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## Oil Politics and Hostage Taking in Niger Delta

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### **Abstract**

*This study investigates the relationship between oil politics and hostage taking in Niger Delta. Specifically, the study examined allured problems of oil politics and the effect of hostage taking in Nigeria. One research hypothesis was formulated and tested to guide the study. A sample size of 600 respondents from four local government areas of Bayelsa state was used. Stratified simple random sampling technique was used. Data for the study was collected with the help of a structured questionnaire. The collected data was analyzed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient. The result of the analysis showed that there is relationship between oil politics and hostage taking in Niger Delta, particularly in Bayelsa state. It was therefore recommended that government should endeavour to develop the Niger Delta region, put in place purposeful visionary leadership and drastic political economic restructuring.*

The core Niger Delta was previously limited to a few states (Bayelsa, Rivers Delta) in the south-south geo-political zone with commercial oil reserves and rivers which empty themselves into the Atlantic Ocean. The quest of government and other stakeholders to conveniently administer, relate with or extend some entitlements to oil-bearing areas seems to be the main reason why the entire area is so coined.

The Niger Delta Environmental Survey (NDES) and Oil Mineral Producing Area Development Commission (OMPADEC), define Niger Delta to cover the nine states of Nigeria federation as Rivers, Bayelsa, Delta, Edo, Akwa Ibom, Cross River, Imo, Abia and Ondo state. The Niger Delta is an important region in Nigeria, probably because of the oil it is producing.

The Niger Delta according to Udeme (2004) is one of the most exploited and controversial regions in Africa. The exploitation of the region dates back to the era of slave trade when many of its productive youths were exported to work in Europe and other parts of the world. Crude oil production from this region is now the lynch-pin of the nation's economy providing life powering growth and development. Its strategic value not only evident in the fact that crude oil resources production constitutes about 80 percent of GDP and 95 percent of the nation's budget respectively but also the region, hosts most of the oil firms in Nigeria. In spite of the high contribution to the nations GDP and budget by mineral exploited from the Niger Delta, the region is characterized by the following problems:

1. Environmental aggression
2. Socio-political marginalization
3. Systematic manipulation and
4. Psychological intimidation (Tekena: 2006)

Dailies (2006) noted that the money from Niger Delta (petrodollars) produces more than 96% of foreign exchange. This is the same money the politicians fight over, the money the dictators loot, the money spend to provide infrastructure for the mega city of Lagos and model city of Abuja. While the oil workers work and live in paradise in the same location terrain, the locals whose swampy land is wasted to accommodate oil rigs, pumps heads, tank farms, and pipelines live in thatched houses and drink polluted water. Their daily means of transportation is paddling in dugout canoes in polluted streams and canals.

Most people of the area were happy when oil production began in their land but have now regretted because the oil activities have completely destroyed the ecological damage to their land. The aquatic life is almost completely destroyed the soil completely eroded and flora and fauna badly affected almost to the level of extinction (Okaba, 2005).

All these explain the restiveness of the people of the area, with manifestations in form of vandalization, disruption of operations of oil companies, kidnapping and hostage taking and the seemingly endless demands for monetary compensation from oil companies and their workers. Also, the revenue sharing formula which seriously disfavors the people of the Niger Delta region according to Ekanem (2003) is another reason that motivate youths of this region to engage in hostage taking and kidnapping as measures to express their grievances. This paper intends to discuss the relationship between oil politics in Niger Delta and hostage taking in the region.

Apart from the issue of the character of oil production, there is the policy that characterizes revenue generated from oil producing states. According to Akinboye

(2003), the political contention of who would control the wealth emanating from oil has remained however, largely a contestation among competing factions of the domestic bourgeoisie. The nature of the Nigerian polity ever before independence has continued to generate dissatisfaction among constituted groups. The Willink Commission of 1958 saddled with the responsibility of examining and making recommendations concerning the fear expressed by minorities in the 1957 constitutional conference in London was a response to the fears of the minorities. The post independence experience has shown that the fears of the minorities rather than being allayed, have become greater thus increasing responsibility for agitation in which issues of hostage taking in one variant of the dissatisfaction expressed.

