

A Struggle Against Underdevelopment in the Geography of Rural Terrorism in South-South Nigeria

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Abstract

Two major pictures commonly associated with rural South-South Nigeria are poverty and spatial underdevelopment. Efforts of successive government to address these two nightmarish problems had not yielded much success. While the search for lasting solution among policy makers and academic scholars is still on, a new phenomenon called “rural terrorism” has suddenly emerged in the rural geography of South-South Nigeria. Rural terrorism though new in this part of the globe has become a plague in rural South-South Nigeria. Serious questions have emerged in research circle as to the ‘why’ and ‘how’ as it relates to “rural terrorism”. Through a clinical research, this paper was able to established that the birth and spread of “rural terrorism” was a response by the youths of the area to the geography of spatial and economic underdevelopment of the region; a means to survival in an economically poor and socially backward region. This paper has suggested that increased investment in the socio-economic development of the region will help in curbing this menace. This work is a product of the combination of intense field work and the work of previous scholars relating to the subject matter.

Keywords: Terrorism, Rural, South-South, Poverty, Nigeria

1. Introduction

Poverty and underdevelopment are the major pictures associated with rural South-South in the geographical entity called Nigeria. Its rural communities boast of countless oil pipelines through which the resources that feeds the country’s economy travel out to earn the country millions of dollars. While the region from 1958 to date has been a fertile ground for multinational oil companies, the geographical area is completely “empty” in terms of availability of socio-economic infrastructure(Ademola,2008). Edward Kallon, the UNDP Resident Representative who visited Ogoniland in the South-South region in 2007 noted that “the area lacked development activities and the youths were not engaged in productive activities neither were they in school” (UNDP, 2017). The absence of such infrastructure over the years has left the people of the region in a state of “economically poor, environmentally devastated and educationally backward”. Over the years several policies had surfaced on the table of the country’s administrators aimed at providing answers to the question of “what should be done”. It is on record that none of these policies had made any meaningful success in the face of underdevelopment in the region(OMPADEC,1993. Ademola,2008). This failure is responsible for the reason why rural South-South Nigeria has been less attractive for socio-economic investment(Onibokun,1987). Despite the picture of poverty and deprivation associated with the area, in the world geographical map, the region is noted as ‘rich in oil and gas’ and contribute about 70% of Nigerian crude oil and gas.(Ademola 2008).

Over the years the desire of the people to survive in the geography of underdevelopment and deprivation has subjected the area to conflicting social, economic and political activities leading to several “crossroads”. These activities had succeeded in creating atmosphere of violence across the region. Today, in the world map of violence the area is noted as very rich in crime and terror (Joab-Peterside,2006). While development scholars had classified the area as “unsafe to dwell and do business”, violence and terror have become lucrative profession among the youths. It has provided an avenue for survival; a means for putting “food on the table” for the jobless educated and uneducated youths from the region. The picture on the brows of these youths is an explanation of frustration, deprivation and poverty inherited from their elders and parents. Going through the history books the youths had discovered that the countless efforts of their parents and the several policies of the government had not succeeded in lifting the region out of economic backwardness. These youths had therefore seen “violence, criminality and terror” as the only ready-made options to fight their ways out of poverty and deprivation. The government had responded quickly through the adoption of military strategy against these “actions of violence and terror” in the region. For over a decade now, the war has been on and there is no sign of victory on the part of the government. Rural violence and terror is still spreading across the region like wild fire, more youths are getting involved by the day and feeding fat on it. The resultant effect is an increase in humanitarian and economic tragedy for the region and nation(Ademola,2008. Ivor,2010). This development is not without any serious implication for a geographical area whose rural region is in serious need of socio-economic development.

2. Technique and Method

This research study was carried out in the South-South region of Nigeria. The region is made up of 105 local council areas accommodating a total of 8316 local communities. These communities are scattered across the creeks with very poor geography which makes accessibility difficult. To make our study possible a sample frame was defined; all communities with population of 2500 persons and above. Using the 2010 projected population of the region by the Nigerian Population Commission a total of 971 communities made up this list. A representative sample of approximately 15 per cent (144 communities) was used for this study from the list and evenly accommodated the six states making up the region. From each state therefore a total of 24 communities were randomly selected for the study. A focus group discussion was employed for the study. This took the form of 'Town Hall' meetings. In each sample community a list of all the identifiable community based local groups was drawn. Two representatives from among their leaders were invited through key informants for the 'Town Hall' meeting for that community. Questions were asked as it relates to the research topics. Previous works of other scholars in this area of research were also used. Personal observation method was also adopted. Poor geography of the area, high rainfall and insecurity in the region were some of the major challenges experienced during this research work. The study despite these challenges was a success. The friendliness and support of the local people helped greatly in this area.

