



## ***Insecurity: An Interdict of Infrastructure Development in Riparian Communities (Case of Tombia in Degema Local Government Area, Nigeria)***

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Insecurity negates development in any societies. Tombia community in Degema LGA of Rivers State is presently confronting an increased insecurity issues. This study aimed to identify the predominant insecurity issue in Tombia with the objectives of identifying the types of insecurity, identifying the source and evaluating the effects of insecurity in the area of criminality, land erosion, land shuddering, inter-community/intra-community conflicts, bad governance and environment. The study applied the qualitative (subjective) technique involving an interview approach based on unstructured open-ended questions targeted at obtaining data from focal groups (chiefs and Community Development Committee(CDC) given rise to a survey population of 30 persons. This involved 24 CDC members and 6 Chiefs out which (25%) and (33.3%) sampled size was attained purposively. Discourse analytical technique was applied to establish information. It was found that environmental insecurity as a result of illegal crude oil businesses was predominant among other kinds of insecurity. It was recommended; criminality relating to thefts, burglary, piracy and robbery in the community can be curtailed given the right information, locations and personnel by monitoring, controlling and sensitization of the people using the religious outlets as media.*

**Key Words:** Insecurity, Development, Infrastructure, Riparian.

### **Introduction**

Understanding the real nature of insecurity requires stepping beyond the traditional analytical framework based on the concepts of legal and illegal, formal or informal, legitimate or illegitimate digging into the nuances and social adaptations undertaken in the context of survival (Agnese and Ivan, 2015). Insecurity is a threat at different spheres of life and exists in complex dimensions inimical to development of any societies. It has negative impacts on the welfare of individuals, families and communities. In recent times, most of these threats were observed humanly induced and emanate from economic, food, environment, personal, community, political and health triggering uncertainties (United Nations-UN, 2016). All over the world, insecurity stands contrary to all forms of development in any community and when the source is unknown managing it becomes difficult. According to United Nations Development Programme -UNDP, (2022) 6 in 7 people worldwide are plagued by feelings of insecurity and the trend is not receding based on present crisis in the world. In a nutshell, insecurity like security is categorized into internal or external or both. In most views, urbanization which came with industrialization played major role in world insecurity while to others it was as a result of bad governance.

In this background, Nigeria is not an exception of issues of insecurity in the world. According to Jeremiah (2016) Nigeria faced serious internal security challenges. Currently, the most serious ones being the Boko Haram insurgency in the north-eastern states of Borno, Yobe and Adamawa and the Niger Delta militancy in the south-south geopolitical zone, comprising Bayelsa, Delta and Rivers states. Other security challenges are violent crimes, ethno-religious conflicts, resource-based conflicts, trans-border criminal activities and election-induced violence (Jeremiah, 2016). Most of these are agitations as a result of the system of governance in the country before and after independence. These contribute to the low level of development in the country in general and Tombia in particular. However, every country has peculiar insecurity issues which are related to geographic location and the way the people live together as a community over time.

Degema Local Government Area (DELGA) as shown in (fig.1) is one of the 23 L.G.As in Rivers state created in May 27, 1967. Out of Degema, Akuku-toru and Asari-toru L.G.As were created in the 80s. DELGA, occupies 1,011 square kilometres; 9.75% of the total land mass of Rivers state. It is the second largest spatially in the state after AKULGA which was part of it. Geographically, DELGA is within the coordinates of latitude 4° 45' 04" N and 6° 44' 38" E (Nwilo and Badejo, 2006). It shares boundary with the Atlantic ocean in the south, Akuku Toru LGA in the west, Okirika LGA and Asari Toru LGA in the east and north respectively. All communities in Degema LGA are riverine including Tombia the study area. Tombia has two public

primary schools, a technical college, two secondary schools, a primary health centre; central water supply system, electricity generating plants, information and communication centre and multi-purpose centre and other private and community provided social infrastructural facilities.

