

## ACTIVITIES OF FEDERAL GOVERNMENT AND MULTINATIONAL CORPORATION IN THE NIGER DELTA: THE LINGERING PROBLEMS

By

**OGBOTUBO SEAMAN LOVEGOD, M.Sc.**

*Department of Political Science*

*Isaac Jasper Boro College of Education*

*Sagbama*

*lovegodseaman@gmail.com*

*08035530005*

### Abstract

*The lingering problems or crisis in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria occasioned by the exploration, discovery and eventual exploitation of oil and the expected or supposedly replication of the benefits accrued there from to develop the delicate natural environment which the powers that be in Nigeria because of politics denied the region, has been problematic to the development of Nigeria over the Years. Since the discovery of oil alias black god in 1956 in Oloibiri in the present day of Bayelsa, the whole of Niger Delta has been explored and exploited. But the negative effects of this adventure had seriously affected the natural ecosystem of the region thereby eroded the living standard of the people of the region. This has caused agitations by the now enlightened people of the region for emancipation but egocentrically ignored by the federal Government dominated politically by a section of the country in collaboration with the multi-national corporations undertaking the exploitation of the resources. Owing to this scenario, the resultant agitations in the region had witnessed the loss of many lives. Conferences un-end have been organized to address this problems but nothing is been done hence the LINGERING PROBLEMS. This write up is a reflection of the genesis of the whole saga and attempts to proffer solutions to the problem. But will Nigeria governments Listen?*

**Keywords:** Federal Government, Multinational Corporation, Niger Delta, Linging Problems

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### Introduction

Before we attempt to examine the causative effects of oil exploration and exploitation in the Niger delta region of Nigeria resulting to the great conflict of interests to the region and the federal government of Nigeria, it is pertinent to state that those effects have always been found to be largely part of the texture of every society that oil is exploited and explored. Neither in the past nor in the present nor even in the future will it be possible to find in a society in which those issues have not been and will not be raised.

Owing to the above, we would state that Nigeria like any other third countries has its place in the capitalist system which came into place since the advent of colonialism- that of making the indigenous people to produce raw materials to feed the emerging European industries and exporting the finished products, i.e. manufactured goods back to the people for their consumption (Lee, 2016). Nigeria became a centre of attraction of multinational corporations following the discovery of oil, and other minerals such as coal, Tin, Uranium, Iron, ore. The discovery of oil took the centre stage when oil became dominant international market in oiling the emerging European civilization in all ramifications.

Oil exploration started in Nigeria in 1900's by a German firm known as German Bitumen Corporation (Williams, 2014). Later, other companies such as shell British Petroleum, Mobil etc. came in. the German Bitumen started drilling oil from 1908 in about fourteen wells along the Northern edge of the Niger

Delta region Basin and off the coast of Lagos around Ijebu-ode and Okitiputa but were unsuccessful (William 2014). In the course of time, the whole of Nigeria was later granted to shell BP- a consortium License of 1938 (NNPC, 1990:24). Thus, Shell BP was the first oil company to successfully carry out oil business in Nigeria. The company with its Headquarters at Owerri drilled its well in 1951 at 140, ten miles northeast of Owerri but no oil was found. (Williams, 2014)

According to Pearson (2015), the initial successful drilling of oil by shell BP even though oil was not found ignited interest from other oil companies. However, it was not until 1956 that the efforts of shell BP met with success when it struck oil commercial quantities at Oloibiri about ninety kilometers west of Port-Harcourt in what is now known as Bayelsa State of Nigeria. The status of Oloibiri compared to Lagos, Ibadan, Enugu, Kaduna, Kano, Abuja and other major cities in Nigeria built with the oil money from Oloibiri is a story historians and historiographers and leaders will tell Nigerians and which is the cause of the problems we are facing and will continue to face in Nigeria unless and until it is properly addressed.

