

## **Conflict in the Niger Delta: Assessing the Link Between Environmental Security And Political Stability**

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**Abstract:** Since the 1990s, concerted efforts targeted at conflict resolution and peacebuilding in the Niger Delta region have mostly failed to achieve peace in the region. While several factors have been blamed for the failure to achieve peace in the Niger Delta, it is possible that inability to understand the exact causes of violence in the region is responsible for the difficulty in finding a workable solution. This study therefore attempts to tap into the relationship between environmental security and political stability in understanding the conflict in the Niger Delta. From a review of existing literature and the conduct of personal interviews, the study stresses that environmental insecurity is the primary determinant of conflict in the Niger Delta. It therefore suggests that until the environmental determinants of conflict in the Niger Delta are addressed, all attempts at peacebuilding in the region are bound to hit the rock.

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### **I. INTRODUCTION**

The seemingly unending crisis in the Niger Delta has attracted the region with the description as a hotbed of conflict.<sup>1</sup> This is manifested in cases of low intensity warfare, gang wars, communal wars, hostage-taking, kidnapping, as well as different forms of internecine struggles occurring within the region since Nigeria's independence in the 1960.<sup>2</sup> However, it was not until the 1990s that conflict in the Niger Delta became remarkably intensified. This was when already existing tensions between Niger Delta communities and multinational oil corporations (MNCs) degenerated into series of violent confrontations between armed Niger Delta groups and Nigeria's armed forces. Ever since, conflict in the region has been a source of huge concern for the academic community, successive Nigerian authorities as well as the international community at large. This is perhaps as a result of the region's overall significance to the Nigerian state.

The Niger Delta region is home to approximately 20 million persons who live in about 13,329 separate settlements.<sup>3</sup> The region is historically, geographically, and economically significant to the Nigerian State; historically, the Niger Delta region in comparison with other Nigerian regions is recorded to have maintained the earliest contact with Europe, where as early as the 15<sup>th</sup> Century, trade relations had been established between some pre-colonial Niger Delta States and Europe. Geographically, the region harbours the third largest wetland in the world (largest in Africa), and is located at the point where different rivers and streams, including the Niger River, empty themselves into the Atlantic Ocean.<sup>4</sup> Economically, the region hosts the country's 40 billion proven oil reserves, and as such contributes an estimated 80 percent of Nigeria's annual revenue, 95 percent of its foreign exchange earnings and 96 percent of the nation's export revenues.<sup>5</sup>

Nevertheless, in the face of its rich endowments, the Niger Delta region for several decades has been plagued by different forms of conflict. Remarkably, as early as the 1990s, violent confrontations had begun between Nigeria's armed forces and armed youths of the Niger Delta, thereby giving a head-start to what is now widely referred to as militancy in the Niger Delta.<sup>6</sup> Militancy in the Niger Delta has since manifested itself through hostage taking,<sup>7</sup> oil bunkering,<sup>8</sup> kidnapping,<sup>9</sup> piracy,<sup>10</sup> among other forms of violence and armed resistance. All of these aspects of the Niger Delta crisis have been sufficiently captured in the literature. Causes and consequences of the conflict in the Niger Delta have also received adequate scholarly attention. However, in spite of the wide scholarly interest in the conflict in the Niger Delta, no attempts have been made to examine the relationship between environmental security and political instability using the conflict in the Niger Delta as a case study. It is therefore in view of this gap in the body of knowledge that this study becomes imperative.

Environmental security in this regard is understood within the backdrop of human security, where environmental factors threaten the survival of people in the form of unemployment, food insecurity, internal displacement as well as health challenges. On the other hand, the Niger Delta region is taken to comprise of all nine oil producing States in Nigeria which include: Abia, Akwa-Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo, Imo, Ondo, and Rivers States.<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, there is need to note that prior to Nigeria's independence, only the Western Ijaw Division in the defunct Western Region, and the Rivers Province (excluding Port Harcourt and

Ahoada) in the defunct Eastern Region were regarded as the Niger Delta.<sup>12</sup> This arrangement was however first altered in 1993 when Akwa-Ibom, Cross River and Edo States were included as Niger Delta states. This was followed with the addition of Abia, Imo and Ondo states in 2000 with the establishment of the NDDC.<sup>13</sup>

In investigating the relationship between environmental security and political instability using the Niger Delta conflict as a case study, this study will be divided into two main sections. The first section undertakes to explore the notion of environmental security, while the second section offers an explanation of the conflict in the Niger Delta using the lenses of the concept of environmental security. It is hoped that the findings of this study will not only enhance understanding of the notion of environmental security, but will offer fresh insights into the seeming intractability of the conflict in the Niger Delta.

