

CAN RESOURCE CONTROL ADDRESS THE MINORITY QUESTION IN THE NIGER-DELTA REGION?

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Abstract

The struggle for resource control constitutes a central issue in minority agitations in the Niger Delta. This paper argues that resource control struggle in the Delta is the culmination of decades of minority discontents against political domination and marginalization in the distribution of power and resources. While there is some level of ambiguity in the conceptualization of 'resource control', the idea is not necessarily about absolute control of petroleum resources. Rather, it is about inclusion and equitable share of oil resources, development and environmental justice. Furthermore, the character and ethnic composition of the Niger Delta suggests that there is no guarantee that 'absolute' resource control will address minority agitations in the region. It throws up further debate about 'majority minorities' and 'minority minorities' relations within the region. Minority agitation in the Delta cannot be addressed in isolation but as part of a wider search for solution to the National Question. The solution lies in political and constitutional reforms capable of advancing social justice, equity in resource distribution, good governance and nation-building.

Keywords: Natural resources, Resource control, Minority agitation, Niger Delta, Nigeria

Introduction

Much has been said and written about the minority question in post-colonial Nigeria and how the problem of ethnic minorities has beset the country since inception (Osaghae, 1991; Suberu, 1996; Sagay, 2008; Nyekwere, 2020). Yet there appears to be no durable solution to minority agitations in Nigeria. Notwithstanding, the minorities themselves have experienced some sort of political emancipation over the years. Through a series of constitutional and political engineering, minority groups have emerged from being the 'regional marginals' in the 1960s into more important stakeholders in the political process. In particular, the creation of new states and introduction of the 'federal character' principle not only doused minorities' fears of majority domination, it also improved their representation in government and governance. In spite of these advancements in the status of minority groups in the federation, majority discrimination, marginalization and domination persist.

An important aspect of minorities' discontent relates to the manner in which the State's distributive system is skewed in favour of the majority groups in terms of access to power and resources. It is believed that minorities still have no real influence, access or control of power and resources at the center. It is their shared view that Nigeria's excessively centralized federal system mainly benefits the majority groups, which in turn has negatively impacted the minorities' share of national resources. This is so, especially when discussed within the context of state capture by dominant ethno-regional forces who have exploited the control and greater access to federal power to mobilize resources along ethno-regional cleavages. Hence, a major complaint of the minorities is the absence of equitable distribution of power and resources and the resultant inequalities and uneven development.

Nowhere else has minority agitation been more profound than in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria—a region home to many minority ethnic groups. It also occupies a strategic position as the live-source of the nation's economy due to the presence of crude oil. While there is a point of convergence among minority groups in the various regions in their demand for a fair distribution of resources, there are also areas of differences in their agitations. For example, minorities in the Middle Belt area have largely agitated for greater representation in the federal government and its agencies and equitable distribution of resources to improve local development. In the Niger

Delta area, the minorities have linked their ultimate socioeconomic development to resource control and their ability to control, access and utilize the resources of the region for the development of the region with little or no interference by the centre.

Consequently, the Niger Delta, since the early 1990s has witnessed violent and destabilizing conflicts between local community actors and the Nigerian security forces and oil companies arising from oil exploitation. What began as a demonstration against environmental degradation and State/oil companies' neglect of the developmental needs of the region later turned into a state of militancy and a widespread ethnic and regional struggle for self-determination and resource control. These issues arose from what the Niger Delta minorities consider as exploitation, exclusion, deprivation and, marginalization in relation to resource contribution, allocation, political representation and developmental response (Osaghae, Ikelegbe, Olarinmoye & Okhomina, 2008). To this end, minority agitation in the Niger Delta has gravitated from being essentially about environmental remediation and development towards the demand for constitutional reforms, resource control and self-determination.

