

POLICY BRIEFING NOTE

INSECURITY IN BAYELSA STATE: THE ISSUES, ACTORS AND SOLUTIONS

Executive Summary

Insecurity in Bayelsa State is caused by militancy, cultism, sea piracy, communal disputes, kidnapping for ransom and electoral violence. Bayelsans across different levels of the society have been victims of the violence and conflicts that contributes to insecurity. There is an urgent need for the Federal Government of Nigeria and the Bayelsa State Government to address the different drivers of violence and conflicts that contributes to insecurity in the State. Future interventions need to adopt a multi-stakeholder and multi-sectoral approach which integrates relevant state, non-state and community-based actors to develop an inclusive system based on the rule of law, transparent criminal justice mechanisms and building social cohesion of communities against insecurity. The Bayelsa State government needs to remove all incentives for violence in the political process to mitigate the rise of violent actors across the state. The government needs to develop a mechanism to reduce the proliferation of cult gangs in the State. There is an urgent need to develop an effective rural security network that will address issues of insecurity outside of Yenagoa.

The Landscape of Insecurity in Bayelsa State

Cult gangs constitute a major source of insecurity across all the Local Government Areas (LGAs) in Bayelsa State. Other forms of conflict manifests differently in each LGA; Ekeremor LGA is predominantly affected by recurrence of militancy targeting oil industry infrastructure, military invasion of communities, sea piracy and sea robbery, communal conflicts (leadership tussles).

The activities of militants and sea pirates also affect coastal areas of Southern Ijaw LGA as the network of actors that perpetrate these acts extends across both LGAs. Nembe LGA is affected by sea piracy and sea robbery. However, there has been significant reduction since the completion of the Ogbia-Nembe Road. Nembe is also affected by political violence, especially during elections. Brass Local Government Area is affected by sea piracy, sea robbery and political violence. Yenagoa and Ogbia Local Government Areas are notorious for cult related violence and kidnapping. Yenagoa has also witnessed an increase in incidences of armed robbery in the last five years. Southern Ijaw, Ekeremor and Nembe LGAs are hotspots for political violence. Furthermore, illegal bunkering and artisanal refining activities have drastically reduced in previous hotspots like Southern Ijaw, Ekeremor and Brass Local Government Areas following the security efforts of the indigenous pipeline surveillance contractors. However, Ogbia Local Government Area has now gained a reputation as the new hotspot where illegal bunkering and

artisanal refining thrives. Sagbama and Kolokuma/Opokuma Local Government Areas are affected by cultism. Despite the prevailing insecurity in the state, Sagbama and Kolokuma/Opokuma Local Government Areas can be isolated as least impacted by violence and armed conflict. Insecurity in Bayelsa state has over the years constituted severe socio-economic, cultural and political impacts such as disruption of socio-economic activities, economic hardship, entrenchment of a culture of violence, failure of governance, militarization of communities and psychological distress.

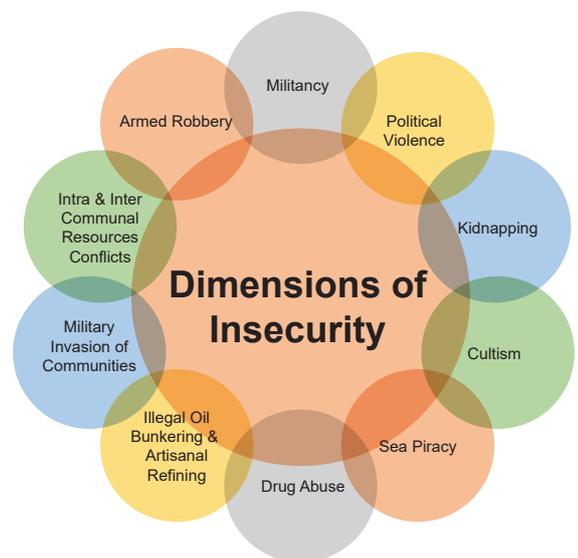


Fig. 1: Dimensions of Insecurity



EMERGING TRENDS

There is increasing proliferation of cult groups in rural communities across all the Local Government Areas of Bayelsa State. These groups were previously based in the state capital of Yenagoa. They are now in villages and are recruiting young people into their fold.

There is a growing trend of piracy and sea robbery in Ekeremor and Southern Ijaw Local Government Area.

Leaders of violent cult groups are now integrating themselves into politics at state and community level. This is creating tensions in communities that may lead to violence.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Actors Involved in Violence, Conflict and Insecurity in Bayelsa State

a. Actions for Government

• The State Government should work with the State House of Assembly to review the laws against cultism, sea piracy and kidnapping to reflect current global and local realities and such laws should be enforced to the latter. We recommend the abolition of the death penalty to a jail term of 20 years with hard labour so that the Governors would find no difficulty in implementing the laws.

• The Bayelsa State government needs to remove all incentives for violence in the political process to mitigate the rise of violent actors across the state

• The Federal and state governments should collaboratively create jobs and employment opportunities for the teeming unemployed youths especially with the gradual phasing-out of illegal bunkering and artisanal refining in the state. This can be done by providing opportunities for alternative livelihoods such as rapid infrastructural development in communities as well as access to skills acquisition, and financial capital for business start-ups.

b. Actions for Communities

• Communities should develop rural security networks such as vigilantes or community policing agencies that would act as information gathering and information sharing networks with key security agencies such as the police, military and DSS. They should also strengthen their resolve to fight crime and criminality by adopting localized solutions such as sanctions, fines, banishments or even the use of traditional practices such as oath taking and invoking of traditional gods.

• Communities should desist from rewarding known conflict actors such as cultists and militants with chieftaincy titles and positions of nobility.

c. Actions for International Oil Companies (IOCs)

• International Oil Companies should avoid community development efforts that are short term and driven by the ideology of Freedom to Operate (FTO) and focus on long term or sustainable interventions that genuinely reduce insecurity in their areas of operation. IOCs can do this by collaborating with the Local and State Governments to entrench a robust framework for a sustainable human and infrastructural development in their host communities.

• Liable as key conflict actors in the state, IOCs should desist from stoking communal crises through the divide and rule tactics. Rather, they should be a source of social capital for communities to bridge the underdevelopment deficits faced by host communities.

d. Actions for Civil Society Organizations

• Civil society organizations like the AA Peaceworks should collaborate with the Local Governments and communities to build local capacity on conflict tracking, early warning systems, conflict resolution and peacebuilding.

e. Actions for International Organizations

• International Organisations, such as the European Union (EU) should use their platform to facilitate dialogue between state actors and civil society in a bid to address insecurity in the State.

• International Organisations such as the European Union should fund the development and implementation of specific intervention programmes that seeks to eliminate the drivers of insecurity in the State.

Further Reading

Jack Jackson and Coronation Edward Tokpo (2020) Insecurity in Bayelsa State: Issues, Actors and Solutions. Research Report for Academic Associate PeaceWorks, Conveners of Niger Delta Dialogue, Warri, Delta State, Nigeria.

Credits

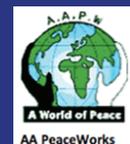
This policy brief was written by

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