



# Militia uprising in the Niger Delta and its implications for national security

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## Abstract

Intractable violence has invariably constituted an enduring image of the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria. Despite extant initiatives for addressing the problem, it seems unsusceptible to management over the years by assuming varying dimensions, including hostage taking, sea piracy, political hooliganism, terrorism and vandalism of pipelines. This study identifies militia uprising as the fundamental driving force of violence in the region in view of the implications for development and security in Nigeria. Using qualitative research method, findings show that the militia uprising in the Niger Delta is not a mere display of rebellious acts against constituted authority, but a purpose-driven aggressive reaction to enduring social neglect and exploitative tendencies inflicted on that region and its people by successive activities of state and non-state actors. Using relational and frustration-aggression theories of conflict, the study submits that the subsisting reactionary measures by stakeholders, including amnesty programme cannot guarantee lasting peace and security required for sustainable development at the expense of problem-solving policy responses. Therefore, the study recommends comprehensive conflict transformation initiative for addressing militia uprising in the Niger Delta with a view to ensuring desired peace and security in the interests of sustainable development and national integration.

**Keywords:** Niger Delta Region; Enduring Social Neglect; Militia Uprising; National Security; Conflict Transformation; Sustainable Development; National Integration

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## **1. Introduction**

Arguably, endemic internal conflicts have invariably constituted an enduring image of post-independence Nigeria so much that it represents a microcosm of Africa's intractable internal conflicts in the Post-Cold War era. Empirical evidence is overwhelming to the effect that the country is inundated with a plethora of conflicts of internal genre: ethno-communal acrimony; sectarian violence; resource-based violence arising from economic marginalisation; identity-based conflicts arising from political deprivation and social exclusion; electoral conflicts; and domestic terrorism among others (Osaghae, 1994; Agbaje, 2003; Ehidiemen, 2003; Osuoka, 2003; Olutokun, 2003; Dukor, 2003; Emiri, 2003; Akinyemi, 2003; Ekeh, 2004; Adebaniwi, 2004; Ojo, 2013). Recent security-threatening developments substantiate this assertion: the World Bank Reports in 2006 and 2007 ranked Nigeria among first 15 fragile states in the world. This ranking was confirmed by The American Bipartisan Centre in May 2011 as the country was ranked among the world's most fragile states. This has created skepticism about the prospects for peace, security and continued existence of a united Nigeria within the context of its heterogeneous background.

The oil rich Niger Delta Region constitutes one of the flashpoints of internal conflicts in Nigeria arising from oil politics inspired by state and non-state actors and the concomitant aggressive reactions of various interest groups from the region. Considering the volume of scholarly discourses on Niger Delta crisis in extant body of literature, it cannot be considered as an understudied phenomenon in Nigeria (Osaghae, 1994; Davis and Hammed, 2001; Ekiyor, 2001; Albert, 2001; Adebaniwi, 2004; Dukor, 2003; Osuoka, 2003; Menegbon, 2003; Ogundiya, 2011).

However, the changing nature of the crisis, the dynamism of aggressive militant activism in the region (including communal hostility, hostage taking, vandalism and sea piracy), and the challenges these have continued to pose on national security have created a lacuna in existing body of knowledge, which explains the logic behind further studies. The preoccupation of this study, therefore, is to systematically examine how the activities of militia groups have sustained the crisis in the Niger Delta with a view to determining the implications for security and development concerns Nigeria.

The core argument of this study is that it would be misleading to presume that the repugnant militia uprising and the attendant intractable violence in the Niger Delta region was stimulated by mere expression of youth restiveness. Rather, the notoriety of militia uprising in the region should be viewed from the broad perspective of people's reaction to prolonged sense of injustice arising from economic marginalization, political deprivation, perceived hanging identity, and devastating environmental degradation, inflicted on the region and its people, despite its economic importance to the Nigerian society. An axiomatic strand of this line of exploration is that militia uprising in the Niger Delta, despite its protracted nature, is susceptible to transformation given holistic, joint problem-solving responses by both state and non-state actors.

The questions are: what factors motivated the Niger Delta youths to engage in militia activism in their continued agitation for social justice and measurable economic redress? How responsive is the state to the plight of the Niger Delta people within the context of its social contract responsibility? What are the implications of government's continued insensitivity in the Niger Delta for national security and sustainable

development? This study attempts to critically explore these posers in the context of the prevailing challenges of militia uprising in the region.

In the final analysis, the study submits that addressing militia uprising in the Niger Delta requires broad-based, problem-solving conflict transformative mechanism through deliberate policy response by state agents and corporate social responsibility initiatives of non-state agents. The objective is to actualize the desired peace and security which are a prerequisite for sustainable development and national integration through productive management of the nation's available human and material resource endowments.

## **2. Theoretical framework**

This study adopts relational theory and Frustration – Aggression theory in an attempt to determine the causes of militia uprising in the Niger Delta region. Relational theory suggests that underlying causation of conflict between or among various groups and entities can be understood by exploring the contradictions among such groups, arising from political, sociological, economic, environmental, cultural and historical complexities. In other words, the theory postulates that explanations for violent conflicts between or among groups could be provided through critical examination of interlocking variables that influence conflicting interests from the holistic perspectives.

It is only within this context that purposeful and problem-solving management strategies could be designed. Johnson (1960) cited in Anifowose (2011:9) submits that, “any analytical penetration of the behaviour characterized as ‘purposive political violence’ must utilize as its tool a conception of the social context in which it occurs given relational theoretic analysis. With emphasis on the Niger Delta Region, the implication of this theoretical exploration is that the existing violent conflicts and the attendant security challenges experienced by the region cannot be logically explored in isolation from multidimensional factors and forces that have a bearing on the collective existence of the Nigerian political system. Put differently, peace and security concerns in the Niger Delta will continue to be elusive with the domino effect on the corporate existence, territorial integrity and developmental process of Nigeria as long as the character, motivation, ideological underpinnings and grassroots operational mode of the militants are poorly understood and erroneously interpreted. On the other hand, Frustration–Aggression theory postulates that aggressive behaviour is a proportional reaction to frustrating tendencies within a given conflict scenario. The theory was developed in 1939 by John Dollard and his research associates, and later expanded and modified by other scholars, including Aubrey Yates and Leonard Berkowitz (Anifowose 2011). The theory suggests that given the requisite conditions, an individual, whose basic desires are thwarted and who consequently experiences profound sense of dissatisfaction, exploitation and anger has the tendency to react violently to the prevailing conditions by directing aggressive behaviour at what is perceived as the cause of his unmet or unfulfilled legitimate desires.

