

## **African Traditional Religion Oath Taking and Resource Management in Nigeria**

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### ***Abstract***

*This paper critically assesses African Traditional Religion Oath Taking and resource control and management in Nigeria. An oath is taken to ensure that the parties of an agreement fulfil their assigned roles. In traditional oath taking, deities and ancestors are called to be witnesses to the agreement. The oath is a fearful ritual, and during rituals; words connoting calamity and death are used to make a pledge, stating that a person will keep to one's part of agreement. The aim of this paper is for the government to introduce traditional oath taking into the mainstream of the system to act as a watch dog or check and balances so that those who are keen in corrupt practices of our resources will pay for it. This work adopts a phenomenological approach. In Nigeria today our resources are in the hands of few elites. These corrupt elites have brought untold hardship to the people of the Niger Delta whereby most of our communities are lacking behind in development. As a result of lack of trust on the part of the elites and some of our wealthy citizens, the introduction of traditional oath taking by the chiefs and other traditional practitioners will help to forestall the deviation of our rich resources. This paper recommends that the government should introduce the system of traditional oath taking so that our elites and some of our elders in our respective communities will respect our God given resources and play the game in the manner that will bring lasting development to our respective communities.*

**Key Words:** African Traditional Religion, Oath Taking, Resource Control

## **Introduction**

Religion and Oath taking is indispensable in African tradition. Both religion and oath taking shape our minds and characters in positive ways. Through religion one always wants to treat others as himself or herself. This is because each religion emphasizes on the golden rule. Oath taking make one remember his or her promise and try to keep to it. It makes the resources managers to be always conscious of what they do in order not to act against the promise which they made.

Dispute between the Nigeria Federal Government and its constituents states have been common since the period of colonial administration. These conflicts and disputes often reach dimension which call to question the very basis of the Nigeria Federation. Minority groups in particular have found themselves struggling to resist various attempts by the central government to rob them of the very resources with which their regions are endowed for their own sustenance and survival (Attah, 2018).

Nigeria is operating a defective and fallible federation. This is because the Nigerian federal system has consistently undermined one of the most cardinal philosophical principles of federalism. This principle posits that 'beyond size, territoriality and constitutionality, the plurality and heterogeneity of the federal constituents must be recognized. By implication, the relative autonomy, independence and self-determination of these units must be appreciated and guaranteed in clear terms'.

The Nigeria federation is a captive state, dominated by powerful ethnic social forces constantly in conflict over material reward of state power. As the minority groups, especially in the south-south of the nation, struggle for the control of the resources with which their land is endowed, the majority groups struggle for the control of power with the sole aim of also controlling the God-

given resource of the minorities. Implicitly, therefore, the struggle for power in Nigeria is the struggle for resource control. The dialectics of Resource Control is critical to the understanding of the dilemma of minority oil producing areas in the Nigeria Federation. Unfortunately, Resource Control is also the basis for the unending conflicts and disputes between these federating oil producing units and the federal government as well as the majority ethnic groups (Attah, 2018).

Resource Control and distribution can be broadly defined as the way and manner the government revenue are shared among the various tiers of government. In another way round, how the resources available are harnessed and determined. It has been actually argued that the extent of independent decision making but the various tiers of government as to the provision of social and economic services is a function of the portion of the total revenue allocated to them. In a clear time, the greater the portion of total revenue allocated to both state and local governments the greater the degree of autonomy of these governments in carrying out various economic tasks. Over the years, the sharing of revenue equitably between the Federal Government and the component states of the federation (states and local governments) has been a tussle of war. Since 1953 to date, every successive government after the Nigerian civil war (1969-1970) has made a bold attempted at reaching acceptable revenue sharing formulae but quite unfortunate that they are short of expectation. This paper, African Traditional Religion oath taking and Resource Control in Nigeria adopts a Phenomenological approach in tackling the subject matter.

