

## Federalism, Democracy and Restructuring in Nigeria: The Niger Delta Experience

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### **Abstract**

*This study investigated federalism, democracy and restructuring in Nigeria with emphasis on the Niger Delta Region. The continued agitation by some ethnic groups in Nigeria is an indication that all is not well with Nigerian federalism. There are numerous calls for political restructuring to give sense of belonging to all the diverse elements that made up the Nigeria state. However, these agitations have not yielded the desires goal. The study adopted the Marxian political economy theory as its theoretical framework. It situated the clamour for political restructuring especially from the Niger Delta region on the sub-structure; economy. Secondary source of data was utilised for the study; it involved the collection of data from sources such as textbooks, seminar papers and magazines among others. The study found that the Niger Delta region is riddled with numerous socio-economic challenges despites the huge financial contribution of the region to national coffer. The study, therefore, recommends that the 2014 National Conference (CONFAB) should be implemented to give every ethnic groups and segments within the Nigeria federal system a sense of belonging.*

**Keywords:** *Federalism, Democracy, restructuring, Niger Delta Region and underdevelopment*

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### **Introduction**

Restructuring is one of Nigeria's most vexed socio-political and economic issues in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Suberu, (2001) noted that despite its positive impact, federalism has been absolutely insufficient to deal with distributive tensions and conflicts. The geo-politics of the country is therefore characterised by agitations for restructuring as cure to the crises of development arising largely from a flawed federal architecture. Scholars, political analysts and segments of the political class have advanced the argument that restructuring is expedient, and a fundamental basis for the development of the country (Amuwo et al., 1998; Awofeso, 2017; Amadi et al., 2017; Shvetsova & Filippov, 2013). But what should be the content and context of restructuring and how it would promote development is not clear. A look at the positions of the different geo-political zones on

restructuring either confuses the subject or ignores critical essentials in the federalism-restructuring debate.

The notion of federalism is currently undergoing intellectual examination in Nigeria due to the problems emanating from its application. In recent times, there have been a lot of discussions on what is ‘true federalism, resource control and local government autonomy’ (Mohammed & Sulaiman, 2018). It appears that federalism in Nigeria is only functioning theoretically and not practically as the reality reveals that federating units are subordinated to the federal government. In other words, most federating units in Nigeria depend on the federal government for revenue. This is opposing to the principles of federalism and serves as a clog on the wheel of true federalism. This necessitated the call for political restructuring to ensure that States/regions that generate resources are in control of their resources.

With regards to restructuring in Nigeria, Ekekwe (2017) pose the following questions: What is Nigeria and what is wrong with Nigeria? How can that wrong be corrected? What has good governance to do with it? He opined that unfortunately; Nigeria is not a country created for Nigerians. This explains why the Nigerian State is struggling in the midst of plenty (Ekekwe, 2017).

The term re-structuring has a political and an administrative connotation, which implies agitation for more formation in the whole component of the existing federalism, as a result of the need to control the center or representation in the political landscape of the country. Restructuring also involves the economic redistribution of resource among the component units of the federation on the basis of federalism and also, the constitutional gap which requires the legal framework for its restructuring. This makes democracy a vital ingredient of federalism and restructuring. Basically, restructuring is part of a democratisation process, and cannot be dissociated from it. Essentially, restructuring will lead to more democratisation, hence enhancing the overall progress of the country. Ordinary citizens will demand more accountability from their leaders once they realise that their leaders are responsible for the development conditions of their regions. Hence, leaders would be made more accountable and frugal in the management of public resources. In his democracy and development in Africa, Ake noted that “country cannot be built without popular support and the full participation of the people, nor can the economic crises be resolved, and the human and economic conditions improved without the full, effective contributions, creativity and popular enthusiasm of the vast majority of the people” (Ake, 1996; p.138). According to Ibaba, (2017), the justification for restructuring cannot be dissociated from demands for good governance. Democracy therefore promotes good governance, transparency, accountability, free participation and inclusion, which is pivotal for the proper function of federalism.

The call for restructuring is predicated on the argument that some states have become economically not viable and liability to others as they relied much on the allocation from the federation account. Also, there is the feeling among some states (oil bearing states in the Niger Delta region) that since the oil which is the mainstay of the economy is domiciled in their domain, the proceeds from oil should be managed by the people of the region.

Within the context of the Niger Delta region which is the focus of this paper, political restructuring is the political re-configuration of the country and devolution of powers to the constituent units as it is practiced in other climes. It involves ownership, control, and management of mineral resources located in a state by the state. The agitations of the Niger Delta people resonate with Ibaba view on political restricting. The agitations of the people of this region (Niger Delta region) led to the adoption of the 13% derivation for oil bearing states by the Obasanjo administration. Despite

setting aside 13% for oil bearing states, the call for restructuring still persist especially from oil bearing states who clamour for total control of their resources.

