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Full Length Research Paper

Conflict and resource control in the Niger Delta: Implications for the Gulf of Guinea Region

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Gaps between the definition of expectations, grants of power and verification of accruals from resources, especially oil and gas, tend to undergird the governance processes in most states that comprise the Gulf of Guinea. These gaps have been responsible for the various problems that have become part of, and which have engendered violence and conflict in the region. As a major stakeholder in the politics and economic strength of the Gulf of Guinea, Nigeria seems to be responsible for the continued crisis in the region. The study, using a coalescence of theoretical explications for understanding the resource-conflict thesis, notes that misgovernance by Nigeria as a major stakeholder and one of the most endowed countries in the region negatively affects the wider Gulf of Guinea region; this negativity is manifested in the now-seeming intractable conflict in the region, and thus makes a case for a thorough understanding of the implications for both Nigeria and the wider Gulf of Guinea region in order to resolve the conflict in the African continent.

Key words: Resources, governance, conflict, Gulf of Guinea, Niger Delta, Nigeria, oil and gas.

INTRODUCTION

The major problem of the African continent and West Africa in particular, can be succinctly stated to be that of misgovernance – either at the political, economic, social or cultural levels. Governance relates to decisions that define expectations, grant power, or verify performance in terms of accurate account of accruals from resources. It consists either of a separate process or of a specific part of management or leadership processes. Sometimes people set up a government to administer these processes and systems. It is thus the authority for defining policy, providing leadership, and managing and coordinating the procedures and resources that ensure security; the set of authorities, processes and procedures guiding strategic and key operational decisions made for the enterprise that is the state or government. It clarifies relationships and responsibilities among the entities making up the enterprise.

Governance in its widest sense refers to all the processes, systems, and controls that are used to safeguard and grow assets in social organisations. According to Adeyeye (2007: 32), governance refers to the use of politics, economic and administrative authority and resources to manage or exercise control over the politics and resources of a given society. Thus, misgovernance in the context of this paper involves the accumulated issues of misappropriation of resource wealth by government or in some cases the inability of government to ensure that resources accrued for government and people are used appropriately for the good of the populace.

In Nigeria, misgovernance is epitomized by the crisis in the Niger Delta, which gained ascendancy as the various problems in the region began to acquire a seemingly intractable nature. The plethora of literature on this region and its recurring crisis (Obi, 1997, 2001, 2009; Ibeanu, 2000; Bannon and Collier, 2003; de Barros, 2004; Douglas et al., 2004; Humphreys, 2005; Collier and Hoeffler, 2005; Ikelegbe, 2005; Omeje, 2008; Asuni, 2009; Basedau and Lay, 2009) point to the dialectics of resource governance as the incubator of internal conflicts in the entire Gulf of Guinea region comprising Nigeria, Gabon, Cameroon, Chad, Equatorial Guinea, Angola and Sao-Tome and Principe. This study focuses on Nigeria's Niger Delta to x-ray the implications of misgovernance for the security policy of the Gulf of Guinea region. The growing interest in the Gulf of Guinea region derives from its endowment of lucrative vast deposit of good quality oil and gas resources aside from other marine resources the region has to offer (Ly, 2010).

International oil politics now is more or less fundamentally about Gulf of Guinea oil and natural gas deposits, and control of the corridors for transporting it; and this is mostly because of the volatility of the Middle East and the proven high quality of the oil that comes from the West African and Gulf of Guinea region. Nigeria, the greatest source of African oil for export, is at the centre of the African oil-producing states bordering the Gulf of Guinea, and the Niger River is the corridor for transporting not only Nigerian oil and gas [but also] oil and gas from landlocked Niger as well (Garrison, 2009).

According to Delano (2009: 3), over the last ten years, the Gulf of Guinea has emerged as a maritime hotspot with regional oil, natural gas, and rare mineral deposits, thereby drawing interest from every part of the globe. The true significance of the region, however, rests in its oil reserves and is fundamentally the prism through which most outside actors view it. The amount of oil the area can provide is estimated at roughly 54 billion barrels, just about 5% of the world's proven reserves, of which 80% belongs to Nigeria and Angola. Although 54 billion barrels seems miniscule, there is universal confidence that this number is an underestimate. With current production nearing 4.5 million barrels a day and expected to reach the 7 million mark by 2010, the region's energy production is rapidly increasing. According to Egbogah (2010), the Gulf of Guinea has about 10% of global energy, and is a largely unexplored basin. Nigeria is a dominant force in the Gulf of Guinea region of Africa. With 46% of the GDP of the sub-region, a high demographic size and huge deposits of oil and gas resources in its Niger Delta region (Egbogah, 2010), it is proper that any research on the conflict situation in the Gulf of Guinea should be started with Nigeria; and there is no other place to situate it than in the volatile Niger Delta region. This is very important given the fact that the problem of the Niger Delta affects everything that Nigeria and Africa stand for generally.

