

# Oil Bunkering and Insecurity in Rivers State

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**Abstract:** This study is focused on the burden of oil bunkering in Rivers State. When a resource like crude oil is constitutionally made to be collectively owned, it is only expected of the State to protect it and ensure that it is equitably distributed to the benefit of all. The activity of oil bunkering is increasing the problem of insecurity in Rivers State. Consequently, this study aimed to examine the nature and dimension of the problems of oil bunkering, how it has escalated insecurity in Rivers State with the intent of finding workable solutions to control it for crude oil to fully contribute to our national development. The paper is anchored on both primary and secondary sources of data. Besides, the Political Economy approach was used to guide this study. The data collected through secondary sources were thoroughly subjected to inductive approach of data analysis. The paper revealed that there is a prevalence of oil bunkering and insecurity in Rivers State; and this reality is affecting the economy of Rivers State and Nigeria at large; greed is the strongest factor causing the existence of oil bunkering; and some of the ruling elite are accomplices in oil bunkering crime to the underdevelopment of Rivers State, thus giving the federal government a big challenge to curb this phenomenon. Consequently, the study recommended strict measures and their application to stop oil bunkering; punitive measures to control oil bunkering; provision of employment for the youths of Rivers State; dissuading our youths from oil bunkering, and adequately equipping security operatives to crush oil bunkering; and the use of peace dialogue to issues rather than force with the people of Rivers State and Niger Delta region at large.

**Key words:** Oil Bunkering, Insecurity, Underdevelopment, National Development

## I Introduction

The development of most economies are often hinged on proper harnessing of the available resources for development. There is no doubt that oil is the mainstay of the Nigerian economy. However, it is saddening to note that there have been oil bunkering activities in virtually all parts of Rivers State that have been undermining the efforts of government to harness this resource for the development of the national economy. Ikelegbe (2005: pp. 208-234) documents that, “an estimated 150,000 barrels of crude oil are stolen every day in Nigeria. The vast majority of this is sold internationally, but approximately 25% stay in the Niger Delta for refining and consumption. Illegal oil refining in Rivers State comes with great economic and social costs” Okonta (2005, pp. 1-3) explains that “Unless the problem is better understood and key drivers of the illegal economy are analyzed, the trade could come to undermine the stability of Nigeria’s legal oil sector”.

The rapid growth of oil bunkering and illegal oil refining camps across Rivers State has resulted in a semi-structured, informal, and highly entrepreneurial economy that is independently managed in each local area along a discreet value chain. Mustapha (2010, pp. 1-5) posits that “the chain has five key parts, which are stage 1 - tap installation; stage 2 - operating the tapping point; stage 3 - supply of stolen crude for export and local refining; stage 4 - local refining into products; and stage 5 -distribution and sale of refined products”.

Given the foregoing circumstances, it is proper to explicitly point out that the activities that surround oil bunkering and illegal refinery ownership affects the economy of Rivers State and Nigeria at large. Besides, in the contest of Rivers State, it led to many youths in this area deserting schools to engage in the oil bunkering and illegal refineries businesses, which cumulatively affected the economy of this state.

To that effect, this paper is poised to carefully examine the socio-economic and political circumstances that prompted the existence of the oil bunkering and attendant insecurity effect and how this affects the economy of Rivers State and by extension the national economy for appropriate solutions to be proffered.

## Objectives of the Study

The general objective of this paper is to examine the burden of oil bunkering and insecurity in Rivers State. The specific objectives are to:

1. Find out the nature and dimension of the problems of oil bunkering in Rivers State.
2. Find out how oil bunkering has escalated insecurity in Rivers State.
3. Examine the challenges faced the federal government in curbing oil bunkering in Rivers State.
4. Determine the insecurity caused by oil bunkering affects the economy of Rivers State.

## Research Questions

This study has to be guided by the following research questions:

1. What is the nature and dimension of the problems of oil bunkering in Rivers State?
2. How has oil bunkering escalated insecurity in Rivers State?
3. What are the challenges faced the Federal Government in curbing oil bunkering in Rivers State?
4. Has the insecurity caused by oil bunkering affects the economy of Rivers State?

## II Literature Review

The two key variables in this work are oil bunkering and insecurity. Consequently, this conceptual review section will focus on exploring what different scholars have espoused about these concepts.

