

*Full Length Research Paper*

# Violence, terrorism and security threat in Nigeria's Niger Delta: An old problem taking a new dimension

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**This paper offers a new and broader look at the violent agitation and domestic terrorism in the region, highlights the missing link in previous studies and fills this gap in literature. Premised on projections and analysis based on experiential knowledge of facts on ground, this paper analyzes and explains the Niger Delta crisis within the Frustration-Aggression theory and argue that frustration is the bane of the recurrent violence in the region. This paper argues that most of the circumstances that generate the frustration and anger that degenerate into murderous militancy in the region is founded on a sense of injustice and also premised on the claim that the Nigerian state has continued to ignore the preceding factors, environmental security and infrastructural developmental issues that sparked the conflict in the first place.**

**Key words:** Militancy, corruption, terrorism, Niger Delta, Nigeria, political leadership, security threat, Gulf of Guinea, MEND, frustration-aggression theory.

## INTRODUCTION

The two bomb explosions that took place at a political rally in Bayelsa state on 29<sup>th</sup> December, 2010 which followed on the heels of twin car improvised bombs detonated on October 1, 2010 which almost marred Nigeria's 50<sup>th</sup> Independence anniversary celebrations suggest that the general amnesty and rehabilitation of militants by the Federal Government (FG) has suffered some degree of derailment. After the Abuja bomb blasts, there was the fear that what happened in Abuja could have a contagious effect on other places. With such views like this, it is easy to explain why some analysts are scared that the crisis could be exploited by extremist elements, who are more dangerous 'enemies' of the state.

The ambiguity in the Nigerian state's<sup>1</sup> position on the Niger Delta question and the rising oil militancy, violent political conflagration and heightened security risk in the region require deeper analysis but time and space constraints will not permit full analysis here.

Since 2005 when aggressive militancy became full blown, the militants has transcended all lines of division and held on to their demand that the local population be given a greater share of the country's oil wealth. Their ethno-religious differences never weakened their revolutionary fervour as their tenacity of purpose was not even predictable few years back. What the Nigerian state could not see even on the eve of the Abuja bomb incident, for instance is the combination of objective and subjective factors that made the incidence possible. There was already a groundswell of anger against official corruption and high level illegal oil business perpetrated by state

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**List of Abbreviations:** **DRC**, Democratic Republic of Congo; **DVS**, Delta Volunteer Service; **EU**, European Union; **FG**, Federal Government; **MEND**, Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta; **MOSOP**, Movement for the Emancipation the Ogoni People; **NDDC**, Niger-Delta Development Commission, **NDPVF**, Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force; **NOSDRA**, National Oil Spill Detection and Response Agency; **OMPADEC**, Oil Mineral Producing Areas Development Commission; **PDP**, Peoples Democratic Party; **UNDP**, United Nations Development Programme.

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<sup>1</sup> In this paper, state is employed to portray the aggregate of the institutions and apparatuses (state instruments) used by the ruling classes to rule or "an institutional structure charged with exercising authority within a definable jurisdictional purview (which is often territorial in nature). We chose to recognize the difference in usage in order not to overwhelm critical debates. Whenever we deviate and use the term state in the general sense (the nation or the organization of the whole people) this will be clearly perceptible from the context.

officials. The region has been enduring under harsh environmental condition since Independence. Yet this never fundamentally offended the sensibility of the Nigerian State. What mattered to the FG was that Niger Delta proved a good region in their strategic calculations. The contradiction in all this is that most of the powerful 'opinion leaders' of the region are essentially 'rentier power brokers' who were raised and encouraged by the Nigerian state to keep the peace and maintain the order required to keep militants at bay and furthering oil production. They are social parasites whose livelihood is sustained through interests, fees, profits and rents on property they own but managed through fronts ((Trotsky, 1939).

For many years, the Nigerian state pursued economic interests at the expense of secure and stable environment in the region. At the objective level, the Nigerian State has proved incapable of alleviating the critical development gaps in the creeks. At the subjective level, the militants are young, educated and have modern technology to their advantage. In 2009, the FG offered amnesty to the militants, which included an unconditional pardon, rehabilitation programme, education, training and cash payments to those who laid down their arms. As part of the deal, the FG dropped treason and gun-running charges against Henry Okah, a suspected leader of the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) and he was freed. While the amnesty offer is an ambitious move to end armed insurgency, facts on ground does not show that the FG is seriously concerned about the appalling state of affairs there. If substantial amount of planning and political engagement is lacking, the policy, which held a positive promise may not likely to lead to the embracement of peace in the region. Lack of political will to holistically address the Niger Delta question despite the amnesty, remain further flash points of frustration and may explain the bomb incidents traceable to the militants of the region after the amnesty.

## METHODOLOGY

This paper employed a mixture of qualitative and quantitative research methods using the interview technique (face-to-face, in some cases by telephone) and the administration of semi-structured questionnaires. This approach provided valuable information that was not available through public records and publications. Elite and random sampling procedures were used. The former sought the views of those that could be considered elites<sup>2</sup>. In the later, only eligible adults (18 years and above) randomly selected were interviewed in selected areas of Warri, Asaba, Owerri, Port Harcourt, Yenegoa and Lagos. A three-month research mission was undertaken between July and September, 2010. A total number of 50 respondents were interviewed<sup>3</sup>. They

<sup>2</sup> In any society, there are those considered knowledgeable and believed to be well informed and economically privileged whose views command a degree of respect in their communities, and they are the ones meant here.

