

OUTLAW SECURITY PROVIDERS AND ARMS PROLIFERATION IN RIVERS STATE: THE SECURITY COLLABORATION CONUNDRUM

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ABSTRACT

Outlaw security providers are known for causing insecurity and urban youth violence wherever they operate. This makes security operations face the challenge of “nipping their activities in the bud.” The conundrum of unstable society undermines government’s efforts to guarantee human security and sustainable development. Joint security operation in Rivers State is aimed at actualising sustainable peace and security by countering criminal activities of outlaws. Using primary and secondary sources, the paper examines the roles of outlaws in the security market which shape conflict dynamics in Rivers State and how their arms proliferation activities create problems for security operations. These groups got their outlaw status in the post-amnesty Niger Delta as they could not surrender their arms during the disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) programme. The problem demands early response in the areas of youth-focused development and people-oriented conflict transformation by engaging the elite and Rivers communities in informal peace education.

Keywords: Outlaws, arms proliferation, security collaboration, security operations, Rivers State

INTRODUCTION

The provision of security is an important need of every human in modern societies considering how people easily tend to make life miserable for others or constitute threat to human and national security through acts capable of undermining law and order. However, while some are legal security providers, there are groups that are categorised as illegal security providers whose acts, when not checked, can create insecurity to their targets or victims.

Security remains a basic necessity in the lives of people and states. The phenomenon is prominent in national discourses. Dambazau (2012:15) argues that Nigeria is overwhelmed by the threats posed by all manners of conventional criminal behaviour; militancy and insurgency; transnational crime syndicates involved in human and drug trafficking, advance fee fraud (419), and cybercrime; political violence, including election violence; ethno-religious conflicts, especially in the North, leading to violent deaths and destruction; and resource-based conflicts over land; and the recent security threats from the Islamist sect Boko Haram. Fawole (2008) identifies the perennial problem of religious and ethnicity-fuelled uprisings in the country as internal security threats with profound implications for foreign policy.

Adequate human security is the prerequisite for developmental projects to take place. **Sustainable human development is only achievable when criminal activities which threaten human security are eradicated. As highlighted by the Brundtland of 1987, the essence of sustainable development is to prioritise basic human needs for the present and future generation. But this people-oriented objective cannot be achieved without the actualisation of human security. This makes the development process to protect the opportunities of generations yet unborn (Ajakaiye and Akinbinu, 2000).** Mitigating insecurity in all parts of the country should start with actions that address all forms of human security threats. This trend of human insecurity has made the country to be described as one of the most dangerous places in the world with poor rating on the Global Peace Index. Most human security-threatening factors are occasioned by poor management of resources, inadequate planning, selective implementation of policies, poor intelligence gathering and inadequate early response mechanism.

The sophisticated weapons criminals use indicates that it is possible that some people somewhere are working for the criminals. Their firepower is adjudged superior to that of security agents. The government is yet to realise that most threats to national security originate from ineffective human security. For instance, the Boko Haram imbroglio is a continuing challenge with a political underpinning that has been widely noted by different scholars. The religious colouration notwithstanding, the frustration-aggression perspective cannot be downplayed. The militancy in the Niger Delta, the kidnapping in the Southeast and the ascendancy of the blue-collar crime can have their ancestry traced to the inequitable character of Nigerian politics. Several important figures and arms caches of the movement have been

uncovered (Olowu, 2012). Thom-Otuya (2016) avers that the high level of small arms proliferation across the country in the form of arms build up is responsible for the rate of crime, community conflict, crude oil theft, kidnapping, and militancy. The availability of arms, with the associated security cost of pipeline vandalism, usually leads to the deployment of security forces which creates public sense of insecurity (Aghalino and Okolie-Osemene, 2014). It has also aggravated state fragility. Donais (2017:3) further states that “part of the very essence of state weakness or fragility relates to the inability of governments to exercise effective control over territory, while conflict leads to the further fragmentation of security provision.” Development and security are inextricably linked, and this demands collaboration and coordination between government agencies and the civil populace to make human security achievable in Nigeria.

