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Corruption, Militancy and their Implications for Development in Peremabiri Community, Bayelsa State, Nigeria

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Abstract
The phenomenon of corruption and militancy has become a serious threat to developmental efforts and good governance in Peremabiri community in Southern Ijaw local government area of Bayelsa State, Nigeria. The question is how can the disenabling issues be addressed to ensure sustainable peace and development for the community? The study used the greed/grievance theory and the pervasive theory of corruption to interrogate the forces driving corruption in the community. Qualitative data collected were content analysed to gain insight into how these disenabling phenomenon became entrenched for socio-political interaction in the community. It argues that militancy emerged in the community because of the level of corruption of the traditional rulers and their reliance on coercion to enforce compliance to their exploitative and oppressive rules. The paper concludes by emphasising the imperativeness of accountable, responsive and participatory governance as antidotes to corruption and militancy in the community.
Keywords: Corruption, Development, Militancy, Peremabiri Community, Nigeria

Introduction

Corruption has become a global threat to sustainable development just as it has promoted conflicts in some communities. Series of studies have shown that successive traditional leaders in Peremabiri community cannot be absolved from corruption and this has has triggered violent militant activities that have contributed immensely to the state of under-development of the community. The hitherto, value driven and development focused community administration has degenerated to crass opportunism and promoted lack of transparency, lack of accountability, exclusiveness and impunity. The exclusion of critical stakeholders of the community from accessing benefits from the oil companies has led to deprivation and elite fragmentation Such fragmentations often resulted into loss of community cohesion and the emergence of factions opposed to the ruler-ship.

It has also been established that the failure of the traditional rulers to meet the expectations of the people is as a result of the endemic corruption, the stakeholders express dissent by organizing militancy targeted against the traditional rulers. The pervasive level of corruption is regularly exploited by emergent traditional rulers who often used the militants to gain legitimacy. So, there is a vicious cycle at play because of the desire for excessive accumulation of illegitimate wealth. Paradoxically, the militant gangs cow elders and traditional rulers of the community into submission in the management of community issues and projects. Therefore, the scenario of crime, criminality and legitimacy-crisis has played out for over two decades. It has also been sustained by militants and their cronies and has impacted negatively on social and economic development of Peremabiri community. This paper therefore examines the factors that engendered corruption in traditional community governance, the manifestations and the emergence of militancy targeted at traditional authorities and the implications on the development of Peremabiri

Community in Southern Ijaw local government area of Bayelsa State, Nigeria.

From 1996 to 2020, corruption and militancy have characterized traditional customary government of Peremabiri community and has resulted in multiple violent intra-communal conflicts with severe negative consequences on the development of the community. Earlier scholarly studies have mainly focused on the state government and local government councils to the neglect of traditional customary governments of communities in the state.

This paper therefore , examines the origin and causes of corruption, the triggers of militancy and their effects on the development of Peremabiri community.

Operational Definition of Terms

It is important to clarify the overarching concepts that define this study especially in light of the fact that they are essentially contested ones. To articulate the core themes, three concepts shall be operationalized. These are corruption, militancy and development.

Corruption: Corruption is operationalised as practices inimical to transparency, accountability and due process in the management of public space and collective resources and consequently undermines public trust and confidence of the people in the leadership.

Militancy: Militancy is operationalised as a social behavior that relies on the use of force as the *modus operandi* for the articulation of views and promotion of interests rather than dialogue and cooperation.

Development: Development is the consensual approach to effecting positive change in the social, political, economic and physical environment of the community. Essentially, it a concept that encapsulates the totality of efforts targeted at improving the all-round improvement in the well-being of a people.

