

IN SEARCH OF INTEGRITY: APPRAISING STATE RESPONSE TO MILITANCY IN NIGERIA'S NIGER DELTA

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Abstract

State's response to militancy in Nigeria's Delta region has oscillated between adversarial and non-adversarial modes of conflict management. These responses have not addressed underlying issues in the conflict especially socio-economic injustice and environmental degradation. Government's confrontational approach to militancy triggered further conflicts in the region. Also, state's attempt at dialoguing with the militants and addressing developmental needs of the region have all been victims of massive corruption, insincerity and lack of genuine commitment on the part of the state and other key conflict actors. The paper concludes that the application of military force will not end militancy in the region. The state should pursue dialogue with the militants and also genuinely commit to addressing the issue of development in the region while tackling official corruption and lack of transparency that have hindered its interventionist agencies from having significant positive impacts on the people of the region.

Keywords: Militancy, State Response, Confrontation, Dialogue, Niger Delta

Introduction

It is no longer argued that Nigeria's Niger Delta region represents a paradox: an area richly blessed with natural resources, but underdeveloped and racked by insecurity. A combination of local discontent triggered by environmental degradation as a result of oil exploitation, deprivation, poverty, underdevelopment and lack of control/access to oil revenue as well as marginalization in national politics led to local disturbances and protests which would later evolve into a full blown militancy in the early 2000s. Between that period and 2009, MEND (Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta) and its predecessors such as Egbesu Boys and NDPVF (Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force) disrupted oil production in the region leading to significant reduction of oil output and drastic decline in oil earnings, Nigeria's chief revenue source.

Where the activities and activism of groups within a state are seen as triggering a level of turbulence that is undermining its internal security and corporate existence, the state is compelled to respond. Nigeria's response to militancy in the Niger Delta initially took the form of a conquest strategy involving massive deployment of soldiers and other security forces to quell militant activities in the region. The November 1999 deployment of soldiers to Odi town in Bayelsa State by the Obasanjo administration in response to the killing of some police men by a group of youths signaled the beginning of several military operations across the Niger Delta in response to militant activities. In the same vein, the wreckage left behind by "Operation Hakuri II" (codename of the military operation in Odi) in Odi town was replicated in several other oil-bearing communities in

the region (see Azaiki, 2009 and Bassey, 2012). Operation Hakuri II saw the deployment and indiscriminate use of heavy artillery and other sophisticated weapons by soldiers which literally rendered the community desolate in what is now popularly referred to today as *Odi Massacre*.

The state's hard approach to militancy in Niger Delta did not yield the desired result as the strategy only served to heighten tension, insecurity and conflicts in the area. As an alternative, the state sought to pursue a number of economic, political and diplomatic measures aimed at ending insurgency and improving development in the region which culminated in the 2009 presidential amnesty for the militants who surrendered their weapons and renounced militancy. The amnesty programme for the militants ended insurgency and restored relative peace in the region thus giving the Nigerian government a rare opportunity to develop a comprehensive framework to address the multiple demands and deep-rooted causes of militancy in the region. However, this opportunity evaporated in the midst of a lack of political will by the government, corruption and bad governance.

A 2015 report by the International Crisis Group (ICG) warned of a relapse into more violent brand of militancy in the Niger Delta if the government did not take urgent steps to address longstanding deep-rooted injustices and grievances in the region. Though the government extended the amnesty programme (which was due to lapse in December 2015) by two years, and also pledged to pay better attention to the developmental needs of the region, it did not stop local discontent from deepening and a relapse into violence exemplified by the activities of emergent militant groups including the Niger Delta Avengers (NDA), and its breakaway faction Reformed Niger Delta Avengers (RNDA); Joint Niger Delta Liberation Force (JNDLF), Reformed Egbesu Boys of the Niger Delta, AdakaBoro Avengers, Niger Delta Revolutionary Crusaders, and the Niger Delta Greenland Justice Mandate. Between February and June 2016, activities of the NDA alone resulted in a reduction of oil output from 2.2 million barrels per day to about 1.4 million barrels per day (*Sahara Reporters, June 5, 2016*). Besides the NDA, the other groups have also claimed damaging attacks on Nigeria's oil infrastructure, vowing to reduce oil output to zero.

Although the state is bound to respond to threats against its national security, the way such threat is neutralized informs, to a large extent, whether the pall of uncertainty that such threat often cast over the political landscape is dispersed in the short or long term, or whether they become permanent features of a nation's life. With regards to the Niger Delta, Nigeria is still searching for durable solutions to militancy in the region. This paper contributes to the debate on curbing violence and ending militancy in Nigeria's Delta region with particular focus on analyzing government's response in addressing the conflict.

