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Oil Theft in Arepo, Nigeria: Women in Organized Crime of Pipeline Vandalism

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Abstract

Crude oil remains the major natural resource contributing 9.04% to Nigeria's GDP and a life-wire for the Nigerian ailing economy for decades. However, the product is being sabotaged during its transportation across the states. Vandalism, oil theft and bunkering remain a flourishing criminal activity and women are inherently partaking in the menace. The study critically explored the role played by women in the illegal oil business in Arepo town of Ogun State. The long years of socio-economic hardship and the claimed marginalization of women in most riverine area account for women involvement and partnership with their male counterparts in the illegal act in Arepo town of Ogun state. women were active in vandalism and played the role of 'carriers' and 'sellers', 'available' and in most cases act to complement their husbands, male lovers for a successful vandalization of oil pipelines. The study concluded that value re-orientation and enabling environment for empowerment will foster self-worth and reduce the spate of women involvement in oil theft along Arepo area and ultimately in Nigeria.

Keywords: Bunkering, Nigeria, Oil theft, Security and Civil Defence Corps, Women, Vandalism.

Introduction

Oil theft through pipeline vandalism and bunkering became prevalent in the early 90s, requires a workable panacea; otherwise, its damaging consequences for both government and the citizenry might have lifelong effects. Oil pipeline vandalism therefore implies deliberate breaking of oil pipelines with the intent to steal petroleum products or to sabotage the government (Vidal, 2011). Vandalizing oil pipeline is no longer a habit but a way of life for many individuals who see it as a means for economic empowerment. This has since supplanted legitimate economic activities. Until the Nigerian government begin to provide for the necessities of her citizenry, people might still continue to rely on self-

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help to sustain their lives (Nwaogbe, 2013). The menace of oil theft is mostly conceived as an organized crime principally perpetrated by men. However, women are daily taking up roles in the illegal booming business to eke a living.

Crude oil pipelines are essential –the medium through which products are delivered from production locations to refineries through the local service station. This makes system 2B pipelines in *Arepo* important and a flash point for vandals initially thought to be male affairs but with the services of the female folks who routinely strive for survival by vandalizing the oil pipelines to the detriment of the federal government and the entire south-western community.

The spate at which oil pipeline vandalism, bunkering, sabotaging, oil theft and subsequently scooping manifest all over Nigeria with attending problem warrants their being treated as a major national security matter problem. The *Arepo* case of oil spillage, theft vandalism seems to have soared higher as there are in-flow of Ijaw youths into the Yoruba speaking community who are believed to be the chief culprit behind the evil menace. Hence, oil pipeline vandalism is no longer new in *Arepo*, but a peculiar menace jointly carried out by men and women with specific roles in the south-western region and calls for immediate intervention by the government.

The entire petroleum pipeline network in Nigeria presently spreads over 7,000 KM (Agbazie, 2004), while that of *Arepo-Mosimi* environs towers about 4KM. These networks of pipelines in *Arepo* area are under the ‘system 2B’ networks of pipelines in Nigeria, from which refined products are transported from the Atlas Cove Jetty in Lagos State to the Nigeria National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) regional depots in *Mosimi* Area of *Sagamu* in Ogun State to the different depots in the south-western states and Kwara State. Hence, the *Arepo* pipelines are product pipelines that aid the transportation of refined petroleum products to regional depots where truck can easily convey gasoline to local service station for private consumption. There seems to be no relentlessness from vandals across riverine areas in Nigeria on the spate and incessantness in oil sabotage. Sadly, the case of *Arepo* community seems to have reached an alarming proportion and common when compared to the sabotage evident in other south-western parts of Nigeria. The situation has continued to render the efforts of the security agencies ineffective.

The women are known for their care-giving role in the home and are invariably instrumental to building the society by nurturing the children. This might not be particularly correct for all the women in the riverine area. Sadly, the acts of taking up criminal roles such as the involvement in oil theft, scooping and illegal bunkering are embarked upon by women who for the love of money are lured into these criminal acts for survival. This unusual cum illicit act taken up by women has devastating effects on the homes and the entire society and a corresponding increase in crime rate and social milieu.