Jide (2004) noticed that the Niger Delta is the provider and generator of surplus wealth for the nation and yet does not have access to the control of the surplus due to policy discrimination against minority. Saro-Saro-Wiwa (1995) lamented that, these surpluses are siphoned away to the exclusive comfort of the majority. Given the fact that the petroleum is Nigeria's major revenue earner, how the revenue from it is allocated becomes a contentious issue but a major constitutional matter. The whittling down over the years of the derivation principles in the allocation of the revenue has been seen by the Niger Delta as a way of denying the region reasonable measures of control and benefits from their resources and perhaps one major source of conflict and contradiction in the Nigerian federation.

The issue of revenue sharing is directly related to the politics and contradiction in power sharing in Nigeria. It tends to raise questions on how the rents from oil are appropriated and recycled, and how the state and transnational entities respond to the demands and plight of oil producing communities. It also raises issues of representation of oil producing communities at seat of power in the Nigerian state.

Melford (2006) observed that the recent development in Nigeria today shows a character of revenue sharing that remains at the dictate of the center. The pattern of revenue sharing plays down on the principle of derivation which negates the features of revenue allocation in the first republic that was characterized by required control over regional recourses.

Melford (2006) also observed that under Section 134(1) of the 1960 constitution, the federal government of Nigeria was required to pay each region 50% of the proceeds of royalties and mining rents derived from the area. In the same vein, Udeme (2004) explained that in the 1960 constitution that ushered in independence, elaborate provisions were made in sections (130-139) for revenue allocation. Unfortunately, it is the absence in 1999 constitution of a provision similar to sub-section (6) of section 134 of the 1960 constitution that has given rise to the dispute resulting in the case of derivation in Niger Delta region. Udeme asserted that there was

no change in the system of revenue allocation in the country between independence and the emergence of military rule in 1966.

It is worth noting that, during the period derivation was the basis of the western region and the northern region of revenue allocation, each region had exported commodities from which they earned foreign exchange. The cycle of revenue allocation from 1960 continue to pose the highest question on instability of Nigeria's federation. The process is not only centralized and manipulated, it is devoid of equity, fair play and justice. People of the region perceive the entire process as a conspiracy to further perpetuate injustice in the area given the massive underdeveloped status of the area. A civil liberty organization (CLO) report in 1996 observed that:

The people lived in massive poverty, diseases of various types, unemployment and general underdevelopment of its human and material resources and remained under threat from rapidly deteriorating economic and environmental condition as well as tension owing to what the people considered government continues insensitivity to the plight of the people.

Tekena (2006) noticed that one of the reasons originally given for hostage taking was agitation to have control over the natural resources found in the Niger Delta. The agitation for resource control is naturally tied to the demand for the control of the land of the people. No issue has in Nigeria's recent history been as contentious and controversial as resource control and revenue allocation. The people of the Niger Delta see it as the only solution to the nagging questions on how to guarantee justice and fair play in the handling of resources of nature, especially when exploration of such resources carry with it negative consequences on the environment. TekTena (2006) has observed that the decision of the former President Olusegun Obasanjo to take to the vexed issue of the onshore/offshore dichotomy in the sharing of revenue based on derivation to the supreme court was probably intended to settle the issue of resource ownership but the process gave more to states outside the Niger Delta, and also reduced allocation to some states in the region.

Alagoa (2006) observed that the Niger Delta is a prime example of deprivation directly traceable to the absence of the true federalism, especially, that there is no control over local resources by the owner of such resources. He further states that: "Apart from the political marginalization, the major problems of the Niger Delta region are traceable to economic deprivation. For example, Niger Delta youths are restive because they are unemployed, hungry and therefore angry." They are angry because the vast sum of money realized from the sales of petroleum and gas derived from the Niger Delta is siphoned to other places.

With the emergence of oil as the primary sustainer of Nigeria's economy, there is an overwhelming community feeling of anger and frustration in the Niger Delta. Those irreplaceable revenues from resources of the region's land are not used to

develop the region but are exploited and used for the development of other areas. While the vicious circle of poverty accounts and provides an excuse for gangs and groups to exploit the popular. Which culminated genuine grievances to embark on illegal and dangerous activities which include hostage taking/kidnapping of oil workers (Ekanem, 2003).

Ekanem (2003) also noticed that one of the greatest disadvantages of hostage taking on economic development is that it impedes business investment by investors from the international communities. It does not provide stable political structure and infrastructure that guarantees an enduring internal political stability, foreign investors will continue to shun the region for fear of insecurity.