### Oil Bunkering

Garuba (2010, p. 11) explains that “oil bunkering entails “tapping directly into pipelines away from oil company facilities and connect from pipelines to barges that are hidden in small creeks with mangrove forest cover”. Asuni (quoted in Garuba, 2010, pp. 11-12) reveals three types of oil bunkering viz:

1. A minor and small-scale pilfering of condensate and petroleum product destined for the local market.
2. Direct hacking into pipelines or tapping with a hose from oil wellhead.
3. Excess lifting of crude oil beyond the licensed amount, using forged bills of lading.

In his description of oil bunkering, Ikelegbe (2005, p. 221) observed thus:

Crude oil is tapped from pipelines and terminals of the oil producing companies with advance technological equipment in the waterways, creeks, swamps and high seas. Plastic pipes are fixed top manifold points and intersection of several pipelines and crude oil is then pumped into barges. In some cases, ships are hooked to hoses that siphon crude from MNC facilities that may be several hundred meters away (p.221).

However, the Nigeria police and navy “are often fingered as accomplices” (Garuba, 2010, p. 11). In fact, the Chief of Naval Staff, Vice Admiral Dele Ezeoba, once said that “he had established a system to monitor the activities of officers of the Nigerian navy to determine their involvement in oil theft” (Odiegwu, 2013, p.1-2). The Nigerian navy and other security forces deployed to maintain peace are settled with cash payments to ensure that military operations and patrol did not interfere with oil bunkering activities as indicated by a report on illegal sale of crude oil (Mustapha, 2010, p. 172).

Apart from the militants, Garuba said that “politicians and military leaders are responsible for the majority of oil bunkering or thefts in Nigeria’s crude oil rich Niger-Delta by saying: “The soldiers are deeply involved. There is so much bunkering activity that is taking place in the Niger Delta.... Eighty percent of soldiers in the region own the best cars... these are people who did not own a motorcycle before coming to the Delta” (quoted in Garuba, 2010, p. 12). When we look at the complexity involved in oil bunkering, it is palpable that it is well beyond the ability of local militants to handle. While Niger Delta youths may handle the local tapping and loading, international syndicates from Eastern Europe, Russia, Australia, Lebanon, the Netherlands and France (including new entrants like Filipinos and Ghanaians) all play roles in financing, transporting, and laundering the money accruing from the business (Garuba, 2010, p. 12). In truth, “impounded vessels used for oil bunkering often mysteriously vanish from police custody to reinforce credence to rumours that high-ranking Nigerian officials are involved in oil smuggling” (Garuba, 2010, p. 12).

Given what has been said about oil bunkering in the Niger Delta, and particularly in Rivers State, it is proper to say that this business has largely affected the economy of this area. This is particularly the case in Rivers State, which calls for some objective measures to correct these anomalies.

## **Insecurity**

The concept of insecurity connotes different meanings such as: absence of safety; danger; hazard; uncertainty; lack of protection, and lack of safety. According to Beland (2005) insecurity is a state of fear or anxiety due to absence or lack of protection. Achumba et al (2013) defines insecurity from two perspectives. Firstly, insecurity is the state of being open or subject to danger or threat of danger, where danger is the condition of being susceptible to harm or injury. Secondly insecurity is the state of being exposed to risk or anxiety, where anxiety is a vague unpleasant emotion that is experienced in anticipation of some misfortune. These definitions of insecurity underscore a major point that those affected by insecurity are not only uncertain or unaware of what would happen but they are also vulnerable to the threats and dangers when they occur. In the context of this paper insecurity is defined as a breach of peace and security, whether historical, religious, ethno-regional, civil, social, economic, and political that contributes to recurring conflicts, and leads to wanton destruction of lives and property.

## **III Empirical Review**

Odalonu (2015) in writing on “The Upsurge of Oil Theft and Illegal Bunkering in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria: Is There a Way Out?” carefully examined the rising causative factors oil bunkering in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria which has negatively impacted on the economy of Nigeria. This is because Nigerian state largely dependent on revenue from oil. The aim of this work was to critically examine the methods, actors, causes, impacts of oil theft and the measures adopted by Nigerian governments to combat oil theft. The location of the study is the Niger Delta region and the study was timed within the period of 2009-2014. Secondary data were generated for the study, while content analysis was used for data interpretation and analysis. The study revealed that different individuals and groups were involved in oil theft and illegal bunkering activities. The study further proved that persistence oil theft in the Niger Delta is due to the enthroned corruption by Nigerian elites, high level of youth unemployment, ineffective and corrupt law enforcement agencies and international crime collaborations. The work also revealed that successive Nigerian governments have made attempts to curb the menace by the establishment of a special security outfit, militarization of the Niger Delta region and granting of amnesty to Niger Delta militants but the upsurge of oil theft in recent times clearly indicates that success has not been achieved, hence some recommendations were proffered to put an end to oil theft in the Niger Delta region.

