ETHNIC MILITIAS, NATIONAL SECURITY AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

ODIWRI, James Erhurhu
Department of Sociology, Nigeria Police Academy Wudil – Kano
E-mail: jamesodiwri@yahoo.com

and

GWABEKA, Emmanuel Jabirwe
Department of Sociology, Federal University, Kashere, Gombe State
E-mail: Emmanueljabirwe@gmail.com

Abstract
The emergence of numerous ethnic militia groups in Nigeria is becoming alarming that it is now a major concern of individuals, groups, security agencies and the government. The paper therefore seeks to examine the factors underpinning the rise in ethnic militia groups in the country and the implications of this on the security and sustainable development of the Nigerian nation. The Relative Deprivation theory and the Frustration- Aggression theory are used to analyze the occurrence of ethnic militia in the country. The paper posits that the proliferation of ethnic militia groups is attributable to poverty, unemployment, perceived marginalization, negligence by government among others. The paper points out the proliferation of ethnic militia portends dangers to national integration, promotes insecurity and criminal activities as well as affecting the level of development in Nigeria. It is therefore recommended that marginalization, equity and justice in resource and power distribution in the country should be addressed to stem the upsurge in ethnic militia.

Key Words: National Security, Marginalization, Deprivation, Crime, Sustainable Development, Ethnic Militia, Nigeria.

Introduction
Ethnic militias in Nigeria did not emerge out of the blues. Government inadvertently sowed the seed during the military regimes in the early 1980's, germinated in the 1990's and harvested in the 2000's. Long years of utter neglect of the Niger Delta areas by previous administration led to the emergence of different militant groups in the areas in the early 1990s. These include Egbesu of Africa (EBA), Ijaw Peace Movement (IPM), and Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP) etc. Thus, the Niger Delta can be seen as the hot bed of militias in Nigeria, particularly among the Ijaw nation because of the perceived injustice and marginalization. As noted by Adejumobi (2002) militia groups became visible in the country in the 1990s when the Nigeria state was in distress under callous military dictatorship, particularly during the Babangida and Abacha regimes. Between 1990 and 2009, many other ethnic militias emerged in different parts of the country to chart the course of their ethnic groups. Examples are Movement for the Actualization of Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB), Niger Delta Peoples' Volunteer Force (NDPVF), Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP), Arewa Peoples' Congress (APC), Oodua
Peoples' Congress (OPC), Bakassi Boys, Urhobo/Isoko Freedom Fighters, Omabtse Boys etc. Ethnic militias are found virtually in all the geopolitical zones in Nigeria.

This is an indication that many ethnic groups in the country have become conscious of the benefits of its formation in terms of political and economic advantages therein. The greatest concentration of these ethnic militias groups is in the south-south geopolitical zone. The tempo of ethnic militia activities reduced between 2009 and 2015. However, in the wake of 2015 general elections, many ethnic militia groups resurfaced, particularly in the Niger Delta (See Table 1). These include Niger Delta Avengers (NDA), Egbesu Water Warriors, Bakassi Freedom Fighters, Adaka Boro Avengers (ADA), Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) etc. We should be able as scholars to provide explanations to this ugly development. The activities of these various militia groups constitute great threats to the corporate existence of the country and stumbling blocks to sustainable development. This paper therefore focuses on the precipitating factors for the rise in ethnic militia and the impact on national security and sustainable development in Nigeria.

Clarity of Concepts

Ethnic Militias
Ethnic militias are extreme groups or organizations formed to promote the course and protect the interest of their own ethnic groups. Such interest ranges from overcoming marginalization, economic exploitation, injustice to acquisition of political power or influence. According to Adejumobi (2002: 2) ethnic militias are youth based formations that emerged with the intention of promoting and protecting the parochial interest of their sociocultural groups. According to Umukpa (2003), ethnic militias are paramilitary formations whose activities sometimes involve the use of violence. For Ohakim (2003), ethnic militias are extremist movements engaged in subversive activities against the state. An ethnic militia movement can be described as an extreme form of ethnic agitation for self determination as various ethnic groups assume militant postures and gradually metamorphosis into militia groups which rely on ethnic identity and support to act as machinery through which the desires of the people are actualized (Okumagba, 2009:317).

