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## Youth Restiveness and Insecurity in Niger Delta: A Focus on Delta State

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# Youth Restiveness and Insecurity in Niger Delta: A Focus on Delta State

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**Abstract** - The paper examines the issue of youth restiveness and insecurity in the Niger Delta as a whole and Delta State in particular. Youth restiveness and insecurity began with agitation and demands by the youths in the Niger Delta societies for their rights (economic, political and environmental rights), crystallizing into the inducement of the evolution and activities of youth restiveness and insecurity in the Niger Delta states in general and Delta State in particular. The data used for the study were obtained from the secondary sources and were analyzed using a quantitative method to ascertain the level of the existence and effects of youth restiveness and insecurity in Niger- Delta and particularly in Delta State. The paper reveals that youth restiveness and the high spate of insecurity in the Niger- Delta states and Delta State in particular has a very negative impact on the Niger Delta states, economy and the Nigerian society in general. To this end the paper recommended frantic efforts by the government and all concerned stakeholders to tackle issues of youths related crises and insecurity through empowerment, job creation and placement cum engagement of the vibrant youths in Nigeria to redeem the nation from the menace.

## I. INTRODUCTION

The history of the Niger Delta region is one characterised with violence and disharmony of various dimensions from ethic to religion, economic to political patronage and accommodation. The escalating state of violence between the Niger-Delta youths and the Nigerian government is that of the politics of access to the oil fund. The crisis over control of oil resources has assumed different dimension over time, with the state of youth restiveness in the Niger-Delta region. Historically, the search for crude oil in Nigeria goes as far back as 1903 when the mineral survey company began mineralogical studies. Oil spillage was discovered in Araromi (Okitipupa area) some 300km east of Lagos, attracted by this sign, a German company obtained license from the government in 1908 to exploit the oil deposits. The pioneer efforts unfortunately did not last long and the company stopped its operations at the outbreak of the First World War (1914 – 1918) having drilled 15 “wells dry”. Three decades later another major exploration

effort was undertaken, the Anglo- Dutch consortium, SHELL D’Arcy (the fore runner of the SHELL Petroleum Development Company of Nigeria (SPDC) commenced exploration activities in 1937. Having being granted the sole commission right for oil exploration in Nigeria but did not go before the second world war (1939 – 1945) broke out and aborted their operations, the company now decided to limit its operations to the tertiary areas. After having over 80million, SHELL hit oil deposit in commercial quantities at Olobiri (now in Bayelsa state). In 1950, the company started production at the rate of 5,100 barrels per day and this doubled in 1959. The scale of monopolistic concession policy was abrogated in 1959 and replaced by exclusive exploration rights which accelerated the place of oil exploration by encouraging the participation of other companies. For instance, being inspired by success of SHELL- BP, Mobil, Chevron Texaco were later jointed in the late sixties and early seventies by a few indigenous companies like Henry Stephen, Delta Oil Resources in the search of oil.

The resultant effect of the exploiting activities of these multinationals in the region is multiple environmental disorders, devastation of the ecosystem and most importantly deprivation through gas flaring and spillage, these coupled with non-sustainable resources and shrewd federal fiscal policy which favors non-oil producing majority ethnic majorities. On the basis of equalities of the state and population in reaction to this, a counter force to the states action, youth movement emerged to confront the governments and the multinational companies. Notable among the youth movement are Movement for the survival of Ogoni people (MOSOP),

Movement for the survival of Ijaw ethnic nationality in the Niger-Delta, Movement in preparations of Ogbia Ogbesu youths. These youth organizations in Delta State embarked on series of protest and demand against environmental degradation and total neglect thereby causing insecurity. They demanded for accelerated development of their area from oil generated revenue accrued to them; and accusing the government of economic disempowerment and handling of environmental consequences of oil exploration with levity hence they sorted to violence. Some of such violence activities include kidnapping and

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hostage taking of expatriates and other oil installations, incessant killings and other social crimes.

