

Niger Delta Militants and Resource Control in Nigeria

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Abstract

For the past three decades, issues about the Niger Delta have attracted attention in scholarly discourse, policy cycle and global political economy as a result of the changing politics of oil exploitation and resource control in the region. There has been a wave of violent agitation by the communities in the region, with several militant groups demanding justice, equality, and socio-economic development of their host communities. This paper examines the major cause of militant agitations in the Niger Delta region, especially from derivation principle for revenue allocation and resource control. The paper contends that militant agitations in the Niger Delta should be considered in the light of youth reactions to the prevailing decades of neglect of the region by the Nigerian state, rather than merely reducing it to youth restiveness and criminal act. The paper concludes that the issues raised by the militants over the Niger Delta crisis are very sensitive and bother on the very essence of fiscal federalism and must be resolved within the context of all-inclusive national dialogue.

Keywords: Fiscal federalism; Niger Delta Militants; Resource control; Youth restiveness

1. Introduction

For several decades after Nigeria's independence, the country has remained a theatre of conflicts, violence and insecurity of different kinds and proportion. Interestingly, at the heart of most of these conflicts and violence is the scramble for resource control and the accruing proceeds. The scramble for resource control has continued to define the nature and intensity of not just violence and conflicts in the Nigerian polity but also politics. This is why some scholars are of the opinion that wherever there are resources there must be politics, and whenever there is politics, conflict must arise because in allocating the resources (which is politics) there must be a clash of interests (See Kareem, 2018). The extent to which these interests are assuaged or met determines whether the conflict will degenerate to violence or not.

Indeed, natural resources have been a constant variable playing a key role in triggering and sustaining conflicts not just in Nigeria but in many other parts of Africa. In some cases, resource conflict is embedded in the social and economic grievance narrative. Resource control in many parts of Africa has had conflict cases attached to it especially as it has continued to raise questions prominent among which is ‘who gets what, when and how? Cases of kidnapping of oil workers, the vandalization of pipelines with explosives, massive killings of community residents and security officials by militants is a major pointer or evidence that lends credence to the prevalence of the phenomenon of resource conflicts in Nigeria. As a result, many see a ‘resource curse’ in Nigeria and many other African countries, whereby easily obtainable natural resources and commodities have essentially hurt the prospects of several African national and regional economies by fostering political corruption and feeding violence and rebellion. Of course, conflicts in Nigeria are also linked to a myriad of factors ranging from ethnic plurality, ethnicity, nepotism and religious differences, resource control issues have been adduced to be one of the most prominent and lethal factors in the country.

At the center of conflicts over the phenomenon of resource control in Nigeria is the Niger Delta. The oil-rich Niger Delta Region has been engulfed in conflict between the militants and the Nigerian state being represented by security forces. Based on the Niger Delta resource control perspective, there is the domination of lands and resources, oppression as well as the utility of state’s power by the Nigerian state against the people, all in the bid to control the abundant resources in the region and amerce wealth at the expense of the people who are the owners of the land. The emergence and continued relevance of some groups in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria has been propelled by resource control. Prominent of such groups whose central aim is to put the Niger Delta region at an advantageous position are Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People, Ijaw Youth Council, Committee of Oil Producing Areas, the Ogoni Bill of Rights, the Ikwerre Charter of Demands and the Movement for the Emancipation of Niger Delta. The activities of these groups center around influencing resource control in the Niger Delta region. Most times, their agitations are reflected when they make strict demands from the government, by issuing threats and sanctions to the government. Thus, the implication of the activities of these groups has been the deepening crisis of development and national cohesion in Nigeria.

To this end, this paper examines how resource control is shaping and reshaping the dynamics and trajectory of conflicts between Niger Delta militant groups and the Nigerian state. The paper also demonstrates how weak institutions and lack of basic infrastructure as well as job opportunities cause and deepen these conflicts more than any other factor. The paper is structured in the division of five sections. The first is the introductory part which offers some insights into the background of the issue of resource control not only in Nigeria but in Africa. The second section attempts conceptual clarification of the term ‘resource control’. The third segment attempts an overview of the issue of revenue allocation and resource control in Nigeria. The fourth segment examines the causes and consequences of Niger Delta militant activities. The fifth section interrogates state response and its implications while the sixth segment is the conclusion and recommendations.

Conceptualising Resource Control

The crucial concept which forms the basis of this study and which is considered critically relevant to the heart of this paper is resource control. This concept is interrogated extensively here, to situate the study in proper context and to create a connection between previous related scholarly works and this research. The term 'resource control' as a principle in an organized state or federal arrangement has been given similar conceptual interpretations by scholars. Ako (2012) opined that there is a significant difficulty when engaging the 'resource control' discourse from the purview of the Niger Delta and that conceptual ambiguity exists. As pontificated by Kehinde et.al. (2013), resource control refers to the various ways and manners the government's revenue and democratic dividends are shared among the various tiers of government. From the works of Itse (1995) and Ike (2001), resource control refers to the power and rights of a community or state to generate income by way or means of taxation of human and non-human substances within a given environment. Such 'powers' and 'rights' to initiate taxation process are however limited by law, especially in a federal system of government where the powers of the central government are superior to that of the subordinate and constituent states. Shebbs and Njoku (2016) posited that the basic principle of resource control is the ability of a state government to exploit the natural resources of a state to the benefit of all (especially in a democratic state), such that every citizen, bonded by the state's sovereignty and their allegiance to the state, has a benefit from the state's resource. They argue that concept of resource control covers the various resources that can be reposed in various places which include but not limited to forest (farm lands) to open lands, air space, land-depth resources (such as oil and mineral resources), sea shores, waters and many others.

