

From Craft-Produced Shotguns to AK-47: Lessons from Nigeria's Niger Delta Conflict

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Abstract:

Nigeria is a country in West Africa. Oil was discovered in commercial quantity in the Niger Delta region of the country in 1956. The idea of oil brought the hope that the Niger Delta would bid farewell to poverty. But this never happened till date. Oil, a supposedly blessing to Nigeria ironically became a curse to the nation. Instead of transforming the Delta to greatness, oil became a source for group competition and conflict. The result was an institutionalized patronage networks and corruption as national asset. The dissents behind more than 50 years of oil exploitation were brutally crushed by the state security outfits. Efforts at getting the Nigerian state to peacefully resolve the conflict yielded little or no fruit. In response, the Niger Delta people resorted to self-help by locally producing shotguns to counter the state security repression on peaceful agitators and unarmed communities. Government clampdown on alleged dissenting communities and insurgents resulted in more production of sophisticated weapons. This paper examines the issues that compelled the Deltans to weapon manufacture. The paper is based on empirical data collected during field trips to the Niger Delta region between April 2013 and May 2015. The study explores ways for peaceful resolution of the conflict.

Key Words: Crude Oil, Repression, Conflict, Insurgents, Shot-guns, sophisticated weapons.

Introduction

Nigeria has the largest oil and gas reserves in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). Crude oil was discovered in Oloibiri in the Niger Delta area of Nigeria in 1956. Its exploration gave hope to the people that the region would be lifted out of poverty. However, this never happened till date. The presence of crude oil and its exploitation severely devastated the Delta environment and impoverished its people. The discovery of oil which was welcomed in high spirit in the hope that it came with positive social development foisted on Nigeria and the Delta a turbulent history of conflict and a disappointing level of

development, which brought about agitation for community inclusion in the management of oil proceeds (NDI 1). The struggle by the militants for access to and control of oil-rents played key roles in bringing about conflicts in the Delta region. For instance, opposition and rebellion against oil exploitation from oil-bearing communities for more than five decades were crushed by the state security outfits. What began first as community agitation for injustice and good environment later metamorphosed into violent armed struggle.

The first phase of the conflict began with the community's peaceful demands through letters to the Federal Government of Nigeria and the Oil Companies for environmental and development justice. The second phase witnessed the flowering of the Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) such as the Greenpeace International, Amnesty International, International Crisis Group, etc, staging popular protests. The third phase saw the struggle move from developmental issues to political agitations for inclusion for resource management, control, and Sovereign National Conference (SNC). In the fourth and final phases, the struggle witnessed the involvement of the youths and their violent resistance in the form of ethnic militancy characterised by volatile requests including ultimatums, which heightened the magnitude of hostilities towards both the oil companies and the Government of Nigeria. The oil conflict, therefore, undermined good governance and social service delivery, particularly in the oil producing states of the Delta region (NDI 18).

There are many reasons for which a country endowed with crude oil might seek to utilise its revenues for sustainable development, including using proceeds from oil to improve the quality of lives of its citizens. But, the case of Nigeria is different. The Nigerian Government failed to use oil revenues to improve social benefits for its citizens. Instead, oil monies went into private bank accounts of the Nigerian officials. Nigeria also failed to launch accountable institutions that would safeguard the natural resource governance in the public interest. The available institutions were either weak or not put in place to manage the oil resources in the public interest. Because government was weak, corruption became endemic in the management of public resources. This situation was made worse starting from the 1970s, when Nigeria began to experience oil booms. By this time, the military had seized political power through coups and counter-coups. Nigeria, therefore, experienced repressive military rules. Under the military regimes, accountability was almost nonexistent, and where it existed, its procedures were violated (Nwankwo 2015:601). For a period of thirty-three years (1966-1999), Nigeria witnessed several military dictatorships, which deepened corrupt practices and human rights abuses in the country (Chukwu 2005:106). Table 1.1., presents the summary of the Nigerian military and civilian leaders from 1960 to 2015.

The above military regimes enthroned criminal leadership as national heritage. Between 1970 to the end of military rule in 1999, Nigeria witnessed the era of institutionalised culture of bureaucratic non-accountability, which affected every segment of the Nigerian society. The outcome was that the military elites assisted by their civilian counterparts looted the country. Under the military as well, the Nigeria's oil economy witnessed an aggressive restructuring and centralisation of state control of the fiscal revenues. Formerly, 100% and (later 50%) fiscal distribution of revenues went back to the regions where

they were derived for development purposes. The emphasis then was on production where the regions competed with one another for economic and social development. This was halted by the military and the fiscal revenue system under it witnessed progressive reduction from 50% until it was abolished. The military also centralised the ownership of lands with mineral resources unto the Federal Government by anti-people's legislation. The centralisation of control of mineral wealth of the nation marked the beginning of resource conflict in the Niger Delta. It also resulted in the emergence of a cycle of aggressive patronage networks and "political godfathers" that prey on the oil wealth of the nation (Ikelegbe 2008:221).

By 1999, Nigeria returned to democratic governance after decades of military rule. It embarked on revolutionary reforms aimed at improving its quality governance delivery, transparency and accountability in the oil sector (Gboyega, et. al. 2011:7; World Bank, 2011a,b). Despite its reforms, Nigeria remained poor and its economy underdeveloped with more than half of its population living below the poverty line and over 35% of the population living in situations of severe poverty (Gboyega, et. al. 2011:7). The hope of the Niger Delta people that democracy would encourage corporate social responsibility in the Delta region after decades of misrule by the military became a misplaced priority. Instead, the region witnessed the highest level of oil pollution and inhuman treatments including genocide in Odi community, all for exploitation of crude oil.

