

ECONOMIC DEPRIVATION AND THE RISE OF MILITANCY, KIDNAPPING AND HOSTAGE TAKING IN THE NIGER DELTA

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Abstract

The Nigerian Niger delta is one of the most richly endowed regions of the country. It harbours oil and gas resources which are the major foreign exchange earners upon which the nation's economic development is hinged. Due to economic deprivation, marginalisation and lack of development, the area has become unfortunately notorious to incidences of militancy, kidnapping and hostage taking. Irrespective of negative consequences of these vices, it appears that those who take to these acts do so as the only available option to attracting government and international attentions to their plights. Lots of lives, properties and resources are lost and wasted stemming from the activities of these groups as well as government's 'militarilistic' approaches. The paper views militancy, kidnapping and hostage taking as direct responses to deprivation and lack of development in the Niger delta. Available literatures in this respect were explored and identified gaps were filled. The theory of deprivation was used as the theoretical framework of analysis. The research also identified that the groups involved in these vices do so as a means to cushion the effects of poverty orchestrated by decades of oil exploration and environmental degradation. The paper concluded by recommending that the 13 percent derivation is insignificant when compared to the environmental and health implications of oil exploration. Thus, adequate attention should be paid to the utilisation of funds meant for the development of the area.

Keywords: deprivation, militancy, kidnapping, hostage taking, Niger Delta

Introduction

The phenomenon of militancy, kidnapping and hostage taking are not new as they are traceable to the method adopted by slave raiders during the era of Trans-Atlantic slave trade. Although these vices have painted the region and the nation in a bad light, the fact remains that it has become the most viable option within the disposal of their perpetrators towards attracting state actors and non-state actors' attention to the plights and agitations of the people of the region. Suffice to observe that lives and properties are lost in this process but the federal government military approaches to these problems have not and may not proffer the required antidote to these problems. It is in the light of this thesis that this research is predicated. The research identified that militancy, kidnapping and hostage taking are direct responses to economic deprivation, marginalisation and lack of development in the Niger delta region.

The kidnapping of all manner of persons, militancy and hostage taking have gained ascendancy in Nigeria. Kidnapping and hostage taking were maladies previously unknown in Nigeria but were used during the slave trade period. Today, these vices have rapidly become domesticated in the contemporary Nigeria. For some years now, the volatile oil rich regions of the Niger Delta have

witnessed these phenomena on a large scale with the target being mostly expatriates and some wealthy Nigerians mainly in the oil business and some other businesses. It has spread throughout the country extending beyond the oil rich environments to other business urban centres. Kidnapping particularly has become a worrisome phenomenon in the Niger delta – even government officials or relatives are kidnapped for ransom. It is imperative to note that militancy, kidnapping and hostage taking are bed mates but “evil trinity” which may result in the death of victims or their release when a specific ransom/condition as may be demanded has been paid/met.

This “evil trinity” is a very serious crime that has gained prominence in contemporary scholarship just as robbery, burglary and other forms of societal crime. Although Yang et al argue that Kidnapping is obscure when compared to robbery and burglary attributing it to three reasons namely, rarity of the event itself, access to known kidnappers and data problem. In their views as a rare event, scholars tend to see kidnapping as an insignificant criminal act which accounts for low research interest directed to it. In the second instance, getting access to known kidnappers is difficult in most instances. The third relates to the reliability and validity of data.¹ It is imperative to observe that incidences of kidnapping, militancy and hostage taking are of major concerns and areas of interest to contemporary scholarship. The main thrust of this research is to explore the social problems of militancy, kidnapping and hostage taking in its various forms and to identify the degree to which these vices are as a result of many years of deprivation and marginalisation leading to abject poverty and infrastructural decay in the area.

Theoretical Framework of Analysis

The American sociologist Robert Merton was among the first to use the concept of relative deprivation in order to understand and explain social deviance by using the French sociologist Emile Durkheim’s concept of anomie as a takeoff point.

