

Managing Minority Problems in Nigeria: The Case of the Ethnic Minorities of the Niger Delta Region

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Abstract

At the root of most if not all internal conflicts in the world, particularly Africa today, is a struggle by some previously autonomous units to free themselves from the grips of a domineering multinational state; in Africa and by extension Nigeria, the nationalities question variously called tribalism or ethnicity has long been accepted as the flagship of national politics and central organizing theme of politics of who gets what, when, how and even why. Observers/scholars in the political realm think and believe the long-drawn-out super power rivalry emasculate political development in Africa and of course the former Eastern Europe by sweeping the "Nationalities Question" under the carpet rather than answering it. For most African Multi-National States, like Nigeria, the questions are quite simple. (1) Is it possible to create a viable national state from a conglomeration of nationalities that were previously independent and performed all the functions of a modern 'nation-state'? (2) If yes, under what conditions are these nationalities prepared to remain part of the multi-national state? (3) Do they have an exit option, if at any point in time they feel grossly dissatisfied? These and many more are a few questions this paper attempt to provide answers as we make progress in this discourse

Keywords: ethnic politics, managing minority problems in Nigeria. Niger Delta-nationalities question, multinational states, modern nation state, nationalism.

1. INTRODUCTION

Minority ethnic nationalism in fact first emerged few years to Nigeria's independence in 1960. These took the form of separatist character, as in form of "Movements for separate region i.e. Calabar – Ogoja – Rivers (Eastern Region), Mid West (Western Region), and Middle Belt (Northern Region) state movements and many violent resistance such as those by the Tiv in the Northern region over their incorporation into the northern political system which was and still been dominated by the Fulani's. As a matter of fact, this grew cold when the protagonists achieved some form of self-rule when states were created for them in 1963 and 1967 by General Yakubu Gowon then. A second factor that contributed to the growth of this industry (Minority revolts in Nigeria) was the grip of the polity of Nigeria by its military who adventured into the body politics of the country in 1966, after a coup de tat which brought in Gen. Ironisi into power. Here, mention will be made of the pivotal role of the increased access of the minorities into political power under the military administration of Gen. Yakubu Gowon, who himself, is a minority man from the Middle Belt. The movements of Isaac Boro of the 7th Day Revolution of the Niger Delta Republic is still very memorable.

Minority nationalism, resurfaced in the 1990s again, this time taking a different form and character. The aim was not centred on separate states, as these was achieved earlier, neither was it focused on the incorporation of people into regional political systems or domination of majority groups, but essentially the focus was on a "Redefinition" of a supposedly defined nation-state. The concern here was pivotally on the terms of the Nigerian Union as in the Nigerian state.

Thus, one former military Governor of one of the Nigerian States, stated thus,

"...our main complaint is that the Middle Belt is the Labourer, the man in factory; they do not participate in the management of the factory and that decisions are not always taken at the conference table."(Col.Yahanna Madaki, speaking for and on behalf of the Middle Belt).

On his part Ken Saro Wiwa, Nigeria's foremost playwright and worlds acclaimed environmentalist, until his death in 1995, was campaigning for a constitutional conference in Nigeria, where in fact the basis of a 'New Nigeria' could as a matter of urgency be negotiated and discussed extensively.

However, this second phase the organization like as I mentioned earlier, is quite different, in that, it could be conceptualized into two main categories. The first was in form of regional associations, i.e. Association of Minority States; Committee of Oil Producing Areas or States as the case may be; old Delta province; Middle Belt Forum, Akwa Ibom Forum; Southern Minority Forum; Edo People Forum; Ethnic Minority Rights Forum (Nigeria Chapter); etc. Others are the Movement for the Protection of Ijaw Ethnic Rights Protection (IENRPN), Ijaw National Congress (INC), Movement for Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP), etc. The truth is that, each of these regional associations comprised of several smaller and cluster ethnic minorities.

This phase of ethnic politics (nationalism) or movement to a large extent was geared towards not just about the access to for instance Crude Oil resources, but essentially because of self determination as inform of a critical theme or motif to produce decisions on in fact how resources within the environment of one's home land are being appropriated and utilized. Thus, beyond the quest for economic advantages, this minority ethnic nationalism in this phase could not be accounted for by merely turning to economic issues or factors.