Over the past few years, Rivers State recorded unusual incidents of violence and armed banditry stemming from availability of arms in the wrong hands, which culminated in cultism, kidnapping, formation of militant groups and other criminal activities. The various groups that emerged as outlaw security providers have taken advantage of the volatile nature of the Niger Delta region occasioned by the struggle for resource control, environmental degradation, insecurity, mass poverty, youth unemployment and poor infrastructure to perpetrate crime within Rivers. Also, Nwajiaku-Dahou (2010) notes that associated political grievances were heightened by underdevelopment and the alienation of local people from rights to land and resources in the Niger Delta.

The problem was even aggravated by the phenomenon of youth restiveness which created a platform for activities of militant groups. Consequently, the outlaw security providers became beneficiaries of youth restiveness and freedom-fighting endeavour of the people in Rivers State. The problem in this regard is that the militants represented the biggest security threat to the government. Very few identified the debilitating role of the outlaw security providers whose acts continue to undermine the efforts of security forces in securing the state. Most people focused on the activities of Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), Niger Delta Peoples Volunteer Force (NDPVF), and others, which target oil exploration and multinational oil companies operating in the area.

Some outlaws have gained prominence through their resolve to resist the marginalization of some groups in the society with assurances to protect when threatened by the state or other groups.

Security providers are stakeholders in human security and, most times, they require the use of firearms to carry out their duties. However, there are times when their belief in the instrument of violence can make them abuse the availability of arms at their disposal to unleash terror on people or even adopt extra-judicial means to punish deviance or perceived wrongdoing.

In Rivers States, there are numerous security providers with different assurances on their capacity to protect people and claims to the ability to fend off threats targeted at communities where they have footprint. Such claims and counterclaims indicate why there is usually a challenge of joint security operation in an environment where state security providers, and traditional, commercial and even outlaw security providers exist.

Joint security operations are the actions and responses of state security providers which are deployed to check or contain arms proliferation carried out by outlaw security providers (Wallstrom, 2011:51). The presence of soldiers and other security operatives helps to instil discipline and orderliness in any environment or state that recorded instability or lawlessness to change the perception of people taking the law into their own hands and going away with it (Okolie-

Osemene and Aghalino, 2013). It is not disputable that if unchecked, outlaw security providers have the capacity to cause insecurity, as well as urban or community youth violence, and create a perception of negative peace, particularly in the minds of the residents of communities. Security operatives are facing the challenge of nipping their activities in the bud. The conundrum of unstable society continues to undermine government's efforts to guarantee human security. In Rivers State, the main goal of joint security operation is the actualisation of sustainable peace and security in Rivers State. The troubling aspect of the existence of this category of security providers is that many outlaw security providers are usually engaged in deviant acts, such as assassination, extortion, violence against women and children, thuggery, kidnapping and attack on suspected cultists who threaten their existence.

Managing this problem is a challenge to the state government, which has to rethink security policies with the aim of regulating some activities of individuals and groups in Rivers State. Many people have raised questions on why it is so challenging for the government to address the problem of security providers who have been operating with impunity. Rivers State demands scholarly attention owing to the fact that the state has remained the hotbed of outlaw security providers' activities in recent times. This made most gubernatorial aspirants to harp on how security provision would become the preoccupation of their government if voted into office as the chief security officer of state. The state capital Port Harcourt, remains the most urbanised city in Niger Delta which has been witnessing rural-urban migration since the advent of oil exploration and exploitation activities. Prior to the national amnesty programme which paved the way for Nigeria's disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration programme for repentant militants, the state was a host of militancy. Then militant leaders like Asari Dokubo, Ateke Tom, and Sogbomo George emerged. Many Rivers State youths became members of militant groups, like the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), Niger Delta Peoples Volunteer Force (NDPVF), Niger Delta Vigilante (NDV) and the Niger Delta Avengers (NDA).

