

**UNIVERSITY OF NAIROBI**

**INSTITUTE OF DIPLOMACY AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS**

**FEMALE COMBATANTS IN AFRICA: A CASE STUDY OF THE  
NIGER DELTA CRISIS**

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**Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for Award of  
Masters in International Studies.**

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## DECLARATION

I declare that this research project is my original work and has not been presented before for an award of any degree in any other University.

Signed.....Date.....

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This Research project has been submitted for examination with my approval as the University supervisor.

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## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this project to the memory of my mother Late Deaconess Roseline Eso Uzu (Nneaya).

## **ABBREVIATIONS**

AP	Associated Press
DDR	Demilitarization, Demobilization and Rehabilitation
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
EU	European Union
FSA	Free Syrian Army
IYC	Ijaw Youth Council
JTF	Joint Task Force
LRA	Lord's Resistance Army
LURD	Liberia's United for Reconciliation and Democracy
MEND	Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta
MONDP	Movement for the Niger Delta People
NDDC	Niger Delta Development Commission
NDPVF	Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force
NDV	Niger Delta Vigilante
NGO	Non Governmental Organisation
NPFL	National Patriotic Front of Liberia
OSCE	Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe
RUF	Revolutionary United Front

SFCG	Search for Common Ground
TND	Tomorrow a New Day
TPLF	Tigrean People's Liberation Front
UN	United Nations
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNIFEM	United Nations Development Fund for Women
UNSC	United Nations Security Council Resolution
WAC	Women's Artillery Commandos
ZANLA	Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army

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## ABSTRACT

Conflict in Africa has become a recurring decimal over time and ranges from wars of liberation against colonial masters to struggles against oppressive governments. There have also been conflicts arising from political exclusion, economic marginalization and social oppression. It has been a common feature for women to be seen as the victims of conflicts and requiring special legislation to protect them during conflicts.

In this research work, I have set out to establish that women take part in combat during conflicts just like their male counterparts. They are active but are relegated to the background at the end of hostilities and during demobilization exercise and this is the core of this work. The female combatants have been noted to be physically strong and aptly buttress the Amazon feminism, which is the theoretical framework used for this research work. This research was conducted through personal interviews, use of books, journals and online sources.

It is my projection that if the ex – female combatants are given the same recognition they enjoy during combats, they will not feel bitter and resort to crime. It is also important to state that if they are given the necessary training to help them resettle after conflicts, less number of them will be involved in crimes and they will play significant roles in post conflict resolutions. This is because of their presence at the grassroots. The objectives of the study cover the extent of involvement of female combatants in conflicts in Africa, reasons for the participation of female combatants in the Niger Delta conflict, recruitment of the combatants and the tasks assigned to them and their roles and status in peace in Africa

In various conflicts in Africa and with particular reference to the Niger Delta crisis in Nigeria, it has come to the fore that female combatants play significant roles during conflicts. They are foot soldiers, commanders and further serve as wives and mistresses of the male commanders and some of the female combatants are used as sex slaves during combat. The recruitment of the female combatants has been on the increase in recent years. The recruitment pattern is usually thorough conscriptions and by voluntary enlistment. Reasons that account for conscription include to beef up the ranks and to have female combatants that can play roles noted above. Some of the female combatants voluntary enlist as a platform to redress male domination within their communities; other reasons include poverty, unemployment but to mention a few.

At the end of the research, the findings include the fact that, female combatants are recruited by conscription and through voluntary means. It was also established that female combatants were assigned tasks in all areas where their male counterparts operated. They are used as foot soldiers, logistics commanders and sadly as sex slaves in rebel camps. It was established that despite their prowess in battles, female combatants are not given due recognition during demobilization exercises. They are easily told to go back home and resume their domestic chores while their male counterparts are given training to help them resettle into normal life.

The effects of this neglect have been identified to include, rising numbers of ex- female combatants who find it difficult to settle into normal life. They find it hard to get married and handle domestic chores. Many ex – female combatants are involved in prostitution, kidnapping and other sundry crimes. It was also established that ex- female combatants are a ready army of recruits in a global world where terrorism is becoming wide spread..

The way forward to addressing the problems of the female combatants in Africa include the implementation of UNSC Resolutions 1325 and 1385. There is also the need to criminalize the stigmatization of ex-female combatants. The very key ideas of properly demobilizing female combatants to enable them reintegrate with their families and to handle sensitive issues in post conflict resolutions cannot be over emphasized.

## CHAPTER ONE

### **FEMALE COMBATANTS IN AFRICA: A CASE STUDY OF THE NIGER DELTA CRISIS.**

#### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

The incidence of female combatants in Africa is a recurrent decimal. This problem has really pre-occupied not only scholars of strategic persuasion, but also in the violence and peace studies and those in the humanitarian scholarship have also not been left out. This is because of the numerous effects and the problems it posits for both local and international peace especially the psychological and traumatising multiplier effects it has on the domestic social space. Although, the concept of female combatants is being confronted with serious theoretical and conceptual clarification, what is vivid is that, Africa's experience presents a case and picture of irregularities and conventionalism ( Aghfer, 2010:23).

Females make up almost several thousands of those recruited for wars. The internecine wars in Africa and the numerous conflicts of different dimensions and colourations on the continent have given rise to the crisis of female combatants. The child- soldier syndrome (Amadu, S and Wale,I, 2003:137-166) in Africa was not exclusive of the great percentage of the females who served in the different categories of the wars. For instance, girls make up of almost half of the 300,000 children involved in wars in Africa (Geoffrey, 2010:11). Research has shown that girls are used extensively in combat in a wide range of international conflicts. In some cases by groups who have had the support of Britain and the United States. Among countries involved are Colombia, Pakistan, and Uganda in Africa, the Philippines and Democratic Republic of Congo, also in Africa. In the Democratic Republic of Congo, there were up to 12, 500 girls in armed groups. In Sri Lanka, 43 per cent of 51,000 of children are

girls. (Richard, 2009:218). The point here is that the problem of female combatant is not peculiar to Africa, though the worst examples are being experienced in Africa.

The percentages of the girls in the areas cited above are just extracts of the total percentage of the female soldiers in wars in Africa. However scholars have looked at this issues from different dimensions. Paradoxically, despite the contributions to warfare by female combatants, they continue to be seen but not heard. Their roles are usually in the area of logistics and administration at the point of recruitment but they find themselves in real combat when the need arise.

The Niger Delta crisis have been explained from different dimensions ( Samuel , I: 2009), Suberu, L: 2010), Akanni, J: 2011), Eghosa, L:2012} the crisis of female combatant remains highly inexhaustive. Celestine, B, (2010) and Angela, F(2011) have both looked at the issues of girls used as spies by the Niger Delta militants but the issue of the females as combatants in the Niger Delta being used in all the ramifications of war and the subsequent effects of this on post violence Niger Delta is largely neglected. In fact, the amnesty and rehabilitation programmes of President Yar'adua even failed to address the total realities of the female combatants. Vividly capturing this position was Bubaraji, J (2011:45) who was of the opinion that the programmes of rehabilitation of President Yar'adua mentioned nothing about the females who took part in the crisis but only the male combatants are adequately catered for in the programme.

This position partly informs the dimensions of this work and seeks to establish that female combatants were actively involved in the Niger Delta crisis and that their roles in the Niger Delta crisis were of combat nature alongside their male counterparts. There is also the need to establish the fact that they were not rehabilitated in the post crisis amnesty programme and

this neglect has led to negative effects especially on the female combatants and by extension on the society.

It should be stressed that the idea of female combatants in this context is understood from the perspective of female mercenaries either forced or engaged to fight wars on behalf of a group, interest or for other reasons peculiar or distant from direct concern of the mercenaries but which the female mercenaries are directly or indirectly committed to. The regular female combatants in the National armies are not part of this category. Although, the idea of female combatants is not alien to the traditional African setting but the difference is the degree and dimensions of the trans-national colouration it has assumed. In the pre-colonial African setting especially in the Yorubaland, in Nigeria, male and female mercenaries are engaged to fight on behalf of empires and kingdoms. Often times, their support are enlisted when necessary because of their identified prowess and abilities not necessarily for financial benefits but for some other social and political reasons (Ayinla, 2004:118) the required recognition and pride of place that the female combatants are supposed to enjoy is always lacking despite their prowess.

The contemporary situation especially in the Niger Delta was largely directed towards pecuniary benefits and primordial sentiments (Eghosa, 2007:12) but more essentially by seeming patriotic commitment to the emancipation of the Niger Delta environment. This work is essentially located partly within the vortex of the contemporary realities and the conditions of the engagements of the female combatants in the Niger Delta. The nature of the contemporary problems of violence and the degree of the engagement of these combatants also partly underscore the availability of the female recruits into electoral crimes and mayhem in the Niger Delta. Convincingly, Jinadu Adele(2009) got this situation more clearly when he posited that the rate at which women are being used in the Niger Delta environment for

stealing of votes, assassination and for all forms of crimes explains the reality of the need to properly engage and rehabilitate these women. Their responses to crimes and modus operandi do not only send jitters but also tells a deep story of a trained and fearless group that could be used for violence and war any day.

This position informs the relative significance of the women combatants in the Niger Delta conflicts and why it is worth this intellectual investigation. By focusing on the roles of the female combatants in the Niger Delta and the role of the domestic factor that has thrown up this class; it underscores a bottom-up rather than the realist top-down analysis of national security formulae. This is because of the nature of the recruitment of these combatants, the nature and period of training and the responsibilities of being a combatant.

## **1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

Dramatic changes in warfare in the later part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century coupled with a rising wave of internal conflicts have brought into prominence increased participation of women in conflicts in Africa. The involvement of women in modern combat poses a severe challenge to prevalent moral norms and legal regulations guiding conduct of modern warfare especially in relation to recruitment, training and responsibility. More significantly, there is rising number of untrained women in combats and their direct involvement appears fraught with negative short and long-term implications for the society and the personality of the women combatants. In Nigeria, the recruitment of women as combatants in the Niger Delta conflicts appears worrisome. The neglect of their roles while in combat and during negotiations and integration processes requires attention. This issue seems overshadowed and even submerged by concern for atrocities associated with their involvement in conflict by the international community

While this is noteworthy, the idea of proper rehabilitation and refocusing for personal, national and global benefits of the women combatants has not been properly addressed. It may therefore be difficult to end the negative impacts of the women combatants on the society as they remain a potential army of violence and destruction rather than agent of positive change. The need to provide answers as to why female combatants are not given their pride of place during and after conflicts necessitated this work.

### **1.3 OBJECTIVES OF STUDY.**

The broad objective of this study is to critically examine the use of women as combatants in the Niger Delta conflicts in Nigeria and the implication for post crisis Niger Delta environment and for Nigeria as a nation. The specific objectives are:

- a. To assess the extent to which ‘female combatants’ were involved in the Niger Delta crisis,
- b. To investigate the reasons for women’s participation in the Niger Delta crisis and the process of their recruitment
- c. To investigate the activities of the women combatants, the task assigned to them and their place in the overall scheme of the crisis in the Niger Delta,
- d. To assess the lessons learnt from the Niger Delta case, on the role and status of women in peace and conflict in Africa.

### **1.4 SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY**



The prevalence of armed conflicts in Africa in the aftermath of the cold war is fast nurturing what can loosely be called a martial culture in the continent. Thousands of children, youths and women have been inducted into a culture of violence. The neo-liberal philosophy of democracy, the shrinking development resources, stiff competition for socio-political and economic values within close social space is partly responsible for this. An aspect of this culture of violence is the phenomenon of women combatants.

This work is a contribution to the existing literature on women combatants in Africa. It is also a significant investigation into the nature of engagement of the Niger Delta women in the crisis. This work departs from the existing works on violence in the Niger Delta. The prior works in this area essentially focused on the causes, nature and consequences of the Niger Delta crisis Adejo : (2005), Ibrahim: (2009), Gomwalk: (2011), Reuben: (2012). Similar works on the activities of the leading dramatis personae in the Niger Delta crisis are also in existence Richard: (2010), Zennor: (2012). This is however a major contribution on the activities of the women combatants in the Niger Delta.

It will be useful to students and researchers working on the role of the combatants in the Niger Delta crisis. Government officials and policy making agents and actors on this subject may also find this work useful.

## **1.5 LITERATURE REVIEW**

This section reviews orthodox thoughts and writings on women combatants with a view to providing a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. Post-Colonial states in West Africa have witnessed incessant outbreak of wars which came in different manifestations. The symptoms of collapse of civil order represents an aggravating trend that is anchored to the

visceral ties of ethnicity, religion and agitations for resource control that transcend boundaries. While these accelerating concerns of domestic conflagration are not new in the post-colonial West African states, their outbreak in the 1990's has been characterised by the absence of legitimate sovereignty manifested in the nature of confrontations with the central government. This situation has led to the rise of novel warfare strategies such as the use of child soldiers, girl soldiers, women combatants and the employment of mercenaries.

West African sub-region comprising states that mostly attained independence in the 1960s has been caught in a vortex of such traumatic social conflict which in a number of cases (Nigeria, Chad, Liberia, Sierra-Leone, Guinea Bissau) threaten to destroy the social fabric of the societies involved. Pressures arising from domestic issues, combined with widespread irredentism, vigilantism and external intervention engendered a spiral of violence with incalculable consequences for the stability and development of these states in particular, and the sub-region in general. The Niger Delta of Nigeria presented an experimental case. The dimensions of violence occasioned by the causes of conflict enables the engaged strategies including the mode of recruitments and the soldiers of war. The focus, essence, dimensions, targets, demands and terrain facilitates the prevalence of women for objective strategic purposes on the part of the rebels. Women combatants are not new in the war memoirs of the history of wars in the pre-colonial African Empires and Kingdoms. The new dimensions and the nature of recruitments underscore its novelty.

Contemporary discourse on women combatants places the issues on two major theoretical plains Richard, G (1970). The first is legalistic which places the issue within the contest of international law and the rights of states to have its own army which may also include women Gabriel, R (2002). This group of women pass through conventional and globally acceptable

routine training and they are acceptable by the sovereign state as part of its soldier, trained, paid and mobilized to defend the country at all times. This position raises political issues which may necessitate the extra-legal disposition which explains the recruitment of women by a rebel group or a group of people to unleash terror on a constituted authority or against a non-state group within a polity or across international boundaries. Bonnah, J (2011). This position raises two fundamental issues.

Firstly, women are recruited through means unknown to both domestic and international law and secondly an extra-legal recruitment connotes illegality and recruitment within this context is regarded as illegal. Convincing as this theoretical postulation appears, it fails to identify three other major issues. What were the possible endogenous conditions that may enable the recruitments and training of women outside normal or regular convention? Two, why would the recruitments of women be necessary in the process of violence against the constituted authority and thirdly, what impact would this irregular combatants have on the society when demobilised? However, this division on the basis of the above analysis becomes important because it identifies part of the conditions under which recruitments of women as combatants appear obtainable.

The above expository position seems to have a clear understanding in the position of Gauth and Green. They argued that, although, there are acceptable rules and laws governing recruitments of soldiers in a regular military formation, nothing like adequate provision for women combatants exists. Mobilization and demobilization are regulated and controlled within the regulated and accepted rules. Buchana, H(2008). Since the laid down rules are explicit relative to the recruitment of the armed forces of a nation, that of rebel groups appear a contrast. Several reasons underscore recruitments and mobilization in an extra-legal

recruitments pattern of irregular forces. Buchana readily provided answer to this and to him the primary objective for recruitment is to get willing accomplices who share either recruiting agents, bodies or networks or the identification of the realization of personal objectives within the vision(s) of the recruiting agents, bodies, networks etc. Several qualities and reasons are considered before recruitment.