Oil pipeline vandalism is a menace and to national development that has received scholarly discourse in Nigeria. Discourses were often tailored to attract attention in the area of causes and consequences of oil pipeline vandalism with a view to ameliorating the menace, because crude oil and its products are the mainstay of Nigeria’s economy and hence account for almost 90% of national earnings and about 25% of the gross domestic products (GDP) (CIA Fact book, 2015). Generally, studies on vandalism, bunkering and oil theft focused on male perpetrators and often ignored women’s involvement. Hence, the study attempted a lucid analysis of immense vandalism in *Arepo* especially by taking a

glance at the role being played by women and the different strategies used by vandals to enhance successful operations. The study focused on “roles played by women in vandals’ corridor”.

Review of Literature

The Nigeria pipeline systems are an indispensable means of conveying gas, gasoline, oil and all forms of crude products. Undoubtedly, the pipeline project is one of the most important infrastructures in Nigeria as it stretches several thousands of kilometres and passes through cities, villages and rural communities across the country. As good as the process of transporting crude oil is, lots have been done by vandals to sabotage the process and stifle the effort of the government through the vandalization of the oil pipelines. In fact, those in the business of vandalizing the pipelines also consider the pipeline system a viable business that must be sustained no matter the implication. In a society like Nigeria, where money is taken as a measure of good life irrespective of the sources and where poverty is widespread, oil vandalism and theft, are most likely to soar as it might be difficult to look away from the lucrative business since the legal means of survival are not readily forthcoming. Similarly, those given the mandate to man the government infrastructure are engrossed in the proceeds, tips given them to look the other way from those behind the boom of the illicit business. This could be particularly so if the would-be or potential whistle –blower is given a piece of the action to keep body and soul together. It is noteworthy that each time pipeline vandals are paraded on network television, it is usually the foot soldiers from the dregs of the society, who run errands for the barons that get caught (Kortstanje, 2011). Kortstanje also noted that the godfathers usually lie low, while their stooges are being paraded half-naked in public.

Importantly, gender is now an established and central topic in criminology and sociology, precisely female involvement in criminality is on the increase. For decades, research efforts focused on male phenomenon in crime while ignoring in totality female criminality (Smart, 1976) (Heidonshen & Silvestri, 1995). Serious academic attentions were often paid to researches on Male crimes, which warrant biased theoretical materials on crime amongst women, a situation which culminates into gender gap in offending. Hence, a study carried out by Karen Heimer (2000) noted that in the past few decades, women and men have converged in their rates of crime and the gender gap in offending has narrowed. The explanations to this convergence have been proposed, including the economic marginalization hypothesis, which argues that the gender gap in crime has narrowed because women have experienced increasing economic hardship relative to men and are likely to commit various kinds of crimes for survival. Women were initially not associated with violent nor gang crime but seek solace in what to survive with and bother less on what brings this survival no matter how criminal it seems.

Over a decade and still counting, vandals of oil pipelines and Nigeria’s crude oil thieves have been in business uninterrupted. These criminal activities have left an indelible mark on the country’s ailing economy (Boris, 2016). However, more worrisome is the increase in female involvement in organized crime and illegal bunkering and vandalism are topping desired measure embarked for survival particularly by women who reside in riverine areas where pipelines belonging to NNPC are laid.

Although the government has made concerted efforts aimed at reducing vandalism in Nigeria through different agencies (such as the act that brought on board the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC) to protect the entire infrastructure in Nigeria and oil pipeline inclusive, based on section 3(I) e, subsection i & ii of the NSCDC Act of 2003 and as amended in the NSCDC Act 2007), it appears that the more government devised means of protecting the oil facilities specifically in the Niger Delta, the more actors improved upon their operations to beat even the most modern technologies employed in policing the oil pipelines and installations (Mernyi, 2014). Importantly, other factors fuelling the assailing pipeline vandalism in Nigeria include lack of proper prosecution of arrested suspects by the federal government of Nigeria; this is aided by security agents who receive bribes and lawyers who exploit loopholes in the criminal laws in Nigeria. This was corroborated by the former commanding officer of the Nigerian Naval Ship (NNS), Commodore Oyetunji while briefing the press at a conference in January 2014 (NIMASA, 2014). He said that government had not been able to really prosecute and jail oil thieves and saboteurs owing to the highly influential personalities backing them. He added that no illegal bunkers, vandals and other persons arrested in connection to illegal oil business were handed over to the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) nor prosecuted since he assumed office (Mernyi, 2014). Government agencies, both the security outfits and officials in the oil industry were said to have compromised to aid oil sabotage, oil theft and vandalism in Nigeria. These government personnel form the network of individuals with vandals to jeopardize government infrastructure.