### **Conceptual/Scholars View on Resource Control**

Scholars disagree as per the exact meaning of Resource Control. Roberts and Oladeji (2005), opined that, while one group conceives it as the total takeover of the resources located in the resource producing states by the people of those states, others understand it to mean that the stakeholders in the resource-bearing area should manage greater proportions of the resources harnessed in those areas. This implies that scholars and even agitators define the concept largely from different and individualistic views. Accordingly to Ifedayo cited in Dickson and Asua, (2016), opines that resource control involves the access of communities and state governments to natural resources located within the boundaries and freedom to develop and utilize these resources without reference from the Federal Government. Douglas (2005), observes that it is an actual control of resources by the people who live in communities with these resources for the support of life. Hinryik (2009) defined resource control as the control and management of resources are extracted. The State or Local Governments would manage the resources from their territories under the federal guidelines (especially environmental ones), and then remit prescribed percentage of the Federal Centre. Dickson and Asua, (2016) further opined that resource control is the principle that every federated unit must be empowered to be self-governing. It amounts to an expression of self-determination by the zone which places collaborative duty on other parts of the country to assist the zone in the realization of their objectives. According to Ikorukpo (2002), a common thread linking all the protests is the feeling of the people in spite of their oil resources and the governmental deterioration consequent on the resource exploitation.

Dickson (2006) posited that “the demands for resource control clearly demonstrate that (fiscal federation) is still an inserted issue. Yet it is an issue we must find a way to resolve if we must continue as a federation”. Ikelegbe (2004) asserted that “the tempo, activity, cohesion and commitment of the civil groups indicate that the state resource authority and the state regional resource distribution would have to be negotiated, redefined and reconstituted if national stability and unity is to be sustained. According to Ekpo and Enamidem Ubok-Udom (2003), the wealth of the nation devolves on its owners, but in their own case they have nothing to show for it, except for paradoxical poverty. In addition, they also argue that in the United States of America, the oil producing states control their oil resources and wonder why the same principle could not be applied to Nigeria.

Given the over breaking domination of the Central Government and its control of fiscal resources, the state and local government have become mere conduits for the dissemination of federal resources to sub-national populations, and for the representation of the distributive claims of these communities at the centre. The scenario has clearly brought the following effects on the people of the Niger Delta.

- Deterioration in the quality of life of the people due to neglect and marginalization by the central government;
- Ecological devastation of the Niger Delta due to oil exploitation without any efforts as its replenishment
- Denial of the Niger Delta people of their natural rights to ownership and control of their land and resources through instrumentality of undemocratic state legislations like land use Degree of 1978, Petroleum Act of 1969 and 1991, the land (Title vesting, etc) Decree No. 52 of 1993, etc;

- Conscious and systematic obliteration of the principle of derivation by successive military and civilian regimes in Nigeria;
- Sustained under development of the Niger Delta region. Given the reality of these facts and the urgent needs to reverse them, the people of the Niger Delta have been and will continue to be consistent in their justified agitations for self determination, resources control and true federalism.

### **Sustainable Peace and Development of the Niger Delta**

There is no doubt that the Niger Delta is in need of sustainable economic development. The Niger Delta, however, may not develop without coming to terms with the following issues.

- How wealth is produced and distributed within the Niger Delta
- Who owns and control the factors of production in the Niger Delta;
- The social relations of production;
- The role and aims of multinationals in the Niger Delta;
- Exploitation of one class (the ruled) by another (the ruling) class,
- Whose mandate it is to develop the Niger Delta?

It is clear that economic development is not a smooth process; development is not linear but is characterised by ups and downs. It is therefore, crucial that the people of the Niger Delta perceive economic development as a process of struggle to be able to manage the economy of the region sustainably. But how can this be when the oil companies are given the impression that the local communities and the state in which they operate do not matter? How can this be when they are made to feel that it is only the NNPC and the Presidency that have control over the fate? How can this be when they are made to feel that they do not even have to

locate in the area where they operate? Has they ever been a worse form of colonialism than that? But the fault is not in our stars, but in ourselves, that we are underlings” (Attah, 2018). An outstanding issue in the sustainable economic and socio-political development of the Niger Delta is that, it is Niger Delta people who have a state in the development of their region. If the development of the Niger Delta is people-oriented and focused, then the economy will be managed in the interest of the majority of her people. To be able to develop the region, a substantial part of the resources in the Niger Delta must be controlled by the people of the Niger Delta. The people must be actively involved in the economic, social, cultural and political processes that affect their lives. The people must be involved in decision making, they must widen their choice and gain for themselves access to a much boarder range of opportunities. The people of the Niger Delta must increase their influence in the Nigeria socio-economic and political calculus; they must empower themselves in economic, social and political terms through the control of their resources.

The development of the Niger Delta will begin when the people take complete control and responsibility for the formulation of policies, strategies and programmes for development. The development of the Niger Delta cannot be imposed by the central government or self-interested multinational companies. It cannot be imposed by the World Bank and the IMF; It must be crafted by the Niger Delta people. The sustainable development of the Niger Delta must be built upon the existing human, material and natural resources with which the Niger Delta is endowed.