Okaba (2005) lamented that, the youths of the Niger Delta are denied of meaningful education, employment, and therefore a promising future. Who now concede and indulge in conflicts and vices of all ramifications, including hostage taking, kidnapping, prostitution, armed-robbery, drug trafficking as strategies to escape poverty and deprivation. Hostage taking in Niger Delta region is becoming a favourable tactic for political militants.

Rose (2002) explores the dynamics of oil politics along two axes i.e. lootability and obstructability. He explained further that, oil (onshore and offshore) is unlootable; it is also however readily obstructable (via pipelines) on shore but not offshore. He hold open the possibility that oil (as an unlootable resource) may yield different types of outcomes – separatist (Cabinda) and non separatist (Sudan), but believes that non-lootability yields general claims; to wit:

Unlootability is likely to yield separatism, benefits to government (rather than the poor), reduce duration of conflicts and enhance army discipline.

What is striking about these three related sorts of arguments in an attempt to future oil and politics is that they fail to meet the most basic sorts of empirical realities to which they purportedly speak. As pointed out by Okechukwu (2008), oil politics have accrued conflicts in the region. According to Okechukwu, Shell Company alone in 1999 experienced 45 hostage taking and 2 helicopter hijack incidents. It is obvious that the continuous situation of hostage taking in the Niger Delta have escalated to other parts of the country. He further stated that from 2002 to 2007, there had been 85 cases of hostage taking and kidnapping that were witnessed by NNC/oil serving company Shell Company and Chevron/Texaco Company respectively.

## **Method**

Ex-post facto research design was adopted for this study. The design was considered most appropriate because it examines the facts that have already occurred. And more so, the researcher has no direct control over the variables in the study. Also,

the design allows the researcher to use the sample for the study to make generalization of the result.

The population of (1,704,515) of the study consists of all the inhabitants of Bayelsa states of Nigeria. To select the sample to be used for the study stratified and simple random sampling techniques were used to do this, each of the eight (8) local government areas (LGAs) in the state served as a stratum from which the respondents were then selected. Four out of the eight local governments were randomly selected and used for the study. One hundred and fifty subjects were randomly selected from each local government, a total of 600 subjects, through the assistance of four (LGA) workers were used for the study. With the use of four research assistances, the questionnaires were administered systematically to the selected subjects in the four local governments respectively. The structured questionnaire for data collection was made up of ten (10) items.

## **Results**

### **Hypothesis I**

There is no significant relationship between oil politics in Niger Delta and hostage taking in the Niger Delta zone. Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient was used to analyze the data. The result is presented in table 1.

#### **Table 1: Pearson Product Moment**

Correlation coefficient analysis of relationship between oil politics in Niger Delta and hostage taking in Niger Delta region n = 6000

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<b>Variable</b>	<b>mean</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>r-cal</b>
Oil politics	13.12	2.43	0.48
Hostage taking	14.92	2.37	

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\*P<0.05 df=598 critical r = 0.196

The result in table 1 indicates that the calculated r-value of 0.48 was greater than the critical r-value of 0.196 needed for significant at 0.05 alpha level of significant with 598 degree of freedom. With this result the null hypothesis which states that there is no significant relationship between the oil politics in Niger Delta and hostage taking in Niger Delta region of Nigeria is rejected. It therefore implies that oil politics in Niger Delta significantly influenced hostage taking in the region.

### **Discussion of Findings**

The result of the hypothesis showed that there exists a significant relationship between oil politics in Niger Delta and hostage taking in the region. This finding agrees with Okaba (2005) assertion that hostage taking is among the several measures youths

from the Niger Delta use in expressing their grievances. Ekanem (2003) opined that host communities see hostage taking as a way to call for government attention to solve the problems of oil politics.

For more than four decades, the people of the region had lived with the anomaly of having to feed on the crumbs of the national cake which is baked in their territory. The people from the Niger Delta could not go beyond disruption of the activities of oil companies operation in the area such as hostage taking, kidnapping of oil workers with demands for ransom and vandalization of petroleum facilities to cause spillage for which communities would demand compensation. They could not go beyond these forms to protest because the political atmosphere, for the greater part of the period during which the country was under military rule, did not present opportunity for a more forceful approach to demands for equity, justice and fair play.