3. The Concept of Terrorism

Terrorism is not a new phenomenon in global history; it is as old as the history of humanity itself. What is new perhaps is the global change in concept, definitions and strategy adopted and the character. These changes are occasioned by the different corridors of civilization and culture which different countries have gone through over the years. The conclusion we can draw from this is that presently there exist historical cycles of terrorism which we can draw out from the history books. Going through these history books we can draw out several definitions of terrorism. The U.S Department of State Security defines terrorism as a "premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetuated against non combatant target by sub-national groups or clandestine agents usually intended to influence an audience" (Ikporukpo, 2007). Since we have stated that terrorism is not a new phenomenon, some remarkable period of terrorism can be pointed out from the archives of history such as the reign of terror (La Terreur) during the French revolution, the Nazi rule in Germany, the Joseph Salins reign in the Soviet Union. The most remarkable incident of terrorism in modern day history is that of 'Nine-Eleven' in which the United State of America was brought to a stand still on September 11th, 2002 when nineteen hijackers killed 2973 persons in a single day. Even though terrorism was not too popular in some countries or nations before the event of 'Nine-Eleven', that singular event opened the eyes of many to the existence of terrorism. It gave a global recognition to 'terrorism' and branded it as a cankerworm which must be eliminated. It may not also be far from the truth to state also that it was this singular incident that increased the popularity of the word 'terrorism' in Nigeria as well as the extent to which agents of terror could go to achieve their goals. Beside the definition put forward by the U.S Department of State Security, the Canada Security Intelligence Service (CSIS) Act of 2001 conceptualized terrorism as 'any action directed towards or in support of the threat or use of acts of serious violence against persons or property for the purpose of achieving a political objective...' (Shewchuk, 2001). President George Bush of the United States in his Executive order 13224 on Terrorism Financing described Terrorism as an act involving 'mass destruction, assassination, and hostage taking'. For Laqueur, (1999), terrorism is viewed as "illegitimate use of force to achieve a political objective when innocent people are targeted". The presentation of these definitions is necessary as to provide a basis to classify as 'rural terrorism' the manner of rural violence being witnessed in the South-South region of Nigeria.

4. The Geography of South-South Region of Nigeria

Historically and geographically, the South-South region of Nigeria consist of the following states; Rivers, Delta, Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Edo and Cross Rivers. It is one of the geo-political zones created by the Obasanjo administration. By political definition, it is made up of 105 local council areas. It is geographically located in the deltaic region of the country. The area is densely populated with the Ijaws, Itsekiri along with the Irhobo, Edoid and the Isok as the majority ethnic groups among the over 50 ethnic groups found in the region. With a population of over 20 million people speaking about 250 dialects, the people of the region have developed an economic culture associated with the local environment of the South-South region. They are predominately into fishing and farming. Their settlement pattern is also a reflection of their environment; a greater percentage of the people live in small villages scattered along the banks of the rivers and creeks. The riverine area of the region is a coastal belt of swamps bordering the Atlantic Ocean. The vegetation of the South-South region consists mainly of forest swamps. Rainfall in the region is heavy due to the closeness of the region to the equator. Annual rainfall total vary from 2400 to over 4000 millimeters. The area has been a significant part of the Nigerian economy; very rich in gas and petroleum and contributing about 70% of Nigerian crude and gas (Ademola, 2008)

5.The Genesis of Rural Terrorism in South-South Nigeria.

From the definition of terrorism given by the various champions of terrorism, it is extremely difficult not to accept the fact that terrorism exist in rural South-South Nigeria. The present degree of violence and the humanitarian tragedy associated with it could easily qualify it as ‘‘act of terrorism’’. Before the 1980’s the region was regarded as one of the friendly geographical areas in the country one can safely dwell and do business. Its rural people though dwelling in the midst of poverty and deprivation were very friendly and accommodating. Dr Goodluck Jonathan former president of the country attested to this in his speech at the special Niger Delta Consultation Forum in Yenegoa, capital of Bayelsa State in February 10th, 2006. He had told the people that when the oil companies first came to the region he was a child then and there was a friendly relationship between the companies and the local people. According to him, ‘‘at that time I noticed there was no need to guard or protect anything as the local people were friendly and even freely offered their houses to oil workers’’(Ikporukpo,2007). Another former president of the country Olusegun Obasanjo statement in 2004 also proved that the region was a peaceful and friendly area. He said in 1969, he was in the region and the people then were noted as ‘‘people of reasonableness, of discussion, as people who see themselves as an integral part of Nigeria other wise I would not have been here’’(Ikporukpo,2007). The only recorded violence in this period that could be branded as ‘‘act of terrorism’’ was in 1966. An indigene of the region serving in the Nigeria army, Isaac Adaka Boro, led one hundred and fifty nine young men to rebel against the Nigerian state. The group declared the ‘‘Niger Delta People Republic’’ made up of the Ijaw speaking people of the region. The republic did not live long as the federal government crushed the rebellion in a military warfare that ended within fifteen days. The reason the leaders of the group had advanced for their actions was the level of neglect and deprivation the people of the region were subjected to in the midst of abundance of natural wealth. Though the rebellion was crushed those behind it succeeded in registering in the hearts of their people the level of backwardness, poverty and deprivation the region was subjected to in the midst of plenty . It was not long when the leaders of the people came together to protest against this injustice towards the region in the distribution of national wealth and socio-economic infrastructure. The initial protest took the form of petitions and sending of community delegation to the multi-national oil companies doing business in the region and the federal government (Ikeji 2001) .The content of the protest was among others;

- The failure of the multi-national companies and federal government to protect their environment from the activities of oil exploration.
- Injustice in the revenue allocation formulation adopted by the leadership of the country which does not favour the region
- Lack of commitment on the part of the federal government and multi-national oil companies to address the development needs of the region from where the country’s economic pipeline is being oiled.
- Failure of the oil companies and government to adequately pay compensation to communities whose means of livelihood was constantly devastated by the activities of the oil companies.