Theoretical Framework

The Greed and grievance theory of conflict emergence popularized by Paul and Hoeffler (1998) emphasizes that conflict emerges as a result of grievances and greed. It is the grievances perceived by a group within a society that drives violent conflict. These grievances include economic deprivation, discrimination based on ethnic, religion, gender. The theorists however contended that not only grievance but greed also trigger and sustain conflict. It follows that while grievances (unfavourable conditions) can lead to emergence of conflict; opportunities derivable from conflict can equally trigger conflict. It is pertinent to state that the unsafe conditions underscored by traditional rulers' corrupt practices are the grievances that led to the emergence of militancy targeted against them. However, when such militants take control of community leadership they indulge in hyper corruption which confirms the greed aspect of conflict emergence in the community.

The pervasive theory of corruption, according to Thompson (2013), emphasizes that corruption is a feature of politics. This is obvious in the case of Peremabiri as emergent traditional ruler from Chief Ibaralayoun Wasini indulged in corrupt practices. Faleti (2007:68) quoting Uting (2000) opined that corruption and selective patronage have become standard business practice within poor and developing countries with huge deposits of large natural resources. This is true of Peremabiri as it is the host of oil companies.

Peremabiri: Political and Socio-Economic Context

Peremabiri is a community in Bomo clan in Southern Ijaw local government area of Bayelsa state, Nigeria. The community was governed on the principles of gerontocracy where executive, legislative and judicial functions were vested in the oldest man (Amakosuowei) who was assisted by a cabinet constituted by other elderly men. According to oral tradition, the rule of gerontocracy in the community ended when

colonialists aided the installation of Chief Tiebo as paramount ruler of the community because of his demonstration of uncommon knowledge and bravery by escorting the Lander brothers to Akassa (Peremabiri August, 2016). Chief Tiebo's rule spanned from 1830 to 1900. His reign brought peace, unity and development to the community.

It was against the circumstances of his emergence as paramount ruler, his charisma and leadership style that the community made his house hold the ruling family. Chief Akisi Wasini from the ruling house succeeded him and ruled from 1926 to 1959. He too, was succeeded by Chief Ibaralayoun Wasini who ruled from 1961 to 1963. The reign of Chief Ibaralayoun Wasini marked the emergence of corruption in the traditional government of the community. Chief Ibaralayoun Wasini was removed as a paramount ruler after he was found guilty of embezzling the community funds and served a prison term.

After Chief Ibaralayoun, five paramount rulers have been removed because of corruption. They include Chief Andrew Siri, (1965 to 1971), Chief D.D. Otokolo, (1972 to 1975), Chief Clifford Obudigha, (1978 to 87), Chief Ado Adikah, (1988 to 93), Chief Genesis Oweibo, (1994 to 1996), and Progress Neverdie (2015 to 2016). It is pertinent to state that because of the unanimous endorsement of the Tiebo Household as the ruling house, elders of the Tiebo House are the traditional king makers who select and present, for ratification, a candidate for paramount rulership to the community. This has ensured a seamless succession process over the years but the smooth transition was disrupted by the recent emergence of militancy. By the 2006 census figures, the population of Peremabiri was 11,426.

The community is the host to a vast rice farm operated by the Niger Delta Basin Development Authority. The vast and expansive forest behind the community has quality raffia palms that has attracted wine tappers and grew the local gin industry in the community. It is also host to AGIP Oil Company and Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC) which have several oil wells and pipelines in the community. The community is thus a member of the Bomo Cluster/ SPDC GMOU. All these have been sources of revenue generation and wealth inflow to the community. There are government primary and secondary schools and hospital in the community. It also has satellite communities and fishing settlements and several palmwine tapping camps.

Corruption and Community Governance in Peremabiri

Corruption in Peremabiri community government can be attributed to individuals because perpetrators are the dejure/defector administrators of the community. Individual corruption, according to Thompson (2013), occurs when officials of an institution receive benefits that do not serve the institution and provide services in return to the benefactors that underscore a symbiotic relationship. From 1962 till 2016, it has been individual traditional rulers and other emergent administrators receiving bribes from the oil companies and holding down community dissent against the later.

