

## **Africa's Oil Coast: Reflecting on Relations Among Gulf of Guinea Coast States**

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### **ABSTRACT**

**The Gulf of Guinea coast is a region endowed with petroleum resources and this has brought prominence to the region as major oil consumers and oil companies are found in the region. The region has become an alternative source of energy to the Middle East and demand for the region's oil has continued to increase. Different countries make up the Gulf of Guinea with different colonial background, economic interest and levels of suspicion. This paper examines relations among these countries and its implication on their oil endowment and security. It suggests efforts that the Gulf of Guinea states can make to strengthen relations/cooperation among these states as this will enhance economic the development of the Gulf of Guinea coast.**

**Key Words:** Relations, Gulf, Guinea, Coast, Petroleum

### **INTRODUCTION**

The huge oil resource of the Gulf of Guinea has made the region attractive to the world oil consumers. These major oil consumers and upcoming consumers see oil as a vital component of their development. Oil wealth in the Gulf of Guinea has brought the relevance of the region to the fore as consumers are turning to the region for their crude oil imports. The United States and the People's Republic of China are actively competing for access to the resources of the region. However, the demand for oil in the Gulf of Guinea coast is not limited to the U.S. and China alone it has extended to other consumers nations such as Malaysia, South Korea, Brazil, and India. This paper takes a look at relations among the states of the Gulf of Guinea coast, challenges in their relations and the need/importance for cooperation among these states.

### **RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY**

The Gulf of Guinea as an area endowed with huge oil and gas deposit has become attractive to different world oil consumers. Since the end of the Gulf War and the deadly September 11, 2001 terrorist attack on the United States of America, there have been many top level conferences in the U.S. on the significance of Gulf of Guinea's oil to the United States economy. The reason is the prospects for expanded oil and gas production in the region. Unfortunately, the Gulf of Guinea enjoys no monopoly on this important opportunity. There are similar projections for increased oil and gas production in other parts of the world including the Middle East and the Caspian regions. The quiet competition between these regions is obvious and stiff, but it has not affected the Gulf of Guinea position in the global oil market.

The quest for the Gulf of Guinea resources has its inalienable challenges among the states of the region. The paper has examined the efforts made by these states to carve out a calculated and collective response to the interest of their numerous "friends" China, India, European community, United States and others. This study is important as it assesses relations among the Gulf of Guinea nations in the midst of their rich endowment. It should be noted that a healthy/peaceful coexistence is vital to the progress and development of the oil rich region.

### **RELATIONS IN THE GULF OF GUINEA COAST**

A country's involvement in good relations with other countries is a proof of its knowledge that it is not an island unto itself. Rather, it is an integral part of the region where it carries out its operations and must, therefore, make deliberate effort to build and sustain a relationship that would guarantee for it the goodwill, understanding and support of its neighbours for its operations and, in fact, existence. As Agwu (2006) puts it, the extent of amity and cooperation in the Gulf of Guinea would be determined by the extent to which the constituent states coalesce meaningfully and cordially. This coalesce will determine their capacity for multilateralism and the protection of their mutual interests when threatened by foreign interests.

These Oil rich countries of the Gulf of Guinea coast are as divergent as any random assortment of sub-Saharan African countries could be. They have different colonial background and are of different shapes and sizes, from large entities to islets, from demographic power-houses to scantily populated states. (Nigerian Tribune, August 9, 2004, p.17). Nigeria in particular, is seen to be in a class of its own and rarely discussed in a regional context. But something is shared by all. What they have in common is, firstly, reliance on the legal extraction of petroleum and rents that accrue from its sale. Petroleum is the life-line of these states to an unprecedented extent: an average of 60 per cent of government receipts emanate from the oil sector. (Traub-Merz, 2004, p. 68).

