

CONTRADICTIONS OF DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN THE NIGER DELTA

OGEGE, SAMUEL OMADJOHWOEFE, PhD.

Department Sociology and Psychology

Delta State University

Abraka.

Abstract

The paper examines the contradictions of democratic governance and its implications for sustainable development in the Niger Delta. With the enthronement of democracy, the host communities expected a new dawn in their lives as their representatives will spread the dividends of democracy in form of sustainable development to their communities. On the contrary, environmental degradation, widespread poverty and youth restiveness have actually become the only recognizable dividend of democracy of the Niger Delta. The social malaise in the region is partly traceable to corrupt and fraudulent electioneering processes which impose corrupt the political misfits on the electorates. The paper argues that not until democratic values of accountability transparency and responsiveness are imbibed, no amount of funding will usher in sustainable development in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria.

Introduction

The aim of the paper centres on the examination of the contradictions that are inherent in the Nigerian democratic governance and its implications for the actualization of sustainable development in the Niger Delta. In other words, it examines the intricate link between democracy and sustainable development.

Democratic governance is the best form of government that human ingenuity has ever invented in society. This explains why it is now a credo subscribed to by most rational people in the world (Osuntokun, 2002). It is a system of governance that entails arrangements through which all the people participate in government by entrusting power on people who must be freely chosen or elected to represent the electorates in government. In any true democratic government, power always belongs to the people. In other words, it is the government of the people by the people and for the people, (Ake, 2000, Igbuzor, 2002).

Since the advent of democracy in 1999, the inhabitants of the Niger Delta region developed a new mind set in the apprehension and perception of the problem of protracted environmental degradation and sustainable development. To them this form of governance offers the opportunity to elect representatives who can present their problems to the government at all levels.

Rather than create an enabling environment for sustainable development, the democratic governance has further aggravated the predicament of the Niger Delta people. Environmental degradation has been on the increase and the people's agitation has equally heightened. This partly explains 'why the spate of youth restiveness and hostage takings have assumed a new dimension towards the tail end of the present democratic regime.

Against this background, the paper seeks to examine why democratic governance has not been able to address the Niger Delta problem. In order to achieve this, the paper examines the strategic position of Niger Delta in the Nigerian economy, the concept of sustainable development, the democratic contradictions and the challenges of sustainable development.

The Niger Delta and the Nigerian Economy

The Niger Delta is a region that is richly endowed with abundant hydrocarbon resources. A heterogeneous, multicultural, ethnically diverse region (Alagoà 1972) that cut across nine states (Abia, Akwa-Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross Rivers, Delta, Edo, Imo, Ondo and Rivers) in the south of Nigeria (Egbuche 1998, Durotoye, 2000). The Niger Delta is known for its unique history of fundamental contributions to the economic development of Nigeria from pre-colonial days to the present era. The same region was the Slave Coast became palm oil coast and later transformed into the oil and gas Delta where there is exploration till date.

Oil exploration in the Niger Delta dates back to 1905 with the Nigeria Bitumen Corporation as a pioneer oil exploratory Company. However, their pioneering effort was truncated with the outbreak of the First World War: 1914-18 (Authur, 1982). In 1935 Shell D'Arcy, a subsidiary of Shell Petroleum and the forerunner of today's Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC) was the second in the scramble for oil exploration space in the Niger Delta (Pearson 1970, Eromesele 1997).

Detailed geological and geophysical investigations by Shell B.P (Olayinwola, 1987) yielded results with the discovery of an oil well with commercial quantity in 1956 in Oloibiri an Ijaw village in Bayelsa State. With a production capacity of 4,929 barrel per day, Nigeria had its first shipment of oil to Europe in 1958 (Schatzi, 1969, Awopegba and Olusoji 2000). The discovery attracted other multinational oil companies such as Mobil Exploratory Nigeria Ltd, Safrap now Elf, Gulf now Chevron, Agip and a host of others to acquired licenses to prospect for oil hydrocarbon accumulation in the Niger Delta (Okaba, 2004).