Rivers is a state where relative deprivation, horizontal inequalities, frustration/aggression, greed and grievance exist. The state has also witnessed proliferation of social movements which agitate for youth-focused development and oil exploration in line with global practices for environmental sustainability, as well as clampdown on non-state actors by successive military and civilian administrations with attendant implications for socio-economic rights in the state. The state hosted the first disarmament exercise for non-state armed groups in 2005, when cash was given to repentant militants in exchange for the weapons they surrendered, especially small arms and light weapons, even before the Federal Government of Nigeria contemplated adopting the amnesty-oriented option as a strategy to managing the Niger Delta imbroglio.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM AND METHODOLOGY

Security provision in many parts of the developing world is fluid, and involves complex and hybrid arrangements consisting of multiple actors, both state and non-state (Dambazau, 2012; Hove, 2013; Pérouse de Montclos, 2016; Gupte, 2017; Donais, 2017; Lawrence, 2017). There is a corpus of literature on human security, joint security operations, arms proliferation as well as the significance of the rule of law and security sector reform in regulating the activities of security providers. However, most the studies did not adequately explore the role of Outlaw security providers and how they use arms to complicate security collaborations carried out by state actors. Even studies on Niger Delta, particularly the lethal violence within the region, did not properly examine the impact of outlaw security providers.

In terms of methodology, the study adopted a case study research design, and made use of qualitative data from Niger Delta Conflict Tracker, Nigeria Watch Project sources, and secondary sources. The Niger Delta Conflict Tracker is the conflict incident monthly tracker that is designed to update peace agents on patterns and trends in conflict risk and violence. It usually mapped by Integrated Peace and Development Unit (IPDU) early warning system that is coordinated by the Foundation for Partnership Initiatives in the Niger Delta.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This section examines the conceptual issues that are relevant to the study. These are security, security providers, outlaw security providers and arms proliferation. The aim of the study is not to theorise. The conceptual framework guides the qualitative analysis as sourced from media reports, Niger Delta Conflict Tracker, observation and secondary sources. Human security and security providers are the main framework of discussion.

Security is seen as the sum total of the vital national interest of the state for which a nation is willing to resort to war (Onuoha, 2007). Muggah and Batchelor (2002) posit that conventional approaches to measuring insecurity focus on crime, public health, forced displacement rates, investment and trade conditions and public perceptions of violence (cited in Muggah, Maughan and Bugnion, 2003). Security is characterised by an understanding between people, a peaceful life without war, where people are able to go about their daily businesses without experiencing any threats (Barnes, 2009).

Although security primarily involves physical safety, there are broader definitions of security which exist within the development community for “human security”. Human Security refers to security that has two main aspects: (1) safety from such chronic threats as hunger, disease and repression; (2) protection from sudden and hurtful disruptions in the patterns of daily life – in homes, in jobs, or in communities. Such threats can exist at all levels of national income and development (UNDP, 1994). According to Hubert (1999; 2001) human security refers to safety of people from both violent and nonviolent threats. It is a condition or state of being characterised by freedom from pervasive threats to people’s rights, their safety or even their lives. In this case, security of the state is not an end in itself; It is an alternative way of seeing the world, taking people as its point of reference, rather than focusing exclusively on security of territory or governments (Onuoha, 2007; Nwolise, 2012).

United Nations Commission on Human Security (CHS) defines human security as the protection of the vital core of all human lives in ways that enhance human freedoms and fulfilment; by doing so, fundamental freedoms are protected. It goes further to state that human security “means protecting people from critical and pervasive threats and situations; using processes that build on people’s strengths and aspirations, as well as creating political, social, environmental, economic, military and cultural systems that, when combined, give people the building blocks for survival, livelihood and dignity.” Proper human security addresses freedom from fear and want. Nelles (2003:1) avers that “human security is premised on the fact that the security of all persons ought to be a moral goal of all governments and their citizens, not a narrowly conceived or poorly justified national security that protects state power or personal interests of privileged elite” (cited in Onuoha, 2007).

Onuoha (2007:97) states that “human security entails freedom from actual and potential threats to human life, safety and survival which may arise as a result of human actions or inactions, or from natural disaster such as flood, earthquake, famine, drought, disease and other non-man-made calamitous events resulting in death, human suffering and material

damage.” This assertion brings human security into social contract between government and the people. Government is not only responsible for the protection of people but also accountable to citizens. Oche (2002) observes that human security is centered on people and their existence (cited in Nwolise, 2012). This indicates that human security guarantees safety of the people and their welfare; it does not specifically focus on the governments which unfortunately do not take human affairs seriously without playing politics with human security in various states especially in Africa. One of the advantages of human security is that it enhances sustainability in every society.

