

Displacement and the Development of Highway Communities in Nigeria's Niger Delta Region

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Abstract

In Nigeria, there have been phases of displacements from one region to the other. While displacements in majority of the regions seem obvious and have drawn interventions, the case of the Niger Delta region is quite recurrent. This study focused on displacements and the developments of highway communities in Niger Delta Region of Nigeria. The descriptive design was employed in collection of data and the population was purposively selected (Those displaced and are living along the Tombia-Amassoma highway in Bayelsa State). Thirty in-depth interviews and three key informants' interviews were carried out. The study revealed that the population was displaced by social factors within the region. It was also found that the population is not recognized as internally displaced and are such not provided for. The study recommends that governmental intervention be made to ameliorate the condition of living in the area.

Keywords: Displacement, highway community, Niger Delta

Introduction

Globally, displacement is the result of a huge number of causes including struggles for political power, violence of various facets, floods, storms and many other natural hazards. The International Organization of Migration (IOM) predicts there will be 200 million environmentally-displaced people by the year 2050 with major effects stunning from receiving countries to the countries of origin (IOM, 2016). The differentiating feature for persons displaced by disasters and those by conflicts stems on the peculiarity of their vulnerabilities else both are often faced with similar pain and deprivation. From developed nations to the third world countries there are accelerated concerns on the welfare of displacees most especially in the embattled third world nations like the case of Africa (Sohne, 2006).

In Africa, over 15 million persons are internally displaced with a larger proportion in Sub-Saharan Africa where many have been uprooted from their homes and are constantly on the move as a result of dynamic forms of political or communal violence in home countries (Ojeda 2010; Solomon, 2010; Morel, 2009; Porter, Hampshire, Kyei and Adjaloo, 2008; Rutinwa 2002). In countries like Sudan and South Sudan, thousands of persons have had to flee from their homes for cases of armed political violence that have led to the loss of lives for many innocent citizens. In Ethiopia, Kenya and Djibouti displacement have been seasoned by associated factors from environmental consequences from periods of drought to floods leading to the burden of food insecurity and resource scarcity (Pavanello, Elhaway and Pantuliano, 2010). From decades of social and political tensions thousands of persons from Cote d'Ivoire and the Republic of Guinea have been rendered homeless even up till the early 2000's (Drumtra, 2003). It can also be noted that the arc of instability in West Africa is linked by connective displacing factors just as was found for the war in Liberia which began wars in Sierra Leone. The exploitations of Liberia's gold and diamonds and the clash of interest between various economic and political juggernauts led to the civil unrest which gave millions no alternative but to run for safety and changing their status from citizens to refugees (Freudenthal and David, 2017; SarfoMensah, 2009). In recent times, conflict induced displacements have been seen in counties like the Democratic Republic of Congo and Cameroun forcing many to take refuge in Nigeria.

Nigeria and a few other peace keeping nations have been patron to a number of reconciliation and peace mediating processes rooted in various conflicts induced situations in many countries in Africa. Particularly for Nigeria, whilst fortunately it is yet to experience and be enlisted among refugee producing countries; there have been faces of diverse forms of internally displacements with an estimates of 2,152,000 internally displaced persons in 2017 which is 10 percent of the worlds displaced persons (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees UNHCR, 2017; World Bank, 2017; Internal Displaced Monitoring Centre IDMC 2017). Amid global trends, factors leading displacements in Nigeria stems from ethno-religious conflicts, social unrest, pre and post electoral violence, resource allocation and many others bottled up in various inter and intra political fracas (Fayomi, 2014). Displacements in Nigeria as in other countries also do not congregate on capitals and megacities only, but also on peri-urban areas and secondary cities; from the agrarian zones to the oil rich belts (World Disasters Report, 2012). In South-western Nigeria, pressures from political violence, environmental degradation

and extreme climatic conditions, poor housing conditions, natural hazards like the flood occurrences in Lagos, Agbeokuta and Ibadan, and even the social unrest surrounding the 2006 census count and many other vices have set many persons in the region forcefully move leaving their belongings behind (Aderogba, 2012; Adelekan, 2011; Bamgbose, 2009; Coker, Awokola and Olomolaiye, 2008).

