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BAD GOVERNANCE IN NIGERIA: FACTORS AND FALLOUT IN THE EASTERN NIGER DELTA AREA OF NIGERIA

THERESA NFAM ODEIGAH

Abstract

Bad governance in Nigeria is an issue that has elicited reactions from different perspectives globally. The effect of bad governance in Nigeria is examined from the study of the Eastern Niger Delta of Nigeria, which is one of the most populous regions endowed with abundant natural resources and numerous human capitals. Despite the endowments of the Eastern Niger Delta, the region grapples with poor economy and human capital development since the political independence of the country in 1960. The main thrust of this paper therefore is that bad governance and the resulting corruption are responsible for structural conflicts in Nigeria. The study adopted a historic and multi-disciplinary approach to conclude that bad leadership and governance are the root cause of conflicts in the Eastern Niger Delta.

Keywords: Poor Leadership, Bad Governance, conflict, Eastern Niger Delta, Nigeria.

Introduction

Bad governance has been understood to reflect a general tendency of a public institution not being able to manage public affairs and public resources according to the rules and regulations of the country. It is more pronounced when a State or government fails to meet the needs and the responsibilities of the society, even though it makes use of the resources of the country (*Wikipedia: wiki.Answers.com.*).

Nigeria as the most populous country in Africa is blessed with several opportunities and enormous potentials to attain its peak in the global economy and politics, but it has been grappling with economic downturn and slow political growth as a result of bad leadership spanning several years since independence in 1960. The Eastern Niger Delta is located in the Eastern part of the Niger Delta and it embraces the present day Cross River and Akwa-Ibom States and it is peopled by a multiplicity of ethnic nationalities (Alagoa, 1980, 56-58). In Nigeria bad governance is associated with leadership at the states and local governments' administration. There is no respect for the rule of law because of the pervading impunity in the polity. The systematic approach of the leaders in their manipulation of public affairs has led to corruption and other vices such as poverty, social uprising, oil theft, human rights abuses, increased criminality and other forms of heinous vices in the country.

Nigeria with all its abundant natural resources as well as human resources has remained a country with a lot of

impoverished people. Very recently Nigeria was ranked as the country with the highest number of the poorest of the poor. In 2018, Nigeria trajectories suggested that over 87million Nigerians were living in extreme poverty and that the poverty level was growing at six individuals per minute (Inyang, 2018). The nature of bad governance in the country has been the subject of intense debate by noted scholars (George-Genyi, 2013). According to Oyadongha the problem is that of perennial leadership failure by the government, especially the imposition of political leaders on the people (Oyadongha, 2018). The socio-cultural, economic and political challenges Nigeria is facing today can be said to a large extent to be as a result of inept, incompetent and corrupt leadership at the federal, state and local government levels spanning over several years. The resources meant for the provision of basic amenities and infrastructures such as water, roads, health, education and power have been diverted to the use of corrupt politicians, few privileged civil servants and contractors.

Factors Facilitating Bad Governance in Eastern Niger Delta

The state of insecurity in Nigeria and the associated increasing crime rate, such as kidnapping, herdsmen and farmers' clashes, cattle rustling, militancy, the *Skolombo* boys menace in Calabar and other security problems in the land, are a result of government's inability to ensure safety of life and property, largely due to corruption. All these groups at one time or the other had caused conflicts and tension in the Eastern Niger Delta, disrupting the economy and peace in the polity. This situation and several other avoidable predicaments have been

attributed to bad governance and lack of transparency of leadership, especially in the states and the Local governments. The inability of the leaders to manage the affairs of the country effectively has contributed to the problems of the economy and the political system which had resulted to the underdevelopment of almost all the sectors of the economy. The political leaders of Nigeria have failed to adequately put in place infrastructure necessary for development of the country (Dike, 2014). According to Durkheim, as economic development progresses, individuals become alienated from an increasingly fragmented society, leading to violence (Durkheim Emile, 1984, 67). When several sectors of the economy are unproductive, it will be difficult for the society to develop. The fact that majority of the citizens are living below the poverty level of one dollar per day has exposed and encouraged the youths to criminality, violence, conflicts, arms proliferation with massive illegal inflow of small arms and light weapons. All these dangerous weapons have been used to the detriment of the people and the country (Uzochukwu, 2018). Thus, some of the factors of bad governance are here discussed.

