

Security Implications Of The Niger Delta Crisis On Nigeria's Polity From 1999 - 2010

Tounaregha Akposeimokumo

University of Africa, Toru Orua, Bayelsa State

Abstract: This paper examined the security implications of the Niger Delta Crisis on Nigeria's Polity from 1999 – 2010. Despite these huge foreign exchange earnings, the economy under performs, and the great majority of the people have not been able to derive much benefit, poverty, unemployment, decay in infrastructure, corruption at high levels, misery, lack of basic human needs. The frustration made the people of the area aggressive towards the Nigeria's federal government. Data was collected was using secondary sources, internet, articles in journals, newspapers, magazine and conference proceedings. Illegal bunkering has been a key source of funds for anti-government militant groups. People are not safe, kidnapping for ransom, stealing, poverty is on the high side, and vandalism is encouraged. From the lenses of human security challenge - teenage girls and boys abuse drug, cultism, and prostitution and out of school, the region is highly radicalized with proliferation of light weapons and general insecurity in Nigeria's Niger Delta are the bye products of militancy in the Region. It recommended among other things that, the Government of Nigeria, the other stakeholders and the international community should address the region's grievances before the security situation further degenerates. The paper concluded, that the most affected group of persons are the youths of the area.

Keywords: Militancy, Niger Delta, Crisis, Resource Control and Oil

I. BACKGROUND

The crisis in the Niger Delta has lasted for close to three decades, the impact on the country compel the federal government to grant the militants from the Niger Delta region Presidential Amnesty by late president Yar'adua to enable peace to reign in Nigeria and the region. Since the granting of Amnesty the country has experienced peace but very relative. For some, the crisis in the Niger Delta is over, as there are no major attacks targeted at government installations or government facilities, for some others, those living in the region, the conflict is not over, because of the fact that, that reasons for militancy are are ever present which has the tendency of reawakening militancy alongside its consequences.

The Niger Delta area is located in the South/South, South West/East geo political zone. South/South states include, Edo, Delta, Bayelsa, Rivers, Cross Rivers and Akwa Ibom, but with the ceding of Bakassi peninsular to Cameroon in 2007 by the International Court of Justice (ICJ), Cross Rivers cease to be

oil producing state. South West state includes, Ondo and South/East is made of Abia and Imo state. The Niger Delta covers an area of well over 70,000 square kilometer and it is made of over 40 ethnic groups with a population of about 15 million people International Crisis Group (2006). The Niger Delta is the largest wetland in Africa; it is rich in both renewable and nonrenewable natural resources such as oil, gas, bitumen, non- timber and timber forest products, wildlife, etc. Ninety-five percent of the total revenue for the Nigeria Government is generated from oil exploration in the Niger Delta, Shagari (2007).

Compared to other parts of Nigeria, the Niger Delta is geographically complex, it spans the coast of the bight of Biafra, from the Forcados River to the Oporo River and upstream. It has a criss-cross of creeks and dense forest nourished by heavy rains almost throughout the year. The area has sufficient land to accommodate four of largest cities in the world, London, New York, Buenos Aires and Moscow. The area under discussion is about 10,000 square miles, and controls an aboriginal population of about two million. A

special feature of the Niger Delta is its vast mangrove forests. The area is well endowed with mineral resources and this is the major cause of violent conflict in the Nigeria's Niger Delta region and other political disputes in the early 1960s, Boro (1966)

Crisis in the Niger Delta is a reoccurring decimal, the people's grievances are always there, and the yearnings are anchored on resource control and the need to restructure the Nigerian state to the advantage of the area. Her minority position in the country makes it so hard to influence government policies. In the 1960s, Isaac Jasper Boro and his Niger Delta Volunteer Service, for similar reasons took up arms against the federal government. His motives were to salvage his people from intimidation, marginalization and reduce their sufferings, in his wisdom, it is only when the Niger Deltans are truly independent that there will be development, hence, declared the Niger Delta Republic. Although, the arms struggles with the federal government lasted only for a while, he was suppressed charged to court and sentenced, he was guilty of treason. In the history of Nigeria, Boro Isaac is the first from a minority to ever challenge the federal government of Nigeria over injustice meted on the people. Today in Niger Delta, the legacies of Isaac Boro endure, succeeding generation of Niger Delta youths, especially from Ijaw extraction when Boro is from, continue to struggle and uphold the ideology of Boro following the Kaiama Declaration of 1998, in which the mandate was to uphold the ideology of Isaac Boro and the continuous struggle for resource control and true federalism in Nigeria. About five decade since the death Boro, nothing much have changed for the better of the people of the Delta, the poverty level is very much high, deprivation, under development, the discovery oil resources in the area has not produced the expected result and a restive youth population who are desperate not to maintain the status quo. Since 1999 when Nigeria returned to democratic rule, many militant groups have erupted demanding a better living condition for the Niger Deltans, carried out violent attacks on government installations, kidnapped expatriates (foreign oil workers), vandalized pipelines, these activities affected the economy such that oil production dropped significantly, some parts of Nigeria especially the Niger Delta became very unsafe for habitation, commercial activities dropped. The region since then has been securitized, thousands of Ijaw youths were recruited into militant groups and wide spread insecurity.