## II. UNDERSTANDING ENVIRONMENTAL SECURITY

The notion of environmental security draws from the idea that there is some sort of relationship between the natural environment and security. While this line of thinking is not particularly novel, it was however not until the end of the 1980s that it became a subject of serious concern for scholars and policymakers alike.<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless, like several other concepts in political studies, finding a definition for environmental security has been largely problematic, reasons for which it may be necessary to begin by offering a simple definition of security as “the alleviation of threats to cherished values, especially those which, left unchecked, threaten the survival of a particular referent object in the near future.”<sup>15</sup> Relating the foregoing definition of security to the notion of environmental security is however not an easy task

There are essentially two approaches to understanding environmental security. These approaches usually fall into two broad categories which include traditional and non-traditional approaches to security. Concerning the former, environmental security is understood by assessing the extent to which environmental changes fuel or inspire conflicts, and as well threaten national security or lead to the loss of territory. In the latter category however, environmental security may be explained in relation to how environmental issues pose non-military threats to the society and individuals. These two approaches are however often used interchangeably especially when dealing with the two main dimensions of environmental security which include: resource question and climate change.

Resource question in this regard refers to the ways through which access to, and control of natural resources, may relate with security.<sup>16</sup> According to Klare<sup>17</sup>, with the end of the Cold War when ideology and superpower rivalry no longer explained the nature of international conflicts, the next relevant and useful explanation was the ‘stress on resource security’ which is an indication of the expanded field of security beyond traditional military threat. On another level, research question may be understood in terms of conflicts arising from the scarcity or unavailability of some vital natural resources. This line of argument usually follows the neo-Malthusian tradition of thought which suggests that resource scarcity would lead to increase in levels of frustration and in turn lead to resentment against the state, which would ultimately result in the outbreak of violence.<sup>18</sup> It is in this regard that the scarcity of water has been suggested to cause future hostilities within and among states. Williams however rejects such claims by stressing that “starving people rarely are capable of organizing major military actions.”<sup>19</sup> Moreover, recent empirical research have demonstrated the implausibility of the scarcity argument, as it has been repeatedly proven that instead of scarcity, it is the availability of some vital resources that tend to fuel conflicts.<sup>20</sup> How therefore does resource abundance threaten environmental security?

According to Nevins<sup>21</sup>, resource abundance is relevant to the notion of environmental security; this is in view of the fact that with resource abundance comes conflict over who gains access, and who controls the given resources. Drawing his analysis from Klare’s *Resource Wars*, Nevins admits that the endemic conflicts in Africa and the Persian Gulf can best be explained in terms of the abundant natural resources in the concerned areas. Auty<sup>22</sup> adds to the debate by concluding that the relationship between natural resource abundance and conflict is a given. The author therefore furthered his argument by trying to explain the relationship using theoretical models; he concludes that high rent resources such as oil have a higher tendency of causing conflicts. Auty stresses that the relationship between natural resources and conflicts is more deterministic than it is probabilistic.<sup>23</sup>

Nevertheless, the problem with the foregoing interpretations of environmental security based on abundance of resources and its lack thereof is that such interpretation almost entirely ignore the fact that since the end of the Cold War, the concept of security has expanded beyond the conventional military threats, violence and conflicts. Instead, with the emergence of the concept of human security, security has come to be closely associated with the welfare of ordinary people.<sup>24</sup> Put differently, the concept of human security now reflects the expansion of the meaning of security to include issues that affect the welfare of ordinary people. It is therefore important that any examination of the relationship between natural resources and security should as well focus on how the availability of natural resources or its lack thereof may impact on the everyday lives of

ordinary people. It is against this backdrop therefore that environmental degradation resulting from the exploitation of natural resources become vital security issues that are worthy of mention.

