

Approaches to Counter-Terrorism: Lessons from Nigeria's Niger-Delta Militancy

Dr. Isaac Terungwa Terwase, Dr. Abubakar Mohammed Sambo, Mailabari Bitrus Nuhu, Bartholomew Terwase Anyam, Lummo Bala Kachalla, Safwan Mikaila Sani & Jude Onyekachi Onwuanibe

Abstract

The military era witnessed several attacks from Nigeria's Niger-Delta militants, especially during General Sani Abacha's regime to General Abdulsalami Abubakar's led military government. The country suffered several attacks from the Niger-Delta region which comprises the oil-producing states from the said region. These attacks continued even during the return to civilian administration from the military-led government in May 1999. The country lost a lot of resources during the said period and there were attacks on foreign experts working with oil companies. Some foreign experts were kidnapped by the Niger-Delta militants. These militants destroyed oil facilities as well as government properties. The region was notorious for hostility, violence and use of arms. This research work made use of interviews as part of the qualitative design for collecting data. The findings from this work opined that the then government led by President Yar'Adua introduced an amnesty program that led to surrender of arms by the militants and it restored peace and security sustainability in the said region. After the amnesty program, the ex-militants were sent on studies to acquire knowledge through school. This research work implies that it can help if adopted in resolving conflict with terrorists in other affected countries.

Keywords: Niger-Delta, Militants, Nigeria, Terrorism and Counter-terrorism.

Introduction

Conflict in any form if not carefully handled or resolved, destabilizes socioeconomic and political activities in the world. It may lead to killings and destruction of properties. Many countries in the past and present that witnessed conflicts especially which emanated from socioeconomic and political points of view include countries such as Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq, Yemen, Syria, Egypt, Tunisia and Libya. Such conflicts resulted in the killing of both citizens and foreigners residing in those countries at that given time. In all, massive destruction of properties owned by individuals and the government was noted and victims were also traumatized.¹

Countries that witnessed terrorism activities bore the pains as a result of killing of their citizens and destruction of properties. Terrorism comes with different challenges and the need for counter-terrorism measures becomes necessary to resolve those issues that lead to the conflict. Sometimes groups fight against the government or the given authority, hence focus of this paper is on Nigeria where the country has witnessed activities of the Boko Haram terrorist group in the Northern part since 2009 to date. Their activities led to killings and massive destruction of properties owned by the government, security agencies and individuals as well as properties belonging to religious groups such as attacks on churches and mosques during worship hours.

¹Terwase, I. T., Abdul-Talib, A. N., & Zengeni, K. T. (2015). Conflict resolution: The truncated zoning arrangement and the Buhari political tsunami in Nigeria. *Jurnal Studi Pemerintahan*, 6(2), 248-259

Boko Haram has killed more than 10,000 people since it started its activities in 2009 to date in Nigeria.^{2,3}

Nigeria was known for peaceful co-existence before July 2009 when Boko Haram terrorist group started attacking the country by way of burning government institutions such as Nigeria Police Force Headquarters in Abuja, the United Nations Building in Abuja and many other structures especially places of worship. Such attacks created many challenges such as the Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) camps and refugees' camps in Cameroon, Niger and the Republic of Chad⁴. The Country equally witnessed issues such as kidnapping of schoolgirls from different secondary schools in different States of Borno and Yobe.

In some cases, the parents of victims were found to be traumatized as Boko Haram claimed responsibility for kidnapping of their children from school in Chibok and apchi^{5,6}.

More so, before the arrival of Boko Haram terrorism in Nigeria, there were militant groups in the Niger-Delta region of Nigeria whose fight against the government and the oil companies was a result of the need for critical

²Awojobi, O. N. (2014). The socio-economic implications of Boko Haram insurgency in the north-east of Nigeria. *International Journal of Innovation and Scientific Research*, 11(1), 144-150

³ Onuoha, F. C. (2010). The Islamist challenge: Nigeria's Boko Haram crisis explained. *African security review*, 19(2), 54-67

⁴Terwase, I. T., Yusuf, M., Mohammed, A. S., & Sani, S. M. (2022). The Impact of Terrorism on Trade in Nigeria and Chad. In *Multidisciplinary Perspectives on Cross-Border Trade and Business* (pp. 76-91).

