

INTRODUCTION

The story of the Niger Delta (South –south) crisis is as old as the entity known as Nigeria. It is a story of total neglect, deprivation and exploitation not only by the colonialists, but by succeeding governments since the creation of Nigeria.

Though, the country, in the early part of the 60s, depended largely on groundnut from the North, palm oil from the East and cocoa from the West. The entire country was almost evenly developed as there was competition among the three regions that made up the country then.

The resources generated in each of the regions were utilised for the betterment of the people of each of the regions while tax was being paid to the Federal Government. For instance, when the late sage, Chief Obafemi Awolowo, as the Premier of the Western Region, introduced free education, built the Cocoa House, established Odua Investments and the Western Nigeria Broadcasting Corporation in the West, others in the North and the East were also pursuing their developmental programmes. It was really a developmental competition among the regions.

But, the advent of the military in the political landscape of this country distorted this competition, which could have helped to develop the country to our desired expectations. The situation became worse when crude oil was discovered in 1956 in commercial quantity in Oloibiri in present-day Bayelsa State.

Following the enormous wealth that accrued from the discovery of crude oil, the military regime of General Yakubu Gowon, submitted that the nation had enough money, but did not know what to do with it. Then, the resources of the entire country were hijacked by the centre, causing the regions (later states) to depend substantially on the Federal Government for revenue for development projects.

This was the beginning of the regional crisis, including the Niger Delta crises. It was also the beginning of ethnicity in Nigeria, an evil that still persists today.

The Niger Delta crisis manifested openly during the regime of the late despot and Nigeria's military Head of State, late General Sani Abacha, who tried to perpetuate himself in office as a maximum ruler. Several groups sprang up in support of his ambition. A one million-man march was even organised in Abuja by a youth group in support of the transformation of General Abacha to a civilian president.

Youths from different parts of the country were drawn to Abuja, the Federal Capital Territory, to drum support for Abacha's self-succession project. Some young men and women from the Niger Delta were not left out in this "bazaar". Incidentally, most youths from the region had not ventured out of their backward and environmentally degraded areas before that opportunity fell on their laps to visit Abuja.

According to a prominent Ijaw leader, Chief (Dr.) Samson Mamamu, "these youths from the Niger Delta that had not seen a bridge in their lives, that had not seen functional electricity in their lives, that had not seen good network of roads in their lives, went to Abuja, saw all the beautiful edifices there and couldn't believe that such development is in their country.

"They came back after the two thousand naira given to each of them as allowances to realise that it was their resources that were used in implementing all those developmental projects in Abuja. That was when the agitation for the control of our resources started", Mamamu explained.

A youth leader, Reverend Sam Ken, wondered why the Niger Delta people should not agitate for the control of their resources when it was discovered that it was the wealth from the region that was used in developing Lagos State when it was the capital city of Nigeria.

Though, Ken said he does not feel too bitter about the overhead bridges that were built in Lagos State then, he, however, feels pained that the new federal capital that is not close to any known river, let alone a sea, has more bridges on land than the Niger Delta region that is crying for a good road network.

"Tell me anywhere in the world where they have more bridges on land than on rivers except Abuja. Then, why wouldn't our people agitate for the control of resources on their soil? He queried.

Investigations revealed that some of the Niger Delta youth leaders, who led their groups to Abuja for the one million-man march, returned home to form most of the militia groups now agitating for the total control of the resources of the region. Latter-day militant leaders like Alhaji Muhajid Asari-Dokubo, Tom Ateke in the Niger Delta area and a host of other militant leaders in the country, sprang up as a result of that experience in Abuja.

Prominent leaders of the region had no other option than to join in the fray because of the threat of the youths, who had accused them of conniving with successive governments in Nigeria and foreign forces, epitomized by multinational oil companies operating in the region, to deprive them of their wealth.

The initial struggle by the various militia groups appeared genuine. Niger Delta leaders, who hitherto had been benefiting from the incongruous system of neglect, had to throw their weight behind the groups with the hope of first saving their heads from the gallows and then attracting more developmental projects to their areas.