The findings of Alagoa (2006) are also in agreement with the findings of this study. That oil politics motivated the host communities to engage in hostage taking to demand for ransom in order to compensate them. The question is who is right and who is wrong in the Niger Delta crisis? Since Nigeria returned to civilian (democratic) rule in 1999, there has been a fundamental shift in public discourse of rights in the Niger Delta. It is a shift from a traditional human rights discourse to one of resource allocation and resource control. This discourse is what we may call the rhetoric of rights and it defines what, for the ruling classes in Nigeria, constitutes the correct rhetoric (political correctness) on issues of Niger Delta.

The last days of the second era of military rule (1983-1999) saw the emergence of a coalition of motley factions of the ruling class, most of them created by the military. It was this coalition that inherited power in 1999. Expectedly, the politics of control of oil revenues which marked out the era of military rule, has remained the cornerstone of the politics of this coalition, and the rhetoric of rights is the idiom of that politics. These factions of the ruling class (erroneously called the political class) orchestrate two distinct forms of rhetoric of rights in the Niger Delta as they angle for control of the vast petroleum and gas revenues from the region. In other words, they have polarized along two opposing lines, each articulating a separate rhetoric rights and claiming to define what constitutes the rights (correct) position on the Niger Delta.

On one side are the federal and non-Niger Delta state governments and on the other are the Niger Delta state governments. In putting forward this rhetoric, governments of Niger Delta states, particularly Delta, Rivers and Bayelsa states insist that Niger Delta peoples through their state governments have a right to larger shares of oil revenues. Since 1999, they have been pushing for an increase in revenue to the Niger Delta from 13% of resources derived from each state to 50%. In response, the federal side initially reacted by seeking to seize all revenues from offshore oil

production by excluding such revenues from the calculation of the 13% derivation. This gave rise to more conflicts, predominantly hostage taking and kidnapping.

### **Conclusion**

The question, why oil is so frequently the epicenter of violence suggests that oil politics works through complex forms of dispossession. Marx and Engels contend that the character and dynamics of state operations are reflective of the prevailing mode of production as well as the dominant political class in control of state power. As an instrument of class dominant and control of property accumulation, the state capitalist society functions to protect the interest of those who own the means of production. Ake (1981) had severely demonstrated the manner in which control rather than ownership has become a significant variable in a peripheral capital state as Nigeria.

Following a critical performance evaluation of the Nigerian state, particularly after the legendary inflow of petrodollar (since the 1970s) several scholars have described it as exploitative, cruel and irresponsible. (Ake 1981, Okaba 2005) see it as illegitimate, oppressive and repressive. (Okowa 2005, Okaba 2003), caption it as weak, captured, dependent and hegemonic. Similarly, Orugbami, (2002) labels it as ethnically factionalized and privatized by a class of kleptocratic elites to protect their tenuous relationship to the productive forces.

Hostage taking on the other hand is illegal and is violation of human rights. Taking into account, the international convention against the taking of hostages, adopted by the General Assembly in its resolution 34/146 of 17 December, 1979, which also recognizes that everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person. And that the taking of hostages is an offence of grave concern to the international community as well as the convention on the prevention and punishment of crimes against internationally protected persons, including Diplomatic Agents, adopted by the General Assembly in its resolution 166 (xxviii) of 14 December, 1973 (Ambakederemo, 2010).

Though the people from Niger Delta see hostage taking as their last resort to demand for large compensation from the oil producing companies operating in the region, it is obvious that the Nigerian state has failed in its constitutional responsibility to the citizenry.

### **Recommendations**

It was therefore recommended that a new social formation is therefore imperative. To complement this radical transformation, Nigerian government should adopt:

1. A revenue sharing formula that will benefit the member states in the Niger Delta region
2. Ensure that development of the region is a priority of the shareholders



3. Provide electricity and portable water for the host communities
4. There should be purposeful and visionary leadership
5. Economic diversification/rural industrialization and value re-orientations of our populace
6. Drastic political economic restructuring
7. Re-design, reconstruction and re-engineering of multinational oil companies (MNOOC) governance system.

Such an overhaul must be oriented towards responsiveness, sensitivity, respect for dialogue and agreements. This would mean the incorporation of better governance attributes which should include broad consultation and participation, collaboration, bottom up approaches, openness and honesty, due process of claims and compensation and the transparency of the CLOS and CD programmes.

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