Another issue of importance in the region is the environmental implication of Resource Control. Multinationals companies must be committed to do business without serious damage to the environment. There are modern techniques for exploring and

exploiting petroleum; these techniques should be applied in the Niger Delta region.

They must be capacity building; the exploitation of our natural resources must enable our people to acquire skills. Companies in the region must develop capacity by training, retraining and making substantial contributions to educate at all levels. The advantage of this is for all stakeholders. There is plenty of gas in the region. Rather than the gas being flared, it should be given to potential investors at a reasonable cost, traditional oath taking should also be administer to the investors to swear if they go against the oath, in developing the area the gods of whom they swear will visit them and destroy all their facilities used in exploring our wealth.

### **The Concept of Traditional Oath Taking**

Oath taking, according to Odumakin (2009), is a distortion of value in politics to the extent that it transfers allegiance from the system to an individual, who for raw ambition or depravity, decides to take the place God in the life of the oath taker.

Okorie (2009) sees oath taking in the traditional sense as a situation where absolute loyalty or adherence to certain agreement are conditionality is prescribed and administered in the beneficiaries of the agreement. This expected that whoever has taken such oath will not escape the punishment or sanction of a certain supernatural force or deity if the oath is flouted. Nwankwo (2017) sees oath taking as a “statement or assertion made under penalty of divine retribution for intentional falsity.” This, according to Nwankwo, implies that “if the gravity of an offence committed is high and defies possible human solution, the accused is presented before the divinized spiritual forces for exoneration or punishment.” Nwankwo, identifies four major reasons why oaths



are taken in Igbo land; these are: first, for the establishment of truth of what is said, second for the maintenance of good human relations, thirdly, to maintain the secrecy of an institution or an organisation or an organisation and fourthly, they are taken when criminals are being sorted out.” The oath is a fearful ritual and most often words that connote calamity and deaths are used to make pledge, stating that a person will keep to one’s part of the agreement. In such rituals, death and wellbeing are used as guaranty to secure the agreements. As summarized by Ikeora (2016) parties to oath taking directly submitted to the supernatural tribunal to settle disputes brought before the deity. The workings of Oath taking rituals are coined to such a way that “time is normally given within which the offending party is expected to either be killed by the gods or be sick so as to confirm that he is the offending party (Nwakiby, 2004). An oath takers “guilt or innocence is established depending on whether or not the accused dies or falls sick within the time given (Oraegbunam, 2009).

Oath taking was and has continued to be one of those potent and important means of curbing wrong doing and detecting crimes as well as punishing culprits in society whether in the areas of the underworld practices such as armed robbery, kidnapping, sorcery, witchcraft, cultic, murders, child thefts or in such nefarious activities by lay about, liars and cheats, adulterers/fornicators, etc. in African society, the mere mention of traditional oath sends shivers into the spines of these evil practitioners. Oath is a way of vindication and authentication. (Ekarika, 2014). It is also pertinent to state categorically that, oath strikes great intimidation and fear in the minds and hearts of every African person. It is a potent institution all over the entire south-south states of Nigeria and beyond. There is an aura of secrecy around oath, not all people are conversant with his workings and regulations. All that people

know about it is its effect and application and the fear of oath is the beginning of wisdom, among adults and children whether as indigenes or aliens wherever it holds away.

### **Traditional Oath Taking and Resource Management in Nigeria**

It is observed that many people in the South-south region of Nigeria, belief strongly on the potency of traditional oath taking in curbing irresponsible resource management. Oath taking is a very important part of any customary arbitration process in Nigeria. Oath taking is a method of ascertaining veracity of evidence in traditional African settlement proceedings. Oath taking is very common amongst the people of the Niger Delta region. Hence oath taking is a common virtue in resolving dispute in Nigeria and many African countries and used in crime detection or resolution.

Traditional oaths are accommodated within the modern Nigeria Legal system as forms of statutory oath where traditional oaths perform the same role as English style oaths. Traditional oath taking should be taken as strategy to curb the excessive wastage of our resource control in Nigeria, foreign companies that come into the Niger Delta region should be made to swear via traditional oath. We should believe that even though many Nigerians profess or are adherents of foreign religion, such Islam and Christianity, a sizeable number of Nigerian still believe in the African Traditional Religion (ATR). It is wrong for anybody to condemn traditional oath as barbaric, fetish, crude primitive or uncultured, in Nigeria, traditional oath is recognised in the country. A person may take an oath in such a manner that he considers binding on him as confirmation of statutory presentation of traditional oath taking. Thus, regarding oath taking as criminal and illegal is certainly not correct as the practice is saved and accommodated within the

Nigeria legal system as form of statutory oath by virtue of the oath Act and laws. Many Nigerians believe in the efficacy of traditional oaths, thus if traditional oaths are used in management of our resources it will have a positive effect in our God given wealth.