<sup>3</sup> At the outset, it is important to note that this author does suggest that the number of respondents sampled and their responses as shown in this work are fully representative of the opinion of the entire residents of the six states that

included business and private individuals, artisans, government officials, civil society activists, analysts, cult members, security personnel, fishermen and farmers in the creeks<sup>4</sup>. The paper aims to promote constructive debate and promises a contribution that offers academic benefits.

## MILITANT INSURGENCY AND SECURITY THREAT IN NIGERIA

As the Niger Delta conflict escalated, it led to a very disturbing national (even sub regional) security concerns. The regional water ways in the Gulf of Guinea became increasingly risky for any form of business, including fishing. It reduced the frequency of mercantile ship movement and threatened to heighten regional tensions. Niger Delta militants were reportedly enlisted in a failed attempt to overthrow President Teodoro Obiang Nguema led government of Equatorial Guinea on the 17th of February 2009 (BBC, 18 Feb. 2009).

The corruption of Nigerian political process that has left the oil mineral-producing communities of the region poor and underdeveloped has produced an unintended consequence: It has created a large class of young men who have no hope of legitimate work that would fulfil their ambitions, and are easily recruited into violence ((Human Rights Watch 2003: 2). Bayart (1993: 17) talked about the idea of accumulation, opening up of opportunities of social mobility and enabling the holder of power to set himself up. During the 2003 elections, state governments in the region recruited armed militias to carry out widespread electoral fraud (Walker, 27 July, 2008). The former leader of Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force (NDPVF), Asari Dokubo, linked the former governor of Rivers State, [Peter] Odili, Abiye Sekibo, former Federal Transport Minister, Austin Opara, former Deputy Speaker of the [federal] House of Representatives and some of Odili's aides as sponsors and financiers of terror gangs. The armed groups were formed and empowered before the general April 2003 election, to ensure the victory of the ruling party, Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) in the state "by any means necessary" (Niger Delta Project for Environment, Human Rights and Development, NDPEHRD, 2004:5-6). The above points to the fact that rather than a consensus of the electorates being responsible for electing state officials, it is the support and the instrument of force that determines who win elections in Nigeria. Again, and of more relevance for our purpose here, it has raised questions about the role of politicians as financiers of armed groups and reaffirmed the militarized nature of Nigerian politics where the political process is subjected to the force of corruption and violence.

The militants have a combination of factors working to

make up the region. We focused on the core areas (Delta, Bayelsa and Rivers States) where militancy has been more recurrent.

<sup>4</sup>Most respondents agreed to be interviewed on condition of anonymity. We adequately acknowledged their inputs and made references appropriately in the work.

their advantage that continue to have profound relevance in the contemporary Niger Delta debate. Firstly, the terrain of the region constitutes one of the most obvious explanations. As “the world’s third largest wetland” (NDDC, 2006: 49), it is characterized by dense mangrove swamps and waterways, making it a fertile ground where shadowy elements carry out guerrilla type operations without detection. The geography of the region, and its marginalization from state transportation and communication infrastructure makes the region extremely difficult to police. This isolation amplifies the significance of MEND’s threats to destroy oil facilities (Kemedi, 2006: 3). The state is unable to maintain effective security patrol on what has been described as the poorly charted waters of the delta, and its elongated coastline stretching about 286,000 km<sup>2</sup> of water (Ogbu, April 8, 2008). MEND employs a variety of techniques that require good knowledge of the mangroves, and tactics designed to cause significant damage such as swarm-based tricks where militants would use light plastic speedboats to launch swift attacks on targets.

Secondly, security in the region is lax. A climate of socio-economic uncertainty helped by easy access to firearms among vast stretches of the populace, has made the region a fertile ground for multiple conflagrations. The firearms used by militants are readily available in the region since small-arms filter into Nigeria using speed boats through Cameroon and Gabon from conflict zones like Angola, Sierra Leone, and Ivory Coast etc. Thirdly, the success of oil bunkering in Nigeria is an indication that influential state officials offer cover and protection to criminal elements to enable them operate and also provide security to well-established cartels without the interference of the state security forces Coventry Cathedral (2009: 14). Added to these tactical difficulties, are the problems of overwhelming and unwavering forces of corruption. Government’s role as the dominant player in the management of the petroleum sector and the lack of operative accountability structure renders the industry vulnerable to corruption (Coventry Cathedral, 2009: 14). Corrupt state and security officials work in partnership with criminal elements to undermine effective law enforcement in dealing with militancy in the oil producing areas (Coventry Cathedral, 2009: 12). This debate leads to the question of how the militants and their activities are sustained.

The terrorist dimension that the crisis has taken may look new in conception and scale, but the massive fear it unleashes are achingly familiar to an African society frequently and routinely terrorized by murderous rebels. Useful examples from other jurisdictions are instructive. In Sierra Leone, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Liberia, Ivory Coast and other war ravaged countries in the continent where vicious conflicts and terror attacks had taken place, it is evident that the illegal transaction in such raw materials as the ‘blood diamond’ given in exchange for arms, has been fuelling the conflicts. Akin

to the trade in blood diamonds, arms are available to the militants through ‘blood oil’ either directly as part payment or indirectly by payment for security services to protect oil theft operations ((Coventry Cathedral, 2009: 13). Though contextual issues might be different, but proceeds of ‘blood oil’ have similar destructive consequences on Niger Delta’s conflict as ‘blood diamonds’ did in the civil wars in Angola, DRC, etc. Donations from politicians, hostage taking and ransom kidnapping, are other means through which the groups fund their activities.

## CONCEPTUALIZING TERRORISM

The Niger Delta conflict which started in the 1990s and gradually escalated into a multidimensional resistance in 2005 to 2008 has got environmental, political, economic, developmental and even strategic dimensions. The new dimension saw to huge destruction of oil installations, kidnapping of foreign (and later) indigenous oil workers, disruption of oil production and illegal oil trade or bunkering. As a country that depends on crude oil earnings as a major source of foreign exchange, disruption of oil production resulted in huge national budgetary deficits. Could these fighters be viewed as Militants, insurgents, terrorists, revolutionaries, ethnic militias or freedom fighters?

Various analysts (Ogundele, 2008. Osaghae, 1995. Dagne, 2006. Scott, 2007. Cohen, 2008) have used rebels, insurgents, militants, terrorists, freedom fighters, etc to describe the crisis and those behind it. The very diversity of views reflects the enormous variety of efforts to understand and describe the problem. Scholars of foreign policy issues argue that in other regions of the world, including the Middle East, analysts share different opinions regarding such militant groups. For instance, while the US has classified the Lebanon-based Hezbollah, a pro-Syrian movement, reportedly funded by Iran, as a terrorist group, the European Union (EU) on the other hand, resists the pressure to outlaw Hezbollah as a terrorist group (Cohen, 2008). Thus, conceptualization is better understood in the context of trends and patterns, and based on the tactic and strategy the perpetrators employ in conflicts. At first glance, the Niger Delta crisis appears to be the acts of an insurgency. And then, they may not be terrorists but are using the tactics of terror (Morgan, 2007). Whether they are considered as acts of terrorism, resistance or insurgency or not, a feature common to political acts is recognizable and according to Mandani - they appeal for popular support and are difficult to sustain in the absence of it (Mandani, 2004: 229). Despite decades of effort, with even greater focus after September 11, attempts to develop a generally accepted legal definition of terrorism have failed (Golder and Williams, 2004: 270). The failure is made possible because of the individual variability both in kinds of conflicts and in their methods of operation. Conflicts

occur under very many different circumstances and take a bewildering variety of forms. and it has been argued that security ought to be appreciated beyond mere military protection of state territorial integrity and interests (Buzan: 1997: 5).

Golder and Williams (2004: 272) argue that the lack of consensus on what constitutes terrorism points to its inescapably political nature, perhaps best encapsulated in the aphorism that 'one person's terrorist is another person's freedom fighter'. A more important elaboration described it as a form of political behaviour resulting from the deliberate choice of a basically rational actor, the terrorist organization (Crenshaw, 1981: 380) 'Therefore, terrorists are normally triggered by some form of oppression – real or imagined - which precedes the terror act that allows the perpetrators to rationalize their actions. According to Burton (1979: 11), terrorism includes a range of social and political problems whose behavioural scope is boundless and includes behaviour that appears to be abnormal' Then, a functional clarification: an unconventional political violence or the threat of political violence meant to have an impact on both the immediate victims and the audience that is carried out by non-state actors and, or clandestine state agents (Brown, 2007: 30). Brown's clarification points clearly in the direction that 'non-state-actors [and/or] clandestine state agents' use illegal explosive devices to perpetrate 'unconventional political violence' meant to create 'impact on both the immediate victims and the audience.' If we combine what Burton and Brown said in the passages above with our own studies, we come to the following assumptions: The activities of the militant networks in the region constitute 'a form of political behaviour, resulting from the deliberate choice of basically rational actor[s]'; The militants use illegally acquired arms to engage in an unconventional warfare in order to sidestep the limits placed on them by the FG.

Organizations that employ these tactics include MEND, NDPVF, the Coalition for Militant Action in the Niger Delta, and the Martyrs Brigade. MEND is about the most visible armed group based in the region (Hazen and Jonas, 2007), and the main militant organization attacking oil infrastructure for political objectives (Energy Information Administration (EIA), 2010). Formed in 2005 with more than 30 camps throughout Nigeria, it is a loose coalition of armed militant groups from the region. Although most of its attacks have been targeted at oil pipelines and supply terminals on the creeks and swamps of the region, it has created a sense of insecurity and panic many miles off shore at different times in Lagos and Abuja.

In what was described as "Al Qaeda-style terrorism" (Interview, Lagos, July 29 2010), MEND had on July 12, 2009, blown up the receptor pipelines inside the 50 million-litre capacity Atlas Cove Jetty in Lagos, effectively crippling the capacity of the facility to receive petroleum products. The attack, which left five workers dead served both the propaganda aim of conviction and using

coercion to get the Nigerian state rethink their "demand that the Delta receive more benefits from its oil" (Duffield, 2010). On October 1, 2010, two vehicle-improvised explosive devices were detonated near

Abuja's Eagle Square, venue of the parade, marking the country's 50th anniversary of independence (BBC, 2010) While the ceremonies were in progress, MEND gave a notice of intent through an emailed threat that bombs were to be detonated in clearly identified spots and time. It warned all "invited guests, dignitaries and attendees [that] "several explosive devices have been successfully planted in and around the venue by our operatives working inside the government security services...In evacuating the area, keep a safe distance from vehicles and trash bins" (Sahara reporters, 2010). After about an hour after the threat, vehicle borne improvised explosive devices were detonated causing substantial damage and fatal casualties. 12 people were confirmed dead and 17 injured in the blasts (Reuters, 2010). The very idea of the bomb blasts at all rather than the number of fatal casualties (though both), were meant to send a message that the militants have the capacity to influence political outcomes beyond their traditional area of influence. With well trained fighters and equipped with sophisticated weaponry, it boasts a membership that is well over 5, 0000 fighters (CNN, 11 December, 2008). Over time, their tactics have evolved from crude kidnapping-for-ransom operations into more sophisticated and effective methods that combine hostage-taking and bombings (National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START), 2008). Indeed, the Niger Delta Technical Committee Report acknowledged that the "militants have grown from rag-tag opportunistic group into very well-armed and well-organised combat forces" (Report of the Technical Committee on the Niger Delta, 2008: 52). The kidnapping of four foreign oil workers from a Shell flow station in Bayelsa on January 11, 2006 brought its existence into national and international consciousness. On 19th April, 2006, a military barracks in Port Harcourt, witnessed a car bomb explosion where two people were killed and six seriously injured. On 29 April, 2006, MEND claimed responsibility for another bomb explosion that destroyed fuel tankers and other properties at Effurun, the outskirts of Warri, Delta State.

It has been argued that the victims or objects of terrorist attack have little intrinsic value to the terrorist but represent a larger human audience whose reaction the terrorists seek (Crenshaw, 1981: 376) The panic its impact produces, and the sense of insecurity terrorism creates on the population makes more sense to the terrorist than real victims of a terrorist incident. As Kropotkin (1968: 35-43) noted, by actions which compel general attention the new idea seeps into people's minds and wins converts. One such act may, in a few days, make more propaganda than thousand pamphlets. Above all, it awakens the spirit of revolt. While the Niger Delta

insurgency could be identified as political acts, elements of terrorism such as; large-scale losses of life, the destruction of property, widespread illness and injury and devastating economic loss are recognizable (FEMA, 2009).

There are common elements identifiable among the majority of functional definitions of terrorism. According to various descriptions, terrorism is characterized by some common strings: political, psychological, coercive, dynamic, and deliberate (FEMA, 2009). Terrorism always pleads a political cause, involves the committing of terrible acts intended to cause political change. The above are reasons that enrich the tendency to assume that the militant networks in the region have appropriated the title, freedom fighters, to camouflage terrorism.

### **FRUSTRATION-AGGRESSION HYPOTHESIS AND THE NIGER DELTA CRISIS**

The frustration-aggression theory is associated with works of John Dollard et al (1939), the core assumption of which is that "aggression is always a consequence of frustration" (1939:1). The authors argued that individuals are motivated to achieve life ambitions and fulfil destiny, but when these expectations are thwarted, frustration sets in. In their line of thought, the occurrence of aggressive behaviour presupposes the existence of frustration; and that "the existence of frustration always leads to some form of aggression" (Dollard et al., 1939: 1). By the way, it is important to note that the existence of frustration does not always lead to aggression, given that frustration may have other consequences other than aggression. However, the argument may have failed to differentiate between instigation to aggression and the real incidence of aggression, but this paper acknowledges that frustration generates inquiries to various types of consequences, which may include instigation to certain kind of aggression. Aggression may develop as a consequence of having been exposed to an extremely frustrating condition sufficient to provoke the experience of hopelessness.

Simplistic analysis of the reasons for hostility in the region - that the Ijaws are at odds with Urhobos, the Igbos with the Itsekiris, etc- has distracted attention from what many consider the major problem. It is true that schism exists among the region's various ethnic groups, but frustration occasioned as a result of a sense of despair and deprivation, environmental and developmental issues, transnational oil companies that neglect the ethos of corporate social responsibility<sup>5</sup> are more like

<sup>5</sup> For our present purpose, corporate social responsibility implies a demonstration of certain sensible behaviour on the part of governments and companies toward society and the environment. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD), and the Dow Jones Sustainability Indexes (DJSI) are three important global institutions that have highlighted the need for governments and companies to abide by the principles of corporate social

it. While this paper recognizes that the competition between the West and the emergent powers of the East in the struggle for energy resources and spheres of influence in global affairs can be considered factors too, we argue that the response of Niger Delta youths to the Nigerian state's neglect and apathy of oil multinationals in the region radicalized them into violent militancy. The New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) further buttressed the position when it pointed out quite eloquently and forcefully, the lack of propriety in the handling of oil revenues;

*"Nigeria presents a remarkable paradox of an enormously wealthy country both in potential and real terms, serving as home to the third largest concentration of poor people in the world. The country annually makes substantial revenue from oil and gas but has apparently failed to provide basic services for its people" (NEPAD, 2008: 33).*

There are many issues in contemporary public affairs of Nigeria that sustain NEPAD's observation. In sharing NEPAD's observation, this paper wishes to explore other issues if only because they contain immediacy and concrete relevance. NEPAD is quick to support its position by highlighting Nigeria's history of corruption and poor governance:

*"The greatest challenge confronting Nigeria is how to transform and manage its enormous wealth from oil and gas to achieve socio-economic development" (NEPAD, 2008: 7).*

The degree of infrastructural decay in the region further strengthens the argument that the lack of infrastructures is among the fundamental causes of distress that stoke militancy in the region (Obi, 2009: 3)

The report of the Technical Committee on the Niger Delta raised a fundamental point that captured the essence of the problem more elaborately:

*"The absence of ... infrastructure[s] in a region that produces so much wealth and opportunities for the nation has continued to prick the conscience of many and contaminate[d] opportunities for building national harmony and a sense of citizenship(Report of the Technical Committee on the Niger Delta(1), 2008): 51) .It is, indeed, tragic that "the political environment is one in which the Nigerian government has failed to ensure that the people who live in the oil producing areas actually benefit from the oil" (HRW, 2002:3).*

A respondent stressed the importance of commitment to values and pointed to the political leaders' opportunistic attachment to the developmental challenges of the region:

responsibility. The scope and range of this paper will not permit a review of their policies and guidelines here.

*“When they come here to ask for votes, they make some appealing promises, project some aura of frugality and fiscal responsibility, but slip into familiar ineptitude once they get there... there are no visible differences between military regimes and the civilian administration in terms of improved standard of living” (Interview, Warri, August 14, 2010).*

Apparently, the above remarks rest on two assumptions: one, on the understanding that democracy is meaningless unless it lets people benefit from available natural and human capacities, and two, democratic governance should bring about, among other things, improved responsiveness of governance processes to public desires and expectations.

A respondent most appropriately conveyed the message that struck eloquently at the heart of the problem:

*“It is inhuman” he said, “for the residents of a major oil producing area, whose resources sustain the country to be despicably denied basic infrastructures” (Interview, Warri, August 14, 2010).*

A resident argued that they did not deserve be treated as ‘political and social orphans’ in their own land when he said;

*“The government is interested in the oil. We have been forgotten and we are left to our fate in spite of our contribution to the wellbeing of Nigerian economy. We are frustrated and tired of being ignored” (Interview, Warri August 14, 2010)*

They argue that the oil companies and the government have done too little to compensate them for [environmental] devastation and that, overall, they have not enjoyed much benefit from oil wealth (Osaghae, 1995: 330).

Respondents were asked whether, if frustration could be the reason the youths take to armed violence. Responses were obtained from a total of 50 persons of who 42 (84%) answered in the affirmative. While a total of 30 respondents (60%) reported having experienced severe hardship, 45 (90%) said that the agitation would not have led to armed confrontation if the right people had taken charge and pursued policies and practices that had ‘human face’. A total number of 38 respondents (76%) were of the opinion that despite the enormous amount of money purportedly spent by the FG, state of public infrastructure remained deplorable across the region. Various interventionist commissions and agencies, such as the Oil Mineral Producing Areas Development Commission (OMPADEC), Niger-Delta Development Commission (NDDC), and the Ministry of Niger Delta have been set up at various times by the FG. These efforts were intended to ensure the development, proper integration, and progress of the region. But facts on ground show that these “commissions of deceit” (Interview, Warri, August 13, 2010) are yet to respond

appropriately to the region’s development needs or help reduce the security crisis. The many years of practical deprivations and despair coupled with the failure of previous intervention policies had over time, created a feeling of frustration among the people. 54% (27) of the respondents accused the FG as promoting some unrealistic projects that serve as major drains on the economy without serving any practical purpose in the near future.

We made some quick checks on the cost of living in Asaba. At ogbe-ogonogo market,<sup>6</sup> we learnt that a cup of ‘oil’ garri (a staple food in Nigeria) sells for N25.00; while a cup of the ‘white’ variety sells for N20.00. We also learnt that a cup of rice costs between N30.00 for the local variety and N40.00 for the foreign ones<sup>7</sup> and that there are nine types of foreign rice<sup>8</sup>. “The quality,” we learnt, “varies according to the country of origin—American, Thai, Indian, Italian, Canadian, varieties etc. (Interview, Asaba, September 2, 2010). A standard or medium-size tuber of yam sells between N300 and N350. As for beans, the ‘brown’ type sells for N35 per cup while the ‘white’ variety costs N30 per cup. Two elements informed the idea of our brief market survey. First: to highlight the place of hunger and desperation that lead to the frustration that cause the youth take to aggression. Second reason was more important: to give some indication of the cost of living on the poor household, and on the average income household.

A respondent argued that until the Nigerian state recognizes the relevance of the region and decide to alleviate their suffering, militancy and the destruction of economic and strategic interests will continue. When asked if the crisis will ever stop, he expressed himself so clearly in attacking some salient factors that frustrate the youths of region:

*“It is the height of delusional exaggeration for them [FG] to believe that its good fortune would last forever. By the grace of God, our boys are determined to intensify efforts at checkmating [Nigerian state’s] oppressive and destructive policies and actions, more so because the FG is itself central to the spread of poverty in our land” ( Interview, Warri, August 13, 2010)*

His views rest on two related views. Firstly, the chain of events that has climaxed in ‘the destruction of Nigeria’s economic and strategic targets’ is nothing short of an appropriate response to the ‘oppressive and destructive policies and actions’ of the FG. He attributed it to divine intervention orchestrated through the powers of celestial

<sup>6</sup> This market is the main food stuff market in the capital of Delta State. Farmers from remote farm steads come to sell their wares here. On account of its status as a state capital, Asaba boasts of good security. Compared with Warri and other commercial cities in the state, Asaba is relatively calm and has a very close proximity to Onitsha, a big commercial city in Anambra State.

<sup>7</sup> Adani and Abakili are the two main varieties of local rice

<sup>8</sup> They include; Mama Gold, Cap Rice, Royal Stallion, Lucky Star, PJS, Mama Africa, Rice Land, Gold Cap and Big MM.

collaboration. "The boys' bravery," he said, "has demystified the federal government's fabled firepower and anyone who attempts to wish it away is tempting the gods" (Interview, Warri, August 13, 2010). This celestial explanation, deficient in logical justification though, is the basis for his second claim- because it is only explicable in paranormal terms; the sustained fierce militancy automatically suggests that God has finally answered the region's many supplications. "With the creation and dedication of a full ministry to cater for the development needs of the region," he said:

*"Something unprecedented in the history of Nigeria has happened" (Interview, Warri, August 13, 2010)*

From his disputation, it is clear that the use of armed security agents by the FG to bully, arrest and detain community leaders and youths can breed resentment and anger among the already frustrated youths.

According to Lawson (1965), frustration ultimately leads to aggression and aggression always implies that frustration has occurred at some previous time (1965: 14). So, when individuals are subjected to a situation of alienation and extreme frustration, it makes them act unusually aggressively. In the region, this has led to the creation of group alliances and allegiances aimed to confront the perceived injustice. Midlarsky (1975) is among scholars who have undertaken a further analysis of this theory in his studies. This theory views the idea of comparative lack as an obvious gap between value expectation and value capabilities. Or the lack of a need satisfaction defined as a gap between aspiration and achievement. Thus, when there is a disparity between the level of expectation and achievement, tension builds because of the pressure of a dashed hope. When this inability to establish connection between both levels persists for a long time, frustration sets in. According to Dollard et al. (1939: 2), "one of the easiest lessons human beings learn, as a result of social living, is to suppress and restrain their overtly aggressive reactions." The illustration shows that an individual who has endured deep-rooted economic hopelessness may transform from a frustrated individual to an aggressive one, which in most cases, may end up in violent actions.

An individual who is deprived of basic aspiration and who, as a result, suffers overwhelming sense of frustration, is inclined to respond aggressively towards those perceived to be frustrating attempts at living a good life. As a respondent illustrated:

*"Here, we have water, but we wash our hands with spittle. They [Nigerian state] rake billions [\$] in profits from the oil that flow from our land. They punish us with poverty, sickness, lack of electricity, pot-hole infested roads, dry water taps, and unbearable living conditions. They set up all sorts of commissions and tell us about development plans but fail to implement any. Our children are not*

*good enough to work in the oil industry. When we protest, they tell the world that our children are terrorists, and then they send soldiers to crush us. It is unfair" (Interview, Warri, August 10, 2010).*

The respondent tried to ensure that the core assumptions in his argument, 'we have water, but wash our hands with spittle,' followed his perspectives and main premises. But there are some of his assumptions that can stand on premises and perspectives other than his. For example, 'unbearable living conditions' is visibly obvious in the region. It is important to appreciate the perspectives, the premises, and above all, the fundamental interests and concerns that informed his argument. An attempt at a systematic appreciation of his viewpoint might be necessary here: That the problem is not the commissions but FG's failure to implement the commissions' recommendations; that poverty and hopelessness are direct consequences of government's monumental acts of neglect; that the problems associated with unemployment explains why socio-economic crisis, political tensions and violence has been prevalent in the region; and that, despite the vast oil economy created in their lands, the benefits have been inadequate to trickle down to them due to endemic corruption in the oil industry (Amaragbu, 2010: 108-112).. What is noteworthy in this analysis is that, rather than improved living standards, oil production in the region has led to bad living conditions and lost income for residents as the job losses from the declining agriculture sector were not replaced with employment in the oil industry. All these produce multiple chain effects that frustrate them and cause them to react aggressively. As an ex-militant noted:

*"The oil companies care less about us. They pollute our air, water and environment and leave us to die of strange sicknesses that are associated with oil exploration activities. We are frustrated because despite the rich mineral deposits that we are blessed with, we live in poverty" (Interview, Yenegoa, July 4, 2010).*

What the above conveys is that the feelings of frustration and anger in the region were based on the region's backwardness although that the resources that drive the country's economy are founded there. Indeed, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) noted that "in the Niger Delta, the results of poor development have been disillusionment, frustration among the people about their increasing deprivation and deep-rooted mistrust" (UNDP, 2006).

Oil companies have been pushing the frontiers of oil exploration without investing in commensurate safety devices. Indeed, some wells in the region has been spewing oil into communities for years and oil multi-nationals have been getting away with it. In particular, a respondent accused the Nigerian state of "culpable over-zealousness aimed at stifling [various] communities'

efforts to get the oil companies take full responsibility for the oily mess that have rendered farms and fishing waters useless” (Interview, Warri, August 10, 2010). The Technical Committee on the Niger Delta’s proposal for the establishment of “regulations that compel oil companies to have insurance bonds against environmental pollution...Expose fraudulent environmental cleanups of oil spills and prosecute polluters... (Report of the Technical Committee on the Niger Delta, 2008: 61) may have been in response to the people’s demands for internationally acceptable standards. Another respondent described the tragedy of the region as an indictment of oil multinationals’ pervasive influence over official structure. His observations rang compellingly heartfelt. “These oil companies,” she said, “have a license to literally get away with even murder.

They have a way of pushing state officials around so they can abdicate their corporate responsibility” (Interview, Yenegoa, July 4, 2010). This fact was eloquently re-established in the report of the technical committee on the Niger Delta: “The oil companies remain virtually out of control, they exploit and oppress the oil-producing communities and degrade their environment.” (The technical committee on the Niger Delta, (1) 2008: 49. Indeed, even when some regulatory agencies insist on firm adherence to regulatory guidelines, management of multinational companies go above them to meet with senior state officials for what they want.

Berkowitz (1989: 69) drew a distinction between attitudinal aggression and behavioural aggression as direct results of sustained frustration and acknowledged that aggression is a common example of the link between terrible motivation and repulsive emotions and rudimentary feelings of anger and fear. According to him, people prevented from reaching a desired goal become aggressively inclined, especially when the interference is believed to be improper, like a violation of socially accepted practice or is perceived as a personal attack (1989: 69). Gurr (1970: 24) argued that the potential for collective violence varies strongly with the intensity and scope of relative deprivation among members of a collectivity. For him, the primary source of the human capacity for violence appears to be the frustration-aggression mechanism. A respondent put the situation into proper perspective:

*“Our region is a site of despair, appalling poverty, anguish, frustration, and agony. Our mortal sin is that we have oil, and produce the petrodollar that corrupt Nigerian leaders and even our own sons [and daughters] godlessly share among themselves. Our waters have been polluted, farmlands have become unproductive and our air contaminated. Out of frustration, the young males are dejected, and console themselves with local brew all day. For the females, prostitution remains the only viable vocation” (Interview, Warri, August 11, 2010)*

The above may appear slightly exaggerated, but no one

who has been there would entirely dismiss the respondent even if you doubt his conclusions. To locate and extract the immediate lesson from the above, it is important to note that people who are frustrated have an innate disposition to do violence to its source in proportion to the intensity of their frustration. According to a respondent, the coming of the oil industry altered their traditional life style:

*Our people are predominantly fishermen and petty traders. We use the mangroves for building and it also serves as the source of our heat energy. The mangroves were a dwelling place to different species of fish. Quite a lot of shell fishes, Oysters and Periwinkles survive on the roots of the mangroves, and fishermen and women visit these mangrove roots to pick them. The destruction of the mangroves has led to the extinction of these animals and fishes. Oil exploration activities have destroyed the mangroves ecosystem, and oil companies refuse to compensate our people adequately” (Interview, Warri August 11, 2010).*

The respondent explicitly stated what the region’s core interests, core concerns and core dilemmas are, and why a proportionate compensation is desirable to the residents. Each time spillage occurs, it impacts the ‘creeks and estuaries’ and as another respondent put it, “frequent spills contaminate fishes and expose the public to health danger” (Interview, Yenegoa, July 4, 2010). When a people who eke a living through fishing are deprived of their means of livelihood and those who cause this destruction fail to provide alternative means of livelihood, they would ventilate their grievances aggressively.

Interestingly, the National Oil Spill Detection and Response Agency (NOSDRA)<sup>9</sup> tacitly admitted that “the exploration and production, as well as storage and transportation of oil in the region have negative impacts on the fragile ecosystem of the area, notwithstanding its revenue generation” (NOSDRA, 2010). Indeed, non-conformity with guidelines on environmental, health and safety standards has produced serious health hazards in the region. Oil companies are known to be very safety conscious and do not tend to compromise on the enforcement of safety rules. However, circumstances suggest strongly that the “big oil conglomerates that operate in the region and the relevant government departments have failed to accurately evaluate and deal with natural risks carefully” (Interview, Yenegoa, July 4, 2010). A respondent said that “there is the possibility that regulatory agencies allow oil companies to dictate

<sup>9</sup> NOSDRA is a regulatory Agency that ensures that oil companies maintain environmental standards. It came into force and was empowered by the NOSDRA Establishment Act, 2006. Its main responsibility is to co-ordinate the implementation of the National Oil Spill Contingency Plan (NOSCP) for Nigeria in accordance with the International Convention on Oil Pollution Preparedness, Response and Co-operation (OPRC 90) to which Nigeria is a signatory.



industry rules in return for monetary or material favours" (Interview, Port Harcourt, July 2, 2010). Pollution from "oil spillage and gas flaring has adversely affected the peoples' capacity to engage in meaningful farming and fishing activities, which consequently lead to a drastic decline in agricultural output. As a consequence, there has been a considerable decline in regional economy as farmers and fishermen are unable to handle job losses and high cost of living and this has triggered more vigorous aggressive tendencies or what Dollard et al. called the inevitability of aggression following frustration (1939: 2)

## Conclusion

The strength of any research and its contribution to knowledge lie in its ability to explore new grounds. This paper is able to achieve most of that by conducting case studies in some selected areas of four states. The case studies were deliberately limited to those areas in order to achieve a realistic on-the ground field work, which would have been more difficult with a broader study area. We began by searching and identifying the characteristics that explain the frustration. The trouble with this method is the difficulty to recognize exact instances of satisfaction and discontent. However, we managed to study the character of community leaders, young men and women (who could not directly accept that they were militants, some said they were only ex-militants), role of the civil society and the attitude of the public. The respondents cut across age, gender, status, religious and ethnic lines. Majority of the respondents had not been interviewed on the reasons behind the continued fierce militancy before, and this, we believe, is part of the new grounds and therefore, strengthens our claims to originality.

The goal of this paper is to explain the Niger Delta crisis along the frustration-aggression theory and we have clearly shown that poverty, Nigeria's political process, with its system of compromises conspire with other frustrating conditions like environmental security to render the youths vulnerable to aggression.

We have attempted to examine the factors that led to armed militancy after the amnesty deal. We have tried to advance the discourse to a critical level of reflection by providing insight into the unhealthy interplay of a wider amalgam of interests that conspired in various ways to shape as well as influence youth restiveness in the region.

We have provided convincing proof that militancy has its roots in the 'able bodied young men' which the political elites armed to rig elections in 2003. They were armed to perpetuate electoral frauds and then ignored, so, they resorted to self-help. They launched a new career as 'militants' and began to destroy oil pipelines; kidnapping for ransom and a few elements from within them began to

claim that they came to 'emancipate' the region. Millions of unschooled and unskilled young men roam the creeks and villages and provide a ready pool of malcontents for recruitment into full-scale militancy.

This paper has shown that frustrating conditions have affected the lives of many individuals and shaped the behavioural pattern of large social groups in the region. There is little doubt that it has greatly influenced the state versus individual or group relationship in the region. So imperative have this fact been in the lives of the residents that the emergence of armed militant groups tells that one of the aggressive responses to the despair suffered by the residents was the battle between MEND and the Nigerian Joint military Task Force (JTF) following government's military action in Okerenkoko in February, 2006.

The critical issue is what kind of society, human condition and historical circumstances produced the militant Niger Delta youth? He arose at a point in history when the region's hopelessness was near-total, when the residents were not only discontented but also frustrated and ready to consider violent actions to restructure their troubled lives and pull themselves from the edge of a schism. MEND is far from a lone agent of history. MEND's armed confrontation with the JTF that began the escalating growth of armed militancy were in harmony with the support given by the intelligentsia, community leaders, students and residents who share its revolutionary zeal and optimism. Its more optimistic logic seems to be the hope that achieving a bigger share of the country's oil wealth would alleviate the critical development gaps in the region. But the hidden worry is also that the conflict could elevate manipulative opportunists or criminal elements that may vitiate the more libertarian aspirations of the revolutionary intent. Setting off bombs many miles off shore as seen in the Lagos and Abuja bombings, the level of precision and destruction of lives and property that attended the blasts, aptly suggests that a new vicious dimension is slowly taking root.

With facts and clearer perspectives, this paper has contributed to the understanding that the militancy is fired by mass anger, frustration and general despair and that when a people are denied dignity, resistance and revolution become inevitable. We have shown that there is a thread of logical correlation between frustration, armed militancy and economic downward spirals in the region. One lesson to be learnt, from the indicators hitherto highlighted, is that awful human conditions are capable of pushing sane persons to the outer limits of sanity. Even decent people can change and may behave in rebellious manners due to hardship and despair. Symptoms of the extent of deprivation are common all over the region, and the youths' campaign for the liberation of their region testifies to Nigeria's bankruptcy of purposeful leadership and poverty of constructive political solutions. Often, economic hopelessness is followed by increased spate of higher incidents of unruly

behaviour, and it is unimportant whether it is the Niger Delta or elsewhere. It is frustration, occasioned by growing human, economic and environmental catastrophe and the impetus of new technologies that has put the heat on the Nigerian state.

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