

### Full Length Research Paper

## Politics of Resources and Peaceful Coexistence: Challenges and Prospects of the Nigerian State

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**Abstract:** Resources are the bed rock of every economy, in Nigeria these endowments are mostly controlled by the government. The control and management of these resources particularly oil has witnessed a lot of politics, diplomacy and political maneuverings. There have been agitations from some regions about the control and distribution of the oil wealth with much of it coming from the Niger Delta region which is the hub of Nigeria's oil endowment. Such agitations are mainly occasioned by the feelings of alienation from the management and distribution of the oil wealth. This feeling among the people has distorted their perception of leadership and governance in Nigeria. This paper takes up issues of diplomacy, politics of resources and peaceful coexistence in Nigeria. It examines the attitude of these political leaders, the role played by resource bearing communities and how such resources have affected relations and coexistence among different Nigerian nationalities. The objective of this paper is to carefully examine the role of government and the citizens in resource management, politics, diplomacy and its influence on the people, bringing to the fore lapses inherent in the management of these resources and its implications on coexistence. It also examines experiences of these oil bearing communities and the Nigerian citizens whose wealth have remained under the control of few individuals at the leadership positions. It assesses the qualities of these leaders considering their obligations to the society. Careful assessment of these leaders reveals that some of them lack leadership qualities and see leadership as a means to wealth. This attitude has affected the perception of the people, most of who have been gradually impoverished and have systematically lost the benefits of these resources. Therefore oil has become a force at the center of the unity of Nigeria as it can undermine the existence of Nigeria. This study has used secondary sources such as textbooks, journals and newspaper reports. It has identified

some gaps in resource management, diplomacy, politics, leadership and followership in Nigeria, implications and has suggested a way forward.

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## **Introduction**

The amalgamation of 1914 brought different independent ethnic nationalities together as a nation and by 1960 Nigeria became an independent nation state. Before and immediately after independence, the country depended on agricultural and mineral resources. Such agricultural resources include palm oil from the East, cocoa from the West and groundnut from the North. Mineral resources were coal, tin columbite and limestone just to mention but a few, this story gradually changed with the discovery of petroleum in a commercial quantity in Nigeria in 1958. For many decades, Nigeria has depended on petroleum at the expense of other resources. The exploration of this all important resource is entangled with a lot politics, competition, secrecy, diplomacy and conflict over its control and management.

This paper on politics, diplomacy of resources, peaceful coexistence: challenges and prospects of the Nigerian State discusses other resources in Nigeria but focuses on petroleum and the political dynamics involved in the control of the “national cake” and how this has affected the coexistence of different ethnic nationalities and the unity of the Nigerian state. It has carefully assessed the challenges and prospects of this all important resource on the Nigerian state.

## **Resource Endowment, Politics and the Nigerian State**

Robert and Olajide see resource as a useful material or substance, which in a technical sense refers to the positive interaction between man and nature.<sup>1</sup> It is thus a means designed to satisfy the given ends of individual wants and social objectives. Nigeria as a nation is endowed with a lot of resources, there is no state in Nigeria that does not possess either agricultural, mineral or petroleum resource but the problem is that despite all these natural endowments, different ethnic nationalities have continued to focus on petroleum. This has brought unnecessary rivalry and tension among different groups in Nigeria. The Niger Delta region where crude oil is majorly domiciled on their part believes that they are short-changed in the sharing of the oil proceeds. A careful assessment of these states will help us understand this fact. For instance, Abia State in

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South East Nigeria is endowed with agricultural and mineral resources such as yam, cassava, palm oil, salt and petroleum. Adamawa State in North East Nigeria has guinea corn, maize, cattle, fish, millet and cotton. Akwa-Ibom State is blessed with petroleum, salt, iron, coal, gold, clay, limestone, gravel and palm oil. Anambra State has iron ore, limestone, coal, fine clay, marble, silica sand, lead, zinc, petroleum and natural gas.

