

Kidnapping in Nigeria's Niger Delta: An Exploratory Study

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ABSTRACT Nigeria's Niger Delta region has attracted global attention over the years both in the positive and negative dimension. On the positive side, the region harbours one of the largest world's oil reserves. It constitutes the engine room of Nigeria's economy through foreign exchange earnings and revenue generation to the government. On the negative side, the region has witnessed various forms of militancy, violence and crime, including kidnapping. This study explores the crime of kidnapping in the region. The study uses available news reports as well as personal and neighbourhood witnesses, in addition to the review of literature. In the result, various forms of kidnappings were identified in relation to economic and political motivations as well as kidnapping as instrument of liberation fight. The study gave an overview of developmental implications of kidnapping on the state economy. In the recommendation, the study emphasized on the need for inclusive governance whereby all layers of stakeholders have the benefit of empowerment and capacity building as opposed to the current practice of elitist governance.

INTRODUCTION

Defining what is kidnapping poses a number of definitional problems in relations to a country's legal and moral viewpoints as well as the availability of other variances such as hostage-taking and hijacking. Mohamed (2008) attempted some clarifications of the definitional position of the term with respect to the legal point of view of some countries. He used Malaysia for instance to illustrate that the kidnapping of adults within the borders of Malaysia comes under the heading of abduction in sharp contrast to the UK meaning. Clutterbuck (1987: 4 cited in Mohamed) also attempted to clarify some terminological differences between kidnapping, hostage-taking and hijacking. He argued that where hostage-taking and hijacking are concerned, victims are held in a known location, such as a plane, ship or building. He further noted that hijacking may be thought of as a refinement of hostage-taking, when a vehicle of some kind is seized along with its passengers. According to him: "the theft of container lorries (with their cargo but without their driver) has been referred to as hijacking; however, most jurisdictions would classify and count this as theft and reserve the term hijack for the illegal seizure of vehicle and people together". In this study, Turner's (1998) broad working definition of kidnapping has been adopted in which kidnapping applies to all situations where persons are forcibly seized and transported to a destination where they are held against their will in unlawful confinement. It also describes incidents when persons are lured away and then held illegally. This may involve force.

Kidnapping is a very serious crime but relatively unheard of in contemporary scholarship compared to robbery, burglary and other forms of societal crime. Yang et al. (2007) attributes such relative obscurity to three reasons namely, rarity of the event itself, access to known kidnappers and data problem. As a rare event, scholars tend to see kidnapping as an insignificant criminal act which accounts for low research interest directed to it. In the second instance, getting access to known kidnappers is difficult in most instances. The third relates to the reliability and validity of data. Turner (1998, citing Schiller 1985; Gallagher 1985 and Warren 1985:229) has attempted a documentation of how kidnapping originated. According to him, the term "kidnapping" originated in 17th Century England where children were "kidnapped" and often sold as slaves or agricultural workers to colonial farmers. Centuries before, in ancient Rome, the emperor Constatine (AD 315) became so alarmed by the incidence of kidnapping that he ordered the death penalty as punishment for the crime. Robber-barons were kidnapping merchants and holding them for ransom in the Middle Ages in Europe. King Richard I of England was held hostage for years by the Archduke of Austria in the 12th Century. In 1800, in the Sulu archipelago, now part of the Philippines, there was already a standard scale of ransom fees ranging from 2000 pesos for a European friar to 30-50 Pesos for a male Filipino. An upsurge in kidnapping in the USA by organised criminal gangs led, in 1931, to the introduction of federal legislation on kidnapping in both the Senate and House of Representatives.

The author concluded that much kidnapping throughout history has no overt political motivation but, since the early 1970s, there have been many highly publicized kidnappings around the world for political purposes.

