



## Socio-Economic and Cultural Factors Affecting Militancy in Oil Bearing Communities of Imo State – South East Nigeria

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### ABSTRACT

*Militancy in the oil-bearing communities of Imo State, Nigeria has remained a baffling and threatening phenomenon to the peace, progress, and socio-economic development of the region. This restiveness has without doubt interrupted and disfigured the socio-economic and cultural life of these communities in Imo state. The oil-bearing communities are located in the South-Western part of Imo State which is located in the South-East geopolitical zone of Nigeria, with the natural blessings of crude oil. This crude oil was discovered in the 1930s but documented exploration started in the 1960s, although the abinitio dominant occupations of the people were majorly farming, hunting and fishing before the interference of oil activities. Thus, turning a blessing into a curse, as the oil discovery, exploration and exploitation begat soil impoverishment, air/water pollution, environmental dilapidation, poverty, and loss of bio-organism, which have contributed negatively to the socio-economic and cultural life of these oil-bearing communities. This study examined historically the trends and notable glimpse of the various militant activities in Imo State. This paper theoretically examines the socio-economic and cultural impacts of militant crises in the oil-bearing communities of Imo State specifically, following the perceived incessant unrest in the areas as a result of neglect from the federal government and multinational companies involved in the oil exploration, as data were secondarily sourced. The paper adopted relative deprivation theory as the most explanatory tool towards understanding the core causes of this menace and is of the opinion that this cankerworm can be attacked to the barest minimum if adequate multifaceted measures will be taken such as; diversification and development of their economy, provision of social basic amenities, gross-tackling of unemployment by the government, restriction on the flow of weaponry into these communities, proper management of oil spillage by the oil companies, and finally creating friendly environment by the host communities. It is the sole point of departure of this work to draw the attention of all stakeholders to cries of the unfortunate misery of the natural blessing in oil bearing communities in Imo State, so that they can be salvaged to a considerable standard.*

**Keywords:** Militancy; Socio-economic; Impact and Oil-bearing

## 1. Introduction

Militancy in the oil bearing communities of Imo State, Nigeria has remained a baffling and threatening phenomenon to the progress, peace and development of the region. For the past two decades, militancy and oil grievances have subtly crept and sustainably affected the general well-being and peaceful living of the people.

Militancy is an action that is grievance motivated, adversarial, confrontational, collective and violent to the detriment of the security of lives and properties (D'Acry, 2011). It is a monster created as a result of multi-dimensional agitations by the indigenes of oil-bearing communities in Nigeria, as a result of injustice, lack of equal distribution of resources, lack of transparency and accountability in governance, poorly observed rule of law, overbearing violations of economic and fundamental rights, environmental degradation and short coming in the achievement of personal and collective socio-economic goals. Oluwaseun (2016) asserted that communities are prone to violent acts and agitations when they perceive injustice of not benefiting from their own resources.

The oil bearing communities in Imo State which comprise of Ohaji-Egbema, Oguta, and Oru respectively have witnessed severe economic deprivation, marginalization in federal budgeting/allocation and social exclusion in sharp contrast to the enormous wealth of the area. The interest of this paper is to create more awareness on the deteriorated condition of the region; as it has been rewarded with massive environmental degradation, unemployment, abject poverty, backwardness, lack of infrastructural educational system (Okonta, 2016).

Prior to the discovery and exploration of oil and gas in the oil bearing region, the primary occupation of the people was fishing and farming (Chiza, 2015) argues that years of oil exploration and exploitation by the oil companies destroyed the subsistence economy of the people. The oil based environmental degradation has alienated the people from the use of their natural resources for their own development. The communities are ravaged by oil spills, fires, pollution, deforestations and poor waste management. The destruction of farmlands, fish ponds and rivers had radically altered the economic life of the once self-reliant and productive region for the worst (Okonta, 2015). The inhabitants of the region have been subjected to untold hardship through oil pollution. All these and insufficiency of social responsibilities by the federal government and oil companies accounts for the increasing violent attacks on oil installations and frequent hostage taking since 2006. Militant activities in the oil bearing communities in Imo State are mostly motivated by frustration.

