

## CRUDE OIL THEFT, ILLEGAL BUNKERING AND PIPELINE VANDALISM IN NIGERIA'S NIGER DELTA: SCOPE, ACTORS AND CAUSES.

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<sup>1</sup>Fidelis A. E. Paki & <sup>2</sup>Tano Dumoyei Agusomu

<sup>1</sup>Department of Political Science, Niger Delta University, Wilberforce Island 560001, Nigeria.

<sup>2</sup>Department of Geography & Environmental Management, Niger Delta University, Wilberforce Island 560001, Nigeria.

Email: [paki\\_fae@yahoo.com](mailto:paki_fae@yahoo.com), [dumoyei@yahoo.com](mailto:dumoyei@yahoo.com)

### ABSTRACT

This paper examined crude oil theft, illegal bunkering and pipeline vandalism in Nigeria's Niger Delta, with the object to discover the scope, actors and causes. The paper relied on secondary sources of data. The finding shows that crude oil theft, illegal bunkering and pipeline vandalism in the Niger Delta is now taking place on an industrial scale and involves commodity traders, international criminals and a whole network of people has since been acknowledged. Similarly, barons and boys, local people, security agents, refinery operators and international actors involving foreign nationals, international oil companies and foreign nation-states collaborate to commit the crimes in the Niger Delta. Furthermore, it was revealed that the causes of crude oil theft, illegal bunkering and pipeline vandalism were poor natural resources governance, failure to curb the lingering Niger Delta crisis and the militarization of the region, among others. It therefore suggested that the country should intensify its efforts to curb the crimes.

**Keywords:** *Crude oil theft; Illegal bunkering; Niger Delta; Nigeria; Pipeline vandalism*

### INTRODUCTION

The Nigeria's Niger Delta region is Africa's foremost oil richly endowed delta and one of the world's richest oil producing areas. It was in 1956 that crude oil was discovered for the first time in Nigeria at Oloibiri in Ogbia Local Government Area of the present Bayelsa State by Shell-BP Petroleum Development Company of Nigeria. According to Ayodele-Akaakar(1997:70); "at this time production was at a rate of 5,000 barrels per day (bpd). The quantity doubled the following year. By the mid-sixties,

production had gone past the 500,000 bpd mark and other foreign oil companies had rushed in to secure exploration acreages. The exploration right which had formerly been granted to Shell alone was now extended to the new corners in line with the government's policy of increasing the pace of exploration in the country."

Today with a maximum crude oil production capacity of 2.5 million barrels per day, Nigeria ranks as Africa's largest producer of oil and the sixth largest oil producing country in the world. The region is estimated to have about 37 billion barrels (bb) of oil reserves and 168 trillion cubic feet of gas deposits (Omotola, 2009), with a huge domestic infrastructure of the petroleum industry of approximately 600 oil fields, 5,284 wells (60% on shore and 40% off shore oil fields), 10,000 kilometers of pipeline and flow lines cutting across the region, 10 export terminals, 22 petroleum storage depots, 275 flow stations, 10 gas plants, 4 refineries (Warri, Port Harcourt 1 & 2, Kaduna) and a massive liquefied natural gas project in Bonny and Brass (Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation {NNPC}, 2007: 3). The NNPC operate in partnership with multinational oil companies (MNOCs) under Joint Operating Agreements (JOAs) or Production Sharing Contracts (PSCs). Others, especially the indigenous oil companies, operate in partnership with international companies under sole risk or as independents. The oil sector since 1975 continue to play dominant role in the nation's economy accounting for 50% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP), 85% of national budgetary revenue and 95% of foreign exchange earnings accruing to government (Garuba, 2016).

However, the Niger Delta region is considered to be plagued with the problems of crude oil theft, illegal bunkering and pipeline vandalism, which has made it to be one of the most adversely impacted oil producing regions in the world due largely to poor handling of petroleum products and poor regulation of the oil industry activities in the country (Raji&Abejide, 2013; UNEP, 2011). The main aim and objectives of this paper are to determine the scope of crude oil theft, illegal bunkering and pipeline vandalism in the Niger Delta, identify the actors involved and highlight the causes. In order to achieve these aims and

objectives, therefore, the paper is structured into six parts. The remaining parts of the paper are sub-divided into the conceptual analysis, the scope of the problem, key actors involved, causes and concluding remarks accordingly.