The United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime (UNODC 2003: 7-8, cited in Mohamed 2008) has categorized kidnapping as follows: kidnapping for extortion (for ransom, to influence business decisions or to obtain commercial advantage); kidnapping between or within criminal groups (for debt recovery or to secure advantage in a criminal market); kidnapping for sexual exploitation; kidnapping linked to domestic or family disputes (spouse or child abduction); revenge kidnapping; and kidnapping for political or ideological purposes. These typologies have been broadly categorized into three by Pharaoh (2005: 23) as follows: criminal kidnapping (hostage taking for ransom); political kidnapping (to settle political scores or further some political objectives) and pathological kidnapping (parental kidnapping and kidnapping for sexual purposes). To further simplify the classification, Turner (1998) listed out four key rationales for kidnapping as follows: a) kidnapping for money but no politics; b.) kidnapping without any political or monetary motive; c.) kidnapping for money and politics and d.) kidnapping for politics but no money. From these classification, it is seen that kidnapping has criminal, political and economic reasons. However, Yang et al. (2007) has added the cultural dimension of kidnapping, whereby some communities use it as a cultural practice (e.g. bride capture).

Kidnapping has grown over the years as an industry involving every level of the society and motivated by many reasons. However, studies on it has been relatively a recent phenomenon, with much of the literature coming from Asian, American and European continents. Throughout the review, no single literature comes from the African contexts, yet there are series of media reports of daily incidence of kidnapping in most African countries. One country where kidnapping has become a daily event of recent is Nigeria and particularly the Niger Delta. Nigeria's Niger Delta is rich in petroleum oil and have been explored by multinational corporations and the Federal Government of Nigeria amid high incidence of poverty, absence of infrastructures and deprivations of the locals and oil communities. Various forms of crime, including kidnapping have emerged as a consequence. Despite this, there is

no systematic investigation of this phenomenon. The goal of this study is to explore the social problem of kidnapping in its various forms as a prelude to a more empirical study. The paper uses documented reports from newspapers and electronic media as well as the general accounts of kidnapping incidence by witnesses. The paper is divided into segments. Immediately following the introductory segment comes a discussion on the study area. The third segment examines the general background to kidnapping in the Niger Delta. The fourth segment attempt to explore the various forms and motivation for kidnapping in the region. The fifth segment looks at the general implication for development. This is followed by concluding remarks.

THE NIGER DELTA REGION

General Location and Physical Background

The area referred to as the Niger Delta region was limited to the geo-political zone occupied mainly by the minorities of southern Nigeria, which currently comprises the six states of Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo and Rivers. In recent years, the region was politically redefined and enlarged to include all the nine contiguous oil-producing states, which incorporates new states such as Abia, Imo and Ondo. Currently, the Niger Delta forms the largest group amongst the ethnic minorities spread over the south-south geographical zone of Nigeria (Fig. 1).

It has a population of over 45 million people distributed in over 1600 communities.

The Niger Delta has some unique characteristics, which tend to make development difficult. It is, for instance, one of the largest wetlands in the world. It covers an area of 70,000 square kilometres and is noted for its sandy coastal ridge barriers, brackish or saline mangroves, freshwater, permanent and seasonal swamp forests as well as lowland rainforest. The whole area is traversed and crisscrossed by a large number of rivers, rivulets, streams, canals and creeks. The coastal line is buffeted throughout the year by the tides of the Atlantic ocean while the mainland is subjected to regimes of flood by the various rivers, particularly the river Niger. By this, the Niger Delta region is the second largest delta in the world and the largest wetlands in Africa. The delta is home to an extraordinary variety of people, mostly fishers and farmers with a proud history and