In recent years, several potentially promising initiatives have originated within the Gulf of Guinea region and from external actors to reduce regional tensions and strengthen security capacities. The key initiatives are efforts to resolve cross-border disputes, a Nigerian-inspired Gulf of Guinea Commission, an International Maritime Organization (IMO) Port Security Programme and a United States European Command (EUCOM) and capacity building programme titled "Gulf of Guinea Guard" embarked upon by the United States and Europe. (Traub-Merz, 2004, p. 69) These initiatives are laudable because they provide the building blocks for a comprehensive strategy. In the area of security relations, there is the EUCOM Gulf of Guinea Guard Naval Proposal. In 2003, the United States European Command (EUCOM),

based in Stuttgart, Germany, built on past United States Coast Guard assistance programmes and training courses for a comprehensive security concept for the Gulf of Guinea. (Agwu, 2009, p. 213) The United States strategic report on the Gulf of Guinea, the EUCOMs Gulf of Guinea Guard proposal sought to address the un-policed 2000 nautical-mile coastline of the region through assistance to improve control of littoral areas, enhancing physical security of national ports, and promoting collective maritime security beyond littoral areas. (Agwu, 2009, p. 213).

In October of 2004, the EUCOM assembled Gulf of Guinea Chief of Naval Operations, who had never before met as a group, for a coastal security conference in Naples, Italy. This signaled the birth of a dialogue among naval officials in these countries, and produced a joint statement to support security in the region, improve co-operation, and engage in further discussions with follow-up meetings. The EUCOMs operational objectives consist of a maritime surveillance system, a regional maritime control and interdiction-capable forces. (Agwu, 2009, p. 213) In the conference, they identified the lack of maritime co-operation among the Gulf of Guinea nations and the absence of functioning navies in most of the states as major obstacles to regional security. The study affirmed that the EUCOM has recognised the need for a holistic approach to security problems in the Gulf of Guinea, citing lack of governance and poverty as root causes of regional conflicts. They advocated for a long-term solution requiring corporate participation in socially responsible investment and development as well as international partners such as France and the United Kingdom. Recognising the need for any solution to be rooted in the region, they showed preference for providing assistance to a regional organisation. (Agwu, 2009, p. 213)

### **THE GULF OF GUINEA COMMISSION**

In order to foster cooperation among the Gulf of Guinea states a Commission was established. This commission was established by the treaty signed in Libreville, Gabon, on July 3, 2001 by Angola, Congo, Gabon, Nigeria and Sao Tome and Principe. (Gulf of Guinea Commission, 2020). This Commission was conceived by former Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo in 1999 as a regional organisation. As stated in a draft treaty in 1999, the purpose of the commission is to: achieve mutual trust and confidence amongst member states; create an atmosphere of mutually beneficial economic cooperation in the region; provide a framework of monitoring and control of environmental degradation and harmonise the exploration of natural resources, including petroleum, minerals, and fisheries; and coordinate and articulate common positions related to peace and stability in the region. The Commission has the potential to serve as a mechanism to prevent and resolve conflicts emerging from the economic and commercial exploitation of natural resources in the region. (De Oliveira, 2011).

The Commission constituted a permanent institutional framework for cooperation among the countries of the region, to defend their common interest and promote peace and socio-economic development based on dialogue, consensus, ties of friendship, solidarity and fraternity. (Gulf of Guinea Commission, 2020). In August 2006, the Gulf of Guinea Commission became fully operational. The commission is to handle and mediate in disputes in the region over oil exploration. The Gulf of Guinea Commission (GGC) with its headquarters in Angola is made up of the Gulf of Guinea States. In recent years, the Gulf of Guinea region has witnessed increase in oil exploration and fishing activities and in the same manner, there is an increase in conflicts and disputes over ownership of territory and exploration of resources have also increased among the region's countries. The establishment of the Commission, which aims at

monitoring peace agreements, preventing conflicts and resolving disputes, provides a good framework for consultation and coordination among the countries. (De Oliveira, 2011). Cameroon and Democratic Republic of Congo joined the Gulf of Guinea Commission in 2008. Membership of Gulf of Guinea Commission is open to other states in the Gulf of Guinea region for purpose of transforming the sub-region into a zone of peace and security. (Gulf of Guinea Commission, 2020).

### **CHALLENGES IN RELATIONS AMONG THE GULF OF GUINEA STATES**

Oil theft has been a challenge to the region. The scale of theft in Nigeria alone reportedly increased to an estimated 200,000 to 300,000 barrels per day in 2004 amounting to 10 per cent or more of national production. (De Oliveira, 2011). By 2007, about 680,000 barrels of crude oil were stolen everyday whilst total production hovers around two million barrels a day, this trend has continued even in 2020 almost uncontrolled. (De Oliveira, 2011). It is believed that such a large scale theft is being masterminded by serving and retired military generals and other highly placed Nigerians who unfortunately remain nameless. (De Oliveira, 2011). It is not only Nigeria that is facing this problem in the region. The result of this oil theft is that there are massive arms and armed militants in the Gulf of Guinea coast, particularly in Nigeria's Niger Delta. This has made the Gulf of Guinea region unsafe and has affected Nigeria's relations with Equatorial Guinea and partly Cameroun. These militants/criminals from Nigeria sometimes extend their activities beyond the boundaries of Nigeria and this has not gone down well with these countries.