Bauchi State is endowed with millet, coffee, cotton, guinea corn, maize, yam, tomatoes, columbite, gold, coal, limestone, iron ore, antimony and marble. Benue State has limestone, coal, tin, columbite, coffee, rice, berni seed. Borno State has pepper, carrot, sorghum, beans and tomatoes. Cross River State is rich in fish production (shrimps, croakers, catfish, bonga and shark) and petroleum, Delta State is blessed with rubber, palm oil, crude oil, plywood and timber. Ebonyi State is endowed with cement (limestone), lead, zinc, salt, rice and groundnut. Edo State has rubber, timber, palm produce, cocoa and petroleum. Enugu State is blessed with rice, yam, cashew nuts, cassava, coal, lead, limestone and gypsum. Imo State is blessed with lead, zinc, white clay, natural gas, limestone, salt and petroleum. Kano State is endowed with wheat, groundnut, cotton, tin, columbite and cassiterite. Katsina State is blessed with kaolin, asbestos, groundnut, maize, cotton, guinea corn, rice, yam, onions, tomatoes and wheat. Kebbi State has gypsum, marble, kaolin, millet, wheat and guinea corn. Kogi State is endowed with iron ore and marble. Kwara State has coal, limestone, marble, iron ore, feldspar, clay, tin, talc, gold, cotton, coffee, cocoa, kola-nut, tobacco leaves, berni seed and palm produce. Lagos State is blessed with petroleum and seaports. Niger State is blessed with rice, maize, sorghum, groundnuts, millet, sheanut, beans, soya and cotton. Ogun State has limestone, chalk, phosphate, clay, kaoline, stones, cocoa, rubber, timber and kola-nuts. Ondo State is the leading cocoa producing state in Nigeria. Osun State is endowed with cocoa, coffee, soya beans, kola-nuts, tobacco, marble, tin and columbite. Oyo State is endowed with tin, gold, columbite, marble, tobacco, cocoa, palm produce, beans, plantain, cassava, maize and kola-nut. Plateau State is blessed with tin, cotton, groundnut, rice, Irish potatoes, maize and soya bean. Rivers State is endowed with crude oil, natural gas, palm oil, citrus fruit, coconut, banana, fish and cassava. Sokoto State is blessed with gold, clay, kaolin, gypsum, salt, marble, granite, flipper, limestone, wheat, maize, millet, guinea corn, rice, beans, groundnut, cotton and sugarcane. Taraba State has rich vegetation for grazing and tea and Yobe State is blessed with agricultural products such as millet and wheat.<sup>2</sup>

There are large deposits of Bitumen in Nigeria it is believed that this resource was first discovered in Nigeria in 1900, deposits of bitumen cover 120 kilometers coastal belts of Lagos, Ogun, Ondo and Edo States. The occurrence of bitumen deposits in Nigeria is twice the amount of existing reserves of crude oil.<sup>3</sup> If fully developed and exploited it can become a foreign exchange earner for Nigeria. The mining of minerals in Nigeria accounts for only 0.3 per cent of its GDP due to the influence of vast petroleum resources.<sup>4</sup> The country is richly blessed with petroleum particularly in the Niger Delta, apart from oil, the location of the region at the coast of the Atlantic Ocean also makes it strategic in both political and economic senses. As a result of repression and unpopular government policies towards this region, there is strengthened resolve of groups in the region to violently engage the federal government. With the avalanche of resources available in Nigeria, the managers of the Nigerian State have paid more attention over the years to the exploration and exploitation of crude oil in the Niger Delta region. The presence of crude oil in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria and the quest for the control of this resource, has necessitate competition, suspicion, mistrust and conflict among various component groups in the country as Fred E. F. Ayokhai puts it, the human society is a collectivity of economic, social and political activities of individuals.<sup>6</sup> This gives them access to the basic necessities of life. Thus man by nature is a dependent creature, who depends on his environment and others within it for food, shelter and clothing. Therefore he believes that no group or human community, no matter its level of development, can be an island unto itself. The dialects of human existence he said ordinarily dictate that each human group consciously or unconsciously relate with each other in the interest of self preservation.<sup>7</sup> This argument may be true but Nigeria has become almost dependent for its survival on petroleum. As a result of the interaction among different Nigerian groups and the economic dependence on oil, Nigeria has witnessed some challenges in this area. The dependence on oil from the Niger Delta region, environmental challenges from oil exploration and neglect of the region by the Federal government, the oil companies, and their collaborators in that zone has created a perceived need to take violent action especially by youths of the region. Assessing this oil dependence, Wole Soyinka concluded that "I am convinced that Nigeria would have been a more highly developed country without the oil, I wished we had never smelled the fumes of petroleum"<sup>8</sup> Problematic distribution of oil resources in Nigeria provided further motivation for the Niger Delta struggle. Protagonists of resource control such as Itse Sagay, Nnimmo Bassey, Ebeku and Saro-Wiwa argued that 50 per cent of oil proceeds should be paid to the state in which it is

