

THE NEED FOR POLITICAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL APPRAISAL OF IGBETI MARBLE AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN OYO STATE, NIGERIA

by

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Abstract

In spite of the high deposit of natural resources in Nigeria, the country's economy is nothing to write home about. The concentration of the Nigerian government on oil exploration at the expense of other natural resources has become issue of worry. Most natural resources remain unharnessed and untapped because they are under the purview of the federal or central government. This paper investigates the issues surrounding the Igbeti marble and makes use of interviews, journals abstracts and internet source. It discusses that the Igbeti marble had remain unexploited by the federal government and more importantly had portend political and environmental disadvantages on the host community and therefore recommends that in the spirit of true federalism the deposit should be ceded to the state government as this would create more employment and income and practically, it will also douse the tension between the two opposing camps, thereby allow for environmental protective regulations amongst others.

Key words: Resource control, Politics, Environment, Marble, Igbetiland

Introduction

Over decade now, the issue of resource control has been a major discourse among scholars in the economic and political parlance in Nigeria and had generated heated debate. Issues around generation and disbursement of income breed high level of focus and a number of times conflicting

opinions and moves. There had been in Nigeria over time concentrated fireworks on resources coming into the country through oil exploration to the extent that it appears to be the only natural resource in the country. This is borne out of the fact that 90 percent of income generated by the country is credited to oil (Damulak, 2017). All states in Nigeria

draw their existence and continual survival from the proceeds of oil. This is in view of the fact that the federal poll from which allocations are drawn derives from oil proceeds.

Nigeria is a very peculiar country and a highly heterogeneous one that inhabits about two hundred and fifty (250) ethnic groups speaking different languages (about 450). This nature of the country is brought to the fore by its feature of diversity of beliefs, customs, institutions, values and culture amongst others (Dickson and Asua, 2016). It is in a bid to achieve or work towards the unity of the country that the foremost nationalist at independence adopted the federal system of government. The federal system of government according to Wheare (1964), in Dickson and Asua (2016), is the method of sharing powers so that the central and regional governments are each within a sphere coordinate and independent. To Wheare, a federal system of government presupposes some areas of cooperation or convergence between the federal/central and states/regional government and other areas where they are at liberty to take independent actions (including resource control). It is also opined to be a system where powers are shared combining the forces of ethnic cleavages and cultural diversities in a way that it will not pull apart the component units (Ebegbulem, 2011).

The Nigerian federalism is clearly different from the one operated in countries like United State of America (USA) and Canada where federalism is coming together of previously sovereign and independent states (Dickson and Asua, 2016). Under true federalism the component regions/states are constitutionally empowered to control the natural and other resources within their jurisdiction and are

required to pay a certain or specific percentage of the revenue so generated from the resources to the central or federal government. One major component of federalism is resource control (Ebegbulem, 2011; Shehu et al, 2017). The Nigerian federalism is a clear reverse of this. This coupled with its colonial heritage, prolonged military rule, identified artificially created imbalance and over centralization had been credited to be a cog in the wheel of Nigeria federalism. By all intent and purpose, the practice of federalism in Nigeria is fraught with a lot of criticism, agitation, hostilities, animosity, accusation and counter accusation of oppression, domination, injustice, inequalities, exploitation among its components that is the federal and states governments.

Nigeria is richly endowed with high deposit of natural resources and solid minerals to the extent that hardly are there any state without the deposit of one or the more natural resource. Unfortunately, the Nation operated a monolithic economy with concentration on oil at the expense of other natural resources which could be sources of income to other states. The inability of Nigeria to practice true federalism and the inclusion of resource control in the exclusive list has made it increasingly difficult for states to explore the natural resources. The typical example used in this work is Igbeti Marble in Oyo state. The Igbeti marble is therefore, left to the activities of illegal miners at the detriment of the state and more importantly the people of Igbeti.

This paper therefore poises to examine the political and economic dimensions of the existence of marble in Igbeti and proffers solutions that would enable the profitable exploitation of the marble to the advantage of

the community, the state and the country as a whole.