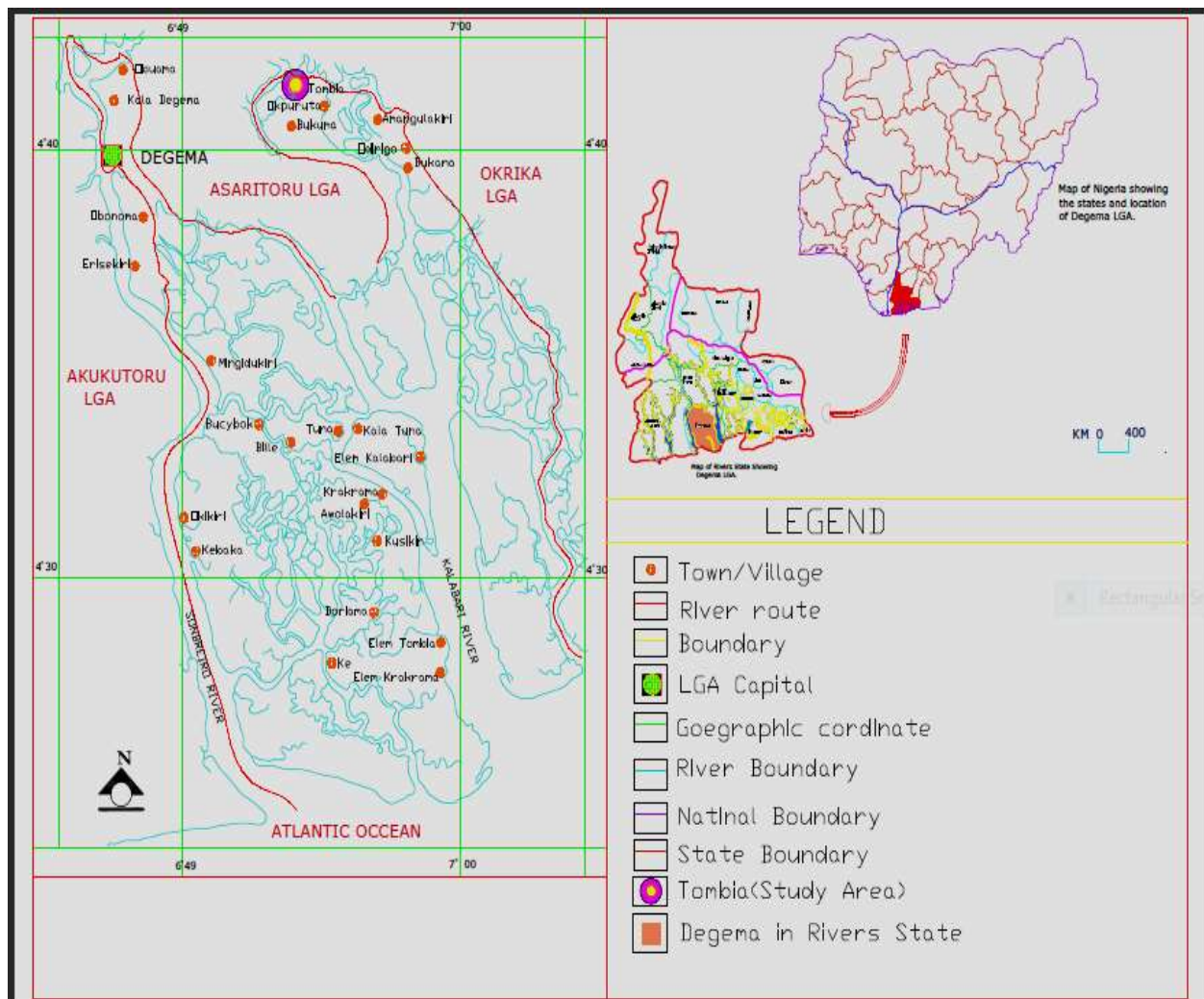


Fig. 1: The Study Area (Tombia community) in National Setting.

Source: Google map (digitized by Authors, 2023)

## Aim and Objectives:

The aim of the study is to identify the predominant insecurity issue in the study community. The objectives are identification of types of insecurity in the study area; ascertain the source of insecurity and evaluating the effects of insecurity in the study area

## The Study Area

Tombia (see fig. 1 & plate 1) is a riverine island community in Degema LGA and has been one of the front line communities in commerce and industry, education, culture/tradition among others in the 2 Kalabari speaking LGAs vis-à-vis Asari Toru and Akuku Toru of Rivers State. It has a population of about 30,000 (Ministry of Budget and Economic Planning, Rivers State, 2009). It covers land area of approximately 11 kilometer radius with substantial area occupied by mangrove forest on marsh land. It is made of 6 major compounds and 4 political wards out of 17 in the LGA. Majority of the people are in fishing occupation which provides more to the economic stay of the households.

Transportation means to the community is by open outboard speed boat, hand pulled canoe and outboard open wooden boat using floating jetties as terminants at the various waterfronts accesses. Despite the jetty platforms, the coastlines also serve as terminants for these means of transport especially during high water tide which occurs once in 24 hours. These means of transport and pattern of access are peculiar to riparian communities most times heightening the vulnerability of the community in terms criminality.