Environmental pollution is one of the most notable manifestations of environmental degradation which weighs remarkably on the lives and welfare of ordinary people. Khan and Ghouri<sup>25</sup> report that environmental pollution is such a wide-reaching problem that it is likely to so adversely affect the health and well-being of the ordinary people. Among the different forms of environmental pollution include: water pollution, land/solid waste pollution, as well as air pollution. In a recent study conducted by Emuedo and Emuedo,<sup>26</sup> it was observed that as a result of oil exploration and exploitation activities within the Niger Delta region, quality of water has been greatly reduced with severe consequences for aquatic life. They stress that some species have even gone into 'virtual extant' as a result of water quality. The effect of poor water quality on aquatic life poses serious threat to socio-economic life of the people; this in view of the fact that fishing is one of the main occupations of the rural dwellers. Akhakpe<sup>27</sup> stresses that the effect of pollution resulting from oil exploitation in the Niger Delta poses greater danger to human life, survival and overall wellbeing than war itself.

In addition to the concern for environmental pollution is the issue of deforestation for which the Amazon forest in Brazil is a useful instance. McDonald<sup>28</sup> notes that there are only few cases of resource exploitation that have attracted more scholarly attention especially in the field of security studies than the Brazilian Amazonian deforestation. This is especially because successive Brazilian governments up to the late 1980s had adopted a narrow state-centric understanding of security in pursuing a policy of deforestation with little or no regard for the effects of such policy on the local population whose main sources of livelihood were derived from the forest. However, as a result of pressure from environmental NGOs as well as international bodies, Brazil abandoned its narrow perception of security based on territory and sovereignty, to accommodate the interests and welfare of the local population.<sup>29</sup> However, the point to stress is that the Brazilian government's policy of deforestation had threatened the welfare of the local population, and as such posed a threat to human security.

The second dimension of environmental security has to do with the impact of climate change on security. It should be noted that one of the most prominent manifestations of environmental change in the contemporary society is climate change which may be simply described as changes in the world's climatic conditions as a result of human activities especially since the beginning of industrial revolution. The changes in climate are specifically attributed to the increasing levels of carbon dioxide alongside other greenhouse gases that trap additional heat in the atmosphere.<sup>30</sup> Brzoska and Fröhlich<sup>31</sup> report that changes in climate have been found to have a direct relationship with the outbreak of tensions and conflicts across the globe. This claim is substantiated with a number of instances where changes in climatic conditions such as drought, as well as increased annual temperature were used to explain the outbreak of some conflicts and tensions in the United States, India, Australia, Tanzania and Brazil.<sup>32</sup>

Burke et al<sup>33</sup> argue that drawing from historical evidence, a relative rise in temperature usually increases the likelihood of conflict. They therefore claimed that based on projected temperature increase between 2009 and 2030 as a result of climate change, there is likely to be a 54% increase in the incidence of armed conflicts in Africa which would lead to an estimated 393,000 battle deaths. This claim is however flawed by the fact that human actions do not usually lend themselves to linear scientific projections. Nevertheless, discarding the validity of the argument that climate change leads to conflict does not however suggest that climate change is not relevant in security studies. Indeed, the relevance of climate change to security is multidimensional as it ranges from issues such as threats to food and health security to the role of the military in responding to disasters caused by changes in climatic conditions. It is therefore in view of the foregoing understanding of environmental security that it comes pertinent to assess its impact in fostering the Niger Delta conflict.

### **III. ENVIRONMENTAL SECURITY AND CONFLICT IN THE NIGER DELTA**

Literally, multiple factors have been blamed for the conflict in the Niger Delta. Most of these factors have been sufficiently captured in existing literature. However, drawing from analysis of available research and interviews with some Niger Delta youths and leaders, this section seeks to underscore the role of environmental insecurity as the primary causal factor for the conflict in the Niger Delta. Environmental insecurity in this regard is taken from the perspective of environmental degradation resulting from oil exploration and production activities in the Niger Delta. At its most basic sense, environmental degradation refers to the deterioration of the environment as a result of human actions or natural disasters, such that the environment becomes undesirable and unsustainable.<sup>34</sup> The World Bank notes that environmental degradation is a high priority environmental concern in view of its negative effects on agricultural productivity, wildlife, and the overall quality of life for those affected.<sup>35</sup> The Bretton Woods Institution however failed to acknowledge the relationship between environmental degradation and conflict.