Before 1996 five traditional rulers had been removed because of corruption and this converges with the pervasive corruption theory. All of them were removed because of embezzlement of community funds and coveting sundry benefits (from the oil companies) meant for the community.

What then have been the causes of corruption in Peremabiri? The major causes of corruption in peremabiri have been attributed to greed for oil money and oil companies' corruptive policies and practices.

Akinola (1997) observed that greed is the mother of corruption. Successive traditional rulers and other *defacto* leaders of the community demonstrated their greed for oil money by indulging in corrupt practices to obtain more money from the oil

companies and other sources of wealth inflow to the community. According to Hon. Quik Penny Gobo, the former Chairman of the Community Development Committee of Peremabiri, greed for oil money is the root of all corruption related crises in the community. He said: "Let no one be deceived, the crisis in Peremabiri is a result of greed for oil money" (Yenagoa, August, 2016). Chief Clifford Ogoro, the chief spokesman of a faction of the community, confirmed the above thus: "The main cause of the conflict over the years has been the unbridled greed for oil money" (Interview, Yenagoa, August, 2016)

Chief Genesis Oweibo, for instance, was removed as traditional ruler in 1996 after it was alleged to have secretly received N5,000,000 from SPDC for himself and cronies in preference to the N30,000,000 the community had agreed with SPDC. A similar self-serving and insatiable demand for money was also demonstrated by Patrick Warri, Odozi Sokare and Progress Neverdie as CDC chairmen who temporarily served as custodian of authority when there were no substantive traditional rulers. They dealt directly with the oil companies and indulged in massive corrupt practices.

Corruptive Practices and Policies of Oil Companies

Nwosu (2010) observed that some practices and policies of the oil companies are overtly corruptive. Some of their strategies include divide and rule; , appeasing strident dissenting individuals or groups; ready disposition to "settle" and payment of cash to individuals. All these have manifested in Peremabiri community relations with SPDC. Divide and rule tactics was employed by SPDC in the case of compensation payment for oil spillage in 1996. The community and SPDC had agreed on N30 million for the entire community at the instance of the Bayelsa State Military Administrator, Navy Captain Phillip Oladipo Ayeni but SPDC excluded majority of the community members and secretly paid him N5 million only the traditional ruler Chief Genesis Oweibo.

Azaiki (2003:113) captured it thus:

> To our chagrin, SHELL in their characteristic manner cornered the paramount ruler and his cabinet and paid only five million Naira which was fraudulently disbursed among themselves.

This deprived other community members with genuine claims as victims of the oil spill effects. As a rural community that is fully into subsistence economy, dangling such an amount of money before traditional rulers was a real source of temptation and highly corruptive. The Environmental Rights Action (ERA, 2005:30) report argued that SPDC's relationship with Chief Ibaralayoun Wasini in 1962 compromised the king's integrity as he was accused of receiving a bribe of six pounds. Azaiki (2003) confirmed this relationship and the attendant consequences:

> Shell arrived at Peremabiri in search of oil in 1963. Wasini II entered into negotiations with shell, this new relationship compromised the kingship and led to the dethronement of king Wasini II by the Community's Council of Chiefs for corruption involving six pounds. The dethronement of Wasini II commenced the free fall of the traditional governing institutions and the supporting systems of Peremabiri society (Azaiki, 2009:110).

Unfortunately, this concept of collecting tokens in a corrupt manner seemed to have become a norm as successive chiefs (after Chief Ibaralayoun Wasini) have indulged in corrupt practices to the detriment of the community in their relationship with the oil companies. The foregoing conforms to Kukah's (2007:30) assertion that greed

motivated corrupt practices of traditional rulers and the multiplier effects when he said: "the traditional rulers who ought to be custodians of these values have surrendered their moral authority on the altars of material greed" thus setting examples for community people.

While a rapacious desire for oil money leads to corruption, SPDC's recognition of any emergent group as *defacto* community administrators ostensibly to control communal wealth is another corruptive practice of the oil company. It was such recognition and patronage that kept Patrick Wari and Odozi Sokare as administrators of the community even when majority community opinion rejected their rule.