Conceptual Clarifications

Resource Control

Resource control has been viewed from different perspectives by scholars. It is defined as the control and management of resources by state or local government from whose jurisdiction the natural resource is domiciled (Raji et al, 2013). It is believed that this is carried out under specific guidelines or arrangements as to remittances from proceeds of such extraction. In a contrary view, it is opined to be access of community and state government to natural resources found within their geographical area as well as the liberty to develop or utilize these resources without reference from the federal government (Dickson and Asua, 2016). Ya'u (2001), observed resource control as the substantive power or authority for the community to collect income and other advantages accruing from the exploration, exploitation and utilization of resources in their domain and deploy same for their development purposes.

Resource control is therefore, the ability or the constitutional provision of state's control of natural resources at their disposal (i.e. geographical area) especially as it affects exploitation and proceeds or income so generated. This is however with a caveat (in view of the fact that the federal/central government cannot exist without income) that a certain percentage of the income be released to the federal government to enable it take care of essential centrally controlled services. By implication state should be empowered to discover, explore, mine and generate income, independent of overbearing influence of the federal/central government.

Politics

Politics as a concept has enjoyed a number of definitions from different scholars. According to Dahl (1984), it is any persistent pattern of human relations that involves to a significant extent, control, influence, power or authority. It is opined to be about the steps or processes put in place, directed overtly or tacitly towards seizure, consolidation and the use of state power. Politics is about who gets what, when, how and why (Dickson and Asua, 2016). However to Easton (1965), it depicts a persistent pattern of human interaction in a society mainly oriented towards authoritative allocation of values.

Politics therefore, is not just about the quest to acquire or the acquisition of power and authority alone but also what such power when acquired can get for the recipient in terms of income (economic emancipation) or other benefits. The interplay of politics hence, is not just an end but a means to an end. It becomes means or methods through which allocation of income and other benefits are based.

Environment

The Oxford Dictionary (2018), defined environment as the surroundings or conditions in which a person, animal or plant lives or operates and the natural world as a whole or in a particular geographical area especially as affected by human activity. This definition implies that environment is not a static thing. It is dynamic to the extent that it is subject to change by human activities i.e. what human choose to do or not to do. It is also opined to be the totality of all surroundings (air space, land, water) of a living organism, including natural forces and other living organism, including natural forces and other living things which create opportunities and situations for development and growth as well

as of danger and damage (“environment”, 2018). Environment therefore, is not a stable condition. The physical structure can be effected upon by human activities whether negatively or positively.

History of Natural Resources in Nigeria

Nigeria has a high deposit of several natural resources including lead, tin, zinc, columbine, gold, coal, phosphate, gypsum, iron ore, tantalite, bitumen, galena, shale rite amongst others (Okechukwu et al, 2009; Raji et al, 2013; Ayinla, 2014; Fayemi, 2016 and Damulak, 2017). This is to the extent that every state in the country has been credited to have a deposit of at least one resource or the other. The discovery and exploration of natural resources started around 1903 and 1904. By 1905, the Royal Niger Company came into Nigeria, one major multinational company to explore our resources. The exploration of gold in what is now Niger and Kogi states started in 1914 with the enactment of the Mineral Act while that of coal in Enugu commenced with another act in 1916. The geological survey of Nigeria in 1919 heralded the takeover of all natural resource deposits within the geographical area. This cascaded into an establishment of the parent headquarter in Kaduna by 1930 (Shebbs and Njoku, 2016 and Damulak, 2017).

The Mineral Ordinance of 1946 which reposed the ownership and control of all mineral substances to the crown in London was enacted to give a legal background to the development of solid minerals in Nigeria and later came up with different act for the solid minerals for exploration (Ibid 2016 and 2017). Before the discovery of oil around 1960’s, tin was the major natural resource being exploited and generating around 1 percent of income (Okechukwu, 2009 and Fayemi, 2016). 1971 heralded increased

involvement of government in natural resource exploration and by 1972 the Nigerian Mining Corporation (NMC) came on board for the exploitation of discovered minerals (coal and marble) which are economically viable through Indigenization Decree of 1972 (Damulak, 2017).