The reasons and qualities of those to be recruited were not outlined by Buchana however, it is clear that the recruitment never followed the conventional methods but the soldiers of war in an irregular formation consists of girls, boys, women and men. This distinction in terms of age and gender explains the disrespect for rules and the degree of illegalities in the recruitments exercise perpetrated by the extra-legal bodies who engages the services of the women combatants and other categories of soldiers for the prosecution of wars and realisation of objectives. This is a common phenomenon in the contemporary wars in West Africa. Wars fought for reasons ranging from border disputes Johan, I (2006), civil wars, Richard, R (2005), and environmental problems Abudu, Y (2009). The use of women as combatants has not received much intellectual attention from scholars. Aruya, R (2010). The recruitment of regular combatants and soldiers of varied identities and nomenclatures follow normal and regular formations and order in line with the national rules and international conventions and norms. The conventions and practices take cognisance of international laws. The combatants of rebel orientations embrace extra- conventions and extra-legal methods of recruitments.

The extant works in this area classified above strives consider a lot of issues in relation to the activities of the combatants and the major differences in relation to the roles they play as against the laid down procedures and acceptable conventions in the application of rules and conducts. This is probably a situation which actually explains the foundation, visions and

purposes of physical military engagement which informs the totality of the activities of the rebels and why extra-legal methods of recruitments are not negotiable. The military methods employed by the combatants explain the realities and dimensions of their works both as rebels and warlords of different aspirations and visions with geographical, socio-cultural and sociological differences Wolthams, M (2008).

In Nigeria in early 1989, the Directorate of Army Recruitment, Resettlement, and Reserve reported that almost 43,000 Nigerians had joined the army during the previous decade: 18,981 between March 1979 and January 1988, and 23,971 between April 1983 and December 1988. Army enrolments were also expected to double from 3,000 to 6,000 as a one-time measure under the revitalization program under which entrants from 1963 or earlier were discharged to make room for younger soldiers who joined in 1979 or later. Bentham, James (2009). This was an example of recruitment into a regular army.

The most demanding personnel problem was managing the steady demobilization of the armed forces from about 300,000 in the early 1970s to a scheduled member of perhaps 75,000 by 1993. An Armed Forces Rehabilitation Centre was set up in 1972 to resettle disabled soldiers. It has continued to operate with a broader mission and under various names but has lacked direction. It has pensioned off disabled soldiers, discharged police, reenlisted ex-servicemen, and handled voluntary discharges. Most of the voluntary discharges were skilled technicians retained on active duty until 1980. Discharged service personnel experienced massive administrative problems, such as delays or failure to receive pensions and gratuities, whereas other ex-service personnel received discharges or benefits to which they were not entitled. Bad as this situation may seem, it had a laid down procedure for recruitment and demobilization.

Finally, in January 1989, the government announced a major resettlement program, including guidance and counselling, job placement, and technical and vocational training. Taken together with the new welfare insurance plans, the program promised to improve conditions of service and release. In 1989 the army announced it would undertake a review of military laws to correct deficiencies. Among measures contemplated were plans to educate lawyers about military laws and to develop better procedures for trying soldiers accused of violations. Existing laws only stated offenses for which a soldier could be charged but did not prescribe procedures. The army also called for inclusion of military law in the teaching curricula of university law faculties. Antoly. Pierce, (2008).

The procedures for recruitment for rebel movements differ from that of regular armies. The Central African Armed Forces, Forces Armées Central Africaines (FACA)) are the armed forces of the Central African Republic, established after independence in 1960. Today they are a rather weak institution, dependent on international support to hold back the enemies in the current civil war. Its disloyalty to the president came to the fore during the mutinies in 1996–1997, but ever since then it has faced internal problems and operates more as an army of liberation. It has been strongly criticised by human rights organisations due to its terror, including killings, torture and sexual violence.

When General Kolingba became president in 1981, he implemented an ethnic-based recruitment policy for the administration. Kolingba was a member of the Yakoma people from the south of the country, which makes up approximately 5% of the total population. During his rule, members of Yakoma were granted all key positions in the administration and made up the majority of the military. This later had disastrous consequences, when Kolingba was replaced by a member of a northern tribe, Ange-Félix Patassé. Anthraz Kuzek (2005).

The recruitment by rebels contradicts the known traditions and history amplified above. In a makeshift mosque in a trailer in the sprawling camp for Syrian refugees, a preacher appeals to worshippers to join their countrymen in the fight to topple President Bashar Assad. In another corner of the Zaatari camp, two men draped in the Syrian rebel flag call on refugees through loudspeakers to sign up for military training. Azaad Hakeem (2013). Rebels in the camp freely acknowledge recruiting fighters in the camp in a drive that has increased since the summer, trying to bolster rebel ranks in the face of stepped up offensives by Assad's forces just across the border in southern Syria.

Recruiting is banned in Zaatari, and the rebel activities put Jordanian officials and UN officials running the camp in a delicate position. Wary of further increasing tensions with the government in neighbouring Syria, Jordan has sought to keep its support of rebels under the radar, officially denying that any training of anti-Assad fighters takes place on its soil, though both Jordanian and American officials have acknowledged it does. Azaad Hakeem (2013). For the UN, the recruitment mars what is supposed to be a purely humanitarian mission of helping the streams of Syrians fleeing the 3 year-old civil war, which activists say has killed more than 120,000 people. Zaatari, only 16 kilometres from the Syrian border, is home to more than 100,000 Syrian refugees.

Andrew Harper, head of the Jordan office of the UN refugee agency UNHCR, which runs the camp, says he has heard reports of rebel recruitment but has seen no evidence. "If we see anything on the recruitment or the fighters coming into the camp, we will notify the Jordanian government," he told The Associated Press. "The camp is for the Syrian refugees, not the fighters, and we must ensure that its neutrality and impartiality is kept." Azaad Hakeem (2013).

An AP reporter visiting Zaatari found rebels from the Western-backed Free Syrian Army unabashed in talking about their search for new fighters, which they say has brought in dozens of recruits in past months. Other fighters visit the camp often to see family living there and take a short break from the war. Training does not take place in the camp according to Abu Salim, who heads the Free Syrian Army's military council in southern Syria, but he said a 40-day training camp for rebel fighters is conducted at a location in Jordan or sites in southern Syria.

"Zaatari is an exporter of fighters," said Abu Salim, a former top Syrian army officer. "We see civilians maimed, our homes destroyed and our relatives jailed, tortured or killed, so we react by recruiting and training people to fight the tyrant government back home". Azaad Hakeem (2013). He spoke on condition he only be identified by his name de guerre for fear of reprisals. The camp provides a potentially rich recruiting ground. The refugees are overwhelmingly Sunni Muslims, the majority population in Syria that has been the backbone of the rebellion, and they have almost all fled from rebel-dominated areas bearing the brunt of the Syrian military's crackdown on the uprising. Abu Abdullah Hourani, a rebel sniper, said recruitment in the camp has increased since August because the FSA needed more fighters to battle against a stepped-up military offensive in southern Syria. He spoke in a Zaatari trailer where he sipped coffee with other rebels who had slipped out of Syria and into the camp for a break of several days from fighting..

"Shiites want to dominate Syria and Assad is helping them by killing us, the Sunnis," said Hourani, who spoke on condition he be identified only by his name de guerre for fear of reprisals. At another Zaatari trailer on a Friday, a Muslim cleric urged a group of around 20 worshippers in his sermon to do their duty and "liberate your land from the tyrant Assad."



"You should all join hands in the fight for freedom and democracy," the preacher, who asked to be identified by his nickname Abu Mustafa for security reasons, said, as the worshippers shouted, "God is great". Afterward, Abu Mustafa passed out a roster for recruits to sign up. He said he gets around 10 recruits a week. "It's the least I can do for my country," he said. Abd-Salam, Majid (2013).

In another part of the camp, two men who identified themselves as FSA member walked among the lines of tents with a loudspeaker, urging refugees to sign up for training. Women who volunteer get training on first aid to treat wounded fighters and men are trained in "war tactics, including street fighting," said one of the men, identifying himself only by his first name, Ahmed. Abd-Salam, Majid (2013).

The Revolutionary United Front (RUF) was a rebel army that fought a failed eleven-year war in Sierra Leone, starting in 1991 and ending in 2002. It later developed into a political party, which existed until 2007. The three most senior surviving leaders, Issa Sesay, Morris Kallon and Augustine Gbao, were convicted in February 2009 of war crimes and crimes against humanity. Wagbam, Nkomma (2008). Child soldiers were heavily recruited in the Sierra Leone Civil War; a total of 11,000 are thought to have participated in the conflict. Most were used for attacks on villages and for guard duties at diamond fields as well as guarding weapons stockpiles. Today, about 2000 are still left serving in the military of Sierra Leone. Wagbam, Nkomma (2008).

The child soldiers were notoriously known by all for their unquestionable obedience and enormous cruelty. In response to the immediate execution of rebels by government forces, the RUF instituted a policy of cutting off the hands of captured soldiers with the intent of sending the message, "You don't hold your weapon against your brother" Wagbam, Nkomma (2008).

Brandishing machetes, RUF rebels amputated the hands, arms, and legs of tens of thousands of Sierra Leoneans. The RUF indicated that the reason for these actions was that amputees could no longer mine diamonds, which might be used to support government troops.

The recruitment process of regular and irregular forces is different as I have attempted to discuss above. It was brought out that international norms and regulations that govern recruitment of forces is completely ignored in militant camps and that women were recruited to play combat roles. It was also established that female combatants have the added burden of playing the role of wives to their male colleagues who were in command positions and the female combatants were further used as sex slaves in the various camps. Despite the roles played by female combatants, they are ignored to a large extent during post conflict activities.

United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSC) 1325, adopted unanimously on 31 October 2000, after recalling Resolutions 1261 (1999), 1265 (1999), 1296 (2000) and 1314 (2000), the Council called for the adoption of a gender perspective that included the special needs of women and girls during repatriation and resettlement, rehabilitation, reintegration and post-conflict reconstruction. It was the first formal and legal document from the UNSC that required parties in a conflict to respect women's rights and to support their participation in peace negotiations and in post-conflict reconstruction. The resolution was initiated by Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah, then Minister of Women's Affairs in Namibia when the country took its turn chairing the Security Council. After lobbying by dozens of women's organizations and the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), the resolution was adopted unanimously.

The Security Council was concerned about civilians in armed conflict, particularly women and children, who constituted most of the victims and were increasingly targeted by armed elements. This in turn had an impact on the possibilities for peace and reconciliation. Women

played an important role in the prevention and resolution of conflicts and therefore it was important that they were equally involved in the process of maintaining international peace and security. It was also recognised the need to adopt a gender perspective in peacekeeping operations and the training of personnel on women's rights. The resolution called upon all countries to allow increased representation for women at all levels. The Secretary-General Kofi Annan was requested to increase the participation of women at decision making levels in conflict resolution and peace process; appoint more women as Special Representatives and envoys; and expand their role in peacekeeping operations, particularly among military observers, police, human rights and humanitarian personnel. In this regard the Council expressed its willingness to incorporate a gender perspective into peacekeeping operations.

The Security Council called upon all parties involved in negotiating and implementing peace agreements to take into account the special needs of women and girls in armed conflict, support women's peace initiatives and implement international humanitarian law and human rights law that respect the rights of women and girls. Parties to armed conflicts were also urged to take measures to protect women and girls from gender-based violence such as rape and other forms of sexual abuse, and to respect the humanitarian nature of refugee camps and take the needs of women and girls into their design. The resolution emphasised the responsibility of all countries to prosecute those responsible for crimes against humanity. During the disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration process, the differing needs of female and male ex-combatants had to be taken into account. Finally, the Secretary-General was requested to conduct a study concerning the impact of armed conflict upon women and girls, report its findings and on gender mainstreaming as a whole in United Nations peacekeeping missions. The resolution also calls upon all countries to respectfully international law applicable to the rights and protection of women and girls, in particular the

obligation under the Geneva Convention of 1949 and Additional Protocol thereto of 1977, the Refugee convention of 1951 and the Protocol thereto of 1967, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women and the Optional Protocol thereto of 1999, the Convention on the Rights of the Child and Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict as well Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography, to bear in mind the provisions of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.

The resolution as elaborate as it appears lacks the framework for the implementation of the agreed issues down to certain levels. It would have achieved more if UN experts monitor all conflicts to guarantee the rights of female combatants. The protection of the rights of female combatants during disarmament, demobilization and reintegration will also be ensured. The crisis in the Niger Delta area saw the active participation of female combatants, who were not recognised for the roles that they played. They were also not adequately integrated into the amnesty programme after the crisis. If the UN Resolutions are properly implemented and monitored, the plight of female combatants will be enhanced.

## **1.6 CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS**

### **1.6.1 Combatants**

Literarily, combatants connote the idea of persons involved in fighting in a war. It may, in a strategic language, be referred to as a group of trained, mobilized men for the purpose of achieving a country's national objectives. Richard, H (1997). Mbu got this view rather clearly when he posits that Nigerian soldiers are in combats at different social climes outside Africa. They are trained, catered for and mobilized for certain objectives for the preservation of humanity and its environment.

This position only amplifies official and legally acceptable model of recruitments into the armed forces of a nation in which the same is mobilised for official usage. It leaves out the recruitments of combatants within the context under discussion. However, Mbu's articulation suffices as a definition even as it fails to capture the extra-legal recruitments method in an irregular order. A combatant, under any social condition, would then mean those recruited, directed and employed in a war, crisis, and in other situations for the employment of the objectives of the group or groups who mobilizes same towards a particular direction which often, is towards certain objectives.

Combatants in the context of the Niger Delta militants experience, connotes an extra legal and irregular methods which rebel groups have employed elsewhere in Africa. Underscoring this methods of recruitments, has been the nature, circumstances and the availability of the willing and ready to be mobilized untrained, ill-trained, semi-trained, ill-demobilized regular soldiers and those aggrieved individuals who voluntarily joined for ethnic primordial sentiments and other anti-nation disposition. The last group are those who have largely refused to be disarmed because they have lost confidence in the Nigerian nation.

Some combatants explained how they voluntarily joined the struggle because of the need to defend their father's homeland – the Niger Delta. This position reinforces other views. It has been easy to get men, women and children to unleash terror in Nigeria. ‘‘the neo-colonial Nigerian state has failed in its responsibility as an impartial umpire in the regulation of differences among the various ethnic nationalities on one hand, it has also betrayed the citizens in the provision of common goods. Thus, ready soldiers are available to kill and bury this sorrowful edifice’’ James, R (2002).

The above scenario painted by James partly explains the condition for the availability of willing combatants in a neo-colonial environment like Nigeria. The seeming frustrations of rising expectations although play a part but a willing combatant may also be a trigger-happy personality who probably for various reasons missed the opportunity of being enlisted as a regular soldier in regular armed forces of a country. Having being ruled by his heart and also un-occupied, becomes available as a combatant in this circumstance.

Rexlong, B (1999) sees a combatant as a man who is engaged in a lawful war as dictated by his country. This is also an official definition which fails to capture the reality of forceful enlistment as combatants or irregular disposition to be used or counted, for various reasons, as combatants in war or rebellion against sovereign authority.

### **1.6.2 Girl Combatants**

The issue of girl combatants connotes the idea of a female child soldier. This directly refers to the idea of children as combatants. The outbreak of armed insurgencies in Liberia and Sierra-Leone in 1989 and 1991 respectively, not only earned West Africa the unenviable tag of the most volatile sub-region in the 1990's but equally generated thousands of child soldiers and significant percentage were girls. This situation attracted other environments and armed wielding groups to readily enlist girls as combatants and the Niger Delta environment was not

excluded. The girl soldiers were observed to be strong and associated with horrendous and highly unusual atrocities which contribute to the nature and dimensions of the security problems in the Niger Delta.