Another unedifying practice was the issue of payment of cash for the community to every emergent community administrator irrespective of the processes of emergence. During Chief Progress Neverdie's reign, SPDC monetized the supply of diesel to the community and subsequently paid N42,500,000 to Chief Progress Neverdie which became an object of a petition to the Commissioner of Police, Bayelsa state by a lawyer acting on behalf of the community as Progress Neverdie could not give account of the money (Ambaowei, 2014). Such payments, by SPDC (whether intended, or unintended) have become causes of corruption in the community as recipients have continuously used them for personal purposes. The critical issue is why is SPDC not showing concern for the level of financial recklessness of the community leaders they deal with? Perhaps, the solution lies in the individual corruption theory which emphasizes the existence of a *pro quid quo* motive and the pervasive corruption theory which maintains that corruption is a feature of politics.

Scholars have averred that oil companies are known for inducing corruption and economic fragility where this could enhance the profitability of their operations (Fedorova, 2001:5 cited in Faleti, 2017:66). Peremabiri's experience confirms the above as oil company induced corruption have triggered conflicts that have threatened the fragile economic situation of the community.

Emergence of Militancy in Peremabiri

The emergence of militancy in Peremabiri could be better explained from the perspective of greed/grievance theory of conflict emergence, which says that conflicts emerge because of grievances and as well as greed. The thrust of the theory which is on conditions and opportunities reveals that while unsafe acts lead to unsafe conditions, unsafe conditions lead to unsafe response. The unsafe acts have engendered the grievances (conditions) which trigger unsafe response-the emergence of militancy and conflicts. On the perspective of greed, opportunities derivable from conflict can equally trigger conflicts. In Peremabiri, the corrupt activities of traditional rulers have engendered grievances in the community as several persons suffer deprivations which heightened inequalities and economic fragility. Also because of greed for oil money, people have seen militancy as an opportunity to further benefit from the oil companies by forcibly taking over the rein of traditional authority in order to deal directly with the oil companies. Thus, the unsafe reactions against the unsafe conditions manifested as militancy. What is militancy? What are the manifestations of militancy?

According to Eking (1994), militancy is overt manifestation of a reactive, generally non-revolutionary impulse directed against internal and external social forces or individuals whose activities are deemed inimical to the interests and values of the community or critical segments. Militancy denotes aggressiveness and combativeness which manifests in verbal agitations, threats, mass demonstrations, boycotts, disruption of economic and social activities, physical attacks resulting in injuries and death and destruction of properties and livelihoods directed against perceived or real adversaries. It is increasingly associated

with the Nigerian peasantry as a socio-economic class.

Hon. Quick Penny Gobo, former Chairman of the Community's Community Development Committee (CDC) affirmed that militancy emerged in the dynamics of community governance and corruption in 1966 during the reign of Chief Genesis Oweibo as traditional ruler. He explained that Chief Oweibo secretly and corruptly received 5 million naira from SDPC and fraudulently disbursed it among members of his cabinet. This, he said, was against the community's agreement with SPDC to pay N30 million naira for damages occasioned by oil spillage in the community.

He further explained that Chief Oweibo resorted to coercion and repression to perpetuate his corruption ridden governance which led to mass opposition against him. It was against the background that Mr. Patrick Wari, an indigene of the community recruited 120 idle and unemployed community youths and took them to Amabulou community, the seat of Egbesu, the Ijaw god of war in Ekeremour Local Government area of the State. They went through processes and acquired the Egbesu prowess. On their return, they forcibly removed Chief Genesis Oweibo as traditional ruler and installed themselves as *defacto* community leaders. Patrick Wari the head of the militants was named coordinator of the community governance.

