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Editorial Note

This volume of the Journal is extremely behind schedule. But as the cliché goes, it is better late than never. In compliance with our tradition, we bring before you a potpourri of articles from seasoned researchers. We hope that the papers in this volume will advance the frontiers of historical knowledge. We thank you for your sustained interest in Ilorin Journal of History and International Studies (IJOHIS).

Professor S.O. Aghalino
(Editor)

***Disclaimer:** The views expressed in the articles in this Journal do not necessarily represent the views of anyone affiliated with IJOHIS or of the Department of History and International Studies, University of Ilorin, Ilorin.

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**THE DYNAMICS OF UNEMPLOYMENT AND CRIMINALITY IN
THE EASTERN NIGER DELTA AREA OF NIGERIA**

Odeigah, Theresa Nfam*

Abstract

The upsurge in criminal activities such as violent crimes, mindless vandalism and the widespread insecurity in the Eastern Niger Delta area of Nigeria has become a menace. These crimes are largely traceable to the rising unemployment rate in the area over the years. Today, youth restiveness, militancy, pipeline vandalism, oil theft, kidnapping, abduction, assassinations, armed robbery, cultism, prostitution, advanced fee fraud, cyber-crime, substance abuse, drug trafficking, human trafficking, political thuggery and vandalism of national power installations, among other criminal acts, have become daily occurrences in the region. A new and scary dimension with its serious effect on our crude oil export and foreign exchange earnings has since been added to these social ills, following the recent upsurge in violent campaigns for secession by militant groups, particularly the Niger Delta Avengers in the area. The primary thrust of this paper is to ascertain the causes and the consequences of unemployment and criminality in the Eastern Niger Delta area of Nigeria. This study therefore adopts a historic-structural and multidisciplinary approaches to explicate this menace. The paper concludes that rising unemployment, poor infrastructural development, gaps in our tertiary educational system and corruption, are responsible for the rising wave of criminality in the area.

Introduction

The Eastern Niger Delta is located in the Eastern part of the Niger Delta region of Nigeria, and it embraces the present day Cross River and Akwa Ibom States with a population of 6,809,174 (Six million, eight hundred and nine thousand, one hundred and seventy four)¹. It is peopled by a multiplicity of ethnic nationalities. The most populous groups are the Efik, Ibibio, Annang, Bekwarra, Ogoja and Boki, among others. The inhabitants of the area speak different languages². The current rising wave

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Unemployment, according to the World Bank, refers to the share of the labour force that is without work, but available for and seeking employment⁴. Unemployment has also been defined by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) as those who are currently not working, but who are willing and able to work for pay, and are currently available to work and also have actively searched for work⁵. The expression of the definition of unemployment, on the first hand, is that persons who are without paid jobs to earn a decent living are unemployed. On the other hand, criminality refers to all human activities that involve breaking the laws of the land can be said to be criminal acts and the fact or state of people being involved in crime is criminality⁶.

MAP 2

MINORITIES COMMISSION EASTERN REGION

LEGEND

- Regional Headquarters
- Regional C.O. B. Stations
- State Capitals
- District Headquarters
- District Towns
- Place names in the Cameroons

Scale: 1:200,000

Fig. 1: Source: <http://www.waado.org>

Unemployment in the Eastern Niger Delta area has constituted a major social problem which has assumed a very serious dimension, especially with the exploration of crude oil in the area. Many able-bodied men and women in the region have abandoned skill acquisition and personal development in search for jobs with the rich Multinational Oil Corporations in the area. Some of the traditional indigenous agricultural activities like farming, fishing and salt making, have been abandoned by the people. The hitherto vibrant agricultural sector and trading, which were the primary occupation of the people in the area, are no more active and the government of the day has also not paid attention to these employment creating sectors of the economy. The neglect of the agricultural sector by the people in the area in search for white collar jobs, despite enormous natural resources in the area, has resulted in a rising unemployment with its attendant challenges⁷.

The Eastern Niger Delta area is, and has remained backward in terms of infrastructural development, educational institutions, skill development and job creation efforts. Annually, many graduates of Nigerian universities and polytechnics join the unemployment queue worsening the unemployment problem. There is no adequate planning to ensure that school leavers are gainfully employed after graduation⁸. The serious consequences of gross environmental degradation and socio-economic dislocation in the Eastern Niger Delta area by the Multinational Oil and Gas Companies, according to Ikelegbe, has created massive unemployment, protests and agitations among the people⁹. The oil industry in Nigeria is vital to the economy of the nation, but the environmental pollution resulting from oil exploration activities, has also resulted in the insecurity of lives and properties, serious economic and social disorganisation of the people, and serious threats to even their culture¹⁰.