The recruitment of girls took two forms; forced and voluntary. Williams, H (2003). A girl is a female child; a young woman who is not married. This understanding creates the problems of age delineation. In this wise, a girl could be a female gender up to 16-18years. In this wise, a girl is a child treated as women combatants in an irregular armed formation or by rebels or militant groups. This is particularly common in the Niger Delta area.

### **1.6.3 Female Combatants.**

Owens and Gladys (2007) in their work *Female Soldiers in Africa* have tried to explain away the theoretical exigency of looking at the issue of female combatants as against the common separation into categories for the reason of clarity. These scholars were of the opinion that a girl is a female as well as a woman. Therefore, it is more convenient to talk about female combatants or soldiers than the normal categorizations which scholars often address. While this appears correct relative to gender, it is necessary to categorize for official policy reasons and also for lucid intellectual necessities which may attract categorizations for groups' identification.

Women combatants are female soldiers recruited by rebels, militants or in a regular armed forces of a country to fight for certain objectives. In the context of this work, women combatants refers to all categories of the female gender recruited and deployed for combat by the Niger Delta warlords. This distinction is necessary because it is difficult to see any female combatants in the rank and file of the Niger Delta militants whose age is less than

sixteen year. This would also enable us to deeply appreciate the nature and degree of the effects of the women combatants on the post crisis/war Niger Delta.

## **1.7 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

In simple terms, feminist theory is a theory on women's rights and gender equality. It involves the study of women's roles in society which include their rights, privileges, interests, and concerns. It serves as an extension to feminism which evaluates the rightful place of women in the society. Various feminist theories already came out as early as 1792. Many publications during that time featured the limited rights and privileges of women because of wrong perceptions against them. There were also accounts on women being able to perform tasks that were deemed only for men. Some women of the past also argued that government laws were biased against women and that these same laws could punish them but are not able to protect them. Part of history also documented women's struggle to fight for their right to vote. Over the years, more and more women published their concerns regarding women's issues and continued to fight for equality. Modern feminist science challenges the biological essentialist view of gender. For example, Anne Fausto-Sterling's book, *Myths of Gender*, explores the assumptions embodied in scientific research that support a biologically essentialist view of gender, Fausto-Sterling, Anne (1992). In *Delusions of Gender*, Cordelia Fine disputes scientific evidence that suggests that there is an innate biological difference between men's and women's minds, asserting instead that cultural and societal beliefs are the reason for differences between individuals that are commonly perceived as sex differences. Fine, Cordelia (2010)

There are various disciplines wherein feminist theories can be applied to. One such discipline is in the field of languages. In this area, feminists argue that much of literature only represented masculinity. The Bible itself is somewhat questioned because of references to



God as a “He”. Others also insist on changing some masculine-based words into more gender-sensitive words. Examples of these are those that pertain to positions or rank in the workplace. The words “chairman” and “mailman” are changed to “chairperson” and “mail carrier” respectively. Ecofeminists believe that patriarchy and male domination is harmful to women, as well as the environment. There is a link between a male's desire to dominate unruly women and wilderness. Men feel as though they must tame and conquer both in order to have complete power. Ecofeminists say that it is this desire that destroys both women and the Earth. Ecofeminists believe that women have a central role in preserving nature because women understand and are one with nature. There is a deep connection that men cannot understand between the Earth and women, hence the terms Mother Nature or Mother Earth. Women need to use their superior insight to reveal how humans can live in harmony with each other and with nature.

Vandana Shiva as an Ecofeminist believes that patriarchy and male domination is harmful to women, as well as the environment. The Niger Delta region has been ecologically degraded over the years and this partly accounts for the crisis in the area. The women who are mainly farmers are greatly affected by the pollution and degradation of the environment. This feminist approach applies to this study especially viewed against the background that the same women who are affected because of land degradation, fought for what they believed in and are sidelined during post conflict reconstruction and are paradoxically not recognized for their various roles.

Liberal feminism was most popular in the 1950's and 1960's when many civil rights movements were taking place. The main view of liberal feminists is that all people are created equal by God and deserve equal rights. These types of feminists believe that oppression exists because of the way in which men and women are socialized, which supports patriarchy and

keeps men in power positions. Liberal feminists believe that women have the same mental capacity as their male counterparts and should be given the same opportunities in political, economic and social spheres. Women should have the right to choose, not have their life chosen for them because of their sex. Essentially, women must be like men.

Liberal feminists create and support acts of legislation that remove the barriers for women. These acts of legislation demand equal opportunities and rights for women, including equal access to jobs and equal pay. Liberal feminists believe that removing these barriers directly challenges the ideologies of patriarchy, as well as liberates women. Betty Friedan is one of the advocates of this feminist theory. While the African society by its structure constrains women to traditional chores, the valour displayed by female combatants during wars places them at the same level with their male counterparts. This makes it important that in so far as female combatants are recruited and used during conflicts, liberal feminism requires that they be accorded equal rights with their male counterparts.

Liberal feminists are responsible for many important acts of legislation that have greatly increased the status of women, including reforms in welfare, education and health. Unfortunately, Liberal feminism has been known to only concentrate on the legislation aspect in the fight against patriarchy. It has been criticized for not breaking down the deeper ideologies of society and patriarchy. Also, it has been criticized for ignoring race and class issues.

Radical feminism promotes the basis for many of the ideas of feminism. They usually clash with the ideals of the liberal feminist, because radical feminists believe that society must be changed at its core in order to dissolve patriarchy, not just through acts of legislation. Unfortunately, this type of feminism also attracts a lot of negative media attention creating a

backlash of feminism. Radical feminists believe that the domination of women is the oldest and worst kind of oppression in the world. They believe this because it spans across the world oppressing women of different races, ethnicities, classes and cultures. Radical feminists want to free both men and women from the rigid gender roles that society has imposed upon them. It is this sex-gender system that has created oppression and radical feminist's mission is to overthrow this system by any possible means. Sometimes radical feminists believe that they must wage a war against men, patriarchy, and the gender system which confines them to rigid social roles. They completely reject these roles, all aspects of patriarchy, and in some cases, they reject men as well.

Radical feminists emphasize their difference from men and they form groups that exclude males completely. This type of feminist highlights the importance of individual feelings, experiences and relationships. Mary Daly is a proponent of this theory. The criticism that usually trails this theory is the advocacy for violence if need be, this is because the UN has provided platforms for peaceful agitations and the calls for violence defeat the peaceful approach.

The origin of the term "Amazon feminism" can be traced to several sources, including the works of Thomas Gramstad. Gramstad sought to combine Ayn Rand's unique depiction of heroism along with then modern feminist ideology and Amazonian concepts. This was partly inspired by Lane and Worth's *In Search of the Woman Warrior*.

The theoretical framework used in the course of this work is the Amazon feminism theory. Amazon feminism is a branch of feminism that emphasizes female physical prowess as a means to achieve the goal of gender equality. Gramstad, Thomas (1999). Adherents are dedicated to the image of the female hero in fiction and in fact, as expressed in the physiques and feats of female athletes, martial artists and other powerfully built women in society, art

and literature. Amazon feminism is concerned about physical equality and is opposed to gender role stereotypes and discrimination against women based on assumptions that women are supposed to be, look or behave as if they are passive, weak and physically helpless. Amazon feminism rejects the idea that certain characteristics or interests are inherently masculine (or feminine), and upholds and explores a vision of heroic womanhood. Amazon feminism supports and celebrates female strength athletes, martial artists, soldiers/women in combat, fire fighters, lumberjacks, astronauts, power lifters etc. This approach points to the fact that women possess the ability to excel in all fields of endeavour, including warfare, just like their male counterparts. This theory helps mirror the role of female combatants in the Niger Delta operations and clearly brings out the disservice meted out to them as a result of lack of recognition for their efforts.

## **1.8 THE SCOPE OF STUDY.**

This work is essentially on the crisis in the Niger Delta of Nigeria. It focuses essentially on the role of women as combatants including the specific roles and assignments they were responsible for. It covers the period of agitation to the emergence of late President Yar'adua's amnesty policy. It also covers the contemporary activities of these women combatants who are now let-loose on the society and the social problems they pose to the society. This work further delves into the issue of female combatants in some states in Africa.

## **1.9 LIMITATIONS OF STUDY**

This work is constrained by a number of factors. These are:

- a. Unavailability of the trainers of the combatants and those involved in recruitments,
- b. Dismantled training camps,
- c. Limited and confiscated documents,

These limitations were taken care of by the available information, publication and oral interviews conducted amongst those directly involved and those who were direct witnesses.

The available data obliterate the possible drawbacks the limitations could have on the positive outcome of this work.

#### **1.10 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY.**

Given the mainly qualitative nature of this work, two sources of data were utilized: primary and secondary. For primary sources, in-depth interviews were conducted among the ex-female combatants, their male counterparts and some government officials. For secondary data, this work relied on extensive library and internet search for books, journals, articles and newspapers, magazines and reports by national and international agencies and the documents by multinational businesses in the Niger Delta area.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **2.0 STATE OF WOMEN IN COMBAT IN AFRICA**

This chapter seeks to address conflicts in selected states in Africa, the recruitment, tasks and capabilities of female combatants during combat situations. The neglect of female combatants in post conflict activities and the roles that ex-female combatants and women groups can play in peace building in societies will also be delved into. This chapter will further attempt to internationalize the issue of female combatants in Africa by analyzing the effects of female combatants in conflicts in some African states and emphasis will be on irregular armies.

Recent wars in West Africa have introduced a phenomenon that is not popular in the history and

mythology of West Africa. Large numbers of women take part in active combat in many parts of Africa and despite their valour as displayed in conflicts, which buttresses the Amazon feminism theory. However, they are relegated in various militant camps and are of little or no

consequence during rehabilitation and reintegration processes. Armed conflicts can be pictured as a fault-line running across the evolution of society, expressing injustice and grievances and often indicating where transformation is needed.

Conflicts and wars throughout the world have led to some radical changes in the status quo of societies and to that extent women have benefitted from some of the war induced evolutions in most societies. There are examples of how wars and violent conflicts have played important roles in the women's movements by raising the profile of women. It is believed that World War II and the Vietnam War helped the women's movement in the US to gain admittance into many sectors that were closed to them prior to the wars. In Africa, female combatants have taken part in most conflicts and displayed rare feats in the field of battle and were also noted to display good administrative skills. Although women in Africa are still perceived as victims, supporters, nurtures etc, they have also revealed that they are violent and takers of life as well. They can rise to the occasion and use violent force either to survive or for the pleasure of it. Between 1990 and 2003, girls were associated with fighting forces in 55 countries and were active participants in conflicts in 38 countries around the globe.

Girls continue to be involved in fighting in the Central African Republic, Chad, Congo DRC, and they took part in conflicts in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Uganda, Mozambique and South Sudan. While the proportion of female combatants in armed groups varies according to geographic regions, it generally ranges from 10% to 30% of all combatants and in Africa, girls are said to have comprised 30-40% of combatants. Women have been actively involved as fighters in African countries as diverse as Angola, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Liberia, Mozambique, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Uganda, and Zimbabwe. Women have been part of wars of liberation against colonial powers as well as in contemporary rebel insurgencies, and in these

conflicts women have served in capacities from foot soldiers to high-ranking positions (Bennett et al. 1995, Nzomo 2002:9).

Recruitment into irregular armies in conflicts in Africa was mainly through conscription and by voluntary process. Private armies and rebel movements have discovered the unique roles women and only women can assume on the battle fields. At one time in the Liberian civil war majority of Charles Taylor's bodyguards were women. Taylor publicly declared that women could be trusted than men and that women can easily devote their lives to a cause once they are convinced that it is noble and in the defence of life and human dignity. Rebel movements through propaganda have convinced some women to believe in their movements; hence, women pledged their total loyalty. Charles Taylor of Liberia, Fodeh Sankoh of Sierra Leone and Kone of the Lord's Resistance Army of Uganda all recruited women into their armies.

It should be pointed out that the recruitment of women in rebel movements does not have a dignifying history. While a few women may have volunteered to join the rebel movements, majority were conscripted violently. In situations of crisis where it seems like only those armed survive, women, particularly young girls, join rebel movements to survive. This was illustrated in Sierra Leone where young girls who joined the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) claimed they did that to stay alive. The life of women in rebel movements did not change during the various struggles. At the end of the wars their lives did not change and not better either. Leaders of liberation movements may have discovered women's usefulness in the battle field but they hardly accorded women equal opportunities once the struggle won them political powers. As soon as they entered the capitals they took on their patriarchy characters and forgot the women that contributed to their ascension to power. Rebel movements use women as expendable soldiers on battlefields and invisible humans in peacetime



The first Liberian civil war started when the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) led by Charles Taylor invaded Liberia in December 1989. After eight years the war came to an end in 1997 and Taylor was elected president. However, the security situation was still unstable and in 2000 civil war once again broke out as Liberia's United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD ) launched an incursion from Guinea. Women and girls were part of the fighting forces in both fighting and non-fighting roles. There were also some units wholly composed of female fighters commonly known as Women's Artillery Commandos (WAC) (Specht 2006:15).

It is hard to estimate how many female fighters joined voluntarily and how many were forced to join the fighting forces, and estimates vary depending on the source of information. In the study conducted by Specht approximately one third of the interviewed female ex-fighters were forcibly recruited. Among those who volunteered to fight most said that they did this to survive and to protect themselves, but other reasons such as economic motives, poverty, and the wish for revenge or for equality with men were also contributing factors (Specht 2006:32). Utas points out that a majority of the young women who fought in the civil war became involved through combatant boyfriends (Utas 2003:208).

Most young women in the Liberian war zone were under immense pressure and many had no other choice but to attach themselves to a fighter with enough power to protect them. Without such protection these young women were at immediate risk of, for example, being forced to provide sexual services or of being raped (Utas 2003:176). Meanwhile, Utas also notes that even though most young women were in a fragile position in the war zone some female fighters who gained positions as commanders and high-ranking officers were able to turn war into a successful endeavor. With looted goods some were able, for example, to build up business enterprises after the end of the war (Utas 2003:212). After two years of transitional

government, elections were held in 2005 in which the former World Bank economist Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf became the first female president of an African state. However, peace remains fragile, much depending on the successful reintegration of the large number of former combatants, especially the female combatants.

Prolonged wars typically erode the adult generation before drawing on the younger generation as cheap, effective and obedient fighters. Fighting forces in Liberia recruited children and young people into their ranks on a massive scale. Some who fought as children in the 1989-97 civil wars were re-recruited in 2002 and 2003 as adults. After two decades of political and economic chaos many young Liberians have never experienced peace. They have had little access to schools and have grown up in families which are struggling to survive.

Many of them have suffered or witnessed rape and other atrocities. When the second war started, many were ready take up arms. The association of women with fighting forces in both fighting and non-fighting functions has been a constant feature of Liberia's civil wars, with some units wholly composed of girls and female combatants (commonly known as the Women's Artillery Commandos (WAC)).

The long-running war provided the broad context in which many girls decided to take up arms. Illustrative of how all encompassing and normalized the state of conflict was for many such children, one girl described how she could not "remember when the war first started because (she) was very small," and understood only that "everything was not good anymore." All parties of the conflict committed many human rights violations, creating a constant state of fear among ordinary people. In this context, also large numbers of girls and young women took up arms.

Girl combatants' experiences and reasons for joining, although sometimes similar to those of boys, can be clearly differentiated from them. This research highlights a number of factors

that pushed and pulled girls into the armed forces, as fighters or in support roles. Although the participation of women in combat is by no means a new phenomenon, the overtly "feminist" reasons many girls cited for enlisting seem atypical. In contrast to the feminist reasons of some girls for fighting, other girls became associated with fighting forces to benefit from male protection from gender-based violence or to acquire material goods.