Now, some other discoveries soon followed and the first shipment began in 1958 albeit significant quantities followed afterward from 1965. Thus, oil actually became central features in Nigeria economy which the Federal government quickly realized and move swiftly to occupy a centre-stage in the comity of nations in the production of oil. Prior to the discovery, exploration and exploitation of oil in Nigeria, the three regional governments of North, East and west had their resources of groundnut, Palm oil, Coal and Cocoa respectively which they greedily exploited to their benefits at the expense of the minority tribes that were “allocated” to then by the colonial master before and immediately after independence. The then constitutions were drafted in their favour and the principles of derivation were made 100% for the region only pay taxes to the central government. All sorts of arguments ranging from devastation of environment, economic trees, etc. were made for the regions to get what they wanted to develop their “Own” region. Now with Oil as the main stay of Nigeria economy coming from the minority areas, what is the derivation Principle today? It is amazing that the derivation principle zeroed down to 1%, and “improved” to 13%. What happened to the 100% enjoyed by the then regional Governments? Hence the chorus, “Nigeria, their Nigeria” in the Niger Delta (Vanguard Newspaper, 2016). Now, let us take a look at the economic environment of oil producing communities before the discovery of oil and the resultant concomitant effects the people are facing today.

### **The Economic and Cultural Background of the People**

Agriculture, manufacturing including fisheries and forestry constitute the major economic activities of the People of Niger Delta with over 65 to 75 percent of the people engage in the, Lumbering, Hunting, gathering of wild fruits and *Raphia Palm*, tapping constitute specific primary forest economic activities. While fishing along the coastline and in rivers, creeks and swamps constitutes economic activities in the areas of fisheries resources and exploitation. In addition, rotational activation of food and cash crop and rearing of domestic animals were also undertaken (Allison-Oguru, 2013). Owing to the seasonal nature of farming activities, farmers engage in subsidiary or secondary occupation in order to remain employed all year round, and supplement farms income. With oil production taking the centre stage of the economy of Nigeria, how is the people of Niger Delta visa-avis the ecosystem of the region is faring in terms of development?

### **The Concept of Development**

Develop, according to the Oxford Dictionary of current English means “become or make large or more advanced” Development therefore connotes according to the same dictionary “the action of developing or the state of being developed” -the question is- Is this classical dictionary definition of development applicable to the Niger-Delta region consequent upon the enormous resources Almighty God deposited in the region so as to ensure the “actual” development albeit the often misapplied use of word “difficult terrain”

The political indiscipline – and of course tenacity to use political power to advance the course of the leaders’ ethnic capriciousness occasioned by the turn of events at discovery of oil their favour is the bane of all the problems or shall we say the challenges we face as a nation. This ugly scenario perhaps made many scholars to define the word development academically in different perspectives hence development stresses the importance of participation by the people devoid of external control which perhaps led Oni and Ohiani (2010) citing Hillman (1960) to state as follows:

Development is a method of helping Local communities to become aware of their needs to assess their resources more realistically, to organize themselves and their resources in such a way as to satisfy some

(if not) their needs and in so doing acquire the attitude, experience and cooperative skills for repeating this process again and again on their own initiatives” thus, any development effort which fails to allow for peoples participation becomes irrelevant in the actualization of such development effort. Hence, Onyewu (2012) opined that, “development can be said to be taking place when a country through its own initiative and self effort is able to utilize both internal and external resources in such a way that poverty, inequality, diseases, ignorance, etc. are rapidly being eliminated in the country.” Thus, development is concerned mainly with the fundamental transformation of society in its culture, social, political and economic sphere. This transportation is aimed at the provision of socio-economic facilities necessary for the improvement of man as its end product. This harmonized with apt insight provided by the late environmentalist Saro-wiwa (1992) which gives us a clear focus on what development means, “Development is that process by which progress is achieved in the economic, political social and technological field ensuring for a nation, the alleviation of individual distress, the provision of social welfare and basic amenities, the general improvement of the (Overall) standard of living and meeting the aspiration of component parts of the (whole) society.” It is the lack of these that is causing agitation in the Niger Delta region. In Nigeria, we do not expect only the multinational corporation to develop the Niger Delta region but largely the aggressive political will of the Nigerian government to address the nagging issues of the area.