Okonta and Douglas<sup>36</sup> note that there is no stage of the oil production process that is environmentally friendly. This is because during the exploration, drilling, refining and transportation of oil products, several

cases of environmental degradation have been recorded, all of which can be categorized into three main dimensions, namely: drilling waste disposal, oil spillage and leakages, as well as gas flaring, and noise pollution.

Drilling waste disposal has to do with the process through which wastes that emanate from the drilling and production of oil are disposed. These wastes usually include mud, drill-cuttings, chemicals, condemned pipes, filters, among a host of other elements. Ayotamuno et al<sup>37</sup> note that given the fact that evidence-best waste management procedures on oil production have not been developed and adopted in Nigeria, outdated and unhealthy methods are usually adopted which cause harm to the environment. In a typical example, Gbadebo et al<sup>38</sup> observe that drill mud and cutting wastes generated during the drilling of Igbokoda X and Igbokoda Y onshore oil wells in Ondo State, Nigeria, contained high values of aliphatic hydrocarbons (AH) as well as polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs). This therefore showed that oil wastes generated from the Igbokoda oil wells were not adequately treated before being released into the environment, hence, its high hydrocarbon values. It is pertinent to note that the high hydrocarbon values observed in the wastes from Igbokoda oil wells is not an exception. This is because studies conducted on waste materials from other oil wells in the Niger Delta have found similar results.<sup>39</sup>

Hydrocarbons in the environment have been observed to have severe negative effects on human and livestock health. First, humans and animals exposed to high values of polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons are likely to have their reproductive systems affected.<sup>40</sup> Hydrocarbons in the environment have also been observed to be carcinogenic, having been found to be capable of being converted by mammalian cells into metabolites that can induce cancer.<sup>41</sup> This perhaps explains the recent statistical data that show that soft tissues sarcoma, a rare kind of cancer, have become common among people living in the Niger Delta.<sup>42</sup> Sarcomas of the uterus have also been reported among people living in the Niger Delta,<sup>43</sup> while Abudu<sup>44</sup> argues that the absence of well-equipped healthcare facilities prevents the early diagnosis of these kinds of cancer, thereby leading to high mortality rates for cancer patients from the Niger Delta.

Another dimension of environmental degradation that can be traced to oil exploration and production activities include oil spillage and leakages. For some decades, oil spillage in the Niger Delta has been a source of concern for environmental and human rights activists as well as international agencies. This is because oil spill and leakages have become a common event across oil bearing communities in the Niger Delta, where the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) reports that between 1976 and 2001, there were 6,817 cases of oil spill, involving the loss of about three million barrels of oil.<sup>45</sup> The report further notes that approximately 6 per cent of all oil spills in the Niger Delta occur on land, 25 per cent in swamps, while the remaining 69 per cent occur in offshore environments.<sup>46</sup>

Oil spillage in the Niger Delta is explained by the fact that the region is crisscrossed with a complex network of pipelines. As such, corrosion and faulty pipeline materials, accidents as well as deliberate sabotage activities are usually blamed for oil spills and leakages in the Niger Delta. Natural disasters such as earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, among others may equally cause oil spills. This is however not applicable to the Niger Delta region, as there is no record of oil spill in the region that is caused by natural factors.

Ogoniland, a part of the Niger Delta, is perhaps one of the worst affected areas in terms of oil spills and leakages. Since 1976, the area is noted to have experienced over 3,000 oil spills which amounts to about 40% of all oil spills recorded by the Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC) in its global operations.<sup>47</sup> In two separate incidents which occurred from August 28, 2008 to November 7, 2008, and from December 7, 2008 to February 21, 2009, Bodo community in the Ogoni area of Rivers State experienced one of its worst episodes of oil spill which lasted for an estimated period of 149 days.<sup>48</sup> The nature of response given by the Nigerian government as well as the Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC) to the spill at Bodo, alongside its consequences thereof, offer an insightful narrative as to why oil spill is connected to grievance which in turn explains the motivation for militancy in the Niger Delta.