While the reasons the militants gave for involving in militancy can be justified, some have argued, that the Niger Delta leaders are also responsible for the under development of the region, because, despite the huge sum of money the region has received from the federal government there is still poverty. Thinkers who believe in this school of thought argue that, instead of the militant groups to be hostile to oil multinationals and by extension the federal government of Nigeria, they can as well attempt to right the wrong deeds of their leaders who derive so much pleasure under developing the region.

From an historical standpoint, the long neglect of the Niger Delta by the Federal Government contributed in no small measure to the conflicts in the Niger Delta, even the government granted those identified to be militants amnesty,

the conditions that necessitated the insurgency are still there, in fact, militancy in the region is taking new dimensions, instead of attacking the expatriates and government installations, restive youths have started kidnapping wealthy individuals in the region, parents of prominent individuals, a ready example in this regard, was the kidnapped Samson Siasia's mother at Agbere community, the kidnapped of the father of the caretaker Magbisa Wellington in 2019, the kidnap of the Senior Special Adviser to the Governor Henry Seriake Dickson of Bayelsa state, Fyneman Wilson in 2018 all in Sagbama Local Government Area. In addition to this is that, because of how hostile the area has become, teenage girls are now so much involved in street cultism, young men and women abuse drugs and practice cultism as a religion and general moral decadence. All of these has serious human security threat to the people on one hand and the security of Nigeria's polity on the other hand. Against their background, the paper shall examine the security implications of the Niger Delta Crisis on Nigeria and the human security implications on the people of the area.

II. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Despite these huge foreign exchange earnings, the economy under performs, and the great majority of the people have not been able to derive much benefit, poverty, unemployment, decay in infrastructure, corruption at high levels, misery, lack of basic human needs, etc seem to be the lot of the people, oil rather than being a blessing to the people is now being regarded as curse. This is because, it has brought with it negative things rather than positive things.

This has led to resentment against the Federal Government of Nigeria and the activities of the oil companies in the region, the sense of the relentless crisis has deepened since the last decade, when a secretive group of armed rebels, operating under the name Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) intensified attacks on oil platforms and pumping stations operated by multi-national oil companies in the region.

Militants and other groups have killed soldiers and security guards, kidnapped both foreign and local workers, set off car bombs, which has led to oil spillage, degradation, under development, and suffering of the people in the region which again has brought threat to internal security in Nigeria.

The pertinent research question is what can be done to achieve permanent peace in the region? This study therefore, intends to investigate the Security Implications of the Niger Delta crisis on Nigeria Polity.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This work relies on a descriptive analysis to bring out the basic essence of the security implications of the Niger Delta crisis on Nigeria polity. However, since no work of this nature can be done in historical vacuum, we have had to delve into a little of history on Nigeria and the Niger Delta in perspective. The choice of this method is borne out of the undeniable fact that, the era under focus and the security implications of the

Niger Delta crisis on Nigeria are recent and the effects are still being felt in the country. This study was carried out through the use of secondary sources of information such as books, articles in journals, newspapers and news magazine papers on conference proceeding and other relevant materials.

IV. LITERATURE REVIEW

As a result of general concern which people have shown to the problem arising from oil and political crisis in the Niger Delta, opinion have been expressed by scholars and writers on the matter. In this chapter, the author review some works in an attempt to identify the security implications of the Niger Delta crisis on Nigeria polity.

The government of Nigeria has made hundreds of billions of dollars of oil revenue since the production of oil in the Niger Delta, despite this huge amount of money, the local people remain in abject poverty and deprivation as they lack the basic things of life such as water, electricity, health care etc, leaving them bitter and angry for not having benefited from the black gold that makes Nigeria Africa's largest producer of oil in Niger Delta, scenes of abject poverty pervades the area, very similar to what you find in a refugee camp.