The yearning of the people against this injustice resulted into the establishment of development agencies to develop the region by successive government. Between 1960 and 2017 the region has experienced the establishment of six agencies or commissions structured to engineer both human and material development in the region. The latest of these agencies is the Niger Delta Development Commission established 2000. Between 1960 and 1999 no meaningful development was recorded by these agencies in the region. Each of the agencies had performed below expectations. The followings were some of the factors that stood against their success; organizational problems, lack of participation of rural people in project initiation, planning and implementation, poor funding, poor fund management, and delay in the release of fund.

The failure of these agencies to meet their objectives greatly accounts for the reason why the region remains miles away from development. The civil approach adopted by the elites to draw the attention of both the federal government and multi-national oil companies to the plight of the people did not yield much progress. The strategy of the federal government and oil companies to silence these vocal elites paid off. The different civil groups leading the protest against the injustice in the area were infiltrated by the government and the oil companies using money as bait. This led to cracks in the groups leading to several internal crises in the region. Recognition was given to those who were on the pay roll of the government and multi-national oil companies as the true representatives of the people. Some of them were either given juicy contract jobs or appointments. They were the ones used by the government to destabilize the various civil groups in the region. Money that should have been used to finance projects was used by government to sponsor pro-government candidates and groups in the region against anti-government candidates and groups. Attention at this point shifted from the collective original objective of these civil groups to the battle to remain relevant and in control of their local environment. The incident that led to the execution of the ‘‘Ogoni nine’’ in 1995 was a fall-out from one of such power play in the region. With the platform set for the return of democratic government in 1999, there was alignment and re-alignment of the different groups to capture political power. The election that ushered in democratic rule that year was short of ‘‘free and fair’’. Those candidates that had the support of the government that conducted the

election won. Those who lost the election did not accept it in good faith. There was re-evaluation of strategy by the losers to take over power from the ruling party or government in the next general election. Even within the ruling party in the region; the People Democratic Party it was not long when cracks emerged occasioned by the formation of a “cartel” who ensured that only those loyal to them were considered in the distribution of political appointment and contracts. As the countdown to the 2003 general election got closer, the opposition grew stronger posting a signal to the ruling party across the region that victory was not going to come to them through the ballot box. One point to note here was that the emergence of democratic rule also witnessed the birth of “ethnic militia” in the region. These militant groups were born out of the need to draw the attention of the federal government and multi-national oil companies to the developmental and environmental challenges in the region (Joab-Peterside, 2006). They were mostly made up of youths from the region. Most of them were school dropouts, jobless and uneducated. They had felt that since the civil approach adopted by their elites in the past did not yield the expected benefits to the region, the adoption of a military strategy against the government and the oil companies will yield much more positive result. There emerged at this period such militia groups like the Niger Delta People Volunteer Force (NDPVF), Niger Delta Vigilante, the Niger Delta Liberation Force etc. The activities of these militant groups brought a substantial spread of violence across oil fields in the region. This was occasioned by major attacks on oil facilities and the kidnapping of oil workers. The humanitarian and economic tragedy which was recorded through the actions of these militant groups resulted into an unhealthy relationship between the government and the oil producing communities. The military option adopted by the government to silence the militant groups only heightened the hostility. It only succeeded in promoting unholy alliance among the militant groups and increased their resolve to stop oil exploration in the region. With arms in hand several oil fields and flow stations were lost to the activities of these militant groups. Between 1998 and 2003 about four hundred oil facilities were vandalized each year. Between January and September 2004 about 581 oil facilities were destroyed (Dimieri, 2006). With the destruction of oil facilities these militant groups were also able to access crude from the flow stations or oil pipelines. Thus it was not very long when bunkering or oil theft became part of the trade of these militant groups. From hot tapping fuel lines to large scale appropriation of crude from flow stations these militant groups were able to buy sophisticated weapons to fight the government. It also became an avenue to salvage them from the poverty into which they were born. The desire to remain in power in 2013 by the ruling party and the resolve to throw the ruling party out of government by the opposition made these militant groups more relevant in the eyes of the political class. The 2013 election returned the ruling People Democratic Party back to power in the region but it was not won through the ballot box but through violence that recorded so much humanitarian tragedy.

After the election the ruling party adopted a “divide and rule” strategy to destabilize the militant groups. Some of the leaders of these groups were recruited as personal policemen by those in power. In order to secure their loyalty, these “personal civilian policemen” were given adequate pay and protection by the government. Those militants not in the “good books” of the government were considered as “bad eggs” and chased into the creeks. This was the beginning of cracks among the various militant groups in the region. For those who could not secure government patronage oil theft offered the only avenue to put food on the table. Even in this business there was a battle for control among the various groups. The attention of these militant groups at this point moved away from fighting against the injustice in the region to economic survival. Violence and oil theft became very lucrative business in the region for the army of jobless youths. The military was drafted to stop them but without any success. The military was not trained for general warfare in the creek, thus they could not win the war. The resultant situation was the loss of billions of naira monthly on the part of the government to oil theft. As at 2004 the country was losing about \$1 billion annually to oil theft (Dimieri, 2006). With access to crude oil these militants were able to build their own financial empire. Their leaders became respected voices among the army of jobless youths and were also able to build their own foot soldiers. The effort of the military to stop them did not prosper for another reason that some of these militant leaders also have the support of powerful people in the government who were using them to play their dirty political games in their locality. The militant leaders with so much wealth at this point were also able to buy their security from some of the military men who were sent to crush them. They were able to handsomely pay some military officers who provided them with intelligent information concerning the movement of the military.