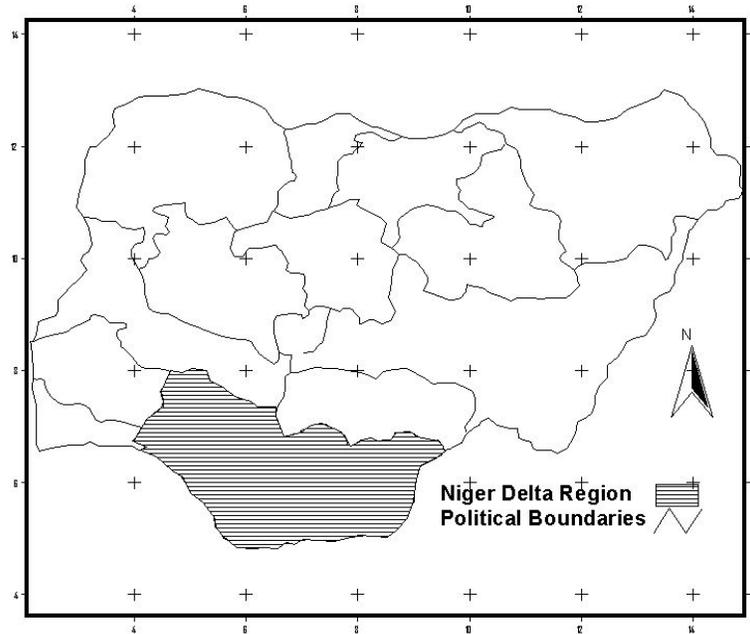


Fig. 1. Map of Nigeria showing the Niger Delta

cultural heritage. The Niger Delta is also the main centre of oil production activity and therefore the centre of Nigeria's economy, accounting for more than 90 percent of Nigeria's foreign exchange earnings and more than 80 percent of government revenue (CBN 1981). The major oil companies operating in the Niger Delta are as summarised in table 1.

Petroleum was discovered by Shell-BP in 1956, following half a century of exploration. Oil production became important in the 1960s, but the Biafra conflict and the civil war between 1967 and 1970 delayed further expansion. The main reservoirs are located in and around the Niger Delta, in both on-shore mangroves and shallow off-shore basins, and since 1990 exploration has increasingly moved to deep, offshore areas. Unclear boundary demarcations in the Niger Delta have caused disputes relating to several strategic areas. Wunder (2003) observed that Cameroon and Nigeria both claim zones on and off the Bakassi Peninsula and ownership of the Zafiro oil field is disputed with Equatorial Guinea. Shell continues to be the most important company, but it has been joined by a series of other multinationals over the years. Despite being the richest geopolitical region in terms of natural

resource endowment, Akpan and Akpabio (2003) observed that the Niger Delta's potential for sustainable development remains unfulfilled, and is now threatened by environmental devastation and worsening economic conditions.

General Background to Kidnapping in the Niger Delta

The root and rise in kidnapping in Nigeria's Niger Delta can be traced to what Townsend (2008) referred to as "natural resource nationalism"-the tendency to seek bigger shares of the returns from natural resources. It is also compounded by what Omeje (No Date) termed "accumulation politics"-the tendency for the ruling class to be involved in endless accumulation of natural resource rents accruing from the region through deliberate act of marginalisation and deprivation.

The Niger Delta "question" or "unsolved problem" of today is a heritage of Nigeria's structural flaws which is fundamentally constitutional and political. Onduku (2001) classified these flaws into two categories. The first has to do with the division of the country into three unequal regions, with the population of the size of the northern region alone exceeding that of the two southern

Table 1: Players in Nigeria's oil industry

<i>Consortium</i>	<i>Shareholders</i>	<i>Joint venture operator</i>	<i>Production barrels/day (2003 estimates)</i>	<i>Production (%)</i>
Shell Petroleum Development Company of Nigeria Ltd.	NNPC (Nigeria, 55%) Shell (Dutch/British, 30%) Elf (France, 10%) Agip (Italy, 5%)	Shell	950 000	42.20%
Mobil Producing Nigeria Ltd.	NNPC (Nigeria, 58%) Mobil (USA, 42%)	Mobil	500 000	21.20%
Chevron Nigeria Ltd.	NNPC (Nigeria, 58%) Chevron (USA, 42%)	Chevron	485 000	18.60%
Nigeria Agip Oil Company	NNPC (Nigeria, 60%) Agip (Italy, 20%) Philips (USA, 20%)	Agip	150 000	7.50%
Elf Petroleum Ltd.	NNPC (Nigeria, 60%) Elf (France, 40%)	Elf	145 000	6.10%
Texaco Overseas (Nigeria) Petroleum Company	NNPC (Nigeria, 60%) Texaco (Nigeria, 20%) Chevron (USA, 20%)	Texaco	55 000	2.70%
Other producers	Ashland (USA) Deminox (Germany) Pan Ocean (Switzerland) British Gas (British) Sun Oil (USA) Conoco (USA) BP (British) Statoil (Norway) Conoil (Nigeria) Dubri Oil (Nigeria)	Various	35 000	1.70%
Total			2320 000	100.00%