Response theories

Broadly speaking, a response could be viewed as the sum total of actions or reactions to a stimulus, or an occurrence that constitutes the basis for behaviour or perception of a problem or issue. While studies on country-specific management of internal conflicts are not common to the extent that models were developed on account of the nature of such conflicts and how they were concluded, several commentaries do exist on specific incidents and how they were managed (see for example, Kennedy, 1969; Obassanjo, 1981). However, scholars in the field of conflict management have developed a wide range of response and engagement models using either case studies or theory-based arguments that highlight the dispositions and response of individuals, groups or institutions

to turbulence and crisis. These models could be adapted to explain states' engagement or response to internal socio-political turbulence that sometimes manifest in the form of militancy.

Some of the response models include those identified by the Louisiana State Civil Service *Manual on Effective Conflict Resolution Strategies* (2014) which categorizes a decision maker's response choices into two broad strategies –“flight” or “fight”. The former relating to the decision maker taking action to confront the problem and preventing the situation from deteriorating; while the latter relates to a situation where the decision maker ignores the conflicting issues or denies the significance of the issues. For Albert and Oloyede (2010), response choices in times of conflict can either be adversarial or non-adversarial. Confrontation, including the use of force, falls under the adversarial mode of conflict management which has peculiar drawbacks especially for dealing with conflicts where the parties will have to continue to exist within the same psycho-social space. On the other hand, the non-adversarial conflict management styles such as collaboration and joint-problem solving, requires the conflict parties working together to find lasting solutions to their differences.

Perhaps, the most commonly quoted is the *Thomas-Kilmann conflict response model* which assesses individual's behaviour in conflict situations. Thomas and Kilmann describe an individual's response style along two basic dimensions: *assertiveness*—in terms of the extent to which the individual attempts to satisfy his/her own concerns; and *cooperativeness*—the extent to which the decision maker attempts to factor the other party's concerns into his/her decision making (Thomas and Kilmann, 2010: 2). These two broad dimensions can be further broken down into five main conflict response styles: competing, collaborating, compromise, avoiding and accommodating. Thomas and Kilmann argue that there is no best method for dealing with conflict. All five methods or styles are useful in some situations and each represents a set of useful social skills. The effectiveness of a given response choice depends upon the requirements of the specific conflict situation and the skill with which the decision maker deploys such a choice.

Furthermore, each of these conflict response modes highlighted has its peculiar attractions that make it useful in given situations that require response. For instance, conflict avoidance may be useful when the issue is trivial or when a person knows that he has no chance of winning, and postponing action for a better time; while competing might mean standing up for what is right or the decision maker defending a position he/she believes is correct. On the other hand, compromise may become useful when the decision maker needs to douse tension, deescalate the conflict and find a mutually acceptable solution that partially satisfies the conflict parties.

Nevertheless, it can be argued that dealing with certain conflict situations requires a combination of assertiveness and cooperation. While force may be useful to trigger de-escalation, introduction of the non-adversarial approaches in their honest connotation often results to durable peace settlement. As General Stanley McChrystal, the US Commander in Afghanistan implied in 2009 with regard to ending insurgency in Afghanistan, deployment of troops alone will not result to victory; the strategy must also include exploring political settlement with the insurgents (cited in Albert and Oloyede, 2010: 3). It is also worthy of note that virtually all of the conflicts in the West African sub-region since the late 1990s were terminated through a negotiated settlement rather than through the battlefields.

Militancy in the Niger Delta

The history of oil-related militancy in the Niger Delta region dates back to the 1966 Isaac AdakaBoro's twelve day rebellion against the Nigerian State (Ogbogbo, 2011; Okumagba, 2012). Although, this rebellion was promptly crushed by Nigerian security forces, it nevertheless helped in arousing the consciousness of the Niger Delta people in seeking remedies to the injustices they have been made to suffer. Earlier on, the region had been recognized as an area that required special development intervention by the 1958 Willink Commission Report. Recommendations of the Willink Report led to the creation of Niger Delta Development Board in 1960, but the Board failed to realize the development aspirations of the Niger Delta people due to lack of political will and the hegemonic political tendencies of the majority ethnic groups in Nigeria (Ering, Bassey, and Odiye, 2013).