Nwolise (2012:16) offers more insight into the significance of human security:

People all over the world today worry not so much about world war, or war between their nation and its neighbours, but about their daily life issues – their survival in the face of environmental, natural, national, and super-natural odds, their health, the means of sustaining their lives and health, and their progress in life in order to achieve self-actualisation, success and happiness in life along with their loved ones.

Security collaboration is an aspect of military geography which has to do with the use of security sector resources, established barracks, the mobilization and positioning of troops, use of military equipment and manoeuvrability with the aim of containing the activities of non-state actors (Albert, 2017). The grand strategy of every security operation is critical in this regard. Security operations are various activities that range from cordon, stop and search, and patrols which aid crime control, promote peace and contain any form of violence or instability that undermines human or national security. The stakeholders involved in the Joint Security Task Forces (JTFs) can be the Army, Navy, Air Force, Police, State Security Services (SSS), Department of State Security (DSS), and, sometimes Immigration and Customs officials, all collaborating to address the lapses created by the inability of the police to restore order. They are also security providers working for the state, and automatically the enemies and targets of outlaw security providers.

According to Ashkenzi (2013) security providers are individuals or formations that purport to be engaged in activities that affect the degree to which groups and individuals can ensure or predict their physical, social and material integrity. The author adds that outlaw security providers are individuals and groups that usually affect the provision of security and prey on their neighbours, provide restricted security or demand for remuneration for scaring other predators away. Outlaw security provision is a predatory task of safeguarding a few to the detriment of many. Outlaw security providers are one of the notable security providers like state security providers, commercial security providers and traditional security providers. Militias, strongmen, warlords, community leaders, self-defense groups, councils of elders, and traditional courts are examples of non-state security providers (Lawrence, 2017). The problem with outlaw security providers is that they do not have a legal mandate to perform the task. In terms of conflict management and prevention, not all security providers have proven that they are forces to reckon with as events indicate that there are times they even aggravate situations. Where outlaw security providers operate, there is the tendency that anarchy would be the order of the day.

Arms proliferation refers to the sudden increase in the number of arms and ammunition. According to United Nations (2008; 2010), small arms are dominant tools of criminal violence; they are cheap, light and easy to handle, transport and

conceal; and their excessive accumulation and wide availability aggravate tension, which undermines human security. Small arms are weapons of choice in not only civil wars and terrorism but also organised crime and gang warfare. More human right abuses are committed with small arms than with any other weapon as a result of their mobile nature. The correlation between proliferation of small arms and light weapons and increase in public sense of insecurity cannot be underestimated, especially when non-state actors take advantage of security lapses to attack their targets. Such groups can easily take the law into their own hands owing to the availability of small arms and light weapons, which automatically empower them with the instrument of violence. International Action Network on Small Arms (IANSA) sees small arms and light weapons as capable of facilitating vast spectrum of human rights violations, including killing, maiming, and all forms of sexual violence, enforced disappearance, torture and forced recruitment of children by armed groups.

The force of forests in harbouring Outlaws cannot be downplayed. Forests usually serve as camps for the Outlaws who stockpile arms in such locations to conceal them from the sight of the security operatives. Some even go as far as burying arms in the isolated places. Also, outlaws establish bush paths as routes that facilitate their mobility and easy access to different locations of their targets or spheres of influence. Forests and isolated areas which are not manned by state security providers usually give outlaws psychological strength and they can engage any rival group in a struggle for supremacy. According to Albert (2017), forests are gradually becoming the comfort homes of criminals and non-state armed groups who usually hide their kidnapped victims there, just like militants who take advantage of forests to engage oil companies and the Nigerian state in asymmetric conflict as they easily ambush, capture and sometimes kill their adversaries. Most kidnapped victims have also died of starvation due to the inability of their relatives to quickly negotiate acceptable ransom money or got killed in an unsuccessful rescue operation. A case in point is the incident involving Obi Akaeze Ofulue of Ubulu-Uku in Aniocha South Local Government Area, Delta State. He was shot dead by his abductors after their unsuccessful attempt to get ransom from his family in January 2016 in the forest between Umunedede and Igbodo in Delta State. The activities of Outlaws have made them conventional security threats in the country.