The armed insurrection against the Nigerian state was formally launched. After the 1998 Kiama Declaration, comprising mainly of ethnic militias of which over 70% are of the ijaws ethnic origin, the youths accuse the state of systematic looting of their God-given resources and marginalization (Onoyume 2007). The youths have therefore militarized the struggle to develop their backward environment and to secure greater control of oil revenue derived from the region, this led to the establishment of armed groups operating under such names as Egbesu boys, Meinbutu, Arobgo Freedom Fighters, Joint revolutionary council and most especially the dreaded Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger- Delta (MEHD) and the activities of this militant groups has serious implications to peace and security in the region, oil exploitation, national revenue profit and other derivatives and that will be the core of our study. Based on this, the country is facing numerous threats such as blowing up of oil wells, kidnapping of expatriates and oil workers thereby causing political instability and insecurity, most times the insecurity and crisis in Warri, Bomadi and other towns in Delta State is alarming. Youth restiveness is a phenomenon that has attracted both national and international attention in recent time. Conflict situations spearheaded by the youth and reported almost on daily basis in different parts of the country especially in the Niger- Delta which includes Delta state. Against this background, successive government and civilian alike have battled with Niger- Delta crisis with the accompanied monumental loss of human and material, and yet lasting solutions seems elusive. Youth restiveness and security in all its ramifications possess a serious challenge to the nation. The human development report (2006) summarizes the economic and social costs of conflict in the Niger - Delta region of Nigeria. Therefore, every successive government had introduced one measure or the other to curb, control, minimize and manage youth unrest in the Niger- Delta and the latest measure taken by Yar'Adua/ Jonathan civilian government to curb the menace in the programme of "Amnesty " where ex-militants and armed youths who have lived as fugitives in their country of birth are encouraged to lay down their illegally acquired arms and ammunitions to get rehabilitated and reabsorbed in to the Nigerian society as free born citizens.

Once again it is obvious that the refusal of the Nigeria state to respond positively to the pens and placards of the Harold Dappapriye and the Saro- Wiwas' era has created an environment of anger and desperation, more so, the dialogue option has equally failed because the Nigerian state have refused to adequately implement numerous blue prints for development in the region.

Nigeria is the jewel in the African oil crown, but oil, militancy and insecurity in Delta and in general the Niger - Delta has become a subject of discussion just like the British weather, whereas the oil produced in the Niger-Delta is the life blood of the Nigerian economy. Oil has failed to translate to national prosperity development in the Niger- Delta. The region has become a hot bed of crisis because the problem of neglect and marginalization has been pushing the people to resist deprivations, intimidation and domination, hegemony politics and injustice.

From the dialects of violent agitations (militancy) in Delta state, the Niger- Delta, two arguments appears a discernable one, that violent oil agitation is as a result of the Nigerian government application of force in unveiling non-violent agitation protests of Niger- Delta against the state of gross under-development of that area that arose from the neglect of both federal government and multinational oil companies operating in the area. We must reiterate the fact that the tremendous amount of oil revenue derived from the Niger- Delta costs the people their farmlands, fishing rivers and a host of other health hazards (like acid rain) due to the enormous environmental degradation caused by oil production activities of petrol business. Reference are usually made to government's violent actions such as the incarceration and execution of Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight other activists of 1995, the Alebiri Demonstration crisis 1997, the Kiama Declaration crisis of 1998, the Opia/Ikiyan invasion of 1999, the deployment of naval war ships to Warri by the federal government to quell the Ijaw- Itsekiri crisis over the revocation of warri-south local government council headquarters from Ogbeloh and Ijaw town to Ogidigben an Itsekiri town, the arrest and detention of Asari Dokubo, Diepreye Alamieseigha, Henry Okah, etc (Oweila 2009).

The second state of argument asserts that militancy in the Niger- Delta and Delta state in form of hostage taking, kidnapping, pipeline vandalism, hijacking etc is a result of frustration due to lack of education, poverty, unemployment, idleness of the youths in the region, therefore contends that militants are not fighting for socio-economic and political emancipation of the region but simply to enrich themselves (Ibeanu 2000, Koroye 2007, Akanfa 2007, Igini 2008n Bariagh Amange 2009). The fundamental question that begs for answers is one which sides of the argument 'dose the truth lie?'