Conceptualizing resource control, it is pertinent to note that there are four broad notions of resource control that may be distilled from numerous conceptual frameworks proffered in the body of existing knowledge on the subject matter. The four conceptual perspectives on resource control when Niger Delta is brought into the discourse are the 'absolute' and 'principal' and local resource control as well as increased derivation. The concept of absolute resource control takes some clues and insights from the definition proffered by the Kaiama Declaration which explains that resource control exists when every region is allowed or permitted to control its resources 100 per cent. The proponents of absolute resource control make the submission of Kaiama Declaration as the true notion of what the term should normatively denote. The Kaiama Declaration, coined, sharpened and popularized the term "resource control" (Osaghae, Ikelegbe, Olarinmoye and Okhonmina, 2007). Resource control according to Article 1 and 2 of the Kaiama Declaration of the Ijaw people proclaimed on the 11th of December 1998 has to do with the extension of the ownership of all land and natural resources within the Ijaw territory as belonging to the Ijaw communities because they are "the basis of our survival". the Kaiama Declaration sees resource control as the ability of Niger Delta peoples and communities to enjoy the right to ownership and control of resources in the region. The proponents of the second conceptual perspective or strand of thought on resource control- 'principal resource control' views resource control as the Niger Delta region having 'a direct and decisive role in the exploration for, the exploitation and disposal of, including sales of the harvested resources' (Sagay, 2001). The proponents of the third viewpoint on the concept-local resource control posited that the term refers to availing the inhabitants of the Niger Delta region the opportunities to enjoy access to the environmental resources and benefits of their ancestral land. The relevance and importance of this fourth conception is borne out of the failures of the political class and militants alike to make any palpable positive changes to the lives of the ordinary Niger Delta citizens they claim to represent. While the political class have exhibited gross irresponsibility in the management of accruing oil revenues to state coffers, the militants enjoy the 'rewards' of their struggle with monthly stipends from the government as well as vocational and educational training opportunities to the exclusion of these

ordinary citizens. In other words, the ordinary citizens on whose behalf political and militant agitation has taken place are practically worse off.

The concept of resource control has also been viewed as a synonymous term with true federalism. In other words, it has been contended that resource control is the same thing as true federalism in conceptual terms. In this conception, increased derivation is basis of true federalism. Thus, it is the right to control or manage the revenue accruing from oil and other natural resources in line with the tenets of true federalism. The introduction of ‘true federalism’ to the resource control debate contributes to misunderstanding the resource control debate. The governors of the southern states in Nigeria also refer to this notion of ‘true federalism’ in the discourse of resource control (Ako, 2012). However, they do so to promote their agenda that states ought to control their resources and contribute (usually a smaller percentage of such revenues) to the federal coffers. In some way, they have elevated the notion of resource control to be synonymous with ‘true’ federalism (Ako, 2012).

Similarly, conceptualizing resource control, Osaghae et. al (2007) observed that the ideological basis of the youth struggle in the Niger Delta is resource control and that the term is associated with perceptions of equity and fairness. Resource control is therefore the equitable distribution and reward for the region, which is seen to be derived from true federalism. The concept of resource control has three main components according to Osaghae et. al (2007). These according to them include:

a) the power and right of a community to raise funds by way of tax on persons, matters, services and materials within its territory b) the executive right to the ownership and control of resources, both natural and created within its territory, c) The right to customs duties on goods destined for its territory and excise duties on goods manufactured in its territories. Thus, for communities of the Niger-delta, resource control signifies a change in the demands of Niger-delta community from “fairer sharing to total control of the natural resources found in a state by the state for use in its development at its own pace”. For its proponents, resource control as conceived above is about self-determination and group survival and so not negotiable because resource control is essential for the survival of the South-South peoples and is a sine qua non to the continued existence of the people of the area in the Nigerian federation (Osaghae et. al, 2007).

Be that as it may, for the sake of this study, we shall limit our focus to oil resource on the justification that it is the most pressing resource control issue in Nigeria. As noted above, the concept of resource control covers the various resources that can be reposed in various places which include but not limited to forest (farm lands) to open lands, air space, land-depth resources (such as oil and mineral resources), sea shores, waters and many others. As the mainstay of Nigeria’s economy, crude oil accounts for up to 95% of export revenue and about 80% of government revenue” (Umeh, 2012). Historically, oil was first discovered in Nigeria in Oloibiri in Rivers State in 1956. With over 55 years of experience in oil exploration, the Nigeria has got over 700 oil fields, 6400 oil wells, 1200 kilometers of pipelines, 10 export terminals, 22 petroleum storage depots., 280 flow stations, 10 gas plants, 4 refineries etc. (Umeh, 2012).

