

# ENVIRONMENT- INDUCED CONFLICTS: A THREAT TO DEMOCRACY AND NATIONAL SECURITY -IMPLICATIONS FOR NIGERIA

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## **Abstract**

The linkage between the environment, security and democracy is often not taken seriously by developing countries until there is a serious environmental problem that threatens security and democracy. This has been as a result of focusing on high politics rather than issues of low politics. However, it has been argued that most threats to democracy and national security today seem to be environment-induced conflicts. The paper demonstrates with examples from Bangladesh and Mauritania as well as literature, the link between environment, democracy and national security. Arguing that Nigeria is also prone to environment- induced conflicts which have far reaching consequences for democracy; the paper examines the Niger Delta scenario and concludes that serious and conscious attempt must be made to include environmental issues into national security to protect her democracy.

## **Introduction**

Since the inception of democracy in Nigeria in 1960, the country has been faced with several environment-induced conflicts which have claimed many lives and property and threatened democracy and national unity.

The link between environmental issues, democracy and national security is an area that most developing countries seem to be neglecting at their own perils. This, perhaps, may have been the case because, the state which is the prevailing entity for guaranteeing security has perceived threats to democracy and national security as military challenges and has traditionally countered such threats with armed force.

This narrow focus on military threats and responses or "high politics", has meant that other factors such as international economic transactions, and environmental issues such as scarcity of resources, ethnicity, religion or "low politics" in general have been considered secondary issues for the security of states.

Economic and environmental challenges ignore boundaries and therefore, are serious threats to democracy and national security. Most threats to democracy and national security today seem to be environment-induced conflicts (EIC).

## **Methodology**

This paper basically relied on secondary data. These were text books and journals, documentary papers, government publications, newspapers and magazines.

## **Objectives**

The objective of the paper is to demonstrate the relationship between environment and conflict, its security implications and the threat this poses to democracy. Secondly, because Nigeria is prone to environment- induced conflict, to draw lessons for the country.

## **Literature Review**

### **Contemporary Conceptions of National Security**

Modern definitions of security are closely tied to a state's defense of sovereign interest by military means. At its most fundamental level, the term security has meant the effort to protect a population and territory against organized force while advancing state interests through competitive behaviour (Dabelko, 1995:3). This approach was challenged with the onset of the oil crises of the 1970s, which dramatically illustrated the relevance of the economic and resource scarcity issues for the security of

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states. Explicit calls for including environmental issues or concerns within definitions of security have an extended history. A few selected contributions are highlighted here.

Ullman (1983:133), argued for redefining security to include threats other than immediate military ones. Focusing exclusively on military threats carries the high opportunity cost of neglecting potentially more menacing dangers, lie redefined a threat to national security as an action or sequence of events that:

- (1) Threatens drastically and over a relatively brief span of time to degrade the quality of life for the inhabitants of a state, or
- (2) Threatens-srgnifieantly to narrow the range of policy choice available to the government of a state or to private, non-governmental entities (persons, groups, corporations) within the state.

Myers enunciated this perspective by stating that:

In essence, ... security applies most at the level of the citizens. It amounts to human well-being: not only protection from harm and injury but access to water, food, shelter, health, employment, and other basic requisites that are the due of every person on earth. It is the collectivity of these citizen needs-overall safety and quality of life - that should feature prominently in the nation's view of security (Myers, 1987:27).

Mathews (1989:162-165) lias argued explicitly for redefining security in broader terms that include attention to environmental variables. Environmental degradation often undercuts economic potential and human well-being which in turn helps fuel political tensions and conflict. Occurring within and among states with domestic turmoil, these dynamics often produce consequences that extend beyond territorial borders.

In response to the research on environmentally induced conflict, some military security thinkers now consider environmental stress as an additional threat to state stability that must be anticipated and planned for (Dabelko, 1995:6). These considerations have found their way into official U.S. documents and Institutions. For example, environmental issues have received more and more attention as security interests in each iteration of the U.S. National Security Strategy since 1991 (Dabelko,1995:6).

Furthermore, the Department of Defense created a Deputy Under Secretary position for Environmental Security in 1993, the intelligence community created an Environmental Task Force in 1993, and Congress allocated over \$420 million (beginning in 1992) for the Strategic Environmental Research and Development Program (Swords 1994 and Dabelko, 1995: 6).