RIVERS STATE OUTLAWS AND THE CHALLENGES OF SECURITY OPERATIONS

There three categories of outlaws in Rivers State: cult groups, outlawed vigilantes; pirates and militias. The former Governor of the state, Chibuike Amaechi noted that “one of the major forces behind the menace of insecurity in Rivers State was class challenge to the extent that some people were being given cash instead of executing projects”. Lady Dorothy Alison also noted that “the horror of class stratification, racism, and prejudice is that some people begin to believe that the security of their families... and communities depends on the oppression of others; that for some to have good lives there must be others whose lives are truncated” (Eze, 2015).

A significant rise in violence in the Niger Delta was recorded in 2016, since the end of the first phase of militancy in 2009 (PIND, 2017). But Rivers State has recorded most of the incidents. The state has a history of clashes between different groups and the security operatives. According to Ojajorotu and Gilbert (2010) and Folami (2016), apart from the killing of over 80 people during the violence unleashed on Umuechem by the police in 1990, many residents were also killed when joint police and army security forces attacked Choba in Rivers State during protests against Wilbros Nigeria Limited. There were also military operations against the Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP) by the Rivers State Internal Security Task Force between 1993 and 1996 during the Abacha regime. The security

operation applied coercion to arrest protesters against the oil companies. The same use of force also accounted for why various security collaborations recorded casualties amongst the security forces.

The fact that internal security operations of the army is usually characterised by high fatalities, resulting from excessive use of force, implies that the army is more violent in its engagement with the public, and its intervention in violent conflict often results in more deaths (Afenso, 2014). Where the army conducts an operation to restore order, both women and youths complain and lament about harassment. The army is naturally a violent security organisation which has little to do with internal security provision. Stop-and-search operations at checkpoints are sometimes turned to hotspots of human rights abuses, as some police officers and soldiers beat up or punish travellers that mistakenly answer phone calls. Moreover, the fear of outlaws and the need for self-defence has also made many joint task force operatives to make it compulsory that motorcyclists and their passengers stop few metres away from checkpoints before crossing the checkpoints after compulsory security checks. In some cases, as observed along Omoku-Egbeda-Elele Road, commuters are even expected to raise their hands up as they pass the security forces (police checkpoints). The fact that the military, which is more violent and equipped than other security agencies, dominates most operations is an indication that alternative response to the activities of outlaws would be a better option.

Although not all outlaws record lethal incidents, the disproportionate coercive strategy of the joint task force members makes them prone to confrontation with the security forces. As observed by Afeno (2014:22), “the operations of the various security task forces mandated to combat militancy, oil bunkering and piracy in the Niger Delta area have always been very violent. In Rivers State, political issues and criminal activities and oil wars characterise killings by the security forces, just like the September 2008 incident when JTF operatives invaded about seven communities in search of Farah Dagogo, a factional leader of MEND, and killed over 70 people, including innocent residents.”

The propensity of outlaws to kidnap and perpetrate crimes makes them the enemies of the people in Rivers State. Most of the outlaws, particularly cult groups, have adopted the strategy of decapitation as a way of punishing their rivals who pose a threat to their existence. Reports have shown that killing of their perceived enemies alone does not satisfy them without considering dismembering some parts of their bodies. This emerging act has become the case with striking cult groups. Unfortunately, the apprehension and prosecution of suspects have always been an arduous task. The role of firearms in equipping outlaws is critical. For instance, they use arms to unleash terror on their targets and this creates insecurity. In most cases, firearms aid the activities of outlaws by giving them both physical and psychological strength.

Since 2015, there have been allegations that new cult groups have been formed in Rivers State, particularly the New Cult Group, with the aim of creating security crisis through appointed coordinators (*The Punch*, 2017). This is an aspect of elite fragmentation aimed at undermining other’s interest.