Revenue Allocation and Resource Control in Nigeria: An Overview

The concept of revenue allocation denotes the procedural methods and formulas of sharing the centrally generated revenue among the different governmental tiers and how the amount allocated to a particular tier is shared among its components in a federal arrangement. Revenue allocation in Nigeria as a federal state, involves the allocation and sharing of revenues among the three federating components viz: the federal, state and local governments. As many have argued one serious problem bedeviling post-colonial Nigerian state is the issue of revenue Allocation. This problem simply has to do with the difficulties, issues and questions on how to find an acceptable formular for sharing the federally collectable revenue among the federating units in Nigeria. In Nigeria, the problem has always been associated with whether the principles of derivation, need, national interest, school enrolment and landmass should be used as a basis for working out an acceptable revenue allocation formular for the country. Indeed, the disbursement of revenue to the three tiers of government in Nigeria has been a subject of hot debate because of the political nature of the exercise and the way and manner the state has continued to fashion out its interests at different times. Of course, the responsibility of disbursing the funds accrued in the common pool account is the exclusive preserve of the federal government.

The taxonomy of revenue allocation in the Nigerian federal structure reflects the existence of two major components, viz: vertical allocation formula and the horizontal allocation formula. The Vertical Allocation Formula (VAF) refers to the revenue allocation arrangement which has to do percentage allocated to the three governmental tiers in the Nigerian federation. This formula is applied vertically to the total volume of disburseable revenue in the Federation Account at a particular point in time (Lukpata, 2013). Under the VAF revenue allocation arrangement, every tier of government to knows what is due to it; the Federal Government on one hand and the 36 States and 774 Local Governments on the other (Bashir, 2008:3). The second component of revenue allocation in Nigeria is the Horizontal Allocation Formula (HAF) which is applicable to States and Local Governments only concerning the allocation of revenue. Horizontal Allocation Formula provides the basis for sharing of the volume of revenue already allocated en-bloc to the 36 States and 774 Local Governments (Lukpata, 2013). Through the application of the principles of horizontal allocation formula, the allocation due to each State or Local Government is determined. By implication, the difference between vertical allocation formula and horizontal revenue allocation is that while the former explains the inter-tier sharing of revenue between the three tiers of government the latter has to do with the intra tier sharing amongst the 36 States and the 774 Local Governments in the federation.

The politics of resource control system in Nigeria is a product of evolution from colonial period to post-colonial period. It is abundantly clear, based on historical evidence available that what propelled British exploration of Niger Area starting from the 15th century was the pursuit of specific economic interests of industrialized economies of Europe. In fact, they (European colonialists) were more interested in making economic benefits from exploiting the resources of the land than in state administration. Thus, the discovery of oil in Nigeria was sort of a mark of success which followed years of successive efforts to pull out oil from the soils of West Africa, engaged by some oil companies charged with that task. The urge or desire of the European colonialists or Britain to protect her economic interests in Nigeria led to the introduction and enactment of certain Legal frameworks or laws which gave her the exclusive power of resource control during the colonial period. A major pointer to this fact was the enactment of the 1914 Colonial Mineral Oil Ordinance, the 1916 Mineral Ordinance and the 1946 Mineral Act both of which reposed the ownership and control of all the mineral substances to the Crown in London. In a nutshell, the British colonial government in Nigeria centralized resource control using legal instruments of ordinances and laws. The 1916 Mineral Ordinance states as follows:

The entire property in and control of the minerals, and mineral oils, in under or upon any land in Nigeria, and of all Rivers, streams and water courses, throughout Nigeria, is and shall be vested in the Crown, save in so far as such rights may in any case have been limited by the express grant made before the commencement of this ordinance (National Archive Enugu, NAE, 422/1916)

It must also be stated that even when agriculture constituted the back-bone of Nigeria's economy, the British colonialists ensured that the little gains made from this sector (the main cash crops being cocoa, rubber and Palm fruits and groundnuts) were majorly diverted to Britain and only very little attention was placed on the areas from where the resources were gotten. So, the colonial regime in Nigeria left a theatre of all odds for the Nigerian resource control system as constituent units and regions were placed in serious combat between themselves in order to obtain what they deserved. Not only that, the minorities were prominently obscured and not recognized during the colonial regime in resource allocation (Shebbs and Njoku, 2016). The colonial era witnessed the gradual proliferation of resource control protests and agitation. To this end, during the colonial Nigeria, we could discover the silent existence of the three critical issues of conflict, politics and law bordering the issue of resource control. The complications arising from resource control were proliferated during the colonial but never went with the regime as the post-colonial regimes have also failed to address the issues arising on its phenomenon.

With Nigeria's attainment of independence, the pattern of resource control by the colonial government (centralized resource control system) was bequeathed to the immediate post-colonial government. Having gained a little bit of control of its own resource, following Independence, Nigerian political leaders were moved to make adjustments to the sharing order of the oil resource (Shebbs and Njoku, 2016). Emphasis at that time was less on oil as there were reasonable successes recorded in other sectors, particularly agriculture. As time went by, crude oil exploration turned out to be the most profiting venture, and seemingly the easier way of making huge income; attention was switched over to crude oil at the detriment of other sectors because of its huge benefits. With thriving nature of the oil sector in Nigeria after independence, the post-colonial Nigeria experienced even more issues and conflicts over resource control than in colonial Nigeria.

The advent of military rule in Nigeria in 1966 ushered in a new phase in the resource control pattern of Nigeria. As power became more centralized following military intervention in the country, the power to the control and ownership of the oil resource was conferred to the Supreme Military Council and the Federal Executive Council. This was entrenched in the Federal Military Decree no, 23 of 1966. With this new arrangement that allowed for more centralization of resource control power, protests and agitations were inevitable over the downplaying of the right of people to protest against government's decisions which appear unpleasant to them posed a minor challenge to resource control in Nigeria "namely, the suspension of the people's rights and control over the entire land, the cancellation of the 50 percent revenue allocation to the Delta area, and neglect of the environment" (Raji, 2013).