Dating from the Nigeria civil war in 1967-1970, the concept of internally displaced persons became an integral part for understanding movements in the South-eastern Nigeria as many were sent on exiles even in their home land (Ibeanu, 1998). Amidst other environmental conditions, the hash effects of erosion have been the reoccurring catalyst for displacements across various states in the region (Nwilo, Olayinka and Uwadiogwu, 2011; Ogbonnaya and Fukuoka, 2010). In the present day Nigeria, understanding displacements will take no rigorous process at all especially when considering the increasing level and pattern of displacements in the Northern part of the country where displacements stems on series of ethno-religious conflict, resource scarcity, insurgencies, clashes between herdsmen and farmers and few other social upheavals (Ayo, 2016; Abdulrazaq, 2013). Many have been disengaged from their families, lives lost, properties abandoned and the only words of encouragement is to 'Run for you your Life'. Since 2007 the northern Nigeria has hitherto recorded an increasing figure of the displaced persons as each year go by.

Aside the Southwest, Southeast and Northern Nigeria, one last region that have recorded chains of displacements for decades now is the South-Southern region which is the bema seat of the Nigeria's Niger Delta States, the oil rich zone in whose resources Nigeria have also been surviving although voices have been clamouring for the revitalization of the agricultural sector to replace the over dependency on oil.

Many of the displacements observed within and outside Nigeria as written by scholars take into documentation the situation and cause for displacements with little attempts on the conditions of living at the point of destination especially for those that refuse to move into other indigenous lands but decides to set up their own communities; having displaced people from different areas within the country. This is the unique pattern of displacements in the Niger Delta region as against other regions within Nigeria.

The Niger Delta Region and the displaced Niger Deltans

The Niger Delta region is located south of Nigeria and bordered to the South by the Atlantic Ocean and to the East by Cameroon. It occupies a surface area of about 112,110 square kilometres. It represents about 12% of Nigeria's total surface area and it was estimated that by the beginning of 2006 its population would be over 28 million inhabitants and about 33,616,000 in 2010.

The Region comprises nine of Nigeria's constituent States namely Abia, Akwalbom, Bayelsa, Cross Rivers, Delta, Edo, Imo, Ondo and Rivers States. The core Niger Delta States, which include Akwalbom, Delta, Bayelsa, Cross River and Rivers States. In these core states are the areas where the problems of hardship and deprivation are experienced the most.

The non-core States are Edo, Imo, Ondo and Abia States where the problems of hardship and deprivation exist but not as severe as those of the core States. The Niger Delta States predominantly speaking Ijaw language.

The Niger Delta Region is a rich and varied mosaic of ecological types from the barrier island forest and coastal vegetation areas through to Montane habitats with their attendant problems (Wifa, 2008). It is the reservoir of the countries crude oil; the most relayed resource for generating revenue in Nigeria (Akpan and Akpabio, 2009; Wifa, 2008), although this has not transcended into alleviating the many persons living in poverty in the region. The region occupies 7.5 percent of Nigeria's land mass accommodating approximately 30 million people. To be exact, the region accounts for 90 percent of Nigeria's demanded gas and oil reserves with up to 90 percent earnings for foreign exchange (Stake Holders Democracy Network SDN, 2016). Regardless of the wealth, there has been neglect in the provision of sanitation, electricity, healthcare and primary education. It is a region of mapped frustration and deep rooted mistrust with various levels of unprecedented restiveness which has led to violence (Oriola, 2013; Wifa, 2008; Watts, Okonta, Kemedi, 2004). Many reports have chronicled the Region's monumental problems although attempts is been made by the present administration of the country to put promises to actions.