Adeniyi (2007, p. 72) described the networks of individuals actively involved in vandalism thus: “The question we should even ask is whether there is no collusion between the vandals, the police and some NNPC staff. Because the ease with which these vandals identify the pipelines buried in remote areas, sometimes six feet below the ground, shows some expert knowledge.” This was corroborated by Abolurin (2008, p. 31) that there must be well placed people who have what it takes and links with engineers who vandalize pipelines. They perforate holes quietly and lay pipelines up to 1km, where they siphon fuel at will, this is a modus operandi of vandalism. Similarly, the involvement of the security agents in the illegal oil business, for instance in Bodo-Ogoni in Bayelsa State, the fee for drilling an oil pipeline ranges from N250,000 to N300,000 part of which goes to the operatives of the JTF to ward off surveillance from the site of drilling for the time being (Naanen & Tolani, 2013). Boris (2016) described the aggregates of person and activities in vandalism as clearly a sophisticated organization which involved different personalities including the oil company personnel, the military officers, politicians, members of the local communities, international oil buyers, militants, shippers, bankers, refiners, wealthy individuals within and outside Nigeria. These individuals are the networks of persons involved in oil vandalism in Nigeria and ensure the sustainability of the processes in vandalism.

Similarly, Ayanrouh (2013) noted that, presently oil theft in Nigeria involves a convoluted and complex web of relationship spanning all levels of the society, involving diverse relationships. These relationships are alleged to include highly connected people in and outside government (members of the executive and legislative arms of government), oil companies including (Nigeria National Petroleum Corporation, NNPC) businessmen,

retired and serving military officers, and militants among others. Olateju (2013) also stressed that; the rich, powerful and connected are Nigeria's oil Mafiosi. Oil theft is a big criminal ring with sophisticated organization and international network as the poor people are most likely not to get the millions to buy or rent vessels, bribe customs and get military cover for their operations. Oil theft is not for the poor; it is an extensive racket involving military, security apparatchiks, politicians, dubious industrial moguls and oil companies.

Pipeline vandalism has become almost an all-comers game because of the seeming "care" of stealing petroleum products. Though the pipeline is buried deep inside the ground and many in swamps forest, the vandal has devised various ingenious methods to breach the pipeline. Once this is done, they divert the products for their legal business. In most cases, trucks are used to load illegal products to be sold to willing buyers in the black market (Ibrahim & Miram 2012). The buyers could be owners of filling stations or other unscrupulous Nigerians acting as middlemen for end users (Omotoso, 2010). When it is not convenient to use trucks, drums or jerry cans are used, and then taken in large quantities to secret places where the buyers come to take delivery (Ibrahim et al, 2012). Illegal oil theft, bunkering has been an economic and security problem in Nigeria since the 80s and government over the years has also been putting measures in place to check it. Despite all the measures undertaken by the government, crude oil theft continues to increase in scope and dimension. (Nwanosike 2013 cited in Boris 2015). Besides the fact that young men and women are being attracted to it every day, it is even more worrisome that parents are now introducing their children to the business, making it a family business (Omotoso, 2010).

According to the Nations Newspaper of 23rd February, 2003 citing the recent vandalization of pipeline in Arepo, Ogun State, the paper was of the opinion that "Nigeria may be in for a big trouble if nothing is done to stop this business". The major concern to the security agencies is the seeming ingenuity of the cartels to evade detection while the forest gives the alleged oil thieves, cover from the public. Their mode of operation is simple armed with several 25-litre Jerry cans; the suspected oil thieves tie the kegs together with strong rope, before filling them with stolen oil. The kegs are then dropped into rivers and tied to the canoe. With their loot under water and paddled away with canoe, they look every bit like fishermen. The stolen fuel is then loaded into waiting trucks for onward transmission to target outlets. At other times when their operators turn ugly, the suspected oil thieves adopt measures that are aimed at obliterating any evidence of their illegal business. Sometimes, the forests are replete with wreckage of trucks and other kinds of vehicles which were deliberately set ablaze by the thieves to avoid being traced or detected. What happens most of the time is that whenever a vehicle that is being used to transport stolen fuel breaks down and time is running out on them, they deliberately set the vehicle on fire to make sure that nobody traces it to the owners. The effects of this are great, most especially on atmosphere and ecosystem (Akers and Seller, 2004).