⁵Maiangwa, B., & Agbibo, D. (2014). Why Boko Haram kidnaps women and young girls in north-eastern Nigeria. *Conflict Trends*, 2014(3), 51-56

⁶Nwammuo, A., & Salawu, A. (2018). Are social media platforms not effective? Analysis of social movements for the release of Nigerian schoolgirl Leah Sharibu abducted by Boko-Haram. *African Journal of Peace and Conflict Studies*, 7(2), 95-119

attention which they sought to be given to them in the said region. The region was practically known for violence against the government to address socioeconomic injustice against the Niger-Delta group where crude oil exploration was taking place, yet bedevilled with environmental pollution relating to oil spillage, lack of infrastructural development, lack of job opportunities for the youths, as well as poverty in the region. These issues mentioned led the youths to take up arms against the government and the oil companies.

However, the Niger-Delta militancy against the Nigerian State was resolved in 2009 by President Yar'Adua-led government where the militants were granted Amnesty and they dropped their weapons against the government.

The Amnesty program is an unconditional pardon to all persons who have directly or indirectly participated in the commission of offences associated with militant activities in the Niger Delta. The amnesty program for the Niger Delta was derived from the recommendations of the Presidential Panel on Amnesty and Disarmament of Militants in the Niger Delta. The amnesty program proclamation did not compel any of the militants to accept the offer of amnesty. The government signed a contract with only those who voluntarily accepted the offer.

Thus, this paper tends to examine the issues that led to militancy in the Niger Delta and its implications and explore the mechanisms for resolving the conflict between the militant groups and the Federal Government of Nigeria. The processes and mechanisms of resolving the conflict become a lesson from the Niger-Delta militancy which can serve as an approach to counter-terrorism in the Northern part of Nigeria and indeed any other part of the world where terrorism is striving.

Research Method

This research work made use of qualitative research design through the conduct of interviews. Several scholars were interviewed alongside some individuals from the Niger-Delta region of Nigeria to give an overview of what happened in the said region. The work also interviewed some Northerners on lessons from the Niger Delta and the application of its mechanism to the Northern part of Nigeria in resolving the Boko Haram terrorism in the country. For conducting this study, fifteen (15) respondents were interviewed.

The Issues in the Niger-Delta

Here, the paper made use of purposeful sampling in discussing and analyzing those issues that led the youths in the Niger-Delta region of Nigeria to the carrying of arms against the Government of Nigeria and the multinational oil companies such as Shell, Total etc. operating in the said region.

Oil Spillage

One of the major issues that bedevilled the peaceful co-existence in the Niger Delta region was the issue of oil spillage which serves as environmental pollution. The land became polluted with oil that spilled either as a result of crude oil mining or pipes that were broken. Over the years, oil spillage became a great issue in the Niger-Delta region since it affected the land directly by way of destroying farmlands as well as fish in the rivers. It became difficult to produce food on such lands and that affected agricultural production in the region.

Most farmers complained of environmental pollution as a factor that affects them in producing food for subsistence and commercial purposes in the Niger-Delta region. In places where oil has destroyed the land, farmers tend to suffer looking for alternative environments where they could get lands to farm on. All these became sources of conflict in the Niger-Delta region. The youth was provoked as a result of the oil spillage knowing very well that their parents cannot go to the farm to cultivate their farmlands again and that resulted in the carrying of arms against the oil companies and the Federal Government of Nigeria. Kadafa opined that some of the causes of oil spillage in the Niger-Delta region could be as a result of vandalism, oil blowouts from pipelines as well as accidents or deliberate acts by handlers⁷.

The work identifies two major areas of oil spillage in their work which include Ogali and Agbonchia in Rivers State which is part of the oil-producing state in the Niger-Delta region⁸.