## II. CONCEPTUALISATION

**Youth Restiveness:** The advanced learners' dictionary defines a youth as "when a person is young, especially the time before the child becomes an adult" this connotes looking at the bracket of between eighteen- twenty five years and young adults from

twenty five years and young adults from twenty five to thirty five years. On the other hand "restive" is defined as unable to be still or quiet, difficult to control especially when one is not satisfied with something. Abdultabil Umar (1998) conceives youth restiveness as a symbolic parricide in which the young generation tiers to humiliations and overthrows the institutions of the parents regardless of issue or consequences. He maintained that most developing countries and Africa in particular, government represents the older generation and in many cases, provides an obstacle to ambitious youths seeking advancement. This inadvertently leads to a tendency towards activism. He further maintained that youths constitutes a force in any political system and that, this has shown that the youths views and interests must be heard and protected. Fever (1966) maintains the phenomenon of youth restiveness or militancy is neither new nor dangerous but natural, as time progresses, he observed that the youth will simply outgrow their militancy and radicalism because political action born of general revolt to be self terminating, it usually ends when some measure of generational independence is achieved. Consequently, Fever posits that, it is a sign of sickness, a malady in a society which arises where there is break down of generational equilibrium especially in societies where the political and economic power as well as the social status dominated by the older generations. This generational disequilibrium leads to the emergence of a generational consciousness of the parts of the youths.

In the words of Brown Ogbeifun (2007), youth restiveness comes under different headings as the motivation and orientation of actors differ. He identified three forms of restiveness based on actors, motivation and interests as youths engaged in genuine agitation for their rights and restoration of the dignity of their group or race; youths engaged in self seeking and criminal activities such as kidnapping or hostage taking in exchange for levied ransom; youths seeking revenge for the oppressive attitudes toward members of the elite class or a manner of responding to a repressive state. In all there is a unifying factor in the rationalizations of their actions as expressed in their definitions, which is not being satisfied with their present's state. Of all these categories, youth engaged in genuine agitation are seen as organising legitimate revolt or restiveness that attracts same coverage. The youths in this category see the prevalent socio-economic balance as skewing negatively against the interest of their people. This group of youths get started by using the dialog option before violence and confrontation will be considered as an attractive option. Theory of grievance according to Ogbeifun (2007) often centre around such issues as total disconnection between people and the state in terms of infrastructural development, inspire of spinning resources at the disposal of the state; poverty; unemployment; economic banditry and sabotage on the

part of the government; unfaithful implementation of life affecting programmes; ethnic marginalization and insensitivity to the plights of the people suffering multiple negative effects of environments destruction of the ecosystem through gas flaring, oil spillage, which often render farmlands and rivers barren to the extent that the people may have no option or sources of veritable livelihood; decaying educational, health, water, electricity and road infrastructures. For Chukeuzi (2009) youth restiveness is a despicable act of being perpetrated by a significant portion of the youth in various communities that can no longer be ignored. As the name implies, it is a combination of any action or conduct that constitutes unwholesome socially acceptable and unworthy, while activities engaged in by youths in any community. It is a phenomenon which in practice has led to a near breakdown of law and order, low productivity due to disruption of production activities, increasing crime rate, intra ethnic hostilities, and harassment of prospective developers and other criminal tendencies. Youth restiveness becomes a national crisis going by its disruptive destructible tendencies

The above definitions show that youths have endowment of raw energy. They always bubble in high spirit, with high hope, big dreams, aspirations and ideas of what their tomorrow may bring. To achieving these, they must naturally stay still or quiet; especially when they anticipate or see their future on a totally collapsing social- economic landscape. They should work if the basic needs of life must be met. Therefore, in this context, they would naturally be restive within an acceptable limit in a continuum, in order to lay a solid foundation for the realization of their tomorrow.

The tendency towards restiveness is however heightened when there exists a feeling that the older generation has discredited itself and lost moral standing to lead. This view was however criticized on the ground that, the older generation are responsively heterogeneous groups. The heterogeneity of the older generation is evidence by their division into different social classes and social groups. Besides, thousands and millions of thread tie the youths with the various social forces in the society. The conflict of the generation theory is also lacking in explaining the ideological and political differences within the old and young generation as well as the ideological and political alliance or unity that exists between them. Youth restiveness has sometimes been described as an expression of immaturity, irrationality, irresponsibility, indiscipline, youthful exuberance and a reaction to childhood protectionism. The conclusion has however attracted several critics especially as there are empirical evidences which demonstrate youth militancy is sometimes in sympathy with the working class agitations and the yearning and aspirations of other oppressed people and sometimes, even the ruling class.