## **CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS**

In order to understand the main focus of this paper, it is imperative to operationalize the three identifiable variables, namely crude oil theft, illegal bunkering and pipeline vandalism. These terms are conceptualized and their relationship established, thus:

### *(a) Crude Oil Theft*

Theft, according to (Hill & Hill, 2005), is a generic term for all crimes in which a person intentionally and fraudulently takes personal property of another without permission or consent and with the intent to convert it to the taker's use (including potential sale). In most countries, if the value of property taken or stolen is low, the crime is "petty theft", but it is "grand theft" for large amounts, designated misdemeanor or felony respectively. Theft is synonymous with "larceny".

On his part, (Okonkwo, 1992) pointed out that, section 390 of the Criminal Code in Nigeria creates an offence called "stealing" and not larceny. The offence of stealing under the Code is not the same as the old offence of larceny in English Law and it has been held that in construing the Code the word larceny should not be used. The offence of larceny no longer exists in English Law having been replaced by the new offence of theft which is contained in the Theft Act 1968. According to section 383 (1) of the Code "a person who fraudulently takes anything capable of being stolen, or fraudulently converts to his use or to the use of any other person anything capable of being stolen, is said to steal that thing"<sup>1</sup> (Okonkwo, 1992:288).

Similarly, theft used in relation to crude oil, therefore, means the act of taking or stealing crude oil and its associated products from pipelines or well heads or oil platforms or overloading ships at the export terminal facilities onshore or offshore with the intention to cheat the rightful owner(s) of the products for personal gains.

*(b) Illegal Bunkering*

The word bunkering is a derivative of the word "bunkers". A bunker is a defensive military fortification designed to protect people or valued materials from falling bombs or other attacks (Schneider & Kitchen, 2002; Davis, 2007). Bunkers are mostly buried underground. The term originated in the days of steamships, when the fuel or coal was stored in bunkers. Recently, the term bunker have come to be associated and applied to the storage of petroleum products in tanks, and the practice and business of refueling ships.

Bunkering simply means the supply of fuel for use by ships. This also includes the shipboard logistics of loading fuel and distributing it among available bunker tanks. Bunkering operations are located at seaports, and they include the storage of "bunker" (ship) fuels and the provision of the fuel to vessels.

Bunkering is a legitimate business, but becomes illegal when it is not done according to laid down rules and regulations of the maritime laws of a country. In Nigeria, illegal bunkering means the clandestine siphoning off or diverting of petroleum products from pipelines and storage facilities, which are often performed or done with crude methods that usually cause accidents and pollution.

*(c) Pipeline Vandalism*

Vandalism is a deliberate act carried out by aggrieved persons with the aim of destroying properties. It is a willful damage. Christensen, Johnson, & Brookes (1992) defined vandalism "as a deliberate hostile behavior aimed at environmental objects with the motive of damaging the property." Vandalism may take many forms, including tactical vandalism (sabotage at the work place); vindictive vandalism (form of revenge); play vandalism (breaking of window panels); and malicious vandalism (vandalism out of boredom, exasperation, resentment, and frustration) (Winter, 1992; Umar & Othman, 2017).

The word vandalism used in conjunction with pipeline refers to the purposive or intentional act of destroying pipelines with the objective to either steal the petroleum products therein or inflicting punishment on the owner(s) of the property in response to perceived hostile behavior of the owner(s). According to

Udofia& Joel (2012), pipeline vandalism “refers to the willful or deliberate act of damaging petroleum pipelines with the sole aim of stealing crude oil and associated petroleum products.”

The essence of pipeline vandalism is the blowing up of pipelines in order to create shortages of petroleum products for home and international markets and sent signals for sudden increase in the crude oil prices (United Nations Development Report [UNDP], 2006). In the Nigerian oil and gas industry, the effects of pipeline vandalism among others include huge economic losses from pipeline and plant shutdown, environmental pollution, fire outbreaks usually resulting in loss of lives. Scarcity and shortage of petroleum products as well as decrease in electricity supply with the attendant socio-economic problems can also be attributed to pipeline vandalism.