A related adjunct of the frustration- aggression theory is the notion of relative deprivation, i.e. a state of mind where there is a discrepancy between what men seek and what seems attainable. Anifowose (2011) convincingly submits that the greater the discrepancy the greater their anger and their propensity toward

violence. Most times, constituted authorities tend to rely heavily on the application of coercive measures to address aggressive behaviour of the people. Unfortunately, coercive reactionary measures have proved counter-productive as they further provoke the already frustrated entities, thereby instigating more aggressive and confrontational tendencies against constituted authorities.

With reference to militia uprising in the Niger Delta region will result in wrong diagnosis if it is situated within mere youth restiveness or act of insurrection against the state. Rather scientific diagnosis of the problem must reflect aggressive reaction to frustrated desires and thwarted goals arising from government's insensitivity to the needs of the people of Niger Delta. Suffice it to say that a crucial element of constructive management of Niger Delta crisis is inherent in understanding the historical, psychological, political, cultural, environmental, and socioeconomic determinants of militia uprising in the region.

In other words, the prevailing complex conflicts of ethnic, political, and economic undercurrents in the Niger Delta Region can only be understood by establishing the correlation between historical antecedents and divergent value systems of the various constituent groups and the subsisting socioeconomic and political realities of the Nigerian nation state. On that standpoint, true federalist structure, accountability and transparency in governance, purposeful resource management mechanism, gender-sensitive participatory democracy and social inclusion are among the measures that should be taken into consideration in addressing militia uprising in the Niger Delta in the interest of the collective existence and survival of the Nigerian state.

### **3. Militia uprising: A contextual and conceptual analysis**

This section attempts to provide an analytical framework for understanding the context and concept of militias. From the context of their traditional and contemporary characteristics, militias constitute part of non-state actors such that, in principle, they are autonomous from the structure and machinery of the state (Alden et al., 2011). Simply put, they are armed non-state actors, operating outside the formal state military agency. Militias, whether operating at ethnic, regional, or national levels, have propensity to use crude violence for effecting a change within political and socioeconomic realms. In some context, they have near monopoly on the use of violence, indiscriminately using sophisticated weapons and/or small arms to perpetrate unconventional warfare in target areas.

The diversity of militias has become more complex in contemporary times than ever ranging from paramilitary formations used as counter-insurgency forces, small localized village militias centred on self-defence, to militias that have spun off from failures within a state security sector and have subsequently sought to counter state power structures (Alden et al., 2011). Perhaps in an attempt to distinguish them from other forms of combatants, Alden et al. describe militias based on their peculiar characteristics thus:

*Part of what distinguishes them from more traditional combatants is their operational mode, especially their willingness to engage in violent tactics that defy international norms of conflict and their proclivity to embrace expediency in alliance-making. --- as materialized entities are prone to pursue conflict --- in terms of local interests, militias are notoriously difficult to manage in the context of transitions from war to peace. As such, the*

*conventional approaches to conflict management and resolution promulgated by the international community are singularly inadequate in addressing the issue of militias as well as the enduring effect they have on post-conflict situations (2011:1).*

In broad terms, there are two categories of militant groups, namely the ideological, politically-inspired or principled militants and non-ideological, criminally-motivated militants or opportunistic mercenaries (Ogundiya, 2011:14). Ideological militants are those purpose-driven militants who display aggressive tendencies in reaction to real or perceived social injustice and other forms of marginalization which are considered as threats to their individual and/or collective identity in a given political entity. The Niger Delta crisis was propelled by ideological militancy as youths chose to take up arms against the state and society in their quest for redress of age long inequality, marginalization, environmental damage and political deprivation. On the other hand non-ideological militants are those who perpetrate acts of violence against fellow humans without just cause. This category of militants heartlessly employs violence and criminal activities as means of survival. A larger percentage of non-ideological militants are religious fundamentalists, political thugs, and grassroots-based or campus cultists who make themselves available for commercialized criminality (Ojo, 2013). As Ogundiya (2011) rightly observes, criminally-motivated militants are equipped by unscrupulous elements in society such as unprincipled politicians to commit crimes including electoral violence, assassination of opponents, public unrest, and hostage taking, among others. By implication, the activities of non-ideological militants are an aberration in any given society as the rationale for their actions is not confined within the fringes of fundamental human rights and the rule of law.

Militia uprising is not an exclusive prerogative of modern Nigeria society, and by extension Africa. For instance, militias have a deep resonance in America's history on account of the central role they played in the American war of independence from British colonial rule. They were referred to as "patriot militias" and they recruited their commanders where they were active under the premise of self-defence against British oppression. It is worthy of note that the second Amendment of the US constitution conceded some measure of sentiment to patriot militias by stating that: "a well regulated militia being necessary to the security of a free state. The right of the people to keep and bear arms shall not be infringed". Within the American context of militia phenomenon, militias were seen as playing legitimate violent actions thought not as "standing armies" or as a perpetually benign force which could be regarded as "national militia" (Alden et al., 2011). Moreover, in the European hemisphere, there was 'the French Militia' or '*milice Francoise*' in France and the Swiss militia system' in Switzerland.

In contemporary times where revolution in science and technology has compressed the whole world into a global village, militias have tended to constitute serious threats to peace, stability and security concerns at communal, national, sub-regional, regional and international levels so much so that their influence cannot be dismissed with a wave of the hand. As Alden et al. (2011:5) observe, outside of the historical American and European experience which has dwindled, the rest of the world has continued to see a very strong presence and activities of militias and their centrality to conflicts. Thus, they have severally distorted the traditional application of legitimate force within which context the monopoly of violence was confined in state actors.

