

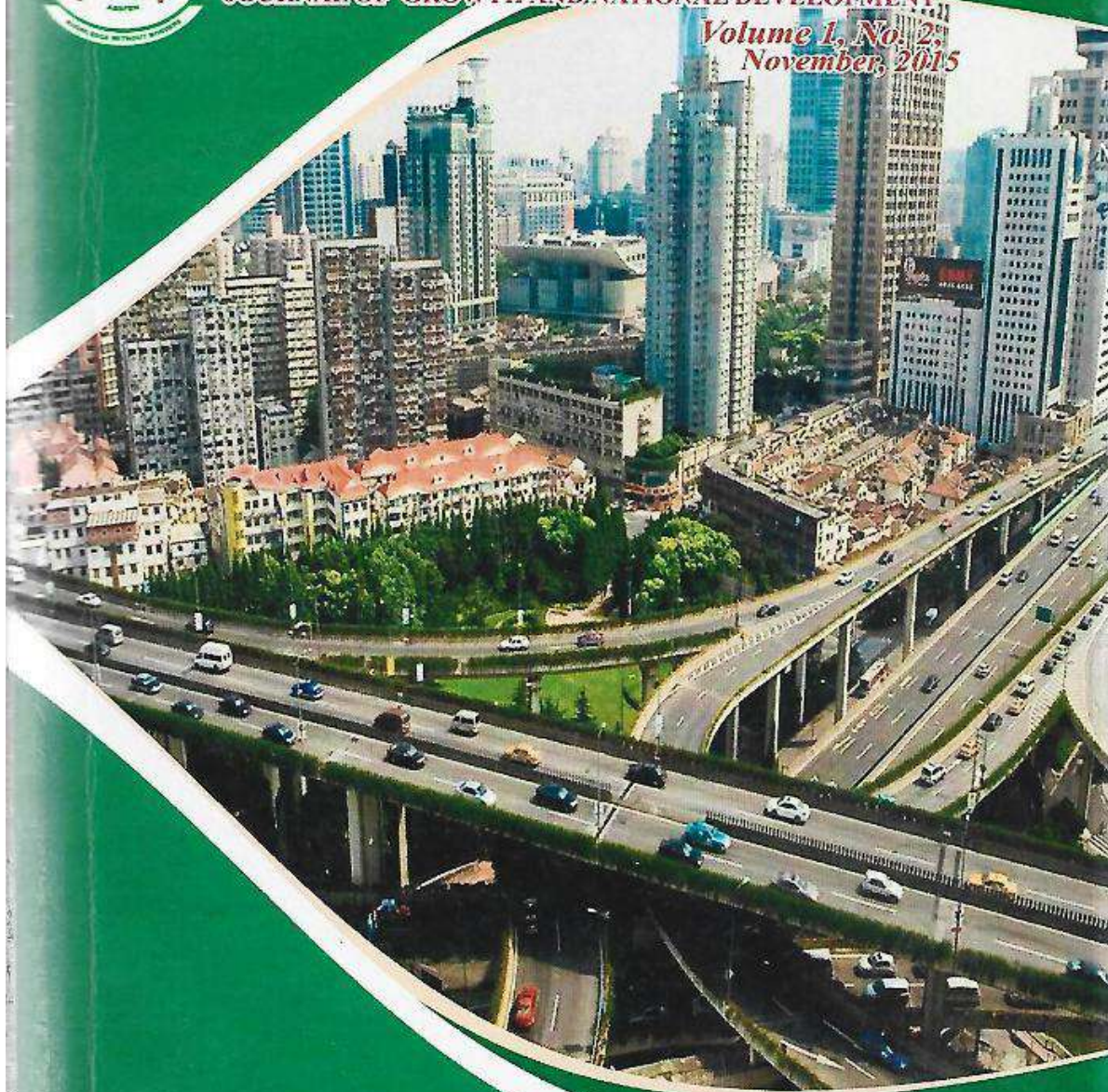


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## Human Resource Depletion: The Role of Insurgency and Militancy in Nigeria

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### Abstract

*Insurgents' activities and government's counter- insurgency operations have killed many people and rendered physically unusable many human habitations and sources of livelihoods across Nigeria. In addition, the increasing condition of insurgency and militancy have overpowered the internal security capacity of the police and has resulted in increase in the involvement of the military in internal security operations. Several Joint Military Task Forces (JTFs) have been set up to carry out counter-insurgency and militancy operation across Nigeria over the years. The activities of the insurgents and counter-insurgency operations of the several Joint Task Forces have claimed hundreds of lives of Nigerians including innocent civilians leading to the destruction of communities. The paper examines government's counter-insurgency human rights implications initiatives in the country and concludes that the activities of the JTFs have really prolonged the large number of violence against the civilian populations which they are supposed to protect. The paper proposes that the desirability of a counter-insurgency and militancy tactics should be ascertained by its ability to protect civilians as well as innocent citizens from human rights abuses and violent attacks.*