The peaceful protests against environmental devastation in the oil-bearing communities were visited by the Federal Government sledgehammer. In the midst of anger and frustration that followed, emerged a raft of the youth ethnic militia movements that came to regard themselves as freedom fighters. As the war to control access to oil wealth in the Niger Delta intensified between the Federal Government and the ethnic militia movements, such as the Ijaw Youth Council (IYC), Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force (NDPVF); Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND); the Egbesu Boys of Africa (EBA), etc; metamorphosed into cartels and linchpins for criminal networks.

Efforts at addressing the Niger Delta conflict by the stakeholders (the Nigerian Government, Oil companies and the International Community) met with little success or failed completely because of the nature and complexity of the conflict and actors involved. For example, the Nigerian Government's efforts were marred by corruption and lack of political will and sagacity to deal with the roots of the conflict. Something similar could also be said of the international communities' efforts and those of the oil companies witnessed the "green – washing" effects in which the companies pretended to be "green" through their high profile donations while the vast majority of their (oil exploration) works were polluting the environment and other unethical behaviours.

The destructive impacts of the youth's insurgency and the response of the Federal Government to it raises the need for a comprehensive study of the conflict in order to understand the reason behind it and why the conflict seems to have defiled every effort at resolving it. This study aims to achieve this objective.

Theoretical Perspective on the Niger Delta Conflict

Greed and grievance provide explanation to this study as both offered opposing arguments. The proponents of the greed theory like Collier and Hoeffler (2004:563) argue that armed conflicts are caused by combatants' desire for self-enrichment. Motivations to this in their view are caused by economic gains through control of goods and resources and increased power within a state. Collier and Hoeffler (2004:563) contend that conflict entrepreneurs are profit seekers that use war to enrich themselves and they see waging wars as comparable to running businesses. Collier and Hoeffler (2004) claim that civil wars stem from the greedy behaviour of a rebel group in organising an insurgency against the government. They explained that rebels act in pursuit of self-interested material gains. Oil, diamonds, timber, and other primary commodities form the basis for contestable resources over which rebels fight their governments.

Collier and Hoeffler's (2004) research maintained that the set of variables representing rebel greed akin to loot seeking are the main reasons for civil war. By implication, Collier and Hoeffler (2004:563) dismissed the alternative hypothesis of grievance (justice-seeking). Their research in particular suggests that presence of oil and gas resources create violent competition and serious conflict over access to resource wealth. In his feasibility hypothesis, Collier et al (2006:5) argues that 'where rebellion is materially feasible it will occur' and the motivation behind violent rebellion are 'incidental to the explanation of civil war'. Collier et al (2006:5) strongly suggests that economic greed, (the desire to gain inroad to resource wealth in addition to the clientelist rents seeking aligned with natural resources) derives rebellion. And the good example of this is evidenced in the predatory economic activities seen among the Niger Delta militants with their professed grievances of economic and political marginalisation. To this, Collier (2007) dismissed the Niger Delta youth militants as mass criminal groups presenting only an ideological facades of political and economic grievances and concern to their communities. Collier (2007) faulted grievance explanation to civil insurgencies by stating that the "grievance-based explanation to civil war is seriously wrong". Other writers such as (Richards 2003:19; Walker, 2009) that share Collier's (2007) views portrayed the Niger Delta militants as bandits and gangsters whose actions are motivated by greed and criminality.

But the proponents of the grievance paradigm reject the claims of the greed theorists. For instance, Ballentine and Sherman (2003:263) argue that economic factors alone as claimed by Collier and Hoeffler's (2004:563) are not sufficient to explain militancy. They contend that insurgencies emerge from the opposition to perceived injustices. People fight because of oppression, inequality, lack of social justice and discrimination. Davies (1962) and Gurr (1970) argue that the gap between expectations and achievements would contribute to the willingness of people to rebel. In particular, movements in this perceived deprivation fuel rebellion. Keen (2008: 408-410) in his 'Complex Emergencies' argues that although many conflict eruptions centred on some concept of greed or grievance, this can never solely explain a conflict. He demonstrated that the aims in a war or insurgencies are 'complex'. Keen (2000:38, 2012:765) presents a critique of Colliers economic war paradigm by emphasising that Collier became too comfortable with "numbers" rather than relying on the "opinion" of a people involved in conflict. He disagrees with the quantitative research methods of Collier and believes that a stronger emphasis could be put on personal data and human perspective of people in conflict. He faulted Colliers affirmation that

rebels are criminals. By implication, Collier fails to understand the underlining grievances in a civil conflict.

In their own perspective, Bodea and Elbadawi (2007:9) argue that empirical data can disprove many of the proponents of greed theory and make the idea 'irrelevant'. Their conclusion is that too many factors come into play in conflict situations, which cannot alone be confined simply to greed or grievance. They considered structural factors in a conflict, which Collier fails to understand. And these structural factors are critical in the Niger Delta conflict. In his own presentation, Vinci (2006:8) argues "fungible concept of power and the primary motivation of survival provide superior explanations of armed group motivation

and, more broadly, the conduct of internal conflicts". Like other critiques of greed and grievance models that did not oppose the theory directly, Vinci (2006:8) believes that there are many varying effects that can lead to desperate forms of conflict.

Stewart et. al., (ed) (2008:3) argues that horizontal inequalities in economic, social and political dimensions including cultural status between culturally defined groups rather than greed are powerful factors that motivate civil wars and insurgencies. This presents alignment with grievance model as opposed to Collier (2000:96) greed model. Stewart et. al. (2008:5) notes that greed is a significant factor in civil wars, but it interacts with grievances in complex ways to cause insurgencies and wars. Her conclusion is that inequalities result in grievances which presents convincing evidence for insurgency to occur while Collier continues to emphasis the economic or criminal agendas of rebels and downplays grievance as a motivating force behind insurgency and war. In their criticisms of Collier's works, Easterly (2009) for instance points out that to establish a poverty trap (as Collier purports to do), one would have to take the 'bottom' countries at some period in the past and show how they have developed, than taking today's bottom countries and showing that they develop poorly in the past. On his part, Cramer (2002:964) points to the limitations of viewing human behaviour in terms of economic motivation and individual rational choice while Nathan (2005) emphasises Collier's lack of interest in the nature and character of actually existing mass violence.

