



## KIDNAPPING AND HOSTAGE TAKING: THE IMPLICATIONS IN NIGER DELTA REGION

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### Abstract

*The recent surge in kidnapping has seen prominent members of society becoming victims of abductions, it appears that armed robbers, fraudsters and small-time crooks have since dumped their different trades and moved on to the more lucrative business of kidnapping. Evidently, the targets were foreign oil companies' expatriates' who were taken by oil rebels' usually on attacks in the energy-rich Niger Delta region. The criminal gangs are becoming ever more interested in snatching wealthy locals. The paper examines the origin of kidnapping and hostage taking as it poses serious menace towards the socio-economic development in Niger Delta. It suggests that sustainable development from government agencies, job creation, national security framework and peaceful resolution seems to be possible way of addressing this ugly trend.*

### Introduction

Kidnapping is a repulsive trend that attracts legal frown in every human society, it involves taking away of a person against his/her will, to hold the person in force imprisonment for ransom or in furtherance of another crime. The ancient Hebrew law speaks vehemently against kidnapping in manner: that "anyone who kidnaps or either sells one another, or still has him when he is caught must be put to death" (Exodus, 21:16). As such, the plague was the earliest ancient English kidnapping law under which kidnapping was punishable by death. Kidnapping and hostage-taking can also be traced to the 17<sup>th</sup> century when persons were abducted and taken away by ship to the North American colonies to work as slaves in plantations. This phenomenon is captioned widely in the newspapers, some tempt to trace the escalating rate of this and similar crimes especially in the last five years or thereabout to the problems in Niger Delta region, where the citizen are agitating for a better social service development in the rich oil region. The report from media indicates that militant groups saw this opportunity as a way to track down foreign oil explorers for government to carry their interest at heart. The argument remains that kidnapping is a protest to address oil companies on spillage and degradation which leads to volatile action. The October 5, 2008 report indicates that 200 foreigners has been kidnapped between December 2006 and May 2008, some of them are lucky to be alive while others died on the process due to psychic trauma they pass through in their hand. The huge ransom paid to secure the release of expatriates became bait and energizer to this militia, and a money-making venture for abductors and negotiators. This notwithstanding, ransom kidnapping and hostage taking are no longer restricted to the Niger Delta region alone. The escalated cases in Lagos, Abuja, Aba, Owerri, Kaduna and Kano have branded to terrorism phenomenon; the entire nation is now kidnappers' city. In 1999, kidnapping was not yet an alarming problem except for reported cases of ritual kidnapping especially during election periods or the myth states, whenever there was a change of currency. Nigerians in the South West always describe

how human parts are used for money-making rituals or to acquire spiritual power, or the menace of child theft; such phrases as gbomogbomo, ajaale or link between Clifford Orji and the sale of human parts have been part of the local discourse. The ritual kidnapping is linked to metaphysics; ransom kidnapping is more about cash. In 2003, the increase agitation in Niger Delta by militant groups in the region began to kidnap oil company workers to press home their demands on a re-negotiation to their stake on oil. Gradually, this degenerated into large-scale criminal activities involving hostage-taking and ransom-collection.

Although the motive of kidnapping and hostage-taking has criminal and political undertones, Yang *et al* (2007) states that cultural practice like bride capture as another interest, in any case, kidnapping is a recent event in Nigeria particularly in the oil regions and South-east zones. These regions rich in oil resources have been exploited by multi-national corporations and Nigerian government leaving them with abject poverty. It is against this backdrop that the paper assess the controversies surrounding kidnapping and hostage taking in Niger Delta region.