Thus, it is that the notion of national security, and with it, its corollary of government obligations, has become expanded from the traditional narrow emphasis on the provision of security from potential foreign enemies to a comprehensive one that additionally encompasses a considerable assortment of independent civil and other social rights. And of particular importance in the present context, comprehensive security must additionally embrace the several environmental prerequisites to the achievement of those social rights. Indeed, the various social and environmental ingredients of comprehensive security are thoroughly enmeshed in a web of inextricable interactions: none can survive and flourish in the long term unless they all do.

The environmental prerequisites to basic human rights according to Westing (1995:2-3), which can be operationally grouped under the heading of environmental security fall into two major categories. The one component of environmental security is sane resource utilization based on use or harvesting at levels and with procedures that either maintain or restore optimal resource services or stocks.

To satisfy this component, renewable resources must be exploited strictly on the principle of sustained use or-strstrained-discard; and non-renewable resources strictly on the principles of efficiency and frugality. The second component of environmental security is

environmental protection, based on protection from medically accepted environmental pollution, protection from wartime and similar vandalism, and for special areas, protection from all permanent human intrusions.

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Arguments Against Considering Environment and Security Issues as Threat to Democracy

There are some cases made against redefining security to include environmental issues and or accepting environmental stress as a cause of conflict and therefore a threat to democracy and national security. These cases differ markedly in terms of the sources of the critiques and the critiques themselves.

Deudney (1990: 461 - 476) argues against the linkage based on three claims: firstly, it is analytically misleading to think of environmental degradation as a national security threat, because (he traditional focus of national security - interstate - has little in common with either environmental problems or solutions. Secondly, the effort to harness the emotive power of nationalism to help mobilize environmental awareness and action may prove counter productive by undermining globalist political sensibility. And third, environmental degradation is not very likely to cause interstate wars. Obviously, Deudney focuses on the conflictual nature of national security threats and responses among states as against within states.

Another critique of environmental security stems from concern about lumping national security concerns and environmental problems under the common heading of "threats". Under this line of reasoning, military security threats and environmental problems are fundamentally different and perhaps exclusive (Deudney. 1991': 23-28).

Still, others see the linkage of environmental security as a bureaucratic tactic. They claim that the true motives for trying to redefine security in environmental terms reside in the realm of parochial bureaucratic interests. For some environmentalists, environmental security represents an opportunity to wrest resources from military budgets for purposes of environmental protection (Finger. 1991: 220 -225).

The literature on environmental stress as a precipitating cause of violent conflict should be viewed as an interesting subset of the environmental security debates and the still larger discussions of redefining security. The very process of trying to prove these links may act as a positive feedback to increasing environmental awareness in developing countries like Nigeria. If links are satisfactorily established, the recognition of environmental security as a cause of conflict would represent additional evidence for the need to redefine security and address environmental problems so as to enhance democratic stability, national security and unity.

Environment Induced Conflicts (EIC) - Some Examples

There are myriad of factors and or forces at play in a region or sub-region which intricate interplay culminate into conflict sometimes with snow-balling effect on the overall well-being of the entire country. Chief among these factors and forces are the issues of economic, ecological, ethnic and religious marginalization, depletion of renewable resources and environmental degradation.

As environmental problems become more severe, aggravated and prolonged, they may precipitate social instability, civil strife and turmoil. Social instability and civil strife can produce insidious and cumulative social effects, such as population displacement or expulsion and economic disruption. These events can in turn, lead to clashes between ethnic and religious groups as well as to continuous civil strife and insurgency of such magnitude that can threaten democratic stability. The military might be called in or may take advantage of the crisis situation to scuttle democracy.

Examples abound where conflict has been triggered by shifts in the balance of political and economic power between religious and ethnic groups. In Bangladesh, members of the Lalung tribe in Assam have long resented Bengali Muslim migrants: they accuse them of stealing the area's richest farmland. In early 1983, during a bitterly contested election for Federal offices in the state, violence finally erupted. In the village of Nellie, Lalung tribes' people massacred nearly 1,700 Bengalis in one five-hour rampage (Homer - Dixon, 1993:40).

In the state of Tripura the original Buddhist and Christian inhabitants make up less than 30 percent of the population. The remaining percentage consists of Hindu Migrants from either East Pakistan or Bangladesh. This shift in the ethnic balance precipitated a violent insurgency between 1980 and 1988, that was called off only after the government agreed to return land to dispossessed Iripuris and to stop the influx of Bangladeshis (Homer - Dixon 1993:40). But as migration has continued, this agreement has constantly been flouted.

