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Issue:

Preventing further escalation in the Niger Delta

Forum:

Peacebuilding Committee



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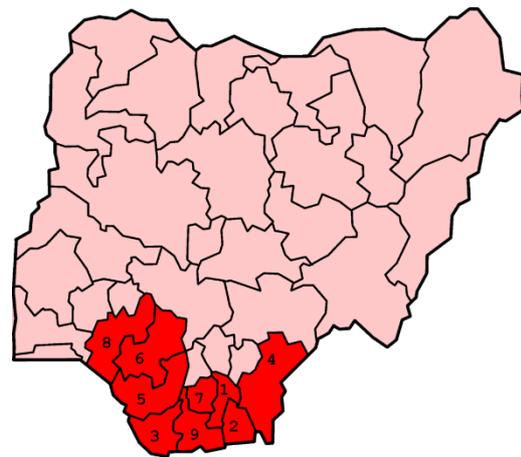
Forum: Peacebuilding committee (PBC)

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Introduction

The Niger Delta region of Nigeria is located in the south-south zone of the country. It is the region that produces oil – the backbone of the Nigerian economy. However, the region which bears this economically important oil has been involved in conflicts for a long time. The current conflict in the Niger Delta first came to light in the early 1990s over tensions between foreign oil corporations and a number of the Niger Delta's minority ethnic groups who feel as if they are being oppressed, particularly the Ogoni and the Ijaw. This ethnic and political unrest has continued throughout the 1990s. Rivalry for oil wealth has fueled violence between ethnic groups, causing the militarization of nearly the entire region by ethnic militia groups, the Nigerian military and police forces, particularly the Nigerian Mobile Police. The violence has contributed to Nigeria's ongoing energy supply crisis by discouraging foreign investment in new power generation plants in the region. Therefore it can be said that insecurity has been a feature of the Nigerian State as conflicts in different parts of the country have continued to put many lives in danger.



Map of Nigeria numerically showing states typically considered part of the Niger Delta region: 1. Abia, 2. Akwa Ibom, 3. Bayelsa, 4. Cross River, 5. Delta, 6. Edo, 7. Imo, 8. Ondo, 9. Rivers

Definition of Key Terms

Delta:

An area of low, flat land, sometimes shaped like a triangle, where a river divides into several smaller rivers before flowing into the sea.

The Ogoni:

A member of an ethnic group from southeastern Nigeria, famous for its fight against oil industry exploitation.

The Ijaw:

A member of a collection of people mostly indigenous to forest regions within the Niger Delta in Nigeria.

Oil reserves:

An estimate of the amount of crude oil located in a particular economic region.

Oil revenue:

The income that comes from oil, which a government or company receives regularly.

Urhobos:

The Urhobos are people located in Southern Nigeria, near the northwestern Niger Delta. The Urhobo are the major ethnic group in Delta State, one of the 36 states of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. The Urhobos speak the Urhobo language.

