



## Resource control and socio-political issues in Nigeria: Thoughts and Reflections

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**Abstract:** The human society (air, land and sea) is made up of numerous resources which men, with the help of state power do exploit. But, the exploitation of resources is not determined by any individual rather, the state. In Nigerian, three factors revolved around the way in which resources are controlled. These factors include: social politics, conflict and legality. This descriptive research builds a nexus between this three socio political issues and resource control in Nigeria. The research adopts the Relative Deprivation Theory and Realist Group Conflict Theory in its discourse. This research recommends that; there should be inclusive cooperate participation in governance to enhance patriotism of the citizenry. Government and politics should be targeted at the welfare of the masses, Resource control measures should be substantiated, realistic and value-laden, contrary to the current situation, and Government should identify the democratic needs of the people and address them in the most Democratic way that works for the people.

**Keywords:** Resource control, social politics, conflict, law.

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### BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Nigeria is a country that is blessed with natural resources. The agitation for the control of these resources started in the 1990s and was spear-headed by the later environmentalist, Ken Saro-Wiwa under the umbrella of the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP) (Dafinone, 2001). Adequate resource control and allocation are essential to peace, unity and stability in every socio political activities between and among component part of a nation state. It is and has also been critical and contentious socio-economic and political issue, especially among developing nations like Nigeria. However, while in the developed world, the main attention is on how to ensure proper exploitation and harnessing of resources, in states like Nigeria, control and sharing of these limited endowed resources among the component parts has become the source of chaos among the inhabitants.

In addition, the inability of the central government to meet its statutory obligation:

defense, foreign policy, education, health; industrial development etc. For instance, in the United States, oil producing states enjoy certain jurisdictional powers over the oil found in their locality, because oil is not a crucial national resource. Unlike Nigeria, the country possesses huge resources but lack leadership to harness these resources for the development of the country.

Resource control is a relevant issue in Nigerian government and politics as the value attached to resources by the government and the people whose land the resources are domiciled cannot be over emphases. The fact that huge benefits are reposed in resources is self-evident. There are two sides of debate over resource control in Nigeria.

On one side, the government laid emphases on the needs of resources to sustain daily administration of the government by the exploration and sale of resources to run the state without loss and deficits.

Government is expected to provide for its people and must utilize every income made from resource exploration to the best interest of the people. The state is also expected to furnish an arena suitable enough to host its human society without glitches and catastrophe by allocating the right values and privileges to the people living in the various regions of the state. This cannot be done if the state is in chaos and or is witnessing an unstable peace in its resources administration process Parkinson (2012).

The other side features the people whose land the resources belong as they lay claim to the fact that, since the resources are domiciled in their land, they own them and they have every right of decision regarding its exploration and usage. To express and achieve this, the people who claim to be in ownership of the resources form fraternities and groups to champion their agitation over the resource control system. For instance, in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria, there is Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People, Ijaw Youth Council, Committee of Oil Producing Areas, The Ohoni Bill of Rights, The Ikwere Charter of Demands, The Movement for the Emancipation of Niger Delta etc. These groups and their activities are all connected to influencing resource control in that region. Most times, their agitations are reflected when they make strict demands from the government, by issuing threats and sanctions to the government.

These two contrasting viewpoints -from the government and from the people- regarding how resources should be allocated make resource control a critical issue in Nigeria. This debate has resulted to several conflicts and tragedies in Nigeria owing to disagreements from both sides on whose argument to yield to. But, most scholars have argued that, regardless of the central issue of resource control, there are complementary factors which affect and influence the way in which resources are controlled in Nigeria. These factors are: social politics, conflict and law. These three issues form the bedrock of this research. This research seeks to tailor these issues to resource control in Nigeria, with practical evidence and facts. This research seeks to proffer answers to the following questions: Why is there conflict between the government and the people over resource control? Who is entitled to what? What are the legal prescriptions concerning resource control in Nigeria?

## REVIEWED LITERATURES

### Resource Control

Resource control involves the access of communities and state governments to natural resources located within their boundaries and the freedom to develop and utilize these resources without inference from the federal government. The actual control of resources by the people who live in communities with these resources for the support of life Douglas (2005).