Another interesting case took place in Mauritania. There has been a long history of racism by white Moors in Mauritania towards their non-Arab, black compatriots. In the spring of 1989 the

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killings of Senegalese farmers by Mauritians in the disputed Senegal River Valley basin triggered explosions of ethnic violence in the two countries. In Senegal almost 17,000 shops owned by Moors were destroyed, and their owners were deported to Mauritania.

In both Countries several hundred people were killed, and the two nations nearly came to war. The Mauritanian regime used this occasion to activate existing land legislation, declaring the black Mauritians who lived alongside the river to be "Senegalese", thereby stripping them of then-citizenship; their property was seized.

Some 70,000 of the black Mauritians were forcibly expelled to Senegal, from where some launched raids to retrieve expropriated cattle (Homer - Dixon 1993: 42). Although Diplomatic relations which were severed between the two countries have since been restored, neither country has agreed to allow the expelled population to return or to compensate them for their losses.

### **Sources and Consequences of Renewable Resource Scarcity**

Homer-Dixon later demonstrated that decrease in quality and quantity of renewable resources, population growth, and unequal resource access can lead to increased scarcity of renewable resources which in turn can lead to migration or expulsion and decreased economic productivity. Migration or expulsion can lead to ethnic conflicts and or a weakened state. Decreased economic productivity can similarly lead to a weakened state and deprivation conflicts.

A weakened state has the consequence of creating ethnic conflicts as well as deprivation conflicts and ultimately a Coup d'etat, thus scuttling democracy and causing political instability.

The scenario may look like this: Dwindling natural resources can weaken the administrative capacity and authority of government, which may create opportunities for violent challenges to the state by political and military opponents. By contributing to rural poverty and rural-urban migration, scarcity of renewable resources expands the number of people needing assistance from the government. In response to growing city population, states often introduce subsidies that distort prices and cause misallocation of capital, hindering economic productivity.

Simultaneously, the loss of renewable resources can reduce the production of wealth, thereby constraining tax revenues. For some countries, this widening gap between demands on the state and its capabilities may aggravate popular grievances, erode the state's legitimacy and escalate competition between elite factions as they struggle to protect their prerogatives.

In some other cases, equal access to resources combines with population growth to produce environmental damage. This phenomenon can contribute to economic deprivation that spurs insurgency and rebellion. This situation is common in the Philippines where Spanish and American colonial policies left behind a grossly inequitable distribution of land. With insufficient rural and urban industrialization to absorb excess labour, there has been unrelenting downward pressure on wages.

Economically desperate, millions of poor agricultural labourers and landless peasants migrated to shanty towns in already overburdened cities, such as Manila; millions of these have moved to the least productive -and often most ecologically vulnerable territories, such as steep hillsides. They bring with them little ability to protect the fragile ecosystem. The country has suffered for many decades from serious internal strife, which are environmentally induced (Homer- Dixon. 1999: 42). These evidences suggest that there are significant causal links between environmental issues and democracy and national security.

### **The Implications for Nigeria**

Considering the linkages between environment induced conflict and democracy and national security, from the examples we have cited and Homer Dixon's Sources and Consequences of Renewable Resource Scarcity, what then can we say are the implications for Nigeria'?

Nigeria has flash points of environment induced conflicts. Some are ecological and economic marginalization, such as the Niger Delta case, while others are economic deprivation accentuated by

high unemployment; others are perceived ethnic and religious as well as political and economic marginalization.

These flash points exist in almost every state of the Federation, but especially in Kaduna, Benue, Taraba, Nasarawa, Plateau, Kano, Imo, Delta, Bayelsa, Rivers etc. All these can be

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summarized under unequal access to resources, decrease in quality and quantity of renewal resources and population growth, as identified by Homer-Dixon.

The Plateau case led to unprecedented political action - the declaration of a state of emergency and the suspension of Governor Joshua Dariye and other political institutions like the House of Assembly and State Executive Council.

The Plateau crisis was seen as a deprivation conflict, thus, a deprivation crisis. The attendant massacre in Yelwa which left so many people dead, property destroyed and rendered many refugees in their own place with the resultant reprisals in Kano state and uneasy tension all over the Country was a threat to national security and democracy. It involved such social cumulative effects as population displacement and expulsion and economic disruption of large magnitude.

We will dwell on the Niger Delta crisis example as a quintessence of an environment induced conflict (EIC). The intricate interplay of factors and forces such as economic and ecological marginalization, depletion of renewable resources and environmental degradation culminated into the crisis situation which was witnessed and is being witnessed within the sub-region and which heightened in the last few years of Nigeria's democratic governance under President Olusegun Obasanjo.