regions put together. The second flaw involves the political and demographic domination of the northern, western, and eastern regions, being the majority ethnic nationalities and the attendant marginalisation of the minority ethnic nationalities that comprise approximately one third of the population of each region. The Niger Delta is one of such minority groups and its position becomes so important given that Nigeria's economy depends on petroleum resources, which is drilled in the region.

Despite being a minority ethnic group, the Niger Delta has a long history of organisational and social mobilisation capability and this predated the emergence of oil resources as economic revenue as well as Nigeria's emergence as a British colony. For instance, Britain's Niger Delta protectorate and the Niger Delta coast protectorate were already well established by the mid -1980s before further British interests led to the formation of southern Nigeria in 1900. In the decades before Second World War, many Niger Delta communities had their own local leaders who distinguished themselves in the

service of their people while serving the British. It was only as a result of the Authur Richards' reforms of 1946 that regional representation became important in British colonial arrangements. It could be argued that the peoples' experiences with the British leadership system and policies helped to shape and strengthen the mechanism that led to the emergence of leaders they could count as representatives. The emerging leaders were very good representatives of the Niger Delta people especially in the late 1940s ([www.waado.org/NigerDelta/Essays/Resource control/Onduku.html](http://www.waado.org/NigerDelta/Essays/Resource%20control/Onduku.html)). A test of such effective representational leadership was manifested when the agitation by the Ijaw Rivers People's League led to the creation of the Rivers Province in 1947. This paved way for the emergence of the Niger Delta Congress founded by Harold Dappa Biriye. The purpose of such a group was to fight for equality for the disadvantaged people of the region. The group later emerged as a platform that serve to internationalise the Niger Delta cause as their leaders made it a point of duty to mount vigorous

campaigns against marginalisation and deprivation of their people at various international forums, including the London Conference of the Minorities in 1958.

The mounting campaign generated by the representative leaders of the Niger Delta cause paid well in raising the consciousness of the people leading to the demand for resource control and developmental attention. At Nigeria's independence in 1960, the situation had gotten to a crisis point when Isaac Adaka Boro, a radical nationalist and an Ijaw born revolutionary championed a revolt against the government of Nigeria. On February 23 1966, he landed at Tontoubau, a sacred forest in Kaiama town in the present Bayelsa State in the riverine areas of the Niger Delta with one hundred and fifty-nine comrades to launch a guerrilla war against the then Federal Military Government. Following his proclamation of the region as an independent entity (the Niger Delta Peoples Republic) with himself as the Head of State, a battle ensued with the Nigerian Police which he defeated them. The Federal Military Government then deployed the Armed Forces against Boro and his men and they were able to hold up the federal troops for quite a while before he was defeated on the 12th day. This rebellion has come to be known in the political history of Nigeria today as the "Twelve-day Revolution". By all calculations, it has always been argued that the marginalization of the peoples in the Niger Delta, the despoliation of their environments and the resultant conflicts have their roots in the discovery of oil as well as its exploration and production activities by the oil multinationals in the late 1950s (Akpan and Akpabio 2003; Onduku 2001). The government of Nigeria has been compounding these problems through deliberate acts of oppressive policies (e.g., the controversial land use Act of 1978) and persistent instances of marginalisation in development. Statutorily, ownership of oil and all mineral resources in Nigeria is vested in the federal government. All land is also, by law, state property, but this controversial law is only activated when the vested economic or political interests of the country are at stake (Omeje 2005). Government attitudes toward the region is also reflected in the general absence of developmental attention as the people continue to live in pristine conditions and in most cases without electricity, pipe borne water, hospitals, housing and schools in spite of the enormous wealth the government derives from the region.