Theoretical Framework

Social Network Theory

The social network theory is an interest (ties) based theory coined and developed by J.A Barnes (1972) which focused on the networks and ties (Nodes) amongst actors that permeates social relationship including ties on criminal activities. These nodes comprised individuals who have and share common interest and will stop at nothing to actualize the agreed interest no matter the forces repelling them. These nodes to which an individual is thus connected are the social contacts of that individual and can be used to measure social capital (benefits) and the value that an individual derived from the social network he or she belongs. This network (nodes) determines the individuals involved based on the capital or value enjoyed. The pecuniary gain attached to oil sabotage is perhaps the social capital and values benefited by individuals in nodes that connect vandals and their collaborators. By the ties in the nodes individuals involved in vandalism interact and carry out certain responsibilities for a successful vandalization of oil pipelines.

The web of person(s) involved is likely to be the members of security apparatus meant to secure the lines; oil workers who are abreast of the flows of pressure; aggrieved (politically motivated) rich individuals who sponsor with ammunition vandals and the on-field (criminally motivated) individuals who bear arms to perforate pipeline and women who furnish other gang members with needed information to operate on pipelines and share one or more interdependency like financial benefits, common interest, amoral attachment, love affairs and who unite to advance these interests through ties. The security agent provides protection, backups to the on-field vandals in the creeks. The oil workers give technical manpower and advice to the oil thieves and send information as and when necessary on the availability of pressures. The aggrieved rich individuals provide the financial backing for a successful operation and sometimes it's more like an investment with the expectation of a return when oil pipelines have been successfully vandalized. Lastly in the network are the risk takers, the aggregate of persons directly involved in the vandalization of the pipes. These nodes (actors) play out certain responsibilities in tandem with collective interest and will undergo anything to accomplish the agreed desires/goals.

Liberation Theory

The Liberation theory as advanced by the duo of Freda Adler, Rita Simon (1975) emphasized on the belief that the more women are liberated from social alienation and inequality the more the upsurge in women criminality as women are becoming more masculinized and perhaps lose their masked character to engage in crime. Women liberation created structural opportunity for them to commit crime and just as women have become lawyers, doctors, counsellors and teachers, some women have become burglars, fraudsters, and terrorist and engaged in more risky crime. Adler also predicted that since the liberation movement had not yet reached its full consequence, a further increase in crimes by women will take place shortly (Adler, 1975). Prior to feminist movement, women were often confined at home and were not predisposed to much criminal activities. However, in a bid to attain societal equality, women seem to have lost many of the restraint which kept them within the law and take part in criminal behaviours

that were often thought to be for men, a situation that increased the crime wave among women (Adler, 1975).

Women sought to compete favourably in the survival game and might engage in some menacing (life threatening) means of livelihood. Oil pipeline vandalism is a common phenomenon in Nigeria- a peculiar practice by men, while the women are left out in this criminal but flourishing economic sabotage. In the same way that women are demanding equal opportunity in fields of legitimate endeavour, a similar number of determined, criminal minded women are forcing their way into the world of major crimes (Adler, 1975). To this end, women will get involved in oil sabotage and take leading roles in the network of individuals in the vandalizing process. Women had same aspiration with men but like an oppressed group, women lack the will power to actualize their desires through a legitimate means and thus might have to engage in illegitimate means to fulfil their wishes. The vigour with which women were competing with men in legitimate work place was matched by the female criminal fight for her own niche in the criminal hierarchy. A new breed of female criminal has emerged with aspirations, skills and technicality to engage major crime with higher rewards and notoriety (Adler, 1975). Moreover, the competition involved in the act of vandalization requires that women learn and adapt to certain characteristics to excel in vandalism. Characteristics like aggressiveness, assertiveness, dominance and risk-taking are learnt by women in the competing world of oil bunkering in the Niger delta region perhaps as a result of the vulcanized environment that has subjected the people, women inclusive, to alternative means of survival no matter how deadly.

