

POLICY BRIEFING NOTE

INSECURITY IN RIVERS STATE: ISSUES, ACTORS AND SOLUTIONS

Executive Summary

Rivers State faces complex security challenges. These include sea piracy, artisanal refining of crude oil (kporfire), cultism, kidnapping, armed robbery, proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SALW), drug peddling, electoral violence, communal violence, environmental pollution. Some of these of insecurities are localized threats in the sense that they may be geographically limited to particular environments. Previous efforts by government to address the drivers of crime and violence in Rivers State have been ad-hoc. Government security forces charged with the responsibility of addressing drivers of insecurity across the State have been implicated in the issues. Drivers of insecurity is intricately linked to the practice of politics in Rivers State. This has further complicated the challenges. Attempts to address the problem of insecurity in Rivers State has to start from the political process, with further attention paid to the security institutions and strict application of rule of law in the State.

Insecurity in Rivers State

Cultism, electoral violence, communal conflicts, armed robbery and artisanal refining of crude oil are major drivers of insecurity in Rivers State. Research shows that there is a link between the nature of politics in Rivers State and the identified drivers of insecurity in the State. These drivers of insecurity contribute to violent deaths in towns and villages across Rivers State. The proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SALWs) is also an outcome of insecurity in Rivers State. Cult groups and criminal gangs engaged in violence are willing buyers of SALWs. Violent politics also contributes to the proliferation of SALW in the state. This has made Rivers State an active market for SALWs in Nigeria.

There is an environmental dimension to insecurity in Rivers State. For several years now, Port Harcourt and its environs have been covered by soot. This is as a result of increased artisanal refining of crude oil and other forms of pollution in the State. These pollution inducing activities, both illegal artisanal and legal oil production, has increased environmental insecurity in Rivers State. This has negatively impacted on the quality of life in Rivers State.

Oil and politics, in the midst of rising youth unemployment, provide the significant contexts involving fluid relationships between the youth and their political sponsors, especially during elections. This link between oil and politics, especially as it involves youths and political leaders in the state, often generate tensions that contributes to different forms of violence in Rivers State.

Government's Response to Insecurity in Rivers State
Attempts by the Rivers State Government to

address the criminal dimension of violence in Rivers State have not had the expected impact. For example, the prohibition of cultism by the Rivers State Government, through a legislative Act, have not led to the reduction of cultism. Enforcement of this Act has been constrained by the nature and character of party politics in the state. Similarly, party politics has frustrated the effective take-off of the Neighbourhood Watch Agency of the state since its establishment in 2018. The strategy by government to offer amnesty to violent groups in a bid to control the proliferation of SALWs and end violence has been ineffective and are often undermined by the political process that contributes to the proliferation of SALWs in the state. The government has also been unable to address issues of environmental insecurity such as soot and oil pollution. The health implications are becoming manifest in Rivers State.

EMERGING TRENDS

There is an emerging trend of gang governance in Motor parks and Markets in Rivers State

There is an encroachment of traditional governance in communities by militant youths.

Tension in oil producing communities in the border areas of Rivers State remains high.

Artisanal refining of crude oil is fuelling criminal activities across Rivers State.



RECOMMENDATIONS

Government.

- i.** There is urgent need for promotion of community development programmes and access to refined petroleum products, especially in coastal communities to address the problem of illegal artisanal refining in the state.
- ii.** The Rivers State Government should fully implement the State's Anti-Cult Act and related other Statutory laws. The application of the rule of law must be strictly applied in the implementation of this Act.
- iii.** Future disarmament of cultists and militants should be based on a sustainable package of amnesty, job creation and placement programmes and law enforcement initiatives.
- iv.** The Federal Government, especially the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) should revisit the 2010 Electoral Act Amendment Bill to criminalise the use of violence by political actors in the electoral process.
- v.** The military authorities should address the involvement of their officers and men in illicit activities such as artisanal refining of oil in Rivers State.

Multinational/Indigenous Oil Companies.

- i.** Oil Companies in Rivers State need to urgently address the problem of environmental pollution and put an end to gas flares, support conservation and environmental restoration activities in impacted communities.
- ii.** Oil companies should commence payment of special compensation to communities devastated by environmental degradation occasioned by oil prospecting and exploitation operations.
- iii.** Oil companies should honour all agreements, especially (G)MOUs. Specifically, SPDC should honour the existing MoU between her and Aminigboko Community and to conduct Stakeholders meeting with Aminigboko Community before commencement of ENWHE FIELD Development Project-GBARAN PHASE 3.
- iv.** Nigeria Petroleum Development Company(NPDC) should adhere to the proposal of Gbo Kabari Ogoni to cash-in

on the “genuine opportunity to robustly engage all stakeholders” before coming up with a comprehensive re-entry plan and a sustainable development blueprint that is acceptable to Ogoni People and all stakeholders in respect of OML 11 which production activities stopped about 26 years ago.

v. Nigerian Agip Oil Company should as a matter of urgency meet with Umuokilide and Umuochidepelu its landlords in Ukpeliedde Town of Ahoada West Local Government Area to address their grievances to avoid the looming show-down between the host communities and the company.

vi. Oil Companies should stop using the military to address disagreements with communities. Companies should adopt a civil approach to conflict resolution in oil producing communities.

Communities.

- i.** Community leaders should take initiative to stop the establishment of crude oil cooking camps and cult/criminal gangs' operational camps in their communities.
- ii.** Contestants for Chieftaincy spaces should desist from recruiting and arming community youths and contracting cultists in their struggles for access and control of the customary power and also demobilize their “private armies” wherever they exist.
- iii.** There is an urgent need for community leaders to rebuild community governance institutions to promote transparency and accountability in the management of funds and other benefits accruing to communities
- iv.** Concerted efforts should be made to promote participatory governance by community leaders especially, inclusion of excluded groups such as women, youth and non-indigenes in decision-making process.

Civil Society Organizations(CSO)

- i.** CSOs should begin to develop specific engagements with communities to address different dimensions of insecurity in Rivers State.
- ii.** CSOs should mainstream issues of insecurity in their advocacy engagement with the Nigerian government and their international partners.

Further Reading

Sofiri Joab-Peterside, Kiale Nyianyaa, and **Jackson Jack T.C.B,** (2020) Insecurity in Rivers State: Issues, Actors and Solutions. Research Report for Niger Delta Dialogue, Warri, Delta State

Credits

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