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## Issues

Access control is a strong factor of security and this is weak in Tombia because of the numerous accesses. Within the community, there are several routes reinforced by unordered clustered developments as a result of lack of bearable land for expansion. Physical access is characterised by meandering footpaths around buildings' minor setbacks. This aids criminality in nights and days. Also, Tombia coastlines like all riparian communities in the LGA are characterized by creeks, unique marsh estuaries and bays within dense mangrove forest. These make it easy for stealing and other social vices to thrive in the community especially at low water tide and night hours. Presently, the security structure in place has not done much to check the trend.

Like most communities in Niger Delta region of the country, Tombia hosts the Nigerian Liquefied Natural Gas (NLNG) pipe lines within a kilometer radius. This in addition to unavailability of land for development increases the level of insecurity by placing the community in more fragile situation. These are major issues that have affected the community in land development and in carrying out daily occupational activities. The threat of unpredictable gas leakage (see plate 2) has promptly stopped night fishing by the people of Tombia which is usually carried with unprotected burning fire or locally made kerosene light. The tradition of night fishing before the gas pipe line was laid in the 1990s has stopped. This is a necessary resolution by the residents to save the community and aquatic lives in an event of fire outburst. Also, Tombia experienced both external and internal conflicts in the 1990s leading to the dead and displacement of some residents. Presently, the people live with the sentiment of the conflicts and no corrective measures are in place to forestall a repeat of this occurrence.



**Plate 1: Tombia community – A North-East view**

**Source: Authors' field work, 2023**



**Plate 2:- NLNG Gas Pipe Line Leakage Near Tombia Community River**

**Source: (CDC), Authors' field work, 2024**

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## Literature Review

Ayeni and Beji (2015) noted that all over the world, infrastructural development seems to have played an important role in support of societal development. This is evidenced in the effects of number of abandoned projects in deferent parts of the world as a result of internal and external crisis, economic sabotage and thefts by government officials, individuals and cooperate bodies. In the rank of 1 to 10, the Global World Security Index showed that Nigeria ranked 8.9 and remained 10<sup>th</sup> out of 177 countries in terms of insecurity considering more than 50 indicators including insecurity (The Global Economy, 2022).

Ajibola (2016) averred that since the inception of democratic governance in 1999, the Federal Government of Nigeria has done little to improve on human rights and protection of its citizen's life and property considering the numbers of bloody sectarian clashes, extra judicial killings, torture and extortion as in the country. The emphasis is that in the past decade, Nigerian politicians continue to manipulate ethnic and religious tensions by sponsoring violence for personal political gain and presently this act has claimed more than 13,500 lives (Ajibola, 2016). Similarly, Adekola and Enyiche (2017) stressed that no nation can develop when there is high level of insecurity in the society. The far reaching effects of insecurity are evident in most communities in Nigeria especially in Rivers State.

The African Development Bank (ADB, 2022) found that incidences of conflict and violence are on the rise in Africa. In the last twenty years, more than 469,000 people lost their lives due to conflicts and human insecurity. In 2021, more than 18,000 conflicts affected the continent and the number of refugees and Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) reached 32 million.

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## Methodology

The study explored the qualitative technique involving focal group interviews based on unstructured open-ended questions targeted at obtaining data from of people in the community. Two groups were selected and they were the chieftaincy council and the community development committee (CDC) representing other levels of socio-economic groups in the community. The CDC has 24 selected members representing the 6 compounds. The survey population was 30 persons which included all 24 CDC members and 6 Chiefs from the major compounds. A random sampling technique was used to select 6(25%) of CDC and 2(33.3%) Chiefs, given rise to 7 sampled populations. Also, observations, photographs were taken to enhance data and the discourse analytical technique applied to establish result.

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## Results

Types of insecurity in the community such as grouped-(criminality, land erosion, land shuddering, inter-community conflicts, intra-community conflict, bad governance and environmental) were prominent. These occurred in different dimensions and periods in relation to day and night. It was noted that stealing and related vices occurred at times when socio-economic activities were low keeping the community relatively quiet in the day. It was found that rate of stealing was high when children were in schools and most adults had left the community for fishing.

The chiefs agreed that crime such as burglary occurred in the day once in a while usually at the quiet times and more frequent in the night. The perpetrators' targets were houses built and unoccupied, houses occupied by few members of the family, corner shops, community infrastructure in isolated buildings and environments and properties seemly abandoned. They maintained that most of these incidences especially the social facilities attacked were provided by governments or donors after much effort. An instance was the Government Technical College which was the best in state in the 1960s to 1980s.