The 2009 Presidential Amnesty Programme introduced by the Umaru Musa Yar'Adua administration, which proclaimed forgiveness for Niger Delta militants, achieved limited success in reducing the hitherto unrelenting attacks against oil workers and assets and heralded considerable peacebuilding investments in the region. While the amnesty initiative brought relative stability to the region, it did not adequately address the core issue of local involvement and control of mineral resources (Omokhoa & Ikelegbe, 2016). In fact, in the last five years, the relative peace in the region induced by the programme has come under strain as a result of perceived bias in the Nigerian government's management of diversity issues and mineral resources in the country (Siollun, 2019; Aiyede, 2020). In 2020, fresh Niger Delta agitation was triggered by perceived inequality in the implementation of the law regulating ownership and exploitation of solid minerals, especially gold in the country. Niger Delta indigenes have queried why indigenous artisans in northern states like Zamfara were allowed to exploit and sell gold and other solid minerals within their territories while such privileges were historically denied to the Niger Delta people (Odiegwu, 2020; Ndujihe, 2020).

There are pertinent questions that need to be asked therefore. For example, how has the Niger Delta minorities fared as part of the Nigerian federation? What are the critical issues of collective discontent? What attempts have been made to address these discontents? Why the persistent demand for resource control? Can resource control address minority agitations in the region? This paper attempts to provide answers to these questions and contribute to the debate on oil resource management in Nigeria's oil belt.

Conceptualizing Resource Control

There is some level of ambiguity when conceptualizing 'resource control' especially within the context of the Niger Delta struggle. Osaghae et al (2008: 19) view it as the "ownership and control" of all resources which signify the freedom to willingly dispose of these resources, to negotiate its alienation or extraction without reference to a violent and or an undemocratic state.' For Sagay (2008: 380), there are two main components of resource control. First, it implies 'the power and right of a community to raise funds by way of taxation on persons, matters, services or materials within its territory...' Secondly, it is the 'exclusive right to the ownership and control of resources, both natural and created within its territory'.

While aligning with the above views, Ako (2012) introduces what he describes as the 'local variant' of resource control. That is, enabling the local populations in the Niger Delta to access and enjoy the benefits of oil resources located in their ancestral land. Ako emphasizes the point that while the regional political elites have displayed lack of effective management of accruable oil revenue and the militants enjoy the 'benefit' of their agitation, the local people, on whose behalf the political and militant resource control struggle have occurred, rarely feature in the distribution of crude oil benefits. Resource control could therefore be broadly defined as the access and participation in the control and management of all land, water and forest resources by the resource-bearing communities or states. This also includes the natural and political rights to access and adequately enjoy the benefits of such resources.

Arguably, the most popular understanding of resource control particularly as it relates to minority agitation and resource conflicts in the Niger Delta can be found in the 1998 Kaiama Declaration (KD) of the Ijaw Youth Council (IYC). The notion of

resource control expressed in the Declaration has become the benchmark for current debate on the issue. There are a number of views on resource control expressed in the KD. First is the expression of absolute ownership of all resources by inhabitants of the resource location. This is found in Article I of the Declaration which advocates ownership of 'all land and natural resources within the Ijaw territory as belonging to the Ijaw communities'. This implies that every community, state or region has the right of ownership over its resources. Secondly, it talks about direct access, control and management of the resources by the people including exploration and exploitation of the resources.

Article VIII which calls for the 'restructuring of the Nigerian federation' based on the outcome of 'a sovereign national conference of equally represented ethnic nationalities' effectively linked resource control with self-determination and the need to resolve the National Question. This has influenced the current debate on restructuring the federal system by governors of the states in the region and others in the southern region. In the discourse, resource control is linked with 'true federalism' and the ability to the states to control and exploit their resources while contributing a fraction of the revenue to the national purse. This notion of resource control does not appeal to the federal government and many of the political and ethno-cultural elites especially in the core north who view it as separatism and an invitation to the balkanization of the country. The intolerant and confrontational response of the federal government to the resource control and self-determination struggle in the Niger Delta flow from its contentious perception of resource control.