Ofeimum (2005) captured the concepts of resource control as the principle that every federating unit must be empowered to be self-governing. To him, the resource control amounts to an expression of self-determination by the zone which places a collaborative duty on other parts of the country to assist the zone realizing their objective. Ikelegbe (2001) asserted that "the tempo, activity, cohesion and commitment of the civil groups indicate that, the state-resource authority and the state regional resource distribution have to be negotiated, redefined and reconstituted if national stability and unity is to be sustained.

Afoyemi (2013), resource control is the way and manner the government revenue is shared among the various tiers of government - the Federal, State and Local Governments, as well as how resources available are harnessed and determined.

In such systems as ours, there are certain taxes which the constituent states do not have the legal right to collect. Such taxes are left for the central government, by law, to collect and coordinate. Nevertheless, in such systems, the 'derivation principle', according to Omojuwa (2001); and Dibua (2006), empowers constituent states and subordinate governments to obtain some benefits from the income generated to the state from their lands. This is practiced in most democracies while it is still yet to be practiced in some others.

The basic principle of resource control is the ability of a state government to exploit the natural resources of a state to the benefit of all (especially in a democratic state), such that every citizen, bonded by the state's sovereignty and their allegiance to the state, has a benefit from the state's resource.

Resources can be reposed in various places. They range from forest (farm lands) to open

lands, air space, land depth resources (like oil and minerals), sea shores, waters etc. But for the sake of this study, we shall limit our focus to petroleum resource on the justification that it is the most pressing resource control issue in Nigeria which have been identified as the major producing the largest percentage of the national revenue.

### **SOCIAL POLITICS**

By definition politics is 'who get what, when and how' (Harold Lasswell 1936). However, politics can only be understood within the confine of society within which there are three major factors that constantly engages in politics. Without them political processes becomes ineffective. They include;

#### **State**

State is a union of families, villages having for its end a perfect and self-sufficing life, by which we mean a happy and honourable life (Aristotle 14<sup>th</sup> century B. C). State is a people permanently occupying a fixed territory, bound together by common laws, habits and customs into one body politics exerting through the medium of organise government, independent sovereignty and control over people and things within its boundaries, capable of making war and peace. The governments of various political systems are brewing a bulk of new policies and programs each dawning day, targeted at ensuring efficiency in the governance process. This is the major cause of the unpredictable changes which could reveal on the course of state administration. So, a state, with its sovereign right controls the entire community under its jurisdiction.

#### **Citizens**

This refers to humans occupying the territory called state. That is to say, while the state sets the platform, the people work it out. So, regardless of what men do within the system they belong, there is a relationship between them, their actions and the system itself. This relationship was described by Parkinson (2012) as the relationship between 'form' and 'politics'. Parkinson argues that "physical form of individuals affects 'political action'.

#### **Group**

Groups are made up of people who have common interest in a matter of public interest. However, Politics involves the distinct role of groups, individuals and the state within the same society. These three, often times go

against themselves having conflicting and (occasionally) corresponding interests. These three also keep the political atmosphere active from the Nigerian experience.

Politics involves interaction among groups which make up the state system. Often, groups (formal and informal) champion advocacies to protect their interests. Groups come up with campaigns to influence public policies which they feel run contrary to their interests. But most of these campaigns have not yielded positive results because of the natural human cultures and identities.

The politics of resource control in Nigeria evidently involves the active role of the state, the groups and individuals. While the state sets the rule of engagement such as derivation principle, quota system etc., the groups and individuals play along. Most often, individuals and groups agitate decisively that the politics does not favour them, thus they bring government back to the table, redrawing the rules and as often the case, point out errors, flaws and faults on the side of the government and seek for redress; the court is usually instrumental in this ordeal.

### **SOCIO-POLITICAL ISSUES of RESOURCE CONTROL IN NIGERIA**

The agitation for resource control in Nigeria came after the abolition of slave trade in 1807 where local traders engaged in resource control struggles to participate actively in the trade of palm oil (Ako and Okonmah, 2009).