As at the end of President Obasanjo eight years reign it was clear that the militarization of the region by his government to stop oil theft and violence was a failure. His strategy only heightened the war and hostility. One high point to note during this period was that, with a large army of jobless youths at their disposal and enough money from oil pipelines, these militant leaders were able to take over the political atmosphere of their rural communities. The entire rural region in the South-South geo-political zone was divided among the various powerful ethnic militant groups. Each group developed a strong hold on the political class and traditional institutions in their area of control. In some local communities they were even used to sack traditional institutions that were not in support of those in government from that area or those who were supporting the government to fight them. This was the picture of the crises when President Obasanjo handed over power to

Musa Yaradua in 2007.

6. Rise of Rural Terrorism in the South-South Region

The administration Alhaji Musa Yaradua at its inception was quick to realize that military strategy could not stop oil theft or the militancy crises in the region. The alternative approach his government adopted was to initiate Amnesty programme in the region for the militants who were ready to drop their guns or stop oil theft. The primary objectives of the programme was (1)To stop the raging restiveness in the region. (2)Stop oil theft by engaging the militants in gainful employment. (3)Bring socio-economic development to the region (Chika.O,2013). The program finally took off 25th June, 2009. By the end of December 2010 about 26,358 militants led by leaders like Ateke Tom, Boy loaf, Chief Tompolo, Fara Dogogo had embraced the Amnesty programme thereby surrounding their arms to the federal government. The program was to last initially for five years; 2010-2015. During this period the programme was expected to train the ex-militants in different trade in various foreign countries. By 2013 over 30,000 ex-militants had benefitted from such programme. This period also saw relative peace returning to the region and oil field. The notable leaders were given pipeline protection contract jobs running into billions of naira thereby transforming them into billionaires over night. By the end of 2015, it was expected that the issue of militancy crises must have ended in the region but this was not to be. Four things stood against the success of the programme;

- (a) The trained ex-militants were not given any meaning employment to enable them pay their bills and put food on the table.
- (b) There was no provision made to take care of the non militant youths in the region still in misery and poverty.
- (c) The federal government did not keep to its promise to develop the region; there was no conscious plan on the part of the government addressing the developmental challenges in the region.
- (d) The militant leaders that were given oil pipeline jobs became very rich but failed to carry along some of their foot soldiers thus resulting into cracks in their camps.

The last factor stood out as the greatest obstacle to the peace process initiated by the Amnesty programme and laid the foundation for the geography of terrorism in the region.

Beside the award of oil pipeline contract jobs to the militant leaders, each was also in control of the stipends paid to their followers through the Amnesty Programme. The followers were soon to discover that what they were receiving was far less than what was in the government pay-roll. This single factor coupled with the fact that most of them were not carried along in the juicy pipeline security jobs compelled most of them to throw away their “loyalty” to the dustbin. Suspicion, distrust and betrayal stepped in within each militant camp resulting into split and counter split in the various groups. Several faceless militant groups emerged at this point with their own leaders. While the ruling party across the region was romancing with the notable and wealthy militant leaders who were on their pay-roll, the opposition was able to cash in on the split in the major camps to recruit their own foot soldiers with which to fight the government in power with the sole purpose of taking over the political atmosphere in their local environment. As the countdown to the 2015 general election got closer an atmosphere of fear and intimidation stood over the political atmosphere in the region. The average rural dweller knew that his vote will not matter in the election. There was already enough “violence” for sale and it was evident that the highest bidder will secure victory at the poll. The 2015 general election came; it was an exchange of violence for violence leaving behind several human tragedies. While the ruling People Democratic Party lost the election at the centre, it consolidated its hold on power in the region. After the election, the violence took a new dimension. The foot soldiers of the ruling party and that of the opposition were sufficiently tutored to release venom upon the enemies of their pay masters. The ruling party in the region came out in full gear to drive members of the opposition party and their supporters into hiding to prove to the party hierarchy at the top that the opposition party does not exist in the region. The opposition party on its own part also came out to prove to its top hierarchy that the election was rigged by the ruling party and that it was actually in charge in the region. There was therefore a scramble for territorial control of the region by the ruling party and the opposition. Different strategies were adopted by both camps and the entire region was again plunged into a theater of violence and war. This theatre of violence was more pronounced in the rural region since both the sponsors and actors of this violence are those who wanted to establish their political authority and dominance in their immediate local political environment and constituency.