While writing on “Illegal Oil Bunkering and Oil Theft in Nigeria: Impact on the National Economy and the Way Forward”, Anyio (2015) explores the impact of illegal oil bunkering and theft which has continued to threaten the survival of the nation’s economy. The combination of crude oil theft, illegal refining and pipeline vandalism has become a major threat to Nigeria and resources accruing to the national coffers. The paper adopted a qualitative/content research approach using secondary sources like government publications, journals, newspapers, magazines, live TV broadcast and the internet. Findings of this paper showed that Nigeria has incurred colossal loses of oil revenues estimated at over N1.29 trillion to industrial scale theft yearly, withdrawal of foreign investors and companies, degradation of the local environment, increased acquisition of light arms and ammunition, high incidents of school dropouts among primary and secondary schools pupils and students, while the Federal Government has not done enough to combat the awkward turn out of events. The paper recommends amongst others the need for the Federal Government use of strict legislation to sanction the big wigs in the oil theft ring both locally and international to serve as deterrent to others and reduce to the barest minimum the incidences of oil theft if not totally eliminated

## **IV Theoretical Review**

The theory that has to be used to guide this paper is the Political Economy approach. Some proponents of this theory include Karl Marx, Frank Cunningham, Mike Lebowitz, C. B. Macpherson, Gregory Albo, Stanley Ryerson, Bryan Palmer, Leo Panitch, John Saul, Claude Ake, Eme Ekekwe etc. In this regard, we shall be adopting the Marxian political Economy. Ihonvbere (1989, pp. 29-41) explains that the Political Economy approach “is both a discipline and a methodological tool of analysis. As a discipline, it is treated as systematic body of knowledge of the growth and development of modes of production”.

Although Marx was not an Economist, he was attracted to a number of positions taken by popular Political Economists David Ricardo and Adams Smith. For example, they posited that labour was the source

of all wealth. This ultimately led Marx to his labour theory of value, in which he argued that the profit of the capitalist was based on the exploitation of the labourer. Marx was also affected by the Political Economist's depiction of the horrors of the capitalist system and the exploitation of the workers (Ritzer, 2012, p. 24). The capitalists in the context of the Nigerian oil economy are the Multinational Corporations (MNCs) while the labourers in the context of our analysis are not those who are employed by the MNCs but the owners of the crude oil; and those who have been living on the land where oil is explored. They have been terribly and immensely exploited by the MNCs and the Nigerian State.

Ake (1981, p. 2) posited a number of statements that can be useful in our analysis of the political and economic issues surrounding the incidence of oil theft in Nigeria. He aptly put it thus:

Those who are economically privileged tend to be interested in preserving the existing social order; and those who are disadvantaged by the social order, particularly its distribution of wealth, have a strong interest in changing the social order, particularly its distribution of wealth (Ake, 1981, p. 2).

In a nutshell, we despair from the above proposition that oil bunkering is a consequence of material deprivation being experienced by the Niger Deltans, and particularly Rivers State; and for the problem to discontinue, scarcity of resources in the region should also discontinue. If not, then we are justified to posit that oil theft in Nigeria will not only continue but might even exacerbate.

Relating this theory to this topic, it is proper to say that it suits because the emphasis of the Political Economy theory is on economic considerations, which the oil bunkering hinges on squarely. Besides, this theory is holistic in nature and can explain these phenomenon from the economic, political, social, and cultural considerations.

## **V Methodology**

This study is going to adopt the historical method. McMillan & Schumacher (1984, p. 23) define the historical research as "the systematic and objective location, evaluation and synthesis of evidence in order to establish facts and draw conclusions about past events. It involves a critical inquiry of a previous age with the aim of reconstructing a faithful representation of the past." Shafer (1974, pp. 63-64) posits that, "In historical research, the investigator studies documents and other sources that contain facts concerning the research theme with the objective of achieving better understanding of present policies, practices, problems and institutions."

The secondary method of data collection were used in this investigation. This is largely because many might be reluctant to answer to a questionnaire focused on oil bunkering. The sources of data will be basically secondary and they will include textbooks, journals, magazines, newspapers, government publications, theses and dissertations, encyclopedias, and materials culled from the Internet.

The paper adopted deductive reasoning to analyze the secondary data gathered and used in this study. Deductive reasoning, also known as deductive logic or logical deduction is the process of reasoning from one or more statements (premises) to reach a logically certain conclusion. Deductive reasoning goes in the same direction as that of the conditionals, and links premises with conclusions. If all premises are true, the terms are clear, and the rules of deductive logic are followed, then the conclusion reached is necessarily true. Using this method of data analysis, the researcher explored what other scholars have done in the past and deductively reach some conclusions in relation to facts and truth.