Gender-based violence can be defined as the physical, sexual and psychological violence committed against both men and women as a result of their gender. Violent armed conflict tends to aggravate sexual abuse, as in Liberia, where rape has been extensively used as a weapon of war. In the context of combat and widespread weapons possession among men, incidence of rape increased. Many girls had experienced house-to-house searches where all the women were systematically raped. In Liberia, about 75 percent of the demobilized children in 2004 were estimated to have suffered from sexual abuse or exploitation. Rape occurred before and during recruitment, as well as during their time in the forces. Some girls tried to protect themselves from these sexual assaults by getting a fighter as a boyfriend or by gaining prestige as a fighter. This research analyses the influence of gender-based violence on the girl combatants before, during and after the war.

## **2.1 Becoming civilians**

Female combatants face many challenges and adopt different methods for coping with life as civilians and possibly mothers or wives. For many, the hardships faced in rebuilding traumatized lives in the context of peace and reconstruction proves just as difficult as the hazards of war. Many girls have very little to return to as their parents might be dead or reluctant to take them back, their houses destroyed, while local economies and protection mechanisms are shattered.

Although women and girls were taken into consideration in the DDR in Liberia, girls' experiences with the DDR programme are not always positive. This report analyses the reasons why some girls went through the demobilization process, while many others did not, and how their needs are being addressed. Considering that girls were an integral part of the fighting forces, as combatants, wives and supporters, a failure in DDR to reach them will create large numbers of bitter and disgruntled ex-female combatants. By seeking to comprehend the motives and concerns of the girl-combatants, and challenging the preconceptions of some DDR practitioners in Liberia, it is hoped that a framework that will cater for the needs of the female combatants will be put in place. One such preconception is that continued bonds between commanders and ex-combatants are always contradictory to the aims of DDR. The research for this study suggests that, if assisted appropriately, many commanders could assist with "their" girls' reintegration. Girl ex-combatants have a unique contribution to make to their society as females, young adults and former combatants.

The involvement of female combatants in war in Zimbabwe is best captured in a documentary and film titled *Flame*. Certainly, not much has been written about female combatants' experiences in the war or about the treatments meted to them or even the roles of women in the war. Sinclair, the director of the movie claims that the stories of the women she interviewed do not always correspond. Still, not all female ex-combatants agree with what is presented in *Flame*. Even 16 years after Independence some of these women maintain that no rape took place in the camps. They maintain that men and women were treated equally in the camps.

But others, including Freedom Nyambuya, one of the more outspoken female ex-combatants, maintain that they were raped. Nyambuya believes that it is time that Zimbabwe accepts this truth and reveals what really happened during the war. Another woman who did not want to

be identified has said that she was raped often by her male comrades, as were other women. A female ex-combatant in Harare stated that in the ZANLA training camps in Mozambique it was usual practice for some senior comrade to request a female to "come and sweep his tent." Among female ex-combatants the topic of rape is still a sensitive issue, and women in particular are not enthusiastic to discuss it. Moreover, many female ex-combatants do not readily talk about the war at all. Often based on their own experience, they fear that by talking about forced sexual encounters they will be labelled prostitutes. This situation can be remedied if government and other gender based organization work closely with ex-female combatants to save them from the stigmatization. If this is done it will assist them settle back into normal lives after conflicts.

Certainly, when female combatants returned from the war they faced a society which did not welcome them back to the freedoms they had known. Many women found it difficult to marry or stay married. At home they found men and in-laws ready to label them murderers or prostitutes, while their male comrades were deemed "heroes." They were seen as too tough, too liberated and not good enough to be wives.

While many women felt that in the bush training camps they had - for the first time - been treated as equals to men, many had suffered unspeakable abuse. "In that respect," says Sinclair, "the women just stopped talking about it because it had become synonymous with a bad experience." Even today, Sinclair found that many women ex-combatants have not told their husbands or families that they fought in the struggle. Hence, Sinclair adds, "to then stand up and admit it is quite dangerous. People might think they have lied to them in the past. They couldn't say the sorts of things we want them to say because they are too contentious; they are not part of the glorious history."

The women's movement in Zimbabwe has often used female guerrilla's experiences, fighting side by side with their men, as the basis for arguments to gain gender equality in legislation. To some extent this has been realized with the Age of Majority Act and changes to inheritance laws. However the women's movement today has not yet dealt with the specific needs of female ex-combatants. Women who fought in the struggle remain bitter about their treatment by society and government but remain hesitant to criticize the government which they fought so hard for. While female ex-combatants remain unable to organize themselves as a vocal group with special needs, the disparities in compensation based on gender widens.

Today, most female ex-combatants do not read what is written about them in academic circles. They do not go to see movies and many will not go to see *Flame*. They are busy surviving, making business deals, growing maize or ground nuts, or selling vegetables on street corners. Some are even poorer. Demobilization payments are long spent and they wait patiently for compensation from the government but - even if compensation were available many couldn't afford the bus fare to town centres to register for such compensation.

During the conflict in Northern Uganda, which started in 1986, women and girls were present in the rebel movement, the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA). Most of them were abducted and forcefully conscripted (McKay 2007:390). It is estimated that as many as 80 percent of the LRA fighters were child soldiers and of those, approximately 30 percent were girls (McKay and Mazurana 2004:29). Female fighters have not always been acknowledged by organizations working in Northern Uganda. From the mid-late 1990s NGOs started acknowledging their presence and roles within the LRA (Fox 2004:472). Still, in most reports on girls and young women within the LRA only their roles as sex slaves and captive 'wives' have been highlighted.

However, as in so many other conflicts women and girls' roles are much more diverse and complex than this. It has been stated that nearly all girls abducted by the LRA received military training. In a study 12 percent of the respondents reported that their primary role was as fighters, while 49 percent stated that their secondary role was as fighters (McKay and Mazurana 2004:73f). Abducted girls were also given as 'wives' to LRA commanders. Aside from being fighters in frontline combat, some with command positions, and 'wives' to LRA commanders, girls and young women have also carried out supportive tasks such as preparing food, carrying loot and moving weapons (McKay and Mazurana 2004:75).

In Ethiopia and the province of Tigray the Tigrean People's Liberation Front (TPLF) was founded in 1975 as a movement opposed to the Mengistu Derg's military dictatorship. Women and girls were involved in active combat within the TPLF, and composed approximately a third of the fighters. Most female fighters appear to have experienced their recruitment as voluntary. According to Veale, the contribution of female fighters to the liberation struggle is seen as almost legendary in Ethiopia, and within the TPLF women were highly regarded and respected as fighters. The Tigrean movement also had an explicit agenda of addressing women's equality in addition to the overall aim of liberation. Work within the TPLF, such as supportive tasks and fighting, was shared equally between men and women. Women and girls seemed in general not to have been subjected to forced sexual relations and sexual abuse as discipline was tight with respect to sexual relations. Rape was also rare and severely punished (Veale 2003).

During the six year conflict from 1998 to 2004 in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) women and girls were actively involved as fighters within the armed forces. Thousands of girls were forcibly recruited by the armed groups throughout the towns and villages of the Eastern Provinces (Verhey 2004). Some also joined by choice and in a few cases girls stated

that they participated because of patriotic values. In other cases girls joined because they wanted to escape problematic domestic relations or because joining was seen as the only opportunity to access food and material goods. Within the armed groups of the DRC the great majority of the girls served multiple roles simultaneously.

The prevailing assumption that girls in the DRC were only used as ‘wives’ and did not serve in active combat roles is incorrect (Verhey 2004:10). As in many other conflicts it is hard to estimate how many female fighters were part of the armed forces in the DR C. However, in 2005 Save the Children reported that there were up to 12,500 girls in the armed groups, and that girls are estimated to make up 40 percent of all children in such groups in the DR C (Save the Children 2005). Meanwhile, it has recently been reported that while 130,000 fighters have been disarmed in the ongoing DDR process in the DR C, only 2,610 of them have been women (IRIN 2007).

## **2.2 Impact of conflicts in Africa on ex-female combatants**

Civilian casualties from injuries and wounds can be very high during guerrilla warfare and when small arms and landmines are used. However, women and children are often the most exposed to these dangers, especially if they are primarily responsible for gathering fuel or water as part of their duties as combatants. Armed conflict traumatizes both combatants and civilians – on a daily basis and sometimes for the rest of their lives, long after the war is over. Numerous studies of the psychological state of refugees, war-affected populations and ex-combatants show that the experience of violence makes a deep impression on the human psyche. People’s responses differ according to their own personalities, the levels and types of violence they experience and their cultural interpretations of the conflict, yet it is increasingly clear that if left untreated, the psychological impact of war can severely diminish the quality



of life and even threaten a whole society. It therefore becomes curious that ex-female combatants are not completely catered for in reintegration and demobilization programmes.

Studies of combatants indicate that increased exposure to combat is a predictor of severe wartime violence, which may contribute to the atrocities committed in some long conflicts. Once combatants are inured to extreme violence, it is difficult for them to revert later on to more normal, healthy attitudes towards conflict resolution.

Women's reproductive health problems during conflicts may range from having no sanitary supplies for menstruation to life-threatening pregnancy-related conditions, from lack of birth control to the effects of sexual violence. In the past two decades, women have also had to deal with the deadly spread of HIV/AIDS. The fact that most female combatants joined militant groups to provide for themselves did not guarantee them better conditions during conflicts. They suffered adverse medical conditions as a result of rape and unwanted pregnancies.

Child soldiers are coerced into serving as combatants and are victims who lose their childhoods. There is not a known number of how many child female combatants there are globally because of combat's fluid nature in underdeveloped countries. However, groups that track child soldiers believe that governments and rebels in Africa are the worst offenders. Both use children because armaments made from lighter materials are easy for children to carry and they work as expendable recruits. Child female combatants suffer the loss of education, the trauma of being forcibly separated from families and friends and the horror of injury. Seeing other enlisted children and family members die during conflict is emotionally scarring. Child soldiers, especially young girls, suffer rape and are forced into prostitution to survive. These girls are also domestic slaves who cook and clean for their captors.

Political segregation is another impact of female participation in combat in Africa. In Liberia, while many male commanders negotiated government positions after the war, female

combatants were largely excluded from the process. Leena Kotilainen of the University of Turku in Finland observed while conducting a research into the issue of ex-female combatants in Liberia that the ex-female combatants find it more difficult to get married, have families, and reintegrate back into society because they are seen as unfeminine, tainted and deprived.

One of the things most ex-female combatants missed on demobilisation was the collective nature of military life; the camaraderie, the social life and the sense of common purpose. This has impacted negatively on the lives of the ex-combatants as the everyday chores of managing a household were difficult for them after demobilisation. It was observed that “reintegration from the military life to civilian life is difficult; when we compare between women who were not fighters and those who were, most of the time, the keeping and leading of the household is difficult for those fighter women than for those who were never fighters” Within the division of household labour, one of the issues women found particularly difficult was their sudden experience of a lack of equality with men, with whom they had participated as equals in the difficult task of being a fighter, but suddenly, saw they were relegated-unequally-to the work inside the home.

The recruitment of female fighters into irregular forces in Africa and their subsequent demobilization after conflicts also impact on family relationships. Most ex-female fighters are demobilized and told to go home and continue taking care of their homes while their main counterparts are integrated into regular armies as part of peace plans or are given specialist training. This separates most couples who actually get married while in the various militant camps. One ex-female combatant noted that “my husband is still a fighter, because of the demobilization and reintegration process, we live in separate ways. Formally we are not divorced but it seems like divorce”

Ex-female combatants are forcing societal change by challenging traditional roles that they find they cannot accept, and strongly argue that to them is a gain for their participation in conflicts as combatants. This presents further challenges to ex-female combatants as their quest for change are often met with resistance in African societies that are highly traditional and have traditional roles for women.

The need to deeply involve women and indeed ex-female combatants in post conflict activities cannot be over-emphasised. Conflict is a gendered activity: women and men have different access to resources, power and decision making before, during and after conflicts. The experience of women and men in situations of tension, war, and post-conflict reconstruction is significantly different. Approximately 80% of today's civilian casualties are women and 80% of all refugees and internally displaced people worldwide are women and children. As emphasised in the Platform for Action of the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women, "while entire communities suffer the consequences of armed conflict and terrorism, women and girls are particularly affected because of their status in society and their sex".

Women are thus caught in a vicious paradox: while they are the main civilian victims of conflicts, they are often powerless to prevent them, excluded from the negotiations when it comes to their resolution and confined to a marginal role in the post-conflict reconstruction and reconciliation efforts. The general exclusion of women from decision-making positions prior to, during and following violent conflicts reinforces their victimization.

### **2.3 Roles for Women in Post Conflict Resolutions**

The problems of women combatants are common to all warring environments in Africa. Virtually all programmes on rehabilitations and reintegration are devoid of painstaking and

carefully thought out agenda for only women or crafted policy roles for women. In many disarmament, demobilization and reintegration initiatives around the African region, women combatants are often invisible and their needs overlooked the former UN Secretary- General Kofi Annan observed. Female combatants participate in all aspects of combat and administration, yet when a peace settlement opens the way for demobilization, they tend to be categorized among the vulnerable groups, a broad label that includes wounded or disabled male combatants and all women and children who accompany warring factions. Scholars have viewed this situation with serious reservations. In the Sierra Leone, many women who fought in the war or were raped or otherwise victimized have been ostracised by their communities and families. It was pointed out by Ms Christiana Lebbie, national coordinator of Friends for Africa Relief and Development Agency, that the “they cannot get work and it’s hard to go back to their villages, they engage in commercial sex to earn little cash” James argues that most of the policies on rehabilitation neglect the roles and importance of women as a special group even when they are at the centre of all the episodes. In Liberia, the programme of reintegration for female ex-combatants drew lessons from the Sierra Leone experience. The criteria for disarmament were expanded to to make it easier for female combatants to take part and benefit from the programme like their male counterparts. Out of a total of 103,000 combatants who completed demobilisation as at 2004, about 22% were women. James’ position was corroborated by Israel when he argues that special roles must be assigned to women just as special policies targeting women must be drawn concisely for the rehabilitation of women in all post war policies.

The need to properly address post war or crisis policies which assign roles for women or those that would inevitably assign roles for women is very important. It is view of this that the following proposals are hereby put forward:

1. Post-conflict trauma healings relating to women combatants can be handled by women. Since the women gender is the focus of rehabilitation, women can easily engage in the rehabilitation of women because of gender understanding and acceptance. This process was traditionally employed in a communal society after an inter-communal clash between two Yoruba communities in the south-west Yorubaland in Ogun State.
2. Since family and community are essential components of civil society and recruitment are drawn from this environment, the role of women as not just whistle blowers but custodian of values which protects and prevent and as well accommodate the traumatized, the fundamental role of women cannot be de-emphasized.
3. Effective programmes to empower families and communities in post-conflict situation should have specific roles for women as benders and tenderers of post war situation.
4. Women should be involved in all conventions and post war rehabilitation programmes. Specific roles should be outlined for women to enable effective participation given their traditional responsibilities and roles in African societies
5. In the Niger Delta, women organization should be veritably empowered to engage in the rehabilitation programmes of women combatants who are being used as available instruments of violence, confusion and perpetration of all forms of illegalities.

#### **2.4 Regional Approach on the Issue of Women Combatants**

The widespread practice of recruiting women as combatants' cuts across the developing and the developed countries though, different patterns exist. The recruitment of women in developed countries such as the United States (where under 18-years are exposed to military training through programmes such as Peace Corps and Young Marines, and are eventually recruited into the armed forces), and in the United Kingdom where it is increasingly taking

the form of volunteers into military services in a bid to overcome persistent shortfalls in recruitment quotas. In contrast, in most Third World countries where women combatants exist, recruitment takes the form of conscription, luring and ganging. Where it is voluntary, recruitment is closely linked to often poor security situation, poverty and sense of ethnic nationality. This situation explains the situation in West African countries such as Liberia, Sierra-Leone and Angola. This is particularly the situation in the Niger Delta of Nigeria.