Presently, oil wells have increased from the initial one in Oloibiri with production capacity of 4,929 barrels per day in 1958 to 1481 wells with production capacity of 2.5 million barrels per day. Its production capacity will be 4 million barrels per day in 2010. Nigeria now ranks sixth largest producer of crude oil in the world and first in Africa. With a reserve level of about 30 billion barrels, Nigeria is placed among the first ten countries with the largest proven reserves (Orden, 1984, Neary and Nijrnbergen, 1986, Ajayi, 2003).

Since in the 1970s, Nigeria has earned at least N300 billion from oil and gas production. She took in N45 billion in 2005 alone. The records show that Nigeria made a whopping N454 billion from oil in 1998 alone. With these earnings from the oil extraction industry, the Nigerian government has over the years, depended much on oil revenue & Since at least 1981, the government has collected between 56 and 86 percents of its annual revenues from the oil sector. Moreover, this dependence on oil revenue has continued to rise over the years. Currently, Nigeria has grown extraordinarily dependent on oil export. It now earns 99.7 per cent of its export income from oil, making it the most oil dependent country in the world (IMF, 2003).

Budgeting and fiscal policies are tied to Nigeria's oil revenue. Thus any fluctuations in the receipts from oil drastically affect the funding of government programmes. Nigeria's vulnerability to oil market shifts is well illustrated by the outcome of 1998 federal budget. It recorded a whopping deficit of N59.8 billion due largely to the decline in international crude oil prices, the cut in Nigeria's Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries OPEC quota as well as the closure of many oil wells in the troubled but oil rich Niger Delta.

Slide in oil prices also have grave consequences for the Country's fiscal policy implementation. For instance, in September 1998, the government raised the salary of public employees by about 300 per cent to N5,200 per month. But three months later, it went back on its promise and slashed the amount of the minimum wage by almost half to N3,500.00 due to declining oil earnings.

What this means, according to Kubeyiye and Neziyanya (1999), is that oil revenues are not only large but are also volatile. They can fluctuate drastically in size from year to year causing fluctuations in the funding of government programmes. This is corroborated by Saurbh and Lipton (1999). They maintain that from 1972 to 1975 government rose from 8.4 per cent to 22.6 per cent of GDR. By 1978, it dropped back to 14.2 per cent of the economy. The implication of the boom is that they breed corruption and wasteful spending. Iwayemi and Adenikinju (1996), stress that with the boom the country generated stupendous wealth, which found expression in unmitigated squandering and uneconomic philanthropic regime.

It is as a result of the enormous contribution of the oil to the national economy, that every political office seeker wants to win at all cost and every regime strives to put in place policies that will enhance a steady flow of the crude oil. However, these policies are continuously skewed in favour of the multinational oil companies to the detriment of the host communities in the Niger Delta region.

Sustainable Development: Conceptual Clarification

Sustainable development as a concept came into lime light in the 80s. It was first used by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) in the World Conservation Strategy. Their primary focus was essentially to protect the physical environment. They felt the impact of the application of technology and other activities of man on the environment might result in negative effects. This is because, in the application of technology on the environment, man ignores the cause/effect relationship between the environment and development.

The nexus between the environment and development became pronounced when the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) repositioned the relationship. Okaba 2005:35 quoted WCED

... as a process of change in which exploration of resources, the direction of investments, the orientation of technological development and institutional change are in harmony and enhance both current and future potential to meet human needs and aspirations in society ...

The assertion above shows that sustainable development involves meeting the need of future generations without compromising the ability of the generation to meet their own needs. The central emphasis is on the need to promote development without undermining the viability of the environment resource base and the existence of a harmonious relationship between the application of technology and exploitation of natural resources in the environment.

The concept of sustainable development helps the oil multinational companies operating in the Nigeria Delta region to develop a pragmatic and rational approach for opening up, a social conscience in form accountability and responsibility. This is the surest way to have an enabling environment where the companies can operate without the inhabitants being exposed to environment hazards in both the short and long terms. Also it is through this approach that the citizenship rights of the inhabitants of oil bearing communities can be safeguarded.