The Minority Question in Historical Perspective

The minority question predates the Nigerian federation. Like every other plural societies, Nigeria has had to grapple with problems associated with majority-minority relations. Minorities are a culturally-distinct group of people who in relation to other groups are numerically inferior (Thornberry, 1980) or occupy a real or perceived position of socio-economic and political subservience vis-à-vis other culturally cohesive groups (Osaghae, 1991). The minority groups in Nigeria are often defined in relation to their ethnicity. Arguably, ethnicity and religion are the most widely discussed forms of identities in Nigeria even though others exist. The general view is that apart from the Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba and Igbo, all other ethnic groups in

Nigeria fall into the minority category. Yet, among the minorities, there are 'majority minorities' such as the Ijaw, Edo, Tiv and Kanuri with considerably larger populations and they wield substantial political and socioeconomic influence in their regions. The specific number of ethnic groups in Nigeria is unknown. The popular figure being mentioned is 250 but Otite (2000: 38-58) presents a list of 389 ethnic groups and their locations in Nigeria even though he recognizes that the list is not definitive.

The minority question did not become a problem in Nigeria's political history until the decade preceding independence when the political elites rooted for a regionalization policy. What had existed before in the form of local jurisdiction, Native Authority or the Indirect Rule system promoted some form of local autonomy which eliminated any idea of superordinate-subordinate relationships among the ethnic groups. The decision to jettison this policy for regionalization kick-started the travails of minority groups in Nigeria to the extent that Osaghae (1991: 238) argued that if the previous policy 'was not replaced by that of regionalization, the majority-minority group distinction would probably not have arisen'. The regionalization process in the 1950s had the effect creating new ethnic categories by forging a common consciousness among micro identities that in the past lacked such consciousness. Thus, Hausa-Fulani, Igbo and Yoruba emerged as the dominant identities within the regional contexts while others inexorably became minorities, largely concentrated in the present-day geopolitical regions of the South-South, North Central, North East and the southern peripheries of the North West.

ware of the new political reality and especially ethnic nationalism among the majority groups, the minorities expressed concerns about political marginalization, exclusion and domination by the majority groups prompting the establishment of Willink Commission in 1957 to look into their concerns. While rejecting their agitation for the creation of separate regions, the Commission in its report provided constitutional guarantees in the form of fundamental rights including prohibition of discrimination against minority groups. It also granted a special developmental status to minorities in the Niger Delta area in the form of a Development Board (Ikelegbe, 2005). This however did not prevent the majority groups from dominating the political space neither did it inhibit further agitation by the minorities for state creation, inclusion and greater participation.

There was a feeling of relief among the minorities in 1967 when the Yakubu Gowon regime abolished regionalism and created twelve states as replacement. Subsequent states creation between 1987 and 1996 as well as the establishment of the 'federal character' principle and 'quota system' further empowered the minorities giving them a sense of belonging and direct access to national resources. Though these political reforms satisfied some of the issues in minority agitations such as the demand for separate states, they have been unable to eradicate the feeling of marginalization by the minorities. The crux of minority agitation today is fair representation in national affairs and the distribution of national resources among all groups on the basis of equality and justice.

Minority Agitations in the Niger Delta

Although with a well-documented history of resistance against any form of external or internal domination that dates back to the precolonial period (see Ogbogbo, 2004 and Tamuno, 2012), it was the discovery, commercialization and subsequent ascendance of crude oil as the chief source of revenue for Nigeria that accentuated minority agitations in the Niger Delta. The restiveness and agitations in the region are linked to perceived marginalization by the majority ethnic groups in Nigeria who have dominated the political and economic life of the country. First, it was a protest against marginalization, neglect and the politics of exclusion by the majority ethnic groups before it metamorphosed into a struggle for control of oil resources. The expectation that oil exploitation will improve livelihoods and redress infrastructural imbalance in the region was replaced by the despicable effects of oil exploitation. Environmental degradation and other negative externalities of oil exploitation are widely regarded as a major source of agitation in the Niger Delta (Obi, 2008; Omokhoa & Ikelegbe, 2016).