#### **SCOPE OF THE PROBLEM**

It is apt to state from the onset that there is no unanimity of figures given in respect of the scope, scale, magnitude and volume of crude oil theft or illegal bunkering or pipeline vandalism by major stakeholders. However, it is an undisputable fact that the scale of organized stealing of crude oil is taking place every day in the Niger Delta region (Arugu, 2014; Boris, 2016). Similarly, Faucon (2009) reported that;

The Nigerian government estimates the amount of oil stolen countrywide is as much as 100,000 barrels a day - worth about \$1.5 billion a year at current prices... Originally focused on stealing from pipelines, "bunkering" has developed an integrated supply chain where petroleum can be stolen straight from the wellhead, distilled and sold at gas stations... Pipelines are tapped by drilling holes vertically downward into them, inserting a metal plug to which a plastic hose can be connected, and siphoning out the petroleum. The hoses disappear deep into the meandering swamps of the delta to

resurface to pipe the hydrocarbons into boats which transport the material to illegal refineries. "This is clever engineering," a Shell official said.

According to the Chair of Shell Companies in Nigeria, Mutiu Sunmonu, the country loses annually about \$6 Billion to oil theft (Independent, 2014: 10). Similarly, at a roundtable discussion in London on oil theft and illegal refining in the Niger Delta, the UK Niger Delta Working Group (2012) reports that participants at the conference agreed that oil theft has expanded over the years, with an estimated 150,000 barrels of crude oil stolen every day in Nigeria (Attah, 2012). This tally with report in 2009, where the UN office for drug and crime estimated that as much as 150,000 barrels of crude is stolen daily from the Niger Delta (Akpan, 2013). And most of this oil is illegally shipped and sold to international markets, while some quantities are refined and sold along the creeks and rivers of the delta.

Furthermore, in 2013, the NNPC attributed the fluctuation on the country's daily crude oil production levels to persistent attacks on major pipelines arteries supplying crude oil to export terminals. It noted that the impact of the menace on the economy was enormous and further added that the continuous crude oil theft, pipeline vandalism and production shut-ins have seriously constrained the sector's capacity to meet its quota (Arugu, 2014). Ahmed (2013) said that one of the joint venture operators estimated the loss to be between 150,000 and 180,000 bpd. Arugu (2014) noted that going by these figures, we extrapolate that Nigeria and the Joint Venture Companies (JVCs) may be losing a cumulative estimate of \$40 million per day at a flat rate of \$100 per barrel of crude oil.

Another source claimed that about 200,000 bpd is being lost to oil theft. This accounts estimate that the Nigerian economy losses #20 billion yearly, which would have provided massive needed infrastructure, employment and social amenities like clean water, basic health facilities and schools and stronger cash reserves needed to finance development in the country (Nigerian Navy, 2013).

Oil theft in Nigeria appears to be on the rise as the days pass by. Oil theft and illegal bunkering have greatly increased - and piracy seems to be an important aspect of it. There is the claim that more than 300,000 barrels of oil are stolen from Nigerian pipelines daily (Akpan 2013; Olusola, 2013; Odemwingie and Nda - Isaiah, 2013; Okere, 2013; James, 2013). However, a former Minister of Finance, Dr. Okonjo-Iweala, claimed that Nigeria losses 400,000 barrels of crude oil to theft per day (Akpan 2013).

Similarly, crude oil theft, illegal bunkering and pipeline vandalism in the Niger Delta is now taking place on an industrial scale and involves commodity traders, international criminals and a whole network of people has since been acknowledged (Okere, 2013; Olateju, 2013; Ogunmade & Uwaezuoke, 2013; Mernyi, 2014; Adishi, & Hunga, 2017). Some of the statistics or figures given by some commentators seemed outrageous. For instance, (Okere, 2013) reported that Nigeria is losing as much as 800,000 barrels of oil per day.

Izeze (2018)<sup>3</sup> narrated the scope of the problem by reporting that the Nigerian government is spending billions of Naira annually on the fleet of military operations in the Niger Delta to clamp-down on illegal refineries, while stealing of crude oil on industrial scale are left unchecked. According to him, Nigeria loses over 2 million bpd of crude to corporate oil thieves. The core issue facilitating the massive stealing of Nigeria's crude oil and gas is the failure and / or refusal of operators in the industry and regulatory bodies to publicly disclose or engage easily scientifically verifiable templates for precise measurements of the volume of all oil and gas produced in Nigeria, particularly at the well heads. Multinational oil companies refused to publish what they pump at production points – to enhance transparency and accountability in the oil and gas sector. This is because there is no metering of oil and gas production at well heads and flow stations. The situation is aided by collision between Department of Petroleum Resources (DPR) and National Petroleum Investment Services (NAPIMS), subsidiaries of the NNPC as well as other institutions of government and MNOCs who benefits from the massive oil theft. He contended that Nigeria maybe pumping up to 5 million

barrels of crude oil daily from its oil fields particularly in the deep and ultra-deep offshore arenas.