Ethnic militias have some distinctive characteristics. Firstly, they have ethnic identity, that is, the groups are affiliated to a particular ethnic group e.g. OPC among the Yoruba, Bakassi Boys among the Igbo and Egbesu Boys among the Ijaw. Secondly, membership of ethnic militias is predominantly youths. This is probably because they are highly vulnerable to manipulation by the political elite and most of them are unemployed. Thirdly, they are guided by certain purposes such as agitation for resources control, political relevance, against injustice or marginalization, economic exploitation, sentiments and retaliatory motives. Fourthly, they use different strategies to achieve their objectives. These include threats, intimidations, violence, protests, hostage taking, kidnapping, bombing of vital nations' wealth base etc. Fifthly, they are tactically funded and encouraged by the ethnic groups or leaders and with external connivance in some cases.
Without these perceived support by external forces in terms of finance, arms and ammunition their activities would not last because of government efforts to checkmate their activities.

**National Security**
The concept of national security is quite encompassing as it is viewed from different perspectives. National security entails the process of providing protection and ensuring safety of individuals, groups, property and territorial integrity of a country. UNDP (1996) describes national security as protection from threat of diseases, hunger, unemployment, crime, social conflict, political repression and environmental hazards. Okene (2011) view national security as the ability of a country to protect and develop itself, promote its cherished interest, legitimate values and enhances the standard of living and well being of its people, guests and visitors. In similar vein, Babangida (2011) contend that national security involves the physical protection and defence of our citizens and our territorial integrity and also the promotion of the economic well-being and prosperity of Nigerians in a safe and secure environment that promotes the attainment of our national interest and those of foreign partners. Maxwell (2014) posits that in any activities involved in the protection of a nation against attacks, protection of lives and property. It can be deduced from the above that national security encompasses many areas of human endeavour such as food security, social security, labour security, environmental protection, promotion of peace and the likes. Security in whatever forms is vital for sustainable development in a country.

**Theoretical Framework**
The paper is based on Relative Deprivation theory and the Frustration- Aggression theory. The theory of Relative Deprivation focuses on the feeling of discontent, anger, and emotion that arise when individuals and groups make social comparison. The theory proposed that feeling of resentment, anger, unrest, negative attitude arise when an individual or groups want something which they feel they are being deprived (Crosby, 1976, Gurr, 1970). It is basically the issue of feeling and actions. Gurr (1970) noted that instead of an absolute standard of deprivation, a gap between expected and achieved welfare creates collective discontent.

According to Runcimen (1972), Relative Deprivation is based on the axiom that people's attitudes, aspirations and grievances largely depend on the frame of reference within which they are conceived. Schaefer (2008) sees Relative Deprivation as the conscious experience of a negative discrepancy between legitimate expectations and present actualities. The basic premise is that it is the conscious feeling expressed by individuals or groups as the present situation does not correspond with his or their legitimate expectations. The concept of relative deprivation is crucial as it has implications on attitudes, behaviour, perceptions and collective discontent which is often expressed through participation in collective violent actions. The various ethnic militia in Nigeria have one grievance or the other. These range from marginalization, neglect, dominance to political deprivation.
On the other hand, Frustration-Aggression theory is credited to the works of Dollard, Doob, Miller, Mowrer and Sears (1939). According to them, frustration creates a motive for aggression to occur and fear of punishment or disapproval; for instance, may cause the aggressive behaviour to be displaced against some other target or oneself. However, Berkowitz (1978) revised the theory and stated that frustration lead to anger and anger can sometimes lead to aggressive behaviour. The theory further explains that there are other social and environmental influences on aggression such as pain, heat and overcrowding. Sundeen (1995) posit that aggression occurs as a result of a built-up frustration. When a person’s attempt to achieve a desired goal is blocked, he or she becomes frustrated and these feelings cause aggressive behaviour. The basic premise of the Frustration-Aggression theory when applied to crime commission and other forms of deviant behaviour is that an individual’s frustration is not meeting certain needs can trigger aggression, which in turn lead to crime. The Relative Deprivation theory and the Frustration-Aggression theory are quite apposite in analyzing the phenomenon of ethnic militias in Nigeria. This is because the militants usually are aggrieved on the ground of neglect of their ethnic groups, marginalization and in some cases perceived social and political deprivation. These grievances spur group(s) to react negatively against the system and government of the day.