But, the struggle became criminal when different faceless groups started emerging, kidnapping foreign oil workers in exchange for ransom. The story is told of an undergraduate, who abandoned his academic career for the business of hostage-taking. The boy (names withheld) is now a proud owner of a fleet of posh vehicles and magnificent buildings in Bayelsa and Delta states.

It is not only the youths that have discovered how to get part of their resources back from the government through criminal acts. They found some top government officials, oil company workers and security agents as allies in the business and they are all smiling to the banks.

The mounting chaos is rooted in the widespread poverty and decades of neglect of the Niger Delta region by successive administrations at the federal level, who have failed to convert the region's wealth into providing jobs or making meaningful development in the area.

During the first half of 2006, Nigeria's energy industry was crippled by guerrilla attacks from militants demanding a larger share of the country's oil revenue. The guerrillas, primarily from Nigeria's Ijaw ethnic community, live in the country's Niger Delta region where the majority of its energy resources are extracted. The ethnic roots of the crisis and the terrain of the delta make government attempts to end the insurgency difficult since a military response could lead to the complete shutdown of the country's oil exports. Given the significance of energy exports to the Nigerian economy, the roots of the current crisis and the reasons behind the government's failure to stabilize the delta, it becomes clear that attacks on energy facilities in the delta will continue to be an irritant to Africa's largest oil producer.

Background to a Crisis

Nigeria is Africa's most populated country and is the fifth largest supplier of crude oil to the United States. When pumping at full capacity, it produces an output of approximately 2.5 million barrels per day, making it the world's eighth-largest oil exporter. Its gas

resources are just as extensive, with proven natural gas reserves at 184 trillion cubic feet, giving Nigeria the seventh-largest gas reserves worldwide. Ninety-five percent of the country's export earnings, accounting for 40 percent of its GDP, come from the oil and gas trade. This dependence on the energy trade makes any disruption of exports especially threatening to the Nigerian economy (Angola Press, July 19). Nigeria's oil and gas reserves are located in the south, in the Niger Delta region. As a result of this uneven resource distribution, there are regular disputes over the distribution of oil wealth; the Nigerian government controls the revenue from energy exports, and distributes this revenue throughout the country. The ethnic groups that live in the delta states believe that the majority of energy revenues derived from their territory and homelands should be controlled locally, rather than by the federal government.

The first significant recent militant stirrings among the residents of the delta began in the 1990s among the ethnic Ogoni community. As a result of the small size of the Ogoni population and the fact that Nigeria was ruled by the Abacha military junta at the time, government forces were able to suppress the Ogoni and they executed nine of their activists. The government's aggressive response permanently weakened the Ogoni resistance. Since this initial outbreak of conflict, much more serious ethnic resistance in the delta has arisen, stemming from a far more threatening community. The latest guerrilla attacks against the government and international oil interests are being led by the Ijaw, the largest ethnic group in the Niger Delta region.

Out of Nigeria's 137 million people, the Ijaw number approximately 14 million, making them the country's fourth-largest ethnic group. They live primarily in the Niger Delta region. The Ijaw are generally Catholic Christians, although they incorporate traditional tribal religious practices into their beliefs. The major grievances of the Ijaw are the wealth distribution policies of the government. For instance, while most of the energy wealth emanates from the Niger Delta region, the Ijaw live in poverty and suffer from extensive environmental degradation as a result of frequent oil spills and gas flaring operations (the burning of unwanted natural gas that rises when drilling for oil; the fumes are a contributor to air pollution and acid rain). The Ijaw demand that a larger proportion of Nigeria's energy wealth be spent on their communities, rather than distributed throughout the country. For example, under the 1960 and 1963 Nigerian constitution, 50 percent of oil revenue was returned to the states in which the resources were derived. Currently, under the 1999 constitution, this "derivation formula" stands at 13 percent. While the federal government has offered to slightly increase the revenue allocation to the states, the Ijaw community is calling for the derivation formula to reach 20-25 percent. They are also demanding ownership and management of the resources located on their land, including offshore oil fields.