Beyond the unimpressive role played the multinational oil companies in the emergence and exacerbation of conflict in the region, the grouse of the Niger Delta minorities is that they have been unfairly dispossessed of their resources and accompanying benefits through a highly politicized fiscal formula and other political measures instituted especially by the majority ethnic groups in what has appeared to be a conscious or unconscious conspiratorial act. The Petroleum Act (1969), Land Use Act (1978) and the 1999 Constitution are particularly implicated as they vest

ownership and absolute control of all natural resources on the Federal Government, in the process stripping the oil-bearing communities of the rights to the resources on their land. Furthermore, is the highly contentious derivation principle used for sharing oil revenues which has, since independence, been to the advantage of the majority groups. The subsequent adjustments and increase from 2% in the early 1990s to 13% under the 1999 Constitution, ostensibly to placate agitations in the region, fell below the expectations of the people.

Francis, Lapin and Rossiasco (2011) showed that the region and its people remain poor and the underdevelopment level worse than the national average. The development indexes show a gross lack of health services, limited access and unaffordability of quality education, large-scale unemployment, infrastructural deficits and widespread criminality and deviant behaviour among the youths (Odobo, 2017). If this is analyzed alongside the grievous environmental degradation of the land, water and forest areas of the region resulting from the extractive industry, it becomes easier to appreciate the basis of the Niger Delta agitations.

An important point in Ogbogbo's (2011) study is that recourse to agitation for resource control and self-determination was a last resort triggered by local frustration, threat to their survival and existence, and utter neglect, levity and indifference with which the government and the oil companies attended to local communities demand for socioeconomic emancipation. These same issues were responsible for the March 1966 Adaka Boro secessionist attempt, the Ogoni uprising in the 1990s and the emergence of several resistance movements such as Egbesu, Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) and the Niger Delta Avengers. The Delta has become the symbol of oil-related violence characterized by forceful occupation of oil flow stations, vandalization of pipelines, hostage taking and kidnapping and the site of struggle for resource control.

While the nature and dynamics of conflicts in the Niger Delta, as Ikelegbe (2005) argued, demonstrate the triumph of greed over grievance, the consciousness is not lost among the people of the region that the absence of good governance and development, and a feeling of marginalization, domination and injustice perpetrated against them are the real drivers of agitations in the region. What they have to show for

the enormous resources that they have—which have sustained the nation for decades—is human and infrastructural underdevelopment and a region racked with violent conflicts. A corollary of this is the displeasure with the federalist option as currently practiced by Nigeria believed to be structurally flawed, unbalanced, problematic, and biased against minorities' states. These issues have been a source of controversy in many parts of the country now coalesced into the demand for reform of the federal system; and in the Niger Delta, a demand for resource control.

The State and Institutional Response to Minority Agitation in the Delta

The Nigerian State is uncannily notorious for its avoidance strategy as well as its reputation of intolerance, confrontation and excessive use of force against dissents. However, it has also shown a willingness to adopt a non-adversarial approach to issues even though it is sometimes compelled to do so. The State has a reputation of ignoring group grievances and agitation in the Niger Delta only to issue threats against dissenters when such agitations gain traction. Often times, this is followed by actual use of force by agents of the State against the agitators. It demonstrated this strong-arm tactic against Ogoni agitators in River State in the early 1990s in the process proscribing youth activism in the region, labelling it a treasonable offence. The same conquest strategy was repeated in Odi community in Bayelsa State in November 1999 leaving a massive death toll and destruction of properties—tragedies that have remained indelible in the psyche of the local population of Odi.

Decades of neglect of the Niger Delta and further military response by the State such as *Operation Restore Hope* (2003), *Operation Flush Out III* (2004) and the more recent *Operation Crocodile Smile* (2016) inadvertently served to exacerbate conflict and militancy in the region. It buoyed restiveness and elevated the youths as vanguard of militant agitation for self-determination and resource control in the region. Same adversarial conflict intervention response has been deployed in communal, ethno-religious conflicts in other minorities' states and beyond as in Zaki Biam in Benue State, Jukun-Kuteb communal clash in Taraba and the many ethno-religious conflicts in Southern Kaduna. Thus indicating, as Ake (1996) argued, in relation to the post-colonial State in Nigeria that it is in the character of the State—contrived in nature—to be excessively repressive and with inadequate commitment to minorities' dissatisfaction.