With the oil boom in the 1970s, the military subverted democratic processes at will and the people of the Niger delta were left at the mercy of oil entrepreneurs who were barreling the interests of the corrupt politicians. As noted by Shebbs and Njoku, the federal Government's Decree No. 9 of 1971 and the Land

Use Act of 1978 were all tailored to managing the resource control conflicts which proliferated in the post-independence period. But before then, the ills had long been done as negligence was still on the high side against the people of the Niger delta area. Subsequently, the democratic structure of the Nigerian state was getting more established and moored on the bedrock of constitutional development. This was somehow influenced by the state creation which intensified the concern of states and regions for development and democratic responsibility.

From 1979 to date, resource control in Nigeria has been characterized by fiscal concentration at the center and retention of the federal collected revenue by the federal government; and vertical revenue sharing which is characterized by relentless tension among the levels of the federation on the sharing formula. Centralization of levying and collection of tax coupled with 52.68% statutory allocation of the Federal Government has led to near total dependence on the central government by both the states and local governments all over the federation (Shehu, Othman and Osman1, 2017).

The centralization of the ownership and control of resources and revenue allocation has not dwindled even with the return to democratic rule in 1999. Under the 1999 constitution, the Nigerian federal/central government is constitutionally assigned to not only exercise most and strategic constitutional power, but to also generate and control the juiciest sources of the federation's revenues federation (Shehu, Othman and Osman1, 2017). Under the sharing formula of revenues in the Fourth Republic 1999 to date, there has been the higher allocation of revenue to the federal government. This development is often adduced to the strategic items under exclusive powers such as defense, communications, military, foreign relations among others which are indeed greater constitutionally allocated responsibilities. It has however been argued that granting too much fiscal power to a particular government in a federation may not help the system for the fact that too much fiscal power may render the other levels of the federation incapable and financially handicapped

Summarily put, the politics of resource control and revenue allocation in the Nigerian federation can be examined in four distinct phases. The First phase of it (1946-1951) was characterized with strong federal control of fiscal matters. The second phase of it (1952-1966) witnessed significant fiscal decentralization as the centrally collected revenues was shared between the federal/central and regional governments. The third phase was the first phase of military rule (1966-1979) with remarkable fiscal concentration at the center and retention of the federal collected revenue by the federal government. The fourth phase (beginning from the 1980's to date) has been marred by vertical revenue sharing which is characterized by relentless tension among the levels of the federation on the sharing formula, resource control.

Process of revenue allocation in Nigeria has been characterized by the establishment of several fiscal commissions on an ad-hoc, permanent, presidential and constitutional basis with varied and circumstantial recommendations and policies in order to evolve a better formula for revenue allocation for the polity. To this end, revenue allocation in Nigeria, a central theme in government has a chequered historical antecedent. Since 1946 when the first commission/committee on revenue was set up, Nigeria has set-up at different times at least nine of such committees in her national history and each saddled with the responsibility of examining various fiscal issues and recommend the best principles and formulas in sharing national revenues to meet-up the challenges of the time. Some of these Commissions/Committees include; the Phillipson Commission (1946), the Hicks-Phillipson Commission (1951), The Chicks Commission (1968, The Raisman Commission (1958), The Binns Commission (1964), The Dina Interim Committee (1968), the Aboyade Technical Committee (1977), the Okigbo Commission (1980), the