Criminality in the Eastern Niger Delta Area

The spate of criminal activities in the Eastern Niger Delta area has become worrisome even to the generality of Nigerians. Our society cannot attain any meaningful development with the endemic crime in the area. According to Damola, criminality is an enemy of the society. The security measures put in place by the government has failed to produce the desired results¹¹. Following the frustration among the unemployed people, and the

illegal inflow of weapons and ammunitions, among other factors, the Eastern Niger Delta area has become a theatre of civil disobedience, pipeline vandalism, youth restiveness, kidnapping, militancy, drug abuse, armed robbery, and the use of unemployed youths as political thugs during political campaigns and elections¹². Emeh also asserted that the lack of employment opportunities makes crime a very attractive option for some Nigerian university graduates, who for many years have been roaming the streets seeking employment. Some of them eventually get involved in criminal activities such as armed robbery, car snatching, oil bunkering, drug trafficking and prostitution, among other vices¹³.

Advanced fee fraud otherwise called “419”, armed robbery, prostitution, substance abuse, drug and human trafficking, among others, have become daily occurrences in the Eastern Niger Delta area¹⁴. Nigeria Bureau of Statistics noted that unemployment rate in oil producing states in Nigeria is high, because the oil companies that dominate the economic activities have very limited job opportunities for applicants that are without skills. The unemployment rate in Nigeria was 13.9 percent as at the third quarter of 2016 being the highest since December 2009¹⁵. In 2011, Akwa Ibom and Cross River states both in the Eastern Niger Delta area of Nigeria had unemployment rates of 18.4 percent and 18.2 percent, respectively¹⁶. It is pertinent to note that a new and scary dimension has since been added to these social ills, following the recent upsurge in violent campaigns by militant groups, particularly the Niger Delta Avengers in the area. Many unemployed people in the area are willing converts for the militant groups, because unemployment prevents personal income earning, and therefore, has the tendency to aggravate social vices in the society¹⁷.

Factors Responsible for Unemployment in the Eastern Niger Delta Area

The Eastern Niger Delta area is endowed with enormous natural resources, such as oil and gas, and therefore, it ought to have a very vibrant economy capable of providing employment opportunities. Even Tony Elumelu, former Group Managing Director of United Bank for Africa (UBA), declared pointedly that most of the graduates were unemployable, because of the deficiency in the country’s educational system. He emphasized that vocational skills were grossly lacking among most Nigerian graduates, and

that some companies in Nigeria go to neighbouring countries such as Ghana to recruit personnel with technical competence and highly rated skills. He advocated for a review of the school curricula in the country, stressing that, vocational and entrepreneurial skills should be taught in schools, and that more technical colleges should be established. As a result of this challenge of lack of entrepreneurial skills, these graduates are unable to establish their own businesses, that would have even made them employers of labour¹⁸

The exploration and exploitation of the oil and gas resources in the Eastern Niger Delta area is another factor, contributing to the unemployment in the area, because of the severe and adverse effects of exploration activities, especially on agriculture, which is the predominant occupation of the people. The degradation of the eco-system has made agricultural practices very difficult and the yield from harvests very low. Therefore, farming is no longer a viable occupation. Recurrent oil spillage has rendered many agricultural activities and projects in the area impossible. Arable farming and fishing activities are not possible in the face of oil spillage and degradation of the ecosystem. The negative impact of oil exploration on the soil has made the indigenous crops less yielding. The complete neglect of agriculture by the indigenous people and various government agencies are partly responsible for the unemployment in the Eastern Niger Delta area¹⁹.

During the pre-colonial and colonial periods in the Eastern Niger Delta area, the indigenous people were into farming, fishing, salt making and palm oil production. Traditional industries like iron smelting, salt making and pottery, provided employment for able-bodied men and women in the area. But today with the insatiable quest for material wealth in the country, the unemployed are no longer interested in working on the farms, but rather they prefer to work with the oil companies²⁰. The abandonment of traditional industries has also contributed to the unemployment in the area. Pottery and even salt production is no longer in vogue.