After the discovery of oil and its economic viability, the Raisman commission came up with a report on resource control in 1958. Allocating distributing of income generated with 50 percent to the Niger Delta, 30 percent to the federal government and 20 percent to the regional governments which allows a fair share of the oil resources by the whole country (Shebbs and Njoku, 2016). After independence the 1963 Republican Constitution in Nigeria reflected true federalism because it makes provision for the federating regions to own, control and develop the natural resources deposit in their respective regions. They are to pay tax to the federal or central government from the revenue generated from the exploitation of natural resource(s). The tax so paid to the central government was expended on essential services like defense, foreign affairs, customs amongst others (Shehu et al, 2017). The military intrusion into the administration of Nigeria caused the suspension of the 1963 republican constitution and consequently the sharing formula introduced by the Supreme Military Council and Federal Executive Council through promulgation of Decree 9 of 1971 and later the Land Use Act of 1978 which ceded all ownership of land to the federal government. After the military rule the subsequent constitution of Nigeria had towed this same line. With the 1999 constitution (second schedule, part 1 (34 & 39) which made provision for all mines and minerals including oil fields, oil mining, geological surveys and natural gas to fall under the

exclusive list which is under the purview of the federal government.

The constitution in section 162 (2) also provided that states are entitled to 13 percent of the revenue generated from the natural deposit in their states (Shehu and Njoku, 2016). The Nigeria strand of federalism is a unitary or centralized federalism.

Historical Background of Igbeti

Igbeti town in Oyo State of Nigeria is a centrally located town. It is bounded by Ilorin to the east, Ogbomoso and Oyo to the south, Igboho and Saki to the west and to the north by Old Oyo Reserve Forest. In terms of the topography it is located in a valley surrounded by sixteen (16) hills and presently, it is headquarter to Olorunsogo Local Government in Oyo State. The population is about a hundred thousand and it have Yoruba natives, however inhabited alongside the natives by Hausas, Fulanis, Ibariba, Tapa, Igbira, Ghanaians and Togolesse. Majorly Igbeti people practice farming with some others going into trading, mining and few civil servants. The town is noted for a large deposit of marble spanning over fourteen (14) kilometers and other mineral resources like kaoline, cement, hard salt, iron ore amongst others (Ogunniyi, 2011, Omole, 2012 and Adesupo, 2018).

The Igbeti marble was discovered in 1969 by some natives who usually wash their harvested yams around the deposit area while returning from their farms. The marble deposit (which was claimed to be located on a portion of land which was claimed to belong to the Seriki family). The discovery was reported to king Folarin who was on the throne then who in turn informed the government of the then western region which brought machines to verify the claims and

also examine the type of natural resource. This led to the discovery of Marble in the area. The type was claimed to be the finest and purest in Nigeria (the purest in Nigeria). The major expectation then was that the government would explore or mine the marble but some influential natives (who were alleged to have worked against the wish of the people) brought in a private investor to do the exploration to the benefits of these few people and exclusion of most natives and any major or noticeable benefits to the general populace. This was attributed to the neglect and non-proactive move on the part of the government. The private investor was said to have exploited the resource for a number of years during which hostilities, conflicts, and animosity became the hallmark of the relationship between the two opposing groups. The western region government after a while sent a delegation for on sight investigation which did not yield any positive results. The marble question took a worrisome dimension when police arrested some natives who were against the private exploration of the natural resource. The insistence of those who wanted government to take charge led the government of Chief Bola Ige to take over the exploration from the private investor who had benefited from the deposit for about twenty-five years. The return of government's presence on site did not bring in noticeable development as regards the marble site. This is explainable by the fact that the constitution of Nigeria ceded all natural resources (regardless of their location) to the federal government under the exclusive list, thereby, incapacitating the state government as regards their control (Ogunniyi, 2011; Omole, 2012 and Adesupo, 2018).

Challenges of Natural Resources' Extraction

The extraction of solid and natural minerals (including Igbeti marble) in Nigeria is bedeviled with a number of problems or challenges. These include improper and inadequate exploration (i.e. inability to harness and tap effectively these resources) under utilization, ineffective exploitation, unavailability of machines and equipment needed, lack of social amenities and infrastructural facilities, especially electricity to power the machines and equipment (where available). Due to the vastness of the country, it has been increasingly and very difficult for the federal government to be able to study and take effective and efficient possession of these deposits and more importantly governmental efforts are channeled towards the oil sector (Okechukwu, 2009 and Fayemi, 2016).