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produced, especially on the continental shelf off its land.<sup>9</sup> But in order to perpetuate its central control and ownership of the oil wealth, the Federal government, both military and the civilian regimes reacted to oil agitation by attempting to suppress it through violent means. The politicization and militarization of oil through armed occupation of the Niger Delta communities by the military in the early 1990s was done for the maximization of the production and sale of oil.<sup>10</sup> The presence of the security forces have led to extra judicial killing of innocent local people, most of who were agitating for their rights and a just share in the proceeds of oil resources.

In an attempt to peacefully resolve the resource orchestrated conflict, the federal government under the leadership of former President Yardua began to negotiate with the militants and other stake holders in the region. Several diplomatic moves were made by the government toward the resolution of the conflict. The International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences has defined Diplomacy as the process by which governments, acting through official agents, communicate with one another. In a more simplified language, Diplomacy could be defined as the activity of managing relations between different countries. The government created suitable atmosphere for conducting negotiation for peace or negotiating trading conditions, arranging treaties and sealing them, and sometimes for conducting arbitration and parleys.<sup>11</sup> Formal agreement ended the conflict in the region and amnesty was granted to the agitators on August 6, 2009.<sup>12</sup> This effort paid off and resulted to an increase in Nigeria's oil output.

However, armed agitation or militancy and the occupation of the region gradually resurfaced under the present administration of President Mohammadu Buhari since 2015 and troops presently patrol Niger Delta creeks in search of pipeline vandals, militants and to maintain "peace" for fear of armed resurgence in the region. Locally made refineries are regularly destroyed as they are termed "illegal". This approach by President Mohammadu Buhari led government has not dampened the spirit of agitation and the feeling of alienation in the region rather it has sent wrong signals to the youths and other stake holders in the region. A proactive effort should be made to spread the revenue base of the country and reduce the attention paid to petroleum as this has become issue in contention. There is need for economic, political and social integration of the Niger Deltans into the Nigerian polity.

The corruption and patronage politics that has characterized governance and oil management in

Nigeria in the face of abject poverty among the masses of Nigeria and the Niger Delta has further aggravated political tempers in Nigeria. The consequence is that what started as a peaceful agitation for fair political accommodation and access to a better share of the national wealth between 2005 and 2011 degenerated into violent conflict that threatened to grind the national economy to a standstill and almost eroded the unity and coexistence that the nation require for development. Nigeria as a nation is plagued by endemic corruption. This is as a result of her rich oil endowment and the special attention paid to this particular resource. Oil business has made institutions of government mediums of theft and corruption. Corruption became very much visible and entrenched in Nigeria's political, social and economic structure during the military era and since then it has become the order of the day. According to Arthur Nwankwo, every military regime brought its own form of corruption, he described General Yakubu Gowon's regime as a "Father Christmas" spending questionable billions of naira on empty projects, activities and neighbouring countries. Under the regimes of Alhaji Shehu Shagari, Generals M. Buhari, Ibrahim Babangida and Sani Abacha, Nigeria transcended the threshold of corruption to blatant stealing.<sup>13</sup> These regimes perpetrated economic genocide against millions of Nigerians. Nwankwo noted that in Nigeria, the common wealth is being shared like spoils of war. This assessment is a perfect description of the nature and scope of corruption in Nigeria as it is felt in every spheres of the Nigerian system including government appointments.