Nigeria is seen by the developed economies of the world, namely, the United States of America, China and Japan, among others, as a big market for their finished products. Nigeria is therefore, seen as a dumping ground for finished goods from the industrialized countries of the world,

with our economy still, to some extent, tied to their economies. Nigeria with its large population helps to provide employment opportunities for people in the industrialized world, while our unemployment rate is increasing at an alarming rate because the country is not producing locally, but instead, it is a consumer nation. The unemployed people, especially the youths should show interest in the local technology, such as weaving of baskets and crafts, local cloth weaving and soap production, among others. The patronage of locally fabricated and manufactured goods is very low, and our government also has failed to encourage the production and consumption of indigenous products, which would have been a major source of generating employment opportunities for our teeming school leavers²¹.

Another major cause of unemployment in the Eastern Niger Delta area is the severe energy crisis in the country. The national energy output of electricity is said to be less than 4000 Mega Watts, while South Africa generates over 30,000 Mega Watts. Electricity supply has become very epileptic in Nigeria, the epileptic and erratic electricity supply has also reduced the operational capacity of many small scale businesses, that would have employed many school leavers. The operational cost of the companies and small scale industries are markedly increased due to high cost of generators, petrol and diesel, thus reducing their capacity to employ. The deviant behaviour of the unemployed people in the Eastern Niger Delta area, has also resulted in a lot of frustration for their parents and family members, leading to anxiety and even depression among the parents and family members²².

Unemployment and criminality in the Eastern Niger Delta area has generally affected the economic growth and development of Nigeria, because development and progress have been stalled by criminal activities of the unemployed people in the area. National assets, such as crude oil and gas reserves, and their exploration have been seriously disrupted on several occasions by the criminal activities of unemployed people in the area. Crude oil pipelines and national electricity installations have also been vandalized to the extent that recently, Nigeria lost over a quarter of its crude oil production target. This has resulted in severe loss of revenue and foreign exchange needed for the country's development. It is also important to note that deviant behaviour and criminal activities in the

Eastern Niger Delta area appears to be lucrative, because most of the unemployed people involved in criminal activities are not even ready to submit themselves for re-training, or to some form of apprenticeship skill acquisition to make them marketable and employable²³.

The exploitative tendencies of the rich oil Multinational Corporations operating in the Eastern Niger Delta area, has not helped the unemployment problem. The companies do not engage the host communities meaningfully, and there is no commitment to the ideals of cooperate social responsibility. Even when the host communities are to be assisted by the oil companies, development is often stalled because community leaders and other major stakeholders corruptly mismanage the funds made available for such purposes²⁴.

Endemic corruption can also be said to be responsible for the unemployment and criminality in the Eastern Niger Delta area. This is because funds allocated for various projects by the three tiers of government and the oil companies are corruptly misappropriated, misapplied or mismanaged by government officials, representatives of the host communities, or by the oil companies. Derivation funds to oil producing States and budgetary allocations to the Ministry of Niger Delta Affairs, and even funds allocated to the Niger Delta Development Commission (NNDC), have not made reasonable impacts on the peoples' livelihood due largely to corruption. Projects like good road networks, schools, health centres and small scale businesses, among other needed infrastructure that would have provided a lot of employment opportunities in the area, are not embarked upon because of corruption²⁵.

Corruption has also resulted in a lot of infighting among the community leaders, and also between the community leaders and the oil companies. The resulting hostility has made the environment not safe for exploration activities, and has also made new investments not forthcoming²⁶. Also some Oil and Gas companies, allied industries and some foreign partners are known to have moved out of the area as a result of pipeline vandalisation, and a generally hostile operating environment²⁷

The Consequences of Unemployment and Criminality in the Eastern Niger Delta Area of Nigeria

Unemployment and criminality in Nigeria generally are a major challenge to national development, and even more so in the Eastern Niger

Delta area. The complex problems of unemployment and criminality have resulted in several other problems that are posing a great threat to the development of the area. The consequences of the gross degradation of the ecosystem and the socio-economic dislocation of the area by the Multinational Oil and Gas Companies, have resulted in unemployment, protests, youth restiveness and agitations among the people, leading to poverty. Poverty in the area has made the Eastern Niger Delta inhabitants insecure financially. As a result of poverty, some people are gradually migrating to other parts of Nigeria for greener pastures²⁸. The deviant behaviours and violence by the people, have resulted in discomfort for the people who paradoxically live in the midst of enormous resources and abundance. Violence in the Eastern Niger Delta area has resulted in huge loss of human lives and destruction of property and national assets²⁹. The violence, destruction and insecurity in the Eastern Niger Delta area has also given the country a poor image in the comity of nations, and has not encouraged foreign investors to come into the country to invest and create employment opportunities for the citizenry³⁰.