Clearly perturbed by militant agitations in the Niger Delta, and the consequences on national security, the State decided to tone down its confrontational approach; offered to dialogue and proposed amnesty to agitators in the region. It requested the militants to disarm and renounce violence in return for State pardon and rehabilitation. Its failure to address the underlying grievances that triggered the agitation in the region, especially issues of infrastructural development limited the successes of the government's amnesty programme. Hence, the government's amnesty initiative was nothing more than a framework employed to placate militant agitations and ensure uninterrupted production of crude oil, rather than being a holistic plan that would address the entire range of the Niger Delta problems and grievances.

Besides the amnesty plan, the State had earlier indicated its willingness to explore the non-violent approach to resolving the minority question in the Niger Delta or at least, some part of it. This is reflected in the legal and regulatory measures it instituted to deal with oil-induced environmental degradation, a major aspect of the peoples' grievances. Some of these measures include the Petroleum Regulations (1967), Petroleum Drilling and Production Regulation (1969), Petroleum Refining Regulations (1974), Oil Pollution Act (1990) and more recently, National Oil Spill Detection and Response Agency (NOSDRA, 2006). But most of these environmental laws are outdated, reactionary and inadequate while the oil multinationals have quite easily flouted them with little or no sanctions imposed on them by the regulators. Government's permissiveness and a desire to maintain an unencumbered production of oil and profit-making have been adduced for the flagrant disregard of environmental laws and continued degradation of the Niger Delta environment (Isumonah, 1998; Siollun, 2019).

Although not borne out of a genuine desire to develop the Delta, the government set up intervention agencies to address the developmental needs of the Niger Delta beginning with the Niger Delta Development Board (NDDDB) created in 1961 to the existing Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC). Collectively, these agencies have more or less been conduits for corruption and contracts' scam, grossly underfunded, redundant and offering very little development projects that have repeatedly fallen below the minimum expectations of the local populations. Beset with lack of accountability, transparency and proper management, the NDDC, for all the desirability of its objectives as stated in its establishing Act, is widely perceived as a 'house of corruption' that serves the interests of politicians, government officials and

cronies of incumbent administration. The uncovering of 1,691 contracts' scam and 22 illegal accounts operated by the NDDC (*This Day*, October 27, 2016) amidst other shortcomings prompted one commentator to observe that 'corruption...is the major factor that has hindered NDDC's performance since its establishment in 2000. And this is responsible for the inability of the Commission to attain its core mandate of ensuring a total, holistic and sustainable regional development' (Jegade, 2017: not paged).

Perhaps, one area where the minorities in the Niger Delta have felt powerless, marginalized and unjustly treated the most is in the area of oil revenue management. Revenue distribution has always been subject to the whims and caprices of the majority groups with near total disregard particularly to the southern minorities whose environment yields the bulk of the nation's revenue. It was more convenient for the State to promote fiscal autonomy and a healthy, competitive derivation principle in the 1960s when the major ethnic groups produced the major cash crops. Yet, it increasingly tightened the noose of fiscal autonomy and squeezed the derivation principle as crude oil became the mainstay of the nation's economy. The trajectory of the derivation principle shows a decline from 50% in 1960 to 45% in 1969, 20% in 1975, 1.5% in 1982, and 1.0% in 1990. It was marginally increased to 3.0% in 1992 and 13% in 1999.