The objectives of the study are to; examine restructuring and socio-economic challenges of the people in the Niger Delta region; and investigate the agitations on political restructuring in Nigeria. The work is structure into four parts, part one; methodology and theoretical framework, part two; literature review, part three data analysis and the last part focuses on conclusion and recommendations.

## **PART 1**

### **Methodology**

The study utilised the historical research design; it has to do with studying past events so as to understand present events in order to be able to predict future events. Within the context of this study, this study takes a historic look at Nigeria fiscal arrangement especially since 1960 when the country attained political independent. It looks at how revenue was generated and distributed between the federal government and the federating units. Secondary source of data was deployed for this study. Secondary source of data refer to the set of data collated or authored by another person, archives, in the form of documents collected for a purpose other than the present one in which it is being used (Asika, 2006). Data for this study was sourced from Nigeria Federal Character Commission, National Bureau of Statistics among others. This was supported by data from magazines, textbooks, journals and seminar papers among others. The content analysis was adopted as our method of data analysis.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework adopted for the study is the Marxian Political Economy Theory propounded by Karl Marx (Marx in Engels, 1867). The theory systematically studied society in its totality and takes into consideration the interconnection of social relations, class conflict and the organic relationship between the sub-structure (economy) and the super structure (politics).

Political economy is concerned with the social laws of production and distribution (Lange, 1974). The Marxian political economy theory is a holistic, historical orientation, which is used for the analysis of social formations and their contradicting relationships. It mainly focuses on the economic laws which govern the production and distribution of material benefits among individuals and groups at different stages of development of society (Iwarimie, 1991). Put differently, the theory is seen as the window to understand the laws that govern the economic life of the society. It explains the relationship between what man produce and how he benefits from the surplus he produce. The theory show how the various parts of the superstructure are used as instruments of the ruling class domination, and as mechanism of oppression of the subject class. According to Ake (1981), a major advantage of this approach is that, it emphasizes the relatedness of social phenomena. This links exist between the economic structure and social structure. More so, the theory helps to penetrate deep into the processes and policies, lay bare their essence and then explain concrete forms of their manifestation.

Applying the Marxian political economy theory in understanding federalism and political restructuring in Nigeria, it become imperative to state that the continued agitations for political restructuring in Nigeria can better be explain within the sub-structure; economy. The Niger Delta region wants to be in control of their resources at the same time, the federal government relied on oil revenue as the mainstay of the Nigeria economy. Without oil revenue, the federal government cannot carryout it fiscal responsibilities while the Niger Delta region need to be in total control of

their resources to engender socio-economic development of the region. The economy therefore is fundamental in understanding the rationale behind political restructuring in Nigeria.

## **PART 11**

### **Concept of Federalism**

The word federalism is etymologically derived from the Latin word *Foetus*. The Latin word *Foetus* means treaty or agreement. Hence federation means a union of states based upon treaty or agreement. Federalism did not begin as a concept that has to do with social or political organisation. According to Awa (1976), earlier writers on federalism interchangeably used such terms as federal, confederacy, federation and confederation but that these terms are not the same in their modern usages. According to Wheare (1953, p. 11), federalism as a federal principle is, “the method of dividing powers so that the general regional governments are each, within a sphere, coordinated and independent”. Federalism it is a political organization in which the activities of government are divided between regional governments and a central government in such a way that each kind of government has some activities on which it makes final decisions (Riker, 1975). It is the coming together of different political units under a single political umbrella, a central authority that faithfully represents the whole and acts on behalf of the whole in such areas as external affairs, which are in a sort of social contract agreed to be to the mutual interest of the different constituent unit (Awa, 1976).

Federalism is a system of government in which power is divided between a central authority and constituent political units, such as states or provinces. In a federal system, the central government and the political units each have their own sphere of jurisdiction, with areas of authority that are exclusive to each and areas of authority that they share (Oluwaseun, et al., 2022). This division of power is typically codified in a constitution, which outlines the distribution of powers and the relationship between the central government and the political units. Federalism is often contrasted with unitary systems, where power is centralized in the national government, and confederal systems, where power is decentralized to the political units (Andrea & Peter, 2020).