Another consequence of unemployment and criminality in the Eastern Niger Delta area is the encouragement of young unemployed women to go into prostitution as a means of survival. Most of the young women are graduates of Universities and Polytechnics, who do not have skills to work with the Multinational Oil Companies. Unemployment also brings with it frustration, social dependency, stress, anxiety and depression. Some of these young women and men have become drug couriers for rich drug barons, who send them across the shores of Nigeria to sell illicit drugs in return for large sums of money, if they are not apprehended by the law enforcement agents. Lack of unemployment opportunities for the young women has resulted in some of them being involved in sexual slavery in Nigeria, and outside the shores of Nigeria. Their vulnerability turns them into victims of greedy and very unpatriotic Nigerian business women and men, who traffic them across international borders under the guise of providing them good jobs in America and Europe³¹. Also young unemployed ladies like the Lakasara girls in Calabar, have formed the habit of joining the men in kidnapping of children as a form of business³².

Another consequence of unemployment among the women of the Eastern Niger Delta area is their increased risk of acquiring sexually

transmitted diseases in the quest to make ends meet. Unemployment among the women has contributed to the increasing poverty that has, in turn, encouraged commercial sex work among unemployed young women. Commercial sex work has exposed the women to infectious diseases like the Human Immune Deficiency Virus (HIV) and the Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) and other sexually transmitted diseases³³.

The recent upsurge of militancy and violence in the Eastern Niger Delta Region by mainly unemployed people is also a consequence of unemployment and criminality. The various militant groups are trying to outdo each other in acts of mindless vandalism, to get the attention of the government or the international community. But a new militant group, the Niger Delta Avengers has vandalized oil pipelines and has also made it impossible for these pipelines to be repaired by perpetrating various acts of lawlessness and insecurity. The nation's daily crude oil export target had been reduced by almost 700,000 barrels per day in the second quarter of 2016, leading to massive reduction in the foreign exchange earnings. Crude oil is the major source of foreign exchange for the country³⁴.

There is an interesting gender perspective to militancy because women have not been found to be directly involved in acts of militancy and vandalism. The women had protested and carried placards, because of the destruction of the ecosystem and lack of employment for the women³⁵. It is ironical that the militants that have been destroying the oil pipelines were the same people hired and paid, at a time in the past, by the oil companies to protect and safeguard crude oil and gas facilities in their communities³⁶.

Kidnapping in the Eastern Niger Delta area cannot be seen as an entirely new phenomenon. This crime can be traced back to the colonial era when slavery was characterised by recurrent raids, abductions and kidnapping. Kidnapping is the taking away or abduction of a person against the will of the individual³⁷. Kidnapping as a social scourge and social menace in the Eastern Niger Delta area, has resulted in unquantifiable loss of property and loss of many lives. The large sums of money paid as ransom to the kidnappers make kidnapping a lucrative business. A number of foreign oil workers and Nigerians have been kidnapped and some were killed. Lots of money were collected from the relatives of kidnapped victims as ransom³⁸.

Some other researchers like Ahati and Ikpong have also seen kidnapping as a way to express the grievances of the local communities against the oil companies. Kidnapping and other criminal acts in the area have engendered fear, anxiety and insecurity in the minds of many people, and this has in turn brought a lot of psychological trauma on families and friends of the victims³⁹. Another serious consequence of unemployment in the Eastern Niger Delta area, that is closely linked to kidnapping is cultism. Most of the unemployed people involved in criminality have been known to have a history of cultism⁴⁰. Unemployed people have been known to have been used and induced financially to facilitate the kidnapping of people. They have also been implicated as being used as local couriers in the trade of human body parts. Human body parts are said to be in high demand by apparently wealthy, fetish and dubious Nigerians, who need them for ritual purposes⁴¹.