Fredric Engel (1978) buttressed that the revolutionist potentialities of the youths and the appropriateness of giving their views priority attention. In his words "Is it not natural that the youths should predominate in our party" the revolutionary party as a political party of the future and the future belongs to the youths, the future belongs to the youths, the innovators. He includes that the youths must eagerly trigger new innovations such as revolution wages, self sacrificing struggles.

**Insecurity:** The advanced learners dictionary defines insecurity as inadequately guarded or protected, unsafe, lacking stability, being plagued by anxiety or the state of being subject to danger and being exposed or susceptible to harm. This can be seen in the experience of the Niger- Delta people, and the country at large. Enochukwu, David (2000), holds that the roots of insecurity in the Niger-Delta lies in the history of struggles for self determination, local autonomy and democracy of the ethnic minorities in the region which goes as far back as the second decade of the 20th century. By the 1970s the Niger- Delta became the main source of oil, the new fiscal basis of the Nigerian state (replacing agriculture) accounting for over 80% of national revenues and 90% of export earnings.

According to a 2007 Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) report, armed militant groups operating in the Niger- Delta have graduated to a new level of lethality. The report further estimates that the availability of AK-47 rifles in the Niger- Delta has increased fivefold in the past two to three years and militant groups likely possess remote detonation and night vision equipment's as well as anti-air craft missiles even more sophisticated than the ones handled by security agencies thereby causing insecurity.

Insecurity in Niger- Delta and Delta State in particular always emerge as a result of resistance campaigns through the kidnapping of expatriates and demonstrating the inability of Nigerian Security Forces to stop attacks, as well as the Sabotage of oil Installations and the effective use of the global news Media. Oil has largely brought about escalating violence in the Niger Delta, which in 2006 resulted in the reduction of Nigeria's oil export by 25%. The general Insecurity caused by the activities of the restive youths and the Security agencies costs the country treasury billions of naira each year. It should also be noted that in order to control unrest and boost Production, the government has adopted strategies ranging from direct negotiation with the Militants to all-out Military assaults on them. However these methods have not been successful. Nigeria's government recently offered a sixty day amnesty to Militants willing to trade their weapons for promises of immunity from persecution and access to vocational training. The insecurity in the Niger-Delta region has grown to another level where everyone can be kidnapped. Today expatriates go through the agony when kidnapped and the trauma is unimaginable.

Securing the pipelines and other oil and gas assets in the country has become a heavy burden to the government; because it is on record that this insecurity problem the federation loses about 120,000 to 150,000 BPD to smugglers talk more of refined products.

Since the hostility began in 1997, most especially in Warri North and South of Delta State, very few investors have come into the region because, no one will naturally invest in an insecure environment. Many companies with considerable investment in Warri have moved headquarters from the region to other parts of the country. The insecurity issue drifts off investors away from the aggravated region and now most of these companies now maintain only skeletal services in the region, which brings up the problem of unemployment and that in turn makes the youth to indulge in violent activities. The jobless youth roam about the streets and seem to device their livelihood from cycles of violence that has visited the region since 1997. Without the rehabilitation of these youths, they resulted into illegitimate occupational endeavors and it became extremely difficult to restore peace in the region.