Table 1: Distribution of Ethnic Militias Groups in Nigeria By Geo-Political Zones

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GEO-POLITICAL ZONE</th>
<th>MILITIA GROUP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>South-East</td>
<td>Bakassi Boys, Movement for Actualization of Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB), Indigenous Peoples Of Biafra (IPOB)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South-West</td>
<td>O’odua Peoples’ Congress (OPC), Reformed O’odua Peoples’ Congress (ROPC)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North-Central</td>
<td>Omatse group, Jukun Youth Movement, Benue-Tiv Movement, Plateau Youth Movement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North-West</td>
<td>Arewa Peoples’ Congress (APC), Yandaba</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North-East</td>
<td>ECOMOG</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Factors for the Emergence of Ethnic Militias in Nigeria

There has been a rapid increase in the number of ethnic militias that emerge in the country today. The proliferation of ethnic militias in Nigeria is attributed to numerous factors. Prominently among these factors are poverty, unemployment, bad governance, insecurity, fear of domination or marginalization, political neglect, proliferation of small and light arms, contagion factor and the likes.

The level of poverty in Nigeria is quite high. Despite the rich natural resources in the country, many of her citizens live below the poverty line. According to World Health Organization over 70% of the population of the country live in absolute poverty. This is true of rural areas of the Niger Delta, North-East and the Middle Belt regions of the country. Many of the citizens cannot meet the basic necessities of livelihood such as food, clothing and shelter. As the adage goes “a hungry man is an angry man”. Therefore, the youth engage themselves in militant activities in order to survive the harsh economic environment. While some scholars attribute poverty to laziness, others ascribe it to society’s inability to provide functional education; poor governance, institutional discrimination against the minorities and non provision of opportunities for employment.

Closely allied to the above is unemployment. Unemployment according to International Labour Organization (ILO) is a situation whereby members of the economically active population who are without work but available for and seeking work, including people who have lost their jobs or who have voluntarily left work (World Bank, 1998:63). Unemployment rate in Nigeria was put at 21.1% in 2010; 32.9% in 2011; 24.3% in 2012; 28.5% in 2014 and a projection of 30% in 2015 and unemployment rate is higher in the rural areas at 25.6% than the urban areas (NBS, 2012; 2014). This showed a steady increase in unemployment trend in the country. Many of the youths who join these identified militant groups are jobless and are easy prey for recruitment.

One factor that precipitated the emergence of ethnic militias in Nigeria today is poor leadership both at the state and federal levels. Long years of military rule in the country left the citizens in state of neglect, poor development and the promotion of ethnic and religious sentiments for their selfish ends. Some segments of the Nigerian society became second class citizens in their own country. Even the advent of democratic government did not help matter as in many places government abandoned their responsibility of providing security, social welfare packages, fairness and equity in sharing of nation cake or certain parts of the country punished for not voting for the ruling party. In some cases government poor management of crises situation in some states and or communities promoted the desire to form security outfit which eventually metamorphosed into militia group. It is not surprising to find that ethnic militias have emerged in such zones to oppose the government of the day. It is in this wise that Ayuba (2014:19) argued that the emergence of Ethnic Militias came through the process of manipulation of ethnicity by the governing elite across the various regions of Nigeria as a means of gaining power and as such it is the consequence of mismanagement of ethnic grievances by the Nigeria state and its agencies.
The proliferation of Ethnic militias is also attributable to perceived marginalization of some parts of the country by the government or leadership as well as the fear that one particular section of the country is out to dominate others. As observed by Fawehinmi (2003) the emergence and proliferation of ethnic militia group was as a result of perceived injustice, deprivation and marginalization of some ethnic nationalities as well as perceived exclusion of various forms such as political injustice, ethnic marginalization and economic exclusion in terms of access to social services. Thus, the politics of exclusion has been a major reason for emergence of ethnic militia in Nigeria. For example, the Movement for the Actualization of Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) developed to protest the marginalization of the Igbo people since the end of the civil war; various ethnic militia movements in the Niger Delta based their argument on the neglect of the zone by government despite that they produce the wealth of the nation and the OPC in the South West developed in the wake of the annulment of June 12, 1993 Presidential election won by Chief M.K.O. Abiola to protest and protect the interest of the Yoruba ethnic nationality. It is argued that the failure of government to meet its constitutional obligations in the face of perceived abundance has been implicated as reason in part for the emergence of militia groups across the nation (Olorunfemi, 2007).