With the discovery of crude oil in commercial quantity in Oloibiri, in present day Bayelsa State in the late 1950s, exploration and exploitation of the resource by multinational oil companies intensified in the Niger Delta. Consequently the region's natural environment became seriously devastated, thus altering preexisting patterns of production and livelihood systems of the region. The negative socio-economic footprints including poverty and underdevelopment that flowed from environmental degradation occasioned by oil exploitation; and the poor management of these outcomes both by the Nigerian government and the oil companies involved, inevitably triggered a new round of Niger Delta agitations in the 1990s. Agitations in the 90s were primarily led by renowned environmental and minority rights activist, Ken Saro-Wiwa and later associated with the struggle of the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP) until he and eight other Ogoni leaders were convicted and executed in November 1995 by a pro-military government tribunal under General Sanni Abacha.

The 1990s witnessed the emergence of well organized resistance groups in the Niger Delta with a broad-based grassroots support epitomized for instance, by the local acceptance of MOSOP and MOSIEND (Movement for the Survival of Izon Ethnic Nationality). Indeed, these groups and many other ethnic-based pressure groups that sprang up in the 1990s in some of the environmentally degraded Niger Delta communities bravely challenged the multinational oil companies and the Nigerian State by organizing rallies, civil disturbances, boycott of state programmes, violent protests, and sometimes, engaging in vandalization of oil installations, as well as hostage taking and other forms of economic sabotage (Ikelegbe, 2005). Nevertheless, their activities effectively drew the attention of the international community to the plight of the Niger Delta and the unsavory socio-economic conditions of its people. The region's agitation for environmental restoration as well as political and economic emancipation eventually snowballed into full blown militancy due to poor government response to the struggle, especially sustained use of force by successive Nigerian governments to suppress the struggle (Inokoba and Imbua, 2010; Paki and Ebienu, 2011).

Consequently, since the early 2000s, the Niger Delta has become militarized. Non-state armed groups have proliferated the region, and matching force for force with state security forces in the struggle to gain control over oil resources. As Ugor observed too, "between 2005 and 2009, almost an entire generation of youth in the oil rich Niger Delta area took up military weapons against the Nigerian State and multinational oil corporations" (2013: 1). Some of the prominent non-state

armed groups that have violently operated in the Niger Delta region since the early 2000s include the Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force (NDPVF); Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND); Niger Delta Liberation Army (NDLA); the Egbesu Boys of Africa (EBA); Niger Delta Vigilante Force (NDVF); and the Coalition for Militant Action (COMA) among many others. These militant groups with their vast knowledge of the creeks and the swampy areas of Niger Delta rely mainly on guerilla tactics in their battles with state security forces. They have at various times engaged in violent activities including vandalization of oil installations, bombings, maritime piracy, kidnapping as well as hostage taking of expatriates, top officials of oil companies and key government functionaries with significant consequences on the nation's economy and security. Unfortunately, what seemed like a genuine struggle for Niger Delta emancipation had turned into one big politico-economic venture for some disgruntled elements within and outside the region to enrich themselves. Criminal syndicates operating in the region have infiltrated and corrupted the ranks of genuine militant agitators, thus making it difficult to differentiate between the activities of freedom fighters and criminal gangs in the region.

Aside the destabilizing effects on global price of oil, activities by the Niger Delta militants have resulted to loss of several billions of dollars in oil revenue accruable to the Nigerian State. Not only has militancy in the Niger Delta made Nigeria's oil fields one of the most insecure globally, it has become a perpetual threat to national stability considering the fact that crude oil remains the live-source of Nigeria's economy. A study conducted by the International Centre for Reconciliation (ICR), Coventry Cathedral in 2009, pegged the total value of loss in oil revenue to the Nigerian economy between 2003 to 2008 from stolen crude oil (illegal oil bunkering) and militancy at 14 trillion Naira, approximately USD100 billion (cited in Paki and Ebienfa, 2011). In the first nine months of 2008 alone, the country lost USD 23.7 billion of oil revenue due to militancy and other forms of economic sabotage according to a report by the LedumMitee Technical Committee which was set up by the government of President Yar' Adua to address the problem of youth militancy in the Niger Delta (cited in Joab-Peterside, Porter, and Watts, 2012). At the peak of youth militancy in Niger Delta in 2009, the government of President Yar'Adua introduced amnesty programme to pacify the various militant groups operating in the region and halt their growing violence. Though the amnesty initiative brought relative peace to the region, failure to specifically address the deep-rooted causes of militancy in the region led to relapse into violence as seen in the activities of the Niger Delta Avengers and a groundswell of other militant groups.