Akpomuvie & Orhioghene argued that oil spillage is the most predominant and pervasive cause of environmental degradation in the Niger-Delta region of Nigeria⁹. This is a result of oil exploration and exploitation from the said region which has negative effects on the soil and thus, affects agricultural production. Ahmadu & Egbodion explain how oil spillage destroys cassava production in the said region. Thus, a lot of works have been examined on oil spillage in the Niger-Delta region of Nigeria where it has caused so much

⁷Kadafa, A. A. (2012). Oil exploration and spillage in the Niger Delta of Nigeria. *Civil and Environmental Research*, 2(3), 38-51

⁸Abii, T. A., & Nwosu, P. C. (2009). The effect of oil spillage on the soil of Eleme in Rivers State of the Niger-Delta area of Nigeria. *Research journal of environmental sciences*, 3(3), 316-320

⁹Akpomuvie, O. B., & Orhioghene, B. (2011). The tragedy of commons: Analysis of oil spillage, gas flaring and sustainable development of the Niger Delta of Nigeria. *Journal of Sustainable Development*, 4(2), 200-210

damage to the land and has affected the livelihoods of the people in the Niger-Delta region¹⁰.

The damages caused as a result of the oil spillage, therefore, form sources of conflict in the region. A respondent opined that:

“We have suffered for so many years in the Niger-Delta region as a result of oil spillage. In some cases, it is as a result of oil exploration by the oil companies and in other cases, it could also be as a result of vandalism of oil pipelines. In such cases, it affects us directly since some of us are farmers. So, when we have such cases, it equally affects the peace in the land. People become angry with the oil companies. We both need peace and we do not want conflict. In conflict situations, people are involved and that could affect their livelihood too. No nation would deliberately want conflict either within or with other nations because it may affect both lives and properties.”

In another response by another respondent, the issue of oil spillage is a big deal that needs serious attention. Thus, the respondent connotes that:

“Oil spillage anywhere in the world hurts the environment and that may affect even the animals in such environment. In places where we have rivers and streams or even lakes, oil spillage can affect the fish in such bodies of water. The effect of such damages may result in a situation where farmers may lose their fish businesses when oil spillages may affect the rivers thereby killing the fishes in the said rivers or lakes as the case may be. All these have negative effects on the land, the people and their businesses.”

¹⁰Ahmadu, J., & Egbodion, J. (2013). Effect of oil spillage on cassava production in Niger Delta region of Nigeria. *American Journal of Experimental Agriculture*, 3(4), 914

Previous research argues that with an extensive network of over 900 producing oil wells in the Niger Delta, oil spillage and gas flow have become a burning issue in the Niger Delta since the spillage causes environmental pollution¹¹. Many scholars who opined the same view, equally examine the consequences on the land, the body of water, the people and their properties.

Lack of Infrastructural Development

Social amenities are as crucial as drinking water for human survival in any city and any given country at large. Inadequate power & water supply and lack of good roads, hospitals & schools are the major focus of infrastructural facilities to be discussed.

The work of Ebiwolate views that lack of physical infrastructure in the rural areas of the Niger-Delta region is part of the issue that contributes to the underdevelopment of the said region. The public libraries in the rural areas in the Niger Delta are not well equipped, thus, they lack Information and Communication Technology (ICT) which could sustain part of the educational facilities in the region.

Scholars suggest that lack of good roads compounds much pressure on land^{12,13}. Because of this, so many people travel on bad roads in the rural areas of Niger-Delta and that creates so much difficulty for the people.

¹¹ Osuji, L. C., & Onojake, C. M. (2004). Trace heavy metals associated with crude oil: A case study of Ebocha-8 Oil-spill-polluted site in Niger Delta, Nigeria. *Chemistry & biodiversity*, 1(11), 1708-1715

¹² Udie, J., Bhattacharyya, S., (2018). A conceptual framework for vulnerability assessment of gas infrastructure in the niger delta. *Climate*, 6(1)

¹³ Ozawa-Meida, L. (2018). A conceptual framework for vulnerability assessment of climate change

Akpan in his work opined that lack of good roads, safe drinking water, electricity supply, good health facilities and inadequate good schools are all factors that bedevilled security and development of the Niger-Delta region over time¹⁴. The absence of such infrastructure contributes to a state of insecurity in the Niger-Delta region where the youths were used as a tool to fight the government or the oil companies. Some of the youth become very angry with the government for not providing adequate infrastructure in the region where it produces the major source of Nigeria's revenue. Elum Mopipi & Henri-Ukoha agrees that conflict in the Niger-Delta region was supported by many issues including lack of infrastructural development and that was part of the demand by the people of Niger-Delta¹⁵. Given that, a respondent opined that:

“We have been marginalized by the Government of Nigeria since our region is the major source of revenue for the country. Our region is the oil-producing region of Nigeria, we produce oil but our region is not developed. That is why some of our youths took arms against the Federal Government of Nigeria. When you go to Abuja, the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), from General Babangida's regime to the present Government of President Buhari, the FCT is mostly built by the government using the revenue that is mostly derived from the Niger-Delta region. That is just the truth. The country largely depends on oil from the Niger Delta for development of the country. We want to see such development in the Niger Delta too where our roads would be in good

¹⁴Akpan, P. (2014). Oil exploration and security challenges in the Niger-Delta region: A case of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. IOSR Journal of Research & Method in Education (IOSRJRME), 4(2), 41-48.

¹⁵Elum, Z. A., Mopipi, K., & Henri-Ukoha, A. (2016). Oil exploitation and its socioeconomic effects on the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. Environmental Science and Pollution Research, 23(13), 12880-12889

shape, the Federal Government would provide adequate infrastructural facilities such as good hospitals, schools, adequate water supply for drinking, adequate and constant electricity supply and as well as adequate housing facilities.”

More so, Amaraegbu concurred that the conflict in the Niger-Delta region started as far back as the early 1990s when violence and insecurity spread in the region as a result of unresolved issues that worried the people such as oil spillage and lack of infrastructural development¹⁶. Other issues later became a focus such as a resource control where the people wanted to control their resources.

Unemployment

Unemployment leads to poverty and people remain poor, especially those who are educated but lack job opportunities to work and earn a decent living. Hence, poverty harms the people and society in general. Unemployment also promotes ideas of joining destructive groups. Some youths join militant and insurgent groups to fight against the government of any given country as a result of unemployment. People who are mostly employed could be busy doing something meaningful with their lives¹⁷.

The work of Terwase, argues that youths who are well trained but lack job opportunities tend to be available for use by militant and terrorist groups¹⁸.

¹⁶Amaraegbu, D. A. (2011). Violence, terrorism and security threat in Nigeria's Niger Delta: an old problem taking a new dimension. *African Journal of Political Science and International Relations*, 5(4), 208-217

¹⁷Evans, O., & Kelikume, I. (2019). The impact of poverty, unemployment, inequality, corruption, and poor governance on Niger Delta militancy, Boko Haram terrorism, and

¹⁸Terwase, J. M., Terwase, I. T., Puldu, G. S., & Abdul-Talib, A. N. (2018). Unemployment, psychological trauma, militancy, and Boko Haram conflict Nigeria. *IRA International Journal of Education and Multidisciplinary Studies*, 13(3), 27-40

It also agrees that unemployment has bedevilled development of many countries especially young people who are energized to work as a result of their training. So, when the youths are unemployed, they can become tools in the hands of terrorists and even insurgent groups against the government as seen in the Niger-Delta region and some states such as Adamawa, Borno and Yobe in the Northeastern part of Nigeria.

In Nigeria, the country has witnessed conflict not just in the Niger Delta alone but in other parts of the country, especially during President Jonathan's led government where the North and South became so divided as a result of the zoning of the Presidency between the North and the South^{19,20,21}.

Other works such as Terwase, on the other hand, argue that in an event of a conflict, those that are victims become psychologically traumatized and as such could be affected negatively²².

The Quest for Resource Control

The Nigerian state is so blessed with mineral resources in all the 36 states of the federation. That, the quest for resource control became so prominent during President Olusegun Obasanjo's led administration from 1999 to

¹⁹Terwase, I. T., Talib, A. N. A., Siben, N. E., Puldu, G. S., & Adesina, O. S. (2017). The AU/NEPAD Peace and Security Governance in Africa. *Otoritas: Jurnal Ilmu Pemerintahan*, 7(2), 93-99

²⁰Terwase, I. T., Yerima, H. M., Abdul-Talib, A. N., & Ibrahim, M. B. (2016). The issues behind agitations, conflict, and war: a case of Nigeria. *International Review of Management and Marketing*, 6(7), 17-21