Notably, at the nation's various export terminal facilities onshore / near shore, the MNOCs base their total production figures on unconventional volume estimates that is dubious and out rightly susceptible to manipulation by mere altering of the physical properties of the crude at the export terminals. The effect is that what oil tankers declared load at Nigerian ports are far less than what the vessels discharge at ports in America and other destinations elsewhere. These facts were established by a team of experts.

Izeze (2018) substantiated his claims by stating that recently, a consortium of Nigerian lawyers and some foreign experts embarked on an investigation of oil theft and established that some ship loads registered less when they left Nigeria and more on reaching the United States (US), while some entire shiploads were undeclared in Nigeria. The US based import genius data base was used by the attorneys to confirm declarations made to US customs by shippers and importers from Nigeria and it was discovered that between January 2011 and December 2014, in Philadelphia Port in the US, over 60.2 million barrels of crude oil valued at \$12.7 billion were not recorded in Nigeria, but were recorded there in the US, a country that maintain detail record for the purpose of taxation. That is just one discharge point in the US. If all other discharge points of Nigeria's crude oil at that period are considered, the country must have been shortchanged to the tune of over \$200 billion. Nigeria's crude oil is exported to other countries such as China, Britain, France, Italy, etc. The Anglo-Dutch Shell, Italian ENI (Agip), and American Exxon/Mobil were among the MNOCs identified in these dubious transactions (Izeze, 2018).

Why these varying figures of the volume of stolen crude oil in the Niger Delta? This is because of the sophisticated dimensions crude oil theft has taken. Crude oil theft is a big business and because businesses have their ups and down; there are good times and bad times. Thus, the magnitude of stolen crude oil is sure to fluctuate. Again, there are times that militancy and



sabotage of oil facilities increase in the Niger Delta and at other times it reduces. It also involves security, which affects the fortune or otherwise of the illegal business. For instance, when security is tight crude oil theft reduces. On the other hand, when security is relaxed, the scope of stolen oil might increase. Furthermore, the Federal Government of Nigeria has allowed the Niger Delta crisis to linger on for several years giving a picture of near anarchy in the region, which made it possible for illegal activities of such magnitude to be going on without being checked.

Arugu, (2014) opined that because of the varying and sometimes conflicting figures from different stakeholders in the oil industry on the actual volume of crude oil stolen, there is need to establish base line information and data on the accurate quantity of crude oil stolen and the revenue loss to the economy. Therefore, the Nigeria Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (NEITI) believes that the absence of reliable baseline information and data on the actual quantity of crude oil lost either through oil theft, bunkering, or pipeline vandalism remains a critical challenge. As a matter of necessity, full disclosure and public understanding of the quantity of crude oil loss to these organized crimes and the enormous loss to the economy will help draw national and international attention to the urgent need for solution (Arugu, 2014).

### **KEY ACTORS INVOLVED IN CRUDE OIL THEFT**

When crude oil is stolen, it is often used for transaction between sellers and buyers; as such crude oil theft, illegal bunkering and pipeline vandalism involves many actors, both local and international. Ikelegbe (2005) attested to this fact when he observed that:

There is a large scale illegal local and international trading on crude oil. This has grown from a few amateurs in the 1980s who utilized crude methods to extract crude from pipelines to a very sophisticated industry which uses advanced technologies to tap crude and sophisticated communications equipment

to navigate through the maze of hundreds of creeks, rivers and rivulets. The oil theft syndicates have also graduated from boats and barges to ships and large oil tankers in the high seas. The stealing and smuggling of crude has become very extensive and large scale since the late 1990s.