7. Pattern Adopted by the Rural Terrorists in the Region

‘Brutality’ is the trade adopted by the different militant groups in the region to earn a living. The split and counter split after the 2011 election and the take-off of the Amnesty program gave rise to the spread of rural terrorism across the region. Today three categories of rural terrorists exist in the region. The first group is that which has the support of the ruling party in the region that also pays and dictates their steps. This group has the highest followers of the militant youths across the region. The group is made of chains of militant groups each with its leader who is loyal to a “War Lord” who dines with the ruling party. These “War Lords” are often

settled with juicy contract jobs from the government house and are therefore very wealthy. With such wealth and connection they are able to control a great number of militant groups in their local environment. They are able to control these groups effectively through the release of “crumbs” from the “master’s table” to their local leaders in their local communities. With an adequate understanding of their local terrain, they are the ready made foot soldiers used by the ruling party to perpetuate violence on their political enemies and their supporters. They also have the cover of the police and military within the region. They are referred to as “sacred cows” by the local people. Besides being sustained from the government coffers they are also actively involved in oil business in their local environment under the cover of some well paid security officers.

The second group is made of those militant youths who had parted ways with their former masters for some reasons ranging from;

- (a). Not adequately carried along in the Amnesty programme.
- (b). Being dumped by the ruling party after the election.
- (c). Not carried along by their former masters who are now enjoying juicy contract jobs from the government.

They have been able to put their acts together to present a common front for survival. They are constantly at war with their former masters and have become the ready-made tools in the hands of the opposition to fight the ruling cabal and their supporters. Through oil business and adequate pay from their political masters some of their leaders have also become wealthy. They have the support of some powerful politicians at the centre from the region and also enjoy some military cover from the centre.

The third group does not owe their loyalty to any of the political parties. They do not also submit to the leadership of the known terrorist groups in the region. Some of them are also beneficiaries of the Amnesty programme who had parted ways with their former militant leaders. It is almost impossible to point out any form of leadership structure in this group; it is difficult to identify their leaders. They live and survive on crime. They operate through intelligent network and has their network spread across and beyond the region. They are the deadliest group and could do anything for money. They do not have any particular political godfather but could do the dirty job for anyone ready to meet their financial demand. The fact that they do not have any notable leader makes it difficult to identify them in any community. Point men are appointed to lead any mission of the gang and sometimes, in order not to be identified link men popularly called “Machineries” in their circles are imported from another zone to carry out a mission in their locality while they provide the necessary information and cover. Even the police are clueless about their method of operation. They do not have anyone in the police force in their pay list but operate an efficient intelligent system that keep track of even the activities of the police force and those of the other militant groups. They do not fight for territorial control neither are they interested in political power or traditional authority. They are only interested in their business and could make anyone or business their target provided it will yield good pay. They also pay heavily to get any information needed for their operations.

Each of these groups though has an established network in the state capitals in the region but their operational base has always been in the rural areas. The geography of the rural area in the region has enough cover for their protection; array of creeks without good road network linking the urban areas. Violence has been the main tools used by each of these groups on their target population. Because of their activities, an atmosphere of fear totally exists in rural South-South Nigeria. Traditional institutions which have been the custodian of the people’s culture, norms and authority have lost their voices to these terrorists and their political leaders. The flow of cash from the political class and from oil theft has helped many terrorist groups in the region to have access to advanced tactics and weapons for their operations.

Before the advancement into advanced weaponry rural terrorists were used to utilizing the dagger, machete, cutlass or broken bottles to threaten or stab their victims to death. Today this weaponry has been over taken by the use of small arms to machine guns which enable them to kill efficiently or carry out mass destruction. The reason for the adoption of this advanced weaponry can be attributed to;

- The need to protect their businesses from rival terrorist groups in the region and Nigerian government soldiers who are constantly at war with them.
- To protect their economic interest; oil bunkering has become a competitive business among the various terrorist groups in the region as it offers the opportunity for economic survival.
- To remain relevant in their local community or environment.

Terrorist groups in the region adopt different tactics to carry out an operation. The tactics adopted at any time is in line with the strength of the operation in question and the goals to be achieved. Terrorists most times favour tactics that will not leave any traces behind after their operation. In 2004 a town called Tombia in Rivers state was completely destroyed with houses razed down as a result of two rival terrorist group fighting for territorial control (Dimieari 2006). In 2007 police report had it that a group of women from Buguma in Asari Toru local council area who went to Bille community for fishing business were intercepted by rural terrorists and after being disposed of their belongings were murdered. Their corpses were never found and there was no clue as to which group was responsible for the dastardly act.

Some tactics are more conventional and commonly used by some groups than the other. A common tactics adopted by almost all terrorist groups is “shooting”. The sound of gun shot is a common message in the rural communities in the region. From the sound of a gun, a boy of fifteen years in any of communities can easily tell you if it was coming from a police rifle and from the gun of a rural terrorist. The terrorists operate with more sophisticated rifles. Available police record shows that most of the terrorist actions that had left several deaths behind in the rural communities had involved the use of gun. The “act of shooting” is often adoption where the operation requires the life of a target or target population. Such mission is often termed “operation fall the target and the obstacle”. Two things are involved here; the target must be gunned down and secondly whoever is with the target at the moment of striking must also be gunned down with the target in order not to leave any witness behind. The second method is mostly adopted where the terrorists have no clear picture of the target but are simply operating on information or description. In order not to record any case of mistaken identify everyone in that target scene must be gunned down. For example in May, 2016, a target was trailed to a pharmaceutical shop along Polytechnic road in Bori, the heart of Ogoni land in Rivers state. In order not to miss their target and ensuring that no witness was left behind, two other persons with him were also gunned down including the owner of the shop. In Ataba community, a remote riverine area in Rivers State, over 67 persons were gunned down in a single attack by terrorists on August 15, 2004. They were said to be working under the instruction of some highly placed political pay masters (Ebiri,2006) In Omoku, in Rivers State 14 persons were gunned down by rural terrorists in the early hours of January 1, 2018 while returning from the New Year church service(Rivers Today,2018). Between 2008 and 2015 documented report showed that about 1213 persons lost their lives in the six South-South states through terrorist ‘act of shooting’.