THE PROBLEMATIQUE

The Niger Delta is strategic and a crucially important point of departure in virtually all discourses on the Nigerian State and the entire Gulf of Guinea region. Over the decades, the region has engendered a lot of interesting debates, workshops, symposia and conferences as a result of the various governance and security challenges bedeviling the region. These activities have centred mostly on the control of the rich oil and gas deposits in the region and the manner of their exploitation, being the mainstay of the Nigerian economy. However, the modes of exploitation and utilization of the proceeds from the sale of these natural resources have caused instability in the region and Nigeria generally.

Familiarity with the literature on the subject matter indicates that the internal conflicts in the oil-rich region of the Gulf of Guinea are as a result of many factors, some of which are that the struggle for the control of oil and gas resources increases the region's vulnerability to conflicts; greed for economic gains is the primary motivation for resistance and struggle for the control of oil and gas resources; there is profiteering from the struggle. Community leaders, warlords and traders profit from the oil and gas-related conflict situation in the region and so stoke the embers of the crisis for private-regarding interests; warlords characterize the insurgency, rebellion and militancy in the region in such a manner that they become the subject of discourse which gives them bargaining power; there is high level of economic and financial crimes involved in the struggle for the control of oil and gas resources in the form of pipeline vandalization, piracy, oil bunkering, small arms proliferation, hostage-taking and kidnapping; and government's militarization of the region gives the sense of insecurity and people therefore feel constrained to take up arms against government forces; and the inadequacy of the democratic institutions in Nigeria means that there is little accountability and transparency in the management of revenues accruing from the exploitation of natural resources in the region (Ikelegbe, 2005).

With the above information which ordinarily seem to have covered virtually all the aspects of the Niger Delta problem, undertaking another research on the region seems unnecessary. However, owing to the fact that the Niger Delta is still volatile and prone to violence and conflicts despite all the developmental, intellectual and financial resources it has received, there is need to explore the link between oil and gas governance and conflicts in the Gulf of Guinea focusing on the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. The reasons being given that the answers to the Niger Delta problem as regards oil and gas governance are already known but the lack of political will being the problem is defeatist as long as the problem is yet unresolved, and as long as it is becoming hydra-headed and octopoidal in nature. And given its strategic importance to the Gulf of Guinea, only a concrete resolution of the conflict in the region would make meaning.

THEORETICAL EXPLANATIONS FOR THE SYNERGY BETWEEN RESOURCES AND CONFLICTS

There is a correlation between oil and conflict that suggests causation. Although scholars have always tried to use the three major counter-examples of Botswana, Namibia and South Africa as mineral-dependent African countries that do not suffer from this symptom (Mokhawa, 2005: 21; Paes, 2005: 305–23; Omeje, 2008), and a few other big success stories of rich oil-producing countries like Norway, the United Arab Emirates and the Sultanate of Brunei, does not mean that the thesis is wrong or can be ignored. Thus, there are several theories about how oil fuels conflict that emerged out of large-number of quantitative studies that found strong correlations between oil dependency and various kinds of violence. Humphreys (2005) outlined six rival families of mechanisms that could explain the relationship between natural resources and conflicts: (a) the greedy rebels mechanism; (b) the greedy outsiders mechanism; (c) the grievance mechanism; (d) the feasibility mechanism; (e) the weak states mechanism; and (f) the sparse networks mechanism.

In the greedy rebels' mechanism, the booty character of natural resources motivates rebels to take up arms and/or continue fighting. This mechanism has three variants. In the first variant, domestic groups may engage in quasi-criminal activities to benefit from resources independent of the state as exemplified by piracy, oil bunkering and kidnappings going on in the Niger Delta region. In the second variant, natural resources increase the prize value of capturing the state. This means that either variant could lead to either situation taking place – weakening the state in order to make its capture possible. The third variant states that if natural resources are concentrated in a particular region of the country, it makes for the possibility of that region thinking it could secede from the rest of the country, and that it would be possible to withstand the pressure and become prosperous.

In the greedy outsiders' mechanism, greedy outsiders might be ready to intervene militarily – either directly or through support for internal conflicting factions in order to gain or maintain control over lucrative resources. The existence of natural resources may be an incentive for third parties – state and corporations – to engage in or indeed foster civil conflicts, as seen and proved in the Niger Delta with the involvement of Shell BP in the Ogoni crisis, for which they have paid huge sums as compensation to the people.

In the grievance mechanism, perceived deprivation of producing regions and social groups create grievances and trigger violent uprising, especially secessionism in producing regions. Natural resource dependence can be associated with grievance rather than greed. This is because countries that depend on resources may experience transitory inequity as part of the developing process; such economies may be vulnerable to terms of trade shocks, that is, they may likely be dependent on a small number of commodities for their export earnings; the process of extraction may produce grievances, either through forced migration or as a result of the environmental damage or loss of land rights; or natural resource wealth may be seen to be unjustly distributed as seen in the case of the Niger Delta.