This trend has continued since 1999 under democratically elected leaders, where millions of oil dollars disappear without any question. Nwankwo however proffered the following solutions to the corruption problem in Nigeria: First the return of Nigeria to the practice of true federalism. This, he said will be achieved by restructuring the polity, convening of a Sovereign National Conference (SNC) to among others, thrash out issues of control of resources by ethnic nationalities and the rejection of the 1999 Constitution which he believe is incapable of fighting corruption as it is replete with objectionable clauses.

Natural resources, generates a paradox of plenty because they create dependence and damage other tradable sectors and sources of economic growth and development such as human capital, agricultural and the manufacturing sectors, stimulate unwise economic policies such as import substitution policy which prevent efficient and effective investments of rents and make the economy vulnerable to external shocks caused by declining terms of trade.<sup>15</sup> Nigeria is a federation, a political arrangement that has been adopted to strike a balance between unity

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and diversity, since it allows the component units of a political organization to participate in sharing powers and function in cooperative manner in the face of combined forces of ethnic pluralism and cultural diversity.<sup>16</sup> In economic terms, a federation is a system of government where revenue and expenditure functions are divided among the various tiers of government.<sup>17</sup>

P. Okigbo asserts that federal institutional arrangement involves the decentralization of the fiscal system or fiscal federation.<sup>18</sup> It means that finance is the engine of the federal system with its proper functioning being a direct result of a stable system of revenue allocation between the various levels of government.

The presence of political institutions to maintain accountability has not translated into efficient utilization of resource rents. The problem of effective resource allocation in Nigeria has been blamed on the four sub-components of the federal structure; the executive (federal, state, and local government), the legislature (federal, state, and local government), the judiciary (federal and state) and the various ad-hoc and permanent fiscal commissions. Only the Executive component is in charge of policy-making, while the other three perform roles to varying degrees as stated in sections 162(1) and 162(2) of the 1999 constitution.<sup>19</sup> O. Omobolaji argues that the Legislature, the Judiciary and the Fiscal Commissions have not been able to conduct effective check on the Executive and decisions made on how to distribute resource rents.<sup>20</sup> This has led to corrupt practices by the politicians who illegally appropriated such resource rents to themselves, their cronies and friends. It also encourages unhealthy competition among different ethnic nationalities who struggle to get power at the center since the Executive prepares the national budget and the Legislature authorizes the Executive to raise and spend money and exercises oversight over the activities of the Executive. The legislature has not performed this oversight function role creditably well as a result the budget becomes a tool for mismanaging resource benefits by the executive and the executive has succeeded in this area. Since 1999 the executive arm of government has been deeply involved in corruption issues. In 1981 the Pius Okigbo Commission recommended that the Federation Account be shared among the tiers of government on the basis of 53 per cent for the federal government, 30 per cent for the state government, 10 per cent for the local government and 7 per cent for special funds. It was, however revised as the federal executive reviewed its share upwards by 2 per cent to 55 per cent and reduced the local government's share by 2 per cent. The Supreme Court, on 2 October 1981 declared the new formula as unconstitutional and demanded a new formula. The modification passed through the National Assembly in 1981 and became operational in 1982.<sup>21</sup>

The Revenue Mobilization Allocation and Fiscal Commission (RMAFC) was the first permanent revenue allocation commission established by the military government, through Decree 49 of 1989. It recommended the vertical allocation formula to be: federal government 47 per cent, state government 30 per cent, local government 15 per cent, and special funds 8 per cent. For horizontal allocation it recommended: equality of states 40 per cent, population 30 per cent, internal revenue effort 20 per cent, and social development factor 10 per cent. The military government accepted its recommendations but raised its own share by 3 per cent. From the above analysis we can see that the sharing formula was manipulated in favour of the government at the center.