The vicious circle of conflicts creates a round of ethnic agitations and reprisals which provides the rational justification for some women, in part, to join military groups, militants and rebels. The presence of women in the ranks of the Niger Delta militant groups just as they were also present in the ranks of the Liberian and the Sierra-Leonean rebel groups and other factions in Liberia illustrates the fact that their membership was an opportunity to seek alternative source of emotional security, defend their environment and a demonstration of a rejection of the existing social and political order amongst other reasons. The widespread use of women soldiers in the West African sub-region is contagious. The contagion effects are the extraneous influences that facilitated the recruitment and use of women combatants in West Africa. These effects can be seen at certain levels. These are Precedence and Geography levels. Precedent contagion relates to the roles played by women in other theatres of crises which ultimately influenced their forced or voluntary recruitment. The geographical contagion effect is a function of cross-border recruitment and deployment which renders them as fighters of convenience or at most mercenaries of war. Most of the wars in the third world are internal wars involving the mobilization of all available war resources including women by the rebels, insurgents and even the government forces. Most often, these wars spills into neighbouring countries thereby allowing for recruitment of women and other categories of

recruits of war across national boundaries. This is a common phenomenon in the horn and sub-Saharan Africa.

In West Africa, common indices are constant ratio enabling crises, wars and violence in West Africa. These are intra-ethnic conflict, trans-border conflicts, crisis of failing states, poverty, collapse of traditional values, problems of institutional transformation, proliferation of small arms, depreciating scarce development resources, inter-ethnic wars and wars of other dimensions and colourations. All these explain why women are part of the constantly recruited combatants of wars in West Africa. The same variables underscore the regional approach to the issue and study of women combatants in West Africa. Common denominators are discernible just as common theories are applicable with minor variations.

The general provisions of the UN Resolution 1385 are enumerated below as it aptly captures the roles that women could play towards conflict prevention, resolution and post conflict building. The resolution contains the following:

- a. To ensure that their national legislation is compatible with the Statute of the International Criminal Court as a matter of priority, with particular attention given to the substantive and procedural provisions regarding crimes against women;
- b. To include in national legal systems, where it has not yet been done, provisions penalising all forms of violence against women in conflict and post-conflict situations;
- c. To support women's participation in peace-building and post-conflict reconstruction by strengthening women's representation in local, national and international bodies for the resolution of conflicts;
- d. To provide sustained funding to women's non-governmental organizations dealing with peace issues;

- e. To encourage research focused on women and their peace-building activities and the impact they have on peace processes and make the results of this research widely known and used in designing domestic and regional policies;
- f. To increase public awareness of the importance of gender mainstreaming in peace-support operations and provide training in gender equality at an early stage in the training of military personnel so that respect for women becomes a matter of course and an atmosphere which reflects this respect prevails in the army;
- g. To introduce education on human rights, peace and gender equality in school curricula at all levels;
- h. To increase the access of women to media and communication technologies so that gender perspectives, women's expertise and women's media can influence public discourse and decision making on peace and security;
- i. To support the training of editors and journalists to eliminate gender bias in reporting and investigative journalism before, during and after conflict situations and to promote gender equality and perspectives;
- j. To involve women and their organisations in peace negotiations at all levels (for example, round tables).

#### **2.4.2 In the Field of Conflict Prevention**

- a. To empower local women and women's groups in areas where conflict is brewing and to support their strategies aimed at avoiding armed conflict;
- b. To encourage the appointment of women to regional, national and international posts relating to conflict prevention;
- c. To increase the percentage of women in delegations to national, regional and international meetings concerned with peace and security, as well as in formal peace negotiations;



d. To include “education in peace” in all curricula beginning from primary school level up to the level of professional training in order to develop a spirit of and respect for peace in society;

### **2.4.3 In the Resolution of Conflicts**

a. To facilitate the input of women’s peace groups and organizations into key peace conferences at all levels through systematic consultation with them, ensuring that their problems and priorities are reflected in the official peace process;

b. To include gender experts and expertise in all levels and aspects of peace operations, including in technical surveys, the design of concepts of operation, training, staffing and programmes;

c. To take necessary measures to train women as mediators to be involved in peace missions, conflict resolution and peace support operations;

d. To provide personal security to women through the police forces, protecting them from all forms of sexual and domestic violence;

e. To ensure that actions against trafficking in women in areas affected by conflict form part of peace and security initiatives and that they take women’s specific needs into account;

f. To give the opportunity to refugee and internally displaced women to play a key role in camp planning, management and decision making so that their interests are taken into account in all aspects, especially resource distribution, security and protection;

g. To grant at least temporary refugee status to women who have been raped or have been subjected to other forms of sexual violence during armed conflict;

h. To involve civil society in the design and implementation of humanitarian assistance programmes;

### **2.4.4 Women Combatants in Post-Conflict Situations**

- a. To establish macroeconomic policies in post-conflict reconstruction that prioritise the public provision of food, water, sanitation, health and energy, the key sectors of the daily life of people and communities in which women provide unpaid work;
- b. To introduce measures that give local women priority in recruitment during emergencies and post-conflict reconstruction;
- c. To adopt constructive measures to guarantee women's socioeconomic rights including employment, property ownership and inheritance during post-conflict reconstruction;
- d. To provide physical and mental health services for women recovering from war injuries and trauma, including specialist support for women who are caring for children conceived as a result of rape and for those who have been ostracized from communities and families as a consequence of rape;
- e. To ensure special legal and social support to women in order to aid their reporting and prosecuting of perpetrators of war crimes and human rights abuses committed during and after conflict;
- f. To conduct a gender-oriented budget analysis of humanitarian assistance and post-conflict reconstruction to ensure that women benefit directly from resources mobilized through multilateral and bilateral donors;
- g. To grant at least a temporary residence permit to women who have been raped or have been subjected to other forms of sexual violence following armed conflict.

## **2.5 LIKELY ADVERSE EFFECTS ON AFRICAN SOCIETIES**

There are different types of conflicts still going on in the African continent. From the Central African Republic (civil war), Democratic Republic of Congo (war against rebel groups), Egypt (popular uprising against Government), separatist attacks in Nigeria, rebel war in South

Sudan but to mention a few. These wars have the tendencies to become internationalized as a result of cross border migrations, globalization and refugee issues. Improperly demobilized ex-female combatants and lack of good integration can further aggravate the conflict situations.

Ex-female combatants could easily provide combat services, technical and training expertise in any theatre of conflict provided they get paid. The recruitment patterns of most irregular armies follow the paths of guns for hire and with free movements across borders it would be easier for ex-female combatants to be recruited, especially for their services in the training of other female combatants in new conflict areas. It is expected that with meaningful and purposeful integration and engagement of ex-female combatants, they will not easily be available for hire.

The spate of terrorism in Africa continues to be on the upward trend and the way that ex-female combatants are viewed after conflicts, despite their valour in battle, continues to make them potent in terrorist acts. Most ex-female combatants are not given recognition like their male colleagues. They are demobilized, asked to go home and are seen as mothers and tenders of the household. The feminine disposition which overshadows the combatant capabilities in them gives them the advantage of slipping through security checks. Women have been used for suicide attacks and to perpetuate other terrorist activities and it is my believe that proper documentation of ex-female combatants and good integration will limit their inducements by terrorist organizations.

Considering that most ex-female combatants get recruited or conscripted as young girls it might get to a situation where the demobilized combatants would become a legion of uneducated women. The significant role of women as the first level of educators in the home might be eroded if steps are not taken to accord female combatants their rightful place during

demobilization exercises and special reintegration process that will ensure that they are educated despite the years they would have lost while fighting during conflicts.

There has been rise in the formation of women organisations and gender based groups in Africa. Most of these groups are formed in response to perceived marginalization of women in demobilization and integration exercises after conflicts. Most agitations that eventually degenerate into armed conflicts start by groups making demands and their demands not being met. It is my opinion that most of the ex female combatants be properly demobilized and integrated into the society to forestall their getting involved in the various women based agitations and lending of military support to such groups.

In this chapter attempts have been made to discuss the extent of involvement of female combatants in conflicts in various African states. The reasons for the involvement of female combatants in conflicts range from the quest to prove their mettle in the face of discrimination against the female gender, to the search for means of livelihood. Other reasons include the urge to fight against oppressive governments and multinational corporations, as witnessed in the Niger Delta area. Recruitment of female combatants into regular armies is an organized venture but in irregular armies, conscription is mainly used.

It was also noted that female combatants are assigned combat, logistic and clerical roles and on the flip side, they are forcefully married away to their male commanders and also used as sex slaves. This aspect of turning them to sex slaves was observed to psychologically affect them and their quest to fight back they become involved in extreme violent acts against civilians during conflicts.

If rules that guide combat and regulate the administration of combatants are applied in all militant camps, female combatants would play their roles during conflicts without been dehumanized. It will also be easy for them to reintegrate with their families at the end of

hostilities. From lessons learnt drawn in this chapter, it is important for female combatants to be given priority during demobilization exercises. Women organizations could also be useful as stakeholders in the rehabilitation of ex-female combatants.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **3.0 THE NIGER DELTA CRISIS AND WOMEN COMBATANTS**

#### **3.1 THE NIGER DELTA AREA**

The Niger Delta region is a region in the southern part of Nigeria, covering an area of about 70,000 square kilometers comprising of the following states: Delta, Bayelsa, Rivers, Akwa Ibom, Cross Rivers, as well as Edo, Abia, Imo and Ondo States, with about one third of it made up of wetlands, swamps and mangrove forest and meandering water ways which stretch for over 300 miles from the Benin River in the West to the Cross River in the East. It is Africa's largest delta and the world's third largest mangrove. Another school of thought describes the area as a very densely populated region sometimes called the Oil Rivers because it was once a major producer of palm oil. The area was the British Oil Rivers Protectorate from 1885 until 1893, when it was expanded and became the Niger Coast Protectorate.

#### **3.2 THE NIGER DELTA CRISIS**

The conflict that engulfed the Niger Delta started in the early 1990s over tensions between the foreign oil corporations and a number of the Niger Delta's minority ethnic groups who felt they were being exploited, particularly the Ogonis and the Ijaws. Ethnic and political unrest continued throughout the 1990s and persists till date, though in varying degrees. This is despite the transition from military rule to democracy and the election of the Obasanjo government. Competition for oil wealth has fuelled violence among many ethnic groups, causing the militarization of nearly the entire region by ethnic militia groups as well as the Nigerian military and police forces. Victims of crimes are fearful of seeking justice for crimes committed against them because of growing "impunity from prosecution for individuals responsible for serious human rights abuses, which has created a devastating cycle of

increasing conflict and violence”. The regional and ethnic conflicts are so numerous that fully detailing each may be impossible. However, there have been a number of major confrontations that deserve elaboration. In these conflicts female combatants were actively involved and played combat roles that saw them engaging government security forces. Their recruitment at the initial stages of the conflict was voluntary as all they wanted was to protest against the degradation of their farmland and fishing ponds. As the conflicts escalated there was need to beef up the ranks of the militants and conscription was resorted to, they were put through tough military training and assigned tasks like their male counterparts.

### **3.2.1 Background**

Nigeria, after nearly four decades of oil production, had by the early 1980s become almost completely dependent on petroleum extraction, generating 25% of its GDP (this rose to 60% as of 2008). Despite the vast wealth created by the sale of crude oil, the benefits have been slow to trickle down to the majority of the population, who since the 1960s have increasingly been forced to abandon their traditional agricultural practices. Annual production of both cash and food crops dropped significantly in the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, cocoa production dropped by 43% (Nigeria was the world’s largest cocoa exporter as at 1960), rubber dropped by 29%, cotton by 65%, and groundnuts by 64%.

In spite of the large number of skilled, well-paid Nigerians who have been employed by the oil corporations, majority of Nigerians and especially the people of the Niger Delta states have become poorer since the 1960s. The Delta region has a steadily growing population estimated to be over 30 million people as of 2005, accounting for more than 23% of Nigeria’s total population. The population density is also among the highest in the world with 265 people per kilometre-square. The population is expanding at a rate of 3% per year and the oil capital, Port Harcourt, along with other large towns are growing at a fast rate. Poverty and

urbanization in Nigeria are on the rise, and official corruption is considered a fact of life. The resultant scenario is one in which there is urbanization but no corresponding economic growth to provide jobs. This has led to a section of the growing populace assisting in destroying the ecosystem that they require to sustain themselves. Ogoniland is a 404-square-mile (1,050km<sup>2</sup>) region in the Southeast of the Niger Delta basin. Economically viable petroleum was discovered in Ogoniland in 1957, just one year after the discovery of Nigeria's first commercial petroleum deposit, with Royal Dutch Shell and Chevron Corporation setting up shop throughout the next two decades. The Ogoni people, a minority ethnic group of about half a million people who call Ogoniland home, and other ethnic groups in the region attest that during this time, the government began forcing them to abandon their land to companies without consultation, and offering negligible compensation.

This is further supported by a 1979 constitutional addition which granted the federal government full ownership and rights to all Nigerian territory and also decided that all compensation for land would "be based on the value of the crops on the land at the time of its acquisition, not on the value of the land itself." The Nigerian government could now distribute the land to oil companies as it deemed fit. The 1970s and the 1980s saw the government's empty promises of benefits for the Niger Delta peoples fall through, with the Ogoni growing increasingly dissatisfied and their environmental, social, and economic apparatus rapidly deteriorating. The Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP) was formed in 1992. MOSOP, spearheaded by Ogoni playwright and author, Ken Saro- Wiwa, became the major organization representing the Ogoni people in their struggle for ethnic and environmental rights. Its primary targets, and at times adversaries, have been the Nigerian government and Royal Dutch Shell.



Beginning in December 1992, the conflict between Ogonis and the oil majors escalated to a level of great seriousness and intensity on both sides. Both parties began carrying out acts of violence and MOSOP issued an ultimatum to the oil companies (Shell, Chevron, and the Nigeria National Petroleum Corporation) which demanded some \$10 billion in accumulated royalties, damages and compensation, and "immediate stoppage of environmental degradation", and negotiations for mutual agreement on all future drilling.

The Ogonis threatened to embark on mass action to disrupt their operation if the companies failed to comply. By this act, the Ogoni shifted the focus of their actions from an unresponsive federal government to the oil companies engaged in their own region. The rationale for this assignment of responsibility was the benefits accrued by the oil companies from extracting the natural wealth of the Ogoni homeland, and neglect from central government. The government responded by banning public gatherings and declaring that disturbances of oil production were acts of treason. Oil extraction from the territory had slowed to a trickle of 10000 barrels per day (1600m<sup>3</sup>/d) (.5% of the national total).

The discussion of the build up of conflicts in Ogoniland is an attempt to provide answers to the causes of conflicts in that region and the gradual but steady mobilization for combat by the people of the area. At the beginning of the conflicts, women were in the fore front the protests in what analysts described as community leaders trying to capitalize on the meek disposition of women to put them in front of the fire line. It is believed that because of the various protocols protecting women during conflicts, they would be spared during battles but the assertion turned out to be false. The government security forces did not differentiate women from men in their onslaught against protesters and men and women were treated alike during combat. Therefore, when protests graduated to proper mobilization for war, women

were recruited, trained and deployed for combat like their male counterparts. The theory of Amazon feminist was pushed through by the female combatants as they proved that they could perform well in all aspects.

Military repression escalated, soldiers and mobile policemen appeared in most Ogoni villages. In one day, four Ogoni chiefs were brutally murdered. Saro-Wiwa, head of the opposing faction, had been denied entry to Ogoniland on the day of the murders, but he was detained in connection with the killings. The security forces, led by Major Paul Okuntimo of Rivers State Internal Security, claimed to be searching for those directly responsible for the killings of the four Ogonis. However, witnesses say that they engaged in terror operations against the general Ogoni population. Amnesty International characterized the policy as deliberate terrorism. By mid-June, the security forces had razed 30 villages, detained 600 people and killed at least 40. This figure eventually rose to 2000 civilian deaths and the displacement of around 100 000 internally displaced persons.

