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INTERROGATING INSECURITY IN NIGERIA'S NIGER DELTA: THE ROLE OF THE IJAW YOUTH COUNCIL

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Abstract
This paper examines the Ijaw Youth Council's (IYC) role in insecurity in Nigeria, particularly in the Niger Delta region. Many nations, including Nigeria, have been torn apart by insecurity. To put it simply, insecurity is the state of being vulnerable to danger or threat. In Nigeria's instance, a number of groups have contributed to the spread of insecurity in one way or another. The Ijaw Youth Council (IYC) is one of these organizations. Originally founded as a civil rights group to defend the rights and interests of the Ijo, the IYC has lost most of its fundamental values in recent years andi ronically, has turned into the same thing it seeks to defend..In this essay, the conflicts and tensions between the Ijaw Youth Council and the Federal Government are examined, along with their underlying reasons. The study's conclusions show that although the Ijaw Youth Council (IYC) has had some success upholding its core values, it has also played a major role in the escalating instability and insecurity in Nigeria's Niger Delta. Among other things, the IYC has disrupted oil exploration and exploitation, participated in cultism and cult-related activities, participated in protests against the federal government and oil firms, and acted as political thugs. The study is descriptive and analytical and it draws on both primary and secondary sources of data.
Keywords: Insecurity, Nigeria, Niger Delta, Ijaw Youth Council

Introduction

The concept of insecurity is not new; it has existed throughout human history and is a global problem that affects both developed and developing nations (Zubairu, 2020). Nigeria is currently experiencing a security crisis that has become an ongoing problem since gaining independence in 1960, and it is evident that

insecurity has not decreased but rather has continued to rise. Nigeria has seen an unprecedented plague of crises and insecurity, each of which has resulted in the loss of life and property. Currently, insecurity is evident throughout Nigeria, from east to west and north to south. On the other hand, a number of variables contribute to insecurity, including poverty, corruption, ethnicity, armed organizations, militant pressure groups, and illicit arms trafficking. Armed groups are not only disregarding security protocols, but they are also disparaging the work of law enforcement officials and the millions of naira the government spends on security each year (Wawro, 2018).

Feeling doubtful, unconfident, or anxious about oneself is known as insecurity. One way to characterize it would be a condition of vulnerability to danger or threat. According to Adeleke (2013), it is the absence of freedom from danger or threat to a nation's capacity to defend and advance itself, advance its legitimate interests and treasured values, and improve the well-being of its citizens. In addition to being a source of worry for all Nigerians, it has also become a common word among them and a topic of conversation when two or more Nigerians are together. It has also caused division and mistrust among Nigerians and has resulted in the loss of several lives. More so, it has caused Nigeria as a state to experience panic, fear, etc.

The IYC's operations in the Niger Delta, which had noble goals when it was first founded, are now rife with unethical behaviour. The pressure group called IjoYouth Council (IYC) was established in 1998. In several ways, the IYC has added to the growing level of insecurity in the Niger Delta. Members of the IYC deal with violence, cults, and weapons (Ikuli, 2020). A pressure group is an association of people whose primary goal is to exert pressure on the government in a way that serves the interests of its members, according to Akinbade and Oyediran (2019). In contrast to political parties, pressure groups are not interested in establishing a government. Instead, pressure groups are structured organizations that aim to accomplish specific objectives. They put pressure on people who are in charge of making policies for the community. Generally speaking, pressure groups are formed to advance or safeguard the interests of their members. Thus, the IYC and its role in Nigerian insecurity are discussed in this paper.

Formation of the Ijaw Youth Council (IYC)

It would be impossible to discuss the establishment of the Ijaw Youth Council (IYC) without mentioning the Kaiama Declaration of 1998, which served as the impetus for the organization's development. (Tari 2022). As part of the 1998 Kaiama Declaration, the IYC was established as a civil rights group. The group

allegedly supports the Niger Delta's Ijo ethnic community's interests (Wikipedia, 2022). To discuss strategies to address issues related to the survival and integrity of the Ijo ethnic nationality, more than 5000 young people from more than 500 communities of 40 clans, from the Ijoethnic nationality, gathered at Kaiama on December 11, 1998.At the conference were representatives of the Movement for the Survival of the Ijaw Ethnic Nationality in the Niger Delta (MOSIEND) and the Ijaw Council for Human Rights (IJHR), Elimotu Movement, The Ijaw Justice Association, Arogbo Freedom Fighters, The Ijo Peace Movement, etc (Asuka, 2010).Ikuli (2020) cites the Supreme Egbesu Assembly, the Ijaw National Congress in the United States of America (INCUSA), and other prominent organizations.

The Ijaw Youth Council was established as a result of the youths' meeting at Kaiama in the Kolokuma/Opokuma Local Government Area of Bayelsa State. The Kaiama Declaration which was an outcome of the meeting claimed that "the Nigerian state and transnational oil companies have deprived the Ijo people of their natural rights to own and control their land and resources, which is the main reason for the degradation of the environment of Ijo land" (Human Rights Watch, 1999) and linked "the political crisis in Nigeria" to "the struggle for control of oil mineral resources".The two most significant resolutions in the Kaiama Declaration were that all of the land and resources (including mineral resources) in the Ijo territory "belong to the Ijo communities" and that the IYC no longer recognized any decrees "enacted without their participation and consent". In keeping with these declarations, the young people also demanded that the military leave the area and forewarned oil firms that if they depended on military defense, they would be considered an "enemy" (Asuka, 2010).

The youths called for the immediate evacuation of all Nigerian State military forces engaged in repression and occupation of Ijo land. To the Ijo people, any oil corporation that uses the Nigerian State's military to "protect" its operations will be seen as an enemy. It is important for family members of military personnel stationed in Ijo land to urge their people to quit the area. According to the proclamation, adolescents from every community and Ijo tribe in the Niger Delta would start "steps to implement these resolutions" on December 30, 1998. In order to avoid being entangled in the vague activities of the oil firms, they were instructed to leave the area by that date.. Furthermore, they called for an end to gas flaring, oil spills, blowouts, and the designation as terrorists and saboteurs. To them, calling them terrorists and saboteurs involved preparing the noose for their hanging and as such they reject such label, advising all employees

and contractors of oil corporations to leave Ijo areas by December 1998 until the dispute over resource ownership and control in the Niger Delta's Ijo area was resolved (Asuka, 2010).

On December 30, 1998, the Ijaw Youth Council declared that "Operation Climate Change," which would involve actions to put out gas flares, would begin on January 1 and last until January 10. Throughout Ijo territory, young people who supported the Kaiama Declaration staged peaceful protests in several localities on December 30, 1998. The capital of Bayelsa State, Yenagoa, saw a harsh security force response that resulted in clashes between young people and soldiers over the course of the following few days in Yenagoa and surrounding areas, killing two or three soldiers and scores of young people (Ikuli, 2020).

The IYC has component units and federal structure similar to those of the Nigerian state. The IYC has three levels, which are the same as the three arms of government of the Nigerian federal government: the legislative, executive, and judicial branches, which are further divided into federal, state, and local governments. Ikuli (2020) reveals that the IYC have National, Zonal/Chapters, and Clans but with two arms: the Executive and the Legislature.

Ijaw Youth Council and Insecurity in Nigeria

The Ijaw Youth Council has contributed a fair share to insecurity in Nigeria in general and the Niger Delta in particular. This the group has done through her agitations against the federal government of Nigeria, multinational oil companies, involvement in cultism and cult related activities, thuggery, etc. As the motto of the IYC entails, “resource control by all means possible”, the group had it as a founding principle to fight for the control of resources within Ijo land. According to Kehinde *etal* (2013), resource control entails granting local governments and people access to natural resources that are situated inside their borders as well as the autonomy to develop and use them without interference from the federal government. Douglas notes that the residents of the communities that own these resources are actually in charge of them in order to sustain existence. Nigeria has faced several difficulties as a result of Ijo youths' desire for control over resources and self-determination. In the Niger Delta, communities and civil society organizations have peacefully contested the federation's constituent units' control over oil and the allocation of its advantages. For young Ijo people, self-determination entails having a political arena in which they can manage their own affairs and control their resources (Kehinde *etal*, 2013). The Ijaw Youth Council (IYC) has been in the forefront of this campaign in its early days.

Popular mobilization, destruction of government buildings, social protests, advocacy and criticism in support of reforms, change, and accountability in the exploration, exploitation, and administration of the oil resources located in their area have all been characteristics of the youths' activities. The conflict between ethnic gangs, local militias, oil firms supported by the military, and even environmentalists has resulted in the capture and murder of thousands of citizens in recent years. The most well-known were the 1999Odi massacre and the destruction of the town by Nigerian military forces, as well as the 1998 invasion of Kaiama by the military during the Kaiama Declaration which claimed the life of the paramount ruler, Sergeant Ofoni and others (Azaiki, 2006).

The demand of Ijo youths in particular and the Niger Delta in general for a fair share of the profits from the exploration and exploitation of oil resources from their land are the culmination of their grievances, agitations, and protests. They did this in place of the past injustices, marginalization, neglect, and inequity they have endured at the hands of the state and the multinational oil companies. Their demonstrations and actions are not in line with the federal government's policies, and the government has occasionally made decisions that have caused disputes between the two parties and destroyed cities and villages (Etekpe, 2007, Azaiki, 2006, Tari, 2020).According to Ikuli (2020), the Ijaw Youth Council has worked hard to turn the Niger Delta's complaints from a simple call for the state and oil companies to develop the region into a political and all-encompassing agitation that questions the legitimacy and power of the state over the management and distribution of natural resources.

In the Niger Delta, an oil-rich area of Nigeria, extraction operations by global oil corporations such as Shell, Mobil, Chevron, ELF, and Agip have seriously harmed the ecology and society. Subsistence crops have been destroyed, the river basin and adjacent areas have been contaminated, and local residents' land has been taken away due to crude oil extraction. Local communities' opposition has been violently suppressed by the police, leading to hundreds of fatalities and carnage. By means of kidnapping, pipeline vandalism, bunkering, and other means, the neglected youths of the Niger Delta, particularly the Ijo, had attempted to impede the operations of these oil companies (Osaghae, 1995).

The residents grieve that there has not been a good catch of fish in years because to oil pollution of the water. It is now impossible for local fishermen to earn a living. The majority of the riverine villages in Delta, Edo, and Bayelsa are also affected by the oil leaks that have engulfed the entire body of water around these towns; if nothing is done to stop this, many lives will be in danger (Ikuli,

2020). All Ijo adolescents around the world are included in the IYC, a significant Pan Ijo umbrella organization, which has a very broad membership base and no strict hiring procedures. It makes space and permits all Ijo youngsters in the age range to take part in its events without being discriminated against based on their background or religious beliefs, including all gangs and fraternities. This led to a number of IYC members taking matters into their own hands by kidnapping oil workers and extorting money from their employers and families. Armed attacks were then typically carried out against oil sites. The Nigerian economy was severely impacted by the terrorist operations, as evidenced by the 40 percent decline in oil earnings between 2005 and 2008 (Ikuli, 2020). Let it be known that members of the IYC also belonged to other militant organizations that were established in this period such as the Niger Delta Volunteer Force (NDVF), Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), etc.

There have been incidents of young people abducting oil workers over the years. On April 13, 2000, Ijo youths abducted 19 employees of Nobel Oil Drilling and Oil Prospecting at the oil airstrip along Airport Road, Warri. In 2006, four employees-two Norwegians and two Ukrainians-of Peak Petroleum Nigeria Limited were abducted by suspected Ijo youths in Ekeremor LGA, Bayelsa State. Their initial goal was to engage in kidnapping and criminal activities in order to gain wealth (Oriola, 2016).

Nowadays, cult organizations are common in the Niger Delta, particularly in Bayelsa and Rivers State. In the Niger Delta in general and the Ijaw Youths Council in particular, cult activities and other associated issues are common. This is not to imply that all Ijaw Youth Council members engage in cult activities or that someone must belong to one of the several cult groups in Ijoland in order to join the IYC. No, it is not true. The idea is that those in cult groups have more authority than those outside of them, yet it is possible to be an IYC member without joining one. These groups' growth and influence have even extended to the point where they are even influencing social institutions and the political system of the government. Now, cult organizations have infiltrated government officials and educational institutions. The majority of these groups, such as the Icelanders, Greenlanders, Vikings, KKK, and others, have taken names that are heavily influenced by western culture. The majority of the members of all these groups are young people who are dissatisfied and unemployed as revealed by Ikuli (2020).

Their activities demonstrate that not all IYC members participate in these cult groups. A number of cult organizations are affiliated with the IYC, and the

Egbesu Boys are one of the most prominent local cult groups inside the IYC. The term "cult group" or "Egbesu Boys" refers to a group of young people in the Ijo community. It's an old local cult that has been extinct for many years. Usually, the cult springs to life during the most dire circumstances. The Ijo deity of war is the subject of the name Egbesu.Many Ijos believe in the god, and many of the soldiers sent to put an end to their protests also believe in him. After performing a specific ritual, the god provides protection from weapons and bullets. The Ijo people of the Niger Delta view Egbesu as a traditional culture that represents justice, not a cult. As such, its influence should not be exploited for private gain or advantage (Kalsuo, 2019).

The Egbesu Boys are a group that has been linked to the Niger Delta Volunteer Force and has been recognized by a number of sources as the IYC's spiritual arm. In order to protest perceived injustices brought about by the exploration and exploitation of oil resources in Ijo land and the Niger Delta, the group started out as a religious-cultural organization of the Ijo people before turning to violence (Refworld, 2022). Ondo, Edo, Delta, Bayelsa, Rivers, and Akwa-Ibom are the six southern states in Nigeria's Niger Delta region where the group operates. There have been numerous conflicts between the organization and the Nigerian military, which have claimed lives. There was insecurity as a result of their conflicts with Nigerian authorities. The potent legend that anyone who gets in the way of the Egbesu Boys will be buried up to their necks in the mud and left to die, caused both adults and children to run away(Refworld, 2022).

Politicians had utilized these cult groups to further their nefarious agendas, eliminating rivalries or resolving political scores. Various people in various areas have a fearful and powerless attitude toward the Egbesu Boys or cult, even though certain communities support the group's actions. Violence has always been instigated by cult groups, and these groups donot agree. Many innocent lives caught in the crossfire have died as a result of these factions' desire for dominance and power over one another. In the end, competitiveness and cultism inevitably result in conflict between them and spread violence everywhere. Politicians view these cult groups as a way to gain control and power, and they need to eliminate their opponents in order to increase their influence.

In 2020, there was an incident in Sagbama Local Government Area of Bayelsa State, the venue of an IYC convention, that left one person dead and numerous others injured. The convention was held to establish an electoral committee for the upcoming IYC Worldwide elections, which had become increasingly polarized over the years with factions led by Eric Omare and

Peretubo Oweilami vying for the presidency. Investigations show that a crisis erupted when certain young people started to feel uneasy around the election committee. Cult organizations were observed utilizing lethal weapons during the ensuing conflict, which resulted in one young person's death and injury to others who were attempting to flee. In practically every election process, these cult organizations are present and interfere with the peaceful elections that are meant to take place as revealed by Femi (2020).

These cult groups in the Ijaw Youth Council had been a thorn in the flesh of the Nigerian government, oil companies, various institutions, ordinary citizens and the IYC itself. This is not only seen in the IYC but also in other civil society organizations. Such organizations where cultism is involved always lead to fear and violence and their violent activities had contributed greatly to the rise of insecurity in the region.

Implications of the Activities of the IYC on Nigeria and the Niger Delta

Both positive and negative effects have resulted from the IYC's initiatives. It has come to light that the IYC's efforts to address the problems and challenges that the Niger Delta region faces as a result of exploitation and neglect have frequently caused more harm than good. Violence is the result of the IYC's acts. The IYC's rallies frequently result in the destruction of government buildings as well as the lives and property of regular citizens (Olorogun, 2022).

The IYC, which aims to defend the rights of Ijo youths, ought to at least properly teach its core members and supporters. However, it is regrettable that leaders are not given any training or retraining. As a result of this unfortunate development, the IYC members had become undisciplined. Due to their unchecked protests, the country had experienced violence and upheaval (Ikuli, 2020). Certain leaders and members of the IYC promote their occult activities under the auspices of the organization. These individuals favoured members of their own cult by abusing their leadership roles. In such a scenario, it will be impossible for someone who does not belong to their cult group to hold a respectable position inside the council (Ikuli, 2020).The IYC has turned into a haven for the country's cult organizations, particularly those belonging to the Ijo ethnic minority. A number of the council's elected officers act and behave in ways that are above the constitution. As Ikuli (2020) explains, these authorities act without respect for the constitution and frequently resort to violence or scheme to get their supporters to ferment trouble in order to accomplish their objectives.

Given this justification, it is clear that the IYC has exacerbated Nigeria's insecurity.

Positively, thousands of Ijo youngsters and non-Ijos now have employment options thanks to the Ijaw Youth Council. Without Ijo youths employed by oil multinational corporations and their subsidiaries operating in the Niger Delta, it is extremely difficult to observe these businesses functioning. Additionally, hundreds of Ijo youths have been able to obtain scholarships through the IYC at different levels thanks to the Presidential Amnesty Programme (PAP) (Ikuli, 2020).Many Ijo youths have been encouraged and assisted by the IYC to acquire a variety of trades and abilities that would enable them to support themselves. Last but not least, according to Olorogun (2020), one of the reasons the IYC was founded was to serve as a mouth piece for the Ijo as well as the entire Niger Delta and to defend their rights and interests and the IYC has done well in this regard.

Conclusion

The level of insecurity in Nigeria has not decreased over the years; rather, it has continued to rise and instill fear in the lives of its citizens, to the point where many are scared to leave their homes due to concerns for their surroundings, belongings, and families. Numerous elements have been recognized as the primary drivers of insecurity, including the nation's inequality and marginalization, poverty, ethnic exploitation, cultism, porous borders, a weak security apparatus, corruption, unemployment, and poor governance. These elements have been found to be the main sources of insecurity, and finding a solution requires serious consideration; otherwise, the nation may experience further crises.

Many deaths, property losses, starvation, and social vices have been attributed to insecurity in the nation. It is imperative that the administration receives all the assistance it can from the world community and the nation's patriotic citizens in order to address the issue of insecurity in the nation. For instance, staying watchful, calling the police in case of an emergency, providing truthful testimony when questioned in court, and other actions can all help to reduce the level of insecurity in the nation.

Instead of improving the situation for the nation, the IYC's actions have made the harm caused by insecurity worse. The IYC has engaged in a variety of societal ills, including violence, cultism, the sabotage of oil installations, and more. These actions have resulted in numerous conflicts with security personnel and the military, which have claimed the lives of innocent people. Nevertheless,

the government has some of the blame for these events since it has not handled them appropriately in the majority of cases. Many members of the IYC had forgotten their goals, which was to exact retribution for their mistreatment.

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