In presenting their findings on conflict eruption, Stewart et al (ed) (2008:294) notes that the link between natural resources and conflict is well established. They, however, highlighted the problems of how these links are to be established, stating that jumping into the conclusion that the evidence of 'rebel greed' presents in the causation factors may be misleading. They also note that, "our research suggests that the conflict-including potential of natural resources is often mediated through their impact on horizontal inequalities and that this can translate into both separatist struggles and local-level conflict". Brown (quoted in Ross 2004:56) notes that the discovery of oil in Aceh in Indonesia was a major spur to separatism in that country, and one element in that separatist (like in Nigeria) movement was resentment that low educational levels in the country encouraged employers to hire Javanese outsiders for most of the high paying jobs within the emerging oil and gas industry. Beyond Aceh and even Indonesia, oil has encouraged aspirations for regional autonomy. For instance, oil has encouraged separation in Sudan, Nigeria and Scotland. Meanwhile, the complex grievances motivating these aspirations to autonomy and separation cannot simply be dismissed as greed. In addition to this, Ross (2003:19) finds that "any given conflict is brought about by a complex set of events; often poverty,

ethnic or religious grievances, and unstable governments also play major roles. But even after these factors have been taken into account, studies consistently find that natural resources heighten the danger that a civil war will break out and once it breaks out, the conflict will be more difficult to solve”.

The table below summarised the views of my research respondents on the internal causes conflict in the Niger Delta.

Summary of internal factors that cause the Niger Delta conflict

Underlying Causes	Proximate Causes
Structural Factors:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Weak state - Intra-state security concerns - Ethnic geography 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Collapsing state - Changing intra-state military balances - Changing demographic patterns.
Political Factors:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Discriminatory political institutions - Exclusionary national ideologies - Inter group politics - Elite politics 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Political transitions - Increasing exclusionary ideologies - Growing inter-group competition - Intensifying leadership struggles
Economic/Social Factors:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Economic problems - Discriminatory economic systems - Modernisation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mounting economic problems - Growing economic inequalities - Fast-paced development and modernisation
Cultural Factors:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Patterns of cultural discrimination - Problematic group histories 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Intensifying patterns of cultural discrimination - Ethnic bashing and propaganda

From the author’s interview transcripts and field notes, August 2014.

The greed theory is still a foundational explanation behind the analysis of civil insurgencies and wars. Most scholars that present critiques of the theory did not argue that the theory is fundamentally wrong, but rather it needs some modifications and additional theories to reach its explanatory power. This study finds that grievance-based incompatibles are at the core of the process that leads to armed conflict in the Niger Delta. Greed becomes salient when the rebel leadership begins to face a difficult task of motivating rebels. In effect, grievance leads to collective action.

General Conditions for Socio-Cultural Group Insurgency in the Niger Delta

The first and overarching research question for this study was: What factors account for the Niger Delta conflict? This question was predicated on the ground that there are disagreements among scholars and conflict analysts on the roots of the Niger Delta conflict. In general, the most commonly identified causes in the literature are poverty, unemployment, environmental pollution, resource control, corruption, exploitation, economic and political marginalization, ethnicity, and infrastructural deficits. These factors have received little or no attention from the Federal Government of Nigeria. Although scholars have explored the links between these causative factors and the conflict, not much has been done to direct attention at other possible causes existing outside these areas such as the use of crude oil

for medical therapy and manufacturing of weapons in the Niger Delta all of which have aided the conflict. Again, in explaining the causes of resource conflict and why people rebel overtime with regard to natural resources and its exploitation, Collier and Hoeffler (2004); Collier (2000; 2001; 2006); Ross (2004) and host of other scholars overlooked ownership structure as plausible explanation to resource conflicts. My objective, therefore, was to probe into the causes of the Delta conflict as a way of discovering new information about the conflict and make recommendations for its resolution.

I observed first hand that the Niger Delta region lacked necessary social amenities for the wellbeing of the people. For instance, piped borne water is absent and where this facility exists, it is not functional, forcing the communities to rely on water from local wells that have been polluted by oil spills, and gas flaring for their household cooking and drinking. The absence of pipe borne water created poor hygiene and health hazards for the local communities in the Delta. In almost all the communities visited, there was no electricity. In places where it exists, there are local politicians living within. The average better off family in the region depends on electricity generators for power supply. Fuels for powering these generators are bought from the black markets provided by oil bandits at exorbitant price. Those that cannot afford the use of generators depend on kerosene lamps. I observed several people struggling for kerosene products at filling stations and these products are often adulterated. Government hospitals are non-existence in several areas. In areas where they exist, the buildings are in a dilapidated condition, while personnel are in short supply and equipments are obsolete. Most functional healthcare centres and hospitals seen are privately owned and are too expensive for the common people. The local people are not able to go to these hospitals and health clinics because they cannot afford the bills and this often leads to unnecessary and unavoidable deaths. Because of the abject poverty of the people of the region, they are not able to send their children to school. Most primary and secondary schools seen in various villages are still housed in the colonial dilapidated buildings, while in some schools students receive lectures under trees. Almost all these schools have unqualified teachers. Moreover, university education is expensive for ordinary man in the Niger Delta and concentrated in the major urban centres. It is only middle class parents that can afford their children's education in the region. This situation has forced many youths to criminality. There is the lack of good roads linking oil-bearing communities and these communities to urban centres. The only reliable means of transportation is through water whereby residents travel for several hours in speedboats to get to their destinations.

By contrast, the political elitism officials of the oil companies and the pro-Nigerian Government community leaders live in mansions with steady electricity supply as well as other social amenities. These people enjoy the best hospitals in cities and around the world and travel in and outside the Niger Delta in private jets and helicopters. A respondent summed the situation in these words:

There are clear differences between the living conditions of the oil multinationals and our communities. They live in glorious mansions and we live in abject squalor. It is sad that even their dogs would hate to step on our communities. But what they are is made possible by what we are. As they become excessively beautiful, we become uglier (NDI 66).