*Keywords. Insurgency, militancy, Joint Task Forces, Human Rights, Nigeria.*

## **Introduction**

There has been an upsurge in insurgent activities in Nigeria since 1999 when the country returned to democratic governance. The police which is the primary institution responsible for law enforcement and internal security has been overwhelmed by the rising waves of insurgency, and this has resulted in an increasing internal security role for the military. Apparently, government has come to rely on incessant deployment of military-dominated Joint Task Forces (JTFs) to perform internal security duties across the country. Over the years, various joint military and security task forces have been established and mandated to perform counter-insurgency operations across the country. The Army, Navy, Air Force and paramilitary Police are regularly deployed for internal security roles. Regrettably, the military often respond to insurgent activities primarily with a brutal show of force that often results in high civilian casualties. To recall, in November 1999, barely six months after the transition to democracy, hundreds of civilians were killed when a detachment of the Army bombarded Odi community in the Niger Delta, in an apparent retaliation for the death of about six policemen who were killed in a clash with local insurgents.

In October 2011, twelve years after the Odi incident, a detachment of the Nigerian Army once again invaded Zaki Biam in North-Central Nigeria and executed many unarmed civilians in reprisal for the killing of 19 soldiers who were earlier sent there to restore peace following ethnic violence. Since then, misdirected retaliatory assaults against civilian populations have destroyed entire communities and killed hundreds of Nigerians.

Since Nigeria's return to civilian rule in 1999, successive governments have failed to adequately address growing insecurity. Thousands of people have died in recurring inter-communal conflicts and politically motivated violence, which have triggered waves of displacement in the North-East, North-Central and Middle Belt regions. The country ranked 11<sup>th</sup> on the Minority Rights Group's country index of civilians at risk for 2014. Ethnic militias, separatist groups and faith-based movements have mobilised to defend their communities and to conduct violent

campaigns to assert cultural, religious or ethnic dominance and control resources in the vacuum left by authorities weakening presence.

### **Concept of Human Resources Depletion**

This is the consumption of a resource faster than it can be replenished. Natural resources are commonly divided between renewable resources and non renewable resources. The use of either of these forms of resources beyond their rate of replacement is considered to be resource depletion, (Okon 2011).

Resource depletion is most commonly used in reference to farming, fishing, mining, water usage and consumption of fossil fuels. People and other living beings depends on natural resources for food, shelter and protection as well as for generating energy and all the products we manufacture. With current consumption patterns, people are using these resources at an unsustainable rate. Many resources are at risk of becoming depleted.

### **The Meaning of Insurgency and Militancy .**

An insurgency is a rebellion against a constituted authority (for example, an authority recognized as such by the United Nations) when those taking part in the rebellion are not recognized as belligerents. An insurgency can be fought through counter-insurgency warfare, and may also be opposed by measures to protect the population and by political and economic actions of various kinds aimed at undermining the insurgents claims against incumbent regime. The nature of insurgencies is an ambiguous concept. Not all rebellions are insurgencies. There have been cases of non- violent rebellions using civil resistance.

The use of the term insurgency does recognize the political motivation of those who participate in an insurgency. Insurgency and its tactics are as old as warfare itself.

### **Insurgency in Nigeria**

The rising wave of insurgency has assumed a crisis dimension in Nigeria. Resource-based and sectarian insurgency have claimed many lives, destroyed

sources of livelihood, and created a climate of perpetual fear and insecurity across the country. In the Niger Delta, resource-based insurgency was intensified since the 1990s when series of protests by environmental activists and resource control agitators were violently repressed by security forces. These cycles of protests started in December 1998 when a group of youth activists in the Niger Delta held a conference to strategize for the survival of their ethnic nationality. From the conference which was held in the town of Kaiama in Bayelsa state, the participants, who were mainly ethnic Ijaw, came up with the 'Kaiama Declaration' in which they affirmed their right over natural resource control and land ownership. The Federal Government perceived this as a threat to its authority and responded with considerable force through the military, resulting in violent confrontations between youth activists and security forces. In the ensuing confrontations, numerous youth activists, movements emerged and later transformed into ethnic militia organizations (Forest, 2012). Between late 2005 and early 2006, leaders of several militia groups in the region came together and formed a number of umbrella resistance organizations in an attempt to combine their efforts to more effectively match the capabilities of the security forces, especially the Nigerian Army (Forest, 2012).

While insurgents' activities have relatively subsided in the Niger Delta, there is an ongoing sectarian insurgency in parts of northern Nigeria, especially in the North-East, where escalation in violent confrontations between security forces and sectarian insurgents have resulted in high civilian fatalities and the destruction of many human habitations and livelihoods. Specifically, violent confrontations between state security forces and the *Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati Wal-Jihad* group, also known as Boko Haram, have increased since 2009 with high civilian casualties and many incidences of human rights abuses.

Although Boko Haram emerged around 2002, violent confrontations between the group and security forces began in June 2009 when an encounter between members of the sect and a joint police and military unit known as 'Operation Flush' over the enforcement of a government law that requires the mandatory use of helmets by all motorcyclists, turned violent. During the confrontation, about 17 members of the sect were shot and injured by security operatives (Forest, 2012). Angered by what

they considered as police brutality against its members, the sect resorted to sporadic violent attacks against the police and other Government institutions across the North-Eastern states of Nigeria. Subsequent clashes between members of the sect and security forces left more than 800 people dead, including the extra-judicial execution of the leader of the sect, Mohammed Yusuf in July 2009 (Forest, 2012). The extra-judicial killing of its leader marked a turning point in the radicalization of the leadership and operations of the group. After a short period of inactivity following the death of its leader, members of the sect regrouped under a more radical leader, Abubakar Shekau, who was formerly Mohammed Yusuf's deputy. Since then, the sect has carried out more violent attacks, including targeted killings and suicide bombings across the North-East and North-Central part of the country causing Government to deploy joint military and security task forces to the affected states.

#### **Causes of Insurgency and Militancy**

The causes of insurgency are multi-faceted, complex and often overlapping. Inter-communal clashes fuelled by ethnic and religious tensions are on a near weekly basis throughout the Middle Belt, and an increase in Boko Haram attacks and abductions has uprooted families throughout the north-east. The military's tactics have caused further displacement as civilians flee pre-emptively. Tens of thousands were displaced during post-electoral protests in 2011, and there were fears of similar violence in the run-up to the presidential and parliamentary elections this year. More than two million slum-dwellers and other marginalized people have been forcibly evicted from their homes in urban centres.

- (i) **Inter-Communal Conflict in the Middle Belt:** Communal clashes along ethnic and religious fault lines have fostered a climate of instability and violence throughout the north and the Middle Belt, the dividing line between the Muslim north and Christian south. Data is limited, but hundreds of thousands of people are estimated to have been displaced as violence has increased over the past 15 years. Conflicts are fuelled by myriad of factors including ethno-religious disputes, criminality, cattle rustling, land disputes and tensions between pastoralists and farmers.

Episodes of inter-communal violence in the Middle Belt states of Plateau, Taraba, Benue and Nasarawa have left more than 400 people dead in 2014, and caused unknown amounts of displacement and destruction, (Stratfor, 2003)

- (ii) **Religious, Sectarian and Electoral Violence:** Both religion and ethnicity are politically manipulated for populist causes. Ethnicity has played a significant role in religious conflicts in northern Nigeria, where sectarian groups have exploited tensions between Hausa settlers and Fulani indigenes. The religious dimension have been misconstrued as the primary driver of violence, when in reality disenfranchisement and inequality may be the main causes (Stratfor, 2013).

The politics of religions in Nigeria is also evident in the Sharia law debate that engulfed the country after its return to democracy in 1999, which also created a space for the expression of ethno-religious demands suppressed by years of repressive military rule. There has since been an exponential rise in religious violence, with the vast majority taking place in northern Nigeria, where it flares regularly in flashpoint areas such as the cities of Kaduna and Zaria in Kaduna State, mainly in the form of urban riots (Wisdom, 2013).

- (iii) **Boko Haram Attacks in North-East Nigeria:** Chronic poverty, corruption, abuses by the security forces and longstanding impunity for the perpetrators of human rights violations have combined to create fertile ground for the emergence of militant armed groups over the past decade (Mamah, 2014). By far the most significant is Boko Haram, Islamist militants whose name loosely translates as "western education is forbidden". Formerly, *Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati wal-jihad*, or people committed to the prophet's teachings for propagation of Islam and Jihad, it has systematically sought to destabilize the Nigerian state and impose sharia in the North-East of the country since 2009. It is thought that more than 7,000 civilians have been killed since, and as many as 1.5 million displaced, with the highest number of attacks taking place in Borno state, (Mamah, 2014)