Research Methods

The study was conducted in *Arepo* village located in *Obafemi* Local Government Area of Ogun State, a community bordered by some Ijebu communities and can be accessed by water from coastal areas such as *Elepete* in *Sagamu*, Ogun State, *Ikorodu* and *Majidun*, areas of Lagos State. The community is host to series of networks of pipelines belonging to the NNPC and are linked to depots across the south western state from the Atlas Cove in Lagos. The study was purely qualitative and a total number of 25 participants comprising members of the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corp (NSCDC), police officers and *Arepo* community leaders and members of *Arepo* community were sampled using purposive sampling techniques. The study adopted both In-depth interview (IDI) and Key Informant Interview (KII) as the research instrument and the respondents comprised of 15 NSCDC anti-vandals officials (10 from the Ogun State command and 5 from the *Ikorodu* Lagos State command).

Similarly, 10 participants in *Arepo* were sampled using KII (5 of whom were community leaders while the other 5 were individuals who had resided in *Arepo* for about 6 years), the 6 years chosen covered the period of incessant oil pipeline vandalism. Data analysis is seen as a mechanism used to reduce and organize data to produce rich findings and thence conclusions are drawn by the researcher (Burns and Grove, 2013). The data obtained through the IDI's and KII's were analyzed with the aid of content analysis and ethnography summaries. Some responses were quoted verbatim to maintain originality in the study. This study sought for and was granted ethical approval by the University of Ibadan Humanities and behavioural Studies Review Committee (HBSRC). The

researcher also sought the permission of the respondents, hence opinions and responses on the subject matter of “the role women played in oil vandal’s corridor in *Arepo*” were not influenced neither were participants coerced.

Findings and Discussions

1. *The Roles Played by Women in Arepo Oil Pipeline Vandalism*

Oil pipeline vandalism as an activity is an organized crime involving syndicates, actors playing out roles in ensuring a successful operation for group goal and ultimately for the pecuniary gains of the individuals. Findings showed that vandals’ activities in *Arepo* cannot be smoothly perpetuated without the joint efforts of financial godfathers, government personnel in NNPC, DPPR who furnish their cronies with information on when pressure are sent. State security agents namely the police are known to compromise the core of their duty to give security cover to the vandals to avoid arrest, fight with sister agencies who seem to constrain their illicit deal of backing up vandals in *Arepo*. Similarly, the youths in their large numbers who could not secure legitimate employment are recruited by some political cum economic gladiators to siphon crude products, whose faces are shown on crime watch when caught in the act usually as a result of the inability of the boys to pay their way out of justice and in most cases they are often released in a spate of months except for the few seen to be prosecuted. This list is in-exhaustive as different people who could not readily get a viable means of survival are hell-bent on the booming but illegal business.

The women who are traditionally seen as weaker vessels have proven beyond reasonable doubt that they can compete favourably with their male counterparts. Just like in lawful endeavours, women are head-deep into all sorts of crime and the *Arepo* oil theft makes no difference in the job specific of what a woman should be involved in despite the volatility and violence involved.

Most literature often discussed oil pipeline vandalism in Nigeria as an act exclusively involving the male gender with no reference to female involvement. This study extended research beyond male involvement by considering the role played and level of involvement by women in *Arepo* oil vandalism menace. Respondents aptly acknowledged that women were actively involved in the *Arepo* incessant oil theft. Most study participants claimed that one way or the other women aided vandalism.

Basically, women are used by vandals as carriers, and not directly vandalizing the pipelines. They are used to carry bottles, fondly called kegs for disguise and against the knowledge of novice. Specifically, women are used as carriers. Participants gave different opinions on the role played by women in pipeline vandalism, and opinions were put thus:

Poverty in Nigeria has caused so many vices especially women’s involvement in that dangerous act of oil bunkering. Although, women are engaged in the process of vandalism, most women paraded by our men are not the main persons vandalising the pipelines, but just because they too want to have one or two things or maybe get little money to eke a living. We often see women in the *Arepo* line scooping crude products. Then at times some of the women you see, they use them as carriers, once their group are vandalising and are in need of keg to convey stolen crude products. The women are usually the ones responsible for such roles

especially by taking the kegs out of the creeks to a destination where they can easily sell them to potential buyers. We discovered through investigation that these women are either paid token or with part of the stolen crude depending on the choice of the vandals.