According to Osaghae (1998:1) management of ethnic minority problems;

“...has tended to be complicated by the complex ethnic situation which gives rise to them. It is known for example that ethnicity rarely exists in a pure form, being usually combined with other conflict generating cleavages, such as religion, race, class and regionalism, in mutually reinforcing ways.” (Osaghae, 1998: 1).

He argues further that, ethnicity is situational, fluid and intermittent, thus, ethnic boundaries are changing constantly. These according to him, could be seen in the levels of consciousness and political mobilization, among groups for in fact different reasons and perceptions of “relative privileges or deprivation, history of inter-group relations, effects of state politics or actions, dispositions and strategies adopted by other competing group.”

Positing further, Osaghae, (1998) stated that the above reasons and others such as, democratization, economic propensity or decline etc all of which combine to “impact on ethnicity” and produces different effects on ethnic groups. Thus, for him these complexities have severe implications for the management of ethnic problems and conflicts.

2. DEFINITION OF ETHNIC MINORITIES

The common conceptualization of ethnic minorities usually are in contradistinction of in fact a majority groupings in any given society or world over.

For Osaghae;

“... Ethnic minorities are usually defined in contradiction to major groups whom they co-exist in political systems, as groups which experience systematic discrimination and domination because of numerical inferiority and a host of historical and sociological factors, and have taken political action in furtherance of their collective interests. Almost as a rule, minorities which are not subjected to domination or discrimination, and instead constitute dominant and hegemonic groups, such as white colonial regions in Africa and Asia, the Afrikaner whites in apartheid South Africa, the Tutsi in post – 1994 Rwanda and the Fulani in Nigeria are excluded from the category of proper minorities.” (Osaghae, 1998: 1-5).

It is against this background that, he went further to differentiate and the same time categorize a workable definition of the term minorities in Nigerian context, as in “contradistinction to the three major ethnic groups in the country – Hausa/Fulani, Yoruba and Igbo – as linguistically, culturally, territorially and historically distinct groups which, because of their diffusion, numerical inferiority and historical revolution within the modern Nigerian state, have been subjected to subordinate political, social and economic positions in the Federation and its constituent units.”

Arising from the foregoing definition, we can then see why the mainstay of minority politics in Nigeria has been consistently tailored and tended to the efforts by the minority elites and movements to redress the situation they found themselves, and again improve the position of the minorities in the “power matrix” in the country's resources allocation system and distribution pattern. (Osaghae, 1998:5). Ekeh (1967) have argued and distinguished between “minority”, which he termed as “peripheral ethnic minorities in the region with no affinities to any of the majority groups, and “marginal”, which had affinities with the majority groups in neighbouring regions, but were minorities within the region, because of its boundaries cut them off from their Kith and Kin; these were the Yorubas of Ilorin and Kabba province of the Northern region and Western region (Osaghae 1998:5).

For Osaghae 1998; the post regional structures in Nigeria context that clearly categorizes ‘marginal’ are best described as dispersed minorities, has become more prominent. These according to him are minorities which does not necessarily occupy a clearly defined “geographically contiguous territories but are strewn over various states and local government areas.

For him, and I share the same view with him that the Ijaw (Izons) are a clear example of this phenomena – the Ijaw whose original home land Niger Delta, was in the old Rivers State, was carved out of Bayelsa state in 1996. Thus, the largest concentration of Ijaws are in the Bayelsa state today, but there are of course the existence of major Ijaw communities in Delta, Edo, Ondo, Akwa Ibom states which to a larger extent have persistently call for either the creation of separate local governments or relocation from their present states to protect their interests against their allegedly hostile host communities (Osaghae, 1998:6).

This position of Osaghae, in my mind is faulty, in that the Ijaws of the Edo, Delta and Ondo and even those of the Akwa-Ibom and Rivers states are occupying their native lands and therefore, to say that, they are clamouring to be carved out of these states to join their kith and kins in Bayelsa which our notable Prof. (Eghosa E. Osaghae) meant in his work (*Managing Multiple Minority Problems in a divided Society. The Nigerian experience*) is misleading to that extent. But that in my opinion, the Ijaws of Edo and Ondo were only clamouring for a fair development of their territories, and above all join them with Mid-western region as in the case of the Ijaws of Ondo state; and the Ijaws of Edo and Ondo were talking joining Delta state was created with the ensuring boundary adjustment exercise.