State's Response to Militancy in the Niger Delta

In the attempts to curb militancy and restore peace to the conflict-ridden Niger Delta region, the Nigerian State has experimented with various conflict engagement approaches which so far include deployment of security forces, establishment of fact finding committees, and creation of development intervention agencies. Other measures include review of oil revenue sharing formula leading to increase in oil derivation funds to the region, establishment of ministry of Niger Delta Affairs (MoNDA), setting up of ad-hoc committees on conflict intervention, as well as the amnesty programme for Niger Delta militants. However, these measures have largely remained ineffective in addressing the conflict issues. In fact, rather than addressing the problem, some of the conflict engagement approaches have inadvertently served to heighten hostilities in the region.

For instance, relentless application of military force by the Nigerian State in quelling militancy in the Niger Delta region have been faulted on the basis that rather than dousing and permanently halting the growth of violence, it has always regrettably helped to further militarize the region owing to the unpleasant human rights issues involved. State repression of youth militancy in the Niger Delta and its unintended outcomes in terms of militarization and multiple violations of human rights are well documented in extant literatures on Niger Delta conflicts (see for example, Osaghae 1995; Human Rights Watch 1999; Odoemene 2011; Okumagba 2012; and Aminu 2013). State military operations in the Niger Delta have always been deployed under specific codenames including “Operation Hakuri II”, “Operation Restore Hope”; “Operation Flushout III”; “Operation Pulo Shield” among several other non-coded military operations. In most of these military operations, cases of mass destruction of property running into several millions of Naira as well as sexual violations of women and young girls by security forces, and the indiscriminate killings and physical torture of ‘non-militant Niger Deltans’ have always been reported. Military operations carried out in Niger Delta communities such as Odi, Choba, Umuechem, Kaiama, Gbakiri, Odioma, Oporoza, Okerenkoko, and Ogoniland clearly supported this assertion. Rather than reduce the act of militancy in the region, these military operations ended up worsening the conflict situation.

According to Okumagba (2012), government’s violent response has worsened the very conditions that gave rise to the violence in the first place, thereby creating a conflict trap. Hence, there was little surprise when a Federal High Court in Nigeria found the federal government guilty of committing genocide in Odi community and accordingly, awarded N37.8 billion to be paid by the federal government to the victims of the Odi massacre for the damages they suffered (Aminu, 2013).

In August 2016, the government launched another military operation code-named “Operation Crocodile Smile” designed to take the fight to the militant in the creeks and swampy areas of the Niger Delta, flush out the criminal elements and protect local populations in the region. Besides the use of force, the Nigerian State has also responded to the problem of militancy in the Niger Delta through the creation of intervention agencies to drive development and improve socio-economic and environmental conditions in the Niger Delta. These intervention agencies include the Niger Delta Development Board (NDDB), and its successor agencies such as Niger Delta Basin Development Authority (NDBDA), Oil Mineral Producing Areas Development Commission (OMPADEC), Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC), and lately, the Ministry of Niger Delta Affairs. However, all these intervention agencies have failed to satisfactorily transform the poor socioeconomic and environmental conditions in the region. Obagbinoko (2009) observed that the activities of these intervention agencies have left much to be desired. Common denominators cutting across the various agencies include poor funding, corruption, and lack of genuine commitment towards addressing the developmental deficits in the Niger Delta despite the region being the ‘goose that lays the golden egg’ for the country. Government interventionist agencies in the Niger Delta region have all provided avenues for corrupt politicians and their accomplices in the career civil service to amass mindboggling illegal wealth rather than fulfill the purpose for which they were established.

Furthermore, government’s response to militancy in the Niger Delta has also been through setting up of ‘ad-hoc committees for conflict intervention’. The military regime of General Ibrahim

Babangida established the Presidential Implementation Committee (PIC) in 1987 to respond to the increasing agitations for development in Niger Delta. However, its impact was never felt by people of the region as the PIC was viewed as a disappointment by the local population (Ering, Bassey and Odiye, 2013). In the same vein, in March 2007, the Nigerian government intervened in the Niger Delta crisis with the establishment of a committee which was given the mandate to assess the increasing menace of oil pipeline vandalization, and recommend measures to curb the growing menace. The committee's mandate included assessing the frequency and causes of oil pipeline vandalization, identifying those areas within the Niger Delta region that are most prone to this menace and the perpetrators involved in the crime, and recommend measures towards addressing the problem (Nigeria First, 2007 cited in Nwankpa and Onyekosor, 2015). Unfortunately however, as common with most of the committees or commission of enquiries that have been set up by the Nigerian government in the time past, the report of the committee was never acted upon or published till date.