In the feasibility mechanism, natural resources provide the means for rebel finance. Natural resources could provide a way to finance rebellions that have been started for other reasons, thereby increasing the prospects of success. This can be done either through control of production during the conflict or by raising revenues in advance to gain control of the resources "*booty futures*" (Ross, 2002).

In the weak states mechanism, resource abundance reduces the quality of state institutions, and makes internal violent conflict more likely. State structures may be weaker in natural-resource-dependent economies; and this argument focuses on the strength of the linkage between the state and society. This argument means that when citizens are not taxed by governments, they have less power over them as they would have less information about government activity, weaker incentives to monitor government behaviour, and fewer instruments at their disposal to withdraw support from governments. Accordingly, resource-dependent states may have little compulsion to respond to the demands of their citizens or create structures that engage their citizens (Collier and Hoeffler, 2005: 512). Conversely, governments that rely on natural resources rather than on taxation have weakened incentives to create bureaucratic institutions. That is, such states are likely to have weak structures because they have less need for intrusive bureaucracies to raise revenue; and as such, the domestic economy is divorced from the State.

In the sparse networks mechanism, rentier economies have a one-sided integration in the world economy and hence cannot develop thick terms of exchange conducive for peace and stability. The importance of natural resources may lie in their impacts on the daily economic activities of the citizens of an economy and how these in turn affect attitudes of citizens or relations between citizens. Thus, natural-resource-dependent economies may have weak manufacturing sectors and correspondingly low levels of internal trade. This is because it is a given that trade is associated with relationship and cohesiveness among people. No one fights his trading partners as wherever there is commerce, manners are gentle. Moreover, through trade, partners understand one another's cultures and this helps in reducing the risks of conflicts between them.

Given the above theoretical explanations to buttress the fact that there is a synergetic linkage between resources and violence or conflict, this study hypothe-sizes that the Niger Delta conflict is a consequence of the Nigerian State's inability to have a coherent resource wealth governance policy.

NATURE AND CHARACTER OF RESOURCE GOVERNANCE AND DYNAMICS OF CONFLICTS IN THE NIGER DELTA

Governance of oil wealth has always been related to the management of the resources of the Nigerian State. The concept of resource management is closely tied to that of resource control as the latter "…largely deals with the need to regain ownership, control, use and management of resources primarily for the benefit of the communities and the people on whose land the resources originate, and secondarily, for the good governance and development of the entire country" (Douglas et al., 2004: 7). Resource-rich nations like Nigeria, and especially in the developing world, have always had the central government taking over the management of resource wealth. Nigeria's oil and gas resources are controlled by the Federal Government which then issues oil exploration and production right to corporate partners in exchange for a share of profits, as well as joint ventures with multinational oil corporations (MNOCs).

Poor management of resources, as noted by Onigbinde (2008), has been responsible for the Niger Delta debacle. She notes that many decades of neglect of people in the region while corrupt and repressive governments kept amassing unimaginable wealth from the proceeds from the area led to the marginalized groups seeking to redress the injustices and inequities in resource distribution. Thus, insurgency became their inherent method of showing their grievance for a change in the system. She goes on to show that with the Nigerian government's sole ownership of oil and gas wealth via the Petroleum Act of 1969, Offshore Oil Revenue Act of 1971 and Land Use Act of 1978, with which government entered into a 50-50 joint venture agreement with Shell in the 1950s, and which the government has refused to change after more than 50 years despite the injustice of the landowners not getting anything, helped to trigger the Niger Delta conflict. The implication of the Land Use Act of 1978 is that "the title to any land where oil is found is automatically transferred to the federal government without adequate compensation to the landowners" (Bisina, 2004, July 29).

Moreover, the government has over the past five decades been on the side of the MNCs whom it collects rents from, such that decisions on oil and gas resources are made directly between government and the MNCs, shutting out the people, who feel alienated and want to show their grievance. This hobnobbing with government has always given the MNCs the opportunity of getting things done their way. According to Obi (1997: 10-14), oil multinationals feed the Nigerian state giving room for an unequal partnership formalized through three types of joint agreements in the oil industry – the joint venture agreements, production-sharing agreements, and risk-sharing contracts. Thus most of Nigeria's oil is produced by oil companies as "operators or technical partners" of the state.

Basedau and Lay (2009) contradict the long-held beliefs in the resource curse theory which has been linking the extraction of natural resources to corruption, authoritarianism, economic decline and conflicts, and state, however, that "resource-conflict link is more complex than conceptualized in the scientific mainstream." They also note that the rentier state theory which identifies economic stagnation, corruption and authoritarianism as part of the political economy of resource-rich states goes contrary to the resource curse theory in the sense that "governments use abundant resources to buy off opposition or suppress armed rebellion, thereby contributing to political stability and preventing armed conflicts (Basedau and Lay, 2009: 758). Their arguments are that very high per capita revenues from oil allow governments of resource-rich countries to avoid conflict and maintain peace by a combination of large-scale distribution, high spending on the security apparatus, protection by outsiders and relatively more favourable state institutions.