Gethener noted that, cultural homogeneity and nationalism requires not just based on fixed elements of culture as a language, custom and religion, but of course, on what he refers to as “a high (Literate) culture.” This for him is the force that propel and strives to integrate itself. But for Shafer’s, he sees nationalism as the “Sentiments unifying a group of people who have a real or imagined common historical experience and a common aspiration to live together as a group in the future.” This expression for me is what informed the Ijaws of Ondo & Edo to clamour for joining their kith and kins in the respective state creation exercises in Nigeria, and not the fact that, their hosts, as Prof. Osaghae puts it compelled their agitations.

Another equally vital objective of nationalism paradigm is that, the characteristics of Ethnic minority activities as arising from the equation of independence ideology or goal of which political sovereignty is the pivot. As I already pointed out and highlighted earlier in the course of this discourse, the aim of minority agitations was not political sovereignty in the sense of it as perceived by majority of scholars and commentators of Nigerian polity. This is made even clearer by Smith (1983 & 1990) as I quote “... the drive for economic autarchy and self-sustaining growth” This means that for him, the independence ideal was quite wider than that of the political sovereignty goal; thus as we could see the independence goal contains specific goals of autonomy, individuality and pluralism. Nationalist movement usually worked either through characterized nationalism or through regional minority movements as in the case of MOSOP – Ogoni, Nigeria or the IYC and INC of the Ijaws, etc.

3. NIGERIA: NATIONALITIES QUESTION; The case of the Ethnic Minorities in the Niger Delta.

Prior to 1914, the Ijaws (Izon otu) of the Niger Delta were a free people, and thus, enjoyed the relatively peaceful Deltaic environment in which they occupy, just like the Yorubas in the West, Hausa/Fulanis in the North, the Igbos in the East, Edos/Itsekiris of the Mid-West, the Ogonis, Urhobos, and many others. However, this was changed by 1914, the amalgamation of the Southern and Northern protectorates which eventually brought about the birth of what we now know as Nigeria in the map of Africa and by extension the World political map.

At the dawn of the new Nigeria (Independence) in 1960 and with the discovery of crude oil at Oloibiri in the then Eastern Region of Nigeria, later Rivers State, and now Bayelsa State of the Niger Delta, there arose a sharp change in the pattern of Resources Ownership allocation/distribution and appropriation in favour of what I referred to as the “THREE BIG BROTHERS” of Hausa/Fulani; Yorubas and the Igbos. However, it might also be interesting to mention perhaps very clearly and frankly too that, there is of course within these three domineering ethnic nationalities, a clique of wolves who believe they can fool everyone all the time. They are not, and will never be tired of holding on to power to suck us dry. They have ruined our economy and set us several years backward, making us unable to stand in the community of nations, before now. They have succeeded in ruining our financial strength and the naira can no longer stand against any reasonable foreign currency. Our citizenry is afraid to go to the hospitals not because they are not sick, but because they cannot meet the medical bills, our entire educational system, which used to be one of the best in the World, today is in shambles. Who will save us all from these Wolves?

Our Military Juntas in the past and their civil collaborations now have treated the Ogoni people, the Izon (Ijaw) and all the oil producing villages, communities and towns of the Niger Delta with pure hatred and disdain for asking for their rights.

These people (the Ijaws and the rest of the Niger Delta) are the cornerstone on which the country’s economy is run. Yet these Niger Delta communities languish in abject poverty and total deprivation of basic amenities, whereas Abuja in the heart of the North is being developed (modernized) with money’s accruing from the sales of crude oil. Take the case of “Kano State” with 46 Local Government Areas, being funded with resources from the soil/land of Bayelsa and other Niger Delta States, while Bayelsa State has only 8 officially recognized Local Government Areas.

It is in the light of this that, the Government of Bayelsa State did create 24 new Local Government Areas ostensibly to bring about the desired development, and of course bringing government closer to the people, thereby providing employment opportunities to its restive unemployed youths. Thus, it behooves on the Federal Government of Nigeria (National Assembly) to formerly recognize these new Local Government Areas in the interest of peace, justice, fair play, equity and for bringing the desired development much closer to the Ijaw country (people).