On his part (Olateju, 2013) is of the view and stressed that:

Let no one be deceived for the rich, powerful and connected are Nigeria's oil Mafiosi (member of Mafia). Oil theft is a big criminal ring with sophisticated organization and international network. Where will poor people get the millions to buy or rent vessels, bribe customs and get military cover for their operations? Oil theft is not for the poor, it is an extensive racket involving military, security apparatchiks (an official in a large political organization), politicians, dubious industrial moguls and oil companies — You don't have to snoop around the communities to find tell - tale signs of oil theft. They are all too impossible to miss; everything is flung out in the open. The communities themselves are complicit in the trade as it provided employment for them.

Similarly, Asuni (2009) identified the main players involved in these illegal businesses at its various levels. She asserts that:

At the local level, Niger Delta youth and community leaders play the leading role. As one moves up the network to the senior echelons, members of the Nigerian military, oil companies' employees, top

politicians and retired military officers predominate. At an international level, countries from Eastern Europe, Russia, Australia, Lebanon, Netherlands, France, Senegal, Cote d'Ivoire etc., are all involved. The crews of two bunkering ships - one Filipino, another Ghanaian were recently arrested in Nigeria and shed some light on this shadowy network.

Ikelegbe (2005); Asuni, 2009; Garuba (2010); Obasi (2011); Olateju, 2013; Ofuoma & Omoruyi (2014); Obodo-Joel (2014) however elaborately discussed the main actors involved in illicit crude oil theft and bunkering extensively. Thus, the key actors in crude oil theft, illegal bunkering and pipeline vandalism in the Niger Delta include the following:

*(a) The Barons and the Boys*

Locally, the key actors in illegal crude oil theft are the organized crime groups or syndicates, which are made up of the barons, those who mastermind the business and the boys, operational staff comprising the young men who actually carry out the acts in the creeks where crude wells and pipelines are situated. Crude oil business is capital intensive and as such the barons are made up of people who have the capital to finance bunkering activities. They recruit or employ the boys and commission them to break and tap into pipelines in order to siphon crude oil into their barges for delivery to buyers. Therefore, they also have the connection to arrange for stolen crude to be transported to the high sea to be purchased by buyers. On the other hand, the boys are mainly from the Niger Delta, who to some extent understands life in the creeks and rivers where expertise in swimming is relatively required for successful operations. They are brave and trained in various tasks, including the capacity to carry arms.

Obasi(2011) reported that on inception of the illegal business, the barons were mainly non Niger Delta people, most of whom were from the northern and south-western part of the country that were involved in the Nigeria's oil industry. This initial constitution

of organized criminal crude oil theft groups have change as some of the boys of yesterday have graduated to become barons and many other elites from the Niger Delta have joined the lucrative trade.

*(b) Local People*

The next line of actors is the collaborators, facilitators and other accessories to the crime. This involves an array of individuals, groups and communities. Those involved in the crime needs collaboration with local people, especially youths in the host communities and passage communities. On-shore crude oil wells and pipelines are situated in domains of communities that are often referred to as host communities and stolen crude is convey in barges that passes through some communities en route to the high sea, which are referred to as passage communities. Members of these communities, especially the youths knows that crude oil theft is an illegal business and in order to keep a blind eye to their operations and allow them free passage, they need to be 'settled'. The barons arrange for the settlement of youths and leaders of host and passage communities to allow for loading of barges and passage of small vessels to the sea.

*(c) Security Agents' Collaboration*

The people who are engaged in crude oil theft do not need only collaboration of local people, but also that of security agents. The security agents that require collaboration with crime syndicates are the police, military and other security agents involved in intelligence gathering, including the Joint Task Force (JTF), who are deployed to the region. These groups of security operatives are often 'settled' in order to allow for unhindered illicit business operations. It is the baron that provides the resources for their settlement.

Sometimes the settlement may not end at the operation area, but 'tips' are carried to unit commanders in their offices by the barons, or some of those security details make returns to their bosses in their offices. Security operatives who are deployed in lucrative beats in the Niger Delta sometimes bribe their way to duty posts. Otherwise, they may not benefit in the next detail. This explains

why some security operatives are always on duty at lucrative beats because of protection they receive from their bosses.

*(d) Local Refinery Operators*

Local or artisanal or illegal refinery owners and operators also engage in crude oil theft or they buy stolen crude oil in order to refine it. Therefore, they are among the array of key actors involved in the illicit trade. In addition, there are those who are employees in some haulage companies who are involved in oil theft. In Nigeria, drivers are noted for diverting petroleum products to other destinations for sale (Paki, 2017).