Boko Haram began its insurgency with assaults on members of the security services, politicians, civil servants and other authority figures in the northern states of Bauchi, Borno, Kano and Yobe. Following the imposition of a state of emergency in Adamawa, Borno and Yobe states in 2012, attacks on civilian targets increased dramatically (Olugbode, 2013). In July 2013, militants set fire to a student dormitory near Potiskum in Yobe state, burning some inside alive and shooting others as they tried to flee. Between 2013 and mid-2014, Boko Haram destroyed 211 schools in Borno State, killing an unknown number of students and teachers and leading to the closure of all state-funded education facilities there (Hamza and Sawab, 2013)

(iv) The abduction of 276 teenage girls from Chibok in April 2014 has been the largest single incident so far, and 219 of those captured are still unaccounted for. At the time of the attack, the local population had been swollen by the arrival of Internally Displaced Persons fleeing Boko Haram violence in surrounding villages. The Chibok abductions emboldened the group to step up the tactic, both to instill terror and raise revenue from ransom demands

### **Government Response to Boko Haram**

The Nigerian government has been criticized for the security forces' lack of presence and their ineffectiveness, which has led to the formation of state sponsored vigilante groups. They have also been accused of heavy-handed tactics that caused further displacement, including the extrajudicial killing of more than 600 suspected militants, disappearance, the razing of property in communities thought to harbour Boko Haram fighters and the use of excessive force and physical abuse. In some communities, such as Bulabulin Ngarannam and Alajiri in Borno State, people displaced by the military have been unable to return since early 2013. Soldiers have also evicted IDPs sheltering in public buildings such as schools, and used the facilities for military purposes (HRW, 27 October 2014). More than two million urban Nigerians, mainly slum-dwellers and other marginalized people, have been forcibly evicted from their homes since 2000, most notably in Abuja, Lagos and Port Harcourt. Evictions are sanctioned by state governments and carried out in the name



of security and urban renewal. They have, however, taken place without adequate consultation, notice, compensation or offers of alternative accommodation, leading to intra-urban displacement and leaving thousands of people homeless. They breach victims' right to adequate housing, constitute arbitrary displacement and often lead to violations of other human rights such as access to health care, education and livelihood opportunities.

### **The Way Out**

The counter-insurgency strategy of deploying large number of military forces is an approach that former U.S Ambassador to Nigeria, John Campbell notes, "could do more harm than good" in the fight against insurgency (Campbell, as cited in Forest 2012). Heavy deployment of troops has caused individuals and communities in violation of their fundamental human rights. Therefore, in order for Government to more effectively combat the menace of insurgency, with the aid of special joint military task forces, with minimal negative impacts on human rights, such operations should be organized and executed in a manner that reduce 'collateral damage' to the barest minimum, and safeguard the security and human rights of the host civilian population. In this regard, operatives of joint task forces must be charged to strictly adhere to clearly defined 'rules of engagement' and avoid any excessive use of force that may amount to violation of human rights.

Security forces in Nigeria are apparently out of control in the fight against insurgency and terrorism. The internal security operations of the military dominated JTFs is fraught with human rights abuses and extra-judicial execution of civilians across the country. However, the mass killing of people suspected to be affiliated with insurgents does not, in itself, guarantee the elimination of insurgency. In this regard, for the military or any counter-insurgency security task force, to carry out its operations with 'minimal collateral damage' and protect human rights, it must engage the insurgents on a regular or symmetrical level while leveraging on its technological advantage; collect intelligence on the insurgents; 'recruit and train indigenous forces' to combat the insurgents; and neutral civilian population (Stratfor, 2014).

### **Conclusion**

Beyond the display of lack of capacity to combat the threat of insurgency, the government through the instrumentality of the military and other security forces have, on several occasions, arbitrarily killed many civilians and destroyed entire

communities- the punitive bombardment of communities like Odi in Bayelsa, Zaki Biam in Benue, Gbaramatu in Delta, and Baga in Borno, are symptomatic of a state killing its own citizens in the name of national security. It is thus a human rights tragedy that security forces that are mandated by law to protect lives and property, and bring perpetrators of violence to justice turn out to be the major perpetrators of violence in the country .

What is more, though the involvement of the civilian JTF in the fight against sectarian insurgency has been useful to the counter- insurgency operations of the official JTF, the activities of the local vigilante group are fraught with arbitrary killings and human rights abuses. Consequently, JTFs operations have increased the frequency and scale of extra- judicial killings and human rights abuses against civilians, and this has made host communities to resent their counter- insurgency approach, making it difficult for security operatives to gather relevant intelligence from local residents for their counter-insurgency operations. JTFs must strive to win the 'hearts and minds' of the local population, and the effectiveness of such operations should be evaluated based on the number of vulnerable citizens they are able to protect from violent attacks and human rights abuses.

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