Anikpo (1998:7) noted that conflicts are a response to the frustration which occurs as a result of obstacles against the actualization of set goals. The neglect of the region since the discovery of oil in the area, pitched the youths of the region against the Nigeria state. The youths responded to kidnapping for ransom, oil bunkering, and pipeline vandalization. The goal of the militant groups has been to protect the identities and interest of the groups they represent within the Nigerian states by violent means if deemed necessary. These militants' groups such as Egbesu boys, Movement for the Survival of Ijaw Ethnic Nationality (MOSIEN), Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), Movement for the survival of Ogoni people (MOSOP) among others have created tension and a state of general insecurity in Nigeria which must be unraveled. It is not only a national problem, but a global problem that deserves serious attention.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Theoretical Underpinning

It is no longer news today that Nigeria is a nation under constant restlessness and diverse violent movements which have drawn both local and international attention.

These movements (violent and non-violent) stem from the ill-feeling of shortchanged opportunities, unfair treatment, unequal attention and partial distribution of generally own resources. These violent movements are sponsored by some social, cultural, economic and political factors that affect the peaceful co-existence and smooth running of the nation. This could be understood in the words of Ibrahim (2008) "the building and smooth running of the nation is a work in progress, which must include building of political entity which corresponds to the territory and population of the nation, building economic institutions that are value and progress oriented, with an ideal nature of bureaucracy, building a social civil and equal society and organizations, a collective sense of oneness and sense of purpose".

### Relative Deprivation Theory

Militancy as a social phenomenon and a problem can never exist or emerge in a vacuum, there must be mitigating factors and situations that may trigger its existence, these factors could range from social, economic, environmental and/or cultural.

The use of relative deprivation theory will suffice in dissecting the issue on ground; the theory is used to explain the feelings of economic, political and social denial of opportunities or resources that are relative rather than absolute in the social sciences. This was first and foremost used by an American sociologist Robert K. Merton in other to understand and explain the concept of social movements, deviances and crime. This middle range theory specifically looks at the potential cause(s) of social movements, deviances, leading to extreme violent situations such as rioting, violent agitations, civil wars, terrorism and other related social problems (crime).

According to Merton (1938) grievances of people who feel deprived or denied of something valuable which they are entitled to is the sole cause of violent altercations and that individuals get involved in deviant behaviors when there is a limited means to the actualization of their goals. This theory being applied to this study, explains the social-economic and cultural factors behind militancy, such as poverty, unequal distribution and access to the resources, environmental degradation, illiteracy and belief system.

In the word of Emaduku (2016), "The Niger Delta is Nigeria's goose that lays the Golden egg while its egg is cherished and feasted upon in order to give and sustain the life of the nation, the goose itself is left unfed, uncared for, malnourished and abandoned". This captures the nature and situational impact of years of oil exploitation and pollution which have totally destroyed the environment (both the water and the land) where the various affected communities prior to this time do fish and farm in order to sustain livelihood, but right now, the worse is the case as they have given it all to the nation without any corresponding recompense to suture the degradation of all the basic social amenities and sources of livelihood. It is important that we take into consideration the health challenges that these communities face as well through the gas exploitation activities go on and the emission of carbon monoxide and other noxious gaseous fluids that are harmful to the body.

These communities being faced with unattended and dilapidated decay watch the resources from their areas being used to run and develop other cities. One can therefore say that this deprivation, disparity and negligence in development issues on these communities contributed to the violent agitations and aggressive social calls for resources appropriation, allocation and control.

Deprivation theory states that people who are denied of things deemed valuable and needful for the meeting of their basic and luxury needs, are given no choice than to get involved into any other means of survival to attract the attention of others and show their displeased feelings with the hope of redressing their grievances, concluding that so far as there are some humans who are perceived as higher than others, there will always be the feeling of deprivation because of social inequality, though this theory failed to recognize possible situational factors that can cause deprivation not just outcomes of the act.