²¹Terwase, I. T., Adesina, O. S., Puldu, G. S., & Abdul-Talib, A. N. (2018). The Role of ECOWAS on Peace and Conflict Resolution in Nigeria and Gambia. *IRA-International Journal of Management and Social Sciences*, 12(3), 55-61

²²Terwase, I. T., Abdul-Talib, A. N., Zengeni, K. T., & Terwase, J. M. (2015). The psychological trauma on Boko Haram victims in Nigeria: Conflict resolution perspective. *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*, 6(6 S4), 519-519

2007. The country's Niger Delta is known as the oil-producing region and it contributes a major source of revenue for the country²³. Resource control as discussed in the work of Ifeka reveals that the Niger-Delta region has issues such as environmental pollution and the quest for resource control by the people of the said region²⁴. The work further opined how the region was also bedevilled by poverty and violence. Niger-Delta youths began the struggle for resource control when many of them felt the country was benefiting immensely from oil production. Such issues as discussed above created room for violence in the region.

Lessons from Niger-Delta

The work draws on lessons from the Niger Delta where the Federal Government of Nigeria under President Yar'Adua granted Amnesty to the militants in the Niger-Delta region. These lessons would create avenues where the present government led by President Buhari can learn how to handle the Boko Haram terrorists in the Northern part of the country.

Provision of Amnesty Program

Nigeria's Niger Delta suffered many issues and challenges such as environmental pollution and degradation, lack of infrastructural development as well as inadequate human capital development in the said region. Those issues were geared toward conflict and violence in the region where the youths took up arms against the government and the oil-producing companies. Oluwaniyi argues that amnesty as a tool was used by the

²³Terwase, I. T., Abdul-Talib, A. N., & Zengeni, K. T. (2014). Nigeria, Africa's largest economy: International business perspective. *International Journal of Management Sciences*, 3(7), 534-543

²⁴Ifeka, C. (2001). Oil, NGOs & youths: Struggles for resource control in the Niger delta. *Review of African Political Economy*, Vol. 28 (87).

government led by President Yar'Adua for calling for the return of peace and security sustainability in the Niger Delta. The Amnesty Program was designed for the youth in the Niger Delta to drop their arms against the government and the oil companies and the program became successful^{25,26}. The Amnesty program returned peace in the Niger Delta where the youths dropped their arms against the Nigerian State and were gainfully engaged.

Thus, the issues of terrorism in Nigeria's Northeast can equally be resolved by borrowing a leaf from the Niger-Delta conflict where the youth took arms against the government. This paper recommends Amnesty Program be given to the terrorist in Northern Nigeria to equally drop their arms against the government to restore peace in Nigeria between the Boko Haram terrorist organization and the Federal Government of Nigeria. Oluduro & Oluduro (2012) posit that the Amnesty program was designed as a tool for resolving conflict between the youths and the government of Nigeria to achieve sustainable peace in the region²⁷. That could also be employed in Northern Nigeria where the youth who took arms could be asked to drop their arms against the government for peace to be restored in Nigeria.

²⁵Oluwaniyi, O. O. (2011). Post-amnesty program in the Niger Delta: Challenges and prospects. *Conflict Trends*, 2011(4), 46-54.

²⁶Omadjohwoefe, O. S. (2011). Amnesty initiative and the dilemma of sustainable development in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. *Journal of Sustainable Development*, 4(4), 249-258.

²⁷Oluduro, O., & Oluduro, O. F. (2012). Nigeria: In search of sustainable peace in the Niger Delta through the amnesty program. *Journal of Sustainable Development*, 5(7), 48

Arms Control

After the provision of the Amnesty program, the youth will drop their arms and that could lead to arms control in Northern Nigeria. The country needs peace and security sustainability, this is because without peace and security it is difficult to achieve meaningful development in the country. A respondent from the field opined that:

“When President Yar’Adua granted Amnesty program to the militants in the Niger-Delta region, they dropped their arms against the government and surrendered to the Federal Government. About 30,000 youth were recruited into the Amnesty program and some of them were sent abroad for training. Today, we have Pilots, Engineers, Doctors, Computer Scientists and others in various disciplines of human endeavors’ that were trained by the Federal Government as a result of the Amnesty that was granted to them for peace and security to return to the region. We truly need peace in Nigeria and no nation on earth can do better where there is a state of insecurity. So, the Amnesty program can be applied anywhere not just in Nigeria alone.”