Collier and Hoeffler (2005) note that "large rents are not intrinsically a curse; they obviously have the potential to accelerate peaceful development, and this potential has occasionally been realized, as in Botswana … clearly, in some circumstances resource rents induce or prolong conflict, and in others they do not" (2005:627). They go further to state that not only can resources finance conflict, but it can also induce patronage politics and motivate conflict, especially in the form of secessions, as currently being seen in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. As they noted:

There is now a case for extending controls to oil: in the Delta region of Nigeria, large-scale organized crime is bunkering oil from pipelines to the scale of around $1 billion per year, selling it in East Asia. There is obviously scope for this massive criminal activity to link with the political secessionists of the Delta region.

As noted by Omeje (2007: 46), oil-related rents (royalties, taxes, oil export earnings, interests on joint venture investments, etc.) are the lifeblood of Nigeria's economy. The domestic budget and the huge import trade sector are mainly financed by oil revenues. Factions of the country's elite, with strong interests in the allocation, appropriation, and use of oil revenues, dominate all levels of government. Their interests conveniently combine with those of the state to support a regime of predatory accumulation and lawlessness… Thus, the actions of some TNOCs – insensitivity to the local environment; destruction of biodiversity; inflation of contracts, imports, and supplies; and collusion with state officials to subvert tax and investment policies – are made possible by the accumulation climate encouraged by the rent-seeking political economy.

According to Volman (2003: 1), the possession of oil resources, and the revenues that accrue to governments from the exploitation of this resource, has had a decisive impact on the security and stability of nearly every African country that has significant amounts of oil. This has been true in the past and oil is certain to have a similar impact on those countries where it is only now being discovered and exploited.

Countries without oil certainly can become militarized and experience conflict with their neighbors or serious internal violence, but the possession of oil resources has unique consequences for national security and internal stability. This is due to the special characteristics of oil production. On the one hand, oil production is capital intensive; it can only be undertaken only by companies willing to invest immense amounts of capital and, thus, requires the cooperation of central governments willing and able to protect these large foreign investments. On the other hand, oil production yields vast revenues for African governments. This allows them to make large arms purchases, to build up their military forces, and to strengthen internal security forces. However, it also can lead to internal political conflict and violence because it increases the stakes of political competition and encourages rival leaders and parties to resort to the use of force to gain control of the oil revenues.

Moreover, because oil revenues are managed by central governments that are often neither democratic nor financially transparent, the money generated by oil production often does not contribute to national economic development, but is instead diverted into the bank accounts of government officials or used to finance unnecessary prestige projects. The misuse of oil revenues exacerbates political discontent and can provoke internal political violence. Finally, because oil production is often carried out with few, if any, environmental controls, it can have a devastating effect on people living in the oil-producing areas, thus further aggravating public unrest. As the following cases illustrate, oil production does not always cause militarization and violence, but it usually has a negative impact on the security and stability of those countries that have large oil resources.

Talking about institutional weaknesses of resource-rich states and the linkage with the performance of their governments, Postali (2009: 208) notes that countries with abundance of resource wealth exhibit problematic fiscal policies and small levels of domestic savings in which case the resource rents are wasted in financing ordinary governmental expenses.

Perhaps the most contentious role of the Nigerian state relates to the sharing of oil revenues. At its heart is the feeling that oil wealth from the Niger Delta has been used largely for developing other parts of the country or taken abroad, while the “goose that lays the golden eggs” has been neglected and underdeveloped. This is based on the policy shifts in the allocative principle that national revenues should be shared on the principle that resources should be returned to the site of their generation on the basis of the ratio of their contribution to the national purse. The argument is when regions that covered with ethnic majority groups produced the bulk of national revenues they enjoyed the derivation principle which ensured that they retained the bulk of the wealth generated within their regions. Since the end of the civil war in 1970 when the bulk of revenues came from oil from the ethnic minority region of the Niger Delta, derivation was increasingly reduced from 50 to 3% in the 1980’s and only increased to 13% in 2001. The domination of the oil wealth produced from the region by non-Deltans has also fuelled resentment and anger amidst claims that the oil of the region is being stolen by other groups, leaving the source of the wealth to wallow in paradoxical poverty (Douglas et al., 2004; Watts, 2008; Ebeku, 2008: 400-403; Asuni, 2009).