### **Agitations on the Niger Delta**

As stated by Owugah (2014). The discovery of oil and the resultant continued exploration and exploitation in the Niger Delta region has no doubt caused serious damage to the entire ecosystem of the region. As earlier stated in this paper, the peoples means of livelihood have been eroded by the oil companies. Oil pollutions, oil line leakages, and of course deliberate vandalism by the people themselves-this is occasioned by anger of neglect by the oil companies and the federal government which the people ignorantly undertook- has severe political, social and economic consequences. The deliberate neglect of the area by the Federal Government made Late Major Isaac Jasper Adaka Boro and his Niger Delta Volunteer Force to take arms against the federal Government. The rest is history but he predicted that more Isaac Boros would arise to continue the fight for resource control or Freedom or Independence if the neglect continues. He paid the supreme price but true to his prediction, we are witnessing more agitations.

By implication tribalism and all the ISMS associated with the evil pride to dominate especially the oil rich Niger Delta region-perhaps to fulfil the statement of their leader that, “The North will rule from the Sahara to the coast”, that federal Government has continued to suppress the genuine demands of the Niger Delta people with military might at their disposal. But the agitations continued. The failed promises of dialogue with the people and degenerating living conditions have created more avenues for the now more enlightened youths to resort to militancy. The famous kaiaama declaration by the youths has and will continue to spur up the mindset of the youths.

Poverty gives birth to illiteracy which in turn gives birth to lawlessness. Right now, even before the so called economic distress, the living conditions of the people of the Niger Delta were getting worsen. Pollution resulting from oil companies activities has affected the general occupations hitherto enjoyed by the people. There is hunger and frustration. How can we explain even at this modern time of technology that, there are no roads, light, water, hospitals, schools in the Niger Delta Region which produces more than 80% of Nigeria’s income . if the region is difficult to develop as often claimed by successive governments, why not send fill choice areas and construct bridges to link neighbouring villages? After all, money answers everything.

The suppression continues to manifest as people from other part of the country got oil block licences to lift oil at the peoples backyard. No person from the region is considered good enough to be granted licence to get oil blocks. It is as a result of the attitude of the Federal government towards the Niger Delta people and their demands that emboldens the multi National corporations (MNCs) to ignore their own side of the bargain. There is a lot of injustice perpetuated by government and the multinational corporations’ which has led to the current confrontations. The Ogoni crisis and the Warri crisis are still fresh in our minds. The formation of MEINBUTUS, by the youths in Warri and the Ogoni agitation both of which came in the last decade of the twentieth century has been disturbing both the Nigerian government and the Oil companies especially shell BP (Owugah, 2014).

Now, when the Federal government thinks that it has succeeded in suppressing MEINBUTUS, another group called MEND sprang up, that is, Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta. Its activities dealt economic blows to the government and the government has not recovered from its activities. Yet the Federal government keeps its policy of suppression instead of developing the area and yet again, another group has sprung up, i.e. NIGER DELTA AVENGERS- this time involving all the states in the Niger Delta for there is no state in the region that does not produce oil and suffering from neglect. And yet again the Federal government is using military might. Will the Federal government kill everybody in the region to continue to enjoy the God given resources of the people?

So much research work have been done by scholars in this oil companies saga and the damaging effect of the area. Various academic and professional solutions have been offered or provided by eminent scholars yet the situation remains the same. Even the state governments of the region are not helping matters. The “little” that comes to them is embezzled instead of developing the region. They play politics with the aspirations of the people that vote them to power. It is sad. In his classical work titled, *oil wars in the Niger Delta* emeritus professor Tamuno (2011) in his preface of the book has this to say, that needed emphasis was the continuity between the colonial era of warfare, to protest primary turmoil which followed the efforts of new rulers, after Nigeria’s independence, to build castles for themselves through the dominant roles played by crude oil and associated gas resources in Nigeria’s Economy till President Yar’dua’s Amnesty in 2009”. Indeed, it is to be stated that, from 1958 when crude oil was first exported in commercial quantities, through the quest for a coastline for Biafra during the civil war years, 1967-1970 to Amnesty in 2009, Nigeria had not known real peace. In turn, that long era of oil war in the Niger delta helped to threaten the interests of foreign stake holders as well.”