This is my opinion and of those who share the same views with me, will go a long way in solving parts of the numerous problems of the Niger Delta as it affects that State (Bayelsa).

All Nigerians are guilty for not standing up in unity against the tyrannical suppression of the Ogoni people in 1995/1996, and the Ijaw people in 1998, 1999, 2001 and up unto 2009. We are too concern with very elusive peace, being extremely docile, tolerant to a fault, selfish and to weak, allowing a clique of men in Military uniform and the civil society to oppress the Niger Delta people and the whole populace. We only complaint when we are directly involved and that is why we will never achieve the desired goals of a united Nigeria except we collectively reassess the basis of our existence as nationalities, in line with nature, modernity, democracy and the real principle of federalism.

4. CONSTITUTIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND REVENUE ALLOCATION IN NIGERIA: PRE/POST INDEPENDENCE.

Nigeria gained independence on 1st October, 1960. For the past 49 years the ethnic Nationalities comprising well over 450 nations in the country have not experienced real independence. This is more so, particularly to the ethnic groups that constitutes the states founded in the Niger Delta, Akwa-Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo, Rivers and parts of Ondo have to a large extent never enjoyed what should in fact be the inalienable rights of any free citizenry. The peoples land, maize of creeks and mangrove rain forest, are pregnant with abundance of resources, which included the most economically envied, their black gold, they of course are the country's richest oil/gas producing areas.

However, on the surface, the inhabitants (people) of the Niger Delta are eclectic as their cultural ethos is divergent at their roots however; there exists a great deal of cultural affinities. Thus, while the many ethnic nationalities may appear disparate, there is of course a profound bond based on a common heritage of severe exclusion, deprivation, devastating health conditions, underdevelopment, a ravaged ecology and in fact a general state of socio-political discontent and deliberately caused by the "Federal Government of NIGERIA" and its "AGENT".

For the past five decades, circumstances in the country (Nigeria) has changed significantly, there had consequently been a systematic alteration in the system of revenue distribution, appropriation and allocation. The fiscal system has not only been dictated by political and constitutional developments that engulfed, however, it has been the outcome of several adhoc commissions/committees. Quite frankly, each of these (commission or committees) has always come up with some interim formulae for sharing the country's revenue rather than evolving or proffering a system that stand the test of time, or put differently, "permanent" and fitting appropriately into the scheme of things.

A mention (tribute) of these commissions become tenable thus, the first constitution was adopted in 1946, which created the need for formal "apportionment of revenue amongst the component units of the then three regions – Northern, Western and Eastern Regions". The "Philipson Commission" of 1946 then recommend, the principle of derivation and progress" as principal determinants of federally collected revenue accruing to each region then. However, there was the absence of a reliable data on which sharing of revenue was based, thus, there was a general impression soon created that the system fostered real injustice and therefore required to be reviewed.

The outcome of these was the "Hicks – Philipson Commission of 1951", this came into being with the coming into force of the McPherson's Constitution. Thus, this commission mainly advocated a system of revenue allocation which essentially based upon three principles viz:

- (i) Derivation
- (ii) Need and
- (iii) National interest.

It is also on record that, the commission used population as a pivot for needs.

Chick commission of 1953; the Chicks Commission like the two others was obvious that changes would have to be made in the pattern of revenue allocation especially as there was the growing constitutional crisis in 1953 and the subsequent adoption of the Littleton Constitution which is fact gave the regions enormous autonomy. A very outstanding recommendation of this particular commission was that, 100% Mining Rents and Royalties was distributed to Regions according to the extradition of the Minerals".

Aside this, the periods 1954-1959 during which the Chick Commission (system) operated saw the thorough and real application of the "principle of derivation". However, as with the previous system, the revenue allocation system developed on the basis of the Chick's Report was criticized largely for its failure to recognize any necessary correlation between the particular needs of a Region and its own resources.

The Raismann's Commission was indeed a sharp turn on the issue of Resource/Revenue allocation. The Commission went ahead and specified that proportions of certain revenues be paid into a distributable pool, and shared among the regions according to a combination of criteria as follows: Population, Financial mining and balanced development. Whereas in the previous commissions mining and royalties were allocated 100% to the Regions of origin, the Raismann system recommended that revenue be shared as follows:

- i) 50% to the Region of Origin
- ii) 20% to the Federal Government and
- iii) 30% to the distributable pool.