*'We found that they invaded all the engineering and carpentry workshops and carted away most sensitive parts in the night in a week when we had consisted rainfall and when the children were on holidays. They entered through the roof; broke the iron protectors to commit this crime. The stolen items were very expensive and the community cannot afford them again for now. Those who did this killed the glory of this school.'*

Others facilities attacked were the community electricity generating sets (EGS) and the primary healthcare facilities. In terms of the EGS parts were stolen with the cables when the community started having its electricity power supply from a gas turbine plant provided by the state government and less attention was given to the (EGS) source of power. The recent trend of stealing involved outboard engine fiber speed boats, outboard engine fiber canoe boat and hand pulled fiber canoe boats. Most cases it remained extremely difficult to recover any of these stolen items which were sometime bought with lifetime savings. The effects of any lose were directly on the socio-economic stance of owner and the community in general because those who cannot manage the shock died in frustration. Another ravaging criminal activity was sea/river piracy. These were robbery attacks on people who were into the business of carrying large quantity of goods to the community. Some of these goods were building materials such as cements, roofing sheets, rods, woods, food stuffs and others that cannot be carried by the common boats. This category of marine vessels spent hours in the seas and rivers before getting to the community hence very susceptible for such attacks.

The CDC noted that these crimes mentioned by the chiefs on investigations were found to be organized crimes. They were successful based on conspiracy between the indolent youths in the community and workers in collaboration with security agencies in the community. It was found that at the time of these incidences especially the schools and health centre, security personnel employed by government were not on duty. Efforts to recover stolen items or investigate further were unsuccessful because of lack of funds and nepotism.

*'We do not have police station in this community. We have to go to Degema the LGA headquarter to get police for investigations and arrest but the problem is who is going to fund it because you have to charter a speed boat to and from Degema. Anybody who wants to do it will be seen as an enemy of the other and can be attacked secretly.'*



Shuddering was considered as a 'silent killer' by the chiefs for the fact that its process may not be noticed but effects physical developments. Also, most people were ignorant or totally unaware of this phenomenon. It means much had not been known about it. However, shuddering of the community was first noticed at a time when some seismic for oil and gas activities were carried around the community in 1990s. Secondly, on related situation shuddering of the community was believed occurring based on the dynamics of gas in NLNG pipelines running paralleled to the community. They also acknowledged and linked building cracks in the community to same NLNG gas pipeline vibrations which caused differentials at building foundations.

The CDC accepted these facts skeptically but emphasized that more scientific proves were required to ascertain the chiefs' claims and until necessary steps were taken to detect source of shuddering the effects will continue. Although, they observed a famous coastal resort (ASTORIA) building sinking to the extent all suits at ground floor were submerged and to ensure safety businesses were abandoned (*see plate 1*). Fortunately, it was accepted by both groups that no building had collapsed as a result of shuddering.



**Plate 1: Sinking Astoria Resort – Tombia**

**Source: Authors' field work, 2023**



**Plate 2: Commuters from Port Harcourt approaching Tombia**

**Source: Authors' field work, 2023**

Land erosion was noted as another silent threat to the lives of the people according to the chiefs. They believed that most people were ignorant of the phenomenon. Participants agreed to the fact that the community topography is gently slopy top down into the rivers round. The resultant this was storm water runoff after rainfalls which usually washed the top dismembered soil into the rivers. This process affects the buildings and the environment. According to the CDC the ground water level had also increased recently. This was observed in the cemetery during burial when water started flowing out in digging just 4 feet (1.2metres) to bury a corpse.

*'We have not seen that before now. Our standard is 6 feet (1.8meters) still water will not come out. Now that it is like this if we continue to bury in this manner, it will affect our drinking water because people bury corpse in their houses and by the sides of their houses where some times we have our bore holes and wells. Despite this, the increasing underground water level will also affect the cost of building anything in the community because one has to carry out a lot of reinforcement and increase the quality of everything use for development.'*

However, to forestall the trend of erosion efforts were made in reaching the state government about a decade ago to reclaim sections of the coastal areas. At the end the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) was committed to dredge embankment round the community with sand from the rivers. This was confirmed by the chiefs but reiterated that the project had not been completed and efforts to reach the contractor and those responsible in NDDC's office were fruitless hence the effects of erosion had not been checked. The remedy presently is individualistic rather than collective. People now provide pavement rams round their developments after constructions which were considered interim measures.