Political thuggery is one of the consequences of unemployment in the Eastern Niger Delta area. The political elite see the unemployed young people as very gullible and vulnerable, and therefore recruit them as thugs, personal assistants, and at times, they use such more acceptable names and titles as youth wing of the party. All these appellations are used to prevent the ordinary Nigerian from seeing anything sinister in their activities. Violence has become part of the political culture in Nigeria, and especially in the Eastern Niger Delta, where unemployed people are readily mobilized as thugs⁴². Giscard posited that electoral violence has become a recurrent decimal in the country's electoral history. The political elite during electioneering campaigns, elections and in the post election periods, have used unemployed young people to cause violence and mayhem resulting in loss of lives and property in the Eastern Niger Delta area⁴³. In Cross River State, and especially in Yakur Local Government, noted for several incidents of electoral violence in the past, many people were killed and properties worth several millions of Naira were destroyed following the April 2015 general elections. Even some of the oil and gas companies and some foreign and local investors in the oil and gas sector had to move out of the region, and some have even moved out of the country entirely⁴⁴.

One of the ways to tackle the unemployment problem in the country, and especially in the Eastern Niger Delta area, is hinged on a complete transformation of the country. The Federal Government should

have an acceptable and implementable agreement with the multinational oil and gas companies on how to protect the environment, and to reduce the negative impact of their exploration activities on the local communities. Adequate compensation should be paid to the communities by the oil corporations, and such funds should be judiciously utilized in providing infrastructure such as roads, portable water, schools and health centres, among others⁴⁵. The governments should also ensure that basic infrastructure are provided, and when there are oil spillage or fire outbreaks that endanger the ecosystem, there should be a rapid response in tackling such problems⁴⁶.

The national transformation should address issues like empowerment programmes to create jobs for the unemployed people. It should also involve a rehabilitation programme, especially targeted at the young women, who are being trafficked as sex slaves across international boundaries. The transformation should include a review of our tertiary education curricula to ensure that skills acquisition is incorporated into the programmes to prepare the students for life after graduation. The right education should equip people with skills necessary for them to be able to solve problems in their environment and make meaningful contributions to national development⁴⁷.

Corruption in all ramifications should be genuinely addressed to ensure that funds for economic growth and development of the Eastern Niger Delta area are judiciously used for the welfare of the citizens. Security funds to State governors of the Eastern Niger Delta area, and derivation funds accruing to the oil producing States should be well supervised with regular audit reports to ensure that these funds are not embezzled by public office holders. The Ministry of Niger Delta Affairs (MNDA) and the Niger Delta Development Commission (NNDC) should have their accounts audited regularly to ensure fiscal discipline. The ministry and the NNDC should be able to carry out a guided amnesty to the unemployed militant groups, who are ready to abandon criminal activities and improve themselves to be gainfully employed. A situation where a general amnesty is offered to everyone and people are placed on salary or stipends at government expense, without them training or working to acquire skills, is counterproductive and should not be encouraged⁴⁸. The Nigerian economy also should be part of the proposed transformation, so

that we can stop being a dumping ground for finished products from the developed countries. Attention should be paid to agriculture, solid minerals and our local industries, so that we can create job opportunities for our people⁴⁹.

Unemployment in the Eastern Niger Delta area cannot be addressed properly without tackling the general insecurity in the area. The security agencies have a crucial role to play in this regard. The security agencies should be well funded and properly equipped and a new scheme of service to improve the morale, especially of the men and women in the Nigeria Police Force, should be put in place⁵⁰. Corrupt officers and men should be appropriately and promptly punished according to our laws to serve as a deterrent to other corrupt security officers.

Conclusion

A combination of several factors is responsible for the rising unemployment and criminality in the Eastern Niger Delta area of Nigeria. These are endemic corruption at various levels of governance, poor leadership, a weak and poorly remunerated national security and massive degradation of the ecosystem arising from exploration activities of the Multinational Oil and Gas Companies. Poor infrastructural development of the area in the midst of abundance, has also contributed to the rising unemployment and criminality in the area. The gaps in our tertiary educational system would require a major curriculum review to ensure that skills acquisition is emphasised, and this should equip the young school leavers with the necessary skills to make meaningful contributions to national development. National youth empowerment programmes should be put in place by the various tiers of government, as well as the Multinational Oil and Gas Companies in the area as part of their cooperate social responsibility, to reduce unemployment and criminality in the area.

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