

SECURITY AND SOCIAL MOVEMENTS IN NIGERIA: THE NIGER DELTA PERSPECTIVE, 2003-2010

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to examine the impact of social movements on Nigeria's national security with particular reference to the Niger Delta region. The study attempts to give a detailed historical account of the evolution and organizational nature of some notable social movements in the Niger Delta and how their activities posed a serious security challenge to the Nigerian state before the declaration of amnesty in June 2009. Social movements refer to "collective enterprises seeking to establish a new order of life". In most cases, social movements are characterized by unrest borne out of widespread dissatisfaction with the existing social and economic conditions of life of a people and their avowed determination to achieve a better living condition. This may, however, result in destabilizing social security. Historically, the Niger Delta crisis originated from social movement spearheaded by Isaac Boro in the 1960s, when he led an agitation against the activities of oil companies operating in the region. The agitation was rekindled in 1990s by Ken Saro Wiwa and his group who agitated against what they described as unfair treatment by oil companies and worsening environmental degradation arising from oil exploration and exploitation in the region. By 2006, the movement had snowballed into militancy with its attendant acts of hostage-taking and destruction of oil facilities. Consequently, there was direct confrontation between the militant groups and Nigerian state as exemplified by military clashes between the militants and the Joint Task Force (JTF) of Nigeria Armed Forces. The situation resulted in pervasive social insecurity in the region with its attendant colossal loss of lives and properties, and massive disruption of oil production activities and consequent loss of huge revenue to the government. Sequel to this, the federal government embarked on various measures to restore normalcy which include amnesty for all militants in the region and post-amnesty programme.

INTRODUCTION

Niger Delta region is geographically located in Southern part of Nigeria. It comprises of nine states namely: Rivers, Bayelsa, Delta, Edo, Cross River, Akwa-Ibom, Ondo, Imo and Abia states. The entire region covers about 70,000 square kilometers and constitutes a vast plain of alluvial deposit. It is situated in the rain-forest zone with the tributaries of the River Niger meandering through a large part of it, with thick mangrove vegetation (NNDC, 2003). The Niger Delta region adjoins to the Atlantic Ocean and is characterized by very difficult terrain. The region is largely a low-lying area which is characterized by innumerable creeks, waterways and mangrove swamps which stretches for over three hundred miles from the Benin River in the West to the Cross River in the East (Inyang, 2009). As a result of the geographical nature of the area, many villagers or rural community dwellers are said to be cut off for the longer period of the year as a result of difficulty in accessibility (NNDC, 2003). The major means of transportation is water transport especially boats which often ply the rivers through the meandering creeks.

The Niger Delta region is occupied by some minority groups of Southern Nigeria. These include the Ijaw, Ogoni, Urhobo, Itsekiri, Ikwerre, Abula, Kalabari, Efik, Ibibio, Isoko and Anang etc. However, in the upland part of the region are the Igbo people of Imo and Abia states, while the Bini (Edo) and Yoruba constitute the dominant populations in Edo and Ondo states respectively. Thus, in the context of contemporary definition Niger Delta is not strictly geographic, but is used to represent the nine oil producing states in Nigeria (See Oparah, 2009).

The Discovery and Exploitation of Oil in Niger Delta Region

In January 1956, the Shell D'Arcy discovered crude petroleum oil in Oloibiri, Bayelsa state. By 1958, Shell had discovered oil in twelve areas in the region of which Oloibiri, Afam and Bonu were the most promising. Oil production started in Oloibiri in early 1958 with 3,000 barrels per day (Ekpu, 2009). Since then, enormous deposits of crude petroleum oil have been found on-shore and off-shore in many parts of the Niger Delta region. By 1997, Nigeria's proven oil reserve was put at 15.5 billion barrels. However, the estimated recoverable oil was put at 22.5 billion barrels of oil in the region from a total of 164 blocks (Inyang, 2009).

Natural gas is also being produced in commercial quantity in the Niger Delta region. Nigeria's natural gas reserve was put at about 124 Trillion Standard Cubic Feet (SCF) (Inyang, 2009). Large proportion of natural gas is produced in association with crude oil. Mr. S. Inyang stated that about 4.07 billion SCF of such associated gas is produced in the Niger Delta oil fields daily as by-product of oil exploration and exploitation activities, and over 70.23 per cent of this is flared (Inyang, 2009). Similarly, Mr. Bank- Anthony Okorafor stated that as at January 2010, about 2.5 billion cubic feet of gas associated with crude oil was being flared every day giving annual financial loss to Nigeria of \$2.5 billion. Thus, it was estimated that Nigeria might have lost about 150 billion dollars to gas flaring between 1970 and 2006 (Okonji, 2010; Adeoye, 2008). The colossal loss in revenue coupled with its devastating impact on the environment made gas flaring a major issue in the Niger Delta struggle.

The discovery and exploitation of oil (and lately gas) gave the people of the Niger Delta region considerable joy as they felt that the new industry would lead to tremendous economic and social transformation of their communities. More significantly, the production of oil has marked the entry of Nigeria into the coveted oil club and the potential transformation of the country's agrarian economy into a petro-dollar economy (Ekpu, 2009). Today, Nigeria is the highest oil producer in Africa and the seventh oil exporter in the world. As at mid-November 2009, Nigeria's oil production reached a record of 2.4 million barrels a day (Olowe et al, 2009). At the moment, petroleum oil accounts for 25 percent of the GDP, 90 percent of the country's total export and foreign exchange earnings, and over 80 per cent of total government revenue (Ajaero, 2009). Moreover, the Federal Government is said to have a target of crude oil production of four million barrels per day and forty billion barrels of oil reserves in 2010 (Okonji, 2010)

Besides, the implementation of the gas master plan would considerably reduce the problem of gas flaring, and increase the production of natural gas for both export and for domestic use. This would increase the revenue accruing to the government from the oil and gas industry and thus contribute significantly towards national economic growth and development. However, these projections and proposals are realistic and realizable if the government sustains its present effort towards effective implementation of post-amnesty programme. The Vice Chairman of Petroleum Technology Association of Nigeria (PETAN), Mr. Bank-

Anthony Okorafor reminds us that “no production targets can be achieved in an atmosphere of insecurity of lives and properties” (Okonji, 2010).

Origin of Social Movements in Niger Delta Region

Social movements are defined as conscious, collective, organized attempts to bring about or resist large-scale change in the social order (LeonGuerrero, 2005). Ann Leon-Guerrero observed that in today’s society, almost every critical public issue leads to a social movement supporting change or acting as a counter-movement to discouraging it. Social movements are therefore regarded as the most potent force of social change in the present societies, including Nigeria. For instance, social movements lead the way for social reform and policies by first identifying and calling attention to social problems (Leon-Guerrero, 2005).

The origin of social movements in the Niger Delta region is traceable to the discovery and exploitation of oil and the phenomenal growth of the industry in the region since 1960s. Professor B.I.C. Ijomah was reported to have stated that the origin of the Niger Delta crisis could be traced to 1960s when the government decided to jettison the derivation principles recognized by the 1960 Independence constitution. This, according to him, was when oil was discovered and had the prospect of dominating the national economy. Consequent upon the action of the government, according to Prof. Ijomah, the youths in the oil-rich region then led by Isaac Adaka Boro fought against the injustice. Prof. Ijomah described the jettisoning of the derivation principle in revenue allocation since oil became the mainstay of the nation’s economy as the “broken pledge” (Ajaero, 2009).

It is not surprising, therefore, that the militants (now ex-militants) in the Niger Delta region often trace the origin of their movements to Isaac Boro or what is referred to as ‘Boroism’ which many of his followers and kinsmen in the Niger Delta had imbibed as the philosophical or ideological basis of their activism. Ombe reported in 2008 during the 40th anniversary celebration of the death of Isaac Boro in Kaiama, Bayelsa State that:

The tenets of Boroism, the buzzword for the activists ideal was so strong in Kaiama community that day, that even the smallest child could wake up to tell you what Boro lived and died for, and why it has also become very necessary for every Ijaw man to celebrate the life and times of Boro where ever he or she lives in the world (Ombe, 2008).

Thus, Isaac Boro has become not only a hero, but a cult personality and a focal point for all Niger Delta activists in their struggle against the Nigerian state and the multinational oil companies operating in their environment.

In the 1990s, Ken Saro Wiwa resurrected the agitation against oil companies, particularly Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC) for the devastating impact of oil exploration and exploitation activities in the Niger Delta environment, especially in Ogoni land. Saro Wiwa, the leader of the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP) also vigorously campaigned for the payment of adequate compensation in form of royalties to oil producing communities by the oil companies and federal government. In the course of his agitation, Ken Saro Wiwa lamented that “the Ogoni people remained one of the most destitute the world”. He then contended that if Nigeria had considered itself a part of the civilized world, “it must show concern for its minorities and treat them fairly”(Ojo Ade, 1999). Thus, the environmental degradation of Ogoni land in particular, and Niger Delta region in general as a result of oil exploration activities justifies the assertion by Ibeanu,

Garuba and Ibrahim (2009) that the environment is “a common and principal denominator of conflicts in West Africa”.

Ifeka (2006) observed that the yawning economic disparities between world capitalism’s productive, information-rich affluent areas and socially excluded impoverished zones were particularly exposed in the Niger Delta. She noted that thousands of kilometers of global capitalism’s oil technology-pipe lines, flow stations, huge oil terminals and company compounds-sit literally cheek by jowl with fishing communities organized for the most part within non- capitalist relations of production for subsistence and eking out a living in the oil-polluted swamps and soils of planet Earth’s second largest wetlands. Similarly, Watts cited in Idemudia and Ite (2006) argued that for over 40 years, oil wealth has brought nothing to the people of Niger Delta except ecological catastrophe, social deprivation, political marginalization, and rapacious company capitalism in which unaccountable foreign oil companies are seem to be granted a sort of a state immunity. It was this socio-economic contradiction between the oil companies and their host communities that gave rise to agitation which eventually resulted in a prolonged conflict in the Niger Delta region.

In 1993 Ken Saro Wiwa contended that there was collusion between the government and oil companies to continue to exploit the oil resources of the peoples of the Niger Delta region without payment of royalties to the oil producing communities. He argued that the government had “no reason whatsoever to appropriate royalties to itself”. He bluntly stated that:

As far as Ogoni people are concerned there is no government to deliver us.... We are prepared to fight to the last cup of our blood to ensure that this [non payment of royalties to oil producing communities] stops. And the royalties the government owes us will have to be repaid... even if it takes them 100 years to pay; they must repay to succeeding Ogoni children (Igiebor and Osifo-Whisky, 1993).

As the agitation gathered momentum and led to confrontation between the Ogoni people on one hand, and the government and the oil companies especially SPDC on the other hand, Ken Saro Wiwa ominously vowed in February 1993 that “we will defend our oil with our blood” (Igiebor and Osifo-Whisky, 1999). He was eventually arrested, tried by a tribunal and found guilty and subsequently hanged along with his eight Ogoni kinsmen on November 10, 1995 in Port Harcourt, Rivers state under controversial circumstance (including the allegation of complicity in the murder of four Ogoni moderates by mob action during one of the MOSOP’s meetings) (Okeke, 2004).

It should be noted that Ken Saro Wiwa’s agitation was imbued with intellectualism, radicalism and eloquence embedded in charismatic leadership. These sterling personal leadership qualities attracted both local and international sympathy for the cause he vigorously pursued along with his Ogoni people. Odogwu (2010) stated that apart from the Ogoni people, Saro Wiwa’s agitation and activities for environmental remediation and resource control had profound influence on other ethnic groups in Niger Delta. He noted, for instance, that Saro Wiwa’s activities influenced the Ijaw youths to establish the Movement for the Survival of the Ijaws of the Niger Delta (MOSIEND). This, according to him, helped to create awareness in the Niger Delta, and with it “the compulsion to seek redress for the abiding neglect in the region”. While on trial and subsequent conviction, several international organizations such as the United Nations, Amnesty International, British Parliamentary Human Rights Group (BPHRG) and the London Forest Action Group etc pleaded for clemency on Ken Saro Wiwa and his eight Ogoni kinsmen. This was not heeded to by the

then federal government under General Sani Abacha. For, the Federal Government had earlier promulgated a decree ostensibly to check the rising incidences of radical ethnic organizations whose activities could pose a serious threat to oil production activities in the Niger Delta.

Obi-Ani rightly observed that the federal government had bared its fangs in May 1993 when it promulgated the Treason and Treasonable Offences Decree of 1993 which imposed death penalty on “advocates of ethnic autonomy who conspire with groups within or outside the country and profess ideas that minimize the sovereignty of Nigeria” (Obi-Ani, 2004). The decree, no doubt, created martyrs in the persons of Ken Saro Wiwa and his eight Ogoni kinsmen, while their spirits and Saro Wiwa’s ideal continued to embolden not only the Ogoni people, but the majority of the Niger Delta people towards agitation for the remediation of their environment and adequate compensation for oil producing communities. The ideals of Isaac Boro coupled with the Saro Wiwa’s campaign of indoctrination for common action for the resource control by the Niger Delta people had produced a discontented populace and more especially restive youths. The youths were said to have become “so militarized that they could not accept any dissenting voice or contrary opinion other than outright control of their resources” (Obi-Ani, 2004).

Security and Social Movements in the Niger Delta Region

By 1999, when Nigeria returned to civil rule, the Niger Delta region was already on the throes of social anarchy. The restoration of democratic rule had considerably encouraged the freedom of action and liberty among individuals and groups in line with the tenets of democracy. Thus, the latitude of freedom and liberty associated with democracy encouraged albeit indirectly the blossoming of social movements in the Niger Delta over the years. Moreover, the democratic political process particularly the political parties’ and individual struggles for acquisition of political power led to increasing partnership between youth groups and politicians. Some politicians in a desperate bid to achieve political victory at all cost employed the services of some youths to achieve that goal. Thus, the 1999 and 2003 General Elections appeared to have provided the youths in the Niger Delta region the opportunity to acquire sophisticated arms and ammunition with which they helped some politicians to attain their political goals, and thereafter asserted themselves and to build militant organizations for the continuation of the Niger Delta struggle.

For instance, Aihaji Mujahid Asari-Dokubo was allegedly assisted by the Rivers state government to win the election of the coveted Ijaw Youth Council (IYC). Asari-Dokubo was said to have remained in close and cordial relationship with the Rivers state government in Port Harcourt until 2004. He was said to have relocated to the creeks after parting ways with the power elites. There in the creeks, he was said to have founded the Niger Delta Peoples Volunteer Force (NDPVF) which attracted many youths as members. His militant organization was said to be “a resurrection of Boro movement” and was committed towards armed struggle (Agbo, 2009). Similarly, Ken Neweigha and his group was said to have relocated to Odi from Yenegoa, capital of Bayelsa state after he had fallen out of favour from the Bayelsa state administration after 1999 General Elections. Before then, however, he was said to have acquired sophisticated arms and ammunition with which he had built a strong militant group or criminal gang which engaged brazenly in illegal activities within Odi and its environs. The gang was allegedly responsible for the murder of security personnel sent to Odi to checkmate its nefarious activities. The incident led to the military invasion of Odi

community on 20th November, 1999 which reportedly led to the death of about 2,483 people, including women and children (Falode, 2008; Uwugiaren, 2006).

By 2004, the armed struggle led by Mujahid Asari-Dokubo had started to have a devastating effect on the oil industry and social security in Niger Delta region. McKenzie reported on July 6, 2004 that Asari Dokubo's militant struggle in the Niger Delta had resulted in the killing of more than 1,000 people a year and left villages in flames. He was of the view that the objective of Asari Dokubo and the gun men loyal to him was to wrest the oil rich Niger Delta away from multi-national oil giants and the government and put it into the hands of the people. The fighting in the Niger Delta, according to McKenzie, at times led to the drastic cut as much as a quarter in oil production (McKenzie, 2004).

Consequent upon the threat posed by Asari Dokubo and his NDPVF to the oil industry which was and still the mainstay of Nigeria's economy coupled with the increasing social insecurity generated by their militant activities, he (Dokubo) was subsequently arrested by the federal government and incarcerated. However, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo's administration was said to have inevitably accepted a truce brokered between it and Asari Dokubo's NDPVF by the United States of America. Consequently, AsariDokubo was released from detention and a general amnesty was granted to all the militants in the Niger Delta region in November 2004 (Agbo, 2009). Thus, Asari-Dokubo and his boys as well as Ateke Tom and the militants under his Niger Delta Vigilante Movement (NDVM) accepted the amnesty and surrendered their weapons in an arms-buy back deal in November 2004. The disarmament group set up by the federal government during the period was reported to have succeeded in recovering 844 guns and 1,337 ammunition from various militant groups operating in the Niger Delta region (Ogundele, 2004).

The 2004 amnesty deal, like that of June 2009, was dogged by controversy especially with respect to its desired effect. The controversy centered on whether the ex-militants actually surrendered all their weapons under the arms-buy back deal. For, by 2006, there was resurgence of militant organizations in the Niger Delta region whose activities seriously threatened the national economy, and as well resulted in pervasive social insecurity in the region. The situation posed a serious challenge to the government in terms of safeguarding of lives and properties, and the sustenance of oil production in the face of the menace of militant organizations in the region. The most notable, vibrant and much dreaded militant organizations in the Niger Delta were the Niger Delta Peoples Volunteer Force (NDPVF) led by Aihaji Mujahid Asari Dokubo, Niger Delta Vigilante Movement (NDVM) led by Ateke Tom and the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) led by Henry Okah. MEND was reported to be the largest of all the militant organizations, "the best organized and the principal perpetrator of militant activities within the Niger Delta" (Arogundade, 2009). There were also the Martyrs Brigade and the Joint Revolutionary Council (JRC), which was a coalition of militant groups operating in the Niger Delta (Ajaero and Azubuiké, 2009). The arrest and detention of Asari-Dokubo by the federal government in August 2005 led to the emergence of more splinter groups and the resolve of most of the militant groups to coordinate their activities under MEND and JRC for the purpose of achieving their primary goals as well as ensuring the unconditional release of Asari-Dokubo by the government. According to the spokesperson of the JRC, Cynthia Whyte:

We demand once again, the unconditional release from the gallows of the Nigerian state, the flag bearer and leading light of the Ijaw and Niger Delta struggle, Alhaji Mujahid Asari-Dokubo (Ajaero and Azubuiké, 2006).

Cynthia Whyte in her statement threatened that:

If the demand is not met in good time, we will roll out the drums of war and our heroic and patriotic combatants will begin a revolution against all interests and agents of the Nigerian State as well as its imperialist collaborators (Ajaero and Azubuike, 2006).

The Niger Delta crisis took a dangerous dimension when in February 2006 MEND embarked on hostage-taking ostensibly to press for the release of Aihaji Mujuhid Asari Dokubo and the former governor of Bayelsa state, D.S.P. Alamieyeseigha (Agbo, 2009). Since then, kidnapping or hostage-taking for ransom has become 'a commercial crime of choice' and a major security challenge not only in Niger Delta, but in many other parts of the country. In Niger Delta and South Eastern states, the frequent incidences of kidnapping have created palpable fear in the minds of citizens and consequently resulted in general social insecurity in these areas. Besides, it has resulted in the draining of financial resources of some public and business organizations as well as some families who were often compelled to pay huge ransom for the release of victims of abduction by militants and other criminal elements who had elevated kidnapping to a state of booming 'economic business'. The former Inspector General of Police, Mr. Mike Okiro was reported to have disclosed that over N15 billion naira had been paid as ransom since the 'business' of kidnapping started in the country (Thomas, 2009). It was also reported that in 2009 alone at least 128 incidences of kidnappings took place, with its attendant monstrous consequences (Odunuga, 2010).

In 2010, over 200 cases of kidnappings were reported (Mgbaburike et al, 2010). The spill over effect of the ugly phenomenon of kidnapping for ransom which began in Niger Delta in 2006 has been very devastating in South Eastern states. Many people, including foreigners and Nigerian citizens were known to have lost their lives in the hands of kidnappers as this heinous crime became more violent and messy. This ugly phenomenon, no doubt, has created an atmosphere of insecurity throughout the Niger Delta region and beyond. For instance, Port Harcourt, the erstwhile most boisterous city in the Niger Delta region was ranked with Baghdad in 2009 as "one of the most dangerous cities.., as criminal gangs and guerillas (militants) seeking greater control of energy (oil) revenue stepped up attacks" (Nwachukwu, 2009). Besides, in 2008 the Governor of Rivers state, Hon. Rotimi Amaechi was reported to have bemoaned the state of insecurity in his state and other parts of Niger Delta region. He was said to have revealed that his state government had over N100 billion in its coffers for development projects, but that contractors were not interested in accepting contracts "for fear of their staff being taken hostage by the rampaging criminals masquerading as militants or freedom fighters in the region". This situation, according to him, made it impossible for him to execute projects that could have had positive impact on the lives of the people (Etim, 2008).

The security of the Niger Delta region was seriously endangered partly as a result of conflicts of interests among the leadership of the existing social movements particularly that of Asari-Dokubo (NDPVF), Ateke Tom (NDVM) and Soboma George. In 2003, both Asari Dokubo and Ateke Tom were said to have been armed by politicians who were desperate to achieve their re-election bids. Thereafter, Asari-Dokubo and Ateke Tom were said to have fallen apart thus resulting in bitter rivalry and atrocious war of supremacy in which about 2,000 youths allegedly died from both sides (Chigbo, 2009). Also, Ateke Tom was allegedly involved in a serious local dispute over chieftaincy succession in his home town, Okirika which resulted in a protracted bloody crisis since 2001. Major Napoleon Ogan (rtd) reportedly alleged that no fewer than 2,000 Okirika indigenes were killed by Tom Ateke and

his group, the NDVM during the violence that engulfed the kingdom over the chieftaincy squabbles (Ogundale, 2008). Thus, the inter-personal and group rivalries among the leaders of social movements in the Niger Delta posed a serious problem to the security of lives and properties in the region between 2003 and 2009. The establishment of the Joint Task Force (JTF) code named *Operation Restore Hope* by the Federal government was primarily intended to restore social order in the volatile region in which 'cult' war and lawlessness was the order of the day.

Moreover, between 2006 and 2009 there was intensification of armed struggle by the various social movements (militant groups) in the Niger Delta region. This was characterized by widespread incidences of armed robbery, kidnappings, oil bunkering and destruction of oil facilities. It should also be stated that by 2008 the activities of the various militant groups had constituted a serious threat to the oil industry, and the security of oil workers. Ifeka (2006) stated that the Niger Delta youths surviving within primordial ties of kin-based fishing communities situated close to exposed pipelines, siphon off and sell an estimated ten percent of Nigeria's annual onshore crude oil production. In this theft, according to Ifeka, the youths were often backed by powerful patrons in high offices at the state and national levels as well as their 'parent' communities. She noted that the youths in Niger Delta might use part of the proceeds to purchase arms—originally of the small hand gun type but later highly sophisticated and lethal ones were acquired. This increased the orgy of violence and youth restiveness in the region between 2006 and 2009. Alike (2008) reported that Nigeria's oil and gas sector witnessed 23 cases of water borne robberies in 2007 and 67 cases of kidnappings and attacks on oil and gas infrastructure as at the third quarter of 2008. Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC), for instance, was said to have experienced frequent shut-in as a result of multiple attacks on its facilities by militant groups since 2006. This adversely affected its oil production. Nigeria was said to have lost N7 trillion as a result of the Shell's frequent shut-in because of militants attacks and vandalization of oil pipe lines by suspected oil thieves (Adeleye and Adegbayi, 2009). The intensity of the militant attacks was said to have forced oil firms "to seek self-help by taking their own additional [security] measures."

Consequent upon the situation, in 2008 the major oil companies operating in Nigeria were said to have expended about \$900 million to provide security for their workers and facilities. Alike reported that one of the top oil companies had a total of 806 armed security personnel in and around its facilities in the Niger Delta, while another company, mostly targeted by the various armed groups in the Niger Delta had about 2015 armed security personnel (Adeleye and Adegbayi, 2009). These measures were to complement the role of the JTF and other government security agencies operating in the Niger Delta region.

It could be stated that the growing interest of the world powers in the security situation in the Gulf of Guinea, especially United States of America, may not be unconnected with the increasing menace of pirates on Nigeria's territorial waters within the Niger Delta region. The Commander of the United States Naval Forces in Europe and Africa, Admiral Mark Fitzgerald stated that the America's interest in the Gulf of Guinea was not borne out of economic interests alone but also because it wanted to stop illegal fishing, piracy and illicit drugs. He further stated that America did not want the condition in the Gulf of Guinea [apparently referring to Niger Delta crisis] to deteriorate (Anofi, 2010). However, the increasing United States military activities in Africa, especially in the Gulf of Guinea, is due to her commitment to protect her economic interests and, above all, to checkmate the growing interest of China in Africa's oil (Klare and Volman, 2006).

Besides, as Kegley Jnr. and Wittkopf cited in Okpaga (2005) have observed, the United States foreign policy makers were not oblivious of the fact that “the country needed to confront the reality of the new world order which was unfolding”. They noted that “even though it is seemingly becoming a unipolar one, the world pyramid of power was moving from a bipolar one to a multi-polar distribution in which no hegemon would be dominant, indicating that competition in international politics would be more polycentric”. The emergence of China as a formidable power and second largest economy in the world, no doubt, poses a challenge to United States political and economic dominance. The competition between the two powerful nations was discernible in the Gulf of Guinea by 2009.

CONCLUSION

It was to stem the tide of pervading and horrifying social insecurity in the Niger Delta region and to reposition the area for rapid social and economic development that the federal government under President Umar Musa Yar'Adua took some far-reaching decisions pertaining to the crisis-ridden region in 2009. In the first place, the federal government was reported to have made what seemed like ‘a soul-searching’ statement when it appraised the Niger Delta crisis and submitted that “negligence on the part of oil companies operating in the area led to severe environmental problems like oil spillage, gas flaring, water and air pollution which, in turn, engendered the.. youth restiveness in the region”. It was said to have further accused the oil firms in the Niger Delta of “falling short of their corporate social responsibilities to their host communities especially in the area of protecting the people from the hazards posed to them by the companies’ crude oil exploration activities”. The federal government therefore promised “to move beyond mere talkfest on the Niger Delta environment issues to tackling them head-on” (Okoronkwo and Ajeluorou, 2009)

Moreover, President Umar Musa Yar'Adua granted general amnesty for all militants in the Niger Delta on June 25, 2009. This was followed by the implementation of post-amnesty programme on October 6, 2009.

Furthermore, President Goodluck Jonathan was reported to have stated that his administration would “consolidate on the gains recorded by the amnesty programme and do all that is humanly possible to prevent the Niger Delta region from, once again, descending to security nightmare” (Ebiri and Godwin, 2010). His administration later commenced the rehabilitation and re-orientation training of the ex-militants at Obubra camp in Cross River state. The National Assembly approved N240.5 billion Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) budget for the year 2010 to ensure speedy and effective execution of development projects in the area (Daniel et al, 2010). These measures largely helped to improve security of lives and properties in the region. The amnesty programme also created an enabling environment for oil companies to repair damaged oil facilities and ramp up production of both oil and gas.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations were made as ways of sustaining peace and social security in Niger Delta region.

1. There is need for the government and oil companies to sustain the efforts toward the remediation of the Niger Delta environment degraded by many years of oil exploration and exploitation in the region. This can be achieved through many interventionist programmes, including cleaning up oil spills and United Nations Environmental Programmes (UNEP).

2. There is need for continuous dialogue with all stakeholders in the Niger Delta region. This is necessary for sustainable peace and social security in the region.
3. The re-orientation and non-violent training programme for ex-militants embarked upon by the Federal Government at Obubra camp, Cross River state is a welcome development. This enabled the ex-militants to imbibe the culture of dialogue, restraint, moral values and personal discipline necessary for their reintegration into their respective communities as responsible citizens.
4. The academic and vocational training initiated by the Federal Government for the ex-militants both within the country and abroad serves as a major tool for the restoration of peace and security in the region. This laudable policy need to be extended broadly to the teeming youths in the region who are yearning for qualitative education as well as other beneficial aspects of human capital development and empowerment.
5. There is need for both the government and oil companies to initiate sustainable policies for creating job opportunities for the teeming youths in the region. This will serve as a tool for discouraging youth restiveness and militancy. The British Council's report on Nigeria's future stated that "the youths, not oil, will become Nigeria's most precious resource in the 21st century". It noted that "by 2030 the country will be one of the few countries in the world that has young workers in large surplus". The report, however, strongly advised Nigeria to "develop the infrastructure, diversify her economy and lay emphasis on economic sectors that will improve employment prospects for young people" (See Kalu, Alakam and Ojiego, 2011). Agriculture and manufacturing sectors of the economy hold prospects for job opportunities for millions of Nigerian youths. This will stimulate economic growth and improve social life of the citizens.
6. The government should ensure adequate compensation for oil producing communities for the natural resources being exploited in their domain as well as for the negative impact of oil production in their communities (Njoku, 2011).
7. Moreover, the government should commit adequate resources towards infrastructural development in the Niger Delta region through its agencies such as Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) and Niger Delta Ministry, as well as other development partners. This will instill confidence in the people of Niger Delta region that the government is responsive to their problems and is committed towards their welfare.
8. There is also the need to sustain the Amnesty programme as a vehicle for promoting peace, stability and youth empowerment in the Niger Delta region.
9. Above all, the government should sustain its effort towards the maintenance of law and order in the region. This is necessary because no meaningful development will take place in a crisis-ridden society.

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