Displacement is associated with oil production in the Niger Delta and one can confidently say that since the discovery of oil in Oloibiri in 1956 the region has known no respite (Obi, 2014; Aaron, 2006). From the 1990's environmental degradation and lack of benefits from oil revenue seem to have geared many of the conflicts in the region. In 2001, a total of 115 incidents of oil spills in which 5,187.14 barrels of oil were spilled giving root to the destruction of farmlands, water and the general living environment posing a great risk to health else the people were forced to migrate from their homes (SPDC Western Operations, Environmental Department, 2002). In recent years the transfer of money from oil compensation to local communities has become the reason for violent clashes. One clue to this is that community development programmes funded by oil companies have made an attractive show of various political positions (Opukri and Ibaba, 2008). The demarcation of new geo-political boundaries and the creation of new constituency area have also aroused violent disputes between communities. In 2004, it was reported that an estimate of 6,000 people had been displaced due to violence

between local militia and security forces (Ibeanu, 2002). The Ewoama community in Bayelsa State for instance with about 8,000 persons have been displaced for 19 years now, following the total destruction of the town by Okpoama community over chieftaincy and leadership dispute. In Rivers State, thousands of Ogoni's were displaced for quite a number of years now as a result of state violence and repression over oil right. In Delta State, the Ijaw-Itsekiri feud displaced thousands of people on both sides which resulted to the relocation of the Warri South Local Government head quarters from Ogbe-Ijaw to Ogidigen (Opukri and Ibaba, 2008; Ibeanu, 2002).

In 2013 also, there was wide spread displacements across the region from mapped cases of flood. From Yenagoa, Amassoma and Ekeremo in Bayelsa State, to the heart of Portharcourt City in Rivers State, and also in Ughelli in Delta State, forcefully evacuating many from their homes

The conflict situation in the Niger Delta is driven by the powerful mixture of weak governance, systemic corruption, underdevelopment, political marginalization and economic inequality. It has brought the region to the forefront of international energy and security concerns shaped by politics of the Nigeria state and a transnational oil interest by the elites (Obi, 2014; Obi and Rustad, 2011). One could summarize that the disturbance of previously remote communities; pollution or loss of vital natural resources have led to the displacements in the Niger Delta also aggravating the level of poverty in the area (Opukri and Ibaba, 2008). Life in the Niger Delta is quite easy, they rely on aquaculture and agriculture (plantain production) which means whenever the water is polluted or the soil is degraded there is trouble but when houses are affected the people involuntary moves. Comparing both, it is found that refugees are easily adapting and very resourceful to their newly found environment than those internally displaced (Pavanello, Elhaway and Pantuliano, 2010; Jacobson, 2002) this might be a responses to the perceived shock of becoming homeless in one's own land. Many of those displaced in the Niger Delta hardly move into other regions but solely concentrate themselves within their region and since there are no camps provided by government for internally displaced persons in the region, displacees have got to do it their own way. Studies (Obi, 2014; Opukri and Ibaba, 2008; Oriola, 2013) have largely focused on the Niger Delta Region from different angles of it conflict situations, however, what becomes of the people who flee for safety, taking refuge along bush paths, high ways and side walks of major roads have been given less attention and this overtime have led to the prevalence of high-way communities in the region. The need to know the conditions of living within these communities is important in understanding the Nexus between displacement and the formation of high way communities in the Niger Delta Region taking a critical focus on the community along Tombia-Amassoma express way in Bayelsa State, South-South of Nigeria.

Methodology

This study was descriptive in the design employing qualitative methods of data collections. The purposive techniques was engaged to select the population under study (Those living along the Tombia-Amassoma highway) which is specific to the subject under study. The study categorized the population on a household bases. A set of 30 in-depth interviews and 3 key informants' interviews were carried out comprising of community leaders at various levels; and this figure was non-statistically derived from what was observed in a pre-test. All interviews were properly recorded, transcribed and coded for a systematic analysis. Tombia-Amassoma community is a small size but gradually experiencing population increase as new displace finds their way into the area.