Oil theft in Nigeria has infiltrated the highest echelons of the Nigerian navy, the army and other high ranking officials in the Nigerian government. Enforcement has been mixed. There is also awareness that while oil business and oil theft has armed and politicized Nigeria's Niger Delta, oil business has also generated significant cash wealth that has been used by authorities at the federal and state level to keep the Delta under their political control. Oil theft has generated significant cash in the hands of militants who use such wealth to purchase arms. This has polarised the security situation in that part of the Gulf of Guinea coast. (Nyewusira, 2012).

In boundary dispute resolution, the successful negotiation of complex disputed maritime boundaries in the Gulf of Guinea demonstrated the ability of the governments in the regions to deploy the political will and diplomatic skill to advance common economic interest through negotiation. This trend could enable cooperation among potential adversaries on issues ranging from customs enforcement and safety at sea to emergency oil spill response. Historically, the countries of the Gulf of Guinea have numerous disputed maritime and land boundaries. In many cases the disposition of fisheries or valuable under-sea resources are at stake. In other cases the displacement of population is at risk. Today, twelve countries have active border dispute, creating a source of tension among the countries in the region and, in many cases impeding resource development. (Goldwyn and Morrison).

In recent years, many of the disputes have been resolved or mediated by bilateral or multilateral dispute resolution fora. One major impetus is that under the law of the sea treaty that mandated African states in 2009 to claim any part of their continental shelf that exceeds 200 miles and resolve any existing boundary disputes in order to make this claim. Nigeria's desire to define its exclusive economic zone (EEZ) has been a major motivator of boundary dispute

resolution. Under former president Obasanjo's leadership, Nigeria settled disputes with Equatorial Guinea and Cameroun. (Goldwyn and Morrison).

It is important to provide a brief insight into the Cameroon/Nigeria boundary dispute. The conflict between Nigeria and Cameroon was a boundary and territorial dispute. One of the territories disputed was the *Bakassi* Peninsula. Attempts were made to resolve the dispute by bilateral negotiations and other peaceful conflict management strategies. But, in 1981, and then again in 1993 and 1994, the dispute nearly degenerated to a war between Nigeria and Cameroon. In 1994, the matter was taken to the International Court at the Hague. (Asobie, 2003) However, the dispute over the *Bakassi* Peninsula was the product of a number of contradictions. First there was a clash between tradition and modernity. The pre-colonial history of the ancient Kingdom of Calabar was haunting the post-colonial reality of Nigeria and Cameroon. Second, there was the tension between cartographical fact and cultural reality, the map was in conflict with the people. Third, there was conflict between the dictates of abstruse international law and the existential imperatives of struggling humanity. (Asobie, 2003).

In pre-colonial time, Bakassi was under the ancient Kingdom of Calabar, which in 1914 became part of Nigeria, under the British rule. (Asobie, 2003). The people of the main settlements in the Bakassi Peninsula owed allegiance to the *Obong* of Calabar. It was therefore, the *Obong* of Calabar that placed not only the Kingdom of Calabar itself, but also *Efiat* and *Idombi* in the Peninsula under British protectorate via a treaty of September 10, 1884. The Chiefs of *Efiat* and *Idombi* were co-signatories to the treaty. Later through a series of bilateral treaties and other legal instruments, the British ceded the territory, first to Germany, and then placed it under the mandate of the League of Nations and trusteeship of the League Nations. Meanwhile the British protectorates in Nigeria, including the Kingdom of Calabar, were merged with its colonies in the area, as one integrated British colony. Later, largely due to the political errors and indifference of Nigerian politicians, the Republic of Cameroon obtained the Bakassi Peninsula in the process of a plebiscite conducted by the United Nations in 1959 and 1961. By the same process, Nigeria also obtained some territories, which formally belonged to Cameroon. (Asobie, 2003).