Now, some supposedly enlightened and educated people of Nigeria are fueling the continued crisis in the Niger delta by their provoking and hate induced statements. In the era of constitutional review/Reform, contestants exhibited fierce and brutal interface when it comes to whether oil/gas and other minerals were to be in the exclusive or concurrent list. Dr. Ogbonnaya Onu ( Punch Newspaper, 2016) stated thus, “If Nigeria is to become a true federation, it must copy countries like Australia, Canada and the united states where minerals got from three feet below the soil belong to the state the argument has been that minerals, oil and others are gift of nature. They might be gift of nature because they are there. But, ----- with the same argument we in Nigeria have no claim to any oil in our soil because being a gift of nature, it belongs to the entire human race. Why should any country have claim on the minerals in the soil? We might as well be prospecting oil in Kuwait----- that is why if you narrow it down to the territory or districts where minerals are, it is only morally right to allow that state to have a say on how that mineral is exploited” owing to the negative impact on the oil and its inhabitants (emphasis mine). And the expected delegates from the southern “minority states” clapped endlessly.

However, let us hear from Alhaji Mohammed Gambo, former Inspector General of Police from Adamawa State- a government nominee to the constitutional review conference--- “indeed, many of our people lost their lives in the defence of this country and I have their mandate to restate here that we are again ready to spill our blood in defence of this country—our forefathers and indeed, the whole federal government arrangement in the world have recognized the wisdom in putting the question of mines in care of the federal government with the realization that in the event of anything, it is the collective responsibility of the people in the county to defend that land, including the minerals and natural resources that are underneath the land. This is because this has not been put there by any individual ----- since there is not only one spot in this country where one could say is the only place where oil could be found, you will find that there will be a belt covering a number of states that contains oil and other minerals, thus the federal government certainly has the responsibility of coordinating and supervising, in a harmonious way, the people in getting out those minerals”. (Onu Punch Newspaper, 2016)

Taking a critical look at the statement or speech of Alhaji Mohammed Gambo. one can see the dirty linens and contradictions in his defence of his people. He acknowledged that oil could be found in any state of the federation but does he also acknowledge that oil exploration and exploitation has its very negative impact on the ecosystem where it is being exploited? And in any case, would the northerners not going to complain or agitate for separation if they are the people suffering from oil exploitation and exploration?

As quoted by Onu (2016), the speech of Alhaji Mohammed Gambo did not go unchallenged. Dr. Emmanuel Nsan, of cross River state former federal minister of Health thundered back thus, “we in cross River state are



also ready to spill blood but this time, the blood is going to be spilled in defence of justice, equity and fair play in this country if the truth must be told, that truth is that this is a clash between a small class of interest group that has been holding hegemonic contract over this country I have the instruction from cross River state to say that from now on, the hour of reckoning is nigh. Nobody should take anybody or person for granted any more”.

Mr. Nduka Obaigbena from Delta State also said, “I like to advise our friends who threatened us with bloodshed that blood flows in everybody’s Veins. The people of Delta are very slow to anger but irrepressible in battle. Mr. Orono Douglas of Bayelsa state spoke thus, “the Ijaw (Izons) and other people of the Niger Delta have conquered death in our peace struggle for self determination if we are afraid of death, we will not get freedom. If we fear death, we will not get justice” (Onu, 2016).

The reason the northerners are afraid of restructuring is not farfetched. When groundnuts, Cocoa and Palm-oil/Coal were the mainstay of Nigerian economy and they were enjoying one hundred percent derivation, they never believed that another product could come up to over shadow their so-called groundnut pyramids and that now, if the country is restructured along the line of true fiscal federalism, they would suffer. But why are they suddenly wearing the garment of angels and apostles of one Nigeria when at the 1950 conference they made it clear that they would not be part of Nigeria, if at the National level, they were not given 50% of the mineral proceeds—and they were given! It was the northerners that never wanted concentration of powers at the centre, i.e. they wanted confederation. But now that oil is the main stay of the economy. The story has changed.