This has disenchanted the Niger Delta minorities who felt shortchanged knowing that their resources hold the economy of the nation and as Osaghae (1991) pointed out, with the exception of Lagos, all the major ports—Port Harcourt, Warri, Koko and Calabar—that sustain the nation's economy are located in the Niger Delta area—. Hence, as the goose that lays the golden egg, the region's minorities insist that revenue allocation and resource distribution be based on each region's contribution to the national coffers. This understanding partly propelled the Southern Minorities Movement, with widespread regional support, to submit a memorandum to the 1994/1995 constitutional conference organized by Abacha's regime demanding, among other things, a minimum of 50% derivation formula. Not only were these demands rejected, coercive agents of the State were deployed to execute a campaign against high mobilization in the region. With no real access to federal power which is necessary to alter the course and increased their stake in the federation, the Niger Delta minorities have felt embittered, disillusioned, powerless and conquered.

The Resource Control Debate

Inevitably, the resource control debate has to begin with an examination of the federalist option as practiced in Nigeria. Ideally, federalism guarantees the political and economic independence of the federating units. It is also a reason why minorities are often in favour of federalism as it provides considerable protection for such groups (Simeon & Conway, 2001). This is also the case in Nigeria as the minorities have historically been staunch advocates of federalism. What however has disappointed them over the years is the exclusive character of Nigerian politics that often tend to sideline them. This exclusion politics ultimately tainted the federalist system in Nigeria from the late 1960s, producing a somewhat unitary system in federal disguise. Worst affected is the fiscal aspect of federalism to which resource control is vital. With the bastardization of fiscal federalism and the derivative basis of revenue allocation, the struggle for resource control was elevated to the front burner of politics especially among the southern minorities' states.

The struggle for resource control among the Niger Delta minorities manifests in the demand for a (re)negotiation of the stakes and context of their participation in the Nigerian federation. It is evident in the clamour by politicians, sociocultural associations and ethnic militias in the southern states for federal restructuring and convocation of a Sovereign National Conference (SNC) of ethnic nationalities to discuss the future of the Nigerian State (Ndujihe, 2020). The primary agenda promoted by the various agitations is fiscal federalism and the ability of each state or community to control and manage its resources at it deems fit.

Yet there is some confusion as to how resource control is viewed in the region. Is it really about the right of control and management of all land, water and forest resources for the development of the area? A question of local ownership of these resources located in the people's ancestral land? Or better still, the agitation for greater involvement as stakeholders in the exploitation of the resources and increased derivation. Osaghae et al (2008) claim that these competing perspectives are all part of the notion of resource control in the Niger Delta area. However, in a way, the southern governors and other citizens of the geo-political zone often equate the notion of resource control with the practice of 'true federalism' in which the federating units possess the constitutional rights to control and manage the resources within their areas and pursue their individual development as the basis of national development.

A component of this perspective on resource control includes the demand for an upward revision of derivation and a return to the revenue sharing arrangements that existed under the Independence and Republican Constitutions of 1960 and 1963 respectively. The 1960 and 1963 Constitutions made provision for a 50% derivation formula in the sharing of proceeds from mineral resources. This and many other unique features of the Constitutions that reflected the federal principles guaranteed the economic independence of the federating regions thus allowing them to develop at their own pace. The delegates from the oil-bearing states to the National Conference held in 2014 made similar proposal for a 25.5-50% increase in derivation funding which was rejected by the other conference delegates.

Nonetheless, a case can be made that agitation for resource control is deeper than increased revenue allocation to the Niger Delta states, but directly relates to the survival of the Niger Delta people. It entails actual involvement, control and management of the resources by those who feel the brunt of environmental degradation originating from the greedy, reckless and socially irresponsible nature of the extractive industry. It is about the right of the communities to have direct access and control in the whole gamut of oil exploitation in their territory (Aiyede, 2020). This decisive role, Sagay (2005) observes, would inform a planned and control production that will lead to a progressive and ultimate replacement of the non-renewable resources with renewable ones as the main drivers of development and an economically prosperous society free of environmental degradation and other externalities of oil exploitation. To this end, the struggle for resource control is about remediation of the Niger Delta environment and the establishment of a sustainable economic base that is less reliant on petroleum resources.