### III. YOUTH RESTIVENESS AND INSECURITY IN DELTA

From 1999 youth restiveness in Niger - Delta took a new dimension. The new form of militancy and restiveness include, kidnapping of foreign oil workers, kidnapping of top notches in government and those supporting government, arson, assassination, and other forms of gruesome murder. Restiveness according to Abudah (2004) is a self generating theory of conflict process within social groups. He further stated that any restive acts of groups whether inter or intra in the nature of contemporary history of Nigeria is synonymous with conflict. Intra group restiveness or conflicts occurs when there is a competition for an interest (Onah, 1999). The relative deprivation theory asserts that psychological variables and deprivation is the basic product for conflict and restiveness of any kind. The more widespread and intense deprivation is among members of a population, the greater is the magnitude of violence in one form or the other (Famham and Pilmot, 1998). Coleman (1996) argues that the unequal socio- economic development of the various ethnic groups in Nigeria led to inter ethnic and intra ethnic conflict. Once there is an uneven development in all or some facets of human existence within a given society, the different groups will definitely become immersed in the competition for the goods of modernity which invariably leads to a conflict situation. Asobie (2004) says that there are approximately 300 spills per years in the Niger- Delta region. And he blames restiveness of the Niger- Delta youths on the oil multinational corporations that operates in the region that is not committed to the plight of their host communities. Again, he argues that the oil multinational

corporation and Federal Government of Nigeria are implicated in the collaboration of militarizing the Niger-Delta region. In the view of Saro-Wiwa (1985), the root causes of conflicts in the Niger-Delta are inequitable distribution of revenue, uneven development among the Niger-Delta region. He goes on to say that development in the centre has been given much attention than the other levels of government and that there is evident inequality in the developmental approach in Nigeria.

Historically, youth restiveness has become transactional device used by Nigerian young adults to get what they want from the relevant authority. Origin credence to youth resistance to operating conditions, issues and unwelcome leadership regimes, dates back to 1934, when Herbert Macaulay floated a political party to kick against political dependency with fellow elite youths who had contact with the west. Other political parties like the NCNC, 1945; NPC, 1949 and AG 1951 had youth wings as vibrant as the mother parties. Thereafter students began to Unionize, campus cultism emerged, and organized gang actions, ethnic cliques and cleavages as well as clannish orientation among students seem to have legitimized restive reactions among the youths. Outside the campuses is proliferated youth initiated ethnic militia such as the Odua People's Congress (OPC) in the Western Nigeria, Movement for the Actualizations of the sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) in the Eastern Nigeria, Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP) and Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) both in Niger Delta, Arewa Consultative Forum (ACF) in the Northern Nigeria etc. This phenomenon, though not exclusive, is predominant in the Niger-Delta region of South-South Zone of Nigeria where the bulk of the country's oil revenue is obtained. Militant youth groups in this geo-political zone are reported to be over 200 in number within ages 15-46. This implies that they form the school age groups for Nigeria's institutions of learning, especially tertiary level and working class.

The Niger-Delta region of Nigeria is a densely populated region sometimes called the oil rivers because it was once a major producer of palm oil. It extends over about 70,000sq.km and makes up to 7.5% of Nigeria's land mass. It originally consists of Delta, Bayelsa, and Rivers states, until in the year 2000 when the government of (former) President Olusegun Obasanjo expanded it to include Abia, Edo, Imo, and Ondo States. Some 2 million barrels of oil are extracted in the Niger-Delta; hence the region has accounted for more than 75% of Nigeria's export earnings.

The youths constitute a large percentage of the Nigerian population. A few of them appear to have access to formal education while a larger majority do not seem to have access to formal education nor opportunity to benefit from non-formal/ vocational education and therefore do not possess skills necessary to guarantee their upkeep. Without proper guidance and

promise for a better livelihood (despite the immense natural resources in the area and perceived benefits derived by the petroleum prospecting and marketing companies) some of these youths seem to engage in some destructive social vices as a way of registering their grievances. Many reasons have been adduced for the high spate of youth restiveness in our society. On the family front, parental neglect and/ control have been listed as contributing to youth restiveness. Togbolo, (2005) affirmed that 'most of our parents and guardians are not living up to expectation in teaching their children and inculcating in them norms and values'. The norms and values of any society are expected to be in the custody of the different levels of leadership in that society.

Youth restiveness, being a social phenomenon needs to be tackled at every specter of the society: Governmental (National, state and local levels); educational and religious institutions. Leaders at these different levels need a wide range of abilities and skills that would enable them work together with the people, perceive their dispositions and gain their confidence, in order to know how to deal with issues concerning them as they arise. At the school level, Ukeje et al (1992) advocated that to play a leadership role accurately, the school administrator needs to have a fairly accurate perception of his role-expectation, which is an accurate perception of the kind of activities and behaviors he should engage in, in order to perform his job well. This is because; role perception determines the direction in which the individual applies his efforts.