Similarly, resource control was one of the highlights of the Ijaws' representation to the Willink Commission. Thus, it should be emphasized from the outset that in Nigeria, majority as well as minority groups have on one occasion or the other in history agitated for resource control. However, the demand for resource control became more loudly when the Military Government of General Yakubu Gowon created a twelve-State federal structure on May 27, 1967 from the former four regions. On the one hand, some of the States that were created e.g., the oil-rich Rivers and Eastern States as well as Lagos immediately demanded for the control of the natural resources located and extracted from their areas. On the other hand, major areas that were not granted statehood but were economically viable equally demanded for resource control out of frustration (Ekwuruke, 2005).

Before this time, however, the struggles for the control of the nation's resources have also, to some extent, been based on the regional cleavages. This, entwined with political conflict, has most times led to political manipulations and delineations with the aim of influencing wealth allocation. Therefore, agitation by these regions, States as well as ethnic groups in the country had been recurrent events. There are three things to note on resource control:

### **Resource Location**

This refers to the territory over which the state resources are reposed. Resources are residential within a state's territory and wherever the resource is, determine who owns it. This implies that it is practically impossible to exploit and control resources in a land which the state does not have territorial right over. This is the major cause of most boundary conflicts where glitches ensue over the ownership of border lands and waters. Conflict of this nature could be interstate or intercontinental struggle for land ownership, for instance, the Bakassi peninsula struggle between Nigeria and Cameroon.

### **Economic Diversification**

Resource control extends to the ability and capacity of the government to discover new resources that were initially undiscovered and explore them to the benefit of the state. Here, emphasis is laid on economic diversification.

### **Human Resources**

Human beings possess abundant values and tactful potentials which, when effectively explored can be an economic value for the state. As oil, for instance, is tapped out of the soil, and used by the government to make wealth for the state's benefit, so can human value. This value applies to the technical know-how and the intellectual substances of men.

Most governments have witnessed critical reactions from people not necessarily because of bad road network, or poor electricity and water but because of poor human management and incompetence of government cum public officials. Government most times fails to mobilise and install the right people into the right positions. Most of them either perform badly or worsen the situation which they were initially meant to handle. It is as a result of the aforementioned that conflicts

generate from injustice affect socio-political activities.

So, resource control goes beyond sight to feelings. We don't see security but we feel it. We don't see diseases, but we feel the consequence of water and air pollution, insanitary condition, etc. We don't see incompetency but we feel the consequences of incompetent staff such as lecturers, health personnel and facilities, frustration by government personnel etc.

### **LAW AND RESOURCE CONTROL IN NIGERIA**

Meagher (2011) noted that legality is instrumental in the protection of human rights and freedoms. This is literally connected with the notion that the judiciary is the 'last hope of the common man'. This can however be guaranteed in settings where there is judicial independence.

The court of law checks arbitrary use of legal provisions, contracts and agreements. When there is a breach of any of such provisions of the constitution, it is the place of the court to intervene and fix the errors. In fact, having a viable and just legal system is the threshold to legality. It is impossible to achieve a just legal process if the legal system is highly compromised.

Law, in resource control is used as a tool to undemocratically persuade political control to personal gains and profits of political office holders. Legality should not be discouraged but to the extent to which it has been wrongly applied is antithetical to basic interests and welfare of the people. Here, law is wielding huge weight on the people's liberty and right of choice.

### **CONCLUSION**

The problem is not bearing from the revenue generated from the availability of resource location neither is it bearing from the dearth of resources. The problem is hinged on the negligence of the people by the government, mal-administration, waste of resources, exploitation of the common purse, looting of the revenue by public officials, corruption etc.

The legal system and its laws are extreme. The government has been highly persuasive and strongly employing forceful means to compel the people to obedience but that hasn't been fruitful. If the government seeks to make use

of force, it may have an immediate result but not with a lasting solution at all.

There can be, however, a turnaround when there is an integrative action toward achieving democratic goals for the local communities.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. There should be inclusive cooperate participation in governance to enhance patriotism of the citizenry.
2. Government and politics should be targeted at the welfare of the masses.
3. Resource control measures should be substantiated, realistic and value-laden, contrary to the current situation.
4. Government should identify the democratic needs of the people and address them in the most democratic way that works for the people.

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