Concerns for the development of the Niger Delta region are age-old phenomenon. The communities in the region have been protesting the injustices peacefully for decades, until recently when such protests took on a violent form. The parties in the conflict do not involve only the Federal Government and the Niger Delta people but also the oil multinationals. In summary, the grievances of the people have involved three closely interrelated but analytically distinct issues. Firstly, that all laws relating to oil exploration and land ownership be abrogated; secondly, the issue of natural resource control and self-determination; and thirdly, that appropriate institutional and financial arrangements should be put in place by the oil producing communities for the developmental and environmental problems associated with oil exploration and exploitation (Onduku 2001). The government seems not to be taking this matter seriously given its attitudes of using military option to suppress the people's demands and protests. The locals have now opted for hostage taking, hijacking and kidnapping of expatriate oil company workers and the demand of ransom, and the repeated invasion and blockading of oil installations. It is so far estimated that over 200 foreign oil workers have been kidnapped in the region (AKBC-FM 10am News: 12th Nov, 2008). In 1993 for instance, it is claimed that the operations and activities of Shell were disrupted by about a hundred communal disturbances (Onduku 2001). The oil multinationals have also been linked to equipping the Federal military for persistent militarization of the Niger Delta to protect its investments and interests. In all, the government wants to continuously maintain the region for revenue purposes and the oil companies have refused to pack out of the region inspite of the several ultimatums given to them by the civil groups. The Niger Delta people have now become more organised in their demands for the development of the region, which has been denied them for a long time. These conflicting positions of the Federal government and the locals have set the stage for violent conflicts. Of late, kidnapping of foreign workers have become one of the key elements of such conflicts as a deliberate attempt to challenge government's hegemonic powers over their resources. This has unfortunately degenerated into various forms and dimensions besides the liberation elements. The next section explores these versions.

Versions of Kidnapping in Nigeria's Niger Delta

Kidnapping has, of recent, assume alarming dimension in the States in the Niger Delta region opening up opprotunities and avenues for dangerous degeneration. Its occurrence and impacts started to be felt this early 21st century, a phenomenon induced by oil resource exploration. There are many factors that have contributed to the emergence of kidnapping in the region. Apart from the wider liberation consciousness of the people over the years, social, economic and political reasons have come to play prominent roles for the rise in the industry of recent. These factors are explored under separate headings as follows:

a. Kidnapping as a General Liberation Struggle

Early versions of kidnapping were believed to be part of a wider liberation call by the Movement for the Emancipation of Niger Delta (MEND) for the development of the State. It was then an activity with no monetary attachment as the key motivation factor and in most cases part of the outcome of a confrontation between MEND and oil interests or the Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN). The key grievances oftentimes advanced by MEND for such confrontations involved three closely interrelated but analytically distinct issues namely: 1.) that all laws relating to oil exploration and land ownership be abrogated to give the locals more empowerment to have control of their resources; 2.) that the issue of natural resource control and self determination be recognized and operationalised as cardinal principles for the protection of their minority status; 3.) that appropriate institutional and financial arrangements be put in place for the development as well as addressing the numerous environmental problems associated with oil exploration and exploitation in oil producing communities in the Niger Delta. The refusal or inability of the FGN to respond to these demands have been at the core of MEND's liberation struggle. This struggles have historical roots in Isaac Adaka Boro and Ken Saro Wiwa's earlier concerns and struggles for resource control and environmental justice. Apart from the "Twelve-day Revolution" that was led by Isaac Boro, against the FGN in 1966, its is popularly believed that the execution of Ken Saro Wiwa by the FGN

on the 10th November, 1995, has played key and fundamental role in fostering MEND's strength and determination for such liberation fights. More so, governments policies that promote economic and environmental injustices against the people of the Niger Delta have also been responsible for MEND's liberation fights. Such policies include the obnoxious and controversial land use decree and revenue allocation policies of government, which have tended to place the oil rich regions in serious developmental and environmental disadvantages (Akpan and Akpabio 2003). The nature of such struggles and fights take the following forms (Akpabio and Akpan 2009) (Table 2).