Corruption has been identified as one of the major factors enabling bad governance in Nigeria. According to Abdul-Ismail, corruption is derived from a Latin word "*rempere*", which means to break, and corruption can also be said to mean the breaking of established codes of behavior for the gain of the perpetrator. Corruption is also an act of looting public funds, fraud, bribery and extortion among others (Abdul-Ismail, 2007). Corruption in Nigeria is an all pervading phenomenon, and the current president of Nigeria Muhammadu Buhari has seen corruption as

the greatest form of human rights violation and that Nigeria is one of the most corrupt countries in the world with a high poverty level in the society. Corruption can also be seen as the dishonest or fraudulent conduct by those in power which includes bribery and the illegitimate use of power to benefit a private interest (Morris, 1991). In the same vein, Uzochukwu opines that, corruption is the giving of a bribe to a person so that the truth will not be told and this involves the embezzlement of public funds for personal use (Uzochukwu, 2018).

Corrupt practices mostly occur at various functional levels of governance among the political and the public office holders. In 2019 January, Nigeria moved from 184th to 144 in the last Transparency International corruption perception index worldwide (vanguard, 2019). Despite series of anti-corruption agencies, corruption seems to be a normal way of life among the Nigerian leaders (Malik, 2017). This had led to a lot of mismanagement of public funds to the detriment of the society. The discovery of oil in the Niger Delta since 1956 and the benefits that comes with the crude oil would have benefited the people of the Eastern Niger Delta, especially the oil boom in the early 70s, but because of bad leadership since 1985, the excessive income generated from the oil sector, has led to the increased level of corruption in the region, further worsening the economy. Nigeria, the seventh largest exporter of crude oil and also having the tenth largest gas reserve, has not improved the economic destiny of the people of the Eastern Niger Delta (Donwa, Mgbame, Ogbeide, 2015, 29).

In the Eastern Niger Delta, corruption is found at all levels both in the public and the organized private sector.

Corruption pervades all through the society through bad leadership, such as an over bloated political system, non-payment of tax by public officers and highly placed politicians (Zekeri, 2018). Corruption has become systemic in Nigeria because virtually all aspects of the national life are symptomatic of corruption. It is pertinent to note that in the year 2000, Transparency International, the world corruption and human rights watch dog carried out a survey on corruption all over the World and Nigeria was ranked as one of the most corrupt countries in the world, in spite of the Anti-graft agencies in Nigeria, such as the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) as well as the Independent Corrupt Practices and Offences Commission (ICPC). According to Transparency International, the global anti-corruption watchdog ranked Nigeria as 148 out of 180 countries, Nigeria therefore is still one of the most corrupt countries in the world as at 2017, because there have been no remarkable improvement in all the sectors of the country's life (Sahara Reporters, 2018).

In some of the Eastern Niger Delta, a number of past and present public office holders have been accused of corrupt practices. The high level of corruption among the leaders at the various levels is as a result of the perception that politics is one of the ways to become rich quickly in the Eastern Niger Delta. Many people have abandoned agriculture and manufacturing for politics since it appears to offer more instant wealth than any other business. (Danladi, 2007). Those in politics most times are richer than people in the other sectors in the Eastern Niger Delta. In 2018, thousands of youths demonstrated and even marched along major streets in Calabar protesting against bad leadership

and the many problems in the State such as poor infrastructure and unemployment (Unah, 2018). The majority of the present and the passed leaders in the Eastern Niger Delta enjoyed quite a lot of power and authority that made it difficult to prosecute them, because in Nigeria those in authority enjoy immunity from prosecution which in effect is part of the causes of corruption.

Corruption epidemic in Nigeria and in particular the Eastern Niger Delta has to a large extent been the bane of development to the region and Nigeria as a whole (Oduh, 2018). In all, corruption has turned the Eastern Niger Delta and other parts of Nigeria into a nation of paradoxes, because instead of oil production turning into improved socio-economic status for Nigeria, rather it has fueled more corruption and insecurity (Alafuro, 2011).

