

ENVIRONMENTAL AID TO NON-STATE ACTORS' CONFLICT IN THE NIGER DELTA 1966-2011

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Abstract

This paper investigates the critical role of the environmental in aiding non-state actor's as vanguards in hydra-headed conflicts that have ravaged the Niger Delta Region between 1966-2011. The expression "non-state actors" is a diplomatic concept used in addressing non-governmental organizations that operate positively with or without the ideologies of a sovereign state. In the context of this paper, the term non-state actors is considered a non-sovereign entity that exercises significant political powers and territorial control that are outside the domain of a sovereign government and often employs violence in pursuit of its objectives. The interdisciplinary approaches were adopted in this study. The paper holds that, the non-state actors' activities in the different parts of the Niger Delta region, formally started as a pressure group demanding for economic and political right from the government by Isaac Adaka Boro in 1966. The paper establishes that, the

environment of the Niger Delta characterized by the mangrove, creeks, tributaries, lagoon, fishing settlements, high seas as well as marine goddess played significant role in the protection, defense, and hide-out of the non-state actors. The work maintains that, the mangrove forest serves a refreshment center, hide out, and camp settlements while the creeks, and tributaries serve as maneuvering points, escape routes and ambush for the non-state actors against the state actors (the military). The work also establishes that the high seas in the environment serve as access point for arm smuggling by alien collaborators as well as the marine goddess which provides spiritual immunities against bullets for the non-state actors. The work identifies arm proliferation, violent communal clashes, increased food insecurity, and abject penury as consequences of the non-state actor's activities in the Niger Delta. The work concludes that the activities of non-state actors in the Niger Delta Region championed by the youths have turned the region into a theatre of hostility, restlessness, and insubordination.

Keywords: Environment, Aid, Non-State Actor, Conflicts, and Niger Delta

Introduction

Since the inception of civilian rule called the democratic government, the country has witnessed so many cases of extra judicial killings, assassination, kidnapping, and attack on state actors like the police, the armed forces as well as the civilian communities by some unidentified and heavily armed individuals popularly called the unknown gunmen having their hideout in the environment they operating from. This view seems to justify Jeje and Adesina, (1996) argument, which sees man as part of the living organisms that interacts with the environment, their view further classified environment under two expansive banners namely natural and cultural environments. Jeje and Adesina argument also sustained that within the two environments identified; there are elements that pushed for different categories of human related or interactions that can easily

transform the interacting groups into diverse environmental indulged problems that has directly or indirectly impact on people.

However the unknown gunmen attacks and killings in different part of the Niger Delta region, formerly started as a pressure group demanding for economic and political right from the government, by Isaac Adaka Boro and later turned into a secessionist movement demanding for self rules through the declaration of the republic of the Niger Delta and finally to militancy in the Niger Delta sub region of the South-South Geo political zone of the country with same demand for resource control. The activities of these known state actors (unknown gun men) in the region have subsequently become a national issue and a problem to global peace and security. The non-state actor “unknown gunmen” attacks and killing of innocent citizens and setting communities ablaze has become a common occurrence in the country, despite the efforts put forward by the governmental agencies and the non governmental agencies and some religious groups to curb the situation into a minimal control. It is on this premise that this paper is posed to investigate the actual position of the Niger Delta environments in aiding the activities of this non-state-actors I called the unknown gun men in the region.

Explication of key words:

Environment: conceptualization of the word environment has always been in conflict amongst scholars, this is because scholars have always established diverse opinions on what environment should be defined. Some scholar considered it to be everything that makes up human surroundings that gives human the comfort to survive on earth, amongst these items in the surrounding includes the air humans breathe, the water that covers most of the earth’s surface, the plants and animals around humans, and other variables. The index lexicon defines environment as the totality of the physical, social, and cultural elements that maneuvers the reality of development of an organism or assemblage of organisms in the human surrounding. Aina (1991), took a different view from that of the index lexicon by considering the word environment as the overall external physical and genetic surround in which man and other creatures live. Likewise, to Jimoh, (2000), environment can be envisaged as a structure where living creatures intermingling with the physical elements.

Aid: support, assistance or help given to either furnish, strengthening or means in cooperating to effect purpose or to prevent it from happening

Non-State Actors: the term Non-State actors are often times considered as those non-governmental national or international organizations that operate positively with the ideologies of the government. There is no mistake with that definition, but it beyond that, there are also some negative groups that operates outside the ideologies of the government. However, in the context of this paper, the concept Non-State Actors will be viewed from the point of non-sovereign entity that exercises significant political powers and territorial control that is outside the control of a sovereign government and often employs violence in pursuit of its objectives.

The Geography of the Niger Delta

The Niger Delta is located in the Atlantic Coast of the South/South geo political region of Nigeria. As obtained in the Willinks Commission Report, (1957:9). The Niger Delta region is reportedly located in latitude 3°N and 6°N, and longitude 5°E and 8°E. According to Nseabasi, (2005), the area called the Niger Delta covers about 70,000 square kilometers and shares environmental peculiarities of been a swampy land with lots of rivulets, Rivers and seas that covers roughly 2,370 square kilometers while the immoveable swamp coat about 8,600 square kilometers. Tremendously, the Niger Delta area is the Africa's largest wetland and the second largest in the world after the Mississippi.

The People of Niger Delta

The Niger Delta originally following it natural creation refers to people and territories within the coastal part of Nigerian through which the River Niger flow through and emptied itself at the Atlantic, which would have housed only the present day Bayelsa State, Rivers State and Delta State. Unfortunately, it original nomenclature has been replaced with political nomenclature, which now brought the area under political and economic definition as people and geography that covers nine states which some are found in South/South Nigeria and some in South-Eastern Nigeria specifically Abia, and Imo from the South-Eastern geo political zone and Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo, , Ondo and Rivers States

from the South/South geo political zone having about 185 Local Government Areas (LGAs) in all the Nine States.

The History of the Emergence of Non-State Actors in the Niger Delta

An oral interview with James Peremowei (2023) revealed that, struggle for environmental survival is the remote cause of the Non-State actor's activities in the area. Peremowei added that, the Niger Delta has over the years played host to the economic survival as well as foreign earning of the entire Nigeria States, maintained that despite this potentialities of the Niger Delta environment as the general base of the Nigerian economic resource and foreign earning, the people and environments have been frequently subjugated and neglected by the federal government. These unhealthy acts of the federal government and its oil mining companies have turned the former peaceful and hospitable environment of the Niger Delta into the theatre of agitation, protest and youth restiveness which has metamorphous into civil unrest today called the militancy. Peremowei noted that agitators in the Niger Delta are only demanding for fair share of the resources gotten from their soil which the federal government has found difficult to accept.

Ibiwari (2023) the Chairman of Ijaw Youth Council popularly known as (IYC) Eastern Zone, while entertaining to some interview questions from rhythm 93.7 at about 4 pm at Isaac Boro Park, during the remembrance celebration of Isaac Adaka Boro opined that, the issues of youths agitation in the Niger Delta has been wrongly presented to the outside society by the government with a derogative nomenclature "MILITANCY". He sustained that if the Federal Government is sincere and is ready to hear the yearnings of the people, she would have long even before or immediately after the declaration of their father Isaac Adaka Boro in 1966 responded positively to the yearnings of the people. He added that, the issues wouldn't have turned or brought the region into the dilemma of non state actor's menace which if in some cases are referred to as unknown gun men activities in the Niger Delta.

Ibi-Wari (2023) The Chairman of Eastern Zone of the Ijaw Youths Council further reveal that non-state actors activities in the Niger Delta region is traceable to the discovery and immediate mining of oil in 1956, in the creek-side village of Oloibiri, in the present day Bayelsa State, affected and

obliterate the natural surroundings and the occupation of the local occupants who solely depend on their environment for survival. and following the fact that the government was only interested on the gratification accrued from the oil resources in the area with total disregard for the social, political, economic and environmental responsiveness of the area resulted to the famous Isaac Adaka Boro agitation which eventually resulted to the declaration of the Republic of the Niger Delta provided or exposed the region on the page of non-state actors activities in the region.

He sustained that the continues denial of remunerations accrued from the natural resources of the region as well as non productive intentions paid on the damage and destruction of the ecosystem as a result of the oil mining activities in the region force later, Kenule Saro-Wiwa to advocate for freedom, resource possession and management from the government and sensitized the people through different means of campaign to pop up a strong awareness amongst the people about their environment and government unfriendliness in the sharing of the oil wealth gotten from their soil.

However, the awareness campaign eventually metamorphous into several protest and agitations through different declarations like the Ogoni Bill of Rights in 1990, the Kaiama Declaration in 1998 by the Ijaw, the Resolutions of the First Urhobo Economic Summit in 1998, the Bill of Rights in 1999 by the Oron People, the Akalaka Declaration in 1999 and the Warri Accord in 1999. Ibi-Wari maintained that all the mentioned declaration contained economic freedom, through resource possession and management.

Since the first phase of the Niger Delta agitation was blamed on ground that it took the path of arm struggle that brought in the menace of non-state actors, the people took a new approach which followed through peaceful declarations, the government was still not flexible in looking the demands of the people, these brought the youth on the page violence and arm struggle, which are a clear evidence of non-state actors activity. The youth's violence metamorphous into the disruption of oil mining activities in the region and subsequently resulted to the emergence of different interest groups like the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force (NDPVF), the Egbesu Boys, Martyrs Brigade, Coalition of Militant Action in the Niger Delta, Niger

Delta People's Salvation Front, Niger Delta Vigilante (NDV), Joint Revolutionary Council and Militant Camps Across the Niger Delta, and so on. These groups ensure the collapse of oil activities in the region through attacking and destroying oil equipment and installations as well as kidnapping oil workers to slow or truncate oil mining activities in the region. Instead of employing the means of constructive dialogue, the government responded through its military might; this action drove the conflict into another stage of confrontational attacks on the State-actors like the Army, Police Navy amongst others resulting to loss of lives and property of both the federal government and the Niger Delta people.

Environmental Aides to Non-State Actors Activities in the Niger Delta Region

The people of Niger Delta region are highly dependent on their environment (land, water and forest) for sustenance. They were attached to their environment and made their living from the exploitation of its resources as farmers, fishermen, hunters and forest product gatherers (Alamieyeseigha, 2005). Coastal wetlands, these environmental regions have played greatly significant roles in aiding of the activities of non-state actors popularly known as unknown gunmen in the Niger Delta.

Mangrove: The mangrove forest that expands in the coast of southern Nigeria accommodates freshwater and the saltwater plants, such as raffia palm, which provide hiding opportunities for the non-state actors region. However, the functionalities of this mangrove forest could be better discussed on the following sub headings



(a) The Mangrove Forest Provides Defense to the Non-State

Actors: the mangrove played significant roles in the defense of the non-state action; this is because some of these mangrove forests are deep and thick in nature such that human occupancy cannot be easily dictated by any person or when by air surveillance machines. According to Tamuno-belema (2023 oral source) who identified himself as repentant militant and now a federal Pekan, throughout 2002 till 210, he was living in the mangrove and everything they needed were been provided. He added that the mangrove live was far better than the city live because some the enjoyments he do have in the mangrove he is not having them now. He also stated that most times they will in the mangrove preparing to attack and air planes will be passing in search of them and will not see them because of thickness of the mangrove.

(b) The Mangrove Forest Provides Spiritual Immunity Against

Bullets on the part of the Non-State Actors: According Nengi (2023) the mangrove was a strong force behind the bullet immunities of the Niger Delta Non-State Actors this because, most of the mangroves in the Niger Delta region are been governed by spiritual forces or deities of ancient times left by its people without serve. He added that upon realizing this by the Niger Delta Non-State Actor, they act fast to re-galvanize the potencies of this water spirits in the forest through any form of sacrifices that the spirit may demand of them. He noted that after accepting to provide sacrifice and service to this water spirits, they also place a demand on the spirits to provide them with spiritual immunities against any attack and bullets, and in as much as the boys kept to their promises of service and sacrifices to the spirits, the spirits also keep to its promises of protection and provision of spiritual immunity against bullet on the boys.

(c) The Mangrove Forest Provides Ancestral Protections to the

Non-State Actors: Some of these mangroves are ancient fishing settlement as well as ancient settlements where the fore bears of Niger Delta had lived and have created themselves deities for protection and to guide them against all or any form of

challenges. These deities in some cases have been left for ages via migrations or search for economic fortunes by the present societies of the Niger Delta and as such they have left without sacrifice and any attempt to appease them with sacrifices resuscitates their potencies. Barabonye in an interview maintained that these ancient deities that was long forgotten functions like a wounded lion whenever they are remembered and scarified to keep the frequent submissiveness of the people. He noted that these boy knowing this visits such areas in the mangrove appease the deities and built their camps for security and protection of the deities. Those that provide sacrifices to the deities dictate the operational method of the deities hence, whatever they needed from the deity are placed as a request during the period of sacrifice. In some cases the deities are charged with the mandate of either to cause darkness cover on any force that will enter the area without the permission of the boys, or bloods sacrifices are make to force the deity to be always testy of blood and as such, bloods of those regarded as enemies are proposed to the deity. The proposals are made in such ways, "any man or woman that is after us and eventually enters into this mangrove forest kill them or deliver them to us to sacrifice to you". And enemies referred to are the Joint Military Task Force Operatives.

- (d) The Mangrove Forest Serve as an Extension of the Non-State Actors Strength:** According to Sokari, (2023) the mangrove forest serves as a refreshment center to the non-state actors in the Niger Delta, because, whenever they had an attack that claims lives of many of their foot soldiers, they retired to the mangrove to re-plan and check mate themselves to know why they got such loss. However, while doing all this, they engaged in guerrilla warfare meaning that they will be attack from the mangrove and returning back at the same time sending out their spies to know the strength of the military.
- (e) The Mangrove Forest Serve as a Coverage to the Non-State Actors:** according to Okonkwo, Kumar and Taylor (2015) as mentioned in Albert (2017), the Niger Delta non-state actors

(Militants) know the mangrove forest very well and takes great advantage of it by turning it into their hideout. However, Albert (2017) outline the statements of Asari Dokubo, the leader of the Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force (NDPVF) which states that, "we own the place, this Niger Delta, this the creeks of Ijawland, these mangroves and swamps. We were in these creeks for eleven months, the soldiers were flying all over with their helicopters, they were going with their hi-tech boats and radars, but they didn't see us.

- (f) **The Mangrove Forest serve as Ambush for the Non-State Actors:** the militants (non-state actors will always attempt to fight the state actors (the military) around the mangrove forest because it will aid them and proved costly casualties on the part of the Military. The mangrove forest aids the militants in their ambush strategies, to capture and kill the armies they consider to be their adversaries.

High Sea: according to Deima (2023), most of the camps especially the camps for the bigger boys in the struggle are built on the high sea. According to him the reasons are, for easy accessibilities of fear arms and other military hard wears from the outside world. Second for a sustainable protection of their military equipments, for easy dictations of enemies attack, to have the acceptance, communion and protection of stronger sea goddess and finally to function as a natural barriers to the state actors.



Creeks: living cultures of the Ijaws people along creeks avail them the opportunities to have wider knowledge about the creeks and its tiding strengths and weakness as well as areas to apply during low tiding to be for safety and where not to applied. This knowledge truly helped the Niger Delta Non-State Actors during the time of the Niger Delta crisis. According to Bukabo-ofori (2023 oral source) the State actors like the military joint task force suffers a serious setback as a result of having little or no knowledge of the Niger Delta creeks. A military officer, who identify himself as rugged scorpion confirm to the researcher that in most cases the soldiers suffer loss not because the non-state actor are better equipped than them but because they are not familiar with the creeks and as such when chasing the boys into the creek they run into woods consciously arranged and planted by the boys to disengage them. He noted that the creeks played a strong defense on the boys such that whenever they ran into the creeks they allowed escaping because of the fear of uncertainty. It is noteworthy that the people's understanding of the environment could aide them in time of trouble and vice versa



Tributaries: the tributaries in the Niger Delta environment also played significant roles in aiding the activities of the Non-State actors in the Niger Delta. According to Okumbia (2023), the tributary supplies much kind of connectivity's amongst the rivers which are not known by the military but only known by the non-state actors. Okumbia opined that the functionalities of the tributaries in the Niger Delta river ways during the period of militancy (non-state actors activities) cannot be over emphasis reason because, tributaries gives the non-state actors a conducive sail and gave the military a hard working conditions that is not conducive to their expectation

Fishing settlements: the militants (non-state actors) were sensitive to the fact that the Military forces will always be careful to shoot when there are presence of innocent citizens, based on this, the militants (non-state actors) built some of their camps closer to fishing settlements and whenever there is heavy attack on the non-state actors by the military, escape and mix up the fisher folks living in the fishing settlement whereby making the military to be confuse on the identities of those wanted and those not wanted. This environmental factor also aided the non-state actor's activities in the Niger Delta.



The Niger Delta Local Communities Aides to the Non State Actor Menace

The local communities in the Niger Delta did not in any way believe that they will be affected someday, this is because, in the primary stage, of the activities of the non-state actors activities in the region, many of the local people as well as the youths felt that the non-state actors are fighting for them, these mentality forced some youths to voluntarily accept joining them, while some were celebrating them in social media species. The celebration of these masked armed men, through their agents has miss informed the people to believe that, the masked armed men actions are to liberate the various regions and race from the hand of the oppressive governments of the federation. Unfortunately, the activities of this masked

armed men turned against those who were celebrating them and their activities. Today, the habitants of the local communities are becoming more vulnerable to the menace of the activities of the Non-state actors.



Even when the Federal Government in collaboration with their State Governments to deploy special military operations in the affected areas to curb the menace, they were accused of misconduct in some cases, the people saw it as an oppressive move by the federal government against them, rather than condemning the horrific actions of the unknown gunmen. Secondly, the local communities play host and hideout to these Non-state actors. Their forest, water way/mangrove, desert and mountains were happily given to this actor to stay, plan and execute their evil activities in the country. Because of the misleading social media information that has forced the local people to accept these horrific actors, they have always frustrated all efforts of the government in tackling the situation to a standing point.

The local communities serve as a spy to these non-state actors, providing information to them on the plans of the government; they also deny the government useful information in getting this people.

The Effect of the Non-State Actors Activities in the Niger Delta

Arm Proliferation: many communities in the Niger Delta region see armed force as a way of life, since any community or Kingdom found without arms in their custody are rated weak and are vulnerable to attack from those that have stockpiled arms, has made communities consider

having arms as the only means of protecting their properties and people from been attack or invaded.

Violent Communal Clashes: the Niger Delta Region today has the record of increased and frequent violent or destructive communal crisis in the country, these could be blamed or traced to the activities of the Non-State Actors that has polarized arm acquisition amongst communities in the Niger Delta and any slightest provocation leads to war. In some cases the arm conflicts amongst intra ethnic groups which prior to the period of the Non-State Actor would have been settle amicably without any form of attacks.

The second violent communal clash caused by the non-state actor's actives in the Niger Delta is the rivalry between oil-bearing communities. Most politicians, elites, traditional rulers has seize the arm proliferation in the Niger Delta via the activities of the non-state actors has a means to perpetrate evil on their neighbouring communities especially the communities that has been in conflicts over ownership of oil field. Examples of such conflicts are "K-Dere and B-dere" of Ogoni communal crisis. These activities of non-state actions have turned the Niger Delta Region a theatre of conflicts such that many delta communities are against each other such that even communities that have had no previous history of rivalry now are recording history of conflict with each other.

Increased Food Insecurity and Penury amongst the Local People: The people of Niger Delta region are extremely attached to their ecosystem such that they largely depend on their environment like the dry land, river and the mangrove forest for their economic survival. The activities of these non-state actors largely detached them from their environment where they made their living from. The farmers, fishermen, hunters and sea fruit gatherers could no longer go out to their daily economic activities freely, because at some point, if they are killed by stray bullets incuse exchange of fair between the non-state actors (militants) and the state actors (military), they are been arrested by the military and punished as spies to the non-state actors without proper investigation, or been kidnapped by the non-state actors and forced to serve as spies and messengers, while the females folk suffer double penuries, first used as sex slaves by the both parties second used as cooks in the camps of these boys. This entire situation faced

by the local communities who the producers and suppliers of food to the urban cities were forced to stay in hideout hence creating food scarcity both in rural and the urban cities.

Increase in poverty: Due to the activities of this non-state actors, the predominant economic activities of the rural people of the Niger Delta suffers set back such that the fisher folks instead of setting to high seas to hunt for bigger and large quantity of fish remains in their local creeks to fish only for their consumption, this according Miebaka (2023) help to increase the rate of poverty amongst the people of Niger Delta.

Insecurity: The insecurity created by these activities equally sustains illegal oil bunkering by the militants, which costs the country four to eighteen billion US Dollars worth of oil (Vanguard, 2008:1).

Kidnapping: The militants, however, see the kidnapping of expatriates as a way to force their collective admittance into the system they had hitherto been eliminated from, Ibaba, (2008). The issues of kidnapping and hostage taking have been an insalubrious phenomenon of the Niger Delta society. This is fore grounded by Kolawole (2007) who observes that: “Kidnapping expatriates and toddlers may just be a child’s play. Something more barbaric may be in the offing if we do not find a solution as soon as possible.” It is noteworthy that this ill wind has already blown to many other parts. Today, most parts of the country especially the Southeastern parts, have been grossly terrorized by the use of this new crime trend. It has, unfortunately, become “the talk and trend of the day in the country since its debut in the delta” (Akalonu, 2010).

Conclusion

The study convincingly postulate that the activities of non-state actors in the Niger Delta Region championed by the youths have turned the region into a theatre of youth aggression, restlessness, and insubordination. It is therefore right to a reaction shows a failed structure that could not congregate the people and their expectation. Owing to this reality, the activities of these non-state actors were propelled by the frustrating attitude of government and the Oil mining Companies for not actualizing the desired goals of the people of Niger Delta.

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Ibiwari Peter	M	38	Unionist	Comrade	Nkoro Town	22/7/2023
Tamuno-belema Amabara	F	42	Self employed	Madam	Bonny Street PortHarcourt	4/8/2023
Nengi Amoniah	M	44	Youth Leader		Port Harcourt	12/8/2023
Sokari, Akinimiye-Ofori	M	37	Youth Leader	Comrade	Kalabari	6/8/2023
Deima Deima	M	47	Youth Leader	Comrade	Okrika	22/8/2023
Bukabo-ofori Dennis	F	36	Self Employed	Mrs	Okrika	17/8/2023
Okumbia Isaac	M	48	Fisher man		Okrika	10/8/2023
Miebaka Fiberesima	M	40			Kalabari	6/8/2023

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