Then, by 1964, the Binn's Commission came into force, and recommended the following:

- i) 50% to the Region of Origin
- ii) 15% to the Federal Government and
- iii) 35% to the distributable pool.

Here, the regions still retained 50% of Royalties. But the second significant alteration of the Revenue Allocation Formular against the Regions (States) occurred in 1970 when in fact the Government Decree No. 13 of 1970 specified the following:

- i) 45% Royalties be allocated to State resource production
- ii) 5% to the Federal Government and
- iii) 50% to the distributable pool.

According to Teriba (1966:362), the Western Nigeria Government in the sixties complained grievously that expenditures in other regions were being incurred at the expense or cost of the West, and so argued for revenue allocation through derivation since Cocoa fetched the highest amount for the country's duty earned at that time.

The Northern and Eastern Regions were not let alone on this matter (Revenue allocation), while the Northern Region capitalized on population based on what I call the fake census date (i.e. 1952/1953 and 1963) respectively as the basis of revenue allocation, the East favoured the principle of national interest but later began to see the merits of derivation as oil industry assumed importance in the economy of the State (country). Thus, by 1965, the Western Region which had enjoyed the benefits of derivation since the colonial era was very less keen, and the Eastern Region became keener on the issue of derivation.

Eventually, when States were being created by Decree No. 15 in 1967, since the regional boundaries were unaffected, each region's allocation from the distributable pool was still simple divided equally among the States created from within these regions then.

Emphatically, we can posit that, all post 1967 reforms of Revenue allocation system in the Nigerian State, were designed to in fact de-emphasize derivation and in its place pursue vigorously, the principle of "Need" based on population and number. This is more particularly true of the 1975 reforms which clearly and greatly altered the principle of derivation.

To clearly buttress our claim, (argument) above, was that in 1982, the National Assembly approved the following as the allocation of National Revenue (A cursory look at the Revenue Allocation Act of 1981) becomes absolute pivotal, viz:

- a) 55% of the Federation Account to the Federal Government
- b) 32.5% to all the States of the Federation.
- c) 10.0% to all Local Government Councils
- d) 1.0% for amelioration of ecological problems
- e) 1.5% for the mineral producing communities.

This attempt (FG's attempt) was somehow reshaped, because it could not come into force properly before the Gen. Mohammed Buhari Regime hosted out the Civilian Government of Alhaji Shehu Shagari in December, 1983. Thus, the new Buhari led Federal Military Government in 1984, enacted a law taking care of some of the most offending aspects (portions) of the Act which incited the then Governor Ambrose Ali's litigation against Musa S. Shagari's led Federal Government. The outcome was the Federation Account (etc) Amendment Decree of 1984 No. 36. This then brought about new changes in the following areas.

- i) 2% of the 32.5% to all States will now be based on revenue from the particular mineral instead of from the total revenue passed by the National Assembly.
- ii) 1.5% was to be specifically allocated to all the mineral producing areas and this will be based on the production capacity of the mineral from the particular locality.

In a very clear, frank and pivotal terms, this decreasing sources of revenue allocation for the oil producing areas of the Niger Delta, particularly the Ijaw territories that produces the oil revenue for the Nigerian State has for all practical purposes remained a major source of grievances against not only the rest of the country, but also to the companies that are physically on grounds of the mineral producing communities. And until frank deliberate policies are formulated to take care of these all important phenomena, the much talk about one Nigeria is very elusive.

5. THE REASONS FOR THE SEVERAL CONFLICTS IN NIGERIA'S NIGER DELTA STATES.

The people of the Niger Delta having reviewed all that be clouded them, especially with the Federal Governments framing up trial and subsequent hanging of Ken Saro Wiwa, a reknown playwright, Environmentalist, a former leader of the Movement of the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP) with eight others of his kinsmen on 12th November, 1995 by the then Gen. Abacha led Federal Government.