### 2.2 Possible Causes of the Crisis in Oil Bearing Communities in Imo State

Naturally, it is known that there wouldn't be a smoke without a fire as there wouldn't be a conflict or disagreement without a cause which could be clash of interests, individual or personality differences As well as misinterpretation of vision. On this premise, it is therefore important to thoroughly consider the salient reasons for this social problem in the oil bearing communities in Imo state. "Standing to be quoted that no social problem is independent rather dependent upon a cause". According to the News Paper report, (Vanguard May 31, 2016), the conspiracies of the old colonial masters in tandem with the different international oil companies, IOCs, Shell, Mobil, Chevron, Total, Agip etc and the activities of our dictatorial and uncaring federal government caused this unbearable situation in not heeding to the appeal for basic rights of the minority oil producing nations, Isaac Boro started the crisis in the 1960s; but was eliminated by the authorities in power and the results of the act are what we are facing today. Conflict or crisis are always resulting from one social disagreement or the other which is inevitable so far as human existence is concern, like Oby (2001) asserted that conflict is inevitable and it keeps occurring, everyday. This is true because everybody encounters one or two challenges or conflicts either at home, work, school or even at other social outings. Therefore, the causes of conflicts or crisis would not be too strange to people because we are all

social animals but for the peculiarity of this work the remote causes would be outline in primary and secondary forms.

The following are primary causes of this lingered crisis in the oil bearing communities of Imo state and Niger Delta region at large:

- a. The presence of greed
- b. Feeling of neglect and deprivation
- c. The hash experience of abject poverty in the midst of abundance
- d. Perceived social injustice and compensation (others benefitting more than they contribute to the economy)

Furtherance to the categorization of these obvious reasons for the series of militancy crisis in Imo State, are according to Johnson, Akinpelu, Adegoke and Ezeani (2010) in three sets.

1. Conflict over resources
  2. Conflict over psychological needs
  3. Conflict over values
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- a. Conflicts over resources are usually easy to identify because they can be seen and are more potentially easy to resolve. This kind of conflict takes place when two or more persons want a particular thing and there is not enough to get to everyone for instance the fuel crises – where individuals even fight over turns and the quantity an individual whom it is his or her turn can take, so that it gets to the rest in the queue, but immediately there is a surplus supply of the resources, then the fight comes to an end.
  - b. Conflicts over psychological needs are concerned with the psyche of an individual cum group. Borrowing from Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs, we can observe the various needs of man that may trigger clashes and disagreement when not satisfied. Such needs are:
    - i. Psychological needs
    - ii. Safety needs
    - iii. Emotional and acceptance need
    - iv. Self esteem
    - v. Self actualization

With this in mind, one can posit that lack of satisfaction/ achievement of needs can foster conflicts and disagreement.

- c. Conflicts involving values are the most difficult to understand and resolve. This is because values are peculiar to the host, as they are belief systems, norms and principles that guide the general conducts of a people. Value incorporates how transparent, honest, fair, equal and just a situation or matter is. The conflict over values surfaces when one fails to be transparent, fair, honest and just with matters that concern others. When a group of persons feels that they are not justly, honestly and fairly treated, they tend to react to show that all is not well. Sometimes, value or belief oriented conflicts are provocatively unending when not managed well. From the above categorization one could denote that the oil bearing communities in Imo state and Niger Delta in general has drawn undeniable attention from both local and international bodies on the feeling of injustice towards the promotion and development of the area, as the case remains expropriating the local people of the area from having a considerable right and benefits from their own natural resources, according to (Olusupo 2013).

### 2.3 Political, Social, Economic, and Environmental Drivers

The historical legacy of military rule and repression of the people has not changed since 1999 and the supposed rise of democracy. There is still a standing army securing the oil infrastructure from the population and protecting the politicians failing to use the resources at their disposal for the good of the people. The Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) controls over 95 per cent of seats at all tiers of government and in the core states of the Delta received in

excess of 90 per cent of the eligible vote in 2003 and 2007 elections. This vote is obviously false and was secured by not only rigging the elections but also by empowering local youths with weaponry.