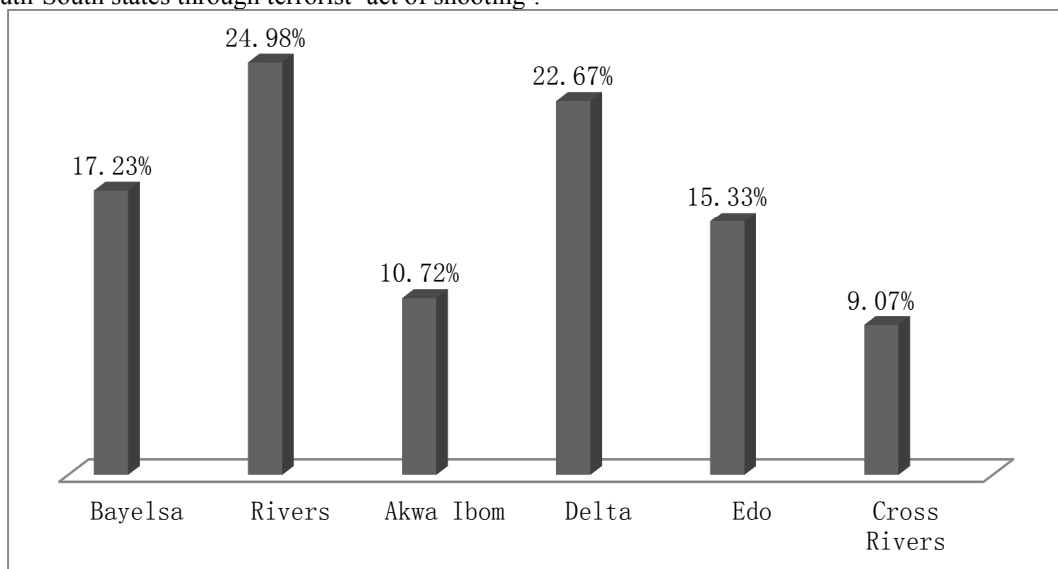


Figure 1 Geographical spread of human tragedy arising from Terrorists ‘Act of Shooting’ in the South-South region between 2008 and 2015

Kidnapping is another tactics adopted by rural terrorists in the region though this tactics is not adopted by every group. It is defined as the forceful movement of a victim to the captor’s choice of location and kept for several days (Ikporukpo,2007). Initially kidnapping was restricted to the foreigners that worked in the multi-national oil companies in the region.

Table 1 Geographical spread of incident of kidnapping across the region

State	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	Total
Bayelsa	20	23	15	16	18	17	10	10	129
Delta	15	10	8	7	10	7	6	7	70
Edo	5	8	6	5	4	3	4	5	40
Rivers	18	23	19	14	15	13	14	15	131
Akwa Ibom	3	4	4	3	2	4	4	3	27
Cross Rivers	2	3	4	3	2	3	4	4	25
Total	63	71	56	48	50	48	42	44	422

Source: Nigeria Police and Newspaper Reports

It was a quick way of making money since the oil companies were willing to pay handsomely to ensure their release and safety. Today, it has been extended to all classes of persons. It seems to be yielding so much money and has almost been on a daily basis in the region.

Recently from a police report a 14-seater passenger bus was hijacked in August 2017 at Uwhuru Patani axis

of the East-West road in the region. The terrorists had requested a hundred thousand naira per passenger.

However this tactics is not adopted for economic benefit only by rural terrorists but of late it has also been adopted by some desperate politicians using terrorism as a means of intimidating their political opponents.

Stabbing is another popular tactics adopted by rural terrorist in the region. It involves the use of the dagger, machete, bottles or any sharp object. This tactics is still commonly in use especially in the remote rural communities where access to advance weaponry is limited. Those who use this method enjoy the advantage of silencing their target without attracting any attention. It shares the same advantage with the “strangulation” tactics also adopted by terrorists. After stabbing, the victim is allowed to bleed to death.

Drowning is also another tactics used in recent times though restricted to the riverine communities in the region. Here after killing the target, a heavy object is tied to the victim’s body and thrown into the river. The purpose is to ensure that the victim’s body is never discovered.