As a result of these disagreements, the Ijaw formed militant groups to launch operations against energy infrastructure and energy workers in the delta, as well as against government authorities. They receive support from the local populations, making it difficult for the government to isolate and eliminate them. Their success in damaging oil infrastructure and terrorizing international oil workers resulted in Nigeria's oil exports being cut by approximately 500,000 barrels per day through much of 2006.

Profile of the Ijaw Militant Groups

One of the major initial Ijaw militant groups in the Niger Delta was the Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force (NDPVF). The group was headed by Alhaji Mujahid Dokubo-Asari, who was apprehended by authorities on September 20, 2005. Asari claims to be fighting on behalf of the Ijaw community, demanding that more energy wealth be distributed to Niger Delta residents. Additionally, he has called for greater political

autonomy for Ijaw-majority areas. While the head of the NDPVF, Asari and his men siphoned oil from pipelines—a regular occurrence in the Niger Delta, called "bunkering"—in order to fund the group's operations. His guerrilla operations consisted of laying siege to international oil facilities and kidnapping oil workers in order to extract concessions from oil companies and from the government.

In September 2005, the government successfully apprehended Asari and charged him with treason. After his arrest, Asari called on his supporters to halt attacks against the Nigerian government, and this resulted in the general cessation of NDPVF operations. Shortly after Asari's arrest and his call for a cessation of hostilities, a new Ijaw militant group appeared on the scene, in what would mark the most aggressive campaign by Ijaw militants yet.

After Asari's arrest, the Movement for the Emancipation of the People of the Niger Delta (MEND) stormed into the public spotlight. On January 11, in one of its first operations, the group raided Shell's offshore EA oil rig and kidnapped oil workers. As part of their demands, they ordered Shell to pay \$1.5 billion to local communities in compensation for Shell's environmental damages, and they ordered the government to release Asari from jail. On January 30, MEND released the oil workers unharmed. Since then, the militant organization has been involved in regular operations against international oil interests and government authorities. They regularly raid both onshore and off-shore oil facilities, kidnap international oil workers and executives and then make excessive demands in exchange for the release of the hostages; once the oil companies, or the government, pays a small ransom (or a promise of community financial projects), the hostages have been released unharmed. The certainty of this equation is fueling these guerrilla attacks since the militants are guaranteed ransom and other payoffs for each operation.

Thus far, in 2006, more than 30 oil workers have been kidnapped, mostly by MEND militants, and all of them have been released unharmed. MEND plans to continue its debilitating campaign. In a recent e-mail sent to Reuters, MEND announced that "We are resuming an all-out war on the eastern sector [of the delta] with an aim to wiping out fields there and the export terminals. This we hope to achieve before the end of August" (Reuters, July 26). MEND has also executed more aggressive operations. On April 19, for example, MEND militants detonated a car bomb at the Bori Camp military base in Port Harcourt, killing two people.

Additional Ijaw militant organizations are undertaking terrorist operations against government forces and international oil interests in coordination with MEND, such as the Martyrs Brigade. Other groups, however, appear less sophisticated and more militant than MEND, such as the Coalition for Militant Action (COMA). According to a recent statement by the group published on July 23, COMA announced that they would resume hostage-taking operations and would target politicians and high-profile Nigerian citizens (Vanguard, July 23). In the statement, COMA said they disagreed with Asari's call for a cessation of hostilities, advising that "in battle, you do not make peace with an unrepentant enemy" (Vanguard, July 23).

Shortly after COMA's announcement, but not necessarily in response to it, Asari released his own statement from jail, arguing that his followers and the Ijaw community should continue their armed struggle against the government and against international oil firms since that was the only way to achieve political and economic rights. According to his statement, which was released on July 24, "How can we [the Ijaw] negotiate when we are in chains and dispossessed? The only noble and honorable path open to us is the glorious and time-tested path of armed struggle" (Daily Champion, July 24).