*(e) International Actors*

This includes foreign nationals, MNOCs and foreign nation-states that are involved in plundering crude oil in the Nigeria's Niger Delta region. Similarly, (Asuni, 2009) listed the name of countries involved in the illegal plundering of crude oil resources from the Niger Delta such as nations from Eastern Europe, Russia, Australia, Lebanon, Netherlands, France, Senegal, Cote d'Ivoire, etc. on his part, (Obasi, 2011) stated that Nigeria's security operatives have been reported to have arrested foreign nationals from Greece, Russia, Romania, Ukraine, and other foreign sailors. Sometimes it involves a multi-national network of actors working together in a single operation. For example, it was reported in July 2008 that, 14 Filipinos were arrested by the JTF in Bayelsa State, with 150-160 metric tons of stolen crude oil. There was evidence that the criminals in the vessel were communicating with their boss in Greece (Ibid). Furthermore, Anglo-Dutch Shell, Italian ENI (Agip), and American Exxon/Mobil were among the MNOCs that have been mentioned to be involved in crude oil theft in Nigeria(Izeze, 2018).

## CAUSES OF CRUDE OIL THEFT, ILLEGAL BUNKERING AND PIPELINE VANDALISM

There are various factors engendering the persistent thriving of illegal business activities in the oil sector of the Nigerian economy in the Niger Delta. Garuba (2012); Udo, 2013;Igbuku (2014); Victor, Offiong& Sunday (2016); Adishi&Hunga(2017), mentioned various reasons ranging from the mundane to the absurd. They

include: (a) poverty; (b) ignorance; (c) greed; (d) lack of respect for national economic survival; (e) get rich syndrome; (f) lack of gainful employment among the youths in the region; (g) exploiting the loopholes in the criminal justice system to circumvent the law; (h) evolving culture of impunity from the wrong perception that some people are above the law; (i) weak institutional structure to checkmate criminals; (j) malice; and (k) bad governance (corruption, incompetency); (l) criminal impunity in the country; (m) neglect of the region by government and multinational companies; (n) quest in sharing and taking part in the national cake; (o) collaboration between the security agents and the bunkers; (p) community - industry expectation mismatch; and (q) ineffective law enforcement. However, the following causes are explained below:

*(a) Poor natural resources governance*

Governance to “the processes of interaction and decision-making among the actors involved in a collective problem that lead to the creation, reinforcement or reproduction of social norms and institutions” (Hufty, M. (2011)). It is the way the rules, norms and actions are structured, sustained, regulated and held accountable. When governance is good, there is accountability, transparency, participation, predictability, legitimacy and the rule of law in society. Because of these lofty ideals which governance aspires to achieve to be seen as good, it is often a big challenge to developing countries like Nigeria. Hence, the absence of these characteristics is often seen as bad governance.

As difficult as the governance of human beings, it is even more difficult to govern natural resources. Therefore, the governance of natural resources is one of the most difficult challenges facing the modern world (Eigen, 2011: 136). This is because resources extraction has led to poverty, conflict and corruption. With good governance, natural resources can generate large revenues to foster growth and reduce poverty (ibid).

Resource governance in Nigeria's oil industry is poor. This is because there is no accountability, no transparency, no all-inclusive participation, the business environment is unpredictable, and the local people continue to question the legitimacy and the absence of rule of law governing the oil industry. The cumulative

effect of these is acts of lawlessness and condoning it, absence of likelihood of effective sanction, bribery and corruption, and absence of stake holding of local people.

*(b) Failure to curb the lingering the Niger Delta crisis*

It has been identified that eight is suespresumably characterized the Niger Delta crisis in Nigeria. These includes social and political exclusion, economic exclusion, poor governance and corruption, poor infrastructure and public service delivery, environmental degradation, escalating violence and disorder, a vicious cycle of violence and landownership World Bank (2007). On his part, (Amuwo, 2009: 239), mentioned that the crisis in the Niger Delta “resolves around issues such as self-determination or autonomy, development, resource control, security, political inclusiveness, corporate social responsibility of the transnational corporations and so on.” Therefore, “the area (the Niger Delta) has become a hot bed of violence, insurgency, kidnapping, hostage taking, oil pipeline sabotage, crude oil theft, gang wars, internecine struggles, and so much else by way of anarchy and chaos” (Afinotan&Ojakorotu, 2009:191).These issues have lingered in the political arena of the country for too long.