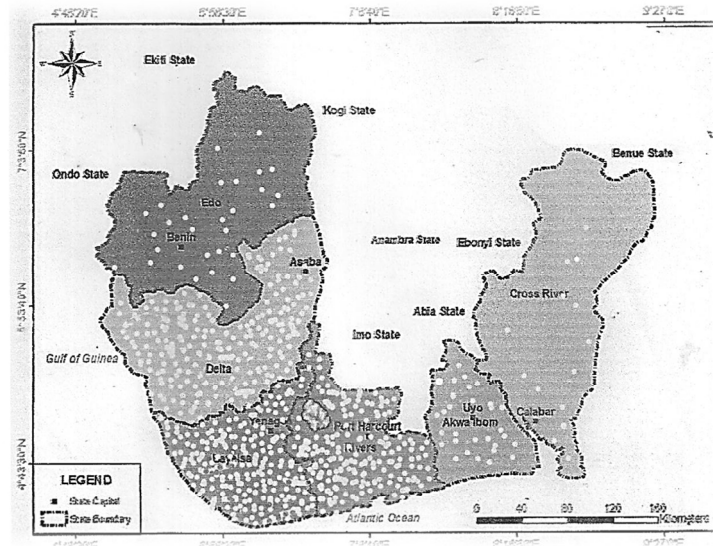


Figure. 2 Map of the South-South region showing States with mild and intense geographical spread of rural terrorism(2008-2015)

8. Rural Terrorism and the Implication for Rural Development.

One of the cardinal objectives of the Amnesty programme by the federal government of Nigeria in 2009 was to take arms out of the hands of the criminal youths of the South-South region. The guns were to be replaced with gainful employment that will put food on their tables and reduce the level of poverty in the region. Secondly, it was also meant to considerably help in the socio-economic development of the region.(Chika. O, 2013). The programme started beautifully and by the end of 2010 about 26,358 youths across the region handed over their arms to the federal government and agreed to stop criminality. The programme has been running for over eight years now and over 30,000 youths have been trained in various vocational and technical skills. This can be regarded by some persons as a pass-mark but in line with the cardinal goals for which it was established, it is doubtful if the programme has actually scored a pass-mark. Even though relative peace has returned to the oil field the same cannot be said of the rural communities in the region. Terrorism abounds in rural South-South Nigeria and has even taken a horrifying dimension of late. Development scholars have continued to canvass for an increased investment in the development of socio-economic infrastructure in rural South-South Nigeria as a way of healing the region of cancerous poverty. This may be the right and positive option but one question that readily comes to the mind is the possibility of such development efforts striving positively in a region bedeviled by the geography of rural terrorism.

Health service is still said to be miles away from the people. The effort of the government to take health services to the people through the primary health care system has not recorded much success. Beside the problem of non availability of improved medical equipment in the public health facility in the region, medical personnel tend to shy away from rural South-South Nigerian. The geography of the region has made kidnapping of medical doctors very easy and as a trade yielding so much income for rural terrorists. Thus sick rural people in the region are often left to the mercy of nurses at public health facility or traditional herbalist. A clinical examination of sixty public health facilities conducted across the rural areas in the region in 2015 to show how many days doctors report to their duty post in a month presented the following information.

Table 2: Availability of doctors at selected sixty rural public health facilities in the region (Monthly average)

Monthly	Number of public health facility	%
1-4days	23	38.33
5-8days	18	30.00
9-12days	11	18.33
12days+	8	13.33
Total	60	100

Despite the fact that good residential accommodation are provided for these doctors in the rural areas, most medical doctors hardly spend the night in the local communities for fear of being kidnapped. Most private clinics operating in rural communities in the region are no longer functional due to the non availability of medical doctors. Their owners could not afford the high pay being demanded by these medical doctors to work in the rural area. The geography of the region is one of the reasons advanced by public development agencies for their inability to develop the region; high rainfall and poor natural drainage system they claimed had often hindered construction work. Though this is a fact that cannot be argued but the activities of rural terrorists has created more negative impact on development efforts than geography. Beside the issue of geography, which sometimes contractors advanced as the reason for the delay in the completion of projects within the stipulated period, that of rural terrorism is one nightmarish problem confronting them today. In almost every community in the region today, before a contractor mobilizes to site, he is expected to take care of the ‘aborigine factor’ which means settling the local youths first and their leaders. These youths most often operates outside the control of traditional authorities. Because of their lack of education there is this misconception among them that any contractor coming to their area to execute a project must have been given so much money. They therefore believed that they must also partake in the share of such money. The settlement is called different names in different communities ranging from ‘marching ground, security fee, bush entry, appeasement fee, sanitation fee etc. The contractor is always left with two options; meet the demand of these youths or employ the services of the military to give him cover through out the duration of the job. This will also mean extra cost because such military officers must be paid their out-of-barracks allowances. Sometimes where the contractor chooses the first option he will still have to contend with another problem; the demand by the local people that a certain percentage of the work force must come from the host community even where they do not have the necessary skills or qualifications. A greater percentage of the abandoned physical projects in the region can be attributed to the contractor’s inability to complete them within the available financial resources after meeting these frivolous demands not captured in the contractual cost. And with the government not willing most times to re-value the project cost, most projects in the region are abandoned mid-way by the contractors.

Rural South-South region of Nigeria is predominately made up of farming and fishing communities. Due to poverty and lack of support from the government, agriculture is practice on subsistence level to provide food for the family and a little cash to afford what their farms could not produce. The frequent raid of the rural communities by the Nigerian military in search of these terrorists has chased them into the forest and creeks considered as a safe place for hiding. Dwelling in the creeks and forest has also given the terrorists access to daily bread through the products of the farmers and fishermen. Mr Igonibo Braide, a sixty year old fisherman from Bakana, a riverine community in the region stated his experience;

“My children had stopped me from going to the sea for fear of loosing me. These boys are ruthless they will stop you at the middle of the sea after the day’s catch and with gun in hand take their time to select the best of your catch then they will give you a list of items you will bring for them the next time you are coming to the sea. They will tell you that since our sons and daughters in the cities are paying taxes to the government that is not doing anything for us but to steal our oil we should also be happy to pay taxes to them through our catch since they are the ones protecting us in the village and fighting to stop the government from stealing our oil”

There had been recorded cases of women who had gone to fetch wood from the forest or creeks for cooking or get food for their families from the farmland being raped or harassed by some rural terrorists. The fear of these terrorists has further impoverished the rural areas. The creeks and farmlands are no longer safe areas to depend on by the rural people for their daily survival. Prices of the few agricultural products that appear in the rural market daily are increasingly on the high side. This has also affected food supply to the urban centers whose food market depends on the rural areas.