Youths seem to see the leadership in the nation to have failed them. With the long years of military rule in the country and high spate of political crisis, rights of individuals such as to education, health, etc are being neglected. Unemployment becomes a common feature, and the youths seem to be the worst hit. There is, therefore a tendency for them to look at their plight as the making of a government/ leadership that does not seem to care for them. Hence, Enyinnaya (2006), reported Spiff who advocated that 'the panacea to youth restiveness in the Niger-Delta is educating the youths in the region and ensuring that they pursued courses that are unique and relevant to the nation's needs'. Ofehe (2008) pointed out that the unemployment and sufferings among the Niger-Delta youths bring about youth restiveness which manifests in increase in armed robbery, hostility to companies' staff and family, prostitution, ritual killing etc. Supporting him, Alaiibe (2008) noted that 'there is high population of unemployed, semi-skilled, half educated youths in the Niger-Delta', this makes a large number of them idle and vulnerable to negative influences. Many of these youths appear to be easily recruited by politicians as thugs, paid huge sums of money, armed, given promises for juicy packages and used for electioneering purposes. Only a few of them seem to be remembered

after the elections are won, while many who may have squandered the money they got for the job are left to go back to their original poverty laden life conditions. The resultant effect is for them to revolt against the perceived injustice. Moreover, the arms that were given to them for the electioneering purposes often times do not get retrieved; in the absence of paid employment to keep them busy, the youths easily get attracted to wrong vices, with the acquired/ un-retrieved arms as somewhat confidence boosters. This is often worsened by the fact that some of these youths seem to have easy access to drugs, which obviously influences them negatively. Ekhomu (2008) noted that 'drug abuse' is becoming a pervasive problem and it is directly responsible for the increase in robbery, violence and youth restiveness being experienced in Nigeria today'.

The problem of youth restiveness has been a burning issue over some time now, especially in the minds of concerned citizens of the Nigerian society. The actions of the restive youths are inimical to peace and development of the region and the nation in general.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

Youth restiveness manifests in the form of students unrest, ethnic nationalism. And religious fundamentalism and quite often provokes lots of violence. Some acknowledged that there is a link between insecurity, poverty, unemployment and restiveness.

The paper has shown that the cause of the youth's retrogressive actions is traced to the government's neglect and lack of concern for the degradation of natural environment resulting from the continuing petroleum exploration and exploitation activities in the region. Government and indeed the oil companies are therefore advised to show more concern not only in the sustainability of the environment in which oil is produced but in the general development of the region ( socially and economically) in order to avoid further insecurity. It is evident that after two years that the federal government introduced amnesty program. For militants in the Niger- Delta, the disarmament of the regions numerous private armies' remains a front burner issue following the sustained attacks and bombing that could evolve into anarchy. Peace is still elusive in the oil rich area and calls have continued to authorities to go back to the drawing board to fashion a better plan that will ensure lasting solution to the perennial insecurity in the region.

It is also pertinent to note that the amnesty lapsed since October 4th 2009, but the post amnesty period has not transformed into peace and progress in the region (The Guardian, April 20, 2010). On the 2010th May day edition of The Nation, it was reported that the militants still attacked shell's facility in rivers state declaring it was the beginning of "Operation Boro".

In the light of the foregoing, the study therefore recommends the following:

- ❖ This region produces the wealth of the nation, so the government and oil companies should show enough concern to the welfare and development of infrastructure in the host communities of the Niger-Delta in general.
- ❖ The existing environmental laws, which deprive the origin of ownership of their natural resources should be abrogated and replaced with resource control act.
- ❖ In order to tackle the problem of insecurity, the government should give a listening ear to the agitations of the restive youths.
- ❖ State executives, legislators and the entire political elites across the Niger- Delta should be collectively committed to the course of the Niger- Delta people, particularly with the lives and affairs of the people should be a thing of the past. The leadership including the traditional institutions and the option leaders should fulfill their natural covenant to the people by representing them sincerely, truthfully and responsibly if not for the present, but for the posterity and providence.

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