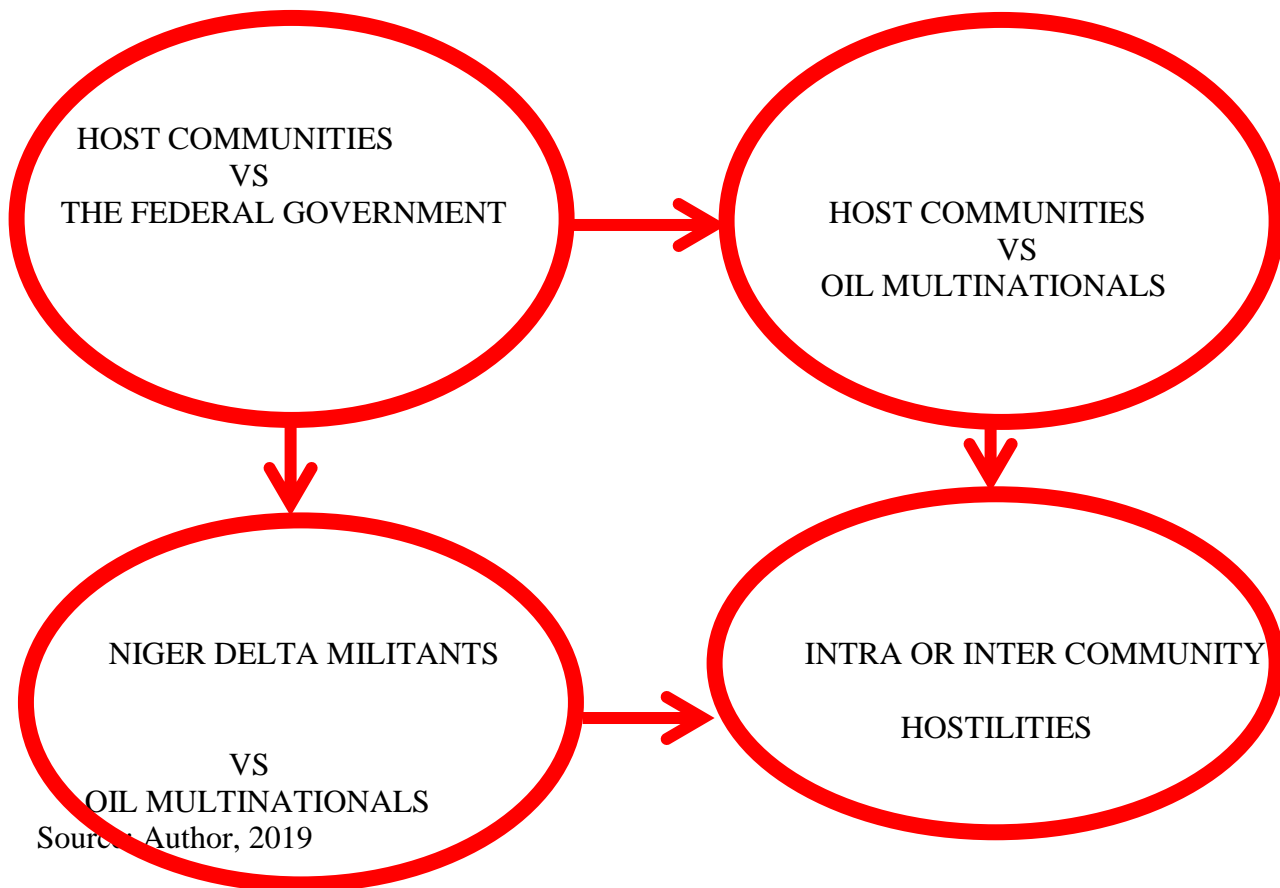
Revenue Mobilization Allocation and Fiscal Commission (1989) and various military decrees (revisions) particularly 1970, 1971, 1992, etc. It is worthy of note that all the Commissions/Committees listed above were ad-hoc in nature except for the Revenue Mobilization Allocation and Fiscal Commission which was established as a legal and permanent entity to deal with fiscal matters on a more regular basis as the need arises.

Indeed, many of the Commissions' establishments were largely influenced by issues related to oil minority communities and oil resource control. Nigeria has therefore been on a long term search for popular and viable resource control and allocation formula for its federal structure. These searches have been highly politicized and controversial between federal (central) government and basically oil producing states and communities on one aspect, and the federal, states and local governments on the other. It is, however noteworthy that Nigeria is a heterogeneous state, but with a monocultured economy substantially dependent on oil, which accounts for more than two-third of its total generated revenue and foreign exchange earnings. Substantial revenue and expenditure of the tiers of the federation are dependent on the statutory allocation which is also based on sale and the price of crude oil with over 50% of the revenue being allocated to the central (federal) government.

It is also pertinent to note that revenue allocation among the three tiers of government in the Nigerian federation has been based on certain principles. These principles are products of the recommendations of the various Revenue Allocation Commissions/Committees set up at different times in Nigeria. From the very first commission (Phillipson Commission) set up in 1946, series of recommendations have been suggested to address the unending phenomenon and questions of revenue allocation and resource control in Nigeria. Basically, fourteen principles are central to the revenue sharing in Nigeria as suggested by those institutions. These include: Derivation, basic needs, Minimum Material Standards, Balanced Development, Equality of Access to Development Opportunities, Independent Revenue/Tax effort, Absorptive Capacity, Fiscal Efficiency and Minimum responsibility of Government. Others are: Internal Revenue Generation Effort., Landmass and Terrain, Equality of States, Social Development Factor and Population.

Nature, Causes and Consequences of Niger Delta Militant Activities

At this juncture, it is pertinent to note that the Niger Delta militant activities have taken four major dimensions. Put differently, the nature of Niger Delta crisis manifests in four dimensional ways. The first dimension is the struggle between the host communities and the Federal Government over resource control. The second dimensional nature of this conflicts manifests in the imbroglio between the oil host communities and the International Oil Companies. The third dimension is the antagonism between the Niger Delta militants and the oil companies/Federal troops. The fourth dimension is the struggle between and within the oil host communities arising from internal disagreements over ownership of oil wells and, or sharing formula of oil rents and, or location of development projects by the government or oil companies. This is represented as thus:



The struggles and agitations of the four dimensions above have been driven by various popular social movements with different tactics and strategies in the Niger Delta. At the initial stage of their struggle, the Ghandi-like revolutionary approach was embraced by Ken Saro-Wiwa and Isaac Adaka Boro who pioneered the Niger delta agitations and militancy. The Ghandi-like revolutionary approach involved militarized violent movement towards ascertaining the wishes and desires of an average people of the Niger Delta. Isaac Adaka Boro staged the first revolt against the government on Niger Delta issues and campaigned for the creation of a Niger Delta Republic in 1966. However, in the mid-1980s, there emerged new social movements as the like Ijaw National Congress (INC), Movement for the Payment of Reparations to Oghia, the Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP), Isoko Youth Movement, Nembe Youth Movement, Chikoko Movement, among others evolved to stage liberation campaigns for Niger Deltans. The killings of Ken Saro Wiwa and other eight Ogonis in 1995 pragmatically change the dimension of the movement to a more militarized *tactics of terror* phase. This, perhaps, indicates a pragmatic shift militant, in championing the course for socio-economic and environmental emancipation, engaged in sabotaging oil installations, hostage taking, and carrying out lethal car bombings. Niger Delta militancy took the worse form of kidnapping and hostage-taking in the 4th Republic following the emergence of President Olusegun Obasanjo.