Kidnapping has come to play important role in such fights over the years. Initially, it could go without ransom (if the sources of finance is guaranteed by their sponsors) but these days, some financial demands are made before release could be effected. Such ransom seem to be useful in funding the organised groups involved. From the cases cited above, target kidnappees are foreign oil company workers, although key government officials have been targeted these days as a direct confrontation with the FGN.

b. Kidnapping for Economic Reasons

Tzanelli (2006, citing Gerth and Mills 1948: 56-7) has raised the idea that kidnapping is regulated by the laws of demand and supply and is a type of social action that involves the calculation of the most efficient means to the desired ends. Kidnapping is a social enterprise and according to The Nation (10 May ,2002), "kidnappers are businessmen, they just happen to be on the illegal side of it.....if you deprive them of the demand then there is not going to be any supply. Why would I kidnap somebody who will not pay? (The Nation, 10 May 2002, cited in Tzanelli 2006).

As kidnapping was first used as a weapon to fight for economic and environmental justice in the Niger Delta, the economic motivation was intermittently used as a means to fund and sustain the fight. The beginning of 2007 saw the emergence of various other deviant groups by various names who hide under liberation struggle to commit economic crimes. It takes few persons to organise somebody's kidnap. In this case the victim would be snatched and taken to a safe location. Such operation is always well- planned and well- executed. The family of the victim is

Table 2: Selected Cases of Niger Delta Liberation Fights

<i>Year</i>	<i>Cases</i>
2003	Troops are sent to the oilfields amid clashes between rival Ijaw and Itsekiri groups. Around 30 people die. In April, militants seize four Niger Delta oil rigs, taking some 270 people hostage, 97 of them foreigners. After negotiations, the hostages are released.
2004	Five Nigerians and two Americans working for Chevron Texaco are killed by pirates in the Niger Delta. Fighting between groups seeking to control the oilfields leaves some 500 people dead in Port Harcourt and surrounding regions, according to Amnesty International. In October, the groups reach a ceasefire agreement.
2005	Six oil workers including two Germans are kidnapped, then freed three days later.
2006	January: Separatist gunmen kidnap four foreign oil workers and blow up a pipeline feeding an export terminal. Five days later, gunmen shoot dead several troops and attack a Shell oil plant. The four foreigners-an American, a Briton, a Bulgarian and a Hungarian-are freed at the end of the month, but the group threatened to take further hostages. February: An armoured government helicopter is brought in to fire on barges being used to smuggle oil near a separatist militant base. Militants strike back later, firing on the aircraft. Separatists kidnap nine foreigners-three Americans, one Briton, two Egyptians, two Thais and a Filipino-working for a Shell subcontractor. The attack forces Shell to suspend exports from a major terminal. Six of the hostages are freed after a week, but the other three are held until late in March. April: The US firm Exxon Mobil briefly evacuates non-essential staff from its Nigerian oil installations due to fear of an attack by militants. At the end of the month, separatists militants used a car bomb to attack oil tanker trucks, and warn China not to invest in the Nigerian oil industry. May: Nine officials for the Italian. Petrol company Eni SpA were killed when armed members of MEND attacked Eni SpA's security forces in Port Harcourt. MEND militants briefly occupied and robbed a bank near the Eni SpA base, leaving at about 3:30 p.m, about an hour after they showed up. A company official stated, "Eni has temporarily evacuated staff and contractors from the area of the base affected by the incident and the situation is currently under control." May: Three foreign oil workers, one an Italian, are seized but released after a day. A Nigerian court orders Shell to pay 1.5 billion dollars in compensation to the Ijaw people of the Niger Delta for environmental damage, but the company says it is appealing the ruling. May 10: an executive with the United States-based oil company, Baker Hughes, was shot and killed in the southeastern city of Port Harcourt. At the time of the shooting, it was not immediately known if MEND had any involvement or not. Witnesses say the attacker appeared to be specifically targeting the American executive. June 2: Militants abduct six Britons, an American and a Canadian from a Norwegian-run drilling rig off the coast of Bayelsa state. June 20: Two Filipinos, workers of PGF Explorations Limited, an oil servicing contract company to Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC), were on Tuesday kidnapped by unknown gunmen at P. W. J Jetty in Rumuolumeni area of Port Harcourt. August 20: Ten members of the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) were killed by the Nigerian military. The members were working on releasing a Royal Dutch Shell hostage. October, 2: Ten Nigerian soldiers were killed off the shore of the Niger Delta in their patrol boat by a MEND mortar shell. Earlier that day a Nigerian/Royal Dutch Shell convoy was attacked on in the Port Harcourt region resulting to some wounded. November, 20: Two former militants killed in a raid by an unidentified armed group at the premises of a non-governmental organisation AAPW (Academic Associates Peace Works) in Port Harcourt. November, 27: A British oil worker, kidnapped with 6 others from a Saipem oil rig, was killed in crossfire when the kidnappers ran into a Navy patrol later in the day of the abduction.