In May 1994, nine activists from the movement who would become known as ‘The Ogoni Nine’, among them Ken Saro-Wiwa, were arrested and accused of incitement to murder following the deaths of four Ogoni elders. Saro-Wiwa and his comrades denied the charges, but were imprisoned for over a year before being found guilty and sentenced to death by a specially convened tribunal by General Sani Abacha, on 10 November 1995. The activists were denied due process and upon being found guilty, were hanged by the Nigerian state.

The executions were met with an immediate international response. The trial was widely criticized by human rights organizations and the government of other states, who condemned the Nigerian government’s long history of detaining their critics, mainly pro-democracy and other political activists. The Commonwealth of Nations, the United States, the United

Kingdom, and the EU all implemented sanctions, but not on petroleum (Nigeria's main export). Shell claims it asked the Nigerian government for clemency towards those found guilty, but its request was refused. However, a 2001 Greenpeace report found that "two witnesses that accused them (Saro-Wiwa and the other activists) later admitted that shell and the military had bribed them with promises of money and jobs at shell. Shell admitted having given money to the Nigerian military, who brutally tried to silence the voices who claimed justice". As at 2006, the situation in Ogoniland has eased significantly and the transition to democratic rule in 1999 greatly assisted the transition. However, no attempts have been made by the government or an international body to bring about justice by investigating and prosecuting those involved in the violence and property destruction that have occurred in Ogoniland, although a class action lawsuit has been brought against Shell by individual plaintiffs in the US.

The roles played by the multinational corporations in the conflicts in Ogoniland deserve attention. The oil majors were accused on several occasions of complicity and even sued at various international courts. The degrading of farmlands in the area partly accounts for protests by women and this later developed into full combat. If the oil majors had collaborated with international bodies, who possess the right expertise to address the needs of ex-female combatants at the end of hostilities, the female combatants would enjoy proper recognition. A comprehensive resettlement programme that is funded by the multinational corporations would have helped them settle down to normal life.

### **3.2.2 Ijaw unrest (1998-1999)**

The December 1998 Ijaw Youth Conference, crystallized the Ijaw's struggle for petroleum resource control with the formation of the Ijaw Youth Council (IYC). This led to the issuing of the Kaiama Declaration. In it, long-held Ijaw concerns about the loss of control of their

homeland and their own lives to the oil companies were joined with a commitment to direct action. In the declaration, and in a letter to the companies, the Ijaws called for oil companies to suspend operations and withdraw from Ijaw territory. The IYC pledged “to struggle peacefully for freedom, self-determination and ecological justice,” and prepared a campaign of celebration, prayer, and direct action, *Operation Climate Change*, beginning December. In December 1998, two warships and about 10,000 Nigerian security forces were deployed to Bayelsa and Delta states as the Ijaw Youth Congress (IYC) mobilized for operation Climate Change. Soldiers entering the Bayelsa state capital of Yenagoa announced they had come to attack the youths trying to stop the oil companies. On the morning of 30 December, two thousand young people processed through Yenagoa, dressed in black, singing and dancing.

On January 4, 1999 about one hundred soldiers from the military base at chevron Escravos facility attacked Opia and Ikiyan, two Ijaw communities in Delta State. Bright Pablogba, the traditional leader of Ikiyan, who came to the river to negotiate with the soldiers, was shot along with a seven-year-old girl and possibly dozens of others. Of the approximately 1000 people living in the two villages, four people were found dead and sixty-two were still missing months after the attack. Nonetheless, Operation Climate Change continued, and disrupted Nigerian oil supplies through much of 1999 by turning off valves through Ijaw territory. In the context of high conflict between the Ijaw and the Nigerian Federal Government (and its police and army), the military carried out the Odi massacre, killing scores if not hundreds of Ijaws. Subsequent actions by Ijaws against the oil industry included both renewed efforts at non-violent action and attacks on oil installations and foreign oil workers.

The mobilization of large number of youths to confront the government security forces that were deployed to the Niger Delta area accounts for initial recruitments by the Niger Delta militants. The presence of women in nearly all the protests made it easy for the women to be recruited and trained like their male counterparts and it is ironic that the same militant leaders who conducted the recruitment did not protect the interest of female combatants during demobilization exercises at the end of hostilities. If the militant leaders, who had acknowledged the competence of the female combatants, had pushed for their rehabilitation and resettlement, there would have been reduced involvement of ex-female combatants in violent crimes.

### **3.2.3 The creation of the Niger Delta Development Commission**

The Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) was established by President Olusegun Obasanjo with the sole mandate of developing the petroleum-rich Niger-Delta region of southern Nigeria. Since its inauguration, the NDDC has focused on the development of social and physical infrastructures, ecological/environmental remediation and human development. The NDDC was created largely as a response to the demands of the population of the Niger Delta, a populous area inhabited by a diversity of minority ethnic groups. During the 1990s these ethnic groups, most notably the Ijaw and the Ogoni established organisations to confront the Nigerian government and multinational oil companies such as Shell. The minorities of the Niger Delta have continued to agitate and articulate demands for greater autonomy and control of the area's petroleum resources.

## **3.3 THE NIGER DELTA MILITIAS**

### **3.3.1 The emergence of armed groups in the Delta region**

The ethnic unrest and conflicts of the late 1990s (such as those between the Ijaw, Urhobo and itsekiri), coupled with an increase in the availability of small arms and other weapons, led

increasingly to the militarization of the area. At that time, local and state officials had become involved by offering financial support to those paramilitary groups they believed would attempt to enforce their own political agenda. Conflagrations had been concentrated primarily in Delta and Rivers States.

Prior to 2003, the epicentre of regional violence was Warri, one of the cities in the region. However, after the violent convergence of the largest military groups in the region, the Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force (NDPVF) led by Mujahid Dokubo-Asari and the Niger Delta Vigilante (NDV) led by Ateke Tom (both groups were primarily made up of Ijaws), conflicts became focused in Port Harcourt and outlying towns. The two groups dwarf a plethora of smaller militias supposedly numbering more than one hundred. The Nigerian government classifies these groups as "cults", many of which began as local university fraternities. The groups adopted names largely based on Western culture, some of which include Icelanders, Greenlanders, KKK, and Vultures. All of the groups were constituted mostly by disaffected young men from Warri, Port Harcourt, and their sub-urban areas. Although the smaller groups are autonomous from within, they formed alliances with and are largely controlled from above by either Asari and his NDPVF or Tom's NDV who provided military support and instructions.

The NDPVF's explicit goal was to acquire control of regional petroleum resources and they attempted to control such resources primarily through illegal oil "bunkering", a process in which an oil pipeline is tapped and the oil extracted onto a barge. Oil corporations and the Nigerian state point out that bunkering is illegal; militants justify bunkering, saying they are being exploited and have not received adequate profits from the profitable but ecologically destructive oil industry. Bunkered oil can be sold for profit, usually to destinations in West

Africa, but also outside Africa. Bunkering is a fairly common practice in the Delta but in this case the militia groups are the primary perpetrators.

The intense confrontation between the NDPVF and NDV seems to have been brought about by Asari's political falling out with the NDPVF's financial supporter Peter Odili, governor of Rivers State following the April 2003 local and state elections. After Asari publicly criticized the election process as fraudulent, the Odili government withdrew its financial support from the NDPVF and began to support Ateke Tom's NDV, effectively launching a paramilitary campaign against the NDPVF. Subsequent violence occurred chiefly in riverine villages southeast and southwest of Port Harcourt, with the two groups fighting for control of bunkering routes. The conflagrations spurred violent acts against the local population, resulting in numerous deaths and widespread displacement. Daily civilian life was disrupted, forcing schools and economic activity to shut down and resulting in widespread property destruction. The state campaign against the NDPVF emboldened Asari who began publicly articulating populist, anti-government views and attempted to frame the conflict in terms of pan-Ijaw nationalism and "self-determination." Consequently the state government felt uncomfortable and invited the security forces.

The government forces collaborated with the NDV during the summer, and were seen protecting NDV militiamen from attacks by the NDPVF. The states forces failed to protect the civilian population from the violence and actually increased the destruction of citizens' livelihood. The Nigerian security forces were widely reported to have used the conflict as an excuse to raid homes, claiming that innocent civilians were collaborating with the NDPVF. Government soldiers and police obtained and destroyed civilian property by force. The NDPVF also accused the military of conducting air bombing campaigns against several

villages, effectively reducing them to rubble, because it was believed to be housing NDPVF soldiers. The military denies this, claiming they engaged in aerial warfare only once in a genuine effort to wipe out an NDPVF stronghold. Innocent civilians were also killed by NDPVF forces firing indiscriminately in order to engage their opponents. At the end of August 2004 there were several particularly brutal battles over the Port Harcourt waterfront; some residential slums were completely destroyed after the NDPVF deliberately burning down buildings. By September 2004, the situation was rapidly approaching a violent climax which caught the attention of the international community.

At this stage of the conflict the identities of the main leaders of the militant groups had been established. They had also delved into illegal oil bunkering in a bid to increase their revenue base to guarantee steady source of income to fund the campaign against government security forces. It was observed that the female combatants were very instrumental to the marketing of the illegally gotten crude oil. The female combatants were also reported to have been used to illegally process stolen crude oil into petrol and diesel with which the militants fuelled their vehicles and boats. This further explains the roles played by the female combatants during the conflicts. If the aspect of marketing that the female combatants were good at was harnessed during the post conflict training, the ex-female combatants would have been trained in marketing in various fields and this would ensure that they are gainfully employed in production firms.

### **3.3.2 The Nigerian oil crisis**

After launching a mission to wipe out NDPVF, approved by President Olusegun Obasanjo in early September, Mujahid Dokubo-Asari declared “all-out war” with the Nigerian state as well as the oil corporations and threatened to disrupt oil production activities through attacks on wells and pipelines. The all out war embarked on by the NDPVF was targeted at oil



installations and a new dimension of kidnapping of expatriate staff was added to the campaign. In response the Nigerian government launched a massive military crackdown on militants. They patrolled waters and hunted for militants, searched all civilian boats for weapons and raided numerous militant hideouts.

### **3.3.3 Rise in Piracy**

Starting in October 2012 Nigeria experienced a large spike in piracy off its coast. By early 2013 Nigeria became the 2<sup>nd</sup> most pirated nation in Africa next to Somalia. The Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) is believed to be behind most of the attacks. Since October 2012 MEND has hijacked 12 ships, kidnapped 33 sailors, and killed 4 oil workers. Since this started the United States has sent military experts to train Nigerian soldiers in maritime tactics against pirates. Although the Nigerian military has now learned new tactics against pirates' attacks still occur on an almost regular basis.

The declaration of war by the militants against the government and against oil companies witnessed the female combatants dropping their role of marketing of illegally gotten crude oil to involvement in combat. They were used as boat operators, took part in raids against oil installations in the region, are involved in piracy and confronted government security forces just like their male combatants. When the government decided to explore the option of declaration of amnesty to all militants, it was expected that the female combatants would be the major beneficiaries because of the roles they played. The Amazon feminism brought out the gallantry in the female combatants but the traditional ways of viewing women as keepers of homes took the better part of the implementers of the post conflict programmes. Available records show that they were relegated to the background.

### **3.3.4 2009 Government Amnesty**

On June 26, 2009, the Nigerian Government announced that it would grant Amnesty and an unconditional pardon to militants in the Niger Delta which would last for 60 days beginning on 6 August 2009 and ending 4 October 2009. Former Nigerian President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua signed the amnesty after consultation with the National Council of State. During the 60 day period armed youths were required to surrender their weapons to the government in return for training and rehabilitation by the government. During the 60 day period militant leaders led their groups to surrender weapons which includes; Rocket-propelled grenades, guns, explosives, ammunition and even gunboats have all been surrendered to the government.

## **3.4 THE WOMEN COMBATANTS**

From time to time in world history women have served in combat roles disguised as men or in leadership roles as queens (such as Queen Boudica, who led the Britons against Rome; Joan of Arc is the famous example). In the First World War Russia used an all-female combat unit. In the Second World War, hundreds of thousands of British and German women served in combat roles in anti-aircraft units, where they shot down thousands of enemy fliers. In the Soviet Union, there was large-scale use of women in the frontlines as medical staff and political officers. The Soviets also set up all-female sniper units and combat fighter planes. A few women also played combat roles in resistance movements in the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia. After 1945 all these combat roles were ended in all armies, and the experiences were forgotten. Throughout most of recorded history, war fighting has been officially considered a “males only” activity with laws and policy established to reflect and maintain that exclusivity. Yet, women have always served, even if “unofficially.” During the last fifty years significant changes have occurred both in the nature of war and in determining who is

eligible to “officially” participate in wars. Technological advances in weaponry and the diminished desire of men to serve in the military coupled with the evolution of the societal roles of women emerge as pivotal components driving that change. It is instructive to note that in the Niger Delta conflict female combatants undertook virtually the same roles like their male counterparts. They fought in the frontlines, carried out reconnaissance and operated speed boats during attack missions.

### **3.5 RECRUITMENTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

The recruitment of combatants in the Niger Delta by the militants followed the same patterns among all the groups. It consists of two main patterns; these methods are through recruitments by desire and by conscription which followed the general patterns of the armed militias in West Africa. In the Niger Delta, most women who were part of the militias were actually conscripted. The multifaceted roles of women during the conflict situations in their communities in the Niger Delta as mediators, combatants, caregivers and even economic providers for the family accounts for their roles during the crisis. The impacts of the conflict on the women in this region which include the increased level of gender-based violence is best captured by Thelma Ekiyor in her article Female Combatant in West Africa: It was pointed out that women volunteered to join militant groups in the hope of preserving their lives and dignity and provide for the well being of their families.

The destruction of infrastructural systems; internal as well as cross-border displacement and the change in traditional roles imposed by conflict explains why I argue that the female ex combatants deserve greater recognition than they are being accorded. The women have experienced sexual violence, domestic violence, economic deprivation and mental torture just to mention a few, and have coped in various ways such as by migrating, and adapting to

change in traditional roles. Violence is used as a tool to keep women in their place. Women were exposed to more brutal forms of violence in militant camps and were often ridiculed. They were told that if they wanted to fight like men they should endure pain like men. They also cope by either voluntarily or forcefully engaging in armed conflict or engaging in informal means of livelihood. There is a growing evidence of women's participation as combatants in the armed conflict in the Niger Delta region, as well as women's activism and protests against the conflicts. Other reasons ranging from poverty, homelessness and the desire for wealth partly informed why some voluntarily joined the armed groups in the Niger Delta.

Margaret Idoko was a formidable and resourceful woman combatant who worked for MEND as a spy, weapon wielder and a seducer. In the interview conducted with her, she claimed responsibility for number of information that led to the attacks on some oil vessels and installations in the Niger Delta. Margaret Idoko explained why she is proud member of MEND. "I come from a poor family and my parents were unable to neither send me to school nor give basic necessities which a child needed to have. My friends who joined earlier were able to have good lives and since I joined MEND, I have been able to do so many things and also assist my family." Margaret Idoko represents a group of women combatants who were lured into the business of arms because of social and economic necessities. This is a case of a woman who voluntarily joined because it was seen to be an avenue to become wealthy and live a fulfilled life. This position raises a lot of questions. Was one of the reasons for the emergence of the militia groups the need for self-aggrandizement? Are the activities of the group a true reflection of the aspiration of the Niger Delta people? Are the militia groups truly represented in the desire for the emancipation of the Niger Delta people? Are self-interests the basic agenda that informed the emergence and activities of the groups? These and other

related questions actually underscore the personal interest theory underpinning the explanation and reasons advanced by John Demuzer. The second group are those who voluntarily joined the militant groups for selfless interest. Benson Agate represents this group. In an interview with her she stated that “I voluntarily joined the Asari group because I want to fight and save my people from this devastation and conspiracy of the Federal Government. I fought and I will fight in the future if the situation persists”.