## **VI Data Presentation and Analysis**

The purpose of historical research is to verify and explain history of any area of human activities, subjects or events by means of scientific process. The most time honoured justification for doing historical research is that people can learn from the past (Spilackova, 2012, pp. 1-2). The foregoing being obvious, the data presentation in this paper, given that it leans on the historical approach, explored some data from sub-topics extracted from the research questions.

### **Nature and Dimension of the Problems of Oil Bunkering in Rivers State**

The nature and dimension of oil bunkering is very high in Rivers State. Umar & Othman (2017, p. 3) points out statistically that the Nigerian government is considered to be losing nearly 300,000 barrels of oil per day as a result of oil pipeline vandalism. Hence, this loss runs into billions of dollars, while negatively affecting the socio-economic development of the region. In virtually all the areas that have oil pipelines, their youths have started engaging in oil bunkering.

Akpan (2016) points out that oil bunkers scoop up over N20 million monthly. That is a huge sum of money and that has the propensity of driving more appetite daily. It is also important to note that in some communities, though contentious, traditional rulers have also been in the practice of protecting culprits. This means that such environment, economic sabotage is done with impunity. On the other hand this bastardly economic sabotage in these communities receive the backing of top government functionaries, politicians, military officers and highly placed individuals in the society. According to Sawyeer in (Tell July 8, 2013 p. 23). Oil bunkering is very common to the point that many youths have decided to drop from school to engage in it. The foregoing facts answer clearly the question, what is the nature and dimension of the problems of oil bunkering in Rivers State?

### **Oil Bunkering and Escalation of Insecurity in Rivers State**

Oil bunkering has spurred on a high level of insecurity in Rivers State. Armed cartels are behind illegal refineries in the creeks of the Niger Delta, and particularly Rivers State. The proceeds from the illegal refineries are aiding the importation of illegal arms and ammunition. The result of these activities result in insecurity in the region like kidnapping, armed robbery, assassinations, rape and other form of violence (Bello, 2008).

Besides, oil bunkering has made the oil communities in Rivers State to be infiltrated with armed security men. On the roads in Rivers State, security operatives of all colourations are often sighted collecting money from people on the way in the name of checkmating oil bunkering. Many lives have been wasted in confrontations between security operatives and those engaged in oil bunkering. These foregoing realities tend to answer the research question, what is the relationship between political leadership and development in the fourth republic in Nigeria?

### **Challenges Faced by the Federal Government in Curbing Oil Bunkering in Rivers State**

Federal Government has clearly contributed to curbing oil bunkering in Rivers State. However, such constraints like corrupt security officials, inadequate equipment to checkmate oil bunkering, an escalation of insincere oil surveillance companies etc has made the task and uphill one. Besides, some political bigwigs are said to be involved in the practice. Consequently, these facts answer the research question, how has oil bunkering escalated insecurity in Rivers State?

### **Insecurity from Oil Bunkering and Economy of Rivers State**

So far oil theft and illegal bunkering has a far-reaching impact on economy of Rivers State. For example, the former Minister of Finance in Goodluck Jonathan's administration, Dr. Ngozi-Iweala put the figure of oil theft and illegal bunkering at 400,000 barrels per day, while one joint venture operators (Shell Petroleum) estimates the loss to be between 150,000 and 180,000 barrels per day in Niger Delta that Rivers State is a part. However, relying on official government figures, it means that Nigeria and her operating partners have been losing a cumulative estimate of \$40m (about N6 billion) per day at a flat price as at when it was \$100 per barrel of crude oil. This translates to an estimated N2.184 trillion per annum (Igwe, 2013). In the process of monitoring or supervising the oil activities alongside the activities of oil vandals and bunkering, human lives are usually lost. In this connection and for illustration between 2013 and 2015 a total of about 350 persons including some NNPC workers, police officers, and community members had been killed as a result of the activities of oil thieves. In other words, these people were killed by these unpatriotic elements –oil thieves and pipeline vandals (Punch, Wednesday, September 2, 2015, p. 30).

Worse still, many youths have decided to drop out of school to pursue their oil bunkering business. This is bad for development of Rivers State. Additionally women much like men engage in this business, too. This bodes ill for our future generations. To that extent of the foregoing, it is safe to say that these facts have answered the, has the insecurity caused by oil bunkering affects the economy of Rivers State?

## **VII Discussion of Findings**

One of the findings of this study is that there is the prevalence of oil bunkering and insecurity in Rivers State. This trend of business, though creates an illegal veneer of self-employment for some youths in Rivers

State, it leads to insecurity that affects the livelihood of the people and the development of Rivers State. Besides, oil bunkering affects the national economy since oil is the mainstay of Nigeria.

Additionally, oil bunkering leads to a high drop-out rate from schools by the youths in Rivers State to participate. This in the long run will affect the overall development of Rivers State. It is equally important to stress that oil bunkering affects the ecology of Rivers State as the aquatic heritage of this state is being affected and the armed conflicts that induce insecurity.

It is equally the finding of this study that greed is the strongest factor causing the existence of oil bunkering in Rivers State. This is informed by the fact that most of the people involved in this business, due to its capital intensive nature, are the ruling elite cutting across politicians, top military brass, traditional rulers and diplomats. Besides, it is equally the finding of this paper that the oil bunkering business will not stop in a hurry if the status quo remained the same. For a change, there will be the willingness of the ruling elite to actively stop the nefarious activities affecting our national economy.

### **VIII Conclusion and Recommendations**

The main purpose of this paper has been to examine oil bunkering and insecurity in Rivers State. The insecurity induced by oil bunkering has made Rivers State to very unsafe as military operatives are freely seen going to communities where this illegal business takes. Sometimes, there are clashes that result in great casualties that makes such community very unsafe. This paper therefore decided to explore measures that could be put in place to ensure that oil bunkering is peacefully stopped as it has great negative consequences in relation to security and development of Rivers State.

Nigeria was said to be on the verge of a major fiscal crisis following unabated massive oil bunkering in the Niger Delta. The former Finance Minister, Mrs. Okonjo-Iweala, had said that oil theft and illegal oil bunkering costs the Federal Government \$1 billion every month (Omoyibo & Omoruyi, 2014, p. 1). Oil bunkering is perceived as a consequence of the state's incapacity to bring succor to the populace in the oil bestow regions and their desperation to meet their necessities. An analysis of oil theft in the context of the political economy theory reveals that it is a consequence of government's exploitation of the oil landlords; the horrors brought about by oil exploration; the desperation of the oil landlords to change the social order; and government's repression of agitations. Oil bunkering is part of a continuum which started with mild agitations to protests, intense activism and disruption of oil production. Apart from some indigenous people of the oil areas, top government officials, MNC's staff, the navy, soldiers and the police are involved in illegal oil bunkering. To halt oil theft in a place like Rivers State would require government, MNCs, security officials and the hosts to act in synergy in curbing the trend.

We acquiesce with a former head of OPEC, Mohammed S. Barkindo who once described oil as the "Devil's excrement" (Watts, 2009, p. 1) and added that it is also the Devil's urine and fart specifically in Nigeria. However, we cannot keep blaming the Devil for our evils with regards to the issue surrounding crude oil in Nigeria. Rather, we must point out pungently that oil bunkering has not helped to solve the problems of the people of Rivers State. Watts (2006, p. 1-2) reveals that "civil violence among and between oil producing communities and the state security force is endemic. It is estimated that more than 1000 people die each year from oil related violence". Thus, we have some blame for the Niger Deltans [which Rivers State is a part] for that "crude oil theft is a crime, we should not give excuse to people stealing crude oil in the name of resource control or agitations" (Kalu, 2009, p. 1). And because it takes two to tango, we also heap blames on the Federal Government and the MNCs for responding carelessly and selfishly to oil agitations and allowing it to aggravate and generate to oil bunkering. In addition, it is a big shame that powerful Nigerians and security agents who are supposed to play roles in thwarting oil bunkering are involved in it. We owe such unpatriotic Nigerians no thanks but profane words of reproof. We have to do all we can concertedly to salvage this situation.

Based on the conclusion above, the paper recommended the followings:

1. Government should use all necessary measures to stop oil bunkering as it affects our national economy in Nigeria.
2. Perpetrators of oil bunkering illegal refineries should be arrested and squarely dealt with to deter others.
3. The people of Rivers State and in fact the entire Niger Delta region should be sensitized to join forces to control oil bunkering as it induces a high level of insecurity in the state.

4. Government should provide employment and empower our youth with skills, which will make many of them to avoid oil bunkering.
5. Parents, churches and the media should advice youths to shun engagement in oil bunkering due to its underdevelopment consequences.
6. Government should properly equip security operatives that are expected to operate in line with rules of engagement to counter oil bunkering in Rivers State.

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