Democratic Contradictions in Nigeria

Democratic governance ensures that, power that is entrusted by the people to their representatives is transformed into authority through elections. The authority therefore becomes the right to govern in any democratic setting. It thus follows that those who cannot procure the mandate of the people by having majority of the votes in an election do not have the right to govern or represent the electorate. It is equally the elections that give accord government the legitimacy or acceptability it requires from the people to govern successfully. (Adejumbi 2004).

Elections not only play a central role in the success of democracy, it is an indispensable ingredient of any democratic governance. It is elections that ensure the enforcement of democratic principles of accountability and responsiveness. It is as a result of the role that elections play in democratic setting that elaborate arrangements are usually put in place to ensure that people exercise fully their inalienable right and freedom to choose who represent them in government.

The experience in Nigeria is that democratic values and expectations are contradicted and compromised and political office seekers see the process as a do or die affair. In their desperation to emerge winners at all cost, employ unlawful methods, some of which in most, cases actively subvert the entire electoral process to their own personal advantage.

Over the years, the equality of the citizens to choose 'their representative has been blatantly curtailed each time election is held at all level of governance in Nigeria. The curtailment of the freedom given to the electorates to choose their leaders stems from acts committed by individuals or groups or even institutions of government in order to secure predetermined electoral results (Orisakwe, 2003).

The incidence of electoral malpractice in Nigeria is becoming more sophisticated with each democratic experience. Zabadi (2003) stressed that at every stage of the electoral process, from the registration of political parties, voters and right up to the declaration of results is fraught with electoral fraud. In the first and second republic, electoral fraud entailed the crude act of rigging which include

inflation of voters register with fictitious names and deliberate denial of people's right to register. Electoral fraud also manifest in the stuffing of ballot boxes with votes that are already predetermined. In some cases, multiple voting as well as voting by underaged and unqualified persons and physical intimidation of voters and opponents, were common feature of the democratic process (Madunagu, 2003).

Electoral fraud has assumed a sophisticated dimension in the current dispensation. The common fraud is for a party to gain influence over the electoral process such that the elections can be conducted to achieve their desired outcomes. Votes are altered or prepared before voting commences. They achieve this with the active connivance of the electoral officials and security agencies before such results are announced. (Arinze, 2003).

The act of using wealth to gain control of the machinery of election is aptly given by Joseph (1999:155).

Nigerian elections are practically a competition for the control of the electoral machinery and secondarily, a competition for individual votes. Any party which fails to win control of this machinery in a particular area; or to neutralize the influence of its opponents over the personnel operating the machinery, risks losing elections regardless of the actual support it enjoys among the electorate...

The moment a party grips the electoral machinery the personnel can permit multiple voting and voting by under aged persons. Such personnel's deliberately mislead voters regarding voting procedures, inadvertently taking the wrong voting lists to particular polling stations (Kurfi, 1983) the police officials assigned to guide against such abuses are always susceptible to acting on the basis of monetary and other inducements as they were to be honest in carrying out their duties. Sometimes, political thugs embark on sporadic shooting to scare away eligible voters while they steal ballot boxes.

Another instance of democratic contradictions that is prevalent in the electoral process is imposition of candidate on the electorates by 'party leaders'. Corroborating the issue of imposition, a participant in a stakeholders meeting held in Port Harcourt in February 2006 report. Thus:

In 2003, no election took place in our state. The governor simply allocated figures and put the people he liked in the State House of Assembly. Election tribunal in a number of cases have confirmed that elections have been rigged through political manipulation and., the connivance of officials. :

Such impositions not only infringe on the rights of the electorate to freely choose it also blocks possible avenues for aspirants to test their popularity.

Implications for Sustainable Development in the Niger Delta

Democratic government is the only form of governance that essentially offers the people equitable opportunities for the electorate to choose those who represent them in government. With this in mind, the weak and the strong have equal access to the government and they can take decisions that have the potentials of making theft lives well. However, laudable gains of democracy can only be achieved when the rule of the game are strictly adhered to.

Paradoxically, the Nigerian democratic experience right from inception is a sharp departure from the desired goal of democracy. Electoral irregularities of all sorts have developed firm roots in the Nigerian democratization process. This has grave implications for the attainment of sustainable development in the Niger Delta.