Facts leading to inter-community and intra-community conflicts were observed as 'untimely bomb' inexplicably instinctive in the people of the community and their neighbours. Inter-community and intra-community conflicts had lingered and remained unresolved for decades basically for lack of the right information and established truth in the path of peace. According to the chiefs 'information we met and inherited were not related to these conflicts experienced, hence it was difficult to manage the situation each time the trouble started'. 'It means nothing is known and no steps can be taken to unravel the truth'. In the side of the CDC the major facts were interests on land/resource control and kingship. The former was linked to inter-community conflicts and the later intra-community conflicts. They maintained, these forms of conflict were not peculiar to Tombia community. The CDC asserted that the end was far because there were people who benefited from these conflicts and would not want it to end.

*'Presently, there are high dispositions in these directions and instead of police; the military is invited to quell the tension. We are working with the military personnel to oversee all criminal activities in the community. Some of the rules are to patrol the rivers and land accesses. The other is all commuters raise hands while approaching the jetty at the main water front. These are sacrifices we have to make for peace and development to thrive in this community' (see plate 2).*

Environmental insecurity was observed to be a more recent crisis and becoming very dangerous to the entire eco-system. It stemmed from an illegal local crude oil refining business known as (burn fire). According to the chief more than 90% of the people in the community were involved in this business directly or indirectly because of the fast rate of break even. Refining had to do with less technical processes of producing kerosene and diesel. Then disposal of the remnants of raw crude was usually into the rivers and creeks. Through this medium land, water and air resources were affected leading to the death of the rich mangrove forest and its habitats as well as aquatic animals which the people rely on for survival. Most animals on land and in water had gone extinct. The chiefs maintained the impairment was alarming and not to the environment alone but also to themselves in the businesses. Significant, was the makeshift fabricated mechanisms for the production these products usually explode and kill them. 'In record, there was no year in recent times without deaths from these businesses yet more people go into them'.

In support, CDC stated that the trend was economic paradigm of the people in dammed consequences of all eventualities. 'Its severities cannot equate its benefits'. However, its origin was unknown but 'like a wide economic tree with the best fruits, 'burn fire' has been embraced by majority of the people as an economic. They maintained that it will be difficult to stop the businesses because all measures taken to tame the development by governments proved unsuccessful. Observation showed that the business of 'burn fire' was not peculiar to Tombia environment but the entire Niger Delta Area. The business grows daily in complex network with grievous consequences on the environment.

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## Recommendations

Criminality as it relates to thefts, burglary, piracy and robbery in the community can be curtailed given the right information, locations and personnel by monitoring, controlling and sensitization of the people using the religious outlets as media. This requires the establishment of a police station with marine units which are presently not available in the community.

Land shuddering and erosion are technical issues and need technical approaches to define required solutions. The solutions need geological investigations and this is capital intensive. The steps taken to dredge sections of coastal edges should be completed and sustained by piling provision or dykes, planting of edge trees and grasses. However, to raise fund and management of these activities, community should reach the government through the political representatives, self-help contributions and donors as well as philanthropists.

Inter-community conflicts, intra-community conflict and governance can be resolved by organized reorientation in 'town-hall meeting' settings towards absolute discard of greed, desperations and forgiveness in the people of Tombia and their neighbours. This is necessary to ensure that the present generation of people inherits problems in ignorance.

In terms of the environmental problems caused by illegal crude oil refining activities in and around the community, sincere steps are required to deal with the situation in the side of governments and all stake holders in the business. The overall solution is to monitor the source of the illegal crude oil and stop the illegalities surrounding the business.

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## Conclusion

The Tombia community is regularly faced with these elements of insecurity and their effects are always negative in overall development of the community. Its more dangerous when sensitive social infrastructure such schools, healthcare centre, energy plants and others are the targets. These life support infrastructure are usually interconnected and interrelated and if unit of the system is dismembered, it affects the functionality of the others in the system. The worst damage is long term loss of lives and properties especially when replacement of stolen items is not on sight. This eventually goes to increase the purported 32 million deaths worldwide as a result of insecurity by African development Bank. Presently, the remnants of this infrastructure are in Tombia are decaying without remedy to the extent patients in healthcare care centers are attended to in the night with mere candles. The rivers and entire environment are also highly polluted without remedy as a result of illegal crude oil activities and this is considered the predominant type of insecurity in Tombia. Resuscitation the present level of insecurity will keep Tombia community alive.

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