What is negative about the security provided by outlaws in Rivers State?

1. Their involvement in the proliferation of arms usually undermines state monopoly of violence. They easily engage in gang or cult violence, violent criminality as well as community violence. Through their capacity to use violence, they challenge security forces that are recruited to provide security in the state.

2. If not well identified, they can disguise as commercial and traditional security providers when the need arises, particularly as guards or community policing agents.
3. They lack regulation by the state authorities and the scope of their actions cannot easily be determined. This accounts for their proclivity for political violence and available tools for violence.
4. Their lack of a legal framework of operation easily makes them dissidents and agents of instability. This is why cult groups, such as Deebam and Deewel, usually clash in communities like Egbeda, Omudioga, Ogbakiri, Emohua, Ibaa, Omuanwa, Isiokpo, Ubima, Omerelu, Ogbogoro, Rumuokparali, Abuloma, Omoku, Etche, Omuma, Ahoada, Kalagbari, Gokana and Khana where they struggle for supremacy and patronage of multinational companies, thereby undermining public peace and security.
5. Some outlaws engage in thuggery and are agents of politically motivated killings and all forms of assassination. They even go as far as extorting money from traders and residents of communities either with threats or in pretence for vigilante activities. Largely, they have been engaged by the entrepreneurial and political elite to the detriment of electoral security, inclusive development and sustainable peace.

In October 2016, available Niger Delta Conflict Tracker revealed that cultists killed and beheaded two rival cult members in Khana Local Government Area (LGA), and four persons were reportedly killed and several houses set ablaze in a reprisal attack by rival cult members. In another incident, a cultist who had allegedly killed a police officer was murdered by a rival cult group in Port Harcourt. In November, a group of cultists were reportedly caught with two human skulls in Ikwerre LGA. One of the skulls was identified as that of a leader of the Deebam group who was beheaded in a cult clash between Deebam and Icelanders.

Apart from the two soldiers that were shot dead by pirates in Akuku-Toru, a youth leader and chieftain of the All Progressive Congress (APC) was assassinated in his home in Eleme, and international oil facility worker was assassinated in his office in Port Harcourt all in April 2017. In May, four people died in gunmen attack in Bonny LGA, two were killed by gunmen in Tai LGA, two people and a cult leader were killed in Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni, two died in a clash between Icелander and Deebam in Ikwerre, five died in a clash between Icelanders and Degbam in Emuoha, one was killed in a rival cult clash in Obio/Akpor, cultists killed two people in Eleme, a prominent member of Degbam was reportedly shot dead by soldiers (PIND, 2017). In all, about 23 fatalities were recorded between April and May 2017. The month of June also recorded lethal violence when group of cultists burnt a couple and their stepson go death after their member was killed in their bid to rape the deceased wife, while the confrontation between Deywell and Degbam cult groups left 14 people dead and six kidnapped in Tai LGA (PIND, 2017). This litany of killings involving illegal use of arms in lethal violence portray the state as unsafe and an enclave of low life expectancy. The death of a cult leader who accepted the Rivers State Government's amnesty is an indication that outlaws can punish their member or rival who offends them. In all incidents, arms have always played a negative role of crime against humanity. Another observation is that most incidents recorded up to two deaths or more.

In a similar incident, two brothers were also beheaded in July 2017 in Rumuokparali and their lifeless bodies left naked. Tens of victims have also been maimed through such inhuman act. Beheading of perceived enemies is now the phenomenon in virtually all cult-related crisis. The decapitation is aimed at demonstrating their supremacy as well as actualising and sustaining their patronage with the oil companies. The struggle for supremacy by cult groups has aggravated the security situation in the state. The fear caused by this has made many women to stop going to farms, leading to decline in food security in the state.

Confrontations between cult groups, pirates and security forces have led to the death of soldiers, as well as police and DSS officers. The shooting of a DSS operative by gunmen during the Rivers rerun election in Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni LGA showed how political issues can make outlaws to complicate security operations (Ehiabhi, 2016). These groups abuse the use and purpose of firearms in Rivers state polity to the extent that people in some streets and neighbourhoods live in fear. Security forces whose joint operations are aimed at restoring order seem to be more armed with firearms than outlaws. However, some of these outlaws have experiences in the security sector and so they display tactics and manoeuvres when confronted by the security forces, thereby making it more complex for them to apprehend the group members.