First, like other typical incidents of oil spill in the Niger Delta, the Bodo oil spill was not detected early enough. It is recorded that it took several weeks after residents reported of oil spill before SPDC officially announced that there had been leakage in some of its trans-Niger pipelines.<sup>49</sup> Even the National Oil Spill Detection and Response Agency (NOSDRA), a body set up by the federal government to help in early detection of oil spills had failed to report the Bodo incidence until much later. This therefore explains why there is no agreement between community residents and SPDC officials as to when the spill actually started. While the community residents claim the spill started August 28, 2008, SPDC officials claim October 5, 2008.<sup>50</sup> This therefore suggests that between August 28 and October 5, 2008, there was no response to the spill. According to Chief Barigbonyie Adams, "we wrote a formal letter to them, informing them [SPDC] of our observation and fears, but they never got back to us. They only admitted there was oil spill when our rivers were already covered with oil, and all the fishes already dead."<sup>51</sup>

The consequences of oil spills and leakages for the Niger Delta region is multi-faceted. However, in this study, only the socio-cultural and economic aspects will be considered. On the socio-cultural effects of oil spill on Niger Delta communities, it is essential to note that water from the creeks and rivers are usually used for

domestic purposes which include cooking, bathing, washing, and general sanitary purposes. However, beyond these basic uses, creek water is also used for traditional rituals, where new mothers and their babies are taken to be washed. The washing of the new mothers and their babies is intended to invoke strength for the woman, and protection for the newly born baby. Comfort Pyagbara, a resident of Bodo community remarked that: "...after the spill we [residents of Bodo community] had no rivers to perform the [post-natal] ritual. So, that part of our culture was suspended."<sup>52</sup> In addition, water from the creeks is used for traditional healing purposes, where diving in the water is believed to cure indigenes of eye infection (referred to as *apolo*). "How can one dive into water that is covered with oil?" Pyagbara asked rhetorically.<sup>53</sup>

Oil spill has also been noted to affect the markets of affected Niger Delta communities. Fentiman and Zabbey<sup>54</sup> note that most riverine communities in the Niger Delta use the waterfront as markets. However, oil spill makes it impossible for such markets to continue to thrive. This is because, while oil spill poisons the fishes and shrimps which account for over 80% of the articles of trade in such markets, presence of large deposits of oil on waterfronts also make the waterfronts unattractive for trading activities.<sup>55</sup> This in turn affects the people's economic wellbeing, as their major sources of livelihood – fishing and farming activities – are destroyed by oil spills and leakages. Needless to discuss the adverse health effects of oil spill which introduces high values of hydrocarbon into the environment.<sup>56</sup> This is because the effects of hydrocarbon in the environment on human health have been sufficiently discussed earlier.

Finally, gas flaring in the Niger Delta is another major environmental issue which explains the grievances of the Niger Delta youths who engage in militant activities as a form of pay-back for the Nigerian government alongside the multi-national oil firms operating within the Niger Delta region. It has to do with the burning of unwanted flammable gas associated with oil exploitation and production.<sup>57</sup> Gas flaring is a common practice across oil-bearing communities in the Niger Delta despite the international conventions against it.<sup>58</sup> Suffice to note that Nigeria is signatory to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the Kyoto Protocol (KP), both of which are opposed to gas flaring.

That notwithstanding, what is needful to note is that like oil spills and leakages, the consequences of gas flaring are multiple and diverse, ranging from changes in the atmosphere to health hazards as well as socio-economic challenges. These multi-faceted consequences therefore help to understand the grievances that have led to militancy in the Niger Delta. Starting from the impact of gas flaring on atmospheric changes, the overall rise in temperature is one of the most easily noticed consequence of gas flaring.<sup>59</sup> Annually, an estimated 2.5 billion cubic feet of gas is flared by oil firms operating across the Niger Delta region.<sup>60</sup> This therefore generates approximately 45.8 billion kilowatts of heat leading to an extremely high temperature that renders some parts of the Niger Delta uninhabitable.<sup>61</sup> Indeed, walking some meters away from a gas flaring site, one is forced to move faster in order to get away from the intense heat generated during gas flaring. Efenji et al report that in Amai community in Delta State, there has been a steady rise of temperature since the beginning of oil production activities, primarily as a result of gas flaring.<sup>62</sup>