On the causal factors responsible for the prevalence of conflicts in the Niger Delta, resource control and the dwindling derivation percentage in vertical revenue allocation are at the heart Niger Delta agitation. As noted above, the discovery of oil in 1956 in Niger Delta region coupled with the commencement of commercial oil production in 1958 led to series of agitations and protests bordering on resource control

and fair allocation of revenue to the region. With this development, the struggles for the control of oil resources by the indigenes were championed and accelerated. The struggle for oil resource hegemony later became more intense, hence partly contributed to the Nigerian Civil War of 1967-70, though indirectly as the Niger Delta hegemons or elites were dragged into the war by the South-eastern forces. At the forefront of these agitations and the struggles for the control of oil resources in the Niger Delta region are the indigenes. Ogbogbo (2004) corroborated the oil factor in Niger Delta militancy noting that communities in the region are primarily directed towards securing increased local participation in the oil business and adequate access to the oil revenues. Thus, the objective of militant groups is the economic and political emancipation of the Niger Delta, largely through ownership and control of its petroleum resources. In addition, some of these groups or militias have produced charters, declarations, agendas and resolutions to express their demands for increased percentage of revenue allocated to states in the region in terms of derivation. In other words, their agitations and conflicts with the Nigerian state has been fueled by the dwindling derivation formula for vertical revenue allocation. The table below illustrates this position.

Table 2: Derivation Formula 1960- 2019

Years	Producing states (%)	Federal Government (%)	Distributable Pool (%)
1960-1967	50	20	30
1967-1969	50		50
1969-1971	45		55
1971-1975	45 minus off-shore proceeds		55 plus off-shore proceeds
1975-1979	20 minus off-shore proceeds		80 plus off-shore proceeds
1979-1981			100
1982-1992	1 and half		98 and half
1992-1999	3		97
1999-2019	13		87

Source: Adapted from Udoh (2019)

The second causal factor in Niger Delta Militancy is connected to the phenomena of poverty and despondency in the area. The Niger Delta masses have been forced to make peace with hunger, poverty and despondency in the midst of wealth cornered and monopolized by the elite and leaders who have at their disposal instruments of coercion to suppress the hapless masses in their righteous agitations. This is considered a major injustice by the Niger Delta people who believe the oil rich region should not experience poverty, hence, the inevitability of conflicts between them, oil multinationals and the Nigerian state. Poverty in the region has always arouse ill-feeling, anger and grudges and builds up as well in the victims the will to destroy the sources of these studied and executed violence on their human worth.

The third causal factor in Niger Delta militancy has to do with the issue of environmental degradation in the region. Oil exploitation has created life-threatening ecological hazards and deterioration of health and the social fabric of the inhabitants of the oil communities. The implication is that the oil industry has exploited the ecosystems for resources beyond the level of sustainability (Douglas, 1998). The ecological problem is a reality that propels conflicts between Niger Delta, oil companies and the Nigerian

government. The critical issues of environmental pollution, resource rampage and degradation, and socio-economic, cultural and psychological dislocation in the Delta have constantly raised agitations by the people of Niger Delta. Environmental degradation resulting from oil exploitation has negatively affected the economic activities of the people, resulting in the subsequent loss of income base, thereby accentuating poverty in an area which, prior to oil exploitation, was seen as largely economically self-sufficient (Babatunde, 2012). Many Niger Delta communities reported they rarely receive sufficient compensation, or any at all, for land taken by oil companies, or rendered useless by oil spills, acid rain, and other forms of pollution. In addition, the hostilities arising from this perspective is hinged on the fact that the oil multinationals operating in the region have abused the environment through gas flaring and oil spill-age. These abuses have polluted the lands and waters of the Niger Delta people. This is affecting negatively the traditional occupation of the people which is farming and fishing

The fourth causal factor in Niger Delta militancy is connected with the struggle for the ownership and control lands in the region. Indeed, one of the root causes of the conflict that has emerged in the Niger Delta has to do with ownership and control of land. The promulgation of some obnoxious legislations on land ownership and control in the Niger Delta has further worsened the crisis in the region. Such promulgations are considered as a violation of the rights of the local communities who believe they should ordinary lay claim to lands in the region. This legislation, which includes the petroleum act of 1969 and the land use Decree/Act of 1978, regulated community access to communal or open access land, and they were primarily promulgated to restrict access to such land, while making it possible for multinational oil companies to have unrestricted access to explore for oil unchallenged, even on sacred land. With this legislations, indigenous communities in the Niger Delta were dispossessed of their lands. Thus, as the available land gets smaller due to oil exploitation, the struggle for its ownership and control increases while the potential conflict over ownership of land increases.

The fifth factor in the Niger Delta conflictive activities against oil multinationals and the Nigerian state is not unconnected with the lack of basic amenities and the dearth of economic development and job opportunities in the Region despite been the goose that laid the golden egg for Nigeria's economy. The proceeds from oil are not transferred for effective utility to development of the region where this huge resource lies. It is believed that successive leaders in Nigeria have shown little concern on the people's welfare. In spite of the environmental degradation which has assaulted the natural value of the oil area, the government and political leaders keep calm about it. This is one of the contributing causes of the conflict in that region of the country. This, coupled with lack of basic amenities and development in the area, has compelled the people to resort to sabotage of the facilities of the oil companies.