In the South-South region there is an age long tradition of celebrating the dead. A traditional night vigil where the dead is laid-in-state is one way of honouring the departed family member. The occasion is always characterized by traditional display, open air religious activities and some other social activities. Large crowd is always attracted into the community at such period from nearby villages and village residents had always cashed on such hours to make extra cash for the family through sales or engaging in any marketable business.

Table 3. Number of women that had suffered harassment from the activities of Rural Terrorists 2008-2015 in Sample Communities.

States	No.	%
Rivers	328	24.72
Bayelsa	317	23.89
Cross Rivers	87	6.56
Akwa Ibom	109	8.21
Delta	357	26.90
Edo	129	9.72
Total	1327	100

This culture is gradually fading out due to the activities of rural terrorists who had made the rural environment no longer safe to carry out such traditional activities for the dead. Rural residents are complaining that these rural terrorists had often cashed on such occasions to deprive rural residents and their visitors of their belongings. Sometimes it is at such period that a target is trailed and successfully kidnapped or gunned down by these rural terrorists. Most families in the rural areas have resorted to 'day-vigil' which entails organizing the necessary funeral rites for a dead relative within few hours during the day. This pattern is gradually gaining root in the region as families have come to discover some advantages associated with it; the family of the deceased is saved from the stress of providing feeding and accommodation for visitors overnight, secondly, money that should have been used for entertainment and other services during the night vigil could now be saved, thirdly, visitors do not need to spend the night in the community, they just need to spend couple of hours at the day vigil and travel back. Though this pattern now appears convenient for most families yet in most cases the services of the Nigerian Police is still employed and paid for to provide security services at funeral scenes to avert any possible attack by rural terrorists and to protect guest at the funeral service.

Conclusion

Rural South-South accommodates about 80% of the population of the entire Southern region of Nigeria. These rural settlements are grossly underdeveloped with a geography that is also unfriendly to infrastructural development. While there is inadequate effort to promote the basic necessity for descent living in the region, their basic traditional means of economic survival is constantly being eroded from the activities of oil exploration. This has ushered in more poverty than wealth into the region. The passion to protect their natural environment from further degradation had triggered off both civil and militant protest from the people. While both strategies seemed not to have made any meaningful progress a new nightmarish phenomenon had suddenly emerged in the region; rural terrorism. Rural Terrorism which is new in the region has been viewed by many as a response to the issue of hunger and poverty prevailing in the region from where so much is taken to oil the economic pipeline of the country. While the barbaric activities of these rural terrorists had drawn the condemnation of both international and local community efforts to stop them had not yielded much result. This has placed a question mark on the Amnesty Programme advanced by the federal government to stop violence in the region. One of the cardinal objectives of the Amnesty Programme was to take the guns out of the hands of the youths in the region. While a remarkable success was made in this direction the same could not be said of the plan to replace it with a descent means of putting food on the table for the ravaging youths. This failure on the part of the government left most of the repentant youths with no option but to pick back the guns. This option was further given a boost by the commercialization of violence by the political class in the region. With such a volatile climate prevailing in the region it is therefore not surprising why and how rural terrorism had made so much headway in the geographical landscape of South-South Nigeria.

Past and present literature had established the fact that poverty and deprivation are causative factors in the history of violence in the region. Taking the guns out of the hands of the ravaging youths and replacing them with a descent means of livelihood seems the best way out of the crises. This can be meaningfully achieved through a consciously planned rural development programme that will be targeted at helping the people to discover their values and potentials. The present practice of rural development centred on physical 'project implementation' is not totally a wrong step but it should be extended to include human capital development. Human capital development should not only take the form of 'skill acquisition' as commonly practiced but should be tailored also at helping the rural people to discover their ability and potentials as well as how to maximize such potentials to yield some economic benefit within the limit of available opportunities offered by the government. It should also help the rural people to discover areas where they have comparative advantage over others and assist them to achieve maximum utilization of such advantage to better their society. The current 'settlement' pattern adopted by desperate politicians or government officials through financial inducement to ravaging youths is a short term measure which does not offer a permanent solution to the issue of violence in the region. Such strategy had never stimulated any positive change within the context of rural development. It merely serves to advertise violence as a "a product for sale" in the eyes of the youths in the rural environment.

Development agencies in the region in the last three decades were merely 'project oriented'. While this is an important part of rural development process projects should be targeted at 'felt needs' in the rural communities. To achieve this, projects meant for the people should involve the people in the initiation, planning and implementation stages. Projects should be initiated from 'below' and not from the 'top' as currently practiced in the region. This singular factor has been greatly responsible for the failure of rural development programmes in the region.

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