This situation is best explained by Galtung's (1971:98) theory of Centre Periphery Model, which divides the world into centre and periphery countries. And within each country, are also centre and periphery

sectors. The distinction between centre and periphery is based on differences in quality of life. These factors reflect a dependence of the periphery on the centre and produce a gap in the quality of life between the two. Galtung (1971:83) defined this as imperialism. Galtung (1971:83) surmised that in the periphery nation, the centre grows more than the periphery, due partly to the arrangement of relations between the centre and the periphery. Therefore, the “peripherisation” of the Niger Delta and its marginalization is defined by the presence of petro-capitalism in the area, which for over 50 years drilled oil in the region without improving standards of living in the rural communities. Respondents explained that the situation was the result of the exploitative relationship between the oil companies and Nigerian state which makes local leaders and government only interested in accumulating wealth but looks disinterestedly on projects that would improve standards of life for the rural areas (NDI 10; USAI 2). For example, senior government officials revealed to the researcher the strong connection between the Nigerian state and global oil multinationals, particularly Shell officials. A presidential confidant reveals that Shell has representatives in all levels of government in Nigeria and the company is privy to every policy discussion from the government at all levels. For Shell to be able to do this, it first gained control of the Nigeria’s political space and cultural institutions. Respondents complained that because the political space has been corrupted, politics becomes “cash and carry” and for this reason, political leaders no longer adopt policies to improve the quality of governance to the governed because their vote is deemed unnecessary for them to ascend to political power (NDI 13). Efforts to protest by rural communities are repressed by the state security forces. Faced with these situations, some of the people began to see themselves as second-class citizens in their homes and, thus, began to adopt violent means to attack those they deemed responsible for their problems.

Some of the respondents view the scenario in the Delta as the government’s annexation of the region’s oilfields through unpopular laws. They are angry over these laws and, therefore, wanted them repealed or amended “for peace to return to the Delta”. For example, an interviewee stated inter alia:

There are several obnoxious laws against us in this region, particularly the Land Use Act, the Petroleum Act of 1959 as amended, the Exclusive Export Zone Decree, the Native Ordinances including the Osborne Land Law. All of these laws militate against development in this region. The first step to peace is the abrogation of these laws to allow the Niger Delta participation in the oil management in their land (NDI 77).

Pursuant to Section 44(3) of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, mineral oil found in any part of the country is the exclusive property of the government. Even if a state wants to act against the activities of the oil companies, this section of the Constitution prevents that state from doing so. Former Bayelsa state governor, Chief DSP Alamiyeseigha lamented this thus: “Although the activities of the oil operators take place in territories belonging to states, they (the states) are prevented by law from penalizing polluters and destroyers of the environment. That is because oil and mining matters are the preserve of the Federal Government as indicated in the exclusive legislative list of the Constitution” (quoted from Okpanachi, 2011:37). From the in-depth interviews conducted, it is clear that the oil laws are one among other factors that cause the conflict, and the way out is amending the laws to address discontent against them.

Oil from Barrels of the Guns

Mao Tse Tung's dictum of war, that power flows from the barrels of guns, is true of the Niger Delta of Nigeria where crude oil flows from the guns. Crude oil, supposedly a big blessing to Nigerians, eventually became thorns in the flesh of the oil-bearing communities in the Niger Delta and an instrument of terror in Nigeria. The British and Shell/D'Arcy repressed the Niger Delta people and took over their lands and oil in the colonial days. Local opposition was not tolerated and by 1948, the colonial government had confiscated all lands with mineral deposits in the Delta area (Steyn, 2009:37). The Orodó, Mbama and Ikeduru people of Imo state had reacted violently and rose in opposition to colonial government and Shell/D'Arcy. The Government's response had been to send the police to protect oil companies and their facilities (West African Pilot, 19 July 1948).

At independence in 1960, Nigeria inherited the colonial government's system of force to enforce oil exploitation in the Niger Delta. Deployment of troops, arrests, detention, trials and execution of local dissidents moving against federal government and oil companies in the Niger Delta are examples of the colonial government's methods imbibed by Nigeria's indigenous leaders. In 1966, Isaac Boro, angry because of the environmental decimation and neglect of the region, agitated against the federal government and the oil companies; he was arrested, tried and condemned to death, alongside his colleagues. In an attempt to suppress the Boro rebellion, the federal troops overran the Niger Delta with cataclysmic consequences (Ejibunu, 2007:17). At the request of Shell Petroleum Development Company in 1987, the Iko community in Akwa-Ibom state was brutalised by a contingent of the Nigerian Police Force (Ejibunu, 2007:20). Shell-BP in alliance with the police in 1992 killed some youth in Bonny Island during a peaceful protest of oil spillage in the Niger Delta (Ejibunu, 2007:23). The International Herald Tribune (2007:19) writes that the Nigerian army and police in January 1993 rounded up 300,000 peaceful protesters in the Niger Delta, shot many of them to death, brutally wounded some and arrested and jailed others. In January 1999, the Ijaw women who protested peacefully against economic marginalisation of their people were violently teargassed, beaten up, stripped naked and summarily detained by the Joint Military Task Force (JTF) in the Niger Delta (Brisbe, 2001:18). It was also alleged that the Warri war of 2003, in which the Delta communities were displaced, was instigated by the oil companies and the Nigerian Naval Officers for selfish interests (Brisbe, 2001:18).

The example provided by the military invasion of Odi, by the order of former President Olusegun Obasanjo in November 1999 showed that the Nigerian government is always willing to use force to enforce its will on the oil producing communities in the Delta region, despite its consequences. Thus, the federal government had always sought to exhibit power against poor and innocent oil communities of the Delta. In a fragrant display of might, the federal government had deployed security units such as Operation Flush, Operation Hacurra I, II and III, Operation Restore Hope and Operation Purge to the Niger Delta to keep oil operation in motion.

Research has shown that the Nigerian government and the oil companies have been very unkind to the Niger Delta. Foreign oil companies have perpetuated regional and class inequalities in the Niger Delta by creating oil colonies in local areas where oil executives live lavishly in comparison to the impoverished conditions of the local communities (Ejibunu, 2007:21). This situation is also responsible for some of the

youth's frustration and despair in the wake of rising hunger amidst plenty. To them, their lives have become helpless, brutish, nasty and short. It was in this state of affairs that the youths took up arms against the Nigerian state and the oil companies in pursuit of justice. They also formed militant groups some with criminal intentions. Hence, the beginning of the hydra-headed monster of kidnapping of foreign and indigenous oil workers for ransom and stealing of crude oil (bunkering).

Crude Oil and arms Proliferation in the Niger Delta

How has oil exploration given rise to the proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SALW) in the Niger Delta? How are the militias able to obtain firearms for their struggle? Answers to these questions are not far-fetched. The Nigerian Government and the multinational oil companies' approaches to conflict management in the Niger Delta provide a breeding ground for the emergence of armed groups that violently began to attack government policies and the oil companies in the Niger Delta. Oil-bearing communities who have become tired of government promises began to support the younger generation who came to see the oil companies as stealing away their future in alliance with the Nigerian government. Oil-bearing communities who are mostly at the receiving end saw no reason why they could not get the best of amenities while their oil wealth is salted away by the oil multinationals and highly placed individuals in Nigeria. It was for this reasons that armed militia of various ethnic groups in the Niger Delta began to emerge on the political scene to challenge the oil companies. The militia also enlists the supports of the community elite groups who secure the means of purchasing arms and ammunitions for them with which they attack the oil companies and security forces (Duquet, 2009:172-173). As the number of attacks increases, the oil companies began to make payments to traditional leaders in the territories of their operations to minimise the group's resistance (Duquet, 2009:173). This strategy only served to aggravate violence and arms proliferation in the region (ICG, 2006b). Militant youths expressed to the researcher that, "our leaders make much profits from the oil companies from which they finance buying sophisticated weapons" (NDI 9) and in some cases, the oil industry provide us with weapons by themselves (NDI 9). Best and Kemedi (2005:93) in their research find that in a number of instances, host-oil-community leaders have used the resources provided by the oil companies to secure weapons and contract armed groups against the oil companies for more resources.

In addition, HRW (2005) has linked the oil companies to the inflow of arms, killings, rapes and inter-communal feuds that have crippled social and economic life in the Niger Delta since the 1990s. Okonta (2005:206) claims that Royal Dutch/Shell and the other oil companies also supply these weapons through a variety of sophisticated fronts to security operatives, mercenaries and local youth they retained in the service of their companies. Direct and indirect payments by the oil companies to local community leaders and youth groups are important sources for arms-financing and acquisition in the Niger Delta (Duquet, 2009:178). Oil workers did not deny this allegation as most of them interviewed declined "speaking on arms procurements" (NDI 51). Few who spoke out linked the oil industry to arms dealing including the use of services of 'fake soldiers' to terrorise communities viewed as posing dangers to oil exploitation. In their views, "our management contribute significantly to arms purchase and arming of fake soldiers to deal with communities disrupting and sabotaging crude oil drilling" (NDI 43).

They also recruit “jobless youths and place them on our payroll. These boys are used to beef up the military wing of the companies” (NDI 87).

Studies in the Niger Delta have blamed the oil companies for awarding contracts to dissident communities and militia leaders in exchange for protection of oil facilities and company staff. Sadly, these ‘fat contracts’ are awarded to groups that had threatened to attack the oil companies (ICG 2006:18). Junger (2007:2) notes that Agip Oil Company for example paid USD\$40 million to MEND in exchange for repairs of the company’s pipeline and protection of facilities. Dokubo-Asari told the researcher that the “oil companies actually award contracts to militias to guard pipelines from attacks” (NDI 5). He said, the companies are involved in vandalising their own pipelines because they “recruit our boys and direct them to areas of weak oil pipelines to be vandalised. That is why none of them ...who accuse us of oil bunkering is free from engaging in it” (NDI 5). Supporting this view, some of the oil workers that spoke to the researcher expressed that “all stakeholders to the conflict indulges in criminality...everyone is involved in failing to do the right thing and that is because of desire for the oil money” (NDI 16).

Kemedi (2003), Omeje (2006) and Duquet (2009) submit that international oil companies, especially in periods of tensions intervened directly by financially supporting the leadership of their favoured armed groups so that they could purchase arms to fight their rivals and strengthen their capacity to protect oil installations. This was said to have angered the IYC who embarked on violent military campaigns against the oil multinationals (Duquet, 2009:172-173). A former commander of Egbesu Boys of Africa highlighted that; “the oil companies have mobilised and supported different militant movements in this region, providing them with weapons to fight their rival communities and sometimes given them contracts to protect oil pipelines” (NDFGI 4). He adds, these “pipelines are vandalised by the militants in alliance with the oil workers and security operatives and the actions are blamed on the militants” (NDFGI 4).

It is a common practice that in the run-up to elections in Nigeria, politicians recruit and arm youth groups as their foot soldiers to intimidate rival candidates in exchange for money and employment (HRW 2005). The recruiting and arming of youth groups by political elites is known to have led to crisis in most of the armed militia groups. A good example is the IYC and the NDPVF, which broke into two rival armed groups as noted earlier. These groups (NDPVF and the NDV) were never disarmed after helping the politicians to gain political positions. The militants admit during interviews that events leading to their formation were highly political as against the resource agitation of the Delta people. They explain that in forming a militant organisation, you must build the ideal of that organisation with “current realities in society to gain acceptance” (NDFGI 4). That is what the political leaders have done and “we are happy working for them because they are doing us well” (NDFGI 4). My fieldtrips show that when these militants muster enough clout, they break-away from their patrons and began to act autonomously. Some militants provide the reason thus:” we breakaway from our patrons because of false and broken promises” (NDFGI 2).

My field research finds that the breakaway militants metamorphose into cabals and networks that transformed into the Association of Oil Thieves (AOT) who through their ignoble practices carved out an

unbreakable chain of oil fiefdoms and linkages in the Niger Delta region. A community leader refers to this group as an “association of unholy brotherhood that masterminds all the evils in the Niger Delta” (NDI 51). He maintains that this group continues to support dissident community leaders, politicians and youth leaders with cash and military protection to purchase arms for war against the oil companies and the government’s forces in the Delta. In his words, “they fuel the Delta conflict by employing large numbers of unemployed young people, empowering them with money and guns” (NDI 51). He also alleged, “in the attempts to have access to oil wealth and secure more guns to gun for oil, other groups such as gangs, area boys, cultists and hoodlums emerged on the political scene and began to identify themselves with the NDPVF and the NDV” (NDI 51). Because these groups are able to gain inroad to large volume of weapons of various dimensions, they began to turn stolen oil into lootable commodity and develop large scale bunkering activities with tentacles connected with oil barons in various countries (Duquet, 2009:175). To benefit from this lucrative business, the armed groups require an elaborate security and transportation infrastructure that need high level and sufficient weaponry to be able to control the waterways and transport their stolen oil (ICG, 2006).

Generally, insurgent groups view government stockpiles of arms as a source of weapons especially if they lack the resources and networks to buy them (Duquet, 2009:177). This is the case in the Niger Delta. The Nigerian security forces are known for their penchant for corruption. They sell weapons to the armed militias in the Niger Delta (Duquet, 2009:177). From my findings in the field, security operatives leak top security information to the militias. My interviews with militant groups show this as they (the militants) proudly told the researcher, “we have invaded police stations, army, air force and navy camps in various locations in the Delta, attacked and acquired their weapons. We are able to do this based on the security information passed onto us by the security men themselves” (NDFGI 2). Studies in the Niger Delta (Asuni 2007), Duquet (2009:176); Hazin and Horner (2007), Ikelegbe (2008) and Watts (2009), have shown that army and police officers are known to have sold weapons from the ECOWAS Peace Keeping Operations (ECOMOG) to militant groups. President Obasanjo (1999-2007) alleged in 2002 that ‘most of the arms circulating in Nigeria and the Niger Delta in particular came from the State Security Sector’ (Duquet, 2009:176). Ebo (2006:28-34) claims that the State Security Sector in many occasions donated weapons as personal contributions to the Niger Delta cause. Based on verified evidence, one may not be totally wrong to conclude that the weapons circulating in the Niger Delta may not have been unconnected with retired and serving military and police personnel. In explaining his ordeals in combating the Delta militias to the researcher, a former JTF Commander states that “top army Generals, Service Chiefs, top business people and great men (if they are) in Nigeria are seriously involved in the Niger Delta oil business” and that is why “our men have not been able to defeat the militants” (NDI 31).

Similarly, arms are locally produced in the Niger Delta. Awka and Aba are well known for their traditional expertise in blacksmithing. Hazen and Horner (2007) note that these towns produce other types of weaponry generally operated without official authorisation and often protected by Senior Police Officers and Army Chiefs. Also Major conventional weapons are locally made in the Delta villages and pistols converted into automatic firearms (Duquet, 2009:176). Leader of the NDPVF Alhaji Dokubo-Asari stated clearly during interview that:

In the past, we acquired most of our sophisticated weapons and bullets from our business partners. But now, we manufacture those weapons and gunboats locally. In case you don't know, every state in this country has its own arms manufacturing base. Sometimes, we parley with government forces and acquire their weapons. We make lots of money from sale of our crude and refined oil and we do kidnap foreign oil expatriates for ransom. From money we make, we purchase weapons we can't yet manufacture. Our target is to be able to manufacture weapons comparable to those ones made in the USA, France, Russia, and North Korea and with time we shall manufacture rockets and weapons of mass destruction. Our business partners also provide training for weapon handling for our members. Most members are ex-soldiers and serving officers who are well trained in weapon handling. They also assist in training our boys (NDI 5).

Dokubo-Asari also claims that their business partners provide them arms and ammunitions. According to him "our business partners supply us with weapons in addition to what we are able to manufacture at our local capacity" (NDI 5). He indicted USA, France, Italy, Canada, Germany, China, Lebanon; India as well as Russia as some of their major business partners. A former Commander of JTF confirms Dokubo's claims and notes that "arms and ammunitions of sophisticated dimensions are manufactured in locations in the Delta" and this has "given the militants enough clout for this struggle" (NDI 12). I equally find that government is aware of this, but could not apprehend the perpetrators because of the personalities involved. Alhaji Dokubo-Asari also made allusion to the militants having access to weapons because of Delta's proximity to international waterways, which facilitate easy inflow of arms into the region. He told IRIN (2006:3) that, "smugglers from neighbouring countries such as Guinea-Bissau, Gabon and Cameroon use speedboats to reach ships on the high sea where they purchase the weapons". He also stresses, "We are very close to international waters and it is very easy to get weapons from ships". In 2004, for instance, Dokubo boasted that he owned 67 boats each of which was armed with two light machine guns and more than 3000 assault rifles (Newswatch, 2004:10). In a kind of self-glorification, Dokubo told the researcher that he has GPMG (General Purpose Machine Guns), the SLR (Self Loading Rifles), AK-47 Kalashnikovs, MG (Machine Guns) and several other types of weapons (NDI 5). He claims that his NDPVF has over five thousand arms among which the GPMG alone are up to 273. Other weapons in this category include fully and semi-automatic rifles, shotguns, machine guns and shoulder-fired rockets, otherwise called "bazookas" and other traditional weapons numerous in numbers and dimensions (Osaghae et al 2008:38).

In addition, arms transfer across borders is alleged to have being sponsored by foreign governments and international black-market profiteers (Duquest, 2009:178). Dokubo-Asari spelt this out when he told the researcher that, "countries such as USA, France, Italy, Canada Germany, China, Lebanon; India and Russia are some of their business partners with whom he alleged he exchange crude oil for weapons in the high seas" (NDI 5). Again, scholars such as Ikelegbe (2009), Okonta (2006); Obi (2006), Osaghae et. al. (2008; 2011) and Watts (2011), have all blamed the inflow of weapons into the Niger Delta on foreign oil interests. According to them, militants import weapons illegally with the help of oil barons across the globe and use them to terrorise the Delta region. Hazen and Horner (2007:18) note that cross border arms trafficking organised by the international arms dealers is an important source of weapons to the Niger Delta conflict.

Weapons also floated into the Niger Delta from other war-ravaged parts of the African sub-region, especially Sierra Leone and Liberia. Osaghae et al (2008:39) argue that some members of the Nigerian army had reportedly arrived Nigeria from Sierra Leone where they had served in the ECOMOG (ECOWAS Monitoring Group) with their rifles and sold them for money. The Libyan war of 2012 provides good access to weapon inflow into the Niger Delta.

Arms Manufacture in the Niger Delta

On arms manufacturing, Dokubo-Asari narrated that apart from the arms they exchange on the high seas with their business partners, they manufacture other arms locally. He notes: “In the past, we acquire most of our sophisticated weapons and bullets from our business partners. But now, we manufacture those weapons and gunboats locally. Sometimes, we parley with government forces and acquire their weapons. We make lots of money from sale of our crude and refined oil and we do kidnap foreign oil expatriates for ransom. From money we make, we purchase weapons we can’t yet manufacture. Our business partners also provide training for weapon handling for our members. Most members are ex-soldiers and serving officers who are well trained in weapon handling. They also assist in training our boys” (NDI 5). Probing the militant leader on who their business partners mentioned in the interview was, he said: “our business partners cut across the globe. You know our oil has great value and is in demand across the world. We do business with representatives of major world leaders and they supply us with weapons in addition to what we are able to manufacture at our capacity. The USA, France, Italy, Germany, China, Lebanon, India etc are some of our major partners. We also partner with some of their arms manufacturing industries to be able to produce our own weapons. For instance, in 2007 we produced the first Nigerian brand of AK-47 code named OBJ-006” (NDI 5). This was Dokubo-Asari’s opinion. However, other respondents seem to be on the same page with him.

As claim by Dokubo-Asari above for instance, this study made new findings about arms manufacture in the Niger Delta. Previous researches, particularly the one carried out by Hazen and Horner (2007:41) notes that arms are manufactured in Awka area of Anambra state. Their research listed the arms produced by the local craft manufacturers to include:

Table 8.3. Craft-produced small arms in Awka

Weapons	Features	Amunition	Cost
Pocket single-shot handgun	Approximately 13cm long; steal muzzle to wooden stock; extremely rudimentary hammer requiring cocking; effective only at a distance of 1-2m; uses single shotgun cattridge	Various calibres of shotgun catridge	NGN 4,000/USD32
Four-shot revolver	Available in manual and automatic configurations	9mm, 7.5mm, or 8.5mm	NGN8,000/USD64
Eight-shot revolver	Available in manual and automatic configurations	9mm, 7.5mm, or 8.5mm	NGN12000/USD96
Single-barrel shotgun	Breech-loading; safety cocking mechanism	Various calibres of shotgun catridge	NGN10,000/USD80-88
Horizontal double-barrel shotgun	Breech-loading; one trigger for each barrel; safety cocking mechanism	Various calibres of shotgun catridge	NGN25,000-30,000/USD200-240
Vertical double-barrel shotgun	Automatic configuration firing both rounds without need for cocking; breech-loading	Various calibres of shotgun catridge	NGN45,000/USD360

Source: Hazen and Horner's interview with craft producers in Awka (2007:40).

Hazen and Horner (2007:41) also note that materials for producing these arms are sourced locally with the importation of their components from foreign sources. Their research also claims that groups in the Niger Delta are trying to develop their own mortars. Armed with this information, I became curious and determined to find out actually if weapons are produced in the Niger Delta. My first engagement on this was with some militant leaders. I was brought to interview them by their special confidant through special arrangements. The militant leaders summed up their story by confirming that arms are manufactured in the Niger Delta through special arrangement with foreign assistance and this operation takes place in top secrecy. In their words:

In the past, we acquired most of our sophisticated weapons and bullets from our business partners. But now, we manufacture those weapons and gunboats locally. In case you don't know, every state in this country has its own arms manufacturing base.

We have clashed with government forces on several occasions. The sophistication of their weapons forced us into alliance with other nations in need of our oil who assist us in manufacturing weapons that match their own in our own soil.

Nigeria's Firearms Act of 1959 prohibits the manufacture of firearms in any form. According to the Act, "No person shall manufacture, assemble or repair any firearms or ammunition except at a public armoury or at arsenals established for the purposes of the armed forces with the consent of the President" (Nigeria, 1959, Section. 23). The same Act in its (Section 13) made it a criminal offence to sell or transfer arms without the producer's initials or marks. Those initials assist the police in tracing weapons used in criminal activities and sanctions imposed sanctions on the manufacturers. This puts to a halt the idea of initializing weapons manufactured locally. Arms manufacture is only legal when the government of the federation licenses the arms producer. Apart from this Act, Nigeria is a member of many organizations prohibiting the manufacture and proliferation of the SALW (Hazen and Horner (2007:92).

The militant commanders express that they enjoy the protection of very senior police and military officers in arms manufacture and are assisted by professionals of foreign nationals. They told the researcher that some of the equipment used in the manufacture of these modern weapons is sourced locally while others are imported. Special military squad through special arrangements brings the imported raw materials into the country in petrol tankers and escorted them to their destinations. The local raw materials are sourced from the Nigeria's SALW industry – the Defence Industries Corporation of Nigeria (DICON), which is the only legal producer of arms and ammunition in Nigeria. This study finds that production of modern weapons in the Delta is notoriously linked to foreign industries such as the Belgian company FN Herstal, the German Hecker and Kock, the Italian Beretta, the French GIAT industries, and the Spanish Santa Barbara Sistemas. The militants claim that the Delta region is also in alliance with other foreign companies whose names are withheld. However, with the assistance of these companies, the Nigerian brands of the Russian AK-47, the German G3, the Belgian FN-FAL, the Czech machine guns and the Serbian RPGs are already in circulation. Others include Ukraine, Bulgaria, and

Czech Republic. The weapons are designed in these countries and exported to different destinations in the secret local arms industries, where they are assembled and distributed for use. The respondents claim that these foreign weapon-manufacturing companies are in agreement with ‘top people’ in the Delta for their services. They made it clear that top Nigerians, including senior military officers, political big wigs, oil barons and the oil companies are all aware of this. This study finds that apart from Awka in Anambra state, weapons are actively produced in some parts of Nnewi also in Anambra state, Aba in Abia state; certain villages in Osomala in Ogbaru local government area of Anambra state and the ancient city of Jos, in Plateau state. When the weapons are designed and imported, the manufacturers are assisted by foreign professionals, who are protected by powerful political interests and selected security outfits. The worrying aspect of this according to respondents is that the manufacturing communities enjoy the support of senior police figures (NDI 78). The militant leaders claim that they have in 2007 been able to produce the first Nigerian brand of the AK-47 codenamed OBJ-006 (NDI 5), a name taken after former President Olusegun Obasanjo as stated above by Dokubo-Asari. This made headlines in the Nigeria’s daily newspapers and hastened the calls for political amnesty; see for instance, Vanguard, July 10, 2007.

The militant leaders took the researcher round two of the arms manufacturing sites but barred him from taking photos of the facilities for security purposes. They state unequivocally that ‘all the 36 states of the federation have their arms manufacturing facilities’ (NDI 5). I find that the Niger Delta state governors are behind arms manufacturing in the region. One of them who spoke to the researcher in confidence questioned the 1959 Firearms Act and noted clearly that:

There is nothing wrong in producing weapons of defence and deterrence. At least, we are coming of age in producing those things we import from foreign lands. That shows we are making progress. We do not want to be taken by surprise, because surprise beat even the strongest. I am impressed that one day, those who assist us in this journey would buy from our products (NDI 120).

The governor told the researcher that although the principles of international relations stipulate that ‘though, thou shall not build nuclear weapons’ (Iraq, Iran, or North Korea); such prohibition does not apply to the USA, Israel, Britain, France, India, China or Pakistan. There is nothing wrong should the Niger Delta become like one of these countries. In what seems like a comic relief on the heightened tempers during the discussion, the governor made a graphic presentation of a table of Johan Galtung’s Centre-Periphery principles of international relations. This is presented in table 8.4.

Principles	For Example	But then Again
Thou shall not invade and occupy other countries	Syria in Lebanon	Does not apply to the USA invading: Afghanistan, Iraq, Nicaragua, Vietnam, Dominican Republic, Cuba, and Mexico
Thou shall not build nuclear weapons	Iraq, or Iran or North Korea	Does not apply to the USA or Israel or Britain or France, or India, or China, or Pakistan
Thou shall not interfere in other countries elections	Russia interfering in the Ukraine	Does not apply to the USA interfering in Iraq, Afghanistan,

		Venezuela, Australia, Guatemala, Chile, El-Salvador, Ukraine, Nigeria, Haiti
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Compiled from the researcher's field notes, March 2015.

The governor emphatically stressed that the Niger Delta must chart its future by all means. Otherwise, the region would be destroyed by the alliance of the Western blocs. He summed up:

With the pace we are going, I am sure one day we will be in the range of North Korea, Iran, Iraq, Russia and other countries known in history for their excellence in military hardware manufacture (NDI 98).

From my personal observation and considering the positions of state governors in Nigeria, these claims are not just threats. It confirms the claims of the militant leaders that arms are manufactured in the Niger Delta and also imported from around the world into the Delta region. In the midst of these happenings, illegal oil companies, oil bunkering and kidnapping businesses increased. Former CEO of Chevron Nigeria, Jay Prior, once remarked that he had 'run companies that have had less production than is being bunkered in Nigeria' (Peel, 2005:11). Young people no longer want to be involved in working hard to earn their living. Rather, the political economy of oil provided the opportunity for lazy people to amass wealth through oil bunkering and violence.

Arms manufacturing in the Niger Delta is real. When the Western European nations began their own local arms manufacturing probably in the 14th century, they were in similar stage with the Awka crafts-produced arms and later advanced in stages. Like its European counterpart, the Awka made local arms-craft is advancing in stages. This research finds that arms manufacturing in the Delta is still in transition and requires further research to explain the extent of progress or otherwise in this regard.

This study for the first time brings to the fore evidence that sophisticated weapons are produced in the Niger Delta by interest groups in the Delta oil conflict. Available literature on the conflict attributes supply of weapons in the region only to arms dealers, who exchange crude oil with weapons on the high seas and creeks of the Niger Delta. As true as this might be, my study has opened another vista for research endeavours to really find out the true state of the claims made in this work by the informants.

Conclusion

This paper presented issues in the Niger Delta and how the failure of government to provide for the people of the region resulted into arms manufacturing for deterrence. The paper provided a lesson for the government of resource rich regions in Africa and other Third World countries to rise to the challenges of nation-building to avert this type of ugly situation exemplified in the Niger Delta of Nigeria.

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