According to Osuoka (2007), petroleum exploitation in the Niger Delta region of the country has mainly been carried out by transnational companies that operate joint ventures with the federal government. With this arrangement, oil and gas revenues and taxes are paid to the federal government. A system of revenue sharing exists whereby the federal government transfers some petroleum revenues to all the 36 states and 774 local government councils in the country. Under the arrangement, an attempt is made to pay 13% of petroleum revenues as derivation fund to the oil producing states as stipulated by the 1999 constitution. However, the fate of revenues and the derivation fund has continued to be a source of controversy and tension between the federal government and the state governments. The general understanding is that a Federation Account exists to which oil and gas revenues are paid with a revenue sharing formula existing somehow as follows: Federal Government, 52.68%; States, 26.72%; and Local Governments, 20.60% (Osuoka, 2007: 58). Thus, the dynamics of violence in the Niger Delta are best understood when put through the test of the conditions and contextual factors that accentuated them. According to Mahler (2010), some of them are:

Oil dependence and abundance

This means that the amount of oil is not increasing as the number of the population and the fact that other states in Africa have also discovered oil thus making Nigeria not the only country that is looked upon by the international community for oil and gas resources. Thus, she notes:

This low per capita oil wealth can be considered to be one of the factors explaining why oil in Nigeria cannot have a stabilizing or conflict-reducing effect comparable to that in oil-exporting countries such as Saudi Arabia or Kuwait. Moreover, the substantial decline in oil revenues in the 1980s and 1990s can also be viewed as having contributed to an increase in the potential for conflict (Mahler, 2010: 15).

Resource management and economic distortions

There is ample proof that oil and gas resources in Nigeria are not well managed. This has resulted in oil spillages that are not taken care of, not by the multinational oil corporations nor by the Nigerian government. Again, Nigeria is one of the major gas flarers in the world (second after Russia), and this poses environmental challenges to the region. Moreover, the manner of distribution of resource wealth leaves much to be desired and this has fired the resolve of the Niger Delta people to fight for their rights to be taken seriously as they wallow in poverty when there is abundance under their feet. The combination of these factors ensures that the violence in the oil-rich Niger Delta continues. Thus, Mahler states that:

Poverty had been prevalent in Nigeria before the "oil era," but it increased drastically in the context of the declining oil revenues in the second half of the 1980s, the economic crisis, and the structural policy reforms, all of which were related to the ineffective and unsustainable resource management. The percentage of the population living in extreme poverty rose from approximately 35% in 1970 to 70% in the middle of the 1990s (Mahler, 2010: 17).

Geographic location of resources within the country

The geographical location of the Niger Delta region makes it inaccessible; it has marshes, creeks and dense mangrove forests. This makes it easier for oil spills, bush burning due to gas flaring and contamination of drinking water to affect the region easily. To further underscore the point being made, as it relates to the entire Gulf of Guinea region, Mahler (2010: 19) states as follows:

Deep offshore oil production in the Gulf of Guinea has only recently become more relevant. Today this offshore production represents about 15% of Nigeria's total oil production. Offshore exploitation is far more expensive; nevertheless, it has become more attractive to multi-national oil companies in the context of the increased attacks on oil facilities in the Niger Delta. Although the attacks on offshore oil platforms by the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) in June 2008 showed that offshore oil production is not beyond the reach of militant aggression, offshore operations are still markedly less vulnerable than operations in the Delta. A further shift of oil production into the Gulf of Guinea could moreover at least somewhat reduce the grievance related conflict potential, as the people in the Delta would be less affected by air, land, and drinking water pollution.

Domestic and international actors involved in the resource sector

Nigeria's rentier nature has made its supervisory agency in the oil and gas sector to be redundant. The Nigerian National Petroleum Company (NNPC) has been more of an observer in the oil and gas exploration as it does not engage in exploration but in monitoring the multinational oil companies, who employ experts to do its work and pay rents to the Nigerian government, excluding the local oil companies in the process. With a 57% stake in the joint venture contracts it has with all oil companies operating in Nigeria, the NNPC does not seem to care how much is made as long as money keeps coming into the coffers of government.

The problem with this kind of arrangement is that in the process it had negatively affected the benefits Nigeria should get from the resources. As noted by Mahler (2010: 20):

Because of their economic importance (for example, technical know-how), the multinationals and especially Shell have influenced the dynamics of the violent conflicts, mainly through three causal channels: Firstly, they obviously carry at least part of the blame for the environmental pollution caused by oil production in the Delta. Furthermore, they have indirectly contributed to the increased militarization of the conflicts, for example, by demanding that the Nigerian state provide official security services, even when the civil protests were still mainly peaceful, as in the mid-1990s. The oil companies also make use of private security services, some of which are extremely brutal. Some oil companies have also provided financial assistance to potential militant actors in order to "pacify" them. While this might reduce violence in the short term, the risks of further empowerment of militant groups in the long run are obvious. Finally, foreign oil companies provide financial support and different types of "development projects" to their so-called host communities…increased after the Ogoni protests, and while it, in the absence of responsible state actors, brings about some short-term mitigation of daily burdens for the local people, it also has conflict triggering impacts. The donations for example generate resentment between the people of the host communities and other (ethnic) communities which do not benefit from such financial support.