Thus, in the opinion of this author and of those who shares the same views, all the draconian decrees, like the Land Use Decree of 1978, which was aimed principally to deprive the people of these areas, deprivation of natural resources through Constitutional Manipulations by the privileged groups (Ethnic Nationalities) of Hausa/Fulani, Yoruba, Igbo, etc have to greater extent failed woefully.

The historical review of the revenue allocation formula adopted in the country so far, justifies the grievances of oil bearing communities of the Niger Delta on the ground that all the revisions, reforms of revenue allocation after 1964 have been only ad hoc, and based principally on expediency rather than on basic study of the perennial and peculiar problems that plague revenue allocation in the Nigerian State.

Importantly, there appears to be concerted efforts, if not deliberate conspiracy to actually deny the oil producing States, (better still nations communities) what resources, available in their own geographical area as the percentages of revenue allocation to them decreases over the years as shown below:

- i) 100% Royalties before 1967
- ii) 50% onshore and 50% offshore 1967
- iii) 45% onshore and zero% offshore 1970
- iv) 45% onshore and zero% offshore 1971
- v) 20% onshore and zero% offshore 1975
- vi) 3.5% onshore and zero% offshore 1985

Several spheres of arguments have emerged of recent, some people in fact argued that revenue yields and expenditure needs are never static (constant) at all over the years, therefore they would not compromise themselves with any long term fixed apportionment (rates).

Thus, to these scholars, revenue allocation is a “dynamic process” which has revolved in the light of changing socio-political and economic circumstances. In fairness as this argument or views thrives, considering the situation above, (in the preceding section) where the changing circumstances of revenue allocation was consistently tailored in fact to the chagrin of particular ethnic groups from whom the revenue was derived a moral question bordering on injustice stands overwhelming clear. Thus far, it appears that the changing circumstances of the revenue allocation are devised in perpetuity to cheating and of course deprive some people in the system, the Niger Delta – “Minority Ethnic Nationalities.”

For Prof. Jubril Aminu who went further to the extent of arguing that, the fossils that formed crude oil came out of the lives two million years ago so nobody reality owns the oil (crude oil and its associated products). This is not all, some have said that, since in the oil economy, it is not the inhabitants of the oil producing areas who produce it, but the oil happened to be gusting out under their feet as “God” bounty to the nation, no one can claim derivation for it.

What these groups of scholars (the Jubril Aminu’s) fail to know, understand or realize is that God’s bounty always rightly belong to someone, and the question is, who it should be? Thus, this question is tied rightly to the various obnoxious Legislations such as the Oil Mineral Decree No. 51 of 1969 which provides in schedule one that, “The entire ownership and control of all petroleum in, under or upon any land out of the 200 miles limit of the exclusive economic zone is vested on the Federal Republic of Nigeria.”

It then follows that, no individual, not even the State Government have got any right to mine or explore for the mineral existing in their own territory. This laws were derived from the Colonial Ordinance of 1914 and 1916 section 3(1) which was largely expected to be changed or modified at independence, instead our fellow brothers (Nigerians) have not only intensified the law but have resorted to apply it even more severely than the colonial masters themselves (British). This in my opinion is a clear neo-colonialism in the Nigerian political and economic context.

6. THE WAY FORWARD

Land, all over the world is seen as a communal commodity; only in Nigeria the case is different. How else can one explain the onshore/offshore dichotomy which is criminally put in place to further exclude and deprive the original natural owners of the resources in the Niger Delta?

Nigeria, I suggest must stop laying claim to offshore oil wells, since these oil must as matter of fact belong first of all to a community, local government or a State before becoming a Central Government (FG) property. Any departure from this existing truth is an aberration and therefore I urge the authorities in our country (Nigeria) to discontinue the onshore/offshore dichotomy.

It would be quite easy for the Federal Government to tackle the problems of the oil-rich but poor regions of the Niger Delta. This is very true, particularly considering the extent of development in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) Abuja, the third Mainland Bridge in Lagos, etc.

Today, Nigeria is facing multiplicity and staggering problems, some of them are very fundamental as to be capable of leading to a total disintegration (collapse) of the country, if allowed to strive, or put differently if not properly and tactically resolved.