Source: Akpabio and Akpan 2009

then contacted and a ransom demanded, which is subject to negotiation. In this category, there is heavy financial motivation and the victims are always from the "well-to-do" class-political class, foreign workers, men and women and people of very rich background. Akasike (2008) has documented few of such incidence as below:

1. ".....the trend of kidnapping reached a climax when they (kidnappers) stormed Ikot Abasi local government area last year (2007) and whisked away six Russians working for an aluminium company. The white men stayed with their captives in an unknown place for two weeks before they were released. The militants had asked for a N100 million ransom before they would release their victims".

2. "Again, these daredevil militants accosted a Lebanese working for a construction company in Ikot Ekpene, pulled him out of his company's Toyota Hilux vehicle and forced him into a waiting car before he was driven away to an unknown destination".

3. "The mindset of the people before this time was that only men were good for abduction in the State. That thinking dissolved into insignificance when the wife of the Senator representing Ikot Ekpene senatorial district, Mrs Comfort Etok, was kidnapped in broad daylight in Uyo".

Kidnaps of this dimension cut across boundaries but the common denomination is immediate and lucrative pay-off. This explains

why they opt for the rich. One common factor that supports this form of kidnapping is the rising incidence of endemic poverty and unemployment mostly in the midst of abundant resources. Oil revenue has sustained the Nigerian economy for many decades accounting for more than 90% of Nigeria's foreign exchange earnings and more than 80% of government revenue (CBN 1981). Despite these, the inhabitants remain very poor while their source of livelihoods depend on the natural environment oftentimes devastated and degraded by oil production. Kidnapping happens to be the only industry of last resort aimed at forcefully getting a share of the region's wealth.

c. Kidnapping as a Political Tool

This case qualifies for what Turner (1998) describes as "money and politics" where there are political motivations for kidnapping but where ransoms are also demanded. Such ransoms are often used to further the political objectives of the kidnapping organisation or simply to facilitate the survival of the organisation. Recently, it is learnt that most top kidnapping operations are masterminded by government officials, opposition groups, unrewarded or uncompensated members of election rigging militant groups, among others. Kidnapping is then seen as instrument for political vendetta and settling of political scores. The operation is organised and targeted mainly at key serving politicians or foreign workers or contractors working directly for government. Once the victim is kidnapped, a high level negotiation is expected which will ultimately lead to a very heavy ransom. Such a ransom is used to further political goals, self-settling of aggrieved groups or a way of financially crippling a serving politician. The most notable kidnapping gangs in the Niger Delta today are "used and dumped" political thugs. Most of them were used during election and dumped at swearing-in still armed and without any compensation. On the strength of the sophisticated weapons at their disposal the members regroup themselves and target their political mentors or enemies. They specialise in high profile kidnapping that even surpasses the capabilities of the State security agents. Kidnappers targeting foreign workers can assume various denominations, namely, a.) members of the opposition groups; b.) youth militants who have been used and dumped; c.) a group of ambitious and serving politicians who

coordinate such activity as desperate way of extracting money from the State. Aiming at foreign workers easily attract the attention and willingness of government to negotiate for immediate and lucrative pay-off.