In particular, the critical legal instruments that changed the status of the peninsula and its inhabitants were the following: the agreement between the United Kingdom and Germany signed in London on March 11, 1913; the Anglo-German Protocol signed in *Obokun*, on April 12, 1913; the exchange of letters between the British and German governments on July 6, 1914; the endorsement, in 1961 by both the United Nations General Assembly and the International Court of Justice, of the result of the plebiscites conducted in northern and southern Cameroon on February 11 and 12, 1961; and the diplomatic note accompanied by a map, dispatched to the government of Cameroon by Nigeria, in 1962, accepting the results of the plebiscites. (Goldwyn and Morrison).

The Cameroon dispute over maritime boundaries and the ownership of the *Bakassi* Peninsula was settled by 2002 decision of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) pursuant to a case brought by Cameroon in 1994 and joined by Equatorial Guinea. In a complex decision the ICJ awarded sovereignty of the Peninsula to Cameroon, and took other measures that, *de facto*, respected the oil practice line established by existing concessions. (Asobie, 2003). Nigeria was slow in implementing the decision, and hundreds of Nigerian troops remained on the Peninsula.

Discussions between Nigeria and Cameroon continued and the United Nations Secretary General appointed an envoy to mediate implementation.

Among the many disputes that Cameroon and Nigeria have had in the years since independence, the *Bakassi* Peninsula stood out very clearly as the most serious of all. This portion of the dispute drew increasing attention, as it became public knowledge that the Peninsula is very rich in petroleum and natural gas. The show of arms, for many years, left many dead and wounded. Fighting occurred on the lands surrounding the Peninsula, which were equally disputed, on the Peninsula itself, and on the sea. (Goldwyn and Morrison).

In order to foster good relationship between Nigeria and Cameroon over the *Bakassi* Peninsular and assist in implementing the judgment of International Court of Justice, the Cameroon–Nigeria Mixed Commission was established in 2002. (Goldwyn and Morrison). Cameroonians believe that some crimes that take place on their coastal areas emanate from Nigeria and they view Nigeria in that light, this if not checked, will also cause damage in their relation.

On the *Bakassi* crisis, Agwu, (2009) argues that the way and manner Nigeria's dispute with Cameroon over Bakassi was resolved, despite the warnings by Nigerian diplomatic and retired military experts, only promoted Cameroon's national interest to the exclusion of Nigerian and, indeed, regional as well as global interests. Agwu further argues that the resolution of that conflict only emphasised justice to the exclusion of equity. Because the resolution over the Bakassi dispute does not satisfy the aggregate of interests in the region, the Southern Cameroon Peoples Organisation (SCAPO) and some elements of the militants in the Nigerian Niger Delta have openly displayed an inclination to foment some instability in the region.

Other border demarcations disputes remain active, or held in abeyance by "gentlemen's agreements" among region's leaders. For example the dispute between Gabon and Equatorial Guinea over the rights to the Corisco Islands here both countries have licensed blocs in the disputed waters, but uncertainty has discouraged exploration activities. A United Nations envoy made efforts to resolve this dispute. Gabon and Congo-Brazzaville have agreed to allow their maritime dispute to remain unresolved, although a change in leadership or new discoveries of hydrocarbons could alter the status quo. Angola and the Democratic Republic of Congo dispute their maritime boundaries. However, Angola has licensed exploration in the disputed areas and permitted operations to commence.

Equatorial Guinea has had generally cordial relations with its neighbours. It is a member of the Central African Economic and Monetary Union (CEMAC), which includes Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Congo/Brazzaville and Gabon and the larger Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), also known as CEEAC). Relations with the Nigerian Government became cordial as the two countries delineated their offshore borders to facilitate development of gas fields. Equatorial Guinea had a minor border dispute with Cameroon that was resolved by the International Court of Justice in 2002. The Corisco border dispute with Gabon was resolved by an agreement signed with the help of United Nations mediation in January 2004, but the small island of *Mbane* and potentially oil rich waters surrounding it remain contested, and the case was submitted to the International Court of Justice in 2006. The then United Nation Secretary General, Ban ki Moon, opened up mediation efforts on June 10, 2008, to facilitate a settlement between the countries over the disputed island.