Since independence, the bane (pre-occupation) of Nigerian politics has been that of achieving political leadership

and economic control of the country's mineral resources, exacerbated by the fact that one section (Hausa/Fulani) has always monopolized (insisting she must continue to monopolize) power based on in fact a misguided belief in a divine right to rule. However, this is often achieved through the help of two other ethnic nationalities of Yoruba's and Igbos. Until recently the baton has just changed in favour of the Ijaws of the Niger Delta (in the person of Dr Goodluck Ebele Jonathan).

The result of which, there is hardly any economic, social or political institution(s) in the country today that has not been bastardized by the ill motivated tinkering and of course, the deliberate mismanagement of the ruling class (Military or Civilian) with the same objective of sustaining their status quo and maintaining their injustices in perpetuity in the Nigerian, nation State.

The ruling class plunders the Federal Treasury and Central Bank to install and perpetuate despotic governments (Leaders) into power, thus deliberately relegating over 92% of the entire Nigerian populace to abject poverty, disease, hunger, squalor and preventing us (them) from having any say in the governance of the country.

This has made both the Northern and Southern Minorities (particularly the Ijaws) perpetually irrelevant in the scheme of things, even though the Northern Minorities provide the core manpower of the army, and the Southern Minorities (Niger Delta) provides the wealth (resources) of the country.

Supposedly, the Federal Government should be the custodian of the welfare of the citizens, but today it has through changes and manipulation of the constitution, laws, politics and governance, succeeded in making itself the very enemy of the oil producing communities (ethnic nationalities of the Niger Delta). This the Federal Government did through the various decrees, commissions/committees we cited earlier elsewhere in this work, i.e. deprivation of lands by the Land Use Decree, the deliberate attempts of course of the three major groups to assimilate the minorities of the Niger Delta as slaves, etc.

With the recent amnesty programme offered by the late President Umaru Musa Yar' Adua, I hope the tide is now set for the real development of Niger Delta?

7. CONCLUSION

To avert these problems (trend), the people of the Niger Delta (ethnic Minorities of the Niger Delta States particularly the Ijaws) have in the past through different occasions submitted several position papers to the Federal Government (Authorities): The Rivers State Members of the Constituent Assembly, 1988; Position of the Southern Minorities on the National Constitutional Conference, February 1994, The Kaiama Declaration of November, 1998, the Ogoni Bill of Rights, the Oron People Declaration, the recent Niger Delta Technical Committee Report, etc. Prominent among all their various demands is the need for them to a large extent determines their resources by themselves.

Now there is a very large question; if the discovery of crude oil is seen as the harbinger of hope, development and some kind of survival, why all these hostilities between oil bearing communities and oil companies are on the increase?

The answer is because the people are utterly raped, neglected and excluded. These are in real terms the manifestation of what Major General Ishola Williams (Rtd.) call "Acute Integrity Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) in the management of resources" or are they the result of some kind of criminal neglect?

What is it really, that has succeeded in reducing the inhabitants of these oil bearing communities and indeed the citizens of the Niger Delta, the highest oil/gas producing States to this unfortunate and unbearable level?

For instance, the case of Otabagi (Oloibiri District) which is reputed for being the first Community in the Ijaw (Izon) country, of Nigerian Nation where crude oil/gas were discovered in commercial quantities no sane human being would counter the citing of any Federal or State project and of course a lucrative tourist centre. Sadly enough, every "Nigerian Leader that has emerged" felt Otabagi (Oloibiri) does not merit and worth anything but a moribund oil museum. And even then, where is the oil museum? It is not imperative in the Federal Government's scheme of things. The Niger Delta does not want another Oloibiri.

Finally, borrowing Sam Amoo's (1997), expansive work, to address the systemic and structural sources of conflicts in Africa, and by extension Nigeria, particularly in my opinion according to Amoo as I quote;

"... Comprehensive decentralization, benign integration and electoral arrangement compatible with local circumstances – should ideally be taken as preventive actions to forestall the outbreak of violence. In interventions to avoid conflicts and sustain peace should be based on long-term strategies, and initiated in times of peace whenever possible, or when group relations are not overly strained.

Thus, Managing Ethnic Minority problems, especially as they affect the ethnic nationalities of Nigeria's Niger Delta which produces the bulk of the nation's oil revenue becomes very pivotal and vitally imperative. This could be done by the authorities, (Government) in an all inclusive manner, as against the several divisive methods and mechanisms applied in the past.

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