijaw Youth Council (IYC)
- The Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND)
- The Niger Delta People Volunteer Force (NDPVF)
- The Congress for the Liberation of Ikwerre People
- Ohikoko Movement
- Egbesu Confraternity
- Niger Delta Avengers.

In all the claims and desires of these groups, the common denominator is that government must redress years of neglect of the region.

4. Conclusion

The treatment of the Niger Delta region stems from the character of the Nigerian state. The characterization of the Nigerian state as neo-colonial, dependent, fragile, privatized, inefficient, non-

economically productive, non - hegemonic and even illegitimate is intricately woven into her origin and the character of the custodians or administrators, the elite of the state. The character of administrators of the Nigerian state is directly proportional to the crude politics of the state which is anti-development, anti people, anti-rule of law and human rights.

The excessive wealth from the proceeds of oil together with crude politics, ethnicity and corruption has caused the citizenry to lose faith in the country, thus the allegiance needed by every modern state like Nigeria not been there. The consequence of this is the rivalry amongst the different nationalities that make up Nigeria for the control of power at the centre. The crude politics gave impetus and credence to the wrong definition of Nigeria which was the leverage of corruption and maladministration needed to foster in Nigeria. The elevation of corruption and maladministration over social justice is what raked up the several "national questions" that the Nigerian state and its administrators are struggling to grapple with. One of such question is whether any part (region) and its citizens should be considered inferior or second class citizens.

The way the Nigerian state and its administrators had gone about answering the several national questions at the level of society is what gave rise to militancy in the Niger Delta region, thus Okowa (2005) asking…

> So on what basis can one define a Nigerian nation? We do not have a common religion. Our common history is less than a hundred years and it is clearly too short to provide comfortable basis for the definition of a sustainable nationhood… or is it the case that oil wealth of the minorities of the Niger Delta has provided a looting-basis

> for the contemporary manifestation and definition of the business called Nigeria. The continuous looting and plundering of the Nation's treasury, regime, after regime, civil and military clearly evidences the fact that our leaders do not believe in Nigeria as their nation… From the foregoing, it is logical to argue, that the fundamental plank that serves as the bases for the definition of the Nigerian nation is the common interest of all to loot and plunder the oil and gas resource the people of Niger Delta.

The crux of the matter is that the Niger Delta region is a victim of its wealth (oil and gas) due to crude politics and the wrong definition of Nigeria. From this backdrop, the Nigerian state needs an urgent redefinition that will elicit patriotism from all Nigerians.

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