In an attempt to formally define the concept relative deprivation, Walter Runciman notes that there are four preconditions of relative deprivation (of object X by person A):

- Person A does not have X
- Person A knows of other persons that have X
- Person A wants to have X
- Person A believes obtaining X is realistic

Deprivation Theory simply means that people who are deprived of things deemed valuable in society whether money, justice, status or privilege join social movements with the hope of redressing their grievances. This is a beginning point for looking at why people join social movements; however, it is even more important to look at relative deprivation theory, a belief that people join social movement based on their evaluations of what they think they should have, compared with what others have or even compared with their own past or perceived future. On the contrary, absolute deprivation is people's actual negative condition. Improved conditions fuel human desires for even better conditions, and thus can spark revolutions.²

Critiques of this theory are of the view that the theory fails to explain why some people who feel discontent fail to take action and join social movements. Counter-arguments include that some people are prone to conflict-avoidance, are short-term-oriented, and that imminent life difficulties may arise since there is no guarantee that life-improvement will result from social action.³

In buttressing their argument, the critiques also quoted Karl Marx: “A house may be large or small; as long as the neighbouring houses are likewise small, it satisfies all social requirements for a

residence. But let there arise next to the little house a palace, and the little house shrinks to a hut. The little house now makes it clear that its inmate has no social position at all to maintain, or but a very insignificant one; and however high it may shoot up in the course of civilization, if the neighbouring palace rises in equal or even in greater measure, the occupant of the relatively little house will always find himself more uncomfortable, more dissatisfied, more cramped within his four walls.”⁴

The above theory helps to explain the *raison d'être* behind the rise of militancy, kidnapping and hostage taking being witnessed in the Niger Delta. No doubt that the area has suffered from many years environmental degradation, pollution and deprivation leading to poverty that they have decided to resort to these insalubrious activities to bring to fore the degree of neglect they have suffered and possibly to secure a redress.

Concept Clarifications

Militancy

The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, defines militant as “Having a combative character; aggressive, especially in the service of a cause”.⁵ The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines militant as “aggressively active (as in a cause)”. The English word militant is both an adjective and a noun, and is usually used to mean vigorously active, combative and aggressive, especially in support of a cause, as in 'militant reformers'. It comes from the 15th century Latin “*militare*” meaning “to serve as a soldier”. The related modern concept of the militia as a defensive organization against invaders grew out of the Anglo-Saxon *Fyrd*. In times of crisis, the militiaman left his civilian duties and became a soldier until the emergency was over, when he returned to his civilian occupation. The meaning of militancy does not usually refer to a registered soldier: it can be anyone or group who subscribes to the idea of using vigorous, sometimes extreme, activity to achieve an objective, usually political.⁶

For this paper, militancy represents a new form of local resistance against internal and external oppressions. In the case of the Niger Delta, it is a coordinated resistance by the youth against the oil companies who they blame for environmental pollution and degradation. It is also believed that the Federal Government of Nigeria has aided and abated the marginalization suffered by the region. Therefore, militancy in the Niger Delta manifests itself in forms of kidnapping of oil workers, hostage taking and incessant attacks on oil installations as well as the use of confrontational or violent methods in support of a political or social cause.

Kidnapping

Kidnapping means differently to different people depending on a country's legal and moral viewpoints on the issue. To Mohamed, kidnapping in Malaysia means abduction while its interpretation in United Kingdom is different. He further argues that when kidnapping and hijacking are concerned, its victims are held in a known location. But this is arguable in the context of Nigeria and specifically in the Niger delta region where victims are held in an unknown location in waiting for the conditions of their release negotiated. He also attempted to link hijacking to hostage taking. To him, “the theft of container Lorries (with their cargo but without their driver) has been referred to as hijacking; however, most jurisdictions would classify and count this as theft and reserve the term hijack for the illegal seizure of vehicle and people together”.⁷ In this study however, the definition offered to kidnapping by Turner would be adopted as the working

definition in the context. Kidnapping broadly speaking applies to all situations where persons are forcibly seized and transported to a destination where they are held against their will in unlawful confinement.⁸ It also describes incidents when persons are lured away and then held illegally. This may involve the use of force.