Government Failure to Stabilize the Niger Delta

There are a multitude of reasons why the Nigerian government has been unable to stabilize the Niger Delta. One of the most obvious explanations is the terrain of the delta. According to the Niger Delta Development Commission, the delta is the world's third largest wetland and is composed of dense mangrove swamps and waterways, making it an ideal location for guerrilla operations. The various oil facilities and pipelines saturate the area and are easy targets for militants who are able to navigate the dense web of waterways in speedboats, lay siege to a facility, capture international oil workers and then disappear back into the swamps and mangroves. The speed and size of the guerrilla attacks often catch the security forces protecting the energy installations by surprise; these same security forces usually suffer from poor equipment, training and morale, placing their dedication in doubt. The weapons used by the militants are abundant in the country since small-arms filter into Nigeria from conflict zones like Liberia, Sudan, Somalia, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Sierra Leone.

Three recent examples of guerrilla operations demonstrate this security context. On June 7 2006, MEND militants approached a Shell gas plant near Port Harcourt in a speedboat. The guerrillas were equipped with small-arms, including rocket launchers, and they killed at least three of the Nigerian soldiers and police protecting the installation. They then kidnapped five South Koreans who were working for Daewoo and Korea Gas Corp. The attack forced Shell to shut down the plant. On June 8, however, all of the South Korean hostages were released (AFP, June 8). Another recent attack, on July 12, demonstrates the size of some guerrilla contingents. In this incident, a convoy of boats carrying construction material for Chevron-Texaco was traveling through the delta under the armed guard of Nigerian naval troops. After passing near Chanomi Creek on the way to Chevron's Escravos River installation, the convoy was overwhelmed by 20 speedboats loaded with heavily armed militants. A shootout occurred, resulting in the deaths of four naval soldiers. Several Chevron workers were taken captive, but were quickly released (AFP, July 14). Other incidents follow this pattern, and militants have even attacked off-shore oil rigs, such as on June 2 when Ijaw guerrillas captured eight foreign oil workers (six Britons, an American and a Canadian) on a rig 60 kilometers off the Nigerian coast of Bayelsa state; all hostages were, once again, released, allegedly after ransoms were paid (AFP, June 4).

According to the chief of Nigeria's Naval Staff, Vice Admiral Ganiyu Adekeye, the guerrillas operating in the delta have studied Nigerian naval operations and discovered the security forces' weaknesses; additionally, according to Adekeye, the navy lacks proper equipment to combat these militants as many of its ships are in poor condition (This Day, July 27). This is one reason why in 2004 the United States provided special boats to Nigerian authorities to help fight piracy, arms and oil smuggling. The United States also conducted joint military exercises with Nigerian troops in Calabar in 2004 with a focus on water combat (IRIN, June 26). Stability in the delta is an important concern for the United States as a result of the current tight supplies of oil.

The sheer number of oil installations and pipelines also make protection of the infrastructure difficult. Shell, which is the largest foreign oil company in Nigeria, has more than 1,000 oil wells in the delta region, and these wells are linked to a 6,000-kilometer pipeline network (IRIN, July 26). Protection against attacks, in addition to preventing sabotage to the pipelines, which causes pipeline leaks and results in the loss of millions of dollars in oil revenue and the destruction of the local environment, is too much of a burden for the Nigerian authorities to handle. The government has already sent thousands of additional troops to the delta, but they have not been able to reestablish stability. Furthermore, the army and security forces are restrained from using

overwhelming force against the militants because this would likely result in a larger conflagration with the Ijaw, resulting in a complete shutdown of oil and gas exports, crippling the economy.