Development of Tombia-Amassamo Highway Community

Tombia-Amassoma road is 40 kilometers touching both ends of the communities. Tombia is a community of its own which is a portion of Yenagoa and Amassoma. The population of both communities is more than 40,000 per individual head count. Tombia-Amassoma geo-politically is located within the southern ijaw local government of Bayles State. As far back as 1982 the community location along the Tombia-Amassoma was a fishing camp with a single fishing hut. A peripheral description of the community along the highway is to best see it as an isolated compound with shanty building structures surrounded by thick forest vegetation. The building style is particularly homogenous, all built in the same pattern. One of the responses from the in-depth interviews revealed a couple of these.

'The people that lived in this place as far back as 1982 were into fishing and farming. The Tombia village is not far from this place and that is where we majorl go to buy all we need including sachet water''

(Old displaced settler- A Bayelsan/Fieldwork, 2017)

The soil composition of the area is very adulating and good for farming. The majority of the people living along the high way engaged in subsistence farming. The first settlers at the area finally became the owners of the area which are known as the people of YENIZUE-GENE EPIE KINGDOM 1.

This place we are living now is owned by Yenizue-Gene Epie local government in somewhere in Yenagoa Bayelsa state (A Displacee/IDI-Fieldwork, 2017)

Majority of the settlers speaks pidgin so as to ease communication amongst themselves since all the settlers

are coming having different cultural background. The Tombia-Amassoma highway community developed well as a result of the convergence of various households from within and outside Bayelsa state. Many of the settlers in the areas were displaced from Akwalbom State, Edo State, River State, Delta State and even Bayelsa States (but living far away in the cricks). Majority of which were female headed families and some have been living there for up to five (5) years in the area and within the course of this study are regarded as old displacee.

All the youths in this area came with their families. We have families from far away Diebu within this Bayelsa, some from Delta, Akwalbom and even neighbouring River State.

(Community Youth Leader/ IDI-Fieldwork, 2017)

To reaffirm that the development of Tombia-Amassoma highway community is the case of the convergence of displaced persons. An in-depth interview revealed that a sizeable number of persons (household) living in the area were displaced by poor housing conditions in the former place of residence, some were pushed out by the hash living pattern; no reliable source of income due to the crude spillage as a result of the activities of the oil bunkers destroying their farmlands and agricultural produce which they sustained within the former residence. One of the household was spotted and separated for their peculiar cause of displacement. The interview revealed that as far back as the 2008 military and militant clashes in Rivers State, they have been on the move from one location to another to meet up shelter and wellbeing and this has led them to the high way community. Although some families have been living in the community for a long time, many have also have cause to leave the area for purpose of better opportunities; so people come in and people move out.

Many of the people living in this our small community suffered from housing problems in the cities, some even lost their farmlands to this illegal oil exploration. There is even one family that came from River State because of constant militant problem that time they have to leave their houses and even the State as a whole.

(Community Chairman/IDI-fieldwork, 2017)

The highway community as at the time of this study had not more than 53 housing structures and many were so dilapidated to behold. It was surprising to find out that all of these displaced families living there actually have serious monetary commitment to the usage of the place. The displaced families pay in monetary terms for every activity engaged. It was really a situation of the 'Lords' and the 'Serfs'. The owners of the place charge them for fishing, firewood cutting, operating of personal sewing machine, land use, the use of store and even to the very common farming.

Although am the chairman here but i report to the paramount ruler of Yenizue Gene Community in Yenagoa..... nothing is for free here, everything is written down in this paper and we give them receipt after payment every year.If they want to go the river to fish it is 18,000 naira, the land they build their houses is cost 10,000 naira, farming in our forest is 10,000 but those that cut our sticks for making this local chewing stick is 6,000 naira but those that cut fire woods pay 8,000 and also tailoring activities is 3,000. Those that decide to rent our land for business or to build store pay nothing less than 15,000. Although they are free to beat down the prices to a reasonable agreement.