Governments in Nigeria have failed in its avowed duty to protect lives and property by allowing the Niger Delta crisis to fester for over the past fifty (50) years. How can a stable sovereign nation allow resources in the country to be plundered to such a magnitude by local and international collaborators? The increasing criminality in the Niger Delta can only be attributed to lack of political will to curb crisis, especially crude oil theft, illegal bunkering and pipeline vandalism persists due to the fact that there is presumed crises in the region that tends to undermine government’s capability and capacity to ensure law and order. The increasing chaos in the Niger Delta has therefore become an international (regional and global) security risk.

*(c) Militarization of the Niger Delta*

Paki (2018:71) averred that “the Niger Delta is an over militarized region”, which he attributed to “the contest for the resources in the region by internal and external forces”. According to him, “such contests have become the fate of resources rich states of the world, especially in Africa where “resource conflicts’ or “resource wars” are fought in the continent, with its attendant

adverse effects on the people” (Ibid: 71-72). Furthermore, (Paki, 2018:72), observed that “the case of the Niger Delta is unique. In the years before colonialism, it was the consolidation of city-states, the slave trade and later the legitimate trade in palm oil, but today the issue of contest is crude oil and gas resources”.

Since the discovery of crude oil in the Niger Delta, the situation (the Niger Delta crisis or conflict or question) has been deliberately allowed to deteriorate until it is almost a state of lawlessness that often prevails. Today there is permanent deployment of military and para-military troops and equipment in the region to keep and maintain peace<sup>2</sup>. This was as a result of violent conflicts between the state and organized militant groups, which have led to the destruction of lives, properties and communities in the Niger Delta (Okumagba, 2012; Onuoha, 2016; Paki, 2018).

Adishi&Hunga(2017:58) reported that “despite the JTF activities in the region, illegal bunkering remains the act of the day. This shows that establishment of the JTF had not achieved the desired results of curtailing the upsurge of oil theft and illegal bunkering in the Niger Delta”. Presently, the JTF is accused of crude oil theft, illegal bunkering and pipeline vandalism (Obasi, 2011; Obodo-Joel, 2014; Boris, 2016).

## **CONCLUDING REMARKS**

This paper discussed crude oil theft, illegal bunkering and pipeline vandalism in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. The findings revealed that the scope of the problem is enormous in that crude oil theft, illegal bunkering and pipeline vandalism in the Niger Delta is now taking place on an industrial scale and involves commodity traders, international criminals and a whole network of people has since been acknowledged. Again, it shows that the main players involved in these illegal businesses at its various levels include the barons and the boys, local people, security agents, illegal or local refinery operators and international actors such as foreign nationals, sovereign nation-states and international companies. Furthermore, the paper discovered that there are various factors engendering the persistent thriving of illegal business activities in the oil sector of the Nigerian economy



in the Niger Delta. These include among others, poor natural resources governance, failure to curb the lingering the Niger Delta crisis and the militarization of the Niger Delta.

Therefore, the paper suggested that the federal government should intensify its efforts to curb the crimes. This can only be done by first of all successfully tackling the issue of poor natural resources governance, find solutions to the Niger Delta crisis and demilitarize the Niger Delta region of the country. Also, the federal government should ensure the prosecution of the perpetrators of the illegal businesses in the Niger Delta with a view to deter other people who might intend to commit the crimes in future. Again, the federal government should ensure the observance of international best practices in the operations of the oil industry in the country. Furthermore, the federal government should increase its competences, especially in managing its national affairs. This will send strong signals to the international community, especially foreign nations and nationals, and international companies that the country is having the capacity to deal decisively those who flout its national laws.

## **NOTES**

1. Oshinye v. Commissioner of Police (1960) 5 F.S.C. 105, commenting on the judgment of Kester Ag. J. in (1960) W.N.L.R. 66.
2. From 1993-1998, the Federal Government deployed the Rivers State Internal Security Force (RSISF) to curb the activities of the Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP) and from 2002 to date it is the Joint Task Force (JTF) on the Niger Delta that have been deployed in the region.
3. Izeze, I. (2018, April 17) is quoted copiously because his report graphically explained the phenomena.

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