(Briggs, 2004) examining the dilemma of ethnic militias in Nigeria, a case study of the "Egbesu group" posits that, the sudden growth of ethnic militias in Nigeria is borne out of cumulative frustration which metamorphosed into anger. The militias see the Nation State of Nigeria as an artificial conglomeration that would not be able or is interested in meeting their demands, therefore resulting to violence and other negative methods became a pastime. On some occasions, government has also used violent methods to address the demands of ethnic militias. This show of strength by government was not so effective in containing ethnic militia rather it gives credence, he opined.

Also, (Ikelegbe, 2005) critically examines youth involvement in criminal violence and arm rebellion in Niger Delta, reviewing extant positions of other scholars which ascribe the phenomena to a disposing youth culture that is rooted in environmental stress, frustrated youth response to state decay, lumped youth, state weakness and collapse. Ikelegbe advance that beyond a certain threshold, a frustrated group would challenge even a strong state. He argued further that, weak and collapsing state characterized by declining public authorities, legitimacy, and declining control over agencies of coercion tend to be more susceptible to violent challenges.

(Imobighe, 1990) conceptualizes threat when applied to a nation-state as representing "anything that can undermine the security of the nation or the peaceful coexistence of people" in this sense, he posits, threat to internal security has to do with anything that has the tendency to undermine the socio-political and economic stability and progress of the state.

Accordingly, Imobighe identified the threats to internal security in Nigeria to include religious/political intolerance, mismanagement of resources, sabotage, smuggling, alien influx, armed robbery, civil unrest, revolutionary insurgency. The scholar however, observed that though faced with a lot of

serious internal security challenges, Nigeria is yet to evolve a credible security policy.

According to (Nweze, 2008) in his work "Internal Security Threats in Nigeria", articulately conceptualizes the idea of security threat in Nigeria and identified sources of security threat in the country to include militarism and military experiences, ethnic/religious pluralism, unemployment, poverty and failure of governance, socio-economic inequalities and demographic factors, small arms and ammunition trafficking, migration and indigene question in Nigeria.

(Sesay, Ukeje, Aina, and Odebiyi, 2003) did extensive research on ethnic militias and the future of democracy in Nigeria. These authors obtained their insight from working with ethnic militias like OPC, Bakassi boys, as well as the Egbesu Boys based in the Niger Delta. This group to a very large extent contribute to the political development of the Niger Delta because of their overwhelming opinion, it was said that, these boys (Egbesu Boys) pose a threat to security and democracy. The contributions of the Egbesu boys to democracy were believed to be potential and even actual by facilitation of the democratic space and by sensitizing and keeping their public informed, they also believed that, their agitation for continual conference would facilitate the attainment of true democracy and federalism in Nigeria.

However, (Segay, 1998), admitted that the people of all oil producing area naturally feel cheated and exploited by a policy under which the wealth under their land is carried away, leaving them with polluted devastated environment. This means that various government policies in the past such as the derivation principle are the factors that are responsible for the restiveness in the region.

(Abati, 2000) in his contribution acknowledged this view and added that, the Federal Government over the years has treated the Niger Delta problem as if it can be washed away. This implies that government over the years have not been paying adequate attention to the region with the view of solving the crisis until recently when oil companies are threatening to shut down operation in Nigeria.

In his own words, (Udeme, 2004) explains how the existence of oil in the Niger Delta has remain a curse because, attempts by oil producing companies to provide palliative for the harmful effects of their activities have not solved fundamental problems of the people.¹¹ This explains the restiveness of the people of the area with manifestation in form of vandalization, disruption of the operation of oil companies, kidnapping and hostage taking and the seeming endless demand for monetary compensation.

(Azaiki, 2007), in his work titled "Inequities in Nigeria Politics" enumerates the causes of youth restiveness in the Niger Delta, he identified the causes of youth restiveness in the region to include *inter alia* the long standing marginalization of the Niger Delta, especially oil producing communities by successive government at the three tiers of government, local government, state government and federal government, the diabolical activities of oil and gas companies who have employed various divide and rule tactics, oil companies rather than involving themselves in the development of the areas of operation prefer to give financial gains to some vocal chiefs which usually result in crisis, the

youths after finishing the Nigeria Youths Service Corp return home unemployed, instead it is the people from other regions that are being employed in oil companies operating in the region, the forceful measures employed by government to checkmate the boys has only helped to increase militancy in the Niger Delta region, the false belief of the people that bullet cannot penetrate their body also increase youth restiveness in the region.