The round ups and expulsion of foreigners in Equatorial Guinea following the March 2004 coup attempt, caused tension between these neighbours. (Goldwyn and J. Stephen Morrison). A brazen daylight attack on two banks in Bata by two boatloads of armed bandits in December 2007, was presumed to have originated in the Niger Delta of Nigeria or neighbouring Cameroun, this temporarily led to heightened tension between these nations. (Asobie, 2003). According to Edjang (2012), security threat from Nigeria is a major security challenge in Equatorial Guinea and this has affected Nigerians resident in Equatorial Guinea as they are viewed with suspicion. Porous and permeable boundaries had often created frosty relations among the Gulf of Guinea nations. Apart from boundary issues, there is considerable dampness, in Nigeria's relationship with Equatorial Guinea, for the interaction between the two countries is substantially marred by suspicions and distrust. The root of it all lies in labour issues, the alleged non-compliance of Equatorial Guinea with the labour agreements it entered into with Nigeria, and the resultant brutalization of Nigerians in that country. (Asobie, 2003). The suspicion and distrust, which Equatorial Guinea harboured against Nigeria has been an age long one intensified when some Nigerian 'responsible opinions' began to canvass the annexation of that country by purchase from Spain, or its outright military occupation, the way India did to Goa. (Asobie, 2003).

That argument was supported by the fact that: The island is an important consideration in Nigeria's foreign policy. First, it is a near neighbour; secondly, much of the labours on Fernando Po's coffee, cocoa and timber plantations were Nigerians by birth. Of the island's population approximately forty thousand were Nigerians. Most were recruited contract labourers .... public concern over their treatment, resulted in considerable pressure from political and pressure groups on the federal government to take a tougher line with Spain, and, argued in favour of Nigeria's annexation of the Island. (Relations in the Gulf of Guinea).

Nigeria played an important role in the decolonisation of Angola. Today, Nigeria's relations with Angola are lackluster. This frosty relationship derives essentially from the competition between both countries over the control of, or a sphere of influence in Sao Tome and Principe. Although Angola and Sao Tome and Principe share the same colonialists, Portugal, they do not share common border, but it is common knowledge that whenever Sao Tome has any relationship with Nigeria, Angola gets jealous. The jealousy is attributed to Angola's annoyance over losing influence in Sao Tome and Principe. This jealousy is also necessitated by the fact that Nigeria is the biggest nation, and possesses the biggest military outfit in the Gulf of Guinea coast. (Relations in the Gulf of Guinea).

The major problem among the Gulf of Guinea nations over Nigeria could be hinged on suspicion against Nigeria and its intentions towards them as a giant and expectations and exploration of mineral resources along border regions. Nigeria has whipped up these sentiments and jealousy through in some cases her arrogance and patent lack of humility in the propagation of its so-called manifest destiny, as in when some Nigerians openly, in the presence of their less endowed neighbours, describe their country as the 'giant' of Africa, thereby intimidating those other small African countries. This has necessitated envy and hostility by these countries to Nigerian citizens whenever they meet. (Relations in the Gulf of Guinea).

In the minds of many Francophones, the Anglophones population is often, quite wrongly, associated with the large number of Nigerian migrants. (Cameroun: Fragile State, 2010). Many people from Nigeria particularly from eastern part of Nigeria settled in West Cameroun in the

late colonial period. At reunification in 1961, they immediately became foreigners in a land many had inhabited for decades. Many Nigerian nationals today have lived their lives in Cameroun, regularly renewing their foreign residency cards. Reunification left them more vulnerable in their relations with locals and with authorities but did not stop their success in business and trade. The harassment they suffer from Camerounian authorities remain of great concern today to Nigerian nationals and officials. (Cameroun: Fragile State, 2010).

### CONCLUSION

In conclusion, relations between the Gulf of Guinea states have been bedeviled by border/maritime disputes, caused by ill defined and improper delimitation of boundaries by former colonialists, cross-border criminal/pirate activities, militancy, oil theft, maritime conflicts and suspicion among the nations of the Gulf of Guinea coast of possible domination by Nigeria. Therefore, there have never existed, a tradition of any coherent, sustained and mutually unbreakable rapport among the states and these problems have adversely affected their cordial relations. Cordial relation is necessary for peaceful coexistence, economic growth/advancement and common purpose in the region. However, it should be noted that the Gulf of Guinea states have made concerted efforts, as identified above in achieving harmonious coexistence/relation among them. Such efforts at present and in the past were mainly championed by Nigeria and have yielded some positive results.

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