(Community Chairman-IDI fieldwork, 2017)

Despite the serious monetary conditions, the displaced families were embattled by wicked life threatening situations. A compilation of responses revealed that displaced persons were living at the margin of life. The road side community has no source of electricity, no health services, no hygienic water for domestic use, and no security, no school facility not a single school for displaced children and many more. Many of the displaced persons are often robbed of their widow's mite by youths from neighbouring villages. The displaced family heads complained bitterly on the level of oppression being heaped on them by the owners of the area. To meet up the high cost but low standard of living many of the displaced persons have to go either Amassoma or Yenagoa to get some job to do but have been reluctant to leave the area. Most of the displaced children trek as far 20-30km to attend a school and these they do in groups else many decline going to school for that day for purpose of safety.

Just yesterday, the woman living behind my house put to bed, it was my wife and some other women that helped her deliver the baby in her house with candle light. If not for God many people would have died in this place sometimes we take traditional medicine because Epie People have refused to provide common small health centre for us and yet we pay for rent.

(A Family Head)- IDI Fieldwork, 2017)

A female respondent also cumulated these unscrupulous living conditions by adding that she has been robbed countless times by some hoodlums using a motorcycle on a run way on her return from Yenagoa.

The Vulnerability of the Displaced Niger Deltans within the Tombia-Amassoma Highway Community

The high way community is already vulnerable per its geographical location, although women and children as revealed from the study faces a greater risk of survival. It is of this research interest to note that aside the problems highlighted earlier as complained by the displacees, from observation and an interviews done the entire community is sitting on a collections of crude oil pipeline as dug many years before the arrival of the present

settlers in the area by some oil companies that have worked and still working in the state. This is no easy a risk to withstand because it only takes a little fire outbreak to consume the entire people in the area. Some caution signs have been put in place to give warnings but it is better imagined what could happen in a community with no electricity, many using candle sticks, a few others having small generator sets and a whole lot of many other lighting tools. The fear of the unforeseen pressured one of the respondents to speak up.

If you go to the back of my house you will see a yellow pipeline indicator, what flow underneath is fuel and other crude produce. It's only God that is protecting us. (Female Respondents-A Family Head) IDI-Fieldwork, 2017 Another threat to a safe and healthy living for these displaced persons on the highway is their unavoidable cohabitation of the highway community and the localization of a major state refuse dump. First and foremost even during the course of moving around in this study we couldn't breathe well because the entire community, the road side and every areas within that domain is faced with breath risking air pollution. One is puzzled with the question of how infants breathe well in the community. One of the respondents gave a shocking response.

We are used to it ooh, every day they dump refuse there, it is public refuse dump and even scavengers come to pick from there. Some of the boys in this area also join them to make some money. (A Displaced Woman/Fieldwork, 2017).

With the knowledge of a healthy environment and its implication if neglected, one could easily know that these people on the highway community are seriously endangering their respiratory systems which in due time if nothing is done will face the consequences. Also from observation the community is surrounded by a bush which is also a risk to malarial infections. Although the study did not reveal any death toll as at the time of this study, responses from households' reports that there have been recurrent episodes of malarial infections affecting both children and adults. These they have coped with by the use of alternative medicines.