### Clarification of Concepts

Kidnapping as a situation when a person is forcibly seized and transport to a destination where he is held against his or her will in unlawful confinement. It is an incident when persons are lured aware and held illegally with the use of coercion. According to Blackstone

*Kidnapping is forcible abduction or stealing of a man, woman or child from their own country, and sending into another. This is unquestionably a very heinous crime, as it robs the king of his subjects, banishes a man from his country and may in its consequences be productive of the most cruel and disagreeable hardships and therefore the common law of England has punished it with fine, imprisonment and pillory (2010:995).*

Kidnapping as the unlawful confinement or removal from one place to another of any person sixteen years of age or over without the person's consent for the purpose of obtaining a ransom, holding the victim hostage, facilitate the commission of a felony after the commission of the felony for doing serious bodily harm to or terrorizing the victim. Kidnapping is the taking of a person against his/her will or from the control of a parent or guardian from one place to another under circumstances in which the person so taken does not have freedom of movement, will, or decision through violence, force, threat or intimidation. Although it is not necessary that the purpose be criminal (since all kidnapping is a criminal felony) the capture usually involves some related criminal act such as holding the person for ransom, sexual and/or sadistic abuse, or rape. It includes taking due to irresistible impulse and a parent taking and hiding a child in violation of court order. Originally it meant the stealing of children and adults as well (Wikipedia, 2011).

### Origin of Kidnapping and Hostage-taking in Niger Delta

Kidnapping and Hostage-taking in Niger Delta is captured in the work of Townsend (2008) as "natural resource nationalism" which is an avenue to seek lion share in return of natural resources. This compound accumulation politics as the tendency for ruling class to be involved in endless accumulation of natural resource rents accruing from the zone through deliberate act of marginalization and deprivation (Onieje, 2005), the Niger Delta question is a heritage of Nigeria's structural flaws which is apolitical.



The Niger Delta organization and social mobilization capability predated on the emergence of oil resource as their revenue base and as well Nigeria's emergence as British colony. For instance, the British Niger Delta protectorate and Niger Delta coast protectorate was established in mid-80s before British interests led to the formation of southern Nigeria in 1900. In the Second World War, Niger Delta regions had their local leaders who distinguished themselves in the service of their people while serving the British. The ideology of Richards' constitution of 1946 came with regional representation as important factor in our colonial arrangements. It is argued that the peoples' experiences with the system of colonial leadership strengthen the mechanism that led to the emergence of leaders as representatives. The emerging leaders are good representatives of the Niger Delta region especially in late 1940s. A case which manifested with the agitation by the Ijaw Rivers People's League led to the creation of Rivers Province in 1947 and this gave birth to Niger Delta Congress by Harold Dappa Biriye, with the motive of equity for disadvantaged people of the region. The group serves as a platform to internationalize the Niger Delta cause with vigorous campaign on marginalization, deprivation of their people at the international of minorities in 1958. The campaign generated by the representative leaders of the region paid well in raising the conscious on people leading to the demand for resource control and development attention. In 1960, the situation migrated to crises point when Isaac Adaka Boro, Ijaw born revolutionary, championed a revolt against federal government of Nigeria. In February 23 1966, Boro went to Tontoubau, a sacred forest in Kaiama town present Bayelsa State in the river line areas of the Niger Delta with one hundred and fifty-nine comrades to launch a guerrilla war against the then Federal Military Government. Following the proclamation of the region as an independent entity (Niger Delta Peoples Republic) with himself as the Head of State, a battle ensued with the Nigeria Police which Boro defeated them. The Federal Military Government deployed armed Forces against Boro and his men, they were able to hold the federal troops for quite some time before he was defeated on the twelfth day. This rebellion is known in the political history of Nigeria today as 'twelve day Revolution'. The argument has always been the marginalization of 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 multi-nationals in the late 1950s (Akpan and Akpabio, 2003; Onduku, 2011). The Federal government of Nigeria compound these problems through acts of oppressive (land use act of 1978) as instances of marginalization to national development. Statutorily, ownership of mineral resources in Nigeria is vested under federal government in the exclusive list, all land is state property, but this controversial law is activated when the economic or political interests of the country are at stake (Omeje, 2005). Government attitudes towards the region is reflected on the absence of even development as the people continue to live in pristine conditions without electricity, pipe-borne water, hospitals, houses and schools in spite of the enormous wealth the government derives from the region. Niger Delta region is an age-old phenomenon, many communities in the region have been protesting on the injustices for decades, until recently when such protests took on a volatile shape. The parties in conflict do not involve the Federal Government and the Niger Delta people alone, but oil multinationals. In summary, the grievances of the people have involved three closely interrelated but analytically distinct issues as follows:

All laws relating to oil exploration and land ownership abrogated the issue of natural resource control and self-determination and appropriate institutional and financial arrangements should be in place by the oil-producing communities for development and environment problems

associated with oil exploration and exploitation (Onduku, 2001). The government was less concern on the matter with the attitude of using military force to suppress the people's demands. The locals now opted for hostage taking, hijacking and kidnapping of expatriate oil company workers with ransom, with repeated invasion and blockading of oil installations. In 1993 for instance, it is claimed that the operations and activities of shell were disrupted by hundred communal disturbances (Onduku 2001). The oil multinationals have been linked to equip federal military for persistent militarization of the Niger Delta to protect its interests. In all government wants to maintain the region for revenue purposes and the oil companies have refused to pack out of the region inspite ultimatums given to them by the civil groups. The Niger Delta people have now become more organized in their demands for the development of the region denied them for donkey years. These conflicting positions of the Federal Government and the locals have set the centre stage for violent conflicts of kidnapping foreign oil workers as a key element of conflicts. The attempt is deliberate challenge governments use hegemonic power over their resources and this has degenerated into various forms of liberation elements.

### **The Partnership Network among Kidnapping and Hostage taking**

Kidnapping took a new dimension in oil region by opening up opportunities and avenues for dangerous degeneration. Its impact was felt in 21<sup>st</sup> century as a phenomenon induced by oil resource exploration. There are factors that contributed to the emergence of kidnapping and hostage-taking in the region.

1. **Kidnapping as a Consequence of Liberation Struggle:** Kidnapping was believed to be a clarion call by the Movement for the Emancipation of Niger Delta (MEND) for even distribution and development in the region. It has no monetary attachment but a motivating factor, which is shown in the confrontation between MEND's oil interests and the Federal Government of Nigeria. The protests advanced by the MEND involved three issues namely:
  - a. All laws relating to oil exploration and land ownership be abrogated so that the regions should have control over their resources;
  - b. The issue of natural resource control and self-determination be recognized as cardinal point for protecting the status minority group;
  - c. The appropriate financial arrangements for development and tackling of environmental problems from oil exploration in the region.

The inability of the FGN to respond to these demands has been at the core of MEND's liberation struggle. This struggle has its roots in Isaac Adaka Boro and Ken Saro Wiwa's earlier struggles for resource control and environmental justice. The execution of Ken Saro Wiwa by the federal government of Nigeria on 10<sup>th</sup> November, 1995 has a fundamental role in strengthening MEND for such liberation fights. Moreover, government's policies that promote economic and environmental injustices against the people of the Niger Delta are responsible for MEND's liberation fights.

2. **Kidnapping for Economic Reasons:** Initially, kidnapping and hostage taking go without ransom but these days, some financial remunerations are made before release could be affected. Such ransoms are useful in funding the organized groups involved. Tzanelli (2006), citing the work of Gerth and Mill (1948:56-7) asserts that kidnapping is regulated by laws of demand and supply; it is a social action that involves the

calculation of the most efficient means to the desired ends. According to (The nation, 2002), “kidnappers are businessmen; it happens that they are on illegal side of it, if you deprive them demand then there will be no supply. Why must I kidnap somebody who will not pay? (The Nation, 2002, cited in Tzanelli 2006). Kidnapping is a weapon to fight economic and environmental injustice in the Niger Delta. The economic motivation, as stated above, is used as a means of sustaining the fight. Thus 2007 witnessed the emergence of divergent groups with different names under the umbrella of liberation struggle, committing economic crimes in the process. The scenario is such that the victim is taken to a safe location, and then the family is contacted to pay a huge ransom to effect his/her release. Due to the enormous financial motivation, the victims are usually from well-to-do families, political class, foreign workers and people from rich background. Akasike (2008) emphasize thus:

*“...the trend of kidnapping reached a climax when the kidnappers storm Ikot Abasi local government area last year (2007) and whisked away six Russians working from an aluminum 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 ransoms before they would release their victims” (Akasike, 2008:49).*

The mindset of the people before this time was that only men were good for abduction in the state. This philosophy dissolved into insignificance when prominent men and women were kidnapped in broad daylight in the region. The common factor that supports this form of kidnapping is the rising wave of poverty and unemployment mostly in the midst of abundant mineral resources. While the oil revenue has sustained the Nigerian economy for decades accounting for more than 90% foreign exchange earnings and more than 80% of government revenue (CBN 1983), the inhabitants wallow in abject poverty because their source of livelihood which depends on natural environment has been devastated by oil production. Against this background, people from the said region now see kidnapping is the last resort of getting fair share on the region’s wealth.

3. **Kidnapping as a political tool:** Turner (1998) describes “money and politics” as motivations for kidnapping. The kidnappers basically demand ransoms for political objectives so as to facilitate the survival of the organization. The latest report on the issue indicates top kidnapping operations as being masterminded by government officials, opposition groups, unrewarded members of election rigging militant groups, among others. It is a tool for political bourgeois to settle their political scores. Its main target is for serving politicians, foreign workers and contractors working directly for government. When a victim is kidnapped, high-level negotiation is expected to raise heavy ransom. The notable kidnappers in the Niger Delta are “use and dump” political thugs used during elections and dumped after swearing-in ceremony without any compensation. They specialize in high profile kidnapping that surpass the capabilities of the state security agents. They normally concentrate on the foreign workers to attract the attention of the government to negotiate for lucrative pay-off.
4. **Kidnapping as a Crime:** The political importance of kidnapping has a spill-over influence on the jobless youths and criminals who depend on it as a complement to robbery and pick-pocketing. They target not only prominent and well-off individuals,



but even ordinary citizens who have little or no wealth. In mid-2008, a teenage pastor daughter was kidnapped and ransom sought from the parents before her release. Robbers and criminal groups have gained advantage of this as a way of sustaining their living standard with the weapons at their disposal.

### **Kidnapping and socio-economic implication in Niger Delta:**

Kidnapping emboldens youths to risk and embrace criminal lifestyle while regarding it as a lucrative business. It becomes a tool for political settlement such that close relations of political opponents are targeted in order to extort money from their political opponent. The escalating rate of kidnap and hostage cases has led to the massive departure of expatriate oil workers from the oil regions, which continues to pose a great economic challenge to the nation. The Niger Delta Technical Committee report indicates that Nigeria lost about \$20.7 billion on the activities of these vandals between January and September 2008. However, kidnapping and hostage taking is a serious crime but relatively unheard of in Nigeria compared to robbery, burglary and other forms of social vices. For Turner (1998), “kidnapping” and hostage taking originated 17<sup>th</sup> Century in England where children were held hostage and sold as slaves for agricultural workers to colonial farmers for domestic job. In ancient Rome, Emperor Constantine (AD 315) became worried on the incidence such that he ordered death penalty as punishment for the crime. Robber barons were kidnapping merchants and held them hostage for ransom in the Middle Age at Europe. King Richard 1 of England was a victim for years by the Arch-Duke of Austria in the 12<sup>th</sup> Century. In 1800, Philippines have a standard scale or ransom fees ranging from 2000 pesos for a European friar to 30-50 pesos for a male Filipino. Due to the upsurge of kidnapping in 1931, exclusive legislation from Senate and House of Representatives was engendered. Turner concludes that much kidnapping in history has no overt political motivation. In the early 70s, it was alarming that kidnapping and hostage taking was for political purposes. The fig below shows in a tabular form the events of kidnapping and hostage-taking in the oil region from 2002-2003:

#### **Abductions and kidnapping (2002- 2003)**

Date	Company	Group/ethnic, state	Purpose of action	Reported outcome
Jun-July 2003 staff kidnapping	Oil servicing company shell contractor	Militant youth gang, Ekeremor LGA, Ijaw/Bayelsa State	Ransom of 3.1 million naira	State government intervention, release of hostages after 14 days.
November 11-13-2003 Oil Barge Kidnapping of staff (9) and militant escorts (4)	Shell barge contractor	Ijaw youth militants in Bomadi/Burutu L.G.A Delta State	Ransom demand of 24.5 million naira	Release after 2 days threats from state and associated security agencies
November, 2003 kidnapping of 14 staff	Chevron Texaco	Militant Ijaw youth /Bayelsa State	Ransom demand	State intervention
Kidnapping of 19 staff	Noble drilling	Ijaw militias Delta State	Ransom demand	State intervention
November- December 2003	Bredero shaw oil servicing co. shell l	Militant Ijaw youths Delta- State	Ransom demand of five Million dollars	Intervention/ negotiation

*Sources: Ikelegbe (2005)*



- Criminal kidnapping and hostage taking for ransom
- Political kidnapping
- Kidnapping for money
- Kidnapping without any political or monetary motive

### **Implication of Kidnapping and Hostage-taking in Niger Delta economy**

Kidnapping and Hostage taking has implication on the economy of Nigerian state at large; most of them involve foreign workers and development partners with side effect on the economy. It scares foreign partners and robs the state benefit on development opportunities, with clear indication that potential investors are castrated from investing in the region. At the moment, foreign and local investors in the region induced oil companies, businessmen and women have fled the region; most oil operations have been reduced drastically. The kidnapper was at the heels of investor and individual, this impacted negatively on oil and gas sector. Incidentally, crude oil is the major base of Nigerian economy through foreign exchange earning, revenue generation and allied services. The impact noticeable that a Director, Department of Petroleum Resources (DPR). Mr. Tony Chukwueke, admit that “we experience one of the most difficult periods in the history of Nigeria’s oil and gas industry. Nigeria is losing 800,000 barrels of crude oil, this is a trying period for federal government despite its drive to ensure that sanity reigns in the sector. So, the entire western operation of the SPDC had been shut down” (Guardian Newspaper, 2006). The sad situation is the inability of State security agents to combat this crime because they are ill equipped. The menace has suffered long neglect from government on the region, making the people to use militant confrontation, with government addressing their plight. At the moment, various levels of governments have speedy development attention in the region to curb the pace of crime. However, the problem lies on political commitment on the side of Nigeria state for development interest.

### **Conclusion and Recommendation**

Kidnapping and hostage-taking is a major challenge bedeviling development in Nigeria, this has sent domestic and foreign investors packing, it is so disturbing and pressing that our economic growth is stagnated as it constitutes fear to every citizen and poses real danger. The socio-economic development of Nigeria state is now in a tight corner as a result of unbeneficial environment.

The Niger Delta issue demands serious attention from the government, in as much as we acknowledge the fact that government is doing her best to curb the situation, we still note that the struggle will not be successful without genuine stakeholders’ participating. “Elitist” governance should make room for inclusion of all layers of stakeholders in evolving development plans for the region. The agencies who are actors for even-development in the region should be monitored strictly to stem the rising case of corruption as is the case with such agencies. For instance, the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) should help to build the capacity stakeholders and engage them in meaningful developmental activities. This phenomenon “kidnapping and hostage-taking” constitutes harrowing threats to national security and our corporate existence. Nigeria can only curb the menace with an integrated and holistic national security policy framework which is predicated on the protection of core national values and interest of Nigeria.



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