The LedumMitee Technical Committee established by the government of President Yar' Adua in 2008 with the mandate to compile the reports of past commissions of enquiry on Niger Delta crisis suffered the same fate, as most of its findings and recommendations were eventually jettisoned in the planning and implementation of the amnesty programme that was later initiated by the same government in 2009 (Albert, 2015). In 2016, the federal government under President Muhammadu Buhari also set up another dialogue committee to respond to the escalation of violent activities in Niger Delta occasioned by the NDA and other militant groups. The dialogue committee is expected to engage all stakeholders in Niger Delta in peace talks to curb the renewed violence in the region.

Over the years, the government flirted with the review of oil revenue sharing formula as a way of placating agitators for resource control in the Niger Delta. The 1960 constitution recognized 50% derivation formula. This was altered in 1969 and altogether abolished in 1979 and replaced by a special account for the oil bearing areas that amounted to paying token royalties to the oil-bearing states in the region. This situation did not go down well with the people and it further increased agitations in the region. Though the government eventually approved 13% derivation fund for the development of oil-bearing states in Nigeria in 2000, it has not stopped the people of the region including their state governors from clamouring for resource control/increase in oil derivation.

The 2009 amnesty programme was another significant effort towards restoring peace in Niger Delta. As stated earlier, the framing and implementation of the amnesty programme raised a number of problems which hindered its potentials of restoring sustainable peace in the region. Albert argued on two different occasions that the amnesty deal was imposed on the Niger Delta militants by the Nigerian government without engaging the militants in a proper negotiation or mediation process (2011; 2015). This indeed was a major gap in the implementation of the amnesty deal as some of the leaders of the militant groups in the Niger Delta region did not accept the policy. For instance, Asari Dokubo, the leader of the Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force, rejected the amnesty policy on the ground that the Niger Delta militants had not committed any known offence or felony against the state but that they are freedom fighters who took up arms against the injustice done by the Nigerian state to the communities and people of the region over the years.

Arguably, the amnesty policy focused heavily only on rehabilitation and re-integration of the ex-militants without any form of reparation given to the victims of the Niger Delta conflict. These

victims are the elderly, women, and the children who might have suffered varying degrees of damages in the course of the several violent confrontations between security forces and the militant youths in the region. Yet, the amnesty project did not award any form of benefit to them (Adams, 2013; Albert, 2015). This fell short of best global practices in the framing and implementation of amnesty programme. Additionally, the Nigerian government through the amnesty policy did not take serious steps towards addressing the crucial issues of environmental degradation and underdevelopment in the region. This proved to be a major setback for the region's peace process. Consequently, rather than being a long-term post-conflict peacebuilding project, the Niger Delta amnesty programme has been reduced to pursuing short-term peace agenda.

Key Integrity Issues in State's Response to Militancy in the Niger Delta

Militancy in the Niger Delta is an offshoot of unaddressed grievances in the region which the state has not really shown genuine commitment to address. Even before crude oil was exploited in commercial quantity, the Niger Delta people had always complained of economic and political marginalization, issues that were copiously recognized by the 1958 Willink Commission report. Yet, it appears that the state's main interest in the region is the uninterrupted production of crude oil, an objective that must be protected by all means necessary including the use of force. However, the state's attempt to address the underlying issues in the conflict through political settlement have also largely been inadequate, half-hearted and blighted with serious integrity issues.

The NDDC and MoNDA— two government agencies that were set up to address development and infrastructural deficits in the region— have performed far below the expectations of the people and have become a conduits for corruption and theft of public funds by politically connected individuals to the extent that former President Jonathan lamented that the NDDC has failed to justify the huge federal allocations it receives (*The Guardian* (Lagos), 16 December 2013). Also, part of the problem is the lack of political will by the government to properly fund the agencies. In fact, monies appropriated for the NDDC for example hardly gets to the commission in full. It is reported that the commission is still owed more than 700 billion naira (about \$3.5 billion) from the Obasanjo and Yar'Adua administrations (ICG, 2015). Like the NDDC, the MoNDA is starved of funds by the government and also suffers from organizational and operational challenges as well as official corruption.