Proliferation of arms and ammunition has to some extent contributed to the development of ethnic militias in Nigeria. The issue of proliferation of arms and ammunition in Nigeria can be traced to the end of the civil war in 1970 when many soldiers were demobilized without recovering their guns from them. This is the origin of armed robbery in Nigeria today. Unfortunately, the same set of people use and mobilize others to form the nefarious groups. The various ethnic militia movements have easy access to various arms and ammunition today with which they carry out their activities; some are sponsored and backed up by rich and unpatriotic individuals and in some cases military and political elite arm youths with guns as thugs for their personal interests which later metamorphose into militia groups (Fayeye, 2005, Okumagba; 2009; Odivwri, 2015). It is on record that many small arms and light weapons find their way into the country through the creeks in the Niger Delta and the porous borders in the North – East and South – West and northern parts of the country. Okumagba (2009) pointed out that the growth and proliferation of ethnic militia groups in Nigeria is partly attributable to increase in the number of small arms.

The political class tends to give support to emergence of ethnic militias for hidden agenda and their failure to deliver dividend of democracy to the people. Some of these militias were used by politicians to achieve their political ambition but after election the group armed by them turn to militant groups due to negligence and betrayals. As Obasi succinctly put it:

"The virtual deterioration and collapse of most institutions for inter-ethnic equity and of national cohesion has strengthen the resolves of political elite to openly canvass for and promote the emergence of geo-ethnic organizations whose membership is largely drawn from the vanguard of the unreserved army of youths excluded from the
political space and de-enfranchised in the political process” (Obasi, 2002:9)

The contagion factor is quite apposite in the explanation of proliferation of ethnic militia in Nigeria. By contagion factor we mean the imitative tendency of one ethnic militia group by another to form their own militia group. The ethnic militia in Nigeria can be seen as a sort of a pressure group. The activities of one group are usually copied by others as a result of successes recorded by some other ethnic militia groups. In the wake of the formation of OPC, the Arewa People’s Congress (APC) was formed apparently as a front to checkmate the incessant attacks on Hausa/Fulani population in Lagos, Shagamu, Oke-Ogun and other parts of Yorubaland (Albert, 2012). The pressure mounted by OPC led to emergence of Chief Olusegun Obasanjo and the activities of militant groups in the Niger Delta region indirectly influenced the election of a minority as president, Dr. Goodluck Jonathan. Members of these groups are known to have benefitted from government patronage in terms of contracts such as surveillance of oil pipelines against vandalization. For example, between May 2015 and August 2016, not less than six new ethnic militia groups emerged, particularly among Ijaw ethnic nationality. We can therefore deduce from our analysis that those who form militia groups are somewhat frustrated by the system as they are deprived of what they perceive they should get. Thus, ethnic militia has become a potential fighting group for possible check against ethnic marginalization.

Impact of Ethnic Militia Activities on Development of Nigeria

The activities of the Ethnic Militias in the country promote negative attitude. It breeds fear and hatred among the different ethnic and religious groups in the country. It promotes insecurity and instability. As observed by Fayeye (2005:118) and quite rightly too, the presence of Ethnic Militias and their operations in the Fourth Republic in Nigeria have resulted in violent clashes and perpetration of violence. He identified various forms of violence engaged in by these militants, which include direct violence involving murder, homicide and massacre; brutal acts against the Civil Society in the form of torture, rape and maltreatment; indirect violence which is non-assistance to human beings in danger; restrictions or physical constraints such as forced labour, imprisonment and kidnapping; mediated violence which involves the destruction of the physical and social environment of the opposing group and establishing the culture of violence in which the militants lead ethnic members into violent acts, seeking economic gains, sensitizing members to engage in armed struggle to seeking political recognition. In many cases, clashes have led to the loss of lives and destruction of property.