### **Implication of Resource Politics on Peaceful Coexistence in Nigeria**

Resources particularly petroleum seems to be at the root and centre of unity and coexistence in Nigeria. For most Nigerians, especially those living in the Niger Delta, the county's oil wealth is actually "oil poverty" because it has produced only poverty, underdevelopment and conflict since its commercial discovery in the late 1950's.<sup>22</sup> It is now almost conventional wisdom that oil resource is a curse for Nigeria as such endowment has not translated into development, economic growth but enrichment of certain individuals at the corridors of power and has resulted to the neglect of other economic resources. In the Niger Delta region where oil is produced, the people live in abject poverty with no access to portable drinking water, poor healthcare and education facilities. Some communities remain unconnected to the national grid, the source of power and other basic social amenities. In so many areas of the region, many communities do not have all season access roads and waterways to their homes, while death rate among the populace due to preventable causes arising from lack of development are still high.<sup>23</sup> Their basic means of livelihood has been affected as a result of environmental degradation caused by oil spillage (pollution), gas flaring and coastal erosion. The region is plagued with poverty, high rate of unemployment, overstretched social and infrastructural facilities with high crime rates all these have led to frustration in the region and agitation for the control of the petroleum resource.

Affirming this position, Chris Ogbogbo believes that the discovery of crude oil as the main pivot of Nigeria's economy has significantly affected the identity and interest of those who inhabit the oil producing region of the Niger Delta. Their desire to have a substantial chunk of the revenue derived from the sale of oil has impacted significantly on the issue of identity politics within the



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region and in their relationship with the rest of the country.<sup>24</sup> From Ogbogbo's assessment, the intensification of exclusionary tendencies in Nigeria political system has become a bomb waiting in the womb to explode. In the Niger Delta, it is recreating and reinforcing centrifugal form of politics, which is increasingly undermining unifying tendencies in Nigeria. The resource control conflict on which the Niger Delta identity converges and the crisis it has engendered has questioned the legitimacy of the Nigerian State. Another worrisome implication of resource politics is the belief and feeling in the Niger Delta region that certain sections of the country conspired to push the region out of power during the 2015 general elections. In addition, the anxieties generated by the expected termination of the amnesty programme in December 2015, the perceived "selected" prosecution of looters of the Nigerian treasury particularly from the South-South region including the former Governor of Bayelsa State Late Chief D.S.P. Alamayshia, Mrs. Patience Jonathan and their associates, the termination of pipeline contracts awarded to some ex-militant leaders and clamour for the State of Biafra supported by some youths in the Niger Delta, these form the current hard realities that are capable of returning the region into renewed agitation and crisis.

One major implication of resource politics is that it has engendered a lot of unhealthy competition among different ethnic nationalities who struggle for political positions at the center. The perceived lopsided political appointments in favour of some ethnic nationalities by the present leadership (M. Buhari) of the country, which some believe is centered on resource politics of who controls what. This struggle for political and economic control has led to mistrust and suspicion among these groups and can in the nearest future threaten the future, foundation and unity of Nigeria as those who feel cheated by the current political arrangement and calculation will sought other ways of addressing their problems, including clamour for autonomy or sovereignty of their ethnic nationality.

It has been pointed out earlier in this paper that indigenes of the oil rich region feel deprived of the oil benefits, as this can be seen through the level of environmental degradation, poverty and unemployment among the oil bearing communities. As a result of what they perceive as injustice of the state in connivance with the "powerful" ethnic nationalities, some youths in the region have resorted to oil theft, establishment of locally made oil refineries and crime as means of survival. This has not gone down well with the federal government as these youths are seen as "enemies" of the state and as a result these local oil refineries that should have been developed into major technological breakthrough for Nigeria are destroyed.

### **Prospects and Challenges of the Nigerian State**

Nigeria is endowed with enormous resources but petroleum resources as discussed constitute a major proportion of Nigeria's foreign exchange, however, poor management, nepotism, corruption, policy dislocation, global oil glut and increasing output from new and existing producers, present challenges for Nigeria's economy. The country as we have discussed earns a significant proportion of her foreign exchange from petroleum resources but this has not translated into real development for the country as she has not prudently managed her earnings. While the country has earned hundreds of billions of dollars from petroleum resources over the past decades, it is believed that 70 per cent of its population lives below poverty line<sup>26</sup> With petroleum as the mainstay of the Nigerian economy the first thing that defines her prospect and survival as a nation, is corruption which has reached an indescribable height and has increased the struggle for political and economic control at the center. As a result of corruption, many activities of the national oil corporation have been conducted in utmost secrecy. This has not encouraged transparency in the industry. Therefore Nigerian leaders need to do more in their fight against corruption.