The 2009 amnesty initiative is the closest there has been to a genuine political commitment to addressing the root causes of militancy in the region. History does not leave us with alternatives and one cannot tell how the amnesty initiative would have panned out under President Yar'Adua. However, after his death, his deputy, Goodluck Jonathan (who incidentally was instrumental in the early period of proposing amnesty for the ex-militants) became President. The amnesty programme almost completely veered from what many considered to be its original intentions. Rather than geared towards addressing the crucial tasks of environmental remediation, improving infrastructures and enhancing livelihoods, while also serving as the take-off point in addressing the issue of resource control, the initiative became a medium through which official corruption was perpetuated and patronages were granted to ex-militants. In a short period of time, key ex-militants became billionaires and major financiers of politicians and political parties. Government contracts, especially maritime security and other oil-related contracts were awarded to the ex-militants and

their political associates who in collusion with security agents were also heavily involved in oil bunkering and massive theft of crude oil from the region.

It is apposite to note that the Niger Delta militants were already enjoying local patronages at the state level especially from government officials in states like Rivers, Bayelsa and Delta. The amnesty programme merely helped to federalize these incentives and patronages to the ex-militants. The manner in which the programme was executed under the Jonathan administration fell short of addressing the root causes of militancy in the region. Beyond restoring the environment, the local people have always yearned for infrastructural and human capacity development. These are peacebuilding deficits that the amnesty programme failed to address. Accordingly, when President Jonathan's party (Peoples Democratic Party) lost the March 2015 election, the stage was set for a relapse into militancy.

The decision of the new administration under President Muhammadu Buhari to reform the amnesty programme inadvertently knocked off a number of the ex-militants and their political associates off their perch. The security contracts and other perks including collection of stipends for ghost ex-agitators under the already over bloated amnesty programme budget were stopped. Added to this was the decision of the government to try some key ex-militants for corruption through the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), Nigeria's main anti-corruption body. The disposition of the new administration did not go down well with the (ex) agitators and their political associates. The authors strongly believe that this is a key factor in the emergence of the Niger Delta Avengers, the new militant group in the region that has successfully disrupted oil production in the Niger Delta region thereby plunging the country into severe economic stress. Since the group began its activities, it has destroyed oil installations belonging to oil multinationals as well as the Nigerian state, reduced oil production output from a peak of 2.2mbpd to about 1.4mbpd, resulting to huge economic loss to the federal government and exacerbating economic crisis both at the federal and state levels. About 29 out of 36 states of the federation is said to be unable to pay workers' salaries due to steep reduction of federal allocation to the states which are heavily dependent on the earnings from crude oil export. In addition to these, gas facilities have also been affected leading to drastic drop in national electricity production. According to the new militant group (NDA), its main objective is to achieve zero production of crude oil in the region. They have asked multinational oil companies to vacate the Niger Delta until government addresses the development challenges of the region and grant the oil-bearing areas resource control.

Typically of the Nigerian state, its strategy was to further deploy force as a response to the militancy. Heavy military operation began in the region to protect oil installations and arrest the militants. Communities such as Okerenkoko in Delta State witnessed heavy military presence in search of members of the NDA and a former militant kingpin –Egbemupolo Tompolo who the government suspects of backing the militant group though he has on several occasions dissociated himself from the NDA. Reports from print and broadcast media have also shown local communities in the region lamenting disruption of socio-economic activities due to heavy military presence. Meanwhile Nigeria's hard approach to the militancy has not stopped the NDA from carrying out further attacks against oil facilities.

This has compelled the government to initiate another round of dialogue with the militants. A committee whose membership includes the Minister of State for petroleum, Minister of Interior,

and the Amnesty Programme Coordinator has been established by the government to begin negotiations with all stakeholders in the region with a view to ending violence in the region. The problem with this option is that many “conflict entrepreneurs” from the side of government and from the region continues to position them in expectation of what they can benefit from the process rather than finding lasting solution to the problem. The trust deficit and insincerity of the stakeholders remains a major stumbling block to ending militancy in the Niger Delta.

Conclusion

State deployment of force in the Niger Delta region will not halt militancy in the region. History has shown that government’s confrontational approach has only helped to trigger further conflicts and strengthen the resolve of the militants. While force may be required to dislodge the criminal elements and other conflict entrepreneurs who are feasting on instability in the region, it is our view that ending militancy in the Niger Delta requires effective peaceful engagement with the militants and other major stakeholders with a view to addressing the issue of resource ownership and management which is at the heart of the conflict. Effective engagement also requires that the government shows genuine commitment to addressing infrastructural deficits in the region while also tackling official corruption and lack of transparency that have hindered its interventionist agencies such as the NDDC from having significant positive impacts on the people of the region.

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