In some parts of the country, it has led to criminality. For example, many of the members of militia groups in the Niger Delta engage in criminal activities such as oil bunkering, kidnapping, hostage taking and armed robbery. Similarly, the Ombatse Group in Nassarawa State in 2014 were involved in the killing of 87 police officers and state security officials who were sent on restoration of peace as a result of the ethnic uprising in the area. The activities of the Ombatse group have led to the loss of many lives and destruction of property in the state. The group was also accused of attacking Nassarawa
State presidential lodge where INEC was collating the result of Gubernatorial Polls in April, 2015 (Premium Times, 2015).

The activities of Ethnic militia create insecurity problems in the country. Peace and security are twin live wires that galvanize rapid development and so their absence constitutes serious risks. As observed by DFID (2000), a lack of safety and security directly affects the welfare of the poor people; cause injury and death, reduce family income and generate a climate of fear. However, the activities of ethnic militias in the country instill fear into the mind of the citizens. As observed by Oronsaye and Igbafe (2012) their mode of operation has driven fear down the spines of innocent, defenceless and well-meaning Nigerians. In 2017 threats issued by IPOB, Arewa Youth Congress and some militia groups in the Niger Delta over quit notice on some ethnic groups from their areas constitute serious security issues.

Insecurity in the country has multiplier effects on the economy. It scares away foreign investors in the country and those already on ground try to close down and relocate their investments. For instance, at the beginning of APC government of Mohammad Buhari, new militant groups sprang up and dealt disastrous blow on oil facilities in the Niger Delta. This led to fall in oil and gas production in the country with its attendant evils. The export on crude oil fell drastically thus affecting our Gross National Domestic product (GDP). Constant issue of threats by ethnic militia has created mass migration of people from such areas to their home states thereby depriving such people from contributing to the socio-economic development of the source region or area.

The ethnic nature of militia in Nigeria portends dangers to the unity and corporate existence of the country. There has been accusations and counter accusations between militant groups in the Niger Delta, OPC, MOSOP and APC at various times and in some cases involving the issuing of threats of expulsion to other ethnic groups and secession from Nigeria. It can create mutual mistrust and misunderstanding among the various ethnic groups in Nigeria. This does not augur well for our nascent democracy and corporate existence as a country.

Conclusion
The rate of formation of militia groups in the country, particularly in the Niger Delta, South- East, South West and Nassarawa State is alarming and worrisome. This is because no meaningful development can take place in the absence of peace and security which the activities of the militia groups are preventing from being achieved. It can be observed that most of the emerged ethnic militia is as a result of multiplicity of factors but prominent among them are ethnic marginalization in the scheme of things in national affairs and poverty level of the people. The menace constitutes security threats to national government, peace and stability of the country; it has adverse effects on the economy of the country, sow seed of distrust, fear and misunderstanding and a threat to corporate existence of the Nigerian nation.
Recommendations/Policy Implications
Providing solutions to the proliferation of ethnic militia in Nigeria demand the cooperation of the youths who are vulnerable to their formation, individuals, religious groups, various ethnic movements, political leaders, students and the government of the day. Thus, the first bold step towards actualizing this objective is to develop youth empowerment strategies. The youths are mainly involved in this anti-social behaviour due to poverty and unemployment. Government should therefore embark on meaningful programmes that will ensure gainful employment of the teeming youth population. These include redesigning of curricula of tertiary institutions to meet the economic realities of the time; empowerment programmes like creation of skill acquisition centres, granting of loans to youth entrepreneurs with minimum interests and the revitalization of moribund industries.

The political class should rededicate themselves to the ideals of the society by ensuring the delivery of dividend of democracy; they should deliver their electoral promises while the government at local government, state and federal levels should engage in good governance. Politicians should stop using the youths to fan embers of ethnicity and religion for their selfish interests. There should be equity, fairness and justice in the allocation of the country’s scarce resources.

Mass education of the citizenry on the dangers of promoting ethnic militia movement is a sine qua non for prevention and stoppage of the menace. The government, the mass media, religious organizations should preach against ethnic and religious intolerance in the country. Government should ban provocative teaching by religious leaders and their followers. Strict laws/penalty for those engaging in fanning the embers of religion, such as jail terms should be made and enforced.

The marginalization of minority groups in the country and within a state should be addressed by both the state and federal government. In this respect, the current agitation for restructuring of the country by the various groups should be religiously carried out with unity of purpose and sincerity. In this way the feeling of belongingness to the Nigerian project would be ensured and this will go a long way in dousing the tension and various agitations.

References