(Hassan, 2010) however, opines that neglect and irresponsible leadership are factors that have sustained the Niger Delta crisis. He also added that, lack of global standard for oil exploration, lack of safety and social responsibility has turned the peaceful area into a flash point, for Hassan, unless we address these issues, we cannot find lasting solution to the Niger Delta crisis. Similarly, (Dokun, 2008), in an attempt to examine the Niger Delta situation, added that, the social and environmental cost of oil production have been very expensive, they include destruction of wild life, pollution of air and drinking water and damage to aquatic ecosystem, all of which have cause serious health problem for the inhabitant of the area. He believes that poverty-environment linkage and environmental sustainability, modules mainstreaming environmental concern and training of policy makers and MNC's. He assumed that, such tools will prevent conflict and bring about conflict resolution.

In terms of human rights violation (Alade, 2003), commented on the hanging of Ken Saro Wiwa and eight other Ogoni minority activists on November 10, 1995, which was as a result of the Ogoni protest against adverse effect of environmental degradation on the local populace caused by oil exploration, consequently, the people demanded for the protection of their environment and compensation for the ruination caused to their environment.

Alade, however emphasized that, the judicial murder of Ken Saro Wiwa and eight other prominent Ogoni minority activists' struggle extremely radicalized the people, and that the entire Niger Delta became overly conscious of the need to fight the injustice meted out on them by years of ruthless plunder

Other scholars such as Olufoye S. Ogundiya and Oyeshola Dokun also maintain that the Niger Delta crisis can be detrimental to socio-political well being of Nigeria, (Olufoye, 2011) put forward that, the Niger Delta militant's poses threat to democracy in Nigeria.

These events had led to series of clashes between various ethnic groups which have degenerated into full blown war as in the clashes between Ijo and Itsekiri in Delta State, also multi-national corporations have been accused of instigation the people against one another.¹⁷

In my humble opinion, I think the reason behind the Niger Delta crisis is due to insincerity of the three tiers of government.

V. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

SYSTEM THEORY

The theoretical framework for this project is the system analysis which takes the entire social system of the country as

a unit of analysis. The systems approach is quite popular in the study of social phenomena (Alan, 1998). A synthesis of the definitions of a system given by various writers can be stated as follows, it is a phenomena which is an organized, purposeful whole with identifiable interrelated structures and functions commonly referred to as subsystems, and which has boundaries delineating it from the environment in which it is located and with which it interacts, processing the inputs from it into output for it, (Joseph, 2003).

VI. SECURITY IMPLICATION OF THE NIGER DELTA CRISIS

From the beginning of the crisis and the present condition of the Niger Delta in relation to militancy, a lot of security issues have come up with serious security implications, that not only affect the region but also the Nigerian state. Attempt is made in this section to analyze some of the implications of the crisis.

Kidnapping and hostage taking has become the order of the day with oil workers and individuals becoming the targets, thus worsening the security situation. Precisely on January 11, 2006, hostage taking of oil workers started in Bayelsa state, after the declaration of 'Operation Orida Danger' by MEND with the kidnapping of four set of hostages. About 200 expatriates have been kidnapped since the commencement of the ugly incidence, although most have been released within weeks in exchange for ransoms typically of thousands of dollars. According to the International Herald Tribune, "Oil companies find themselves in an uneasy position, stuck in crisis that they, in a sense, helped create-for years human right groups accessed the environment in the Niger Delta. Besides, expatriates, individuals have been kidnapped by militants for ransoms. Mrs Cecilia Omeya, the mother of former Governor Celestine Omeya of Rivers State was kidnapped on May 1, 2007. Also, the militants also target at children such as Michael Steward, son member of the Rivers State House of Assembly, Samuel Amadi, the two year old son of the Eze of Iribe Kingdom, Dr. Francis Amadi and also a three year old British child Margaret Hill, have swelled that ranks of those taken hostages by the militants. Security in the Niger Delta remains a major concern with persisting incidents of criminality, vandalism, threats from self-described militant groups, host community agitations and offshore piracy. Gunmen abducted the father of the Bayelsa State Commissioner for Agriculture, Mr Doodei Week (Punch, 2019)