As a rest of electoral irregularities and by extension democratic contradictions representatives elected in public offices are not true reflections of voters preferences. Local elections conducted by the state electoral commission are not related to the wishes of the local people. Election administrator and security agents in charge of midwifing electoral process condone and abet the perpetuation of electoral fraud thereby eroding public confidence in electoral outcomes. This in turn led to declining legitimacy on the part of elected representatives and their institutions. (Ross, 2001).

In a situation where most parliamentarians are not true representatives of the people, they therefore owe no allegiance to the electorate but to the power that be. Such representatives wreck the collective treasury without any intention to serve the people in their wards or constituencies. Federal Government has repeatedly indicted Niger Delta governors for diverting most of the fiscal allocations from the federal Account and derivation fund to their states for their own private use. The minister of State for Finance, Mrs. Esther Usman succinctly asserted that:

... greater scrutiny of the activities of the governors especially those receiving huge sums from oil derivations each month.... Three or four days after each month's allocations were shared to the state, the governors buy foreign exchange and if you call any of the states and ask after the governor or even commissioner you will be told that they have gone abroad.... Go to the state that gets so much, you can hardly see anything to show for it (Ujah 2004 in Vanguard May 10 Pg 1).

The imbalance between allocations and the low level of infrastructural development seem to lend credence to the above claim. A particular state in the Niger Delta gets at least N6 billion allocation monthly that ought to translate into tangible physical development (UNDP, 2006). It does not and our so-called representatives do not ask questions, they have no moral courage to check the essence of the executive arm of government.

The tale is even worst in the third tier of government. The local government in a real sense is the closest and most democratic. Be that as it may, it should be most responsive to the felt needs of the people at the grass roots. Contrary, it has remained a tale of non-performance. Local government chairpersons see themselves as executive overload. It does not matter whether they perform or not, they must have their monthly allocations. In some states in the Niger Delta, the chairperson and chancellor visit their offices only once a month and that is when allocation has been disbursed.

Councillors that are supposed to take the yearnings of the people to the chairperson do not help matters. They don't raise such issues. If they do and make their chairperson doubt their loyalty then the crumbs from the master's table in which they literally feed will not get to them.

Another implication of democratic contradiction on the sustainable development in the Niger Delta is that some representatives in connivance with the multinational oil companies act as 'benefit captors'. Compensation money met for the local landowners and host communities go into their private pockets. In some cases, some representatives in the Niger Delta region finance youth gangs to harass oil companies as a tactics for social and economic relevance.

The terror that is unleashed in every community in the course of every election breed long lasting hatred. For a long time, the family and supporters of aspirants whose ambitions are blocked due to electoral fraud remain enemies and this has implication for development as the people cannot speak with one voice on matters that border on their collective good.

The youths, which constitute a viable potential for sustainable development has their life ambitions truncated. Politician in the region hire them to carry out nefarious assignments before and during elections. They are either paid to stuff, snatch ballot boxes, intimidate their leader's political opponents and even in some cases, paid to kill anybody that stand in the way of theft leaders. As soon as the big wigs assume power, the youths are dumped. They find it very difficult to go back to their traditional occupation when the political era is over.

Conclusion

The issues raised in the discourse sufficiently reveal that part of the problem of sustainable development in the Niger Delta is traceable to the contradiction that characterizes the democratic governance in Nigeria. These contradictions which find expression in electoral irregularities produce representatives that never represent the people but pledge their loyalty to the force that masterminded their imposition on the people.

These contradictions further erase the democratic principle of responsiveness and accountability. In the absence of effective machinery to hold elected officials accountable to the electorate, the dividend of democracy continually eludes the host communities of the Niger Delta. Thus democracy has now become a bane of sustainable development in the Niger Delta region.

Effective and good governance is an issue of serious concern. For there to be an enabling environment for sustainable development in the Niger Delta, the contradictions of democratic governance must be done away with. As a matter of public policy the government should ensure that the principles of democratic governance should be adhered to. It is only when the electorate is allowed to freely choose their representatives that the dividends of democracy, which translate into sustainable development, can be guaranteed in the Niger Delta.