Living with the Displacees in Tombia-Amassoma Highway Community: The Situation Ahead

Generally speaking, the Tombia-Amassoma Highway community might not be relocating anytime soon. This is because the conditions for displacements in the region as a whole are yet consistent up till date with no evidence of serious panacea. In fact, in 2012 there were series of flooding incidents, washing away farmlands and houses. Abudlrazaq (2013) affirms in his study that natural disasters as floods have caused persons to be internally displaced in Nigeria as seen in Lagos, Oyo, Kogi, kwara and Bayelsa State. This covers states from the Southwest, North central and the South-South Niger Delta Region. Also in 2017 there was a repeat of that although not as serious as that of the former. Although cases of militia actions in the region have gradually reduced at least to a point of not resulting to the displacements of innocent people as many of the militants now live in hidings. But for other conditions as earlier revealed by the present settlers in the community, places like Tombia-Amassoma will remain a good first aid to the homeless. Some of the displaced families are already seeing the area as a permanent resident, some as their villages but many are still on the plan of moving out to give room for incoming immigrants into the area as it was the case when they initially came too.

Summary and Conclusion

Any displacement under these conditions as revealed in this study is quite dramatic and requires a sympathetic attention. The high way community was never seen as a camp for the Internally Displaced Persons right from its inception rather it emerged as a stop by location and later a gradual site for living under the control of some old first settlers in the area. This alone will restrict the concern and effort of the government to directly interfere into their situations, since the highway community is geo-politically grouped within the Epie Local Government of Bayelsa (as claimed ownership), which means everything that concerns the wellbeing of those living or affiliated to that local government is catered for by the local government as derived from the state allocations, although the case of this displaced people could be handled exceptionally taken up by the state government since the people involved hails from different states of within the region. The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, Internal Displacement IDPM (2008) had earlier posited that while refugees enjoy the concerns of both national and international supports under the international laws from the Refugee Convention agreements, issues of internally displacements are often left for the nationals to fix things up whether they are capable or not as many countries fear external interference as a way of bridging their countries sovereignty. Consistent to the pattern of living, we all agree that feeding is paramount to living. The bulk of the displaced families engaged in agricultural activities to feed from the forest vegetation along the high way. It is obviously necessary for serious human felt reasons that these displaced people are not monetarily charged to pay for their engagements in farming, fishing or any other source of feeding. This alone worsens their conditions. Although the research found that first timers into the area where waved off some bills to pay to ease their tension but never last for long because the area (highway community) is seen by its owners as merchandise for business and some sort of generating revenue for themselves. Although one might wonder how easy it could be to generate revenues from those who needs more than even the revenue.

The location of the Tombia-Amassoma High way community is very strategic as many passers-by cannot

but have a facial experience of this draconian living of the people. The highway leads to the state capital of Bayelsa State and also to the major university in the state- the Niger Delta University. The office of the commissioner on non-indigene matters should be very active and focal to this situation to help draw the attentions of other states involved in this displacements process to really have lasting and sustainable solution.

According to Okoh (2016) it is revealed that the insurgency battling the northern pole of the country under recent and frequent herdsmen attacks have shifted grounds to the middle belts and raising serious tensions for the Niger Deltans. In more threatening developments the governor of Bayelsa State freely offered 1200 hectares of land to the activities of cattle grazing for the herdsmen in 2017, counting the death tolls and displacement of persons as the case in other regions of the country, many concern persons within and even neighbouring states within the region have pull out to kick against the movement for the fear of the effects it might result in the future and the government until this time of this study have been dogged and reluctant on withdrawing its action on its implementation.

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Table 1: Number of Internally displaced persons in Northern Nigeria in 2016

Nigeria States	Number of IDPs
Abuja	13,481
Adamawa	136,010
Bauchi	70, 078
Borno	1,434,149
Benue	85,393
Gombe	25, 332
Kaduna	36,976
Kano	9331
Nassarawa	37,553
Plateau	736,976
Taraba	50,227
Yobe	131,203
Zamfara	44,92

Source: Reconstructed from International Organization of Migration (IOM), 2016

Building Structures in the TombiaAmassoma Highway Community



Image 1-5 (Structure of the general area)



Tombia-Amassoma Highway Community



A pipeline indicator bbeh



Road Side Refuse Dump along the Tombia-Amassoma High way