In addition to the tactical difficulties in suppressing delta militants, there is also the problem of corruption. In a country where 37 percent of the population lives on less than \$1 per day, corruption and crime are major concerns. With the price of oil peaking over \$70 a barrel, oil theft (bunkering) is tempting and provides an important source of revenue for guerrillas, civilians and criminal elements. Yet, the process of siphoning oil from pipelines causes leaks, which not only causes supply disruptions, but also destroys the environment—guerrillas and other criminal elements then demand that the oil companies pay certain contractors to repair or clean up the leaks, creating a never-ending cycle of contracting work. Additionally, oil companies are known to funnel money to guerrilla groups covertly so that the group "protects" their installations. Companies consider these pay-offs more efficient than spending millions of dollars repairing the pipelines after they are damaged. Also, the money allocated to the delta states from the federal government often falls victim to cronyism since community leaders and elected officials filter the funds to contracts and firms that pad their own pockets. Much of the revenue never makes it back to the delta communities.

Conclusion

Nigeria's future as a stable energy supplier remains in doubt. Already in the first half of 2006, the effects of guerrilla attacks and sabotage to the country's oil infrastructure has reduced production levels by 20 percent. Attacks on oil infrastructure have completely shut down oil facilities in some parts of the delta. The attacks on oil infrastructure will continue in the future, as the government has not drafted an effective policy to end the guerrilla campaigns. President Obasanjo, recognizing the problem, released a report on the Niger Delta on July 18, confirming that the region is "suffering from administrative neglect, crumbling social infrastructure and service, high unemployment, abject poverty, filth and squalor and endemic neglect" (Daily Champion, July 27). Additionally, because the guerrillas are not solely criminal in nature and are part of an ethnic movement, heavy-handed tactics by the government against the Ijaw communities where the militants are sheltered could further enflame the crisis.

In the medium-term, one should expect the government to take measures to respond to the latest uptick in violence. President Obasanjo has tried to negotiate a change in the derivation formula to appease the communities in the delta, and the Bayelsa state government has set up a committee to examine strategies to deal with hostage-taking and other terrorist acts in the region (Abuja Rhythm FM Radio, July 13 2006). Record high oil prices have also offset the losses that the government has sustained as a result of its oil exports being down 20 percent for the year. Moreover, as a result of high energy prices, international oil firms continue to invest in Nigeria despite its chaotic environment. Nevertheless, in a country where 95 percent of export earnings come from the oil and gas trade, the stabilization of the delta should remain a top government priority.

But, some people however, questioned whether the use of violence by the militants to push their grievances is the most appropriate tool to achieve their set objectives. For a pioneering militant group like Alhaji Asari-Dokubo's Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), that is the only option open to it now.

QUESTIONNAIRE AND ANSWERS

Militant Groups

1. Which area are you most familiar with (North, Middle Belt, South –West, South East, South South) ?

Answer - **South-South**

2. How many militant groups are present/operating in your area?

Answer: They are more than ten in number but the most active ones at least for now are (1) Movement for the Emancipation of the People of Niger Delta (MEND) (2) Niger People Volunteer Force (3) Martyrs Brigade (4) Coalition of Militant Action (5) The Egbesu Boys

3. What are their goals, and have they changed since the transition to democratic rule in 1999?

Answer: Their goals are to drive out the oil companies from the delta and permanently halting Nigerian exports to the world oil market.

Their goals have not change instead they have succeeded in cutting down on crude oil export thereby reducing the revenue earnings of the country.

4. What kind of illegal activities do they engage in?

Answer: Oil Bunkering/illegal trade, kidnapping and hostage taking

Identity

1. What role does identity (ethnic, religious, other) play in these group?

Answer: Marginalization of ethnic minorities in the country. A good example is that of Ijaws and Urobo's in the Niger Delta Region which absolute exploitation of both human and natural resources leaving them in abject poverty by all successive government of Nigeria and their collaborators.

2. Has the importance of ethnic or religious identities changed after the transition to democratic rule?

Answer: The emergence of democratic rule has more hardship to the Niger Delta People than hope. A case of Udi is the South-South area a good example which the President Olusegun Obasanjo sent Nigerian troop to invade the town and over 1000 people lost their and properties worth million of naira were lost while inhabitant of this area became refugees.