The sixth factor responsible for the Niger Delta militant activities has to do with the struggle over the location of development projects by the government or oil companies. There are struggles between and within the oil host communities arising from internal disagreements over ownership of oil wells and, or sharing formula of oil rents and, or location of development projects by the government or oil companies. This prevalence of inter-group struggles among communities in the region of the location of developmental projects is a product of the fact that there are numerous needs and interests in the Niger Delta, but the resources to meet them are limited. Hence there is always the scramble for perks and developmental projects by the various groups and interests (Kareem, 2018). This scramble sometimes results in inter-group crisis and, or inter-communal conflicts and some cases, two or more communities may lay claim to an oil-well so as to enjoy any benefits that may accrue from it.

The seventh and major factor driving militant activities and conflicts in the Niger Delta region are massive corruption, structural failure and bad governance. In other words, the Niger Delta region has been riddled with bad governance and corruption on the parts of government officials, both at the state and local government levels, community leaders, youth groups and oil producing companies amongst others. Corruption has continued to defy all possible solutions to the conflicts in the Niger Delta region. Corruption remains the major factor responsible for the ridiculous level of underdevelopment in the Niger Delta region. Poorly constructed, inappropriate, and nonviable institutional set-ups are responsible for a significant level of the opportunism and corruption that has pervaded the Niger Delta for decades. It is important to note that for stability and peace to reign sustainably in the Niger Delta region and the Nigerian state, there must be equity, probity, accountability and transparency in the management of the nations' oil wealth.

The consequences or cost of Niger Delta militant activities have been outrageous not only on the oil multinationals, but also on the Nigerian state and the local communities themselves. First, attacks on oil facilities by militant groups and the spate of oil worker kidnappings, have caused significant shortfalls in oil production in Nigeria which has dwindled the economic strength and revenue generation capacity of Nigeria. Between 1999 to 2003, oil industry production deferment ensured that Nigeria accounted for a loss of 6.8 billion dollars (Babatunde, 2012). Second, the perennial violent conflict in the Niger Delta region has significantly caused national insecurity and an increase in defence spending. Third, the incessant conflicts in the oil-producing areas have taken a toll on the people, particularly the women and children who have been internally displaced: the psychosocial impact on them is enormous (Isumonah, 1998). Fourth, massive human displacement has led to the disruption of children's education and their exposure to trauma and diseases. The internal displacement caused by the violent conflict has resulted in loss of livelihood in the form of physical, financial, human, social and economic assets (Ukeje, 2001; Ojo, 2002). Fifth, these conflicts have resulted in massive loss of life and property, livelihood as well as physical infrastructures. Sixth, the conflict in the Niger Delta region has lowered or reduced foreign investment in Nigeria's oil and gas sector of the economy; a phenomenon that has grave cumulative repercussions on the economic growth of the country. In other words, militant activities manifesting in conflicts in the Niger Delta region have resulted into the decrease in foreign investment especially in the oil and gas sectors as many foreign investors ran away from the country at the climax of the conflict.

State Response to Niger Delta Conflicts and its Implications

At this juncture, it is pertinent to examine critically the salient and fundamental issues and critical methods underpinning Nigerian state response to the conflicts in the Niger Delta region. This is imperative considering the fact that state response to Niger Delta conflicts has produced very significant implications and consequences on the transformation of the hitherto Niger Delta social movements into Violently Radicalized Groups (VRG).

To start with, one major response of successive governments in Nigeria to the conflicts in the Niger Delta region has manifested in the 'buying-up the leadership' tactical method of suppressing agitations emanating from militants or aggrieved communities. The 'buying-up the leadership' tactical response denotes the use of monetary inducement, bribes and incentives to convince the leadership of aggrieved Niger Delta groups, communities and militants to drop violence and open agitations against the government or oil multinationals. The state's tactical response most times truncate the groups' effort by

either buying-up the leadership of these groups or arresting and prosecuting them; this is often the case when bribery and incentives do not work.

Another form of response by the Nigerian state to the phenomenon of conflicts in the Niger Delta region is repression and militarization. The militarization of the Niger Delta region and the repression of the non-violent protests that followed, left trails of “sorrow, tears, blood” anguish and death (Courson, 2009). The heavy toll in terms of human rights abuses in the region as a result of militarization and repression further worsened matters. In some cases, entire oil-bearing communities were razed to the ground after the military were informed by oil companies that protesting communities were threatening oil facilities or staff (Courson, 2009). For instance, the response of the Nigerian state against IYC-led protests in December 1998 was repressive. During the military era, repressive approach was deployed against oil-bearing communities of the delta including those in the Ijaw axis (Yenagoa, Mbiama, Bomadi, Kaiama). Civilian government in post-199 era never fared better as repression became their tool at responding to protests and agitations in the Niger Delta region. For instance, barely six months into Obasanjo’s democratic dispensation, to be precise, on November 20, 1999, Odi, an oil-bearing community in Bayelsa State was razed to the ground by troops ordered in by the President. According to some estimates, about 2,483 persons (mainly women and children), lost their lives (Human Rights Watch Report, 2000).