Hostage taking

According to the International Convention against the Taking of Hostages which was adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1979 defines hostage and hostage taking as follows: any person who seizes or detains and threatens to kill, to injure or continue to detain another person (hereinafter referred as the “hostage”) in order to compel a third party, namely, a state, international intergovernmental organisation, a natural or juridical person or a group of persons to do or abstain from doing any act as an explicit or implicit condition for the release of the hostage commits the offence of taking hostages (“hostage taking”).⁹ For the purpose of this paper, hostage taking is defined as the seizing or detention of an individual coupled with a threat to kill, injure or continue to detain such individual in order to compel a third person or governmental organization to take some action.

Description of the Area of Study

In this context, we intend to describe the ethnic configuration known as the Niger Delta. What we actually intend to do is to paint vividly the picture that depict the Niger Delta as the host of Nigeria’s oil wealth. The Niger Delta is Nigeria’s largest oil region and one of the highly productive oil exporting regions in the world.¹⁰ The Niger Delta is a heterogeneous, multi-cultural, ethnically diverse region, these particular features indicate that the region is an area for potential Hobbesian competitions and conflicts.¹¹ This region can be geographically, carthologically, hydrologically, politically, economically and sociologically defined. A geo-political definition of the region would state that the Niger Delta includes those states of Nigeria that border the coastal waters of the Atlantic. These oil producing states include, Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo, Ondo, Rivers state, Abia and Imo.¹²

Sociologically, the region would be defined as a society with people whose major economic activities revolve around coastal waters; they are people who possess similar cultural similarities and relative convergence of history. The major economic activities of the people of this region include: fishing, farming and hunting. Though, fishing happens to be the most conspicuous economic activity among the major ethnic groups of the Ijaws and Ilajes who are particularly known for their prowess in fishing. In terms of the economic potentiality of the Niger Delta region to the Nigerian economy; the region is said to have been the bedrock of Nigeria’s Gross Domestic Product since the time oil was first discovered, and exported into the metropolitan countries. ANEEJ, hinted that three of the states in the region namely: Bayelsa, Delta and River states account for 75% of oil production and over 50% of government revenues come from this region. ANEEJ aptly states that the growth in Nigeria’s GDP today is relative to the immense contributions of the oil industry since it was first discovered.¹³ Thus, the Nigerian economy is the fourth largest economy in Africa with GDP at current prices standing at \$41.5 billion as at the year 2001 coming behind South Africa’s \$112.9 billion, Egypt’s \$93.5 billion, and Algeria’s \$54.6 billion. Apart from improving the country’s GDP, it has placed Nigeria as one of the largest exporters of petroleum products in the world.¹⁴

Prior to this period, the contributions of the Nigerian oil industry had been remarkable in pre-doom era. Taiwo and Aina state poignantly that since the discovery of oil in Oloibiri, the Niger Delta had served as a major export zone in oil production in Africa and the entire World. They stated that when it was first discovered in 1956 by Shell, oil production and exportation started at a production rate of 5100 barrels of crude oil per day. The quantity doubled the following year, and crude oil exports from Nigeria rose from 20 million barrels per day in 1972 and reached a peak of 24 million barrels per day in 1979. Nigeria has since then been ranked between the fifth and seventh oil producing country in the world.¹⁵ Though, the instability of the ranking is a function of multiple factors that do affect economic performances of a country. Despite this huge and abundant wealth accruing from Oil and Gas production in the Niger Delta, what has been the benefit of the host communities is its poverty resulting from many years of economic deprivation. One need no wonder about the rise and incessant cases of militancy, kidnapping and hostage taking in the region.

The Niger Delta has some unique characteristics, which tend to make development difficult. It is, for instance, one of the largest wetlands in the world. It covers an area of 70,000 square kilometres and is noted for its sandy coastal ridge barriers, brackish or saline mangroves, freshwater, saltwater, permanent and seasonal swamp forests as well as lowland rainforest. The whole area is traversed and crisscrossed by a large number of rivers, rivulets, streams, canals and creeks. The coastal line is buffeted throughout the year by the tides of the Atlantic Ocean while the mainland is subjected to regimes of flood by the various rivers, particularly the river Niger. By this, the Niger Delta region is the second largest delta in the world and the largest wetlands in Africa. The above created impression drawing from the submission of Akpan “The Niger Delta has some unique characteristics, which tend to make development difficult”¹⁶ is a sardonic statement that has kept the Niger delta continually deprived and must be condemned and jettisoned. Suffice to observe that there are mountainous regions like Abuja and swampy environment like Lagos that have recorded significant infrastructural developments. Therefore, the Niger Delta’s case cannot be different and can be developed if the government is committed to doing so.