Beyond temperature rise, gas flaring has also been linked to acid rain across the Niger Delta region. The narrative is that as unwanted gas is being burned during the gas flaring process, thousands of tons of flue gas components are released into the atmosphere. These gas components including nitrogen oxides and sulphur dioxides therefore react with other atmospheric compounds such as oxygen and water to form acidic elements that mix with rain.<sup>63</sup> Evidence of acidic rain in the Niger Delta region include the rapid corrosion of corrugated iron roofing sheets in the region which often results in leaking rooftops.<sup>64</sup> Acid rain has also been linked to the colouration and wearing out of walls, which make buildings in the Niger Delta to be relatively less durable.<sup>65</sup> Acid rain has also been blamed for endangering aquatic life in the Niger Delta.<sup>66</sup>

Also, gas flaring in the Niger Delta has been found to portend some grave consequences for crop cultivation in the Niger Delta region. In a study conducted in 1987, Ukaegbu and Okeke<sup>67</sup> observed that there was almost a hundred percent loss in yield for all crops cultivated within 200 metres away from gas flaring sites. They also noted that for crops cultivated with 600 meters away from flaring sites, there was 45 percent loss in yield; however, for crops planted at least 1000 meters away from gas flaring sites, the loss in yield was only 10 percent.<sup>68</sup> Thus, in view of the fact that there is limited cultivable land across the Niger Delta region, it becomes evident that gas flaring has further worsened the scarcity of arable land, thereby rendering a good proportion of the Niger Delta people unemployed.

Therefore, in this regard, unemployment in the Niger Delta may be inextricably linked to environmental degradation. It is however pertinent to note that while the relationship between the environmental security and conflict in the Niger Delta has not been acknowledged, there is sufficient evidence in the literature to show the impact of environmental degradation on unemployment and widespread poverty in the Niger Delta. In fact, widespread poverty in the face of overwhelming wealth remains one of the most cited causes of the conflict in the Niger Delta. Suffice to recall that the Niger Delta area produces a vast majority of Nigeria's wealth, yet it is described as one of the poorest regions in the country.<sup>69</sup> Poverty in the Niger Delta is evident in the low standard of living, malnutrition as well as the inability of the people to afford some basic

needs.<sup>70</sup> Akanireports that over 70 percent of the entire Niger Delta inhabitants are poor, 35 percent of whom live in extreme poverty.<sup>71</sup>

Widespread poverty in the Niger Delta region is understood on the grounds that oil production is linked to environmental pollution which in turn endangers aquatic life and reduces the yield of agricultural products. Thus, considering that over 68 percent of Niger Delta inhabitants are engaged in either fishing or farming activities, it has been argued that oil production activities have ended up in displacing the Niger Delta people from their natural habitat as well as their traditional means of livelihood. The foregoing claim is best understood with the remarks of Celina Agbai, a resident of Afiesere community in Delta State. According to her,

...since the oil companies came, everything has changed for us. Our farms have been spoilt by oil, our fishes are all dead, and now even our forests are no more. Life in the past was really better than what we have now.<sup>72</sup>

The remarks above agree with the findings of Ebegbulem et al<sup>73</sup> who stress that the discovery of oil in the Niger Delta region has not in any way improved the standards of life among the people, but has rather worsened their living conditions. Some families even had to rely on relatives who were militants for their daily supplies.<sup>74</sup> Militancy in this regard is therefore considered as a movement whose primary aim is to return the natural wealth in the Niger Delta region to its inhabitants thereof. Nevertheless, it should be noted that the explanation for poverty in the Niger Delta stretches beyond the activities of oil companies which has led to the destruction of the people's traditional sources of livelihood – fishing and farming. Indeed, the absence of well-equipped educational facilities in the Niger Delta is also worth blaming for widespread poverty across the region. The point to stress is that these shabby educational facilities usually fail to impact quality education on the youngsters. In consequence, young people who go through such institutions are therefore unable to secure decent jobs, and this therefore continues the cycle of poverty. These youths are therefore the willing recruits of militant leaders from who they get their livelihoods.