This represents a situation of selfless interest as the main desire that informs why a group resolved to take up arms in defence of certain objectives. Another group were those conscripted to take up arms, perform certain responsibilities or in certain cases, perform dual or multiple responsibilities. This entails force and in some cases threats. This group are often placed under serious surveillance and in some cases threatened with death if they refuse to either join or carry out certain assignments. This group often turn out to become the most rabid elements among the female combatants.

The female combatants did not really go through detailed and comprehensive training but they were trained in arms carriage, spying and pretensions. Like their male counterparts, they rely more on their instincts, intelligence, fearlessness and bravery in the discharge of their duties. This explains the nature of the rugged training they received in the creeks which was mainly aimed at toughening them. The Amazon Feminism theory aptly captures the roles that were played by female combatants during the Niger Delta conflict. The female combatants displayed acts of valour like their male counterparts and it remains a paradox that the female combatants are relegated to the background in the post conflict programmes. According to a News Agency of Nigeria report dated 4 June 2013, only 500 female ex-combatants have benefited from the post amnesty training programme of the Nigerian government. The

number is very insignificant compared to the number of female combatants who took part in conflicts in the Niger Delta region. It is expected that if the female combatants are rewarded like their male colleagues, they would inspire women in other fields of endeavour to put in their best because rewards will be sure when necessary.

The rare sights of women involvement in violent confrontation with security forces within the Niger delta region was discussed in this chapter. Some of the protests that culminated into shoot outs and even fatalities were touched on. It was brought out that environmental degradation leading to destruction of farmlands and fishing ponds motivated women in the Niger delta area to join their male counterparts in militant camps. Farming and fishing were reported as the main occupation of the women in the region and the loss of the means of their livelihood partly accounts for their willingness to join ranks with male combatants to fight against government and oil firms like Chevron, Agip, Mobil etc.

It was also noted that in the aftermath of the conflicts, women were as usual treated as second fiddle. Their male colleagues were trained in several institutions in Nigeria and outside the country to enable them integrate into the society and to gain employment. The female combatants were decamped and told to reunite with their families and only a few of them have so far benefitted from the post amnesty programme.

The continuous involvement of women in protests within the region even after the conflict is one of the effects of improper mobilization. The theory of Amazon feminism supports the strength and character displayed by women at all times during conflicts and protests in the Niger delta area. If the female combatants are properly demobilized and trained in various trades, they would engage in money making ventures through the right means. They would also contribute to nation building rather than engaging in crimes as is the case today.

The presence of children born out of unwanted pregnancies as a result of sexual affairs in the various militant camps was discussed as well. It is important for the government to give adequate support to the ex-female combatants to enable them train the children in this category. It is my view that ex-female combatants with such children require special orientation to help them nurture the children. If this is not carefully handled, such children will grow up under psychologically affected mothers and this will negatively impact on them and the societies will be worse for it.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **4.0 WOMEN COMBATANTS AND POST CRISIS NIGER DELTA.**

#### **4.1 POST CRISIS WOMEN COMBATANTS**

Women in the Niger Delta are like their counterparts in the other parts of the world and considering the terrain in the area the women are saddled with heavy tasks of catering for their families. The division of roles between the male and female sexes, as prescribed by most cultures assign the subordinate position to women. As a consequence, the women have for long suffered various forms of brutality, discrimination, inequality, exclusion and violence. According to Oakley, theory in social sciences has developed without the benefit of women's voices on their experiences. One needs to know the plight of women generally, all over the world to be able to understand the particular case of the women of the Niger Delta, who are

so poor despite living in an oil producing area. The exploration of oil in the area has brought about environmental degradation and poverty and subsequent crisis that engulfed the area.

Ololade (2009) captured the situation of women in the Niger Delta thus, “Niger Delta women perform certain economic responsibilities within the family as wives, mothers, farmers and breadwinners. They are the principal care givers of the children and the aged. Even though they are food producers, harvesters and cooks, they are also expected to function as the wage earners. This is because the intra housing income distribution pattern and the rise of matriarchal household in the country, coupled with poverty, force them to take active financial role in their families. Since most of them are uneducated and therefore unemployed outside the home, their major source of livelihood is subsistence farming as they comprise 60 to 80% of the agricultural labour force and account for 90% of family food supply”

Analysing the genesis of modern day brutality against women in the Niger Delta area, scholars have pointed to the beginning of exploration and exploitation of oil in this area. According to these scholars, the exploitation of oil resources in the Niger Delta has resulted in particular economic and environmental conflicts, with the female folks bearing the brunt of the situation. Studies have shown that oil provides over 90% of Nigeria’s foreign exchange earnings presently, yet the people of the Niger Delta, especially the women are among the poorest in Nigeria. This is because in the area where the men are known to always go in pursuit of contracts, the women are engaged in full time farming. Thus in the upland area where agriculture activities are high, crop yields have greatly declined, this is largely due to the fact that farmlands have been taken away from women, who are the main farmers.

These lands have been used for laying oil pipelines which criss-cross the land and contaminate it. With these situation, there is acute shortage in arable land for agriculture,



hence the attendant food shortage. The direct impact is that it has led to a situation within the region where the already impoverished women must import food from other parts of the country leading to high cost of food. It is also worthy of note that despite the agony of these women, 90% of them still rely on the use of other crude implements like cutlasses, hoes, knives to carry out their farming activities.

The above situation in the area has not in any way lessened with the coming of the multinational oil giants, rather they have continued to bear the brunt of hardship in times of conflict. Available evidence indicates that women in the area were subjected to all kinds of violence, sexual violence such as rape, physical violence such as beatings, maiming and murder, as well as destruction of their properties. They have suffered unimaginable human rights abuses for which redress is unattainable because their husbands and sons have been killed and maimed in the conflict and women have had to assume burdensome responsibilities as heads of households. To this they have not been able to respond with violence like their male counterparts.

As a result of the above, women have resorted to mild protests, which to a large extent have not yielded much meaningful result. This is attested to by the massive non-violent protests by women from several communities in the Niger Delta since the Ogharefe women protest against Pan Ocean, an oil prospecting company in the Niger Delta area. The tactics and determination of the women forced the chevron oil company to send their representatives to negotiate with the women. During the negotiation, the women made clear their position, in which they asked the oil companies to make concrete efforts at improving the economic, environment and social conditions of the people. However, at the end of the day, no concrete attempt was made by the oil companies and did not implement their Memorandum of

Understanding, instead the company chose to use divide and rule tactics to destabilise the women.

In the case of Pan Ocean, the company bluntly refused to pay the people any compensation, despite the series of protest, carried out by the women between 1984 and 1986. This was also the case of shell in 1999, which refused to compensate the community despite the protests both in Nigeria and in London, particularly against gas flaring; these indeed are glaring manifestation of infringements on the rights of the women and outright denial of compensation for taking the source of livelihood and the destruction of the environment. This has relegated women in the area to the background despite their immense contributions to the economy of the area, especially in the area of food production. This position of subordination, lack of opportunities as well as their exclusion from decision making, make them more vulnerable to poverty. This is apart from the fact that most of these companies have refused to offer them meaningful employment in their firms.

This situation has created a large commercial sex market in the region with all the associated health and social problems. It is in the Niger Delta region that the country has recorded one of the highest levels of HIV/AIDS. The presence of the affluent oil workers in the mist of such poverty in the region has led to high rate of prostitution. This had earlier been observed by earlier European visitors to the area in the early 1900's. For example, the Benin Province report as documented by Akubor(2005) captured it thus, "the company policies which destroyed the family cohesion among the peasants forcing them to seek cash paying jobs, led to massive migration of the physically fit individuals to the nearest urban centres to seek their fortune.....the female members of the group constitute naissance to the community and environs.....this was because most of them were forced into prostitution, since they were

never able to get occasional jobs like the men.....this group of people were greatly patronised by young men, who worked in the foreign firms.....a lot of them go about the camps and towns...begging for money.....they seduced them to buy them wearing apparels and trinkets”

However, Thomas (2003), has a different perspective of this problem, whereby he contends that the multinational oil workers have often been very brutal to women, behaving like animals as they take advantage of the poor hungry illiterate girls of the Niger Delta by making them victims of their lust forcefully. These girls according to the scholar inhabit creeks and villages separated by rivers and seas and had little contact with the outside world. This he argued is due to devastation caused by the crises in the area as well as the denial of these areas access to basic social amenities and marginalization by the federal government, multinational oil companies and sometimes by leaders from such areas. Thomas further testified that the conditions of the women and young girls is akin to the stone age, due to the situation in the area, thus making them fall victims to these men. At the end of their search and exploitation for oil, the workers leave the women behind with no contact address. They leave behind young unemployed mothers and children.

The activities of these explorers are not restricted to only single ladies/girls. The biting poverty in these communities has forced some married women to respond positively to their lusty demands. At the end, these women who think they have found solutions to their problems realise later that their situation have been made worse. Closely related to this fact is that, the women have suddenly become articles of trade in the hands of both the foreign workers and those who promise to make life better for them outside the crises area. This has resulted in human trafficking in which most women and girls from the area have been sold

out for the purpose of prostitution, which is a form of modern slavery. For instance, in 2002, 15000 Nigerian women and girls were engaged in prostitution in Italy alone, while countless more were going about it in Nigeria. In fact, 95% of these numbers were from the Niger Delta area alone (JDP/Caritas Nigeria 2008). Analysis shows in Edo state alone, over 150 families have been traced so far and contacts between them and their daughters, for those still in their destination countries have been established.

The above statistics shows that the situation that forced some women into taking up arms in the region is still very potent. The female combatants returned to the communities to find that young women in the area continue to engage in all manner of crimes as a result of the destruction of the sources of livelihood. While the women discussed above are not part of the female combatants, they contribute to the frustrations of the ex-female combatants. This is because the female combatants feel a sense of loss as what they fought for was still at play. Part of their struggle was for the recognition of women, especially by the oil producing firms. It was their hope that having lost their farmlands and other means of survival, they would be trained and gainfully employed. This did not happen and their male colleagues rather benefited from their involvement in the conflict. They returned to meet young women who looked upto them but they did not have anything meaningful to offer them and this accounts for the high rate of women involvement in crime in the post conflict period. They offered their fellow women what they knew best, which is violence. The case may become different if the oil companies embark on a constructive contribution to the education of the girl child in the region and the rehabilitation of the ex-female combatants.

Disruption of operation of oil prospecting firms, street protests and violent confrontations with security agencies are crimes that have continued to be witnessed in the Niger Delta area

and involving female combatants after the conflict and amnesty programme. It is also observed that these modes of crime are organised which reflects the training received by the female combatants. This underscores the issue of lessons learnt on roles of women in peace and security in the Niger Delta and other parts of Africa, which is one of the objectives of this study. The trend of violent activities bears semblance to the situation that heralded the crisis in the Niger Delta area. It is clear that the government has put in place measures to end the conflict but has not institutionalised measures to forestall a repeat of conflicts in the area. It is therefore safe to argue that lessons learnt from the conflicts are not being applied, especially as it affects women and ex-female combatants.

If the government compels oil firms and other multinational corporations in the area to set aside certain percentage of their annual profit for the training of the girl child within the Niger Delta area, it would help develop the girls and keep them away from vices that are associated with girls living around oil producing areas. It is further believed that if the oil firms and multinational communities in the area introduce the women to green house farming methods as practised in some countries in the world, the conflict over land degradation will cease. The green house farming method entails crop production in an enclosed area under regulated temperature. This requires technical knowhow and government and their development partners can train women in the area in such farming techniques. The government could also obtain soft loans to enable them have a smooth take off and acquire new farm lands for them within the vast Niger Delta Region. This will reduce conflicts in the area and the lessons learnt from past crisis would have helped to cater for women in the area and for the integration of women combatants into a new source of livelihood.

The theoretical framework used in this study supports the above suggested approach. The strength of character of the women, their quest for success in all fits of endeavour, and their urge for equality and recognition is a push that will propel them to success. Their energies will therefore be channelled towards nation building at the grassroots.

#### **4.2 WOMEN COMBATANTS AND THE AMNESTY PROGRAMME**

Another policy instituted by the Federal Government of Nigeria in its effort and drive to end the violence in the Niger Delta is a policy of social accommodation known as the Amnesty Programme. This programme aimed at re-engaging the combatants and militants in the Niger Delta in a legal means of livelihood. At the core of this programme was the vision of re-integration of the combatants into the society. Through this, the militants and combatants would creatively participate in the development of the country on one hand and on the other hand, live normal lives guaranteed by the constitution. This programme did not however specify a carefully thought out plan for the rehabilitation of women relative to the social importance of this group to the society. This has been partly seen as a reflection of the social history of the area which apparently consigns women to the background. A feature that has no basis in contemporary schemes of the roles played by modern women in the society

A study has revealed an un-encouraging number of women who have benefitted from the Amnesty programme till date. It was further revealed that less than ten percent (10%) of women out of the total population of the beneficiaries of the programme are women. More interestingly is that the programme is now a subject of political patronage and not genuinely extended to the true beneficiaries. This reveals the insincerity that has come to characterise the implementation of the Amnesty programme, in addition to its actual inadequacy. Several ex-combatants of NDPVF have sprang up here and there on different and new platforms such

as Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), Movement for the Niger Delta People (MONDP), Martyrs Brigade and others. The groups have one thing in common; armed agitation for recognition in the amnesty programme and the ex female combatants cash in on the opportunity to present their case, though in violent ways in some cases. The methods they adopt include taking foreign oil workers hostage, destroying oil facilities and killing of armed soldiers in the creeks.

The political militant groups such as MEND, MONDP and others are still up in arms. Fringe groups such as the criminal cult groups are also involved in hostage taking and demand for ransom and also unleash senseless violence on rival cultists and unsuspecting innocent persons. Because of injustice and lack of recognition in the amnesty programme some of the criminal cult combatants have now metamorphosed into political militant groups and vice-versa (Naagbantou 2007). Former female combatants have been paraded by the police as members of such criminal gangs and they have always cited neglect in the post conflict activities as their reason for joining criminal gangs.

#### **4.3 PROBLEMS OF INTEGRATION OF FEMALE COMBATANTS**

The problem of integration of female combatants is rooted in the structure and culture of the Nigerian societies. Job vacancies in the oil industry are reserved mainly for the male folks and the idea of viewing women as the weaker sex, that are good for keeping the homes has not helped matters. However, the Federal Government of Nigeria responded to the crisis in the Niger Delta in a number of ways. Direct military confrontation was instituted and applied as a way to bring peace and order to the Niger Delta. This method appears to have recorded little success because rather than curb the crisis, or contain the insurgency and violence, the resolve of the various Niger Delta militant groups to continue direct confrontation and recruitment

increased. The Niger Delta environment becomes more threatened than ever. The insufficiency of this approach was partly informed by the goals of the Federal government of Nigeria to protect the multinational oil firms in the Niger Delta in order to maintain the Federal Government in-flow of revenue. Largely, insincerity of the government elites to protect their businesses using the government instruments of violence rather than addressing the major reasons that primarily informed the armed rebellion in the Niger Delta was responsible for the increase in the activities of the militants.

No serious attempts on the parts of the Federal Government of Nigeria and the States in the Nigeria's oil region to painstakingly institute programmes directed at integrating the female combatants in the Niger Delta. The existing programmes of action were holistically addressed on how the uprising and violence in the Niger Delta could be addressed for the benefit of the government and the oil firms. The establishment of institutions like the Niger Delta Development Commission, Delta State Oil Producing Areas Development Commission and the Ministry of Niger Delta were attempts by the government of Nigeria to address the crisis in the region. The government further granted amnesty to the combatants as was announced on 26 June 2009. The militants were given a period of sixty days to surrender, receive unconditional amnesty or be considered criminals. Female ex-combatants have continued to be relegated to the background in the amnesty programme just as they were made to play second fiddle in the various militant camps despite their prowess in combat. Thus, the demobilized women in the Niger Delta have found interests in other violent activities.