Tactics and Weapon

1. What tactics do the groups use in order to achieve their goals?

Answer: (1) Kidnapping
(2) Hostage taking

- (3) Bombing
- (4) Sabotage

2. I the groups were present before 1999, have their tactics changed since the transition to democratic rule?

Answer: Their tactics have change as they are now using Guerrilla warfare tactics and attacks on pipeline that carries oil produced in the delta/swans to its export terminals with explosives.

3. What weapons do they use?

- Answer:** (1) Mortar explosion
(2) Rocket launcher
(3) Small arms
(4) Bomb
(5) Explosive

4. Where do the weapons come from?

Answer: According militant leader Dokubo Asari major source of their weaponry have been from the illegal trade in crude oil. It is also speculated that politician executive of some of these multinational have provided more to the militant groups.

5. How much do the weapons cost?

Answer: Millions of naira

6. Do members receive any form of combat training?

Answer: With the way they attack it is very clear that these militants had combat training and are professionals.

Funding and Support

(1) From where/how do the group get funding for their operations?

Answer: Mainly from the illegal trade in crude oil and through hostage takings and incessant kidnapping of oil workers. It is also speculated that their release is always followed with ransom before their freedom.

(2) Do local or state politicians support these groups?

Answer: Support for these groups is not done openly but it is expected also that they have the support of both local and state politician.

(3) Do the group support any politician?

Answer: Support of politicians by these militant groups at least for now is not notice or significantly experienced but the April 2007 general election will be an avenue to proof these claim.

(4) Do the Local population support these groups?

Answer: Because of the activities of these militant groups, security forces have increase recently in the area. It is likely that people are harassed by the presence these security forces and these may affect the acceptability or total support of militant group from their local population.

(5) Are Local traditional rulers supportive of these groups?

Answer: The event of the last two week i.e the killing of about twelve (12) local chief in Bayelsa State by this militant groups shows that they may not have total support of their Local traditional rulers.

Resources

(1) Do the Groups engage in illegal trade?

Answer: Yes, illegal trade in crude oil hostage takings are good example.

(2) If so, how much profit do they make from this trade?

Answer: Millions of naira

(3) Are there any conflicts or fighting between groups over the dominance in a particular illegal market/trade?

Answer: At least for now there has been no reported case of conflicts or fighting between these groups of militant over dominance except that of Urobo's and Ijaw's in the Niger Delta over the ownership of the territory.

Additional Questions

1. Why has there been a rise in militancy in Nigeria since the transition to democratic rule in 1999?

Answer: Empty promises by the succeeding governments and its collaborators may have been contributed to the present struggle for self emancipation of the region and upsurge in crime activities in the area since these people are no longer have hope or trust in their government.

2. Some scholars have argued that the transition to democratic rule has opened up public space and that the lack of an authoritarian monopoly on power and physical force has allowed for militant groups to become increasingly militant and for new groups to arise. What do you think about that? Can democracy have such reverse effects, or are there other factors casing the rise in militancy?

Answer: When people are push to the wall there is always tendency of fighting back and I believe this is exactly what is happening in the South – South region of Nigeria. This would have happen even in the military regime. It was a time bomb waiting to explode and democracy no doubt has provided an avenue by which this happens.

3. Why are some militant groups more militant or violent than other groups in Nigeria?

Answer: Militant or violent tendency of these groups depends sole on the type of resistant they encountered during their attacks or activities.

4. Are there regional differences in the level of militancy in the North, Middle Belt, South-West, South-East and the South-South? Why?

Answer: Militancy is as a result of agitation for certain right and privileges of people of a particular place as in the case of introduction of Sharia Law in the Northern States, cry of marginalization of the South-East and threat of secession from Nigerian State by MOSOP. Odua Peoples Congress in the South-West is also struggling for self determination of his people. Again the Movement for the Emancipation of the people of the Niger-Delta (MEND) in South-South region is fighting for self emancipation of its people and total control of its natural resources. It is on record that the people of Niger – Delta region are living in abject poverty while their environments and resources are being exploited by the successive government and their collaborators.

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