Moreso, the presence of the marble deposit in Igbeti has also taken political and environmental dimensions which if not handled carefully portends serious danger to the community and its inhabitants.

Political Dimensions of Igbeti Marble

Power is identified as the hallmark of politics and that it is precursor to the structure of relationships where one group is controlled by another (Millet, 1970). Politics is about power relations and determines who is in control or otherwise. However, it does not imply or foreclose attempts by the group under control employing all available means to have an upper hand.

The above explains the political dimension which the issue of Igbeti marble had taken among the natives. There had been intense animosity, hostilities, prejudices and aggression between the two opposing camps

as regards who should be in control of the deposit (private or government). This is to the extent that political parties are joined with this underpinning factor in mind. This was always intentional and a medium of carrying the hostility and disdain for one another to whatever level is deemed possible. This dimension is highly worrisome because the division played out along party lines allow for conflicts and sometimes fights and acts of thuggery, arson, carnage and banditry. The town is polarized to the extent that its unity is highly threatened which is seriously affecting the development of the land because the natives do not work together, agree or opinions on issues. Insecurity definitely works at cross purposes with development. They do not agree on how to channel, champion and harness their needs to the government as issues (most of the times intentionally) are seen and handled from different perspectives and angles. These had also over time been incessant land litigation among the land owners, some families and the marble industry (which had mined the natural resource). The resource that is supposed to be a unifying factor had now become a serious source of political polarization, division and upheavals.

Environmental Dimension

The inability of the Oyo State government to take possession of the Igbeti marble is having a major and an untold negative effect on the environment and consequently the community and its environs. This is majorly in view of the activities of unregulated and illegal miners who had invaded the area.

The activities of the private investor for over twenty five years which was not regulated or monitored by the government as well as its unceremonious exit had left on the site huge pits, about sixteen (16) which are hazards to

the people as they can fall into these pits and die. It is expected that if the state government should take charge, these pits can be filled up or converted to a better commercial use and thereby, generate some income into the state (Omole, 2012).

Another hazard is being experienced in the area of generation of dust which is injurious to human and animal health. In view of the fact that mining in the area is unregulated the government dust generated results in air pollution induced diseases and ailments which make the people prone to causing slow death and reduction in lifespan (Ogunniyi, 2011).

The lack of a functional physical planning which is about spatial ordering of land use for the purpose of creating conducive environment in the town (Omole, 2012), had led to most of the natives in bid to live close to the mining site where there is a beehive of commercial activities build their houses around the area. The inconduciveness of the area is evident by the effects the vibrations caused by the mining activities is having on the buildings i.e. cracks in the walls and weakening of the foundations. The danger of collapsed building is therefore highly imminent and can lead to loss of lives (Adesupo, 2018).

The unregulated noise being generated by illegal mining activities portends danger to the ear drums of the natives whose abode oxiliate around the area. In fact it has been established that exposure of the ear drums to unregulated noise can cause deafness over time to the victim.

Conclusion

It is unfortunate that the Oyo State government has not been able to benefit and generate income from the presence of Igbeti

marble which is within its geographical area. The removal of resource control from the exclusive list in the spirit of true federalism will allow for states to explore the opportunities that these natural resources deposit offers. The over concentration on oil which is prone to incessant and unstable price is highly unhealthy for the independent development of states. This will also reduce the over dependence of states on the federal government by creating employment and allowing states to be innovative. The agitation from the Niger Delta will also be drastically reduced. Host communities, (especially the women and children who are most vulnerable) experience of environmental, political, economic, social devastation would be mitigated against.

Recommendations

1. Though the federal government had increased its efforts towards effective and efficient exploration of mining (Mining Act of 2007), devolution of power of resource control would make state to put the deposit to profitable and adequate use.
2. The state (Oyo) government should employ the local government to engage in political education and mediating role among the natives to douse the tension and hostilities thereby making the opposing factors to sheath their sword.
3. The state government should engage in physical planning of the town in order to mitigate the environmental effects of the illegal mining of the marble.
4. Federal government should allow state to manage such resources will make them to be innovative and reduce or pressure on the oil sector.
5. The state takeover of the marble site will ensure the creation of a structured employment under strict and conducive environment and safety.

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