Nigeria has enjoyed a colossal boom in oil prices, oil prices rose from \$10 per barrel in 1999 to \$140 per barrel in 2008. The prospect in this industry was so massive that the federal government under Olusegun Obasanjo established the excess crude account (ECA) in 2004. The ECA was aimed at saving oil revenues above a base amount derived from a defined benchmark price. The purpose of this was to protect planned budgets against shortfalls as a result of price uncertainty in the global oil market. This account was not to be linked with government expenditures and therefore protect the Nigerian economy from external shocks. Increasing oil prices led to increase in the ECA from \$5.1 billion in 2005 to over \$20 billion by November 2008, by June 2010, the amount dropped to less than \$4 billion due to budget deficits at all levels of government and the drop in oil price. However, oil prices rebounded and by June 2014, oil prices remained above \$100 but from June 2014, oil prices fell by more than 30 per cent to an average of \$60 per barrel and the uncertainty in oil prices continued in 2015.<sup>27</sup> According to Opatewa Nigeria threw to the winds the other diverse resources which hitherto defined Nigeria's economic identity,<sup>28</sup> this has affected Nigeria's economic advancement, economic stability of the states, increased agitation by oil bearing communities and unity of the nation. This has become a major challenge to the economic development and stability of Nigeria and has affected a broad range of Federal, State and Local Government expenditures. As it is a

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popular knowledge that most government expenditures are associated with petroleum and the absence of good price and with regular flow, Nigeria faces serious consequences and a future that is bleak.

Resource politics in Nigeria as earlier pointed out has influenced a lot of unhealthy competition among different ethnic nationalities as they struggle for political position and juicy contracts. For Nigeria to survive as a nation, the exploration of mineral resources must not be an exclusive preserve of the federal government States must be allowed to participate in the exploration and exploitation oil and mineral resources in Nigeria. This will reduce focus on oil, clamour for resource control, resource conflict and call for ethnic autonomy.

Nigeria must work towards socio-economic integration as some ethnic nationalities feel alienated from the “national cake”. This could be done in fair appointment and other opportunities that may be created by the government at the center. In the present day Nigeria, there is perceived injustice by the State in connivance with some “powerful” ethnic nationalities, Federal character system should be used to reduce agitations as such agitations can affect unity and peaceful coexistence in Nigeria.

### **Conclusion:**

Conclusively, with Nigeria’s array of resources, petroleum has remained the dominant and cherished bride in the economic calculation of the country. Wealth from petroleum resources has not been properly managed as petro-dollar has ended up in private pockets. Petroleum resources have led to corrupt practices among the politicians and other leaders who illegally appropriate such resource rents to themselves.

However, the neglect of other resources has affected their development as sources of revenue for the country and has increased the dependence on revenue from petroleum. This has resulted in agitations, corruption, competition and conflict among various ethnic nationalities in Nigeria. It has increased divisive discussions in some regions and regret of the 1914 incident, the amalgamation. It has ultimately affected coexistence and national integration in Nigeria. The quest for the control of this important resource has led to division, suspicion and mistrust among different ethnic nationalities. This mistrust will in future threaten the fabrics, unity and peaceful coexistence in Nigeria as those who feel cheated by the current arrangement will sought other ways of addressing their problems. There is need for economic and social integration of the oil producing region into the Nigerian polity.

The government should adopt an open mechanism in the oil business, it has also become imperative for Nigeria to broaden her scope of revenue base and reduce the attention paid to petroleum resources. Countries in the Southern African region have majorly survived on agriculture and mineral resources and Nigeria can do the same. It has become expedient for Nigeria to develop other resources and encourage states to be less dependent on federal allocation. As they are likely going to face more challenging time if oil prices continue to drop, the introduction of electric cars and with the pending looted funds stashed abroad, the Nigerian State as it is today has become endangered specie.

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