In other words, the resource control struggle is about sustainable development based on a socially responsible use of ecological resources. It implies that the business of crude oil exploitation would not only be about profit-making but also about investing on the people and the environment. Thus, unlike the manner in which the State and corporate entities exploit the resources with the main focus being on uninterrupted revenue generation, the 'real' owners who are the inhabitants of the land where the resources are deposited would pay equal attention to issues of sustainability and the need to invest in the present without jeopardizing future development. They are less likely to endanger their future survival with reckless plundering on natural resources

as in the case of Oloibiri and many other oil-bearing communities in the Niger Delta that were literally exploited, desecrated and left desolate by the State and oil multinationals.

Contentiously, the seeming emphasis on 'absolute' or 'total' control and management of resources is partly responsible for the misconceptions and considerable opposition to minorities' agitation for resource control in the Niger Delta. In particular, the continued resistance by the Nigerian government and some conservative groups in the country against resource control is predicated on the fears that the demand for absolute control of resources by each state or communities encourages separatism and further polarizes the country along ethnic or regional lines. Nevertheless, the debate is not about the oil-bearing communities or states appropriating all the proceeds of crude oil resources or an unwillingness to accommodate others in the sharing of benefits accruing from oil exploitation. Rather, it is about environmental and social justice and a recognition of the natural rights of the resource-rich communities and states to justly and adequately benefit from such resources and to use same for economic and social advancement of the area. However, the reality is that the Niger Delta peoples lack the political might to surmount the various ethno-cultural and legal encumbrances to their agitation for resource control due to their minority status in the federation. It is the case that the minority status of the Niger Delta peoples remains a hindrance to their struggle for equity in petroleum resource management.

A neighbouring opinion is that had crude oil been domiciled in territories of the majority groups, it is difficult to argue that they would have permitted the institutionalization of the constitutional provisions and other legal instruments that have copiously stripped the Niger Delta minorities of the rights to environmental resources in the region and denied them the full enjoyment of such resources. This implies that the minorities remain situated in the margins of decision-making with less significant influence on resource allocation and distribution.

Nonetheless, there is no guarantee that absolute or principal control of environmental resources will effectively address minority agitations in the Niger Delta considering the unintended consequences of state creation which produced a 'majority minorities' and 'minority minorities' situation within the region. In other words, the new 'marginals' could become the main agitators for inclusion and representation within

the region. Consequently, minority agitation for resource control cannot be addressed in isolation but as part of a wider search for solution to the National Question.

Relying on Maiese's (2004) PIN (Position, Interest and Need) model of conflict analysis, it could be argued that agitation in the Niger Delta is not necessarily about absolute control of petroleum resources. That is more or less, the position or stance of the minorities in the region. Their interest on the other hand, is about inclusion, fair representation in governance and a proportional share of proceeds of petroleum resources. This means that the minorities in the region are making a case for greater involvement in the entire process of oil exploitation. More importantly is the needs which are intricately linked to the peoples' survival. The key issues are safety, security, development, environmental remediation, improved human capabilities and general socioeconomic wellbeing. In essence, the resource control agitation is about meeting these important needs; the absence of which constitute the underlying triggers of agitations in the Delta.

Concluding Remarks

Oil resource management, with its negative externalities, is at the heart of minority agitation in the Niger Delta. Beyond that, the agitation is largely about social and political exclusion, economic impoverishment, environmental degradation as well as the right to control, manage and benefit from natural resources in the Niger Delta. Addressing these and erasing the feeling of political exclusion, marginalization and domination, requires that the State redresses the long years of environmental injustice in the region and promote equitable distribution of resources. To adequately accommodate these segments of the federation, there is the need to redefine existing fiscal arrangement and amend the extant legal frameworks that appear suppressive, offensive and injurious to the people of the region. Particular focus should be on the laws that implicate land use, oil exploitation, oil revenue sharing and environmental justice issues. These could be achieved through a sincere and comprehensive reform of the federal system that will lead to considerable devolution of power and resources to the constituent units and the institutionalization of an effective power-sharing framework that promotes inclusiveness, good governance, nation and state-building.

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