Apart from perpetrating and perpetuating internal conflicts and violence in various independent states in post-cold war era, militias have continued to play a central role in the generation, intensity and manifestation

of various ongoing global conflicts. Within the African context, the contemporary post-second world war period provides egregious examples of conflicts that involve a diversity of militias. Prominent among them across the continent include the *Janjaweed*, being interpreted as 'devils on horseback', in Darfur, Sudan; the '*interahamwe*', (meaning 'those who work/fight together) among the Hutu; and the '*impuzamugambi*' (meaning those who have the same goal) among the *Hutus* in Rwanda; the *mau mau* secret liberation army in Kenya (Alden et al., 2011); and *Oodua* People's Congress (OPC); *Bakasi* Boys, and Movement for the Survival of *Ogoni* People (MOSOP), all in Nigeria.

With particular emphasis on the Niger Delta, although militias were originally motivated by the urge to agitate for social change and justice in political, economic and environmental terms, political elite have employed their activities for anti-people and counter-productive tendencies. Elsewhere, this author has argued that political gladiators in the region have always relied on ethnic militias and campus cultists to perpetrate electoral violence (Ojo, 2013). For instance, they have recruited, financed and armed ethnic militia groups such as MOSOP, Bakasi Boys, 'Sea pirates' and 'Creek Boys' to gang up against the state to perpetrate electoral violence in their bid to win elections at all cost. By so doing, political elites who are expected to be models of good politics and custodians of the rule of law have been the ones promoting commercialized criminality through militant activities.

#### 4. Conflict in the Niger Delta: A historical analysis

The Niger Delta people constitute part of the so called minority groups in Nigeria based on the size of their number compared to other core groups, especially the three majority groups (Yoruba, Igbo and Hausa) who are so called based on their being more densely populated than their minority counterparts. They are located in the south-south geo-political zone within Nigeria's political entity. The original occupations of the inhabitants of the region include fishing, farming, trading, and forest product gathering, among others. The region is located in the southern part of the country, spreading over a total landmass of more or less 70,000 square kilometers. The ethnic components of the Niger Delta region comprise the Ijaw, Ogoni, Efik, Urhobo, Bakasi, Ogbas, Ikwerres, and Ekpeyes. Others are the Abuas, Egbemas, Engennes, Obolos, Isokos, Itsekiris and some parts of Kwale. These ethnic groups constitute the dominant indigenes of seven states from among the present 36 states of the federation: Edo, Akwa-Ibom, Rivers, Cross Rivers, Delta, Bayelsa and Ondo States. It has been argued that the communal groups that inhabit the region have settled in the area for some 7,000 to 10,000 years which made them claim the earliest occupants of the region.

In the present political structure of Nigeria, Dukor (2003) observes that by all standards, the minorities are no less inferior to the so-called majority groups. This is because apart from paradoxically constituting the majority over the acclaimed majority groups if they (i.e. minorities) are all combined together, the minorities are greatly endowed with economic relevance in the polity. This economic relevance, says Dukor (2003) comes from the crude oil in their soil coupled with other natural resource endowments such as aquatic habitants. Hence, despite their so-called minority status, within the polity, the Niger Deltans remain the 'landlords' of national wealth and they deserve considered recognition (Dukor, 2003). Thus as the majority

groups have unduly dominated the political arena, subjecting the minorities to political marginalization, the minorities invariably hold onto economic power through the natural resource deposits conceded to them by divine design in Nigeria's geopolitical architecture.

*Ab initio*, the Niger Delta Region used to rank relatively high among peaceful and tranquil communities that constitute the geographical entity now known as Nigeria. However, for quite some time now, the region has remained one of the most troubled spots in Nigeria arising from the militant uprising by the youths of the region. This was sequel to the discovery of oil in commercial quantity in the region first from Oloibiri, Bayelsa state in 1958.

It is pertinent at this juncture, to note that neither the discovery of crude oil in commercial quantity nor subsequent exploration of same *per se* that led to militant uprising in the region, which has regrettably reduced it to an enclave of social conflicts. Rather, it was due to the fact that over the years successive governments at all levels seemed to have played politics with the peculiarly deplorable conditions of the people following the devastating consequences of gas flaring and oil spillage activities of multinational oil companies across the region. Worse still, subsequent exploitation of crude oil has had devastating effect on the entire ecosystem of the region in terms of polluted land, air and waters, with the domino effect on the erstwhile non-oil socio-economic activities and political life of the people without commensurable response either from the government or from the multinational companies. Thus, despite the fact that the largest proportion of the country's revenue is derived from the region, it ranks among the most backward and socially excluded regions in the country where suffering from hunger, ever increasing rate of unemployment, persistent violence, and other human rights abuses have made life unduly brutish and hostile.

On the part of multinational companies, despite existing law and Acts under which the oil exploration could be conducted, their operations still run contrary to international best practices. Suffice it to say therefore, that militia uprising in the Niger Delta, which has been a major determinant of political instability, social unrest economic chaos and developmental retardation, was in reaction to protracted injustice inflicted on the people over the years.

Thus, in comparative terms with other internal political and sectarian conflicts, particularly the Boko Haram terrorist insurgency, militia uprising in the Niger Delta was not borne out of mere act of rebellion against constituted authority. Rather it was instigated in response to long lasting economic deprivation and political marginalization suffered by the people of the region. The people that had sustained themselves over the years through subsistence economy in terms of land-based and aquatic agricultural practices were deprived of their means of livelihood arising from exploration activities with little or no compensation or commensurable alternatives. What is more, many groups were subjected to forced migration from their traditional base for other localities where they live as perpetual aliens arising from the hostility inflicted on their environment by oil exploration and exploitation activities. Following from economic incapacitation, many parents could not give their children qualitative education which resulted in a cycle of ignorance and abject poverty arising from inability to use education as a tool for improved social status and wealth making. Moreover, given age long political deprivation and economic marginalisation, the people felt that their

identity was hanging in the scheme of governance and resorted to aggressive means for redress given obvious government insensitivity to their plight for many decades.