Transnational oil theft network

The issue of oil bunkering or theft of oil in the Niger Delta region has been well documented as it has become one of the major sources of making money in the region. Most of the militant activities in the region are linked to this thriving trade. The petroleum resources are sold to neighbouring states like Cote d'Ivoire, Senegal and Benin where they are refined and sold, sometimes even back to Nigeria. The enormity of the criminal network is such that it is not only the pipeline saboteurs, but the security outfits and government officials that are involved in the sleaze that has ensured that a lot of people make a lot of money from unauthorized sale of petroleum resources.

This is done mainly in the high seas and in the creeks and involves a whole lot of people. "Because of the broad involvement of influential persons in illegal oil theft, the state approach to solving the Niger Delta crisis is marked by significant inconsistency and, despite growing militarization, persistent reluctance and a lack of engagement" (Mahler, 2010: 21).

International demand and customer structure

According to Mahler (2010: 21), Nigeria currently exports the majority of its oil, approximately 50%, to the United States. The United States, in turn, imports approximately 10% of its oil from Nigeria, and intends to increase this share (and that accounts for the AFRICOM craze). The relationship between the two countries since Nigeria's transition to democracy in 1999 has been harmonious and has been marked by a very benevolent attitude towards Nigeria on the part of the United States. In parallel with the expansion of oil imports from Nigeria, the United States has increased its supplying of weapons to the country and has expanded its military presence in the Gulf of Guinea, for example, via naval patrols.

Moreover, in December 2005 the two countries announced coordinated actions to counter small arms trafficking, to bolster maritime and coastal security, to promote community development and combat poverty, and to fight money laundering and other financial crimes. Primarily because of its own economic interests (oil supply), and also because of strategic considerations with respect to the role of Nigeria as a regional power in West Africa, the United States is generally interested in reducing the internal instability in the country. Nevertheless, the United States' efforts to exert its influence on the violent conflict in the Niger Delta have not been quite successful. This is exactly why AFRICOM has become an issue in intellectual discourse in the Gulf of Guinea region.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE NIGERIAN GOVERNMENT SECURITY POLICY FOR THE NIGER DELTA

The link between oil and gas governance and the implications for the Nigerian government's security policy in the Niger Delta region cannot be effectively discussed without going along with the thoughts of Mahler (2010: 7), which had noted that the rentier nature of the Nigerian economy was responsible for the problem. She notes that the rentier state theory is universally valid and attributes the linkage between oil rents and authoritarianism to the following causal mechanisms: Firstly, it is presumed that oil rents foster the formation of stabilizing patronage networks, widespread clientelism, and distribution policies, all of which lessen the pressure from the population to democratize and may additionally result in the depoliticization of the society. Secondly, the abundance of revenues generated by the oil sector means that national rulers do not need to tax the population. This again may disburden the political elite of demands from the population for political participation and accountability on the part of the elites. The rentier state theory does not focus primarily on violence, but rather on the stability of authoritarian rule. However, she notes that it can be assumed that resource wealth makes it easier for authoritarian rulers to use violence in the form of political repression, for example, because it enables the financing of a massive security apparatus.

Mahler introduces the issue of the resource curse thesis, which has gained prominence within the theoretical debate on natural resources. Noting the already-known fact that resource wealth is linked to poor economic growth and other economic problems such as Dutch disease effects and poor performance of the agricultural and manufacturing sectors accompanied by an insufficient degree of diversification and extreme vulnerability towards external shocks; Mahler focuses on the link between natural resources and violent conflicts, that is to say, that resource-dependent countries are more likely to experience internal instability and violent conflict than non-resource countries. This is partly contradictory to the rentier-state theory.

The causal mechanisms assumed to be responsible for this link, according to Mahler (2010:8) include, on the one hand, the fact that natural resources can be the *motive* for violent conflicts. This means that parts of the population might feel that they are deprived of the financial benefits of the resource revenues – while suffering from the ecological and social impacts of production (motive of *grievance*) – or that resource wealth can be the target of avaricious rebels who wish to take possession of the resource revenues (motive of *greed*). On the other hand, resource revenues can serve as a catalyst for violent conflict by financing the rebel groups and other actors involved (*opportunity, feasibility*) and thus prolonging the conflict. Finally, resources, and especially oil, can indirectly increase the likelihood of violent conflict by weakening political institutions and/or by triggering socioeconomic decline, because oil producers tend to have weaker state apparatuses than one would expect given their level of income because the rulers have less need of a socially intrusive and elaborate bureaucratic system to raise revenues.

As far as implications for security policy is concerned, the Niger Delta is a very important case study for Africa especially as it provides a clear example of the link between poor resource management and protracted conflicts. According to Onigbinde (2008: 18-19), the Nigerian case can be used as an example of resource-rich countries in Africa and the challenge they face once they start to incur wealth from resource production and trade. Countries like Ghana have discovered oil thereby making it a nation that needs to be watched to ensure that the Nigerian situation is not repeated, especially when it holds promises of a stable democracy that Nigeria presently lacks. The need is great because without ensuring that resources are adequately managed to meet the needs of the resource producing region, the security of these nations are at risk.