A document titled, "A chronology of kings in Peremabiri community and a brief history" (2014) signed by a factional traditional ruler and executive members of his council presented to the Bayelsa State Conflict Management Alliance (BSCMA) asserted that Patrick Wari and his militants indulged in wanton destruction of properties of their perceived enemies. They dealt directly with the oil companies and controlled all sources of money inflow to the community just as they refused to be accountable to the community. Their rule was characterized by brutality, destruction and massive corruption which made people to desert the community. Infighting within the leadership made Patrick Wari to leave the community and Mr. Odozi Sokare succeeded as leader. Odozi towed the line of Patrick Wari and was more vicious. The document further stated that the persistent violent stance of the Odozi led government made one Mr. Quick Penny Gobo, an indigene and other aggrieved community youth to attack the community which resulted in the death of Odozi and more than 100 persons and the destruction of about 56 houses and other properties (Interview, Yenagoa, August 2016).

A factional chairman of Council of Chiefs of the Community, Chief Noel Mgbila, said that a strong relationship had existed between ruler-ship, governance and militancy in the community. He stated that militants determine who became traditional ruler or community development committee chairman in the community. The relationship endures as long the incumbent does the biddings of the militant leader. According to him, this was the reason a renowned militant, general Ogunbos who was instrumental to Chief Progress Neverdie's emergence as CDC chairman became the arrowhead of the opposition against Chief Progress Neverdie as traditional ruler of the community. He said it was because Chief Progress Neverdie never allowed general Ogunbos to deal directly with the oil companies. It is therefore an open secret that the fear of militants is the beginning of wisdom in traditional governance in Peremabiri community (Yenagoa, August, 2016).

Effects of Corruption and Militancy on Development in Peremabiri Community

The dynamics of corruption and militancy have contributed immensely to the state of under development of Peremabiri. No aspect of development was spared as the social, political and economic life of the community experienced regression in the last two and a half decades. Indeed, the disenabling phenomena of corruption and militancy are seriously hindering the realization of the goals of virtually all the developmental projects and initiatives targeted at

improving the material condition of the generality of the people of the community. The negative effects of these phenomena on developmental programmes include but not limited to the following key areas:

Social and Political Development

Peremabiri community that was ranked very highly in Bomo clan and southern Ijaw local government area steadily regressed to a state of anarchy, desertion and uncertainty particularly from 1996 to 2016 and till date. The regression manifested as multiple violent conflicts and disrupted social issues. It recorded series of social disintegration which included breakdown of traditional authority and the preeminence of youth groups; the prevalence of mutual distrust; fear, hate, and anger and the dislocation of family structures. The age-long smooth and peaceful transition and succession process of traditional authority, for instance, has been bastardised. The Tiebo ruling house suffered from internal and external manipulations, financial inducements and could no longer speak and act cohesively. The result is the emergence of multiple claimants of legitimate authority supported by factions of the ruling house.

The head of the king makers of Tiebo ruling house who attributed his travails to refusal to accept bribe to favour an unqualified aspirant for traditional rulership of the community said he was declared *persona non grata* in Peremabiri by a militant usurper. He said:

> An aspirant offered to bribe me with money to make him paramount ruler. I am not a wealthy man but I refused the offer and stood my ground that traditions must prevail in the selection of paramount ruler (Interview, Yenagoa, August, 2016)

Social development has also been impacted negatively because of the cyclical militant activities. The community is being treated as a pariah community by her neighbours because of the level of belligerence of the militant actors. The level of community fragmentation is underscored by the presence of two contending traditional rulers claiming legitimate authority of the community with one operating at the community and the other at Yenagoa, the state capital..

The situation has also produced the highest number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in communal crisis in the state. Thousands of Peremabiri indigenes are being sheltered at the Samson Siasia Sports Complex, Yenagoa as internally displaced persons since January 1, 2016 when violence broke out in the community. There have been social problems such as forced separation of families.According to Matthew Mathias, a member of the IDP camp, only one of his four wives is with him at the camp while his 27 children are scattered in the state (Yenagoa, August, 2016).