The armed mobilisation of the youth in the run up to the 2003 elections across South East and South States was a significant conflict escalator/ perpetrator to militancy in the region. Many of the youths now leading the militant groups and agitating for change, graduated into the use of violence in conflicts over collective and communal issues as they were indirectly mobilized for political tussle, most significantly the 2003 Warri Crisis, which was fought over the positioning of a local government office. It is important to note that after they did not surrender their arms after the 2003 elections and mostly remained active since then. An important lesson was learnt in 2003: a monopoly of firepower is needed to secure the elections. However, Violence escalated in the run up to the 2007 elections as politicians again mobilized these boys to secure the victory at the polls. This explains how Politics has supported corruption, terrorism, monopoly and exacerbation of violence within the oil bearing communities of the region. This is the single most important issue that must be addressed in the long term if there is ever to be real peace in the region.

The historical failure of all power stakeholders to deliver even the most basic of developmental needs to a population living on top of one of the world's largest deposits of oil and gas has created serious resentment and frustrations at all levels of society and intensely on the oil bearing communities in Imo State.

Democracy has also failed to deliver since 1999 and the population has become further disenfranchised. However, until the rise of democracy violence remained rare. This has significantly changed in the last one to two decades as more sophisticated weapons and increasing number of armed youths are seriously challenging the state's monopoly of force. This has created a situation where most citizens, even those who promote peace, can understand and tolerate why some have turned to violence to bring about change, in coincidence with present social disintegration experience. The oil bearing communities in Imo State are now less coherent and the social norms respected from antiquity, have lost their social values as the internal conflicts in these communities have been fueled by the oil companies' practices and federal government social policies. Another worrying dynamic is the lack socioeconomic gratification and compensation, including short comings in the achievement both personal and collective goals.

The domination of corruption, in our economy and short term financial gain at all levels of society is a significant conflict driver in the Niger Delta. Injustice serve as a perpetrator to militant activities as the feeling of unfairness and marginalization sets in over the resources and financial allocation. Udo (2013) noted that the most violent conflicts and agitations in Sub-Saharan Africa are related to natural resources, perceived unfair allocation and management of the resources' dividends by the governments. This shows that Nigeria is excessively dependent on oil and it accounts for more than 90 per cent of the revenue of the Nigerian government.

The economic stakes are so high in the Niger Delta that unless non oil focused legal alternatives are supported, the conflict for political office and control of the illegal economy, especially oil bunkering, will continue on its accelerating and self-replicating violent path. The domination of oil politics has resulted in a disproportional focus of efforts to gain employment / be associated with this industry.

Addressing the basic developmental needs of the population has never been the concern of either military or civilian government while they have grown rich from the resources of the oil bearing region. Frustration and anger over the lack of delivery of basic needs have grown over decades and now are the most serious underlying dynamic of the mounting conflict in the Niger Delta. Successive post-independence governments have failed to use the oil revenues for the benefit of the people. The current violent trends in the Delta to address this deprivation first raised its head in 1967.

The person who led the first revolt against the Nigerian military government in response to the repression of the Delta people was Isaac Adaka Boro. The rebels proclaimed an independent Niger Delta People's Republic. All oil contracts were declared null and void and Boro ordered oil companies to negotiate directly with his new administration due to the overbearing violation of economic and fundamental rights. The government forced the rebels to surrender after only twelve days but the trend to change the situation using violence lingered in the region (Aaron, 2006).

The oil industry has had a significant impact on the environment and lives of the people of the oil-bearing communities in Imo State and on the escalation of conflict. Gas flares burn 24 hours a day in these communities which might be a constant reminder to the people that the oil industries are working with the government and not

with the people. The activities of oil industry have significantly damaged the environment of one of the most fertile regions on the world, as oil spills kill fish and agricultural plants, in addition to reducing nutrient value of the soil (HRW 1999:5-12)

#### 2.4 Socio-Economic and Cultural Impacts of the Crisis

The group proliferation and struggles are core issues and politics of oil exploitation, exploration, which is prevalent within this region in general and oil-bearing communities in Imo state in particular.

Whereas the oil produced in the region is the life blood of the Nigerian economy, oil has failed to translate to be a source of prosperity and development for the Niger delta areas (Kimiabi, 2010), so as the oil bearing communities in Imo State; the Ohaji/Egbema, Obowo and Oguta suffered as well and the resulted big masquerade is "militancy". One can justifiably say that resurgence of militancy in the oil bearing communities of Imo State has seemingly reached a high uncomfortable level as it has contributed to the crumbling economy of the affected communities, state, region and nation through the series of attacks on the oil properties as a result of the negative impacts of oil exploration on the environment and the inadequacy in the appropriation of the huge generated revenue from the area, (Moses D. and Olaniyi A.T 2017).

This means that the presence of crude oil as a natural blessing in these communities has not brought prosperity, development, better standard of living, peace and government greedless attentions as hoped rather it has brought about community/regional instability, insecurity, conflict, criminal engagements, violent agitations and social tensions.

These impacts though negative cut across the general facet of the stability of the communities in the following ways;

- a. Jeopardizing security conditions of the members of the communities, oil workers and work facilities.
- b. Culturally, it has created a marital breach between the oil bearing communities and other communities of the Nigerian state; people are now skeptical about giving in to marriage proposals from the indigenes of these oil bearing conflict prone communities
- c. The loss of huge revenue for the economy as some oil companies work activities are shut or slowed down.
- d. The creation of a negative single story, image destruction of the various communities as they are now tagged crisis prone areas.
- e. The loss of expatriates and human resources personnel as they refuse to honor their postings to the off shores areas including low morale among workers and massive resignations as the feelings of apprehension and insecurity within the communities have been the order of the day.
- f. The human resources is always the first to be so affected as in 2006, 2007 and 2008 Shell Petroleum Company (SPDC) threatened to downsize most of the workers who could be the breadwinners of their various families, (we all could relate the negative impacts it would give on the families and the society general).
- g. The loss of lives of both innocent and guilty policemen, soldiers, arm youths and residents who were ceased in the course of cross-fire.
- h. The crisis has contributed to militate against investments, job creations and employment opportunities in such areas as oil outlets have partially withdrawn operations and some shut down.
- i. Illegal oil bunkering has resulted from the tensions within the oil bearing communities as militant groups engage in it, claiming that it is a means of earning a living in the bad situation.
- j. The Indorama Petrochemical Company that shut down its operations led to the joblessness of 3,000 youths and aggravated the already worse unemployment situation (Sunday Trust Newspaper, 2007).
- k. It has deterred foreign direct investment from foreign countries in contributing to the development of the communities, state, region and country at large.

## 2.5 Historical Insights on the Crisis

The discovery in Oloibiri in 1956, the Niger Delta region and Following the return to democracy in 1999, tension has grown across the Niger Delta region over the management of oil exploitation and the distribution of oil wealth. These tensions erupted into violence in 2006 when militants protesting the marginalization of the region bombed several critical oil installations and kidnapped expatriate oil workers. These attacks claimed several lives and nearly crippled Nigeria's oil production and export capacity.

The insurgency came to an end when President Yar'Adua offered amnesty, vocational training, and monthly cash payments to nearly 30,000 militants, at a yearly cost of about \$500 million. This program brought relative peace to the region, and petroleum exports increased from about 700,000 barrels per day (bpd) in mid-2009 to about 2.4 million bpd in 2011. Several ex-militant leaders such as Asari Dokubo, Gen. Ebikabowei "Boyloaf," Victor Ben, Ateke Tom, and Government Ekpumopolo (alias Tompolo) were rewarded with lucrative contracts to guard pipelines. The amnesty program was intended to end in December 2015, but was later extended to December 2017 by President Buhari.

In June 2015, President Buhari terminated the ex-militants' pipeline security contracts and the government began prosecution against the former militant leader, Tompolo, for contract fraud. At the same time, President Buhari cut funding for the amnesty program by around 70 percent in the 2016 budget, citing corruption. With these developments, coupled with the government's ongoing failure to properly address local grievances in the Delta region, it was only a matter of time before another wave of militancy would resurface.

In January 2016, unknown criminal elements began attacking oil facilities in the area. In response, President Buhari vowed to deal decisively with the resurgence of oil theft, sabotage of pipelines, and general insecurity. His threat did not deter the emergence of a new militant separatist group, the NDA, which proclaimed its formation on 3 February 2016. Since then, the group has carried out numerous high-profile attacks on oil facilities across the region. Several notable attacks are worth highlighting.

The Niger Delta Red Squad (NDRS), which is the major militant group in Imo State:

- i. In 2016 and 2017, attacked the oil pipelines belonging to Agip Company at Umuonei in Awara community and threatened to invade the house of the former governor of Imo State; Rochas Okorocha if they ever sight any military parade in their communities.
- ii. On 10 February, NDA militants blew up the Bonny Soku Gas Line, which carries natural gas to the Nigeria Liquefied Natural Gas plant, and an independent power plant at Gbaran.
- iii. On 13 February, the NDA launched its "Operation Red Economy" with a 14-day ultimatum to the central government to respond to its demands. The following day, the NDA carried out a devastating attack on one of the most strategic pipelines in the nation's energy network, the Trans Forcados Pipeline (TFP), which transports oil, water, and associated gas from fields in the western Delta to the 400,000 bpd Forcados oil terminal.
- iv. On 23 February, the NDA reissued its warning that it will continue hitting oil facilities until the government addresses its grievances.
- v. On 4 May 2016, NDA militants struck again, blowing up the Chevron Valve Platform located in the Delta state of Warri.

The regional and ethnic conflicts are so much that a complete detailed history and activity may turn impossible or impractical but for this paper's sake some notable happenings will be x-rayed.

The crisis or tension in the oil bearing communities in Imo State and Niger Delta region has turned to a long-term struggle since the early 1990s between the alien oil companies and the host communities. In the past two decades, militants have engaged in hostile fights with various government forces by bombing and vandalizing several oil pipelines, taking hostage of foreign oil workers and killed several persons, due to their peculiar feelings of exploitation, deprivation and abandonment, (Global Security Index, 2016). These agitations are geared towards greater autonomy and control of the area's petroleum resources, justification of their violent and destructive activities is on the pollution from oil activities that have occurred in the region.

The attack on a Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC) facility in Awarra-Ohaji/Egbema Local Government Area of Imo State on the feeling that the oil producing communities have nothing to show for years of oil exploitation.

Till date there have been under timed hostage taking, kidnapping for ransom, pipeline vandalization, oil theft, arson and ambush; all these are to call the attention of the Nigerian government to decisively take and implement decisions towards ameliorating the environmental, political and social problems.

## 2.6 Glimpse of some Notable Militancy Cases in South East/South Nigeria

The menace of militancy has for over some decades been a threatening social problem to Nigerian government in general and southeast/south-south in particular.

(Naz, Ahmed and Ibrahim, 2012) says that a society where people suffer from acute social problems such as poverty, unemployment, social injustice, illiteracy, culture of violence and religious intolerance, tends to be prone to myriads of upsurge in violence and crime against the social order and authority of the society.

The above implies that chaos and hunger striking societies are characterized by all sorts of unrest as a result of total abandonment of a particular segment of economic and cultural recognition and resources, such segment tends to be involved in violent agitations and terrorizing movements in order to draw the attention of the government of the day to their feelings of relative deprivation, oppression and exploitation.

*Stated below are some of the notable militant crisis and their host communities:*

The conflict in the Niger Delta, that of the Ogoni and the Ijaws first arose in the early 1990s over a disagreement with the foreign oil corporations and later sprang up to militant level in 2003. According to Achonwa (2012) militancy came out of negative feelings that rose as a result of increasing dissatisfaction, environment degradation, social and economic deprivations.

The first group was formed in 1992 by an Ogoni playwright named Ken Saro-Wiwa with the name "The movement for the survival of the ogoni people" (MOSOP).

The conflict between the Ogoni people and the oil companies increased to an intensified and uncontrollable height with an ultimatum to the oil companies (Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation, Shell and Chevron) demanding for the sum of 10 billion dollars as royalties, compensation and damages. This brought about military deployment in most villages and there were terror operations against anybody or group involved in any form of agitation, the villages were captured, more than half a million person were arrested and close to 2000 civilians died.

The Ijaw unrest took place towards the ending parts of the year 1998, according to (Koos, Carlo and Pierskalla, 2015) the Ijaw conflict sprung up as a result of their loss of control and ownership over their homeland, lives and resources to the foreign oil companies, this led to the formation of Ijaw Youth Council (IYC) who then called for the Ijaw territory.

The military was deployed and there were "operation climate change" and a dust-to-dawn-curfew, which resulted to acts of violence and loosing of more than hundreds of lives by the Ijaw people and the military carried out the Odi massacre in 1999.

According to Fatade (2009), the Ogoni and Ijaw unrests led to the creation of the Niger Delta Development Commission in 2000, but the ethnic unrest and conflicts of the 1990s resurfaced with the small arms and other weapons. According to him, the Warri was the central point of the regions, violence up until 2003 when there was vigilant and volunteer groups such as the Niger Delta Peoples Volunteer Force (NDPVF) and the Niger Delta Vigilantes (NDV) trans-locating their conflict center to Port Harcourt.

According to Achonwa (2012), the activities of the militant groups placed Nigeria as the second most-pirated and violent nations in Africa, after Somalia. The movement for the emancipation of the Niger Delta is believed to sponsor the several attacks on ships and lives of the oil workers in (2012). Starting from October, 2006, militant groups in Nigeria's Niger Delta states with keen interest have seized the foreign employees of the oil companies. More than 200 foreigners were abducted, detained but unharmed (Heinrich 2013).

The above kidnapping exercise prompted the launch of a massive military tie-down in 2008 on the militants thereby cracking down their various violent activities within the region.



The Niger Delta Red Squad (NDRS), according to (Danielle 2016) is one of the militant groups operating in the oil bearing communities in Imo State, has been responsible for the several attacks on the pipelines and the present attack on the Agip's oil pipeline at Umuonei in Awara Community in Imo State. The group attacked the Agip's oil pipeline three months after they blew up their first target and they are threatening to attack offices of Imo State oil Producing Area Development Commission (ISOPADEC).

Additionally, since crude oil was found in the Niger Delta region in 1956, it has played a diversified role in Nigeria's development in the various sectors such as the politics, security, cultural and socio-economy. This has brought about clash of interests and needs between any government of the day and the various militant groups, their names are as follows from the Global Security Data (2017):

- a. Niger Delta Avengers (NDA)
- b. Aggrieved Youth Movement (AYM)
- c. Joint Niger Delta Liberation Force (JNDLF)
- d. Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND)
- e. New Niger Delta Emancipation Front (NDEF)
- f. Niger Delta Greenland Justice Mandate (NDGJM)
- g. Niger Delta Red Squad (NDRS)
- h. Niger Delta Searchlight
- i. Outgas Fire Force (OFF)
- j. Reformed Egbesu Boys of Niger Delta
- k. Reformed Niger Delta Avengers (RNDA)

Currently, the cease fire agreement by the NDA in August 2016 in order to negotiate with the Nigerian government and the "Operation Crocodile Smile" by the Nigerian Army to rid of all terrorism/criminal cases in the southern region has been of help; the operation was concluded on 11<sup>th</sup> September 2016 and 23 militants were arrested, while five were killed.

Though the activities of the various militant group is on the low level, it's important to note that they are still on the move following the various recent attacks and kidnapping acts within the various communities in the region.

## 2.7 Past and Present Government Measures Towards Tackling the Crisis

Niger Delta area in general and the oil bearing communities in Imo state in particular are the base of crude oil extraction in Nigeria which amounts to about 95 percent of the nations earning, and 90 percent of its export and annual income (IMF, 2003; Azaiki, 2007). The key measures towards tackling the crisis in these areas have been programmes like disarmament, demobilization, amnesty policies and rehabilitation reintegration (military deployment).

Militancy activities almost dried up around 2009 when the late former president, late Umaru Musa Yar'Adua, signed an amnesty deal to pardon all militants within the Niger Delta in general, in exchange for their demobilization and disarmament. This surrendering of arms and unconditional national pardon experienced a total number of 26,808 militants surrendering their arms and ammunition and they were granted a pardon which involved co-opting or integrating them into the society as well as training (Ajodo-Adebanjoko 2016).

Thus, the presence of the amnesty cushioned the feeling of injustice and want for control of resources from the local agitators. In spite of this, there have been recent emergence of some militant groups in the region and communities with so many diverse needs even though the names of the new groups look and sound new, there is no doubt that this is an act of recycling.

In bid to tackle this in recent times, the federal government has also returned fire for fire by constituting a military operation code- named "operation crocodile smiles" which everyone knows that it is not the right approach to the problem in the region and communities.

The government of Imo state has "lawfully" granted state pardon to Ohaji/Egbema militants who hitherto operated around the Awara Court Area of Ohaji/Egbema L.G.A of Imo State after due consultations with the relevant security agencies and in the interest of peace and co-existence in the region (Ezeugwu 2018).

According to him (in Business Hallmark, 2018), the state pardon was granted as part of the continuous efforts to restore permanent peace in Imo State and the entire Niger Delta region, because these boys have been responsible for ceaseless oil vandalization, kidnappings, loss of lives and properties in the Awara Court Area and the entire Ohaji/Egbema/Oguta oil bearing communities of Imo State. Emphatically, the amnesty programme has helped to reduce crime rates in Imo and the minister for information made an assertion that Imo State has been on a zero level of violent and insecurity cases prior to this time. Amnesty is a step to stabilize the situation of insecurity and militancy for constructive conflict resolution processes, even though these programmes (amnesty and fire for fire “operation crocodile smiles) have not totally addressed the root-cause both at the regional and communal levels.

### 3. Conclusion

The cankerworm issue of militant unrests in the oil bearing communities of Imo State, as an outcome of vexation on long-term neglect, unbearable hardship and shortage of livelihood, due to exploited and plundered environment, hence tampering their abnatio sources of economic livelihood. Poor or no basic socio-economic infrastructure and prevalence of hunger have sponsored youth restiveness, hostage taking of foreign expatriates, tampering and destruction of oil pipeline, violent uprising and intensified militia activities in the host communities, thereby making these communities prone to insecurity and violent. This we can see as a negative omen to the socioeconomic life of these communities in Imo State.

### 4. Recommendations:

There is no gainsaying that various efforts have been put in place in order to cushion this cankerworm that has eaten deep into the fabric of the these oil bearing communities in the Imo State. However, these efforts have failed to curb this menace and provide the peace and tranquility that we all yearn for. The shortcoming of these strategies could as a result of poor democratic administration, transparency, accountability, active involvement of the host communities, lack of equity and the feeling of deprivation. The above agrees to what (Abidde 2009) says that Peace cannot be dictated rather it is natural given birth to out of a just and humane environment. With this in mind, this paper proposes the following measures (all embracing approach) as possible saving routes to this incessant imbroglio

1. The diversification and development of the economy of these oil bearing communities has the potential to being one of the main solutions to this mounting violence.
2. As a matter of urgency, there should be the provision of basic amenities by the government to this oil bearing communities such as alternative sources of livelihood, provision of electricity, good roads, good pipe-borne water, good and affordable health care services, good education, sustainable and efficient skill acquisition/empowerment programmes. This will foster and sustain peace, trust, and development.
3. The federal government should urgently tackle the issue of gross unemployment by engaging these youths through sustained employments, such as enacting supportive policies and laws that makes it compulsory for the oil exploring companies to employ them at every level of their operations as well as creation of avenue to train some supposed young work force, who incase do not have the technical competence/knowledge. This will foster cordial relations between the state authority and the people of the oil bearing communities in Imo State.
4. There should be rigid/tight restriction on the flow of weaponry into these areas, including legal-based policies on registration of ammunitions. This will help curtail the proliferated presence and use of ammunitions in the concerned areas and the general Nigerian society
5. There should be a shift in the general oil venture agreements in order to create conducive avenue for the oil bearing communities to own shares in the Multinational Oil Companies, as well as initiate a sustainable budgetary dialogue and allocation of the oil dividends. This will provide a sense of belonging and substantial ownership stake along with the oil expatriates and put an end to the trending pipeline vandalism.
6. There should be conclusive agreements to ensure proper management of oil spillage and payment of compensation to local authority for land use and pollution.
7. There should be developed balanced financial aids which could be inform of loans or credits to assist other non-oil bearing communities of federation as part of their national cake in order to create a favourable and conducive atmosphere for all round and fair inclusion and development of the nation.

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