One other major factor facilitating bad governance and conflicts in Nigeria is electoral fraud which includes election rigging. Elections in Eastern Niger Delta are characterised by corruption, conflicts, violence and this results in election rigging, high-jacking of ballot boxes, bribery of the electoral officials and the manipulation of election results. Wrong candidates are imposed as winners of elections on the people as a result of a weak and corrupt electoral system. (Odeigah, 2017: 78-9). Fighting corruption in Nigeria has not produced the desired results, because of the politicisation of the fight against corruption. Corruption and the negative consequences of corruption have caused a lot of conflicts among communities and the society at large. It is pertinent to note that democracy is the best form of governance in the world, but in the Eastern Niger Delta and Nigeria as a whole, democracy still has to struggle

with the problems of tribalism, favouritism, nepotism and mismanagement of power (Zekeri, 2018). Our democratic experience is still growing and it is expected that as politicians operate within the limits of the constitution and with appropriate constitutional amendments by the National Assembly, the people will begin to enjoy the dividends of democracy.

Problems Resulting from Bad Leadership

Insecurity, is another major problem that Nigeria is grappling with today. Security challenges can be attributed also to a large extent to bad governance. The herdsmen and farmer's clashes and the Niger Delta militancy, cultism and kidnapping among other security challenges in the country emanated on the long run from bad leadership, because most of the young people involved in these vices are unemployed and some are uneducated. The government of Nigeria has not been able to address the insecurity problems because of its lack of political will. Insecurity in Nigeria has become a hydra-headed monster and it seems that both present and past administrations found this difficult to tackle. One of the fundamental provisions of the 1999 Constitution of Nigeria which also agrees with a number of United Nation's human rights provision is the protection and the security of the people and their properties. Little wonder, the 1999 Constitution section 14 (2) states that the security and the welfare of the citizenry will be the primary concern and aim of the government. The massive electoral fraud and rigging results in further corruption because the wrong set of leaders emerges from this process who further perpetrate corruption. The poor security situation, resulting to a large extent from bad

governance has claimed the lives of several people across the country. Money meant for procuring arms and ammunition as well as the training and re-training of security officers are often mis-appropriated by public officers. Bad leadership is part of the major problem facing Nigeria, because governments have failed to provide basic protection for its citizens (Abamara, Okoye, Oguegbe, Jeo-Akunne, 2015).

Unemployment: Most of the youths in the Eastern Niger delta are unemployed and lack skills that would improve their employability. Illiteracy is one of the causes of insecurity in Nigeria, because most of the young people involved especially in the Niger Delta militias are not educated and are without marketable skills. The activities and clashes of the herdsmen and farmers which also is rooted in bad governance, has brought a lot of hardship and suffering among the people. This has resulted in poor agricultural production because the farmers are afraid of being attacked and killed on the farm by herdsmen. The population of the cattle has also been depleted due to cattle rustling by criminally minded people. This situation if not properly addressed could lead to serious food crisis in the Eastern Niger Delta. Eastern Niger Delta is experiencing a lot of insecurity in all fronts, politically, economically and even socially, and these are to a large extent attributable to bad leadership and governance. Crime and criminality among the youths in Eastern Niger Delta could therefore be said to be a consequence of the lack of education and when they are educated there is no entrepreneurial training resulting in massive youth unemployment as a result of poor planning and poor governance by successive governments (Uzochukwu, 2013).

Poor management of the country's abundant natural resources such as crude oil and other agricultural endowments has resulted into the emergence of various militants groups and restiveness in the country's Niger Delta region. The crude oil is the main foreign exchange earner for Nigeria. Poor governance and bad leadership over the years has made Nigeria a mono-product economy. Most other countries of the world have diversified their economies but leaders in Nigeria have not being able to bring about the diversification of the economy. Bad Governance has been understood by some scholars to reflect a general tendency of a public institution not being able to manage public affairs and public resources and its citizens. Any economy that depends solely on one product, cannot meet the demands of its citizens. The danger of a mono-product economy is that it can limit a country's home grown market. The leadership in Nigeria over the years has not encouraged citizens to go into other sectors of the economy such as agriculture, mining, manufacturing and local technology. Another danger of our mono-product economy is that the economy slows down when international oil prices crash and that was what actually precipitated the economic recession in Nigeria in 2016. For an economy of this nature to thrive, the leaders have to lay a solid foundation and there must be an increase in the volume of non-oil exports and other businesses (Hassan, 2016).