The impacts of violence on sustainable development and sustainability are noteworthy. One of the impacts of violence on sustainable development is that majority of youthful population would lose their lives through violent acts in the society and this will threaten the realisation of sustainable human development. A society that is characterised by violence cannot have high life expectancy due to the bleak future of individuals engaged in violent actions. In addition, the fact that outlaw security providers have succeeded in weakening state's monopoly of violence is an indication that sustainability cannot be achieved in an environment that is characterised by confrontations between state security providers and outlaws. By implication, if the state security providers are not able to adequately police the areas controlled by outlaws, businesses are likely to shut down, and when this happens, jobs will be lost.

As seen from the various activities of Outlaws, Eleme, Tai, Ikwerre, Emuoha, Obio/Akpor, and Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni local government areas can be described as the most volatile areas, having low peacefulness, as a result of the large footprints of the outlaw security providers. In fact, Icelanders and Degbam have always struggled for supremacy. These groups in their various numbers have defied government's intervention of the amnesty option aimed at recovering the arms they use. Outlaws also have a proclivity for forceful entry into oil companies and shutdown of flow stations, seizure and even sometimes the occupation of premises and facilities of the companies. These oil companies go as far as engaging the security forces to rout the outlaws. The incremental wave of conflicts in Rivers State has continued to attract the attention of conflict experts, peace workers and social workers who are now being engaged in the task of mapping the conflicts. Some have even relocated from other parts of the country to actively participate in studying the trends over time.

Their negative attributes notwithstanding, outlaws are beneficial to the individuals and groups that have links with them. But the fact remains that outlaws are drivers of negative peace and must be checked. Managing them at the right time will reduce the negative peace that dots daily life in Rivers State. Regulation of outlaws to minimise their abuses in communities will be a step in the right direction. Positive peace, if given priority, will guarantee the protection and

promotion of human rights across the state. It is only when there is peace that “the enhancement of youth empowerment and protection, respect for human dignity and constructive engagement in nationhood could be guaranteed” (Nwobueze 2015:352). Therefore, the Rivers State Government should isolate outlaws through credible leadership, youth focused-development, community information dissemination, intelligence gathering as well as collaboration and coordination among different security agencies and the people. It Until the security sector takes cogent collaboration steps towards containing outlaws through effective people-oriented joint security operations as well as multilevel policing framework, the outlaws will continue to be regular in irregularities. Building strong and credible institutions to make and implement the law would be a step in the right direction.

CONCLUSION

Outlaw security providers have gained ground in most parts of Rivers State because the government’s approach to and conception of security has remained state-centred, rather than people-centred. This calls for a paradigm shift in the perspective of real human security in the state. Managing the problem of outlaw which undermines the efforts of the security forces demands that stakeholders at all levels in Rivers State consider addressing the problem of youth unemployment and unemployability, engage them with needs-based peace education, both formal and informal and prioritise youth-focused human development in all the communities to curtail their engagement in deviant acts like cultism, oil bunkering, piracy, and banditry. Young persons who are exposed to peace education with the principles of conflict transformation, peace psychology and emotional intelligence cannot identify with outlaw security provision that is known for sabotaging government’s efforts to maintain law and order.

The government’s people-centred security strategy will be effective in addressing the problem of outlaws than traditional approaches to national security. The Rivers State Government should live up to its responsibility in protecting the people from the activities of outlaws, which have become so rampant in recent times. The provision of security for political office holders and the elite should not dominate the state’s security interest; rather focus should be on community-based security to ensure the safety of youths and all classes of persons. Discouraging the proliferation of arms and mobilisation of youths by outlaw security providers will be more result-oriented than the use of coercive instrument of the state with appreciable impact on the actualisation of the sustainable development goals. Pre-emptive intelligence gathering will go a long way in sustaining peace and security in Rivers State. A secure Rivers State will enhance safer Niger Delta region.

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