Peace and Security Sustainability

The most effective way of triggering development in any form is where there is peace and security. Since the return of peace to the Niger-Delta region, the oil companies have been benefiting because the fear of kidnapping which was mostly carried out by the youths in the region has stopped. The country is equally doing more production of both oil and gas in the said region. This work employs the Nigerian Government to equally apply the measures to Boko Haram terrorist group in the Northern part of the country for peace to return to that part of the country.

Scholars concurred that 30,000 youths were granted Amnesty by the Federal Government of Nigeria and that is a great number having militants of such magnitude to surrender to the government for peace to reign in the country²⁸. Terwase, argue that African countries and not just Nigeria alone need peace and security sustainability for development to take place²⁹.

Conclusion

The Nigerian State has witnessed Niger-Delta militancy and their operations affected the oil exploration in the region especially when they became violent, subsequently, the Federal Government of Nigeria led by President Yar'Adua offered them Amnesty and that helped to resolve the conflict in the Niger-Delta. This paper has drawn lessons from the resolution of the said conflict and has, therefore, recommended that the present Government should give a chance to Boko Haram by way of offering them an Amnesty program where they can drop their weapons against the Nigerian State. The conflict started in 2009 and to date, the conflict is still ongoing and many people have lost their lives as a result in Nigeria. The country has lost so many soldiers on the battlefields on so many occasions even as they have equally killed so many Boko Haram members. Thus, this paper tends to examine the issues that led to militancy in the Niger Delta and its implications and explore the mechanisms for resolving the conflict between the militant groups and the Federal Government of Nigeria. The processes and mechanisms of resolving the conflict become a lesson from the Niger-Delta militancy which can serve as an approach to counter-terrorism in the

²⁸Aghedo, I. (2015). Sowing peace, reaping violence: Understanding the resurgence of kidnapping in post-amnesty Niger Delta, Nigeria. *Insight on Africa*, 7(2), 137-153

²⁹Terwase, I. T., Talib, A. N. A., Siben, N. E., Puldu, G. S., & Adesina, O. S. (2017). The AU/NEPAD Peace and Security Governance in Africa. *Otoritas: Jurnal Ilmu Pemerintahan*, 7(2), 93-99

Northern part of Nigeria and indeed any other part of the world where terrorism is thriving.

***Dr. Isaac Terungwa Terwase** is a graduate of University Utara Malaysia where he obtained a Doctor of Philosophy Degree in Political Science. He is currently lecturing in the Department of Political Science, Federal University of Kashere, Gombe State, Nigeria. Dr. Isaac Terwase specialized in Peace and Conflict Studies, as well as International Relations. He can be reached at isaacterwase@gmail.com*

***Dr. Abubakar Mohammed Sambo** holds a Doctor of Philosophy Degree from the University Utara Malaysia. He was the Pioneer Head, Department of Political Science, Federal University of Kashere, Gombe State, Nigeria. Dr. Abubakar Sambo is currently lecturing in the same prestigious Department of Political Science, Federal University of Kashere, Nigeria. Dr. Sambo is a specialist in International Relations, International Law, Peace and Conflict Resolution as well as Regional Governance such as ECOWAS.*

***Mailabari Bitrus Nuhu** is a Ph.D. Candidate at the Nigerian Defence Academy, Kaduna, Nigeria and presently working with the Federal University of Kashere where he is teaching and researching in the Department of Political Science.*

***Bartholomew Terwase Anyam** is working with the Federal University of Kashere and he is on postgraduate studies at the Benue State University, Makurdi, Nigeria.*

***Lummo Bala Kachalla** is currently lecturing in the Department of Political Science, Federal University of Kashere, Nigeria.*

Safwan Mikaila Sani is a graduate of University of Jos, Nigeria. Safwan Sani is currently teaching and researching in the Department of Political Science, Federal University of Kashere, Nigeria.

Jude Onyekachi Onwuanibe is currently on his Ph.D. Program at the Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Nigeria. He is also lecturing in the Department of Political Science, Federal University of Kashere, Nigeria.