The climax of the true intentions of the proponents was the "Kaiama Declaration" of December 11, 1998, in the historic town of Kaiama in the Kolokuma, Opokuma Council of Bayelsa State signed by Felix Tuodor and Ogoriba Timi. Amongst other things the youths complained that the quality of life of the Ijaw people is deteriorating as a result of utter neglect, suppression and marginalization visited on them by the alliance of the Nigerian State and transnational oil companies. They therefore declared as follows:

- All land and natural resources (including mineral resources) within the Ijaw territory belong to Ijaw communities and are the basis of our survival;
- We cease to recognize all undemocratic Decrees that rob our peoples/communities of the right to ownership and control of our lives and resources, which were enacted without our participation and consent. These include the Land Use Decree and the Petroleum Decree.
- We demand the immediate withdrawal from Ijaw land of all military forces of occupation and repression of the Nigerian State. Any oil company that employs the services of the armed forces of the Nigerian State to "protect" its operations will be viewed as an enemy of the Ijaw people. Family members of military personnel stationed in Ijawland should appeal to their people to leave the Ijaw area alone.
- We, therefore demand that all oil companies stop all exploration and exploitation activities in the Ijaw area (The Guardian' 1998:6) The declaration was to take effect from 30<sup>th</sup> of December 1998.

A declaration such that requested the control of a territory in a sovereign state and its resources was technically and legally viewed by analysts as an act of secession bid and declaration of war against the central government. The request for the immediate withdrawal of Federal Security forces from a Nation State's territory, and the expulsion of oil companies duly authorized by the Federal government was a direct affront on state power.

The implications were diverse. If the declaration was allowed to go its full hog, it was capable of crippling the nation's economy (weakening the state) and undermining State authority. The attendant social implication was that if left unchallenged and uncountered, other ethnic nationalities would have followed, snow-balling into a situation of national insecurity and political instability which could even

have aborted the transition to democracy that was on.

Even then it had to take the intervention of the Military in Odi by the Obasanjo administration to bring down the tempo of the crisis with devastating consequences. Notwithstanding this drastic military action, the crisis has persisted.

While the crisis subsists, the interplay of factors/forces has culminated into a gory and mind bogging quagmire of:

- (i) Kidnapping, abduction, hostage taking of local and foreign nationals from drilling and production platforms, offices, residential premises, oil fields locations etc;

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- (li) Hijacking of oil Company air crafts, ransom taking/extortion from local and foreign nationals;
- (iii) Forceful shutdown/Seizure of oil flow stations;
- (iv) Damage, vandalization of oil pipelines. Mow stations and production facilities;
- (v) Increased physical attack, body harm on Company officials and workers;
- (vi) Frequent disturbance of public peace by marauding and rampaging youths;
- (vii) Increased inter-ethnic tension and frequent communal clashes;
- (viii) Frequent intra and inter-ethnic conflicts with resultant destruction of live and property;
- (ix) Paralysis of economic activities in the affected areas.

With some developed countries like the United States and Britain having investment in the Escravos Gas Project being the largest U.S. Investment in Africa, who knows if the U.S. could have intervened militarily in the Niger Delta directly or under the United Nations cover so as to protect U.S. national interest? There lies the possible international dimension of the implications of environment induced conflicts.

### **Recommendations**

In line with the issues raised in the discourse above, it is recommended that:

1. The Federal Government should set up a Security Watch System (SWS) that should provide an early warning signal to security threat. The Security Watch System should include all the arms of the federal Government security apparatus. community leaders, religious leaders, youth leaders, and civil society organizations. In the Niger Delta region, it should include oil producing companies.
2. Government should intensify efforts at providing infrastructure and amenities for communities prone to environment- induced conflicts so as to reduce tension.
3. Youths especially in the Niger Delta region should be deliberately empowered to be gainfully employed.
4. Environmental issues should be included into the national security policy of the country.

### **Conclusion**

The implications of all these mean that Nigeria is prone to hotspots of environment induced conflicts, which have serious consequences for democracy and national security and unity. Nigeria has had a fair share of environment - induced - conflicts. We need to learn from our bitter experiences and those cited in this paper. Apart from steps been currently taken to solve these problems, there should be serious and conscious attempt to include environmental issues into national security agenda. In this way, environment induced conflicts will no longer be tackled on ad- hoc basis but will be anticipated and planned for.

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