However there is need to point out that there is another school of thought which maintains that the foregoing factors that are blamed for militancy in the Niger Delta, are merely ploys taken by Niger Delta leaders and their collaborators to justify crime. Proponents of this school of thought therefore stress that it is greed and not grievance that explains the problem of militancy in the Niger Delta. Asuni<sup>75</sup> for instance argues that the Niger Delta militants are merely criminal groups who seek to gain access to resource wealth through violence. This explanation is however questionable on the grounds that the claims of the militants are verifiable, while some militant leaders have even evolved ways of channelling resources obtained from militant activities into the development of infrastructural amenities in the region. For instance, Mr Government Ekpemupolo, leader of the movement for the emancipation of the Niger Delta single-handedly operates a hospital which provides free medical care for the people of Gbaramatu kingdom. He also built the Mieka Diving School at Kurutie which is capable of boosting the employability of Niger Delta youths.

Other factors that have been blamed for the conflict in the Niger Delta include the role of *Egbesu* worship in the Niger Delta. *Egbesu* is the arch-deity of justice and war for the Ijaw people of the Niger Delta region.<sup>76</sup> As such, since the pre-colonial era, *Egbesu* worship has been an integral aspect of social and spiritual life among the Ijaw people of the Niger Delta. Being a god of war, *Egbesu* worship glorifies young men of Ijaw origin as warriors, thereby inciting them to engage in warfare as a sign of their manliness.<sup>77</sup> It is therefore in the light of *Egbesu*'s glorification of violence that *Egbesu* worship has been considered as a causal factor for the problem of militancy in the Niger Delta. According to Campbell,<sup>78</sup> *Egbesu* provides the Niger Delta people with a sort of spiritual motivation for violence. This claim is further justified with the fact that Government Ekpemupolo, one of the militant leaders in the Niger Delta equally serves as the Chief Priest of the *Egbesu* shrine at Gbaramatu kingdom in Delta State, Nigeria. Asuni<sup>79</sup> stresses that in terms of his contribution, Ekpemupolo may be rightly described as the spiritual driving force behind militancy in the Niger Delta. This explanation however omits the fact that while *Egbesu* worship may help to explain the spiritual driving force for the conflict in the Niger Delta, it does not necessarily stand alone as a factor responsible for conflict in the region.

Other factors blamed for the conflict in the Niger Delta include the loss of faith in local elders and leaders.<sup>80</sup> This is largely because since the 1990s, Niger Delta leaders have had a history of colluding with multinational oil companies, where bribes are collected in return for low penetration costs and cordial relations.<sup>81</sup> Thus, having lost confidence in their leaders, it is claimed that Niger Delta youths abandoned the initial approach of organizing peaceful protests in favour of violent activities, hence the emergence of militancy in the Niger Delta. Also, the link between illiteracy and youth indulgence in violent activities has been propagated.<sup>82</sup> On this note widespread illiteracy in the Niger Delta is considered as a possible explanation for the problem of militancy in the region.<sup>83</sup> Also, the absence of healthcare facilities and other basic infrastructural amenities such as safe drinking water, electricity and roads have been blamed as factors responsible for conflict in the Niger Delta.<sup>84</sup> The problem with all these explanations however is that there are several other Nigerian regions suffering from the exact-same deprivations but have remained rather peaceful and pliable. For instance,

Lagos suffers from lack of safe drinking water,<sup>85</sup> electricity,<sup>86</sup> and even poor transportation systems,<sup>87</sup> but remains one of the most peaceful states in Nigeria.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

This study has examined the relationship between environmental insecurity and the conflict in the Niger Delta. This is used as a model to prove that there is positive relationship between environmental security and political stability. It is however wrong to assume that this study has adopted a mono-causal approach to understanding the conflict in the Niger Delta. This is because the study rather stresses that the primary determining factor for conflict in the Niger Delta is environmental insecurity, while other determinants such as socio-cultural, political and economic factors are simply narratives used to either attract sympathy for the cause of the Niger Delta youths, or to brandish them as criminals seeking for their own selfish interests. It is therefore suggested that as long as conflict resolution and peacebuilding strategies in the Niger Delta do not significantly address the environmental challenges facing the region, peace in the Niger Delta will remain far to seek.

#### ENDNOTES

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