It is instructive to note that the Niger *Deltans* did not just wake up and began to take up arms against the state, or perpetrate serious industrial destabilisation against the activities of the multi-nationals in the region. A number of non-violent, activities that had potential for conflict transformation were employed by the people, such as proposals for policy responses, civil disobedience, non-violent resistance, campaign of protest, among others with the primary motive of effecting a change without being violent.

Among the foremost measures employed by the people of the region in the course of their struggle was the agitation for separate states in the 1950s and 1960s. This struggle was informed by demands for more acceptable formula for the distribution of power and resources without placing undue premium on numerical strength of the constituent groups. This development resulted in the setting up of the Minorities Commission in 1956, which examined the feasibility of creating distinct states for the minority groups within the Nigeria's federalist system.

Another drastic measure taken by the Niger Delta people was the intellectually-driven draft and presentation of Ogoni Bill of Rights by the Ogonis to the federal government in 1990 during the military regime of General Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida. The internationalization of the Ogoni Bill of rights was expressed in successful presentation of the Bill to various international communities and institutions across Africa and the western world. These include the United Nations sub-committee of Human Rights on prevention of Discrimination Against and protection of minorities, the African Human Rights Commission Rain Forest Action Group and the Green Peace Organization. The Bill contained the lamentation of the people arising from government negligence to the deplorable conditions of the people, the protracted neglect of their environment by successive governments and their image about themselves as "a separate and distinct ethnic nationality" within Nigeria's corporate entity.

The central position of the bill was that the Ogonis should be granted political autonomy to be able to lay absolute claim on the oil deposit in the region as a distinct entity within Nigeria's federalist structure. The Bill among other things further strongly advocates the preservation of Ogoni cultural identity and the need for development of Ogoni local languages as well as the protection of their ecosystem.

Unfortunately, all the foregoing entirely fell into deaf hear of successive governments, especially the federal government. At best, successive governments have been hostile and reactionary rather than being friendly and responsive in their approaches to the Niger Delta predicaments.

Considering various failed negotiable instruments in relating their grievances to constitute state authorities and the multinational organisations, the *Niger Deltans* took up arms, the only instrument they felt was left for them to seek redress and have their identity secured within Nigeria's federalist structure. Thus, the people of the region began to display more aggressive measures expressed in physical, structural and psychological dimensions in the defense of their destiny against state-centric oppressive inclinations. It is within this context that the sporadic and endemic outburst of militant uprising and insurrection against the state and persistent disturbance of multinational companies by the Niger Delta citizens, which has constituted intimidating security concerns, could be explained.



The revolt of the Ogoni people in 1966 marked a watershed in their aggressive reactions to the oppressive tendencies of the state and agitation for redress as it involved mobilization of mass action and open confrontation with the state, which had the potential to undermine the territorial integrity of the state. Isaac Jasper Adaka Boro and two others- Sam Owonaro and Nottingham Dick led the 12-day revolution, declaring the pre-matured independent Niger Delta Republic. A successful execution of that secessionist attempt would have undermined the territorial integrity of the Post-independent Nigerian State.

After the 1966 Adaka Boro revolution, there was no other serious attempt of revolt by Niger Delta people until the 1990s. In 1993, the Ogoni people further related their grievances to the government and to all Nigerians by seizing from participating in the presidential election. MOSOP mobilised the Ogoni people to boycott the elections on the argument that they, as a people, they had no part in fashioning the constitution on which basis the election was conducted (Osuoka, 2003).

In another development, Ken Saro Wiwa led the ogoni in a revolt against the state between 1993 and 1995. Sequel to the phenomenon of majority/minority dichotomy in the country, the minority groups suffer from the tyranny of the majority groups who have always taken undue advantage of numerical strength to undermine the historical and identity relevance of the so called minority groups, as well as their importance in the art of politics and governance process, despite natural economic endowment of the region especially in oil and gas deposit, which constitute the major source of national wealth. Ken Saro Wiwa describes the oppressive tendencies on the part of the so called majority groups as a calculated mechanism for drifting the minorities into extinction. According to him:

*If you take away all the resources of the (Ogoni) people, you take away their land, you pollute their air, you pollute their streams, you make it impossible for them to farm or fish, --, and then what comes out of their soil you take entirely away--- if more people in Ogoni are dying than are being born, if ogoni boys and girls are not going to school --- if those who manage to scale through cannot find jobs --- then surely you are leading the tribe to extinction (TELL, April 4, 2005, p.29).*

On January 4, 1993, Saro Wiwa led about 300,000 Ogoni people in aggressive protest against Shell Oil activities and the devastating condition of the environment in the region arising from exploration and exploitation of oil and gas by multinational oil companies. This mass protest was unprecedented in attempted reactions against environmental damage in the Niger Delta in that it marked a watershed in physical demonstration of the people of the region.

On May 24, 1993 the protest of the Ogoni people assumed an intellectual dimension as Ken Saro-Wiwa began to tour Europe with the motive of attracting the attention of international stakeholders on environmental protection and Human Rights to the deplorable conditions of the Ogoni people and their environment. Ken Saro-Wiwa and his men complained about the innumerable oil spills caused by indiscriminate use of outdated equipment and technology by multi-nationals, which intensified exploitation in order to maximize profits. They contend that this had destroyed their farmlands, waters and air, and demanded for commensurable compensation as well as the need to operate in compliance with international standards and best practices.

Ken Saro-Wiwa and his group claim that one of the most visible casualties of the oil spills has been the grave damages done to mangrove tree in the swamps. The tree which has become an endangered species used to provide habitat for seafood such as oysters, crabs, and mussels. These aquatic creatures had been sources of wealth for the Niger *Deltans*, but the continued survival of which have also become endangered arising from the toxicity of oil and gas emitted into the waters by the exploration activities. However, in 1998, Saro Wiwa and eight (popularly referred to as the Ogoni nine) other activists were arrested and sentenced to death by hanging without due process in military tribunal under the despotic regime of General Sani Abacha despite international opposition to that stance (Green and Luehrmann, 2003).

There was also the ijaw youth *Kaiama* Declaration in 1998. The minorities further drove in their demand through “*Kiama* Declaration” in which the people demanded for resource control, calling on the state to introduce a legal regime for resolving the just claims of the minorities in the spirit of understanding and equity (Emiri, 2003). The common thread running through these aggressive revolts is the need to resist the persistence of injustice, bad governance and environmental degradation with a view to defending their common destiny and survival in the context of the Nigeria’s federalist structure.

The prevailing context and dynamics of open confrontation by Niger Delta militants has taken various dimensions. Four major dimensions are identified in this study as follow:

- i. Confrontation between militants and the state, triggered by socio-economic deprivation and political marginalization;
- ii. Confrontation between militants and multinational oil companies in the region: this took the form of confrontations between specific oil-deposit communities and designated oil companies over particular issues such as neglect, damage done to their environment, demand for improved socio-economic conditions of indigenes, provocation over affluent life styles of expatriates compared to abject poverty on the part of the indigenes, among others;
- iii. Confrontations between militants and their paramount leaders in various communities across the Niger Delta Region arising from breach of agreement and mutual distrust and suspicion; and
- iv. Crisis of relevance and supremacy among various militant groups across the region.

At this confrontational stage, both the militants and the government had shifted emphasis from solving the problem to winning the war. The devastating consequences of the conflict has undermined governance process and security concerns and posed deadly threat to the collective existence of Nigeria as a united political entity. The international implication of the foregoing is that protracted violence in the region has subjected the image of the country into disrepute among the comity of nations.

Recent security-threatening occurrences of international magnitude tend to affirm the continued prevalence of violent attacks in the Niger Delta despite existing management initiatives. For instance, in 2012, the Canadian government labeled some parts of the region danger zones, consequent upon which it warned its subjects to “go there with caution”. In the same vein, within the same timeframe, the United Kingdom, warned its citizens against traveling to some parts of the Niger Delta including Bayelsa, Akwa-Ibom and Rivers States (The Punch Nov 25, 2012; pp. 2). This apprehension is not unfounded considering the fact that cases of abduction and extra-legal killing of various categories of people including expatriates is still rampant in the region, despite the amnesty programme and other counter-insurgency measures by government and

other stakeholders. For instance as recent as October 2014, there were attacks by pirates in the creeks of Niger Delta which resulted in killing of security agents and abduction of Oil workers. The incident occurred in Bayelsa State and the state Commissioner of Police (CP) confirmed it. The CP, Mr. Valentine Ntomchukwu attests that Sea pirates attacked and killed three policemen who were escorting an Agip barge. Within the same period, unknown gunmen attacked a boat in the Nembe Local Government Area of Bayelsa State and abducted six personnel from a local oil service company. In another operation, sea pirates on a speedboat boarded a supply vessel and kidnapped the ship's master and its chief engineer (The Punch, Tuesday October 28, 2014, pp. 36).

In another development, in November, 2014, three expatriates working with ElMerit Oil Company were abducted by gunmen at Emakalakala in Ogbia Local Government Area of Bayelsa State. It was reported that the abduction, which was confirmed by security agents, occurred barely a day after Bayelsa State government made a political declaration that the Niger Delta region was free from militant attacks and that "Bayelsa State was the most secure state in the country" (Saturday Punch, November 29, 2014, pp. 13). Precisely, the coordinator of Joint Media Campaign Centre, Joint Military Task Force Operation tagged, *Operation Pulo Shield*, Col. Mustapha Anka confirmed the incident (Saturday Punch, November 29, 2014, pp. 13). It is disheartening to note that attacks on Joint Military Task Force by sea pirates have become a recurring decimal in the Niger Delta Region. On Sunday, December 21, 2014, it was also reported that sea pirates attacked and killed three soldiers attached to Operation *Pulo Shield* and hijacked a military gunboat at Santa Barbara, a notorious waterways in Nembe area of Bayelsa State (The Punch, 23/ 12/ 2014: pp.5).

## 5. Militia uprising in the Niger Delta region: The youth are not to blame!

*"War is defeat for humanity. Only in peace and through peace can respect for human dignity and its inalienable rights be guaranteed"- pope John Paul II, World Day of peace, January 1, 2000; "Those who make peaceful revolution impossible will make violent revolution inevitable"- John F. Kennedy, 1962 (see Barash and Webel, 2002: 28, 244).*

The above popular quotation epitomizes the ideological underpinnings of militia uprising in the Niger Delta. Anywhere in the world, oppressive tendencies of the political class, which subject the citizenry to bondage that is not imposed by nature usually determines the emergence of militias as a counter-measure in an attempt to deliver themselves and those who identify with their mission from the clutches of political predators. Suffice it to say, therefore, that the rise of any militant group in whatever form – be it ethnic or otherwise, anywhere across the globe, could be attributed to the urge on the part of the oppressed to reverse the unjust *status quo* and pave way for change. With specific reference to the third world, Dukor (2003:165) convincingly captures why members of the public are wont to resort to violence in expressing their grievances thus:

*State violence, manifesting itself in fascist and dictatorial rule, press censorship, physical and psychological intimidation of the citizenry is rampant in the third world. History has shown that forms of protest like civil disobedience, legal challenges, sit-down strikes, sit-ins, hunger strikes, self-immolation and cessation of public activities are either not applicable*

*or ineffective in resisting State violence in third world countries like Nigeria. Instead, militant demonstrations on the part of students, traders, workers and armed resistance may be the only viable way of resisting State violence---* (Dukor, 2003:165).

In his theory of civil disobedience, John Rawls (1984), cited in Dukor (2003: 146) justifies why deliberate violation of basic principles of civil liberties could be employed as a veritable instrument of non-violent change in a democratic society. According to Rawls (1984):

*a constitutional theory of civil disobedience defines the theory and separates it from other forms of opposition to democratic authority ... It sets out grounds of civil disobedience and the conditions under which such action is justified in a just democratic society. And finally a theory should explain the role of civil disobedience within a constitutional system and account for the appropriateness of this mode of protest within a free society.*

Leaning on Rawls' analysis, and with emphasis on the Nigeria's context, Dukor (2003:143) stresses that through the instrumentality of civil disobedience a minority sends signals to the majority to consider their plight in quest for redress:

*in civil disobedience, fidelity to law helps to establish to the majority that the act is indeed politically conscientious and sincere, and that it is intended to address the public's sense of justice. It is clearly distinct from militant action and obstruction and organised forcible resistance.*

Against this standpoint and with particular emphasis on the Niger Delta region, therefore, Osuoka (2003:144) argues that the resistance of the nationalities in the Niger Delta area- the Ogoni, Isoko, Urhobo, Itsekiri, and Ijaw, among others- is the peoples' response to the crisis within the Nigerian state. It is within this context that the sporadic and endemic outburst of militant uprising against the state and multinational companies could be explained.

The long years of unyielding disposition on the part of the government was partly demonstrated by continued reduction of revenue allocation to the Niger Delta from 100 percent in 1954 to the current 13 percent.

No doubt, the consequences of violent acts of the militants in the region under discourse have been so devastatingly far-reaching considering the invaluable human and material resources that had been lost to the crisis coupled with further damage it had done on the environment. It has also aggravated political instability, complicated economic disorder and dented the image of the nation at the international community. What is more, some opportunistic mercenaries have taken undue advantage of the militancy in the region to their selfish interests by perpetrating and perpetuating criminal and inhumane acts including hostage taking for ransom, human trafficking, electoral violence, political assassination and economic sabotage through vandalism of pipelines among other.

Against that background, successive governments have always criminalized militant uprising in the Niger delta at the expense of proper diagnosis and development-inclined policy responses. More often than not, governments at all levels have always condemned the aggressive reactions of the militants as acts of rebellion against the state, and as mindless attempts to disrupt the socioeconomic order of society. These repressive measures by the state have further compounded the problem rather than solving it. Government

repressive clamp down on Odi Community during Olusegun Obasanjo administration in 1999 over the violent act of militants is a good case in point. The entire community was reduced to rubbles and death tolls were counted in hundreds and the environment destroyed beyond recognition.

Moreover, in May 2009, the Joint Task Force (JTF) comprising more or less 7000 troupes, two war ships, and 14 gunboats bombarded Gbaramatu kingdom and Camp 5, the Headquarters of MEND on the order of the federal government under Late Musa Yar'Adua. In the course of the counter-insurgency, 4 Ijaw communities were grossly attacked by the JTF, namely: Oporoza, Kunukunuma, Okerenkoko and Kurutie (Ogundiya, 2011).

The central position of this study is that the perpetration of violence by the Niger Delta people could be explained in the context of failure of government to address the National Question through the instrumentality of constitutional provision in the interest of the continued existence of Nigeria and Nigerians. Thus it will be misleading and counterproductive to presume that the militia uprising could be suppressed by 'rhetoric, military campaigns or repressive and regulative policies' (Ogundiya, 2011), which are not directly designed to address social inequality, iniquity of state and non-state actors and unjust dealings with the environment.

## 6. Towards managing the crisis: Efforts in retrospective

Apparently, security challenges in the Niger Delta region arising from provocative activities of aggressive youths have remained a subject of concern for successive governments in Nigeria. Hence, almost all Nigerian leaders have attempted to address the problem in the interest of national security and sustainable development. Prominent among the measures employed by various regimes, both military and civilian, include establishment of agencies and state and local government creation.

However, one common characteristic of most government interventions is that they are reactionary rather than responsive in nature. This has to a large extent accounted for the persistence of the problem with the far-reaching implications for National peace and security. One way by which government's reactionary approaches are being measured is employment of coercive measures by deploying security apparatus to the troubled zone. Unfortunately, such fire-brigade measures have not been translated into much desired peace in the region. Indeed, on many instances, government's deployment of counterforce has aggravated the existing problem it was meant to solve. A good case in point was the 2003 Odi massacre during General Olusegun Obasanjo civilian regime. As a follow-up to coercive measures, government is fond of sending delegates on an official visit to the conflict zone express concerns to the damage done on people, their property and the ecosystem.

Apart from coercive approach, successive governments have attempted to address the Niger Delta crisis through management agencies. For instance, in 1960, the Niger Delta Development Board (NDDDB) was established with the prime mandate to "consider the problems of the area of the Niger Delta". Provision was made for the establishment of NDDDB in Nigeria's Republican constitution of 1963. Section 159 of that document clearly states that "there shall be a board for the Niger Delta which shall be styled the Niger Delta Development Board". The terms of reference of the board which was meant to be effective until July 1, 1969

is stated in the constitution to the effect that it shall be responsible for advising the government of the federation and governments of Eastern Nigeria and Mid-Western Nigeria with respect to the physical development of the Niger Delta. It was further stated that in order to discharge that responsibility, the Board shall cause the Niger Delta to be surveyed in order to ascertain what measures are required to promote its physical development; prepare schemes designed to promote the physical development of the Niger Delta.

It is instructive to note that although the Mid-Western region had not been evolved as at the time the Board was established, however, efforts towards its creation had been in the pipeline. Since then, the mandate of NDDDB has been reviewed, which has equally attracted continued change of name of the agency: Niger Delta River Basin Development Authority (NDBDA) in 1976; the Oil Mineral Producing Areas Development Commission (OMPADEC) in 1992; and the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) in the year 2000.

Security commission on the Oil Producing Area is another initiative developed to address the endemic crisis in the Niger Delta. The commission had the mandate to examine the causes of protracted crisis in the area and come up with possible way out. Some of the observations of the Commission include the following:

- Government neglect of the area;
- Certain retired and serving military generals' involvement in the vandalism of the pipelines and refineries;
- The use of force by government to curb the crisis which rather aggravates it; and
- The insensitivity of multinational corporations to the plight of the people of the region and the environment.

Unfortunately, the reports of the commission were not implemented by the same federal government that set up the commission in the first instance.

Subsequently by way of responding to problem of the region, successive military governments created more states in the region. These include Akwa Ibom state on September 28 1987; Delta State on August 27, 1991 during Ibrahim Babangida administration; and Bayelsa State on October 1, 1996 under Sani Abacha administration.

Fiscal response is yet another policy measure employed by government to address the Niger Delta crisis. However, governments' fiscal responses have not demonstrated enough sense of justice to the region and its people considering continued reduction of revenue allocated to the region. Since 1946, revenue derivation to the Niger Delta has been on reducing trend. In 1946, revenue derivation to the region was 100 percent. This was reduced by 50 percent based on Raisman Commission in the 1950s when the exploration of crude oil in commercial quantity kicked off. The General Yakubu Gowon military regime further reduced it to 25 percent following Ojetunji Aboyade Technical Committee on Revenue Allocation recommendation. The civilian regime of Alhaji Shehu Shagari further reduced it to 5 percent while General Mohammadu Buhari's military regime cut it to 1.5 percent; the worst so far between 1946 and 1985 when the Buhari military regime was in power. When the Babangida administration took over from Buhari through a counter-coup in December 1985, it raised it from 1.5 percent to 3 percent, which was later raised to its present 13 percent (The News, March 6, 2006, p. 4).

Apparently the present derivation conceded to the region has not met its pressing needs to any appreciable extent. The position of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in late 2005 which still remains valid, lends credence to this assertion. In 2006, the UNDP describes the Niger Delta region, as “a region suffering from administrative neglect, crumbling social infrastructure and services, high unemployment, social deprivation, abject poverty, fifth and squalor, and endemic conflict” (The Punch, Nov. 7, 2012, P. 18). This development has informed the protracted and intractable nature of the problems as they are being treated on the face value, rather than being tackled from roots.

One of the latest efforts employed to address the militia uprising in the region by the Federal government was the establishment of Ministry of Niger Delta on September 10, 2008 during the regime of Late Umaru Musa Yar’Adua with Chief Ufot Ekaette as pioneer Minister (The Punch, Thursday, 1/1/2015). Comparing the amount of money the ministry since inception to its quality of delivery, it could be argued that stakeholders in that ministry have not performed up to expectation. Between 2009 and 2013, the ministry has received a cumulative sum of N342 billion. In 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012 and 2013, the ministry has collected N51.2 billion, N82.6 billion, N55.2 billion, N86.2 billion, and N63.4 billion respectively The Punch January 1/1, 2015, pp. 29). From all indications it is obvious that the ministry cannot be exonerated from fiscal impropriety and corrupt tendencies considering the prevailing socioeconomic and environmental challenges confronting the region. The Late President Umaru Musa Yar’Adua also declared amnesty for the militants in the Niger Delta on 25 June, 2009, christened “Presidential Amnesty Programme”. Musa Yar’Adua claimed to have done this, pursuant to Section 175 of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria and ‘in consultation with the Council of State.

The root of amnesty programme could be traced to the recommendations of the technical Committee on the Niger Delta (TCND) constituted by the administration of Yar’Adua (Ogundiya, 2011:18). In its report submitted to the State House on December 1, 2008, the TCND recommended the need for amnesty to be extended to the militants within the context of Disarmament, Demobilisation, and Reintegration (DDR). Other recommendations made by TCND included increased allocation of crude revenue to the region; urgent improvement of infrastructure and human welfare services; and new institutions for actualizing the region’s longer term of development (Ogundiya, 2011). The whole idea of the amnesty was to discourage militia uprising in the region by granting unconditional state pardon to the militants. Government considered the programme necessary in view of the inadequacies of previous attempts at addressing the Niger Delta problem in the interest of sustainable development and national integration.

However, apart from want of constitutional clarity leveled against the idea of amnesty programme (Ogundiya, 2011), poor policy framework, technical deficiency and faulty approach vitiated potential prospects of the project (Albert, 2011; Ogundiya, 2011). From the angle of poor policy framework, Albert (2011:17) argues that the ‘amnesty’ programme in the Niger Delta provides one of the most laughable dimensions of handling the problem as:

*it does not come anywhere near the process and procedure of rehabilitation and reintegration”, and it seems “to be in a hurry to unleash the ex-militants back on society”; whereas “there is little or no effort to come to terms with the ex-militants in relation to their perceptions of the problems of the region”.*

From technical ground, Ogundiya (2011) observes that “poor coordination, corruption and mismanagement, inflation of militants’ registers, poor funding culminating in the delay of the payment of ex-militants’ allowances and delay in the skill acquisition programmes for the militants, short supply of training facilities pose dangerous threat to effective implementation of the programme.

Against the backdrop of poor policy framework and technical error, incoherent approach ultimately undermined the effective implementation of the amnesty project. In that regard, the project lacks due process in terms of transparency, proper monitoring and evaluation framework, thereby making the outcome short of desired expectation. For instance, Sampson, (2010) cited in Ogundiya (2011) laments that only 20 per cent of the estimated cost for running the programme actually get to the reach of the ex-militants who are invariably the primary beneficiaries of the programme. The remaining 80 per cent goes to consultants and contractors who are strategically involved to represent the interests of certain politicians and businessmen behind the scene.

What the foregoing suggests is that the amnesty project did not take cognizance of the major shortcomings of the existing initiatives which makes transformation impact assessment of the initiative grossly insignificant. A summary of the shortcomings of the amnesty project is analysed by the Ijaw Council for Human Rights (ICHR) thus:

- That 80 per cent out of the estimated cost for running the amnesty programme goes to consultants and contractors; including corrupt government agents (emphasis added), leaving the beneficiaries with just 20 per cent;
- That the plan has not taken into consideration those who have been directly affected and traumatized by the crisis; especially those who have lost their sources of livelihood and major breadwinners, including mothers of dead militias, wives, children and sibling;
- That the “status of institution for training falls far short of acceptable standard, as they are neither certified nor can award acceptable certificates. Most of them have inadequate facilities for proper impartation of knowledge and skills”;
- Candidates requiring further academic education are not adequately prepared for in the document;
- ‘there is no monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) framework mentioned in the document. There is also no parameters for measurement of success/failure of suggested activities of programmes’;
- That the sum of 20 million naira proposed by PCA for hall rentals and 6.750 billion naira for accommodation, is outrageous and could be used in rebuilding destroyed communities and setting up skills incubation centres for beneficiaries;
- The PCA document contradicts itself in activity, target groups and needs. “the document indicates that they already have information on needs and asset assessment, therefore no need for the needs assessment estimated at 500 million naira (see Ogundiya, 2011: 20-21).

## 7. Concluding remarks

This study has examined the precipitating and accelerating determinants of militia uprising in the Niger Delta region. The study has revealed that this development should not be reduced to mere display of youth



restiveness but a reaction to protracted oil-induced injustice inflicted on the people and their ecosystem by state and non-state agencies. As this study has shown, failure of successive governments to respond proactively to non-violent agitations over the years had provoked the youth to presume that the only instrument of action at their disposal was to take up arms against the state. It must be admitted that the long history of violence and restiveness in the Niger Delta has been inspired by reactions to frustrations and oppressive inclinations by the state and private investors on the one hand, and on the other, the quest for attracting stakeholders' feelings and assuage concerns of marginalization and deprivation. Semenitari (2004:26) summarized the nature and character of violence in the region thus:

*History shows that the Niger Delta is the nation's soft underbelly and the region of many stubborn kings and revolutionaries who insist on control of their resources. Whether it is king Jaja of Opobo, King Nana of Itshekiri, King Koko of Nembe, or the more recent Isaac Adaka Boro and Ken Saro-Wiwa, the people of the region have remained committed to the same ideals, freedom from oppression, and control of the land and resources God has put within them (see TELL, October 18, 2004, p.26).*

Apart from the negligible performance on the part of Multinational Corporations within the context of their Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), governments at the federal and state levels seem insensitive to the plight of the people in the Niger Delta within the context of their Social Contract Responsibility (SCR). Governments have expressed sheer insensitivity in terms of poor policy responses, misplaced priority and mismanagement of resources. For instance in 2012, the then incumbent Governor Rotimi Amaechi of Rivers State and his Akwa Ibom State counterpart, Governor Godswill Akpabio, purchased private jets at the expense of the social welfare of the citizenry. In October 2012, Rotimi Amaechi was reported to have acquired a brand new Bombardier Global 5000 (N565RS) at \$45.7 million. In the same vein, Godswill Akpabio purchased a new Gulfstream Jet for \$45 million earlier in June, 2012 (The Punch, 07/11/2012).

The rationale for this official fiscal recklessness is questionable and condemnable as such money could have been expended for the common good of the people in the region. In other climes attempts are being made by the leaders to reduce recurrent expenditure in order to be more responsible and responsive to the needs of their people. For instance, the King of Norway and the British Prime Minister (PM) fly commercial Airlines when they travel. Whereas Norway is an oil producing country like Nigeria but contrary to the Nigerian situation, Norway is among the countries in the world whose wealth are being used to earn improved standards of living for the citizenry. On his own part, David Cameron, British PM is said to have conserved \$300,000 in favour of his country's taxpayers anytime he travels on commercial Airlines (The Punch, 07/11/2012).

The scenario in the Niger Delta is a microcosm of internal crises and the attendant development retardation and security challenges in Nigeria. From the foregoing, it could be submitted that the problem in the region has not been susceptible to management because successive governments have failed to be passionately sensitive to the prevailing socioeconomic and environmental realities of the region.

It is revealed that failure of reactionary measures mainly demonstrated through coercive and palliative approaches by government and multinational oil corporations have informed the endemic feature of youth restiveness and other dimensions of violence in that hitherto peaceful region. Hence, emphasis must be

placed on responsive policy framework in order to transform the Niger Delta Region from violence to sustainable development and human security.

## **8. Recommendations**

Militia uprising in the Niger Delta is a practical problem that requires grand strategy in terms of proper diagnosis with a view to applying people-based and development-oriented grand strategy which has the following components:

### **8.1. Public/private response to Niger Delta crises**

As this analysis has shown, governments at both federal and state levels have not demonstrated enough political will and constitutional commitment to the prevailing problems in the Niger Delta. Hence government should be more proactively responsive through the Social Contract Responsibility (SCR) in collaboration with the multinational investors within the context of their Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in the interest of national integration and sustainable development. This will go a long way in transforming the youth and make them positive change agents in Nigeria's quest for actualizing its Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and vision 20:2020.

### **8.2. Political approach**

This has to do with addressing the Niger Delta problems through constitutional and legislative response to the National Question. It must be noted that the task of the government is not just to quench the violence in Niger Delta region but to embark on comprehensive reform of the political atmosphere. This will ensure full sense of social justice that would promote a common sense of identity in the people of Niger Delta Region in particular and the Nigerian citizenry in general.

### **8.3. Quick passage and implementation of Petroleum Industry Bill (PIB)**

The PIB is described as an Act to provide for the establishment of a legal framework for the activities of multinationals in the region in consonance within the context of international best practices. If carefully managed the PIB has the prospect to ensure the comparative advantage of promoting scientific exploration of oil and gas and enhancing environmental protection in the region. Government should take cognizance of the fact that every policy option taken in the present will definitely affect the future either positively or otherwise. Hence, the passage of PIB into law should be considered a matter of urgent public importance which should exert speedy response by the National Assembly.

### **8.4. Socioeconomic approach: Domesticating the South African 'GEAR' model**

Government must endeavour to fashion out economic policy that will have measurable short-term and long-term positive impact in the life of the citizenry. In this regard, this study proposes South African Model of "Growth, Empowerment and Redistribution (GEAR)", in which South Africa used economic policy design to concretize post-apartheid reconciliation. The Policy was built on the premise that reconciliation between black majority and white minority cannot be feasible and have long-term value "in a situation in which poverty and prosperity continue to be defined in racial terms". Nigerian government should transform the aggressive behavior of militant youths in the Niger Delta region into national strength by domesticating the South African model of economic reconciliation epitomized in GEAR.

#### 8.5. Judicial approach: Establishing truth, justice and reconciliation commission on Niger Delta

Addressing social injustices and inequalities created by the exploitative and explorative activities of multinational investors is imperative for the quest for peace and stability in the Niger Delta Region. Therefore, there is need for a special body to be known as "Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission on Niger Delta". The Commission should identify the root cause(s) of the problem in the region and proffer modalities for economic empowerment and social justice in the region.

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