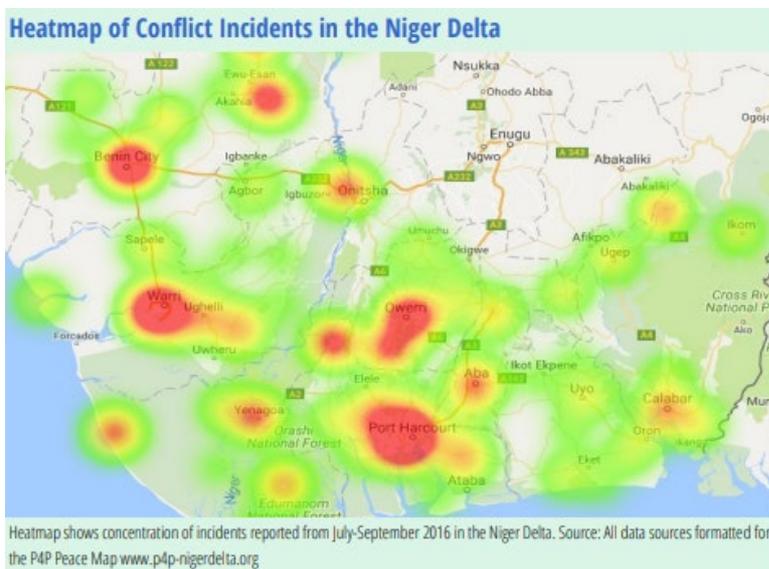
General Overview

Since Nigeria's independence in 1960, lack of security has been a pressing issue to the population, conflicts in various parts of the country and continued to pose a threat to the population's safety. Violence in the Niger Delta has been a major and horrific nuisance to the region where conflicts have been occurring for over several decades. The region has seen a series of conflicts before the beginning of the pre-colonial period, its roots being initially in the protest against injustice, however more recent disputes have escalated and been a cause of different warring-parties that desire resource control. Oil being the major source of interest. Long-held concerns were made over the loss of control over resources to the oil companies extracting from that region, these concerns were from members of an indigenous ethnic group called the Ijaw. Protestors largely being local indigenous activists have been protesting against commercial oil refineries and pipelines in the region, resulting in the Nigerian government sending troops to occupy the Bayelsa and Delta states. The increased military force had a consequence of soldiers opening fire with heavy machinery, killing a minimum of three protestors. Foreign employees of Shell (the primary corporation operating in the region) had been taken hostage by most likely the Ijaw. Activities as such have to lead to greater governmental intervention in the area, and the mobilization of State Security Service and the Nigerian army into the region, resulting in extreme violence and human rights abuses.

Nigeria's unhealthy dependency on oil is tearing apart its economy, in the 1980s it had become nearly solely economically dependent on petroleum extraction. At the time this generated 25% of Nigeria's total GDP, since then it has risen to 60%. Traditional agricultural practices have been forced to be abandoned in the local region, the majority of the region has seen a large decrease in wealth per capita since the 1960s, even though having many skilled, well-paid Nigerians working for the foreign oil corporations. The population has also seen a rapid increase with having over 40 million people living in the region accounting for roughly 20% of Nigeria's population. Economically viable petroleum was first discovered in Ogoniland (a part of the Niger Delta) in 1957, foreign oil companies, largely the Shell and the Chervon Corporation, starting extracting petroleum throughout the next two decades. Ogoniland was home to about a half a million of the local ethnic group, the Ogoni people, who were forced by the government of Nigeria to

abandon their land to give to the oil companies this being done without consultation, offering negligible compensation. In the 1970s-1980s the people of the Niger Delta were promised benefits for the fall through by the government, however, this failed to materialize. The people of the Niger Delta, primarily the Ogoni, becoming increasingly dissatisfied and disturbed with social, environmental and economic apparatus rapidly deteriorating birthed the creation of the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP). MOSOP became a major organisation with the objective of representing the Ogoni people and their struggle for environmental and ethnic rights, with it primarily targeting the Nigerian government and Shell. Tensions between the two sides further escalated with more serious and intensity in both parties, they began committing acts of violence, MOSOP then demanding 10 billion USD in accumulated royalties and compensation for damages. The Ogonis threatened mass action to disrupt the companies' operations if they were to fail to comply with their demands. The government's response was to ban public gatherings along with declaring disturbances to oil production acts of treason against the nation. The military allocated soldiers and mobile policemen to appear in the majority of Ogoni villages, on the same day four of the Ogoni chiefs were brutally murdered. With MOSOP unable to find who was responsible.

The conflict in the Niger Delta has been the cause of numerous human rights violations in the region, committed by Nigerian Government forces and other armed groups. Claims have been made that the oil company Shell is responsible for many of these violations, through their support of organizations that seek to protect the winning of oil. The residents' human rights were violated in situations such as the following: "In 2009 to 2010, soldiers guarding Shell's facilities at Kolo Creek have systematically harassed and intimidated local residents from the nearby community of Otusega. Nigerian soldiers have carried out cruel, inhumane and degrading treatment, and beatings with horsewhips immediately outside Shell's logistics base. Soldiers have also coerced locals into forced labour along a Shell pipeline and arbitrarily detained locals, including a woman who was eight month pregnant and on her way to hospital." (Counting the Cost: corporations and human rights abuses in the Niger Delta) Furthermore, in 2008 and 2009, there were oil spills that were not cleaned up properly, and therefore posed a threat to the health and safety of the people dependent on the resources of the region for their food and water.



Major Parties Involved

Nigerian Armed Forces

The Nigerian Armed Forces are the armed forces for Nigeria, its previous name being the Royal West African Frontier Force (RWAFF) this was changed in 1958.

Niger Delta Avengers

The Niger Delta Avengers (NDA) is a militant group in Nigeria's Niger Delta. The NDA has attacked oil-producing facilities in the delta, causing the shutdown of oil terminals and a fall in Nigeria's oil production to its lowest level in twenty years.

Niger Delta Greenland Justice Mandate

The Niger Delta Greenland Justice Mandate, or the NDGJM, is a militant group allied with the Niger Delta Avengers, who also operate in the Niger Delta. The group is mainly composed of ethnic Urhobos, with a large majority of members being a part of the Isoko ethnic group.

Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta

Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta, or the MEND, is one of the largest militant groups in the Niger Delta region. The groups' efforts are mainly focused upon knocking down oil production in the Niger-Delta region, as well as localizing control of Nigeria's oil and securing reparations from the Nigerian government for pollution caused by the oil industry.

Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force

The Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force is one of the largest armed groups of the Niger Delta, the majority of its members are from one of the largest ethnic groups of the region, the Ijaw. It was founded in an attempt to gain more control over the region's natural resources, primarily its vast petroleum resources.

Niger Delta Liberation Front

The Niger Delta Liberation Front is an armed group in Nigeria's Niger Delta, their main goal is to gain full independence from Nigeria, the group has close ties with the Nigerian Army as well as the Movement of the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND).

Timeline of Key Events

1966 A young delta revolutionary named Isaac Boro proclaims the Niger Delta Republic to comprise mainly the delta's majority tribe, the Ijaw. He launches a "twelve-day revolution" in the Niger Delta which is eventually crushed by the Nigerian military.

1967 Nigerian civil war sparks by the secession of eastern states. Boro gets released from prison and is used by the Federal government to fight against the secessionist Biafra republic.

1968 Boro gets killed in unknown and mysterious circumstances.

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1993 Military annals elections take place.

1999 Military rule ends after a former military ruler named President Olusegun Obasanjo wins civilian elections.

2000 12 northern states declare Islamic Sharia law.

2003 Scores die in ethnic fighting after an Ijaw uprising in the western delta forces oil companies to shut down 40% of the country's oil production.

2004 Delta militant Mujahid Dokubo-Asari threatens an "all-out war" against the Nigerian oil industry saying elections in 2003 were rigged. His men battle Nigerian troops from their jungle hideaways. He eventually disarms after the government brokers a peace accord with a rival militia.

2005 Military raid devastates the delta town of Odiana after a land dispute with neighbouring community results in the killing of local councillors. Nigeria's Senate goes on a fact-finding mission but never publishes its report.

2005 Dokubo-Asari teams up with other civilian activists who accuse President Obasanjo of presiding over a "civilian dictatorship" Nigerian authorities arrest and charge Dokubo-Asari for a treasonable felony after he allegedly calls for the disintegration of the Nigerian state in a newspaper interview.

2005 The government starts locking up leaders of various separatist groups and militia across the country.

2005 British police arrest Diepreye Alamiyeseigha, Nigeria's only Ijaw governor, and charges him with money laundering. The governor escapes back to Nigeria where he resumes office before eventually being impeached.

2005 Political tensions rise across as Nigeria heads towards elections in 2007, when President Obasanjo is due to step down after two terms in office. Opposition rises across the country against rumours of a possible third term bid by Obasanjo. The president neither refutes or confirms the rumours.

2006 Delta militants calling themselves the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta start carrying out serious attacks against oil facilities. Four foreign hostages are kidnapped in January and later released. Militants step up attacks in February in apparent retaliation against military operations in the delta, taking nine more hostages and destroying part of an export terminal. The militants say they are partly fighting for the release of Dokubo-Asari and Alamiyeseigha and demand \$1.5bn in compensation payment for environmental damage from Shell.

2006 Security forces move Dokubo-Asari to an undisclosed location for "his own safety"

2006 At least 15 people die after a protest against Danish cartoon depictions of the prophet Mohammed turn bloody. Tensions are high in the north after the federal

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government puts a ban on Islamic police in a northern state. Analysts say political tensions across Nigeria could feed into the delta's crisis.

Previous attempts to resolve the issue

To possibly solve the issue, the Federal Government in 2009 proposed an amnesty program that witnessed a large number of militants surrendering their arms in return for training by the government. The program made many repentant militants trained within and outside the country and during the period, consequently relative peace returned to the region. However, this has been temporary as there had been the emergence of new militant groups such as the Niger Delta Avengers (NDA), the Red Egbesu Water Lions, Joint Niger Delta Liberation Force (JNDLF), Niger Delta Red Squad (NDRS) and the Adaka Boro Avengers in 2016. These new groups have continued from where the former militant groups left off with new bombing of oil installations and abduction of oil workers. Several lives have been lost including those of militants and security operatives. Thus, insecurity has become the order of the day once again in the Niger Delta. Apart from death that has occurred as a result of a confrontation with the militants, security operations have failed due to the risks that they involved.

Possible Solutions

Sustainable peace and security remain a key challenge in the Niger Delta region. A possible solution is to make a collective non-violent conflict management approach, this would involve a group of negotiators, local and international as well as foreign international mediators along with all the parties involved in the conflict. Furthermore, a thorough and accurate analysis needs to be made of the situation in order for the parties involved to agree upon sufficient solutions. Alongside this, the Federal Government should penalize the petroleum extracting companies, with the money being allocated by the government to compensate and rehabilitate all those affected.

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