A respondent added that arrested women were often used to serve complementary roles to their male counterpart in the group by conveying kegs across the creeks to places needed either by retailers or final consumers.

You know most of the people we've arrested worked as carriers after scooping they help on field vandals to carry the keg from the point of the scooping down to where they will keep it for further purpose.

This respondent noted that women work as carriers, sellers with their husband

Women aid vandalism. They help in selling the product, some of them during interrogation claimed they join hand with their husband in the business. Some of these women see vandalism, oil scooping as a family income stream and had to join in to keep body and soul together.

Similarly, an NSCDC officer added that in recent times (given the period of the study 2015) a lady who was part of the vandal's team was nabbed.

Women are engaged in vandalism. Recently there is this lady we apprehended along the lines with other colleagues in the mid night. That very night of operation, she was even sick but she had to join the operation which was carried out around 12 am. So, she was apprehended along with the other culprits.

A respondent corroborates the above statement with the evidence that it is no news that women are often apprehended along their male group members in the *Arepo* oil theft

Women take part in vandalism. The last arrest we did last time, was it not ending of February? We apprehended two men, one woman. We don't want to know whether they went there for operation or as carriers. The moment we meet them on the lines inside the creek, that place is not their workshop and once we see the product maybe they went there to assist. Maybe they are the owner of the work or not, but in as much as we meet them on the lines, we arrest them and this we do often.

A respondent explained how women get involved in the illicit act and most often trade their food items for vandalized petroleum in *Arepo*

Actually, women are not directly involved in vandalism; they sometimes serve as carriers but most importantly they trade for the vandalized product. They trade food items for petroleum product. These vandals sometimes stay beyond a day in the riverine area of Arepo linking Majidun depending on the quantity of the about to be stolen crude products, which gives the need for food and other items like alcohol

for consumption and it's women who mostly avail these vandals with these items in the creek. So, technically, women are part of the process leading to vandalized oil pipes.

The beauty of a qualitative study like this gives room for divergent views, as observed from the previous comments of study participants that women are mere bottle (kegs) carriers and products sellers. Other respondents differ and argue that women go for operations with the men while in the creek of Arepo. Some of the study's participants claim that a woman, whose popularity and notoriety is known to state security agents had been in the business of vandalism, oil theft for long and would often go to south-south region of the country to recruit boys for her business. The security men equally observe that she has the backing of top politicians. According to some respondents, this woman constantly goes to South-South to recruit new boys to re-enforce her team in-case some of the older boys were arrested and she has often scaled arrest from the security apparatus.

Some respondents who are security officers manning the Arepo, area pipelines confirmed knowledge of a notorious woman whose business for a while now is to recruit boys in their numbers for the purpose of siphoning PMS from leaked or ruptured pipes along Arepo axis. They claim the woman in that Arepo axis has been in this business for an over ten years and has always scaled arrest.

There are many women involved in vandalism and it all depends on the level of stealing. Vandalism is irrespective of the gender. They are carriers, they can at least paddle their canoe, and they can swim well on water. They usually assist them when they are offloading at the river bank; they assist in offloading to their available vehicle or the means of transporting their produce. That reminds me, a woman in that *Arepo*, very influential, she recruits often and even travel to the South to recruit new boys. She has always scaled arrest and investigating someone like her is always difficult because she has backup, I mean backups.

An NSCDC officer added that a pregnant woman was recently nabbed on the line, he described the scenario thus:

Women are one of the active members. Even recently, around January (2015), we arrested a pregnant woman; she is also a vandal. We met her on the line and we arrested her. We were so shocked by her condition but she's use to such life and to her the hard reality of life pushed her to that level.