Since oath taking in the English courts in Nigeria is flouted with impunity and reckless abandon, we recommend that traditional oath be introduced into the various methods for the administration of oath taking in their locality. This will save time and perhaps end delays associated with trials. Additionally, truth will be easily unveiled. Who will believe that in spite of the natural and human resources available in Nigeria, Niger Delta, this region continues to be in the forefront of abject poverty. Our present leaders have exploited our wealth, they act without the fear of God and as such their conscience have been painted black, and therefore, have decided to entrench extreme poverty, unemployment, corruption, bad leadership and lack of development in Niger Delta. Traditional oath taking will bring lasting solution to our resource control in Niger Delta, as oath takers are under bond to play the game according to its rules. Traditional oath taking should be introduced into the mainstream of our government; this will act as check and balance or a watchdog to our resource control. Our leaders should come together to promulgate laws in our constitution that any company that must explore our resources must swear to an oath of allegiance with the host states, failure to comply with the terms of the oaths will certainly face the dreaded consequence, this will go a long way in creating fears on those coming to explore our rich resources for their personal interest. Furthermore, some of our elites and statesmen who owned oil wells in our region should be made to swear to traditional oath to bind them, and failure to adhere to the terms of their oath taking will definitely and automatically face the

wrath of the gods, this will also forestall the excessive exploitation of our rich resources in the Niger Delta region. Traditional Oath taking will instil discipline and fear into the managers of our resources, for effective management and there will be that synergy between the parties. They should not use their powers and influence to stampede the owner of these resources but rather involve them in every matter that has to do with their region; else the oath sworn will play out on the defaulters. It is also observed that 90% of our oil wealth is owned by the Northerners, who exploit our rich resources for their personal gains. Oath taking should be administer to them, if not we will ever remain perpetual beggars while the elites exploit our wealth.

### **Recommendation**

1. If our region must develop in spite of its present state of coma due to lack of respect to our God-given wealth, it is believe that our legislators should promulgate a bill that will be pass into law, because the activities of some our elites in making their wealth through our resource will stop henceforth.
2. The introduction of traditional oaths in our locality the region that owns the resource control should be geared up to forestall the illegal exploitation of our resources.
3. That our Chiefs, paramount rulers and other titled chiefs should not be self-centred, but should act as a bridge not accepting gratification from any company whose intention is to exploit our resources.
4. Oath taking is the only measure or panacea to enact discipline respect to our resource control, and should be implemented forth with. Any multinational coming into Niger Delta region to exploit our wealth should be rigorously screened to swear to

this traditional oath of allegiance, before such company is granted free hands to explore our wealth.

5. Our youths should also be actively involved in the terms of the agreement made through oath taking with the multinational company, so as to carry them along in matters of their region.
6. They should be synergy between the government and the people of the region, to develop the area and each party should respect whatever agreement reached between the parties.

### **Conclusion**

This paper, African Traditional Religion oath taking and Resource Control critically examines the need for oath taking to be brought into the mainstream of our government, since oath taking is very pivotal in our traditional religion, it will go a long way to put to stop excessive wastage of our rich resources by some of our elites and statesman and other multinational companies who explores and exploits our wealth for their personal interest. Our people should rise to this challenge by coming to gather and introducing this system to forestall the excesses wastage our resource control. They should be administration of oath taking to all this multinational companies and the elite and statesman. If the exploiters go contrary to the agreement reach out, faces the consequences of their disagreement. The people of the Niger Delta region are endowed with great potentials and should not allow her potentials to be rubbed by the foreigners and other stakeholders in our country, but should rise and challenge the under development of this region by stopping the exploitation of our rich resources, not bringing in politics but rather speak out and also intervene when the Federal Government plays her politics on our God's given wealth. The development of the Niger Delta cannot be imposed by the central government or self-interest multinational

companies. It cannot be imposed by the World Bank and the IMF; it must be crafted by the Niger Delta. The sustainable development of the Niger Delta must be built up the existing human, material and natural resources with which the Niger Delta is endowed.

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