MAP OF NIGER DELTA



Estimated Population of the Niger Delta

State	2005	2010	2015	2020
Abia	3,230,000	3,763,000	4,383,000	5,106,000
Akwa Ibom	3,343,000	3,895,000	4,537,000	5,285,000
Bayelsa	1,710,000	1,992,000	2,320,000	2,703,000
Cross River	2,736,000	3,187,000	3,712,000	4,325,000
Delta	3,594,000	4,186,000	4,877,000	5,681,000
Edo	3,018,000	3,516,000	4,096,000	4,871,000
Imo	3,342,000	3,894,000	4,535,000	5,283,000
Ondo	3,025,000	3,524,000	4,105,000	4,782,000
Rivers	4,858,000	5,659,000	6,592,000	7,679,000
Total	28,856,000	33,616,000	39,157,000	45,715,000

Source: Niger Delta Region Survey Based on National Population Commission Data cited by Ibeanu.¹⁷

Origin of Militancy, Kidnapping and Hostage Taking in Nigeria

The practice of taking hostages is very ancient, and has been used constantly in negotiations with conquered nations, and in cases such as surrenders, armistices and the like, where the two belligerents depended for its proper carrying out on each other's good faith. The Romans were accustomed to take the sons of tributary princes and educate them at Rome, thus holding a security for the continued loyalty of the conquered nation and also instilling a possible future ruler with

ideas of Roman civilization. The practice was also commonplace in the Imperial Chinese tributary system, especially between the Han and Tang dynasties. The practice continued through the early Middle Ages. The Irish High King Niall of the Nine Hostage got his epithet *Noígíallach* because, by taking nine petty kings' hostage, he had subjected nine other principalities to his power.

This practice was also adopted in the early period of the British occupation of India, and by France in her relations with the Arab tribes in North Africa. The position of a hostage was that of a prisoner of war, to be retained till the negotiations or treaty obligations were carried out, and liable to punishment (in ancient times), and even to death, in case of treachery or refusal to fulfil the promises made.¹⁸ Warren has attempted a documentation of how kidnapping originated. According to him, the term "kidnapping" originated in 17th Century England where children were "kidnapped" and often sold as slaves or agricultural workers to colonial farmers. Centuries before in ancient Rome, the emperor Constantine (AD 315) became so alarmed by the incidence of kidnapping that he ordered death penalty as punishment for the crime. Robber-barons were kidnapping merchants and holding them for ransom in the Middle Ages in Europe. King Richard I of England was held hostage for years by the Archduke of Austria in the 12th Century. In 1800, in the Sulu archipelago, now part of the Philippines, there was already a standard scale of ransom fees ranging from 2000 pesos for a European friar to 30-50 Pesos for a male Filipino. An upsurge in kidnapping in the USA by organised criminal gangs led, in 1931, to the introduction of federal legislation on kidnapping in both the Senate and House of Representatives. The author concluded that much kidnapping throughout history has no overt political motivation but, since the early 1970s, there have been many highly publicized kidnappings around the world for political purposes.¹⁹

The United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime cited in Mohamed has categorized kidnapping as follows: kidnapping for extortion (for ransom, to influence business decisions or to obtain commercial advantage); kidnapping between or within criminal groups (for debt recovery or to secure advantage in a criminal market); kidnapping for sexual exploitation; kidnapping linked to domestic or family disputes (spouse or child abduction); revenge kidnapping; and kidnapping for political or ideological purposes.²⁰ These typologies have been broadly categorized into three by Pharaoh as follows: criminal kidnapping (hostage taking for ransom); political kidnapping (to settle political scores or further some political objectives) and pathological kidnapping (parental kidnapping and kidnapping for sexual purposes).²¹