Two main reasons have been identified for the apparent documentary and policy neglect of women combatants in the Niger Delta. Firstly, the nature of Nigeria's democratic project, process and party politics endeared the violent women to the Nigerian political elites who



found them useful in the perpetration anti-legal process of winning elections. Secondly, institutional decay and un-responsive attitude of policies in Nigeria to social upliftment of the citizens was advanced. This situation created a situation of unemployment and unready institution that could re-absorb the women combatants to re-integration and provision of positive alternative means of existence. An evaluation by Tomorrow a New Day (TND) a project that is funded by the EU under its Instrument for Stability and implemented by Search for Common Ground (SFCG) in three states, in the Niger Delta area found that the TND has enabled the communities to identify and address local problems and to develop appropriate responses, particularly on issues of inclusion and re-integration. This was accomplished in part by the project's work on coalition building, which successfully engaged marginalized groups including women, youth, and ex-combatants on core conflict issues, such as re-integration of former combatants, chief/elder conflict with youth, and tension between security forces and the broader community. For example, the evaluation determined that now almost three quarters of survey respondents feel that the Amnesty process has contributed to reconciliation and wants to see the process expanded to ensure that more ex-agitators are re-integrated.

It also concluded that 78% of survey participants feel that over the last 2 years, the relationships between security forces and the community have improved. Overall TND has been effective in engaging with ex-agitators and in developing inclusive structures which facilitate re-integration and this highlight the value of inclusive and grassroots processes and structures with a good level of local ownership. While these projects aimed at reintegration are laudable, female combatants still suffer neglect. In the Beijing Platform of Action it is stated that women's full involvement in all efforts for the prevention and resolution of conflicts is essential for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security. Subsequently,

international organizations such as the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) also adopted resolutions stressing that women and men might be affected differently by conflicts and crisis and also that women can make relevant contributions to peace building. Despite the above provisions, female ex-combatants continue to be left out in conflict management in the Niger Delta area. It is important to note that the female ex-combatants can be very instrumental to finding lasting peace in the area if they are given their rightful place and due recognition.

#### **4.3.1 Impact on female ex-combatants**

The issues and problems of women combatants in Africa and particularly in the Niger Delta area of Nigeria have attracted scholars and policy makers to its effects and not just to its cause and dynamics. Although, earlier researches appears to have greatly focused on the problems of child soldiers in Africa and West Africa in particular. The issue and problems of women combatants in the Niger Delta of Nigeria is fraught with a lot of significant but negative effects on the Niger Delta society in particular and the region in general. This has unbearable effects on the Nigeria's social landscape. The effects include socio-psychological, political and economic with both immediate and long terms outcomes.

#### **4.3.2 Socio-Psychological Effects**

The engagement of women in combats in has created an environment of unwilling women who have now embraced violence as a source of livelihood. The depreciation and loss of female social attitudes and responsibilities left an army of women who appears to have lost sense of woman's social responsibilities. The Niger Delta environment presents a clear example of a gory story that clearly depicts where engagement of women in combats and wielding of arms have led to the neglect of social responsibilities associated with womanhood.

Niger Delta of Nigeria is an environment where weapons of war of different dimensions are freely moved about. Women, who have taken part in the rebellions in the Niger Delta, now play the roles of custodian of arms, they engage in violent crimes and also train young girls in violent trades and crimes ranging from prostitution to armed robbery, stealing of votes, assassinations, kidnappings and vandalization of crude oil pipelines. The import of this is that the women who have engaged in combats and fought bravely along with their male counterparts are now going through psychological deformation which explains their preference for illicit and destructive trades rather than tenderers of children and custodian of positive values and virtues.

While examining the participation of women in combat in Africa and its psychological implications on women, Brenda argues that several years of wars in post-colonial Africa and the degree of women participation shifted the primary responsibilities of women to the attracted trade of armed wielding and killings and today, we see women who love violence and also encourage it rather than pacificators role which primarily was expected. Joan appears to have a clearer context of understanding the psychological effects of wars in Africa on women who engaged in combats. He argues that the language of violence and the methods of its accumulation and uses created a new culture which women in Africa appears to have imbibed and they are now ready tool in the hands of rebels in different nations. The women now understand only the culture of war and violence. The psychological implications of armed wielding on African Women have no doubt created a new group of violent women in Africa. This situation has entrenched the culture of war and violence and readily available women soldiers who needs re-orientation and rehabilitation.

#### **4.3.3 Political and Economic Implications**

The political and economic implications of the activities of women combatants in have been well documented. The entry of women of this category into politics armed rebellion altered seriously to the economic and political structures of the Niger Delta area. Niger Delta has a rich pre and post- colonial histories of ambitious trading and agricultural activities.

Niger Delta environment is blessed with enviable geography that encourages various economic activities. Not only were the pre-colonial Niger Delta merchants engaged in long distant trade, they were equally very wealthy as a result of the trading activities which involved different articles. The enormous wealth was to reflect in the opulence that characterised the royal courts and the outward look of the merchants and princes of the Niger Delta. Agricultural production flourished in the Niger Delta and this explains the sufficiency of food and the multi-subsistence food economy that continues to be an enviable feature of the Niger Delta.

Niger Delta women played significant roles in businesses and farming just as men because these ventures were not exclusive to men. The attachment to land by the Niger Delta women could be compared to what was obtainable in any pre-colonial African society. The post-colonial modernizing features and its trappings have not changed enormously the love and attachment to land by the Niger Delta women. Ezetang gave a vivid and clear analysis on the activities of the trading and farming about the Niger Delta women in the pre-colonial and post-colonial times. The women were so glued to their lands and they also engaged in various trading activities which included trading across the seas with neighbouring kingdoms and the post-colonial era has witnessed a transformation in their business engagements. One of the transformations is becoming war mercenaries - a combatant business which greatly affected the percentage of women who now engage in farming and trading activities. This is a serious

economic effect of the wielding of arms by women in the Niger Delta who abandoned trading and farming for more dangerous business of war because of the benefits at the time despite its obvious dangers, and because of neglect after the conflicts.

Politically, the Nigerian environment is partly heated by the post war political engagement of women combatants. Women joined different political blocks in the Niger Delta. Some joined pro-government groups while others joined the oppositions to earn a living in a post war Niger Delta environment. This is in the absence of educational opportunities and the existing limited economic prospects in the country. Women combatants have been playing active roles in political violence in the Niger Delta area. One of the ex female combatants boasted of how they have been used at different times to unleash terror on the opposition and also on how the female ex-combatants take part in various electoral crimes. She explained how she has been graciously doing all these obnoxious works with happiness for the sake of the huge financial benefits that comes with it. The effects of this on Nigeria political landscape are numerous. A willing tool is always available to the politicians who are willing to engage illegal methods of winning elections. Secondly, the existence of this group remains a threat to Nigeria's democracy. Thirdly, the political landscape of Nigeria continues to be insecure and lastly, an army of a violent group is always available to sabotage the system.

From a gender perspective, the above situation explains the feminist claim to prowess. The ex-female combatants point out their exploits in the field of violence and this is captured in the theory used in this study. If they could excel in many areas as described in the theory, they can be masters of violence, especially with the training they had received. This feminist push for recognition and for equality if properly channelled could help female combatants and

indeed women to engage in productive ventures that would make them feel fulfilled and equal to their male counterparts.

Women experience oppression in the domestic sphere, within the context of the community as well as through formal and social institutions controlled by men. Women who volunteered to join irregular military movements and groups in the Niger Delta region may have thought that by joining the groups they would have broken the myth of male dominance in the area of combat, and that they would be treated equally as men. The change of the role of the women from housewives and mothers to combatants has caused a further decline in their status as forced marriages and rape seem to be common amongst combatants.

This study has also looked into the area of differential experience and treatment of male and female combatants during and after their exit from combat duties. At the stage of recruitment, the male combatants were mainly volunteers who turned out for recruitment while the female combatants were volunteers but a large number of them were conscripted. In the assignment of tasks, the male combatants were mainly assigned to combat duties. On the other hand, the female combatants were deployed as human shields at the stage of protests. When the protests metamorphosed into full scale combat, the same women were used to play combat roles and were forcefully taken as wives by the male commanders and some of them even used as sex slaves. The female combatants by their natural calling were deployed as caterers and also made to handle other logistic functions in the militant camps. The male combatants had the privilege to rise to high ranks while the female combatants usually remained within the low ranks.

In the post-conflict activities, the male combatants were the first to be documented for local and overseas training with assurance of job placement in oil prospecting firms and their

affiliated companies. The female combatants on the other hand are not really given recognition in the rehabilitation programme and the few that have benefitted are given such training that continues to confine them to menial jobs like operating hairdressing salons. This differential treatment meted to male and female combatants portends a threat because with conflicts breaking out in different parts of Africa, the ex-female combatants could be a ready source of recruits to war lords.

At the end of this chapter, it has become apparent that female combatants have been neglected to a large extent in the post-conflict and re-integration activities in the Niger Delta area. The female combatants receive the same kind of training with their male counterparts and combined combat and domestic roles throughout the conflict. This neglect has led to their involvement in violent crimes and to the recruitment of women who suffer neglect within their communities. The lessons learned from the activities of women based organisations who are always available to push for gender equality has not been harnessed towards the wellbeing of the female combatants and other marginalised women. It is safe to say that the female combatants and other women organisations have so much to offer to the society and that if the government and all agencies that are involved in the search for lasting peace in the Niger Delta and indeed other parts of Africa give the women their pride of place it would go a long way to achieve the desired peace and security

## CHAPTER FIVE

### CONCLUSION

The presence of female combatants has remained a permanent feature in the history of conflicts and rebellion against constituted authorities in Africa. Various conflicts in the African continents have been used to illustrate the roles of female combatants, their recruitment procedure and their conduct and bravery during combat. The way they are made to play the dual roles of fighters and also as wives to their male commanders were delved into. Paradoxically, the female combatants are not given their pride of place as fighters during combat and during peace processes and demobilization exercises. This research work seeks to establish that female combatants do not take the back seat during combat and that the continuous neglect of this category of people portends danger in African communities. It is my belief that if female combatants are adequately catered for during demobilization and rehabilitation exercises, the cases of women involvement in violent crimes will be reduced. The case of women in prostitution as a result of the feeling of abandonment after conflicts could be reduced if women are given their pride of place.

The Niger Delta was just an example which illustrates the general situation in Africa. The crisis in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria and indeed the African continent has always been eruption of bottled up issues of political exclusion, economic deprivation and inequality among other issues. Most conflicts have witnessed female combatants playing active roles both in the frontlines and in support roles as logisticians. The theoretical framework adopted for this research, which is the Amazon Feminism aptly captures the valor of the opposite sex and portrays the fact that women are capable of matching their male counterparts in physical activities. Paradoxically, women are not treated on equal terms with men at the end of



hostilities and during demobilization and reintegration exercises. This situation therefore calls for a grandiose programme of action which has the capacity to deter illegal recruitments and conscription of women into rebellions in any form. The programme of action must be regional in orientation. This will help a lot in upholding Africentric moral doctrine which places women in a respectable position beside their forceful recruitment as agents and instrument of war. This programme must be holistic in vision and intention. This will prevent their forceful recruitment on one hand and the re-integration of those earlier recruited into the mainstream of the society which accept them and afford them new opportunities for the actualization of their dreams outside rebellion and arms wielding.

## **FINDINGS**

Inquiries in the course of this project has shed light on areas that have not been given adequate attention by many scholars. Women and indeed female combatants have been seen from the prism of vulnerable people. While this project is not trying to debunk that assertion, information gathered points to the fact that women and female combatants play active role during conflicts. Female combatants are involved in information gathering and such information is processed into intelligence upon which operations are planned.

It also came to the fore that female combatants are assigned logistic roles in various militant camps. These include catering services, ordinance stores management and clerical duties. However, some of the male commanders take some female combatants as wives and other are sex slaves. This attitude of subjecting female combatants to roles of wives and sex slaves was noted to psychologically affect the female combatants. They see themselves as equal partners to their male counterparts during combat and find it very ironic that there are attempts to make them play second fiddle and this brings out the vicious aspect in them. It was further noted that this vicious part is exhibited against civilians during conflict as the

female combatants seek to prove a point to their male counterparts. Therefore, if the female counterparts are restricted to logistic duties and are not subjected to sex slavery in the militant camps, vicious attacks by the female combatants on civilians will be reduced. This is because as noted earlier, female combatants are observed to be vicious during combat in a bid to prove a point to their male counterparts.

Another finding is that despite exploits during conflict by female combatants, they are not fully integrated into post conflict plans. Their male counterparts are absorbed into government as was experienced in Liberia after the rebel movement toppled the sitting government while the female combatants are told to return to their traditional roles of keeping the home. On the other hand, if a warring faction lays down arms and accepts amnesty from government as was the case in the Niger delta region of Nigeria, the male combatants are trained in various institutions to enable them settle back to normal life while very few of the female combatants receive post-conflict training, the bulk of the female combatants return to their communities very bitter.

Women who run homes and educate children at elementary levels are usually left out in post-conflict processes. Many women organizations that could be incorporated into post conflict activities to fast track the rehabilitation of female combatants are completely sidelined. Most female based organizations advocate for the rights and equality of the female gender and they are in good position to advance the course of the female combatants and if given the opportunity, they could help re-integrate the ex-female combatants into their various communities.

The effects of the neglect of female combatants in post-conflict activities have been visible in the inability of many of the female combatants to get married. Some of them continue to engage in activities that they consider exciting like they were used to during conflicts as

against the sedentary lifestyle of household chores. Some of the activities include armed robbery, Sea robbery, kidnapping and violent protests but to mention a few. If properly engaged by government agencies, ex-female combatants would not be engaged in sundry crimes and violent protests.

The male combatants are viewed as possessing the capacity to do damage and are rehabilitated to the neglect of the female combatants. However, globalization has made recruitment into terrorist organizations a very easy venture and the neglected female combatants present a ready army to be recruited by terrorist gangs. They also engage in trans border crimes like drug and human trafficking which is made easy for them by the military training they have acquired.

## **WAY FORWARD**

Some protocols that have been put in place to ensure the safety of women during conflict have been discussed in the course of this work. However, it is important for the UN and other regional organizations to promulgate additional protocols to protect the interest of female combatants across Africa. Issues to be addressed should include conscription and equal treatment for female combatants with their male counterparts. Laws should be enacted to the effect that all female combatants should be given special post-conflict training to enable them fit into family and communal life. The laws should also criminalize any form of stigmatization against ex-female combatants. Women based organizations should be incorporated into post conflict efforts aimed at rehabilitating ex-female combatants. These will reawaken the female gender in them and down play the vicious traits that they had acquired in the course of conflicts thereby facilitating reunion with their families.

Issues affecting female combatants should be institutionalized and taught in schools to achieve long term results. The girl child should be educated on the dangers of involvement in combat on the side of irregular armies, especially as societies do not accord them recognition despite their exploits. They should be encouraged to enlist into regular armies that have terms and conditions that regulate their engagement. The idea of directing female combatants to return to their household chores after conflicts without the due process of screening and demobilization creates cover for the very vicious ones to escape prosecutions for atrocities they may have committed. This accounts for the fact that hardly any female combatant is prosecuted for war crimes in conflicts in Africa. Ex-female combatants should be documented, screened, and where capable, be prosecuted for war crimes like their male counterparts as this would check crimes against humanity as perpetuated by female combatants during conflicts.

There should be a regional framework for monitoring the rehabilitation process of female combatants. Emphasis should be on monitoring and evaluation of the progress of the ex-female combatants. Areