KIDNAPPING IN PRE- AND POST-AMNESTY NIGER DELTA, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The phenomenon of kidnapping is on the increase on daily basis in Nigeria. It is however more widespread in the Niger Delta region. This paper specially examines the dynamics of kidnapping in the Niger Delta region before and after the implementation of the Presidential Amnesty Programme. Using both primary and secondary data, the paper traces the commencement of kidnapping in the Niger Delta region to the beginning of armed phase of the Niger Delta agitation for resource control. The perpetrators were basically militant groups and the victims were expatriates. It was strategically used to wage the resource control war against the federal government and the multi-national oil companies. However, with the implementation of the Amnesty Programme since 2009, there has been increase in cases of kidnapping instead of reducing. While the perpetrators now involve both members and non-members of armed groups, the victims also include expatriates and indigenes of the region depending on their economic worth as it is used as a mean of livelihood and survival by people indulging in it in post-amnesty Niger Delta. The paper argues that widespread increase in kidnapping in post-amnesty Niger Delta can be traced to prevalence of poverty in the region and the way and manner in which the amnesty programme was implemented. The paper recommended massive job creation and reconsideration of the system of justice administration in the country as solutions to the problem of widespread kidnapping in the Niger Delta region.

Key Words: Kidnapping, Amnesty Programme, Niger Delta, Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

Kidnapping and hostage-taking are often used by armed groups especially terror inclined groups as tactics to force significant concessions relating to their primary targets. The crises in the Niger Delta have made the region prone to armed conflict and violent crimes where series of terror-related violence such as deliberate attacks against government installations, piracy, oil bunkering, kidnapping and hostage taking, among others are recorded on daily basis. One of the most protracted criminal violence in the Niger Delta region is kidnapping. This paper examines the act of kidnapping before and after the implementation of the amnesty programme (AP) in the Niger Delta region. It explains its use by the Niger Delta armed groups during armed conflict with the Nigerian state and the reason for its resurgence after the implementation of the AP. The study is animated by the following research questions: How did kidnapping begin in the Niger Delta region? What factors explain the use of kidnapping by armed groups before the implementation of the amnesty programme in 2009? To what extent did the amnesty programme have effect on kidnapping incident in the Niger Delta region? To what extent did the amnesty programme have effect on kidnapping incident in the Niger Delta region? What factors explain the level of incident of kidnapping in post amnesty Niger Delta? What implication does the level of incident of kidnapping have for the region and Nigeria?

METHODOLOGY

Data for this study were taken from the field work conducted for a larger study titled: ‘Government Engagement with Armed Groups in the Niger Delta Region, Nigeria’. The field work was conducted in the core Niger Delta region states of Rivers, Delta and Bayelsa. While collecting data for the analysis of the objectives of the study, several people were interviewed. These categories of people included community members, youths, ex-members of militant groups, NGO workers, scholars, journalists, and members of Joint Task Force (JTF). A Total of 76 in-depth interviews (IDIs) and 3 focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted. Data got from the fieldwork were veritable

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source of information for this study. Furthermore, secondary data were sourced from books, journal articles, reports and newspapers.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Two concepts are critical to this study that must be carefully and adequately conceptualised. These concepts are: amnesty and kidnapping. The word ‘amnesty’ is derived from the Greek word amnesia which means “to forget”. From the etymology of the word, amnesty could mean to forget, lose memory of something or pardon. According to Ntoubandi, amnesty:

…is an act of sovereign power designed to apply the principle of tabula rasa to past offences, usually committed against the state, in order to end proceedings already initiated or that are to be initiated, or verdicts that have already been pronounced³.

The essence of cancelling off offences against the state committed by an individual or a group of individuals is to promote reconciliation that will set the stage for sustainable peace. It is therefore a post-conflict peace-building initiative to bar criminal prosecution and civil action again an individual or group of individuals in respect of specified criminal conducts committed for the purpose of peace, security and stability of the state with the expectation that they will not go back to those offences.

Goldberg cited in Osumah and Aghedo defines kidnapping as acts involving the seizure of a person or group of persons by force with the intention of collecting ransom or forcing concessions on the person or another person or group⁵. Turner defines it as a situation whereby a person or group of persons are forcibly seized and transported to a destination where they are held against their will in unlawful confinement⁴. Elster believes that difference exists between kidnapping and hostage-taking using visibility theory as the framework of analysis⁴. In the case of kidnapping, the victims are held in a secret location away from public knowledge, whereas in hostage-taking, the victims may be visible and their whereabouts known but rescuing them is difficult so as not to cause collateral damage. However, no significant different exists between the two with regard to stages involved and their motivation and logic. A successful kidnapping incident may involve six stages which commence with strategic planning by the perpetrators, abduction, concealment, followed by negotiation. After an agreement is struck, the resolution sets in and this may mark the termination of the kidnapping episode. However, further action may be taken by the kidnappers, the victim or government. The sequential components of a kidnapping episode are given in the figure 1 below.

Figure 1: Sequential Components of a Kidnapping Episode

[Diagram of the sequential components of a kidnapping episode]

Source: Adapted from Turner (1998)⁵.

However, as the figure above has shown, a kidnapping episode may be truncated at any stage of the incident and resolution sets in. For example, leaked information, intelligence gathering, changed situation or lack of adequate planning by the kidnappers, among others may forestall a kidnapping incident at the planning stage. Similarly, the police, military or any other state and non-state security apparatuses may intervene in a kidnapping situation and release the victim(s) through force instead of negotiation, thus making resolution set in at any stage before negotiation.

Kidnapping is not new in human history. The earliest written records have shown that individuals, a part or whole of a society have been taken by force, sold, traded or enslaved. The oldest codification of criminal law ever discovered
in human history- The Code of Hammurabi- prescribed death as the punishment for kidnappers⁹. This shows that kidnapping existed during that period. Similarly, the Bible, in the book of Exodus, tells us the story of Joseph who was kidnapped by his brothers and sold into slavery in the land of Egypt. Likewise in Nigeria, kidnapping is not a new phenomenon. Ikime cited in Osumah and Aghedo reported that the rivalry generated by 19th Century booming slave trade business was characterised by cases of raids, piracy, abduction, and kidnapping of agile and able-bodied men in Niger Delta region of Nigeria⁷. Turner identified different types of kidnapping based on the motivation of the perpetrators/kidnappers⁸. According to him, motivation for kidnapping may range from material motivation (acquisition of money) and non-material motivation (political reasons). Putting these two dimensions together, he arrives at four typologies of kidnapping based on the distinctive rationales for kidnapping. These are: money but no politics, no money no politics, money and politics but no money. Money but no politics kidnapping is a typology of kidnapping in which the kidnappers abduct basically for no other reason than to collect ransom or to sell the victim(s) into servitude for hard labour or sexual exploitation. The second typology- no money no politics- is a form of kidnapping in which neither pecuniary motive nor politics play any role in the kidnapping episode but the satisfaction of certain affective objectives. For instance, parental abduction of children especially when the parents are separated or divorced, one of the parents who does not have the custody of the children may forcibly take the children away to another place to live with them. On the other hand, the children or any other person may be kidnapped by strangers or non-family members not to collect ransom but to harm the person. The third typology- money and politics- is a kind of kidnapping where there is political motivation for kidnapping but ransom and other material items are also demanded. The last of the typology is politics but no money. This is a kind of typology exclusively motivated by political events. Turner’s typology of kidnapping basically emphasised that motive for kidnapping may be material and non-material. It may also involve the two in a single episode.

Osumah and Aghedo identified three categories of kidnapping in Nigeria⁸. The first is what they called ritual-oriented kidnapping. In this form of kidnapping, children, lunatics or physically challenged, special people and other forms of vulnerable people are targeted by the perpetrators basically for ritual purpose. The ritual may be for money-making, longevity of life¹⁰, power acquisition, among others. In this kind of kidnapping, the victims are killed and vital human parts are removed for sacrifice. For instance, in East African countries like Zambia, Burundi and Tanzania, albinos have become endangered species of human being. They are haunted, kidnapped and used for rituals¹¹. Similarly, in Nigeria, people with hunchback are haunted, kidnapped and killed for the extraction of their hunchback for rituals. Another form of kidnapping is the politically-motivated type which stems from the premium put on power by political actors especially in this part of the world which often make them employ any means possible to acquire the power. A typical example of politically-motivated kidnap is the abduction of the then serving governor of Anambra State, Dr Chris Ngige by his political godfather- Chris Uba. This kind of kidnapping booms in areas where organized criminal groups are available and are easy accessible to political elites. A sub-category of this form of kidnapping is terrorist groups kidnapping¹² which is usually employed by armed groups to achieve their socio-political and economic objectives. Boko Haram has kidnapped high profile personalities in and out of Nigeria in furtherance of their campaigns against the Nigerian state¹³ famous among which is the Chibok kidnapping incident. In some cases, they have collected ransom for the kidnapped people. In other cases, they simply used them to perpetrate their bombing spree. The third form of kidnapping in Nigeria is business-related kidnapping in which a person usually of wealthy background is kidnapped with the intention of collecting money from them or their relations.

Kidnapping and hostage-taking are not limited to period of war or armed conflict. It can also be a peacetime scourge. The motivation during the two periods may however be different. During wartime or armed conflict period, it may be politically/ideologically motivated as a strategy to force concessions from government. However as a peacetime crime, it may be majorly motivated by material acquisitions.

**KIDNAPPING AND HOSTAGE-TAKING AS STRATEGY FOR WAGING RESOURCE CONTROL STRUGGLE IN THE NIGER DELTA**

It is important to trace the origin of militancy in the Niger Delta region before the adoption of kidnapping and hostage-taking as strategies by armed groups can be explained. The creation of armed groups in the Niger Delta region can be located within the agitation of the Niger Delta region. The agitation which commenced in the colonial
era was majorly on better political recognition within the Nigerian State. As far back as late 1940s, the political elites from the region used party politics, dialogue, sponsoring of motions, media publicity and petitions to government to state their demands from the Nigerian state. For instance in 1947, the Niger Delta Congress and the Council of Rivers Chiefs led by Chief Harold Dappa-Biriye were formed to protect the interests of the Niger Delta people and challenge the domination of the people by the Igbo. The demand for special attention by the people of the region through these groups led to the establishment of the Rivers Province in 1948. However, the party campaigned for the creation of autonomous Rivers State especially during the 1959 general elections. Similarly, the King of Benin Kingdom- Oba Akensua II- and some of the prominent elites in Benin kingdom formed the Benin Delta Political Party (BDPP) to challenge the political domination of the Action Group in Western Nigeria. The party also sought to agitate for better political representation for the Edo and other non-Yoruba people by creating a separate region for them out of the Yoruba group. With these agitations from the minorities in the South, a commission of enquiry to look into the issues of the fears of the minorities in Nigeria and how to allay them otherwise known as Henry Willink Commission was established to look into the fears of the minorities and make recommendations. The hope of the people of the region was dashed when it recommended entrenchment of fundamental human rights in the constitution and the establishment of Niger Delta Development Board (NDDB) rather than creating autonomous states.

Although, the Mid-Western region was created in 1963 from the Western Nigeria, it was a little drop of water in an ocean. The greater part of the core Niger Delta region still saw themselves dominated by the Igbo-controlled National Council of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC). The region’s elites had thought that aligning themselves with the North to gain control of power at the centre in the 1965 elections would liberate them from the Igbo domination, the staging of what was perceived as the Igbo coup in 1966, the assassination of Tafawa Balewa and the enthronement of an Igbo military officer as the head of national military government- General Aguiyi Ironsi- kick-started armed rebellion against the Nigerian state by the Niger Delta region led by Isaac Adaka Boro in 1966. The rebel group demanded the secession of the Niger Delta region from the Nigerian state but crushed by the federal military operation.

With the discovery of oil in commercial quantity in the 70s, the persisted developmental problems of the region became compounded with environmental degradation which threatened the survival of the inhabitants of the region. The discontent of the inhabitants of the region and host communities increased because while the benefits of crude oil exploration go to the federal government, the associated problems are localised. The means of livelihood of the people especially land and rivers have been destroyed. This intensified the agitation of the Niger Deltans again basically expressed in non-violent manner but made oil companies increasingly uncomfortable to continue their oil exploration activities. They therefore started taking steps to address some of the complaints of their host communities. Several meetings, negotiations and dialogues were carried out between them which led to the signing of memoranda of understanding (MOUs). Most often, the oil companies undertook some developmental projects such as building of schools, roads, hospitals, scholarship awards, building of town halls for communities among others. On the other hand, host communities would agree to cooperate with oil companies, protect their installations and make their communities peaceful for conducive environment for oil exploration. However, non-adherence to the contents of MOUs by oil companies, increased devastation of the ecology as a result of oil exploration activities of oil companies and complacency of the Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN) meant fruitlessness of the dialogue option and this gave way to the adoption of litigation option.

The litigation option involved resorting to court for resolution of the agitation and grievance of the Niger Delta people. The litigants in this case were usually host Niger Delta communities on one side and transnational oil companies and/or government on the other hand. At times court actions were taken by representatives of a single community or suits filed by a collection of communities that were adversely affected by the activities of oil companies. Most cases between the Niger Delta people and oil companies pertaining to environmental claims arising from pollution and their claims were often products of disagreement over compensation. This was more prominent from 1980s upwards. For instance, in the case of Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC) and His Royal Highness Chief Tiebo VII and 4 others, the traditional ruler of Peremabiri community in Bayelsa State with four other representatives of the people sued SPDC to the High Court to seek damage for oil spillage arising from SPDC activities in the area in 1987. Similarly, in the case of SPDC versus Farah (the plaintiff), a community
within Ogoni had gone to court to claim adequate compensation from SPDC in respect of damage resulting from an oil spill from SPDC’s Bornu oil well in Tai/Gokana local government in the 1970. However given the slow pace of the judicial system in Nigeria and the willingness of the oil companies to exhaust all the legal remedies available to them by going to appellate courts and the Supreme Court often frustrated the communities from enjoying the benefits of going to court. For example, in the case of SPDC versus HRH Chief Gba Tiebo VII and four others, the offence of oil spillage was committed in 1987, it was filed in the High Court in 1992 and went to Court of Appeal in 1996. Similarly, in the case of SPDC versus Farah, the case commenced in the High Court in 1989 but won by the plaintiff and was awarded ₦4,621,307. SPDC appealed the judgment but lost at the Court of Appeal. The case was then taken to the Supreme Court. The continuous redress of oil companies to appellate courts was regarded by the people as deliberate attempt at frustrating their labour. For instance, in the case of SPDC versus four Ijaw communities in Burutu Local Government in Delta State, Delta State High Court awarded N30 million to the four communities as compensation for damages from oil spillage. The case lasted for 14 years and cost the communities ₦30 million to prosecute. Before the court delivered its judgment, six of the eight representatives of the communities had died while SPDC chose to appeal the decision of the court and refuse to pay the compensation. The slow pace of litigation and frustration encountered when justice is eventually done poisoned the relationship between the oil companies and their host communities and discouraged the use of litigation option and the adoption of protest option.

Protest option took place at different times and locations in the Niger Delta from the 1990s. There were significant and better organised and mass-based protests, boycotts and stoppage, obstruction of exploration and production activities in the region. Most times, the protests were directed at oil companies. They were usually in form of rallies, formation of human shield around oil facilities of offending oil companies, blockade of entrance of offending oil companies, blockade of major roads within their communities in order to make access to facilities or station impossible, among others. These protests were meant to draw the attention of the local and international communities to the environmental degradation of the region by the oil companies but the oil companies often called on security apparatuses of the federal government for the protection of their workers and facilities. In the process, the security personnel would crack down on the peaceful protests of the people leading to serious injuries for the protesters and damage of people’s properties. Typical examples are those of Umuchem and Etche communities in the 1990s and the infiltration of the rank and file of local resistant movements like Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP). Other cases of militarised response to peaceful protests of the people in the Niger Delta were recorded in Igbide and Æzere communities among the Isoko people in Delta State. The anger that resulted from this state’s response to people’s peaceful protest led to the flowering of community-based activist groups such as Urhobo Youth Movement (UYOMO), Ikwerre Youth Movement (IYM), Ijaw Youth Council (IYC), Movement for the Survival of the Ijaw Ethnic Nationality in the Niger Delta (MOSIEND), etc and the drafting of Charters, Bills, Accords and Declarations and Resolutions like that of Izon People’s Charter of 1992, Charter of Demands of the Ogbia People of 1992, Oron Bill of Rights, Wari Accord, Akasa Declaration of the Egi People, among others. The state violent repression of peaceful protests of communities against environmental degradation of oil companies meant the failure of the option and the adoption of rather confrontational approach by youths of the Niger Delta Region.

The adoption of the violent confrontation by the youth was hastened by the Niger Delta region’s youths’ visit to Abuja during Abacha’s ‘two million man match’ procession to demonstrate his popularity among Nigerians. The visit of the Niger Delta youths to participate in the procession in Abuja inadvertently exposed them to reality that they had been severely marginalised and deprived of development. Many of them wondered if they were in Europe. They were surprised that Abuja had attained such development in less than 10 years while Niger Delta, the region from where oil is explored to cater for the whole nation, is perpetually impoverished. In late 1998, Ijaw Youth Council convened a meeting of Ijaw youths at Kaiama to discuss the impoverishment of the Niger Delta Region by the FGN and oil companies. It was in this meeting that the armed struggle for resource control was launched. Already, series of intra- and inter-communal conflict, political mobilisation of the youths during election had led to proliferation of small arms and light weapons in the region. These weapons were used by the youths to pursue their war against the Nigerian state. With the exposure to oil bunkering in the region, the proceeds were also used to procure additional weapons or used in exchange for more sophisticated weapons.
In 2006, armed struggle for resource control took another dimension with the establishment of the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) as an umbrella body for all militant groups in the Niger Delta region especially of Ijaw extraction. The establishment of the movement was a reaction to the arrest of Mujahed Asari Dokubo for reasonable felony, impeachment and humiliation of Diepreye Alamieyeseigha for corruption and the arrest and detention of Chief Ebitimi Banigo for money launderings. The aim of the formation of the armed group was to carry out increased and coordinated attacks on oil installations using sophisticated weapons and in commando style in order to cripple Nigerian economy. With the establishment of the group, Operation Orido Danger was declared on the Nigerian economy and the foreign oil workers were given ultimatum to vacate the region. In order to make their operation effective on the Nigerian economy, kidnapping and hostage-taking was adopted. However, basically expatriates were kidnapped. The first kidnapping took place in January 2006 when MEND boarded a boat in the EA oil field and seized a Bulgarian, Briton, American and Honduran. Between January and December 2006, a total of 24 incidents of kidnapping were recorded with 118 victims. By 2008, the total number of incidents of kidnapping recorded had increased to 150 cases with a total of 390 persons kidnapped. Between January 2008 and January 2009 alone, a total of 1,128 persons mostly expatriate oil workers and their families were kidnapped. This shows a steady increase in incidents of kidnapping and the targets were foreign oil workers. The tension resulting from the kidnapping incidents and various attacks of armed groups led to the evacuation of oil workers in the Niger Delta region.

The question then is why the resort to kidnapping of expatriate by MEND? Elster hinted on the significance and importance of kidnapping and hostage-taking for armed groups in civil or armed conflict situations. Kidnapping is strategically significant and useful to armed groups to achieve certain aims. It is so useful that if members of armed group in armed conflict with organised state do not have the skills to carry out series of kidnapping attacks, it may outsource it to common criminals that have the skills to do it. Such is the usefulness of kidnapping in armed conflict scenarios. International Crisis Group cited in Ukiwo observed that freelance fighters offered their service to be hired.

Scholars have observed that armed groups carry out kidnapping and hostage-taking of expatriates to internationalise domestic crisis. Another reason for kidnapping foreigners by MEND was to internationalise the Niger Delta crisis. Americans, Briton, Hondurans, Filipinos, Chinese, among others were kidnapped to internationalise the domestic crisis involving the Nigerian state and MEND. This was achieved to a large extent. As a result, many countries declare Nigeria, especially the Niger Delta region a no-go-area due to kidnapping of expatriates. Another strategy adopted to internationalise the Niger Delta crisis was communication with international media and research organisations like BBC, CNN, International Crisis Group, Amnesty International, etc. of planned attacks and those already carried out and their significance to the struggle. Furthermore, the kidnapping episodes were meant to send message that despite the size of military personnel and security agents Nigeria possessed and deployed to the Niger Delta region, the Nigerian state could not provide security for the people especially the expatriates. It was therefore meant to create security dilemma and to show the foreign workers that they were vulnerable in spite of their close affinity with the Nigerian security agencies.

Again, the kidnapping of the expatriates was strategically used to serve as human shield for the militants in their enclaves to protect their camps and communities from military onslaughts. Kiagbodo Clark, a former federal commissioner for information in Nigeria during the Second Republic reiterated the relevance of kidnapping of expatriates for the Niger Delta insurgency when his son- Ebikeme Clark- was kidnapped. He observed that:
Kidnapping is not new to me...I remember a particular case when some Indians and Americas
were kidnapped. Most of the victims were working for Wilbros, one of the oil servicing companies
based in Port Harcourt. I remember the freedom fighters (referring to the militants/armed groups
here) around Escravos spoke about how their village were bombed from the air, attacked from the
seas and they said they kidnapped some of the expatriates in order to provide them cover and that
actually stopped the bombing of the area.

The use of kidnapping as a means of livelihood for the militant to complement oil bunkering business of these
militants and to finance their insurgency during this period cannot be ignored. The inability of Tom Polo, Farah
Dagogo, and Boy Loaf to agree on the sharing pattern of payment of ransom for kidnapping led to breakup of the
trio in the early days of MEND. While Farah Dagogo went back to Rivers State, Boyloaf departed for Bayelsa State.
The departure of Farah Dagogo to Rivers State saw him aligning with Soboma George to form a coordinated
kidnapping syndicate in the State. As Asuni noted, kidnapping became a big business in Rivers State which was not
in anybody’s interest to stop because even government’s hostage negotiators and security agents were involved and
sharing in the proceeds of the kidnapping syndicates. Boyloaf who also headed to Bayelsa State executed series of
kidnapping of expatriate oil workers for ransom payment. Lastly, Kidnapping was also carried out during this period
to cripple the Nigeria economy by bringing down oil exploration activities on daily basis. This was carried out
simultaneously with attacks on oil installations. It was believed that technical aspects of the exploration were
handled by the expatriates including repairs. Therefore, they would neither be able to explore nor quickly repair the
damaged oil installations. As a result of these kidnappings and concerted attacks, oil exploration was brought down
from 2.6 million barrel per day (mbpd) to about 700,000 mbpd in third quarter of 2019. The ripple effect of this on
the economy led to the implementation of the amnesty programme by the Yar’Adua government in August, 2009.

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE AMNESTY PROGRAMME AND INCIDENTS OF KIDNAPPING IN THE
NIGER DELTA REGION

Armed groups in the Niger Delta region were not only involved in kidnapping. They were also involved in series of
other anti-state activities such as illegal oil bunkering business, drug business, sabotage/vandalism, piracy, attacks
against government security agents, among others. The thinking of the Federal government of Nigeria that led to the
implementation of the amnesty programme was that if armed groups fizzled away, all activities associated with them
will naturally disappear and this will lead to uninterrupted oil exploration. Therefore, amnesty programme couched
in disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) was embarked on by the Yar’Adua-led federal government.
Disarmament was arm collection from the members of armed groups. Demobilisation involved the disengagement of
members of armed groups from their military-like structure of their various groups while reintegration was the
reinsertion of the ‘ex-members’ of armed groups into their various communities. The number of militants disarmed
and enrolled in the amnesty programme gave the impression that the programme was a success. In the first phase of
the programme 20,192 ex-militants enrolled. In the second phase, 6,166 were enrolled while the third phase saw the
disarmament of 3,642 ex-militants. Thus, the total number of ex-militants enrolled in the programme was 30,000.
The number of militants that turned out and caliber of weapons submitted ordinarily suggested that armed group had
fizzled out in the Niger Delta region and their activities have stopped. However, this is not.

Figures II below shows cases of kidnapping and hostages taken by month as of January, 2015. From the figure, 66
cases were recorded in 2010. In 2011 and 2012, 14 and 35 cases respectively were recorded. In 2013, cases recorded
were 36 while in 2014, it increased to 39. The figures present here are not comprehensive because several cases of
kidnapping go unreported on daily basis. While media attentions are usually attracted to high profile kidnapping
episodes and whose perpetrators were apprehended by security personnel, “low profile” kidnapping are always
unreported. This figure shows that incident of kidnapping has not stopped in post-amnesty Niger Delta. It has rather
increased beyond the pre-amnesty period. For instance, in 2012 a report from African Insurance Organisation (AIG)
noted that Nigeria accounted for 25 percent of kidnapping-for-ransom cases worldwide. Global Kidnap Review
presented by NYA International in 2016 also shows that Asia and Africa have the highest cases of kidnapping
worldwide with 40 percent and 34 percent respectively while other regions like Americas, Middle East and Europe
and CIS have 14 percent, 10 percent and two percent respectively for 2015. This review further shows that Nigeria
has one of the ‘severe’ cases of kidnapping in Africa and that it is basically associated with ‘maritime-based
militancy in the South. Not only has kidnapping become widespread in post-amnesty Niger Delta, its features have also changed compared to what it used to be before the implementation of the amnesty program.

Figure II: Kidnapping cases in Niger Delta Region as of January, 2015

Source: Bergen Risk Solution, 2015

First and foremost, unlike pre-amnesty kidnapping cases where the victims were basically expatriates, post-amnesty kidnapping victims are not only expatriates. Although, expatriates are still being kidnapped, majority of the victims are indigenes. In other words, the coverage of victims of kidnapping in Niger Delta region has become widened to include all classes of people: expatriate, rich and poor indigenes. Secondly in pre-amnesty Niger Delta, perpetrators of kidnapping episodes were known to be members of militant groups alone. But in post-amnesty Niger Delta, the perpetrators are not only limited to members of armed/militant groups. Other people that are not members of militant groups also carry out the act. Thirdly, there is a change in motivation for kidnapping from what it was in pre-amnesty period. For instance, kidnapping in pre-amnesty period was motivated by grievances resulting from negligence of the region by federal government of Nigeria and inequity in the sharing of oil revenues. Therefore, kidnapping was carried out as part of the strategies to advance the cause of Niger Delta struggle for resource control. However, post-amnesty kidnapping cases in Niger Delta are motivated by greed.

FORMS OF KIDNAPPING IN POST-AMNESTY NIGER DELTA

Basically four forms of kidnapping can be noticed in the Niger Delta today (and also other parts of Nigeria). They are: kidnapping for Ransom, kidnapping for ritual, kidnapping for trafficking for slave labour or sex, and kidnapping for body spare parts harvest.

Kidnapping for ransom: This is a kind of kidnapping in which the victims are abducted and concealed until when their relatives pay ransom to release them. The trend in this form of kidnapping in post-amnesty Niger Delta shows that it is often perpetrated by family members (including domestic staff), university students and organized criminal networks/groups and unemployed youths. In the case of family members, it is often perpetrated to forcefully collect money from a family member who is considered to be stingy. Such person is arranged to be kidnapped or other person perceived to be liked most by him/her such as children, wife or husband. In the case of university students and unemployed youths, it is basically carried out as a means of livelihood to sustain themselves. The last perpetrator- organized criminal network/groups- are coordinated armed groups who take kidnapping as profession to earn a living. They often target politicians, traditional rulers, business magnates, oil workers, expatriates, international footballers and their relations, and other well-to-do indigenes of the region (see Table I). They also target other middle class people such as doctor, lawyers, lecturers, among others. Ransom collection by these groups from the middle class people is not necessarily high depending on negotiation and perception of “kidnapping value” of their victims at a point in time. They often carry out kidnapping along with other crimes such as armed robbery.
and theft with the intention of further forcefully extracting money from the victim when discovered that money obtained from them at the point of robbery does not correspond to their perception of economic worth of the victims.

During interview with a key informant at Warri in 2014, a story was told of an NGO worker in Warri who was kidnapped by some members of armed robbery gang in 2013. According to the story, the victim drove into an armed robbery operation carried out on passengers of a commuter bus. Upon sighting him by the robbers, he was stopped at a gunpoint and was dragged down. The perception of the victim as a hostage with huge “kidnapping value” by the kidnappers led to others being released after forcibly obtaining them and holding the victim hostage with a demand of 12 million naira for his release. In the end, the sum of 70,000 was paid as ransom. There are various ways this form of kidnapping can be carried out.

**Kidnapping for Ritual:** This is a kind of kidnapping in which the perpetrators basically kidnap a person usually minor for ritual purposes. This may be for money ritual or acquisition of power for invincibility or life elongation. For instance, in Calabar, a 13-year old banana hawk was kidnapped, killed and kept in a freezer for ritual purposes according to confession of the abductor.

**Kidnapping for Trafficking:** This is a kind of kidnapping in which the perpetrators intend to traffick the victims for sex or hard labour. For example, in June 2010, 56 kidnapped children who were being trafficked were rescued on the territorial waters in Cross River State.

**Kidnapping for Body Spare Parts Harvest:** in my interview with Professor Nwolise, he pointed out that there is a new form of kidnapping now which is done for the supply of human spare parts especially abroad. He stated that most victims are killed at home and their organs are harvested for export. Most of the victims are trafficked abroad, where they are placed in coma and suspended in warehouses from where their organs are harvested to serve rich clients in need of (new) organ replacement.

### TABLE 1: SOME OF THE HIGH PROFILE KIDNAPPINGS CARRIED OUT IN POST-AMNESTY NIGER DELTA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Incident</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jan. 10, 2010</td>
<td>Three Britons and a Colombian working for Netco were kidnapped when their convoy was attacked near Port Harcourt.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nov. 17, 2011</td>
<td>Two Americans and one Mexican sailor were kidnapped by militants. All three were later released on December 3, 2011 for ransom.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sept. 30, 2011</td>
<td>Professor Hope Eghagha, the commissioner for Education in Delta state was kidnapped at Owo Ekei in Ika North East LGA of the state. He was later released when an undisclosed ransom was paid.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jul. 15, 2012</td>
<td>Emmanuel Sorukwu, son of the secretary to the Delta state government was kidnapped at Warri, Delta state and released later when an undisclosed amount was paid.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aug. 16, 2012</td>
<td>Samuel Udugah, a cousin of the then Delta state governor was kidnapped. 50 million naira ransom was demanded.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>His Royal Highness Eze Okwu Osisan, the traditional ruler of Igbaru Community in Ogbia/Egbema/Ndoki LGA of Rivers state was kidnapped. 10 million naira was demanded but 500,000 naira paid.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aug. 11, 2012</td>
<td>Professor Sunny Odoemena of the Department of Biochemistry, University of Uyo was kidnapped. 50 million naira was demanded but 12 million naira later paid.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oct. 29, 2012</td>
<td>His Royal Highness Eze Okwu Osisan, the traditional ruler of Igbaru Community in Ogbia/Egbema/Ndoki LGA of Rivers state was kidnapped. 10 million naira was demanded but 500,000 naira paid.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dec. 17, 2012</td>
<td>Five Indian sailors were kidnapped by MEND militants. All five men were later released on January 27, 2013 for ransom.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dec. 20, 2012</td>
<td>4 South Korean oil workers were kidnapped by MEND gunmen from an oil plant in the Niger Delta. All 4 men were later released on December 23 with ransom paid.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February, 2014</td>
<td>President Jonathan’s uncle Chief Inengite Nitiabai was kidnapped. He was later released with millions of ransom paid.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 3, 2014</td>
<td>The son of Pa E.K. Clarke was kidnapped. It took the intervention of Tom Polo for him to be released.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nov. 28, 2014</td>
<td>Two Pakistani and one Indian construction workers were kidnapped at the Emakalakala town, Bayelsa state.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 20, 2015</td>
<td>President Jonathan’s cousin Mrs. Patience Egbeni, 35, and one Kate Eni were kidnapped by men dressed in military camouflage in Ogba Local Government Area, Bayelsa State.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Daily Sun Newspaper, January 3rd, 2013 and other internet sources
EXPLAINING KIDNAPPING IN POST-AMNESTY NIGER DELTA

In the preceding section of this paper, it was argued that post-amnesty kidnapping in Niger Delta is not only perpetrated by armed groups. It is also perpetrated by non-members of armed groups unlike pre-amnesty period where the act was strategically committed by members of armed groups. Can the factor of increase in perpetrators help explain increased cases of kidnapping in Niger Delta? Yes. The explanation for why there is a surge in cases of kidnapping in Niger Delta after the federal government of Nigeria had implemented the amnesty programme can be located in why these armed groups did not disband after the amnesty programme even though one of the expected outcomes of the amnesty programme is to disband these groups and why non-members of armed groups result into kidnapping.

One of the factors responsible for increase in cases of kidnapping in post-amnesty Niger Delta is widespread incidence of poverty in Nigeria. This is a situation in which people in the society cannot cater for the basic requirement of life such as food, water, shelter, clothing, minimum medication, etc. The origin of poverty in Nigeria has been traced to the implementation of the Structural Adjustment Programme in the 1980s. Since this period, incidence of poverty in the Nigerian society has become widespread as non-poor population keeps shrinking while extremely poor population keeps increasing. The table below shows that in 1980, 27.2% of the population was poor. By 1985, poverty incidence percentage increase to 46.3%. It slightly decreased to 42.7% in 1992 but increased again to 65.6% in 1996. In 2004, it reduced to 54.4% before increasing to 69.0 in 2010. It is estimated that over 70% of Nigeria’s population now live below poverty line of one US Dollar per day. This means that over 70% of Nigeria’s population is extremely poor.

**TABLE II: INCIDENCE OF POVERTY IN NIGERIA, 1980-2010**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Poverty Incidence (%)</th>
<th>Estimated Population (Million)</th>
<th>Population in poverty (Million)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>27.2</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>17.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>46.3</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>34.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>42.7</td>
<td>91.5</td>
<td>39.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>65.6</td>
<td>102.3</td>
<td>67.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>54.4</td>
<td>126.3</td>
<td>68.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>69.0</td>
<td>163</td>
<td>112.47</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The situation of incidence of poverty in Nigeria is worse and has more devastating effects in the Niger Delta region than any other region in the country. There is the feeling among the people of the region that they ought to be better than any other region because of the resources they possess. On the contrary, environmental degradation resulting from oil exploration has badly damaged the means of livelihood of the people- water body from where the people fish has been polluted while lands on which the people farm have also been degraded. Furthermore, prices of goods and services in remote communities in the region are higher than any other region in Nigeria which erodes the purchasing power of ordinary people. This has been compounded by youth bulge and widespread unemployment among the youths of the region. Frustration resulting from these is seriously fuelling criminalities in the region. Hence, increase in kidnapping. Socio-economic profile of most kidnappers arrested shows that most of them are young, graduate/undergraduate and very poor. They were lured to partake in crimes and violence as long as it gives...
them the opportunity to have better socio-economic status in the society. Thus, poverty has significant impact on increased crime especially kidnapping in post-amnesty Niger Delta and indeed Nigeria.

Another factor explaining the surge in kidnapping incidence in the Niger Delta region is the way and manner in which the amnesty programme was implemented. This can be explained in two differently ways. First is the internal implosion and fragmentation of militant groups as a result of the implementation of the amnesty programme. Although, the origin of fragmentation of militant groups in Niger Delta has been traced to the federal government supported arm-for-cash deal implemented by Rivers State government in 2004\(^3\), the implementation of the 2009 amnesty programme further led to fragmentation as a result of divide and rule tactics employed by the federal government which caused huge gap and separation between the leadership of these groups and their rank and file members. The leadership of the militant groups was adequate taking care of with payment of huge amount of money as incentive to lead their boys to lay-down arms\(^4\) and also award of pipelines surveillance contracts. This made the warlords extremely rich and produced new elites from among them. On the other hand, their rank and file perceived that they have been neglected by both the government and their group leaders. Although, N65,000 stipends were paid to them monthly by government as incentive to also disarm and accept the amnesty, it was considered too small by them. All the rank and file members of militant groups, like their leaders, are used to ostentatious lifestyle. The least of the rank and file members during the pre-amnesty period when militancy held sway was getting well over N100,000 monthly with a lot of other allowances as incentives for partaking in the struggle. This money came from drug business, oil bunkering, kidnapping of expatriates, patronage from politicians, among others. Therefore, the N65,000 giving to them monthly after they have disarmed was considered too trivial and worthless. An ex-militant interviewed in Yenagoa, Bayelsa State said:

> When they came to talk to us to submit our arms and accept the amnesty, the federal government promised us several things. They said they would build us houses, buy us cars and would set us up. It is over five years now that I have disarmed and accepted the amnesty. Where are all the promises? The N65,000 that government is paying me is not enough for me to take care of my family. I have two wives and 9 children. And government is saying we should not go back to the creek (the word ‘creek’ here symbolises resumption of militancy or criminality). How is that possible?\(^5\)

In some cases, huge amount of money were ferried away by their warlords from their foot-soldiers’ stipends before they are given, thus making the remaining amount less sufficient for them. An ex-militant named Kurotimi Poki interviewed in the Guardian Newspaper of May 25 2011 complained bitterly of his stipend being tampered with by his group leader. He said thus: ‘When our N65,000 salary comes, our commanders would cut the money. Sometimes, it is just N10,000 that would get to us’\(^6\).

At first, this act often led to frequent clash between leadership of armed groups and their foot-soldiers. For instance, Commander Young Shall Grow and his footsoldiers fell apart because he was said to have been deducting from his footsoldiers’ stipends without their consents. He was ambushed and attacked but saved by the mobile police attached to him as security escort by government. Similarly, Soboma George was ambushed and killed in 2010 by his footsoldiers for deducting huge sum of money from their footsoldiers’ stipends. Later, the footsoldiers started regrouping under different leadership since they are bound by common agitation based on neglect by their former leaders and unequal treatment by government under the amnesty programme.

Furthermore, the militants, especially the foot-soldiers were disarmed but not appropriately demobilised and reintegrated. In the three phases of the disarmament stage, 30,000 militant were disarmed. As at 2014, only 4,608 have undergone educational and vocational trainings in onshore and offshore ranging from marine technology, heavy duty operations, welding, diving, agriculture, oil and gas technicians, etc out of which 690 are females. Out of this figure trained and educated, only 222 have been offered direct job in various private and public establishments within and outside Nigeria or have established him/herself\(^7\). The situation has not changed till now. Many disarmed militants are yet to be trained while those already trained are yet to find employment. These unemployed ex-militants carry out series of crimes including kidnapping to fend for themselves. For instance, in Foropa, a coastal community in Southern Ijaw Local Government area, a militant leader who was identified as Keiti Sese nicknamed
'Commander Nomukeme' took over the National Youth Service Corps lodge and health care centre and turned them to militant camps. Sources in community said the group was engaging in pipeline vandalism, kidnapping, oil bunkering among others in the community. When JTF raided the place, several identity cards bearing names of ex-militants that have undergone demobilization at Obubra in Cross River State were recovered. These names included

1. Jacob Pere (Amnesty Number BY/B3/910/09)
2. Mary Yelaye (BY/B1/2080/09)
3. Flower Shedrack (BY/B1/2089/09)
4. Sese Clement (BY/B1/209/09)

Again, the JTF operation Restore Hope in November 20, 2010 arrested Mr. Obese Kuna, one of Farah Dagogo boys. Military offensive in the three camps of Obese led to the recovery of 45 AK 47 rifle, 12 General Purpose Machine Guns, brand new military boots and vest, combat uniform, telescope, several GSM mobile phone, laptops, communication gadgets like walkie-talkie, badges with MEND insignia, bullet proof vest, several thousands of ammunitions and the sum of 673,000 naira. Three days before he was captured, he was reported to have attacked oil facilities and kidnapped 19 oil workers in which 12 are Nigerians, 2 Frenchmen, one Canadian and 2 are Indonesian in Rivers State. These are few cases of many former footsoldiers of warlords that have broken away from their leaders to establish their own criminal outfits carrying out kidnapping as one of their illicit acts.

Secondly, the granting of the amnesty for the ex-militants has prompted the perception of the people that violence and crime against the state pays looking at the circumstances under which the ex-militants that took arms against the state have become so rich within the amnesty programme. During an interaction with some students of Niger Delta University in 2014, one of the students jokingly said ‘…after my first degree I will go and join a militant group in my village. After all, there is no job out there and one has to make a living. Maybe government will call me too for amnesty…’ The message from this student’s comment which is the perception of many law-abiding unemployed youths in the region is that violence and crimes within the Nigerian state pay. the implementation of the amnesty programme to members of militant groups and giving of stipends to foot-soldiers and award of contracts to the warlords have given some of the youths in the community a sense of impunity and the impression that it is only through violence that one can become rich in the region. The implication is that the amnesty is more of an incentive to indulge in crimes and violence than solution to prevalence of crime in the region. In the long run, more crimes and violence are likely to be perpetrated using the amnesty programme as a springboard.

Increase in kidnapping in post amnesty Niger Delta has several implications for the region and the Nigerian state at large. For the region, it has resulted in loss of lives as some of the victims often die in kidnappers’ custody. It is also fuelling insecurity and due to the ineffectiveness of the security agent, many companies have folded up in the region while those still left spend so much hiring security personnel for personal safety. The folding up of these companies/businesses is contributing to unemployment in the region. Furthermore, several wealthy people from the region that would have contributed to the development of the region stay away from the region for fear of being kidnapped. Nigeria is also affected in several ways. Kidnapping is spreading to other states in the country and also continues to affect oil exploration and production.

CONCLUSION

The study has revealed that kidnapping began to be used in the Niger Delta region when the resource control struggle took militant dimension and armed groups were formed. It was basically one of the strategies used by the armed groups to achieve several strategic objectives aiming at downing oil exploration, creeping Nigerian economy and bringing the state to her knees and letting their voice heard by the world. The victims were expatriates. Indeed, the use of kidnapping by the armed groups was successful as oil exploration plummeted and financial profile of the Nigeria state fell as well. This made Nigeria to implement the amnesty programme with the intention of pacifying the armed groups. Instead of kidnapping incidents to reduce, it keeps increasing after the implementation of the amnesty programme. The perpetrators and victims have also increased. From armed groups alone in pre-amnesty period, the perpetrators now include undergraduates, unemployed graduates, uneducated youths, among others. From only the expatriates as victims in pre-amnesty period, victims now include well-meaning Niger Delta
indigenes such as politicians, traditional rulers, business men and women and middle class professionals like doctors, lawyers and their relations. It is basically used as a mean of livelihood and survival by people indulging in it in post-amnesty Niger Delta. The study also argued that the implementation of the FGN-sponsored amnesty programme directly or indirectly played a significant role in the increase in the incidents of kidnapping in post-amnesty Niger Delta through the politicisation of the programme by the Nigerian politicians and indigenes of the region and indirectly rewarding criminals who waged war against the state with contracts that have made many of them the new elites. It is important that government must address kidnapping in the region because of the implication it has for the Niger Delta region and the Nigerian State. Government must address the root cause of the phenomenon by engaging in massive job creation for the youths of the region and Nigeria. The security sector and the system of justice administration must also be addressed. A situation where criminals are rewarded with wealth while law abiding citizens are living in poverty will only encourage more crimes like kidnapping to be committed.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

12. Ibid
13. Ibid

VA Isumonah, Armed Society in the Niger Delta Region, Armed Forces and Society, 00 (0), 1-28, 2012.


J Elster, Kidnapping in Civil Wars, Prepared for the Workshop on “Techniques for Violence” Oslo, August 20-21, 2004


Ibid.


These figures were extracted from Figure II by calculating the cases of kidnapping recorded across months in each of the years.

By low profile, we mean those involving not-too-rich people


This occurrence can be attributed to change in orientation and motivation for kidnapping and the fact that majority of the expatriates now move about with security escorts.


Key informant Interview, September 13, 2014


Data obtained from the Office of the Special Assistant to President of Nigeria on Niger Delta and Chairman President Amnesty Programme in October, 2014 in Abuja, Nigeria.

Farah Dagogo was one of the commanders of MEND in Rivers State before he accepted amnesty in 2009. He contested to be a law maker in Rivers State in 2015 and won but his victory was cancelled by election tribunal.


Said in pidgin English but translated by the author.