It is imperative to observe the first known act of kidnapping involving Nigeria was the one conducted by the state in 1984 although it did not take place in Nigeria. The "Dikko Affair" was a joint Nigerian-Israeli attempt to kidnap Umaru Dikko, a former Nigerian civilian government transportation minister living in the United Kingdom, in 1984, and secretly transport him back to Nigeria in a diplomatic bag. The kidnapping took place by an Israeli national intelligence agency Mossad which was recruited to track, locate and kidnap Dikko, but the transportation was unsuccessful. After it was foiled, the political fallout seriously damaged relations between Nigeria and the United Kingdom for years.

However, the current wave of militancy, kidnapping and hostage taking began with the abduction of expatriate oil workers by the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger-Delta (MEND, a youth group) in 2006 as a means of alerting the world of the many years of injustice, exploitation, marginalization and underdevelopment of Niger-Delta region. The apparent negligence and the underdevelopment of the region have always been explained with limp reasons. The oil companies

claim not to be responsible for the development of the region by virtue of the fact that they work for Nigerian government and pay royalty to the government. Federal government on its own blames the ministries constituted by it to tackle the problems of the region and the ministries blame the youths for disrupting projects. It is a vicious cycle where only the poor are adversely affected. In a statement released by the leader of MEND group, “the taking of foreign hostages is to draw the attention of the people of these countries to happenings in Nigeria.”²²

Every day, tens of Nigerians are kidnapped for various reasons ranging from economic, political and personal grievances. Some are killed before they were rescued while others are rescued by their relatives after paying ransom. Suffice also to observe that some are killed even after the ransom has been paid while some do not present any demand depending on the motive.

To further simplify the classification, Turner painstakingly enumerated four key rationales for kidnapping as follows: first kidnapping for money but no politics; second kidnapping without any political or monetary motive; third kidnapping for money and politics and four kidnapping for politics but no money.²³ From the above classifications, it is obvious that kidnapping has criminal, political and economic reasons. However, Yang et al. have added the cultural dimension of kidnapping, whereby some communities use it as a cultural practice (e.g. bride capture).²⁴ Kidnapping has grown over the years as an industry involving every level of the society and motivated by many reasons. However, studies on it have been relatively a recent phenomenon, with much of the literature coming from Asian, American and European continents.

It is imperative to state clearly that in terms of militancy, kidnapping and hostage taking in the Niger delta, the motive is different unlike what obtains in some southeastern states and other cities in Nigeria where these criminally minded individuals do so as a means of survival and amassment of wealth. According to Uzorma and Nwanegbo, Hostage-taking and kidnapping in the South-Eastern Nigeria thrive firstly, as a result of the fast mount of moral decadence and societal mentality on wealth and its acquisition amongst youths and adults, which result to the worship of money irrespective of the means of making it. Secondly, unemployment is ascribed to as the major factor for the blossoming of hostage-taking and kidnapping in the South-Eastern Nigeria as it is adjudged, is a self-employment opportunity wherein the clever and the unemployed few find avenues of cutting their own share from the fewer affluent in the society.

Furthermore, Uzorma and Nwanegbo corroborated an earlier assertion when they adduced that “inequitable distribution of developmental projects and public fund loots are other reasons while the crime thrives particularly in the Niger delta. Other reasons alleged as the rationale behind the terror of the indigenes who took to the crime of hostage-taking and kidnapping are to let the Federal Government know that despite the fact the country’s wealth comes from their area, they suffer untold environmental hazards and are underdeveloped, while the other parts of the country are developed with the money produced in their region.”²⁵

Motivation for Militancy in the Niger delta

It is possible to trace the motivation for militancy to many years deprivation by the federal government and the multinational corporations operating in the area. At Nigeria’s independence in 1960, the situation had gotten to a crisis point when Isaac Adaka Boro, a radical nationalist and an Ijaw born revolutionary championed a revolt against the government of Nigeria. On February 23 1966, he landed at Tontoubau, a sacred forest in Kaiama town in the present Bayelsa State in

the riverine areas of the Niger Delta with one hundred and fifty-nine comrades to launch a guerrilla war against the then Federal Military Government. Following his proclamation of the region as an independent entity (the Niger Delta Peoples Republic) with himself as the Head of State, a battle ensued with the Nigerian Police which he defeated them. The Federal Military Government then deployed the Armed Forces against Boro and his men and they were able to hold up the federal troops for quite a while before he was defeated on the 12th day. This rebellion has come to be known in the political history of Nigeria today as the “Twelve-day Revolution”. By all calculations, it has always been argued that the marginalization of the peoples in the Niger Delta, the despoliation of their environments and the resultant conflicts have their roots in the discovery of oil as well as its exploration and production activities by the oil multinationals in the late 1950s.²⁶

The response of the state to the Niger Delta crisis has been to militarize the environment by deploying and stationing military occupation in the oil producing communities that would keep at bay restive youths, individuals and associations through the force of arms in order to ensure the free flow of oil to the Nigerian state. Several environmental, minority rights and human rights activists in the area were regularly hounded, arrested and detained without trial for long periods of time, or murdered by the state. Driven to frustrated heights, some groups in those communities also resorted to armed reaction ostensibly in self-defence. Several militant youth groups emerged, while the existing non-violent groups also established radical youth wings. The objective was to counter the violence of the state, and drive home their point of deprivation and neglect. The extra-judicial murder of Ken Saro Wiwa and eight others in November 10, 1995 increased the resolve and conviction of those groups that the Nigerian state preferred the path of violence, and it would require organized counter-violence to protect themselves and to achieve their interests. Their demands were refocused on relative autonomy and self-determination for their ethnic areas within the context of the Nigerian federation. This is the only way they felt that the social injustice, neglect and deprivation that they suffer could be effectively redressed. Again, the reaction of the state was to intensify its cycle of violence against those communities and their groups.²⁷ Recently, is the emergence of the IPOB a non-violent group based in the southeastern Nigeria which has also been on government clampdown and gruesome shoot at sight by both the military and the police.

It is this context that led to the emergence and proliferation of ethnic militia groups in the Niger Delta region. Between 1990 and 1999, no less than twenty-four ethnic based minority rights groups emerged in the Niger Delta region mostly with radical bent. These include the Egbesu Boys of Africa (EBA), Chikoko, Ijaw National Congress, Ijaw Youth Council (IYC), Ijaw Peace Movement (IPM), Isoko National Youth Movement (INYM), Itsekiri Nationality Patriots, and the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP). None of these groups was established with violent inclinations. Circumstances forced this on them. It is this context that led to the emergence and proliferation of ethnic militia groups in the Niger Delta region. Between 1990 and 2017, no less than twenty-four ethnic based minority rights groups emerged in the Niger Delta region mostly with radical bent. These include the Egbesu Boys of Africa (EBA), Chikoko, Ijaw National Congress, Ijaw Youth Council (IYC), Ijaw Peace Movement (IPM), Isoko National Youth Movement (INYM), Itsekiri Nationality Patriots, and the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP), Movement for the Actualisation of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASOB) now known as Independent People of Biafra (IPOB). None of these groups was established with

violent inclinations except Movement for the Emancipation of Niger Delta (MEND). Circumstances forced this on them.²⁸

The nature and character of the Nigerian state, the failure of political leadership and public institutions, the structure of power and economic relations amongst groups and the orgy of militarism were some of the factors that provided the background for the emergence of ethnic militia groups. These factors prompted cries of social injustice, marginalization, neglect, deprivation and seeming insecurity for the people. There are twofold arguments which this research presented in this subsection. Firstly, the rise of ethnic nationalism and its auxiliary expression of militant groups associated with a sense of threat of security concerning the interests, future and self-preservation of a group. These concerns throw up issues of individual and group rights, social justice and fairness in the Nigerian political economy. Hassan Mathew Kukah notes, “ethnic associations provide umbrella of protection to various communities that feel estranged from the alien and hostile state.”²⁹ Secondly, the character and disposition of the Nigerian state, towards the management of public opinion and protests, have elicited counter-violence from some ethnic-based civil society groups pejoratively referred to as militant groups. In most cases, these groups start on a non-violence base only to be radicalised in the culture of violence by the state or find themselves doing so in order to make their voice heard. The process of armed violence between the state and the militant groups is therefore a cyclical one. The irony of the dynamics of violence is that once it sprouts, it often takes a face of its own, engulfing the entire society as reflected in the phenomenon of militant, kidnapping and hostage taking activities being witnessed in the area today.