More worrisome is the recent statement credited to governor of Kaduna state, Mallam el Rufai who allegedly said thus “, I am praying that oil should dry up in Nigeria”- nay the Niger delta. But what he did not pray for is that the vast land on which agricultural products are produced in the North should be “fouled” so that agricultural produce should cease. Statements such as this and others from the North offend the minority people of the Niger Delta and hence the agitation for self determination, resource control vis-a-vis fiscal federalism would continue- and a day shall come when there will be chaos or revolution would occur and the ultimate freedom would eventually be realized. That statement could be likened to a man who knows how to bite but does not want to be bitten. At this juncture, it is pertinent to cite some of the Ogoni bill of rights as well as some portions of the Kaiama Declaration to buttress the points of disregard for the legitimate demands of the people of the Niger delta. --- “that the federal republic of Nigeria has, in utter disregard and contempt for human rights, since independence in 1960 till date, denied us our political rights to self-determination economic rights to our resources, cultural rights to the development of our languages and culture, and social rights to education, Health and adequate housing and to representation as of right in national institutions.

- a. That the constitution of the federation republic of Nigeria does not protect any of our rights whatsoever as an ethnic minority of 500,000 in a nation of about 100 million people and that the voting power and military might of the Majority ethnic groups have been used remorselessly against us at every point in time.
- b. That the multinational oil companies, namely shell (Dutch) British) and Chevron (American) have severally and jointly devastated our environment and ecology, having flared gas in our villages for 33years and caused oil spillages, blow-out e.tc. and have dehumanized our people, denying them employment and those benefits which industries and organizations in Europe and America routinely (get) to their areas of operations.
- c. That the Nigeria elite (bureaucratic, military, industrial and academic) have turned a blind eye and deaf ear to these acts of dehumanization by the ethnic majority and collude with all the agents of destruction aimed at us.
- d. That we cannot seek restitution in courts of law in Nigeria as an act of exploration our rights and resources has been institutionalized in 1979 and 1989 constitutions of the federal republic of Nigeria, which constitutions were acts of a constituent Assembly imposed by a military regime and do not, in any way, protest minority rights or bear resemblance to the tacit agreement made at Nigeria independence.
- e. That without the intervention of the international community, the government of the Federal republic of Nigeria and the ethnic majority will continue these noxious policies until the Ogoni people are obliterated from the surface of the earth.

From some portions of the famous Kaiama Declaration which has great affinity with the Ogoni Bills of rights as highlighted above.