Lack of infrastructural development, such as good roads, schools, hospitals, adequate water supply and electricity have characterised governance in the Eastern Niger Delta. Apart from human capital development, infrastructural development is the key to any country's progress. Poor access roads for instance

have been the bane of agricultural development in the remote areas of Nigeria. Even agricultural produce cannot be easily evacuated due to poor road network leading to massive post-harvest losses. Poor infrastructural base and the current insecurity in the country have contributed to the poverty in the land because agricultural activities cannot thrive without basic infrastructure and security. These factors have created unemployment, poverty, and increased criminality in Eastern Niger Delta. Governments in Eastern Niger Delta over the years have had no virile, respected opposition, resulting in the government of the day being overbearing and totalitarian (Adeleke, 2013). Leadership should not only be very responsive to the yearnings and aspirations of the people, but should be committed, accountable and transparent in all ramifications.

Ethno religious crisis have been a major problem in the polity due to our multi-ethnic and multi religious composition. This is one area that poor governance has especially manifested itself. The ethnic and religious differences are what the political leaders have used over the years in causing conflicts among the people as well as the spring board of their elevated positions in politics (Abubakar Sidiq Usman, 2012). Political leaders have therefore exploited our multi-ethnic and multi-religious composition to gain power at the expense of the unity, welfare and peaceful co-existence of the people. The problem of leadership in the Eastern Niger delta and by extension Nigeria as a whole, is because the leaders and those in positions of authority, are unable as leaders to rise above these ethnic, religious, primordial sentiments and bigotry.

Way Forward

One of the ways to enthrone good governance in the Eastern Niger Delta is through the establishment of strong democratic institutions. The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) should be truly independent and funded on first line charge. This will remove any financial control over any of its activities and reduce the influence of any arm of government on it. The electoral process should also be strengthened to ensure that the results of the elections reflect the people's wish and mandate by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) being transparent. The Economic and Financial Crimes Commission should also be truly independent to avoid it being used against political opponents. The same goes for the Independent Corrupt Practices and Offenses Commission ICPC, as this will strengthen it to carry out its mandate without undue political interference.

The political parties should not be hijacked by the so called "money bags" that finance the parties and therefore determine all that happens in the parties. There should be internal party democracy and rule of law to ensure that credible candidates emerge in primaries. Very expensive nomination forms for aspirants should be abolished to reduce exclusivity and encourage young Nigerians with great ideas to contest. The Nigeria Police should also be better funded and remunerated to ensure they are well equipped and motivated to fight crime and properly prosecute offenders without asking for gratification.

The judiciary should enforce its independence as the third arm of government. Corrupt judicial officers should be shown the way out of service and incorruptible and diligent judicial

officers rewarded appropriately. There should be special courts to handle corruption offences and this will ensure speedy trials and appropriate conviction. The executive and the legislative arms of government should also obey court orders and obey the rule of law in the country. This will reduce impunity which is associated with corruption, poor governance and other anti-democratic practices.

One of the ways to enthrone good governance in Nigeria is by the voters exercising their rights and refusing to be bribed or financially induced by inept and corrupt politicians. This will ensure that only politicians who are willing to serve the people are elected into leadership positions. Elected leaders will be expected to address issues that affect the people such as infrastructural development and diversification of the economy as it was in the pre-colonial and colonial periods. The emphasis on oil alone as the main foreign exchange earner should change so that the agricultural, solid minerals and manufacturing sectors will be paid the attention they deserve. This will eventually solve the unemployment problem among the youths also reduce crime and criminality in the polity.

Conclusion

Bad governance and leadership challenges, no doubt has contributed quite significantly to the problems experienced by the people of the Eastern Niger delta area and indeed Nigeria as a country. The issues of an easily manipulated electoral system and officials and the all-pervading corruption among leaders resulting in poor infrastructural development, unemployment, a mono-product economy and lack of development of the manufacturing,

solid minerals and energy sectors are all the effect of bad governance and poor leadership. The improved quality of life that the people of the Eastern Niger delta and indeed all Nigerians are yearning for may never materialise until the issue of bad governance and leadership is addressed.

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