Recommendations

The following suggestions are considered germane in turning the tide in the issues of militancy, kidnapping and hostage taking in the Niger delta.

- a. An all-inclusive convocation of Niger Delta Conference organized by the Federal Government, where all stakeholders, militant leaders, chiefs, women organisations, and youth groups will be dully represented and issues concerning the region will be seriously discussed is imperative. This will pave way for a sovereign national conference upon which all the ethnic configuration of the nation can bare their minds on the Niger delta question.
- b. Activities of the Oil Companies must be sincerely subjected to scrutiny by the National Environmental Protection Agency which will focus on environmental degradation, pollution and displacement of the rural economy.
- c. A Periodic National Assessment Survey is needed to evaluate the extent of poverty in the area. Evidences of quantitative and qualitative reports of such survey can be subsequently used for development programmes in the Niger delta.
- d. A Periodic Assessment of the activities of NDDC is needed; such assessment can be published for public scrutiny.
- e. There should be a joint committee of federal, state, local governments and local community leaders who will manage and supervise objectively funds intended for the development of the Niger delta. This will obviate misappropriation and embezzlement and ensure that these monies are spent on the provisions of infrastructures and on poverty eradication.

- f. There is need to reconsider the 13% derivation formula which is inconsequential compared to the output impact on the Nigerian economy and the level of deprivation, degradation and environmental pollution, and the paper suggests that it should be raised to 45%
- g. In order to check militancy, kidnapping and hostage taking, the Niger delta states government should be prudent and accountable to the people.

Conclusion

Incidence of militancy, kidnapping and hostage taking in the Niger Delta has posed many challenges on the Nigerian economy and the general developmental efforts of the region in particular and the Nigerian nation in general. But the major challenge is the attitude of government and some privileged elites who care little of the plights of the rural dwellers – particularly the oil producing communities who are directly affected by the oil exploration activities. One needs not wonder so much why militancy, kidnapping and hostage taking seem to be a recurrent decimal in the Niger delta. It is also unfortunate that today kidnapping takes place anytime and anywhere, in the churches, on the streets, in the hospitals and even at home. It is these methods that distinguish content and character of kidnapping from other states outside the Niger-Delta region who are drawn to this evil practice, mostly for monetary purposes.

The rate of militancy, kidnapping and hostage taking is so alarming that Nigeria's oil production capacity has drastically reduced – affecting the GDP and the entire system. Actions targeted first addressing the agitations of the Niger Deltans must be urgently and seriously considered. The truth is that a lot of people are idle and cannot find sustainable means of livelihood. Job creation should be attended to adequately to ensure that many people are gainfully employed. Apart from the get-rich-quick syndrome that pervades Nigerian society, many of the youths have taken to kidnapping as a means of livelihood especially in the states outside the Niger delta.

The Federal government of Nigeria who failed to pay attention to the sufferings of its citizens; the foreign oil multinationals who are indifferent to the plights of their hosts communities and the politicians who armed the jobless youths with guns with which they fought their opponents during 2003 elections must be held accountable to have started this Harmattan fire that is burning the entire country down. It is true that Nigerian government and foreign oil nationals have lost so much money because of the lingering “evil trinity” but those who bear the brunt are those who have been taken hostages. Many of them have no say in the matter. The shift in focus has been tremendous, from kidnapping of expatriate oil workers to relatives of politicians to relatives of those in the Diaspora and now anybody on sight. Where there is proper education and civic orientation perhaps these deviant behaviours could be changed, but at the moment in Nigeria with the worship of wealth coupled with the fact that money is held too high above every other virtue in the pursuit of survival, the end in sight for these vices may not be any time soon.

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