The renewed acts of sabotage by self-described militant groups on oil and gas infrastructure in parts of the Niger Delta in 2016 and till now, has severely impacted oil and gas operations. For example, export operations at the SPDC-Operated Forcados Oil Terminal (FOT) were disrupted after three sabotage incidents in 2016. (Vanguard, 2017)

On 15 November 2016, Unknown gunmen have abducted a 72-year-old retired principal, Chief Sunday Festus, in Bayelsa State, the motive was to collect money from the of the kidnapped (Punch, 2016)

As a result of the prevailing insecurity in the Niger Delta, expatriates have left their work, although, in recent times,

many have returned due to the relative peace enjoyed by all and sundry as a result of the Amnesty the Federal Government granted ex-militants. The crisis has made illegal bunkering of oil to thrive, which is also the source of funds for the militants operating in creeks losses 70,000 to 300,000 barrels per day to illegal bunkering, the equivalent output of a small oil producing country in its annual report in late August 2006, Shell Nigeria estimated illegal bunkering losses at 20,000 to 40,000 barrels per day in 2005, down from 40,000 to 60,000 in 2004. The Washington based council on Foreign Relations Independent Task Force calculated that a loss of just 70,000 barrels a day at a price of \$60 a barrel “would generate over \$1.5 billion per year that will increase resources to fund arms trafficking, by political influence or both”.

Illegal bunkering has been a key source of funds for anti-government militant groups. Several militant lords have either publicly or privately admitted involvement and others said they consider the practice a defensible means of providing income for aggrieved and impoverished residents of oil communities. However, it must be noted that the activities of these bunkers have become a serious threat to the security wellbeing of the Nigerian nation.

Niger Delta today is not very safe, the area is radicalized to extent that idea of peace is alien to the people of the area. In the core Niger Delta states of Bayelsa, Rivers, and Delta states respectively, criminal activities has led to the closure of businesses, especially the multinational corporations have been scared away by the increasing insecurity in the region. In addition, small and medium, scale enterprises are also victims of attack by criminals in the geopolitical zone.

Beyond militancy and militant activities in the area, the region is becoming a breeding ground for gangsterism and cultism. Bayelsa state for example, is quite unsafe to raising children, cultism is fast becoming a religion taking the place of the traditional African religion, the average Bayelsa youth is aware or conscious of cultism. They participate actively or passively.

The implication of this is that, people are not safe, kidnapping here and there, stealing, bunkering, poverty is on the high side, vandalism is encouraged. Another dimension to the security problem is that, teenage girls have been identified as active participant in drug abuse, cultism and prostitution. Both federal, state and local government have not been helpful, instead of addressing the root causes of insecurity in the region, government at all levels is interested in fighting the manifestation leaving out the remote causes of the problem.

VII. CONCLUSION/RECOMMENDATION

The militancy in the Niger Delta was created by Niger Delta governor when the country returned to democratic rule, the motive was to force the federal at the centre to allow oil producing states to control the resources found on their lands. State governors equipped and bought guns for youths, empowered them with money, backings and connections. Although, Isaac Jasper Boro set the precedence for succeeding generations to follow, however he was suppressed by the overwhelming force of the federal government, the fact remains that succeeding generation got inspiration from him.

The method and dimension it has taken now should be of great concern to lover of peace. The security situation is deteriorating; the crisis is taking different dimensions with consequences for human security. While it is safe to say kidnapping, oil theft, bunkering and pipe line vandalism is on the low, the region suffers human security challenges such as teenage cultism (teenage girls) gang wars prostitution etc. Cultism has become a religion for the young ones, ex agitators are now the role models and major actors in deciding who wins in an election. Ateke Tom – ex agitator for example is the King of Okrika Ijaw of Rivers state. Majority of the agitators occupies sensitive positions in government in Delta, Rivers and Bayelsa states respectively while law abiding citizens are relegated to the background. Based on the findings, the following are recommended;

- ✓ The Government of Nigeria, the other stakeholders and the international community should address the region's grievances before the security situation further degenerates.
- ✓ Furthermore, state government should as a matter of urgency address the human security challenges of Niger Delta youths by engaging them, provide skill acquisition programmes for restive youths, paying attention to the root causes of militancy/criminality, instead of tackling the manifestations alone.
- ✓ Most importantly, providing jobs for law abiding citizens to discourage criminality in the Niger Delta region.

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