Internal violence and civil wars in any African country have massive implications for sub-regional security. In this regard, a stable Nigeria is important in ensuring the peace and security in the sub-region and in Africa as a whole. Adversely, an unstable Nigeria will hinder efforts geared towards maintaining sub-regional stability. This assumption is based on the fact that it is easy for conflicts in one country to spread to another very quickly, turning a national concern into a sub-regional one.

The problem of the Niger Delta can increasingly spread especially as African borders remain weak and porous. The artificial and porous borders between African countries have made for easy transportation of arms across these countries and so through the activities of "states, arm brokers and mercenaries, thousands of weapons have been transferred into the Niger Delta region and used by state security forces, the security factions of oil companies and insurgent groups" (Onuoha, 2008). Weapons are also being cast-off into the Niger Delta from the Great Lakes Conflict. These examples show how serious the problem of porous borders in Africa is. It is possible to assume that if and when conflicts occur in other African countries; these same weapons will be delivered across from Nigeria to other warring factions in the sub-region. In addition to porous borders, ethnic linkages cut across borders. Strong ties between families and ethnic groups across borders also create a new form of regional insecurity as it can accelerate the flow of arms and other illicit acts including mobilization for conflicts.

The Nigerian case could become a template for many other militant groups fighting for resource control. This could be through exchange of information, human capital and small arms and light weapons. This could increasingly link these groups together as they have similar goals and activities. The absence of strong intelligence between African countries makes it even more difficult to stop criminal activities across borders. Ethnic militant groups are now building networks and links that cut across borders and there are reports of links between militant groups in the Niger Delta and groups in Guinea and South Africa.

Nigeria's role as a strong contributor to diplomacy and African peacekeeping initiatives could be inhibited by the growing insecurity and conflict in the country with a shift of focus of its military from international stabilization onto domestic security issues. Economically, Nigeria as the largest and the most populous country in West Africa and its role as an oil provider to African nations such as Benin, Togo and Ghana is very critical because insecurity in the country will affect the supply and demand of oil. Humphreys (2005: 509-510) noted about oil in Chad that "control of oil revenues has been central to Chadian politics for more than thirty years; it has made and broken political leaders; has incited violence, and has shaped political agendas. But what is perhaps most striking about Chadian oil is that, up to 2003, not a single drop has been pumped."

According to 2006 estimates by the Oil and Gas Journal (2007), Nigeria is the seventh largest natural gas reserve holder in the world and the largest in Africa. In October 2004, Nigeria announced that its natural gas reserves could be as high as 660Tcf. The government plans to raise earnings from natural gas exports to 50% of oil revenues by 2010. However, the Nigerian National Petroleum Company (NNPC) estimates that $15 billion in private sector investments is necessary to meet its natural gas development goals by 2010. The vast majority of natural gas found in Nigeria is associated, meaning that it occurs in Crude Oil reserves as free gas. Because many of the fields lack the infrastructure to produce the associated natural gas, it is flared. Nigeria flares more natural gas than any other country in the world, with 43% of its total annual natural gas production being flared. NNPC estimates that Nigerian flared natural gas accounts for approximately 20% of the world total. Nigeria is working to end natural gas flaring by 2008. However, Shell announced in its 2004 People and Environment Annual Report that it would not be able to meet the 2008 goal of eliminating natural gas flaring (Oil and Gas Journal, 2007).

Implications of the Niger Delta conflict for the Gulf of Guinea Region

From the above expose, it is abundantly clear that the conflict in the Niger Delta region has many implications for the Gulf of Guinea region. These are stated below:

Globalization of conflict

The insurgency in the Niger Delta has gone beyond Nigeria; it has gone regional, and as such, it should no longer be the responsibility of the Nigerian government but that of ECOWAS and the Gulf of Guinea Commission. However, the problem is that generally, individual states do not accept that internal problems could have regional implications. They prefer to call insurgents 'bandits' and 'militants', and take it as an internal problem that can be handled domestically even when it is clear that the activities of these 'bandits' affect the country and spill over into other countries of the sub-region. This challenge of the perception of the conflicts in the various states of the region is hinged on the protection of sovereignty by these states. The quest to protect sovereignty has unfortunately led many states to take on more that they can ordinarily take instead of employing a regional and more global approach to stem the tide of insecurity in the region.