- a. That it was through British colonization that the Ijaw (Izon) nation was forcibly put under the Nigerian State.
- b. That the division of the southern protectorate into East and West in 1939 by the British marked the beginning of the Balkanization of a hitherto territorially contiguous and culturally homogeneous Ijaw (Izon) people into political and administrative units much to our disadvantage. This trend is continuing in the Balkanization of the Ijaws (Izons) into six states Ondo, Edo, Delta, Bayelsa, Rivers and Akwa-Ibom States, mostly as minorities who suffer socio-political economic, cultural and psychological deprivations.
- c. That the quality of the Ijaw (Izon) people is deteriorating as a result of utter neglect, suppression and marginalization visited on Ijaw (Izons) by the alliance of the Nigeria state and transnational oil companies.
- d. That the political crisis in Nigeria is mainly about the struggle for the control of oil mineral resources which account for over 80% of GDP, 95% of nation budget and 90% of foreign exchange earnings. From which 65%, 75% and 70% respectively are derived from within Ijaw (Izon) nation. Despite these huge contributions, our reward from the Nigeria state remains avoidable deaths resulting from ecological devastation and military repression.
- e. That we unabating damage done to our fragile natural environment and to the health our people is due in the main uncontrolled exploration and exploitation of crude oil and natural gas which has led to numerous oil spill, uncontrolled gas flaming, the opening up of our forest to loggers,- indiscriminate canalization, flooding land subsidence, coastal erosion, earth tremors e.tc. Oil and gas are exhaustible resources and the complete lack of concern for ecological rehabilitation, in the light of Oloibiri experience is a signal of impending doom for the people of Ijaw (Izon) land.
- f. That the degradation of the environment of Ijaw (Izon) land by the multinational oil Companies and the Nigerian states arises mainly because Ijaw (Izon) people have been robbed of their of their natural rights to ownership and control of their land and resources through the instrumentality of undemocratic Nigeria state legislature such as the Land use Decree of 1978, the Petroleum Decree No 52 of 1993 (Osborne Land Degree) the National Inland Waterways Authority No. 13 Of 1997 etc.
- g. That the principles of derivation in revenue allocation have been obliterated by successive regimes of the Nigeria state. We note the drastic reduction of the derivation principle from 100% (1975) 2% (1982), 1.5% (1984) to 3%, 1992 to date and a rumour 13% in Abacha's 1995 undemocratic and unimplemented constitution.
- h. That the violence in Ijaw (Izon) Land and other parts of the Niger Delta area, sometimes manifesting in intra and inter ethnic conflict are sponsored by the Nigerian states and transnational oil companies to keep the communities of the Niger Delta area divided, weak and distracted from the causes of their problems.

In addition to the above, the present system whereby only three tribes are recognized by the Nigeria state is an insult to the Ijaws (Izons). It is common knowledge in Geography that a compass is composed of four cardinal points namely: North, East, West and South. If Hausa/Fulani is recognized in the North the Yorubas in the West and Igbo in the East, which tribe represents the south as the main tribe? So, the Nigerian compass is a tripod one? This implies that, all the above representations are clear enough for the unbiased mind that the complaints and agitations of the people of the Niger Delta are deliberately by caused by the so- called selfish majority tribes and the transnational oil companies to continue to exploit the natural resources of the Niger delta to their advantage. And so long as the tremor continues, the struggles of the people of the Niger Delta will not abate. If Nigeria breaks up today, the blame will be on the majority tribes of Nigeria and their foreign collaborators. And I dare prophesy that evil machinations is getting closer by the day for, you can you can suppress some of the people some of the time but you cannot suppress all the people all the time.

### **Recommendations**

The federal government should jettison his military mentality in governance. They should stop to promote ethnic hegemony and the mentality that a section of the country is born to rule while others are to be governed forever. They should play the state man expected of him and consciously with all amount of

seriousness address the aspirations of the Niger Delta people in terms of roads, bridges railways, sea ports, schools hospitals, electricity etc. and clean up the already damaged environment of the Niger Delta and restore the 100% derivation people once enjoyed by his northern people before the discovery of oil otherwise, his so called integrity will be questioned by this generation and the ones to come.

Since the sing-song is dialogue-dialoguing have been on before and after independence till now, it is a means of peaceful settlement of disputes and hence it is hereby recommended. However, the plausible way forward is the political will of the Federal Government not minding the “tinted” arguments of some northern elements, to urgently and vigorously carryout the desired developmental aspirations long agitated by the people of the Niger Delta. The Federal Government should soften its stand on restructuring of the country in line with Fiscal Derivation principle so that each state should be allowed to develop at its pace. After all, there is no state that does not have natural resources. If the country is restructured, the potentials of each state would come to the fore which would compel them to look in-ward so as to develop such graciously given by Almighty God for their benefits and that of the Nation. This would reduce the entire dependence of oil money and the “LOST” groundnut pyramids, cotton, coal mines, palm kernel and oil, cocoa etc. could resurface.

The Town of Oloibiri-the place where oil was first found should be developed and to be befitting Town as a sort of monument and tourist centre like Abuja. The principle of derivation should be looked into with a view to “Up grading” it to Cap it with the tenets of justice and fair play. Good Luck to Nigeria.

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