It should be noted that the excessive use of force by the Nigerian state, led to the realignment of political forces which offered the pathway to the transformation of social movements into Violently Radicalized Groups. With state repressive response, the radicalization of Niger Delta social movements was inevitable. This was predicated on the notion that non-violent protests were not achieving any substantial result, some irrepressible pressure groups emerged in various parts of Ijaw territories. Indeed, with militarization as a state response, there became a paradigm shift in local resistance from a non-violent to a violent form. Thus, new groups such as MOSIEND, Egbesu Boys of Africa (EBA), Supreme Egbesu Assembly (SEA), The Atangbala Boys (TAB), Niger Delta Vigilante (NDV), Niger Delta Peoples Volunteer Force (NDPVF), and Niger Delta Freedom Fighters (NDFF) amongst others changed their non-violent approach to a more violent method of agitation (Courson, 2009). It is pertinent to state that the excessive use of force against anti-state movements was as a result of the fact that the government sees the activities of the protesting oil communities and the armed militias as acts of economic sabotage to the main source of national revenues and a challenge to its power in the Niger Delta (Obi, 2009). The activities of some of the armed groups are also interpreted as acts of criminality as well as a threat to national stability and security. Since Nigeria is an oil-dependent nation, with oil accounting for over 80 percent of national revenues and 95 percent of foreign exchange earnings, any act capable of resulting in the disruption of oil production is perceived a threat to the survival and wellbeing of the country (Obi, 2009).

There has also been institutional response from the Nigerian state with establishment of new institutions saddled with the responsibility of addressing the core issues in Niger Delta conflicts. The establishment of Oil Mineral Producing Areas Development Commission (OMPADEC), Niger Delta development commission (NDDC) and Ministry of the Niger delta to oversee the areas development was a major institutional response of the Nigerian state to the conflict situations in the region. As part of the institutional response of the Nigerian state, the government expressed and manifested the implementation of the 13 percent constitutional provision for derivation for developmental projects. Some of these institution in collaboration with oil companies improved on social responsibility, investing in community development projects such as schools, road construction, and rehabilitation.

Apart from repressive response by the Nigerian state, bargaining and negotiations were sometimes deployed to ensure peace in the region. Unfortunately, bargaining and negotiation as a tool of the Nigerian state response has since been marred by what some call the snail-speed approach of government to critical issues of the Niger Delta people. Shebbs and Njoku (2016) posited that negotiations with the government over a single issue has protracted for 42 years, indicating that the government has been unwilling to bring a lasting solution to the resource control conflicts. This snail-speed approach to issues of resource control is a political strategy to delay justice while the political actors keep swelling in the gains of oil rents and stolen funds as the multinational oil companies and investors obtain unrestricted access to explore communal land for oil exploration and make profit (Shebbs and Njoku, 2016).

Another form that the Nigerian State's response has taken can be seen in the series of peace-building programmes and initiatives floated by the government and which were targeted at putting an end to conflicts in the region. One of such was the Amnesty programme. An amnesty deal by the Nigerian government for militants in the Niger Delta aimed at reducing unrest in the oil-rich region came into effect today. President Umaru Yar'Adua offered an unconditional pardon and cash payments to rebels who agreed to lay down their arms and assemble at screening centers. Under, this peace-building initiative, the Nigerian state targeted up to 10,000 militants whose attacks in the six Niger Delta states have cost the country a third of its oil production. It should be noted that this approach to conflict in the region as unprecedented move was a sharp departure from the typical use of state violence or repression to suppress dissent by indigenous civilian and militia groups in the Niger Delta, and signified a realization that the Niger Delta crisis required a democratic, participatory solution and not one that legitimized militarization and brutal oppression of impoverished maritime communities (Vanessa, 2013). It has been estimated that not less than 46,000 militants accepted the amnesty and surrender of ammunition across eight Niger Delta states (Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Delta, Rivers, Cross River, Edo, Imo and Ondo) since 2009 (Vanessa, 2013). Indeed, to a very large extent, the amnesty peace-building programme was successful though it has been marred by huge corrupt practices. By implication, the amnesty programme has entrenched significant reduction in the wave of violence in the region, the massive empowerment of people, creation of job opportunities to ex-militants and re-integration of aggrieved persons into the Nigerian society.

2. Conclusion and Recommendations

From the foregoing, this paper aptly submits that conflicts in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria have been a product of a complex mixture of resource control and revenue allocation issues, corruption, poor governance, grievance, deprivation, environmental degradation, political repression as well as the quest for social equity and justice. As indicated above, the interrogation of some of the existing perspectives to armed conflict in resource-rich contexts provides a systematic analysis of the core drivers of Niger Delta militant activities. From the findings of this paper, it is abundantly clear that there exists some complex dynamics and connections between the political economy of oil and the ways it has fed into the politics of dispossession, the history of ethnic minority agitation, resource control, and the vicious cycle of repression and insurgency in the Niger Delta region. State response which has been characterized by the increased securitization and militarization of the region has not proved to be the most effective method of addressing the core issues in Niger Delta agitations and conflicts; rather it has only offered a sympathetic pathway for the radicalization of social movements in the Niger Delta region. Thus, to address this lingering issue, the sustainable fundamental strategies entail strengthening the existing institutions of governance and providing basic amenities as well as job opportunities especially in the oil producing communities whose traditional means of livelihood – fishing and farming have been altered by environmental pollution caused

by oil production. Also, there is need for leadership and followership reorientation, as well as state response that reflects the goal of entrenching Niger Delta infrastructural development and maintenance, development of opportunities and human resources and an offer of valued life to repentant militants. With all these measures, the prospect for peace, stability and development in the region and Nigeria at large will be guaranteed.

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