d. Kidnapping as a New Habit of Crime

The political importance of kidnapping activity has had a spill-over influence on the jobless youths and criminals who take it as a new substitute or complement to robbery and pick-pocketing. Such a group of kidnappers target not only prominent and well-off individuals but also ordinary citizens who possess little wealth. The common target include every perceived person with prospects of high and lucrative ransom including teenagers, children and adults alike. For instance, in mid-2008, a teenage daughter of a popular Pastor was kidnapped and a ransom sought from the parents before her release. Robbers and other criminal groups have taken advantage of this as a new way of making a living or sustaining their living standard. The general feeling of the people now is not whether it will happen but when, where and who the next target would be.

DEVELOPMENTAL IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUDING REMARKS

Incidence of kidnapping in the Niger Delta have posed many implications on the economy and the general developmental efforts of the region in particular and the Nigerian nation in general. As most kidnappings involve foreign workers and development partners, the effect on the economy is very enormous as it scares away potential development partners and robs the state of the benefit of such development alliances and opportunities. With a rise in daily cases of kidnapping, it is very clear that available and potential investors are scared of doing businesses in the region. At the moment foreign and home investors to the region have reduced significantly; oil company workers and other business men and women have fled the region; most oil company and allied operations have been shut while the volume of investments and capital flows to the region have reduced drastically. Who would be the next target of the kidnappers is at the root of every investor and business conscious individual. No other area is so affected by the

impact of kidnapping than the oil and gas sector. Incidentally, this is an area that controls the Nigerian economy through foreign exchange earning, revenue generation and allied services. The impact is particularly so noticeable that the Director of the Department for Petroleum Resources (DPR), Mr. Tony Chukwueke admitted when he said:

“we are experiencing one of the most difficult periods in the history of Nigeria’s oil and gas industry. As I am talking to you, Nigeria is losing over 800,000 bpd. So this is a trying period for the federal government despite its drive to ensure that sanity reigns in the sector. So, the entire western operation of the SPDC had been shut” (Quoted from Guardian Newspaper, June 12, 2006).

What is sad about this is the inability of the State security agents to combat this crime because they are very ill equipped. The spread of kidnapping as a business itself has to do with long period of governmental neglects of the region, causing its people to aggressively adopt militant confrontation in a bid to force government attention to the plight of the region. At the moment, various levels of governments have stepped up developmental attention in the region in a bid to curb the rising incidence of the crime. However, the problem lies in how politically committed is the Federal Government of Nigeria on these developmental interest. The paper believes that the Niger Delta problem deserves serious governmental attention. The current efforts of government is welcome, but such efforts will not be successful without genuine stakeholder participation and involvements. “Elitist” governance should make room for the inclusion of all layers of stakeholders. In evolving developmental plans for the region, efforts should be made to check the rising cases of benefit capture, whereby the real trickle down development benefits are captured by vested interest and elites while the people are left out. Available development agencies for the region should be strictly monitored to stem the rising case of corruption that have always been the hallmark of such agencies, e.g., the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC). Doing these will help to build the capacities of every stakeholders as well as engaging them in meaningful developmental activities.

In conclusion, it is observed that while the Niger Delta region remains the engine of Nigeria’s economy, it however suffers infrastructural and ecological neglects. Its “minority status” has

systematically marginalised and disabled its influence in the overall national politics which is characterised by ethnic domination. Oil wealth in Nigeria has become synonymous with poverty in the producing regions. These are fundamental issues that have engendered all forms of social disorders.

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