References

- Adejumbi, S (2004). Democracy, Good Governance and Constitutionalism in Africa in Odion-Akhaine (ed.) *Governance: Nigeria and the World*, Lagos: Centre for Constitutionalism and Demilitarisation.
- Ajayi, S.I. (2003). Nigeria and the Political Economy of Development: the Dream, the Myth and the Reality. A presidential Address in the 44 Annual Conference of Nigerian Economic Society held in the University of Ibadan 27-29 August
- Ake, C. (2000). *The Feasibility of Democracy in Africa*. Dakar: CODESRA
- Arinze, Y. (2003). What Manner of Elections. *Vanguard*. 6 May. Benin: Ethiopian Publishing Corporation.
- Corden, W.M (1984). Booming Sector and Dutch Disease Economics: Survey and Consolidation Oxford Economic Papers 36(3)
- Eromesele .V. (1988). *Nigeria Petroleum Business*. Lagos: Academy Press
- Igbuzor, O. (2002). Making Democracy Work in Nigeria: the Civil Society and Constitutional Reform in Buyra and Adejumobi (eds.) *Breaking the Barriers, creating New Hopes: Democracy, Civil Society and Good Governance in Africa*. New Jersey: Africa World Press.

- IMF (2003). Nigeria: Selected Issues and Statistical Appendix Country Report NO 3/60
- Iwayemi, A & Adenikinju, R. (1996). Macroeconomic Implication of Higher Energy Prices. *Pacific and Asian Journal of Energy*, .Vol. 6NO 1.
- Joseph R. A. (1999). *Democracy and Prebendal Politics in Nigeria: The Rise and Fall of the Second Republic*. Ibadan: Spectrum Books Limited.
- Kubeunje, K.E & Neziyanya T (1999). Oil: Mixed Blessing for Nigerian Economy. *African Recovery*, Vol. 13, No. 1.
- Madunagu, E (2003). What Voting Pattern? *The Guardian*, 8May.
- Mordi, A.A. (2006). Creating an Enabling Environment in the Niger Delta: The role of legislature a paper presented at the Seminar on Law Security and Sustainable Peace organized by Alpha Peak at Grand Hotel, Asaba 11- 13, December.
- Neary, J. P & Nynbergen, S.U (1986). *Natural Resources and Macro Economy*. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Okaba B. (2004). *Oil Exploration and the Challenges of Sustainable Rural Development*. Benin: Ethiope Publishing Corporation.
- Okaba B (2005). *Petroleum Industry and the Paradox of Rural Poverty in the Niger Delta*. Benin: Ethiope Publishing Corporation.
- Orisakwe, S. (2003). INEC will Improve with lime. *The Guardian*, 26 April
- Osuntokun, J. (2002). *Democracy and the Nigeria Populace: What Dividend?* Ibadan: University Areas.
- Pearson S. R. (1970). *Petroleum and the Nigerian Economy*: Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Ross M.L (2001). Does Oil Hinder Democracy? *World Politics*, Vol.53 No. 3.
- Saurabh, S. & Michael Lipton (1999). Damaging Fluctuations Risk and Poverty: A Review. *World Development Report*, Vol.9 No. 3.
- Soteolu, D. (2004). The Challenges of Leadership and Good Governance in Nigeria in Odion-Akhaine (ed.) *Governance: Nigeria and the World*. Lagos: Centre for Constitutionalism and Demilitarisation.
- Transition Monitoring Group (2003). Preliminary Report on National Assembly Election. *The Punch*, 18 April.
- Ujah. E. (2004). Governor Waste Monthly Allocations. *Vanguard*, 10 May.
- UNUP (2006). Niger Delta Human Development Reports.

Zabadi, I. S. (2003). Electoral Malpractices and the Threat to Nigeria Unity: the Imperative of Equitable Democratic Practices. A Paper Presented at the 22- Annual Conference on Democracy and Conflict Management in Zaria 13-15 January, 2003.