Misuse of advantages

The Gulf of Guinea has many advantages. First, because of its closeness to the major markets in Europe and North America; secondly, there are no environmental hazards; and thirdly, the quality of oil produced in the region is far better than in other places. However, the challenges are that there is unskilled workforce in the region. There is no capacity to retain everything about the oil. There is no diversification, even when a lot can be gleaned from the crude deposits in the region. Thus, there is exploitation and no expropriation; that is to say, government is incapable of acquiring all it could in order to make adequate use of all the wealth accruing from the oil and gas deposits from the region. The oil from the region goes out cheap and comes back expensive, and it is still the poor masses that suffer most in the event of high prices for oil and gas resources. People in the region become desperate as the gap between them and those who take out of the region becomes wider each day. Moreover, the rentier nature of government in resource-rich nations like those in the Gulf of Guinea (Nigeria specifically), where government after collecting high rents from multinationals, become accomplices in the bid to ensure calm and acquiescence from the people of the region, leads to militant struggles, and in the process, a lot of advantages and development are lost. Moreover, as noted by Onyeukwu (2007: 21) "the presence of oil revenue of course ensured that the military dictatorships in Nigeria did not need to tax the majority of the people, which is a way was useful to them, as taxation through which to fund government could have led to unrest, which may have forced them out of government". He further categorized the nature of conflicts in the ND into 5 major areas – intra-community; inter-community, inter-ethnic, community-oil company, and states-federal government (Onyeukwu, 2007: 23).

Maritime security

All the states in the Gulf of Guinea Region are weak in the waterways security. The world super powers control the maritime security of the Gulf of Guinea Region, and this is an indictment on the governments of the region. This weakness in the control of the waters gives room for penetration of the borders by external actors to even compound the conflicts in the region through thriving arms trade and preponderance of mercenary activities.

Border security

As with the waterways, so it is with the borders. Presently, there is porosity in the borders connecting the Gulf of Guinea states. Moreover, there is a report that the Niger Delta militants have started tracing their steps towards Ghana ostensibly to train them in the art of militancy as the country is grappling with how best to govern their new-found oil and gas resources. This does not bode well for the region as it could trigger conflict between the two countries with devastating effects.

ECOWAS weaknesses

ECOWAS has identified the Niger Delta among the hot spots of the region, the Commission as an institution is being careful not to intervene directly in Nigeria as it is its major financier. This is not helpful as the Commission had intervened directly in Togo, Cote d'Ivoire, Liberia and other states in the sub-region. But then Nigeria is a superpower in the region and needs to be handled carefully. This is another major implication for the conflict in the region.

Governance

There has not been any serious form of governance in Nigeria. The thirty years of military misadventure in the country swept away any form of governance that the country was ever going to get; thus, it is difficult to talk about governance of oil and gas in Nigeria. Talk about governance can only be discussed in relation to Angola which has made strident effort to control its oil and gas resources, and it is the bedrock of the government there now. There is coherence in the leadership in Angola in terms of oil and gas unlike what obtains in Nigeria. Thus, three factors were responsible for the problem in the Nigerian State: i. Three decades of military rule that could not produce public good; ii. Corruption that did not allow for any form of governance in the sector; iii. Role of organized crime brought about the issue of arms in the region.

These three factors exist within the context of the Niger Delta which had led to militancy, and which was a result of political consciousness that erupted after decades of agitation for inclusion in the affairs of resource governance.

CONCLUSION

This study centred on the importance of comprehending the synergy between the governance of resources and the conflict that has bedeviled the Niger Delta region of Nigeria and the Gulf of Guinea states in general, and found the governance of resources by states in the Gulf of Guinea culpable for the imbroglio, a culpability that centres on government's laisser-faire attitude to the manner the resources from the region are expended to the generality of the populace.

The inability of governance in Nigeria is shown in the fact that government does not know how much oil and gas wealth is produced; there are no metres at the point of production to gauge how much oil is produced; and at the point of export, government depends on the oil companies to tell her how much is being exported. This is simply a very clear case of a government that is not serious about monitoring the activities in the area. Despite the fact that successive audits embarked upon by the Nigerian government have consistently shown these anomalies, government is yet to react as there are still no metres at the production points. Recently, the Nigeria Extractive Industry Transparency Initiative (NEITI) described the records of the country's crude production and export as unclear, saying that after 58 years of oil production, the country does not know exactly the quantity it produces. The oil and gas sector is shrouded in secrecy. The audit reconciliation carried out by NEITI in respect of its first and second audit report could only narrow down the discrepancies in revenue reporting to \$16 million (1999 - 2004) and \$155 million for 2005 (This Day, 29/03/2010). This does not bode good for a country that claims to have the interest of its people at heart. And of course, when people are consistently denied what is due them, there is bound to be crisis.

The insecurity and conflict in the Gulf of Guinea region has been there for over forty years and it is a well-known fact that arms follow money; because there is a lot of resource wealth in the Gulf of Guinea, and there are scattered cases of skirmishes all over the neighbouring regions, there is bound to be arms in the region. These are used in the fight for control of bunkered oil that occasions conflicts constantly. Of course, given the role of political godfathers in the region that have been arming the youth for electoral purposes, the problem has been exacerbated by inconsistencies in the political leadership of the region. Thus, it is only through a concerted effort on the part of the political leadership to gain tighter control of the resources and for a greater accountability by government and all those responsible for the allocation of resource wealth in the region, can there be the abatement of conflict in the Niger Delta region in particular, and the Gulf of Guinea in general.

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