Some respondents added that women do not just serve the purpose of stolen products carrier; rather they constitute part of the team that entered the creeks to perforate pipes:

Women are particularly involved in the *Arepo* pipeline menace. They are active vandals, they are armed too, and women joined their male lovers, collaborators for operation as well. Most of them are ready to fight physically, spiritually anything just to make them succeed in their oil theft operation.

The respondents were asked on the role and involvement of women in pipeline vandalism. Here is a clue to the role women play in vandalism; a respondent explained women involvement thus:

Women vandalize a lot. They purchased their product at the local level, because when you talk about vandalism as a whole, it has stages. There are some, they load in kegs; they call it bottle in their own slang. They have terms they use for their operation. If they are taking their kegs for supply for instance they will say “have you submitted your bottle for refilling?” And when they are marketing, they call it ‘available’. They also have a name for tanker as well because they also load tankers. So, women at the grassroots level to be precise in *Arepo* help the vandals a lot because they purchase from them. At times in the evening just take your car towards Arepo area, press your horn they will run towards you. 50 litre keg, you’ll get for 1500 or 2000. They will bring it out for you even I have been in an operation in that *Arepo* and we lost men there. I was shot in that operation; I had a bullet wound in my buttock and we were there if you enter their house it was a woman who house the product and I don’t know how they survive without fire outbreak. So, with my experience, women are actively involved.

Women involvement in oil theft (vandalism) either as carriers or vandal is no longer a debatable phenomenon despite the rather strenuous cum volatility involved in vandalism. The fact is that women involvement in vandalism has some rational undertone as well as the social ties binding the collaborators. The women who are engaged in aiding or vandalism must have rationalized their decisions on the basis of pleasure and the great benefit to liberate self from reliance on men. Established social ties with their male counterparts will inspire them to continue in the aiding and abetting vandalism provided the social tie is strengthened.

Conclusion

In recent times, the lucrative illegal oil business seems to be the top priority of Nigerians who find it difficult to survive the downturn in the Nigerian economy, hence, the prevalence of vandalism. This is particularly true of *Arepo* oil pipeline menace as women are joining in to take their fair share of the general grid. Findings show that some women were bold enough to undertake the illicit act of vandalism despite the risk and form part of the social networks to complement their love ones’ effort to eke a living. The study further reveals that women are often used as “carriers” of bottle (kegs), “sellers” of stolen crude products and sometimes exchange food for the services they render to the vandals in the creeks.

Recommendations

Woman involvement in oil pipeline vandalism is an ill omen to the entire family institution and the society at large. Not that it is viable for men as well but it is imperative to note that crudes and its products are of utmost importance to the Nigerian economy and if nothing is done to salvage the prevalence of vandalizing pipelines used to transport the products across states, Nigeria and Nigerians will continue to recount incalculable losses

financially and morally. Hence, the following recommendations are necessary to reduce the spate of women involvement in oil pipeline vandalism:

Generally, the long years of socio-economic hardship in Nigeria have contributed immensely to the increased rate of vandalism and other vices. Therefore, it is suggested that government (federal, state and local) should judiciously use the available revenue to solve the twin problems of unemployment and poverty by creating an enabling environment, empowerment programme for the women while giving room for equal job opportunities for both sexes in the area of agro business, service sector through public-private partnership. Government should initiate small and medium scale business with credits facility that will alleviate poverty. The more of initiatives for the women the more we get a noticeable consequence on the homes and society at large.

The study also recommend the pressing need to make policy/law that stiffens or make grievous punishment attached to vandalizing pipelines, oil theft in Nigeria and as well to strengthen every government institutions especially the social control agencies on ethics that promote honesty, integrity, transparency and accountability and re-orientate the general populace to imbibe the culture of good value systems of contentment and hard work. Importantly, there is need to re-orientate the women on the fact that womanhood is not all about competitions for what a man can do the women should do better rather, a woman should be that which helps inculcate good morals on children and invariably the entire society.

It also imperative for governments both at the federal and state level should upped their efforts in combating corruption especially among security agents. Researchers have revealed that security agencies in Nigeria are the most corrupt institutions in the country. Governments should establish corruption monitoring centres (a form of ombudsman) in each security agencies where people including criminals coerced to pay bribes can report such cases. The anti-corruption agencies should also be empowered to arrest and prosecute erring officers as well.

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