Economic Development

The economic implications are noteworthy. The community has lost major sources of financial inflow to corruption and militancy in community governance. Chief Clifford Ogoro, a factional Chief spokesman of the community described the implications on the economic development thus:

> Peremabiri was a centre of commerce being host of oil companies, rice farm and local gin industry which led to an increase in population. Sadly because of the belligerence of factions in the crisis, the community has been reduced to a ghost of its former self. The wine tappers from Akwa Ibom and other traders have fled the community which has resulted in reduction of rents (Yenagoa, August 2016).

The above has increased economic fragility as indigenes previously involved in the value chain of the local gin industry have become redundant and helpless. This is a huge loss considering the value of local gin industry to job creation. He also said the high level of distrust and mutual suspicion coupled with the fear of the militants, has prevented the community from coming together to discuss development issues. He bemoaned the situation thus:

> Development needs proper planning and committed execution. For several years now Peremabiri has not gathered together to plan for the development of the community. How can militants plan and execute development? Theirs is simply share the money (Peremabiri, August, 2016).

Educational Development

Talent Wasini confirmed that educational progress of the community has been negatively affected because of the militant activities. He said the population of the community has drastically reduced which informed his decision to close down his private school while the government schools suffer from inadequate teaching staff as teachers are not willing to remain in the community. The numerous displacements has negatively impacted the indigenes across the state. Some reside at internally displaced camps and fishing camps where there are no opportunities for education (Yenagoa, August, 2016). This confirms Danjibo's (2006) contention that conflict leads to loss of educational opportunities for less privileged people.

A plethora of literature depicts that development cannot take place in an environment devoid of peace (Adetula,. 2006, Albert 2012, World Bank, 2013). The situation in Peremabiri underscores this reality as there has practically been no community development effort since the emergence of militancy in the community's government.

Social Capital

The negative effects of corruption and militancy on social capital, especially its bridging variant cannot be over-emphasised. Corruption and militancy has proved to be a disenabling phenomena as they completely eroded the social capital that galvanise majority of the people to actively participate in the activities of the community. So, the local administration has been heavily constrained from getting the support of the people for projects and programmes. Communal values that characteristically had hitherto promoted solidarity, harmony and belongingness have been overturned for values that undermine the spirit of hard work and good character as a form of social relations. Indeed, inter-personal and group relationships have been terribly damaged and trust is in serious deficit.

Conclusion

This paper has examined the problem posed to development by the disenabling phenomena of corruption and militancy in Peremabiri community, Bayelsa State. There is the need to reinvent both the traditional and state institutions to rein in corruption and militancy for transparency, accountability, dialogue and cooperation for meaningful and sustainable peace and development to take place in the community.

Societies, (traditional or modern) thrive on norms and rules that define social relationships and individual and institutional responsibilities. Authority in traditional/customary government derives power and legitimacy from the traditions and customs of the people hence they are referred to as traditional rulers and go by the same traditional titles and cognomens. Unfortunately, in Peremabiri community, traditional rulers have, on one hand, abandoned the traditions of the people and embraced warped values, greed and corruption and on the other hand, majority

of the people have reacted by embracing the language of violence as a mode of social interaction. Peremabiri, like every other traditional community has her own customs and traditions for regulating individual social conduct. Embedded in the customs and traditions are sanctions for violation of the traditional rules and rewards from the gods and ancestors for commendable and courageous acts.

The way forward therefore is to strengthen these sanctions in community governance so as to control individual social conduct and enthrone accountable and responsive governance to bring an end to militancy and ensure the delivery of sustainable peace and development in the community. In addition, a complete overhaul of the security architecture and apparatuses would go a long way to changing the prevalent culture of corruption and militancy in the community. The security operatives in the community have been compromised and corrupted. Therefor, is the need to review the security system to promote professionalism and accountability. A reinvention of both the tradition and the modern mechanisms for peace building and peace promotion in the community will birth an environment conducive to development.

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