Federalism, as a system of government, has been a subject of scholarly interest and debate for centuries. One of the earliest proponents of federalism was the philosopher Jean Bodin, who argued in the 16th century for a system of government in which power is shared between a central authority and regional entities. Bodin believed that federalism could help maintain political stability and prevent tyranny by distributing power among multiple levels of government (cited in Ayenew, 2021). In more recent times, scholars such as Daniel Elazar have studied federalism as a way to manage diversity within a country. Elazar proposed a typology of federal systems based on the relationship between the central government and the constituent units, distinguishing between ‘cooperative federalism’, where the central government plays a dominant role, and ‘dual federalism’ where the central government and the constituent units are more equal partners (cited in Colleen & Joshua, 2021).

Other scholars, such as William Riker, have focused on the political dynamics of federalism, arguing that it can lead to a ‘race to the bottom’ as constituent units compete for resources and investment by lowering taxes and regulations. Riker also highlighted the role of political parties in federal systems, noting that they can either help to stabilize the system by mediating conflicts between levels of government or exacerbate tensions by exploiting regional differences for political gain (cited in James, 2019).

### **Concept of Democracy**

The meaning of democracy has evolved over time and can be understood in various ways. At its core, democracy is a system of government in which power is vested in the people, who exercise it directly or through freely elected representatives (Yascha, 2018). Democracy is a set of ideas and a system of government that possesses characteristics of a government created by a genuine consent of these people: the government must uphold the principles of the rule of law and the government also exists for the people. In other words, it must be responsive to the duties it owes the citizenry as a government. Nwankwo (2016), define democracy as a set of ideas and a system of government that possesses characteristics of a government created by a genuine consent of the people. This implies that the government must uphold the principles of the rule of law and the government also exists for the people. In other words, it must be responsive to the duties it owes the citizenry as a government. Hague and Harop (2004, p.112) corroborate this view when they assert that “it pertains to the given right vested within the citizens of a country holding the democratic agreement with the state to partake in free, fair, competitive and meaningful electoral procedures with the drive to make key voter choices in areas of which political parties/candidates and their ideologies are accounted into governance”.

### **Concept of Restructuring**

Ekekwe (2017) position on restructuring is somewhat different. This is because he conceived restructuring as simply calls by those who are frustrated in their attempts to continue to loot the state’s resources. In his words,

The real problem in my view is the character of our inherited State and the nature of its ruling class that has evolved in it. This ruling class, by definition, is the major beneficiary of the existing power structure and its associated processes. It is the class in which representatives of most, if not all, the ethnic and religious groups in the country, can be found (Ekekwe, 2017, p.69).

Furthermore, Ekekwe (2017, p. 69) noted that;

Although the term restructuring has become popular, there is to the best of my knowledge no equally popular meaning that has been attached to it. It has simply become the phrase under which hides the dissatisfaction many Nigerians feel about the overbearing State and its unresponsiveness to the demands of the citizens

Restructuring is the act of re-organising the legal, ownership, operational or other structure for the purpose of making it more manageable or better organized for its present needs. Restructuring in this context is corporate restructuring which means constitution that will support good governance, respect for citizen, equity and equality (Folajoba, 2017). To some scholars restructuring connotes a deliberate and planned change (Hallinga, 1997; Lam, 1997; Denharh & Denhart, 2002). To them, any intervention which fails to produce fundamental change in the public is not restructuring. To this end, restructuring is a systematic intervention aimed at improving the structure, operations system and procedures to enable its transformation as a multifaceted agent of change, and as a veritable instrument of social cohesion and socio-economic development (Nkwede, 2013).

## PART 111

### **Restructuring and Socio-economic Challenges of the people of the Niger Delta Region**

Nigeria is a federation made up of three tiers of government; federal, state and local government. Each of these levels of government is assigned certain constitutional responsibilities and functions. The federal government is empowered constitutionally to discharge functions in the exclusive list; currency and foreign relations, both the federal and state government discharge the functions in the concurrent list; economy, education and health why the state government discharge the functions listed in the residual list; chieftaincy affair. Again, the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria clearly vested the power of exploration of resources on the federal government. Section 40 (3) of the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria provides that “notwithstanding the foregoing provision of this section, the entire economic zone of Nigeria shall be vested in the government of the federation and shall be manage in such a manner as may be prescribed by the National Assembly” (CFRN, 1999 Constitution as amended). Explicit in the above provision of the constitution is the exclusive right of the federal government to harness all the minerals both onshore and offshore. This has implication especially for oil bearing communities in the Niger Delta region who are at the receiving end of the activities of oil exploration. As noted by Okoko and Ibaba (2006 cited in Nna, 2024), the burden of Nigeria’s diversity is borne by the people of the Niger Delta region because their oil and gas resources are exploited for the development of the rest of the country. This has led to poverty, environmental degradation and general underdevelopment of the region.

A report by the Socio-Economic Rights and Accountability Project (SERAP, 2023) has revealed how communities in the Niger Delta continue to live in depressing and deplorable conditions, despite the fact that the wealth derived from these areas is the main economic mainstay of the country. According to the report, the communities in the Niger Delta region remain the poorest in the country. The report further highlights extensive social, economic, and environmental degeneration largely affected the lifestyles and wellbeing of the people of the Niger Delta (SERAP, 2023). Data released by the National Bureau of Statistics (2023), revealed that oil accounted for about 90% of Nigeria's export earnings and about 70% of government revenue.

**Table one, volume of oil produced by oil bearing state in Nigeria (%)**

S/N	States	Percentage	Year
1	Delta	30	2023
2	Akwa Ibom	22	2023
3	Rivers	18.20	2023
4	Bayelsa	18.20	2023
5	Imo	7	2023
6	Ondo	2.50	2023
7	Abia	1.40	2023
8	Edo	1.21	2023
9	Cross River	1	2023

National Bureau of Statistics (2023)

The data above revealed the percentage of oil produced by oil bearing states in the Niger Delta region; Delta state occupy the highest position, follow by Akwa Ibom while Cross River state lack in the bottom

According to the United Nation Development Programme (SDG, 2015), the people in the region are living in deplorable health conditions owing to the activities of oil exploration. A 2011 report by the UN Environment Programme estimated that after decades of repeated oil spills in Ogoniland, it would take thirty years (30) to reverse damage to public health and the regional ecosystem (UNEP, 2011). The report noted that unborn and newborn infants are most vulnerable to oil-related pollution because they have not yet developed basic defense such as the blood-brain barrier, which helps protect against toxic chemicals (UNEP, 2011). It further stated that mothers who ingest poisoned food or contaminated water are also at greater risk of maternal malnutrition and sickness, potentially increasing infant mortality risks (UNEP, 2011).

On poverty, the Multidimensional Poverty Index (2022) report of the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), shed light on the staggering number of people living in multidimensional poverty in Nigeria's oil-rich Niger Delta region, comprising states such as Akwa Ibom, Rivers, Cross River, Edo, Delta, and Bayelsa (NBS, 2022). Delta state has 2.73 million people in poverty, which is just under 50 percent of its population. Edo has 1.4 million people living in multidimensional poverty, representing 35.4 percent of its estimated 3.9 million populations. Rivers State has 4.4 million people living in multidimensional poverty which account for 62.4 percent of the state's estimated 7.47 million inhabitants. Cross River State also struggles significantly, with 3.44 million people living in multidimensional poverty, constituting a staggering 75.6 percent of the state's population, with 5.08 million, this represents over 71 percent of its total population of 5.451 million people while Bayelsa state has 2.61 million people living in multidimensional poverty, constituting a staggering 88 percent of the state's estimated 2.9 million inhabitants (NBS, 2022).

It is in the face of these dire socio-economic challenges that the people of the Niger Delta region agitate for resource control to be in charge of their God given resources. This is contrary to what is obtainable in some federal arrangement like Canada where the constitution of the Canada federation also known as the British North American Act of 1957 provides that "all lands, minerals and royalties belonging to the several provinces of Canada, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, all the unions and all the sums due them or payable for such lands and minerals or royalties shall belong to the several provinces of Ontario, Quebec, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick of which the sum are situated or arise" ( Bartlett, 1983 cited in Nna, 2021).

### **Agitations on Political Restructuring in Nigeria**

The rationale behind restructuring is premise on the ground that Nigeria is like a bewildered couple who have gotten their marriage license after a lavish wedding; yet neither of them really understands the meaning of marriage or their roles as husband and wife in the union. Legally, they are married but functionally, their union is a crippled one. This couple will be at loggerheads until somehow, someday, they forge an agreement on the type of income they want and what are their respective duties in making that home come into existence. In other words, Nigeria must give our legal marriage its proper functional underpinning (Tinubu, 2017).

According to Nwabueze (2017), the object of re-structuring for which there is a widespread clamour among Nigerians, is not to break up the country or to enable agitators to secede from its sovereignty and territorial integrity. Far from that, the object is, by reforming the governmental structures and attuning them to the needs and wishes of the people, to ensure that the immense diversity of ethnic nationalities comprised in the state will continue to co-exist together in peace, prosperity and progress as citizens of the one country united by common interests, common aspirations and a common destiny. The clamour for restructuring must therefore be seen as a clamour for the setting up of appropriate platforms or fora to renegotiate suitable governmental

structures for the pursuit and realization of our common needs for development, good governance and national transformation.

The agitation for political restructuring in Nigeria is rooted in the country's historical and contemporary challenges. Nigeria's current political structure, established during the colonial era and maintained through various military and civilian administrations, has faced criticism for its perceived inequities and inefficiencies. Proponents of restructuring (Oduah, (2017) argue that a more decentralised system would better reflect Nigeria's diversity and allow for more effective governance. They believe that devolving more power to the states or regions would empower federating units to address issues such as security, infrastructure development, and resource management more efficiently. However, opponents of restructuring (Ndibe, 2016) raise concerns about the potential for further fragmentation along ethnic and regional lines. They argue that a strong central government is necessary to maintain national unity and address challenges that require a coordinated and national approach.

Perspective on political restructuring varies from region to region in Nigeria. For instance, the North is opposed to restructuring. They often express concerns that restructuring could weaken the North's political influence and lead to a loss of control over key national institutions. They also fear that political restructuring would weaken the North economically since they are not economically viable and rely mainly on revenue from oil explore from the Southern region. Below is table that depict internal generated revenue and monthly allocation from some selected states in Nigeria.

**Table two, revenue accruable to states in Nigeria**

S/N	States	INTERNALLY GENERATED REVENUE (IGR)	FEDERAL ALLOCATION
1	Lagos	₦382,181,548,627	₦119,024,027,796
2	Rivers	₦112,780,373,912	₦172,627,019,317
3	Ogun	₦84,554,199,594	₦39,644,151,088
4	Ondo	₦24,788,059,726	₦64,686,727,823
5	Kwara	₦23,046,944,296	₦44,573,231,265
6	Abuja FCT	₦65,519,663,655	73,169,929,941
7	Edo	₦28,425,496,842	₦69,169,646,683
8	Sokoto	₦18,762,009,020	₦54,460,056,835
9	Delta	₦58,439,598,672	₦213,634,192,630
10	Enugu	₦22,145,937,216	₦53,104,455,150

National Bureau of Statistics (2023)

From the table above, we can clearly see that among the top ten states in Nigeria in terms of IGR, it is only one Northern state (Sokoto) that occupied eight position. This further portray that Northern states are not economically viable and in the face of political restructuring, they may not be able to survive. This is the major fear express by those in the Northern region.

The position of the Southern region on political restricting is very clear; they want an atmosphere where they can control and manage their own resources for the benefit of the people of the region. This is the basis of the Niger Delta struggle and the agitation by the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) including the struggle for the creation of "Oduduwa Republic". The debate on political

restructuring is still ongoing in Nigeria; it is believe by many that only political restructuring can address the myriads of socio-economic and political challenges that bedeviled Nigeria.

## **PART IV**

### **Findings**

1. This study found that the Niger Delta region is riddle with socio-economic challenges despite the huge financial contribution of the region to the national coffers. This corresponds with Obi (2010) view who argued that oil is more of a curse than a blessing to the Niger Delta people owing to the deplorable social conditions of the people
2. This paper found that the basis of agitation for political restructuring is anchored on the injustice that characterised the Nigeria federal system. Some states in the federation contribute little or nothing to the federation account but end up sharing revenue from the national coffers. This is detrimental to states where the resources are generated as it denied the people access to God given resources for the betterment of the local inhabitants.

### **Conclusion**

Federalism as a system is confirmed as a panacea to centralisation of power, more especially in a heterogeneous society like Nigeria. It is also established that there are issues that are threatening the peaceful coexistence of Nigeria's federalism. Chief among these issues are the challenge of political restructuring. The study emphasised that although the call for restructuring is not altogether a recent development as there have been demands for it even before 1999. The inhabitants of the Niger Delta region still wallow in poverty, environmental degradation and general underdevelopment despite the abundant resources domiciled in their environment. These among others have necessitated the continued call and agitations for political restructuring. It is believed that political restructuring will help to a large extent address some of the grievances of the different ethnic groups in Nigeria. Through political restructuring, the people of the Niger Delta region will be in control of their resources in terms of ownership, control and this will enhance resource development. The system of federalism operational in Nigeria is also prevalent in almost all African countries where resources are controlled by the national government at the expense of the region that generates those resources and this has not aided the development of resources in Africa.

### **Recommendations**

- i. The recommendations of the 2014 National Conference (CONFAB) should be implemented to give every ethnic group and segment within the Nigeria federal system a sense of belonging.
- ii. Nigeria's federalism needs to be reviewed to redefine the functions, powers and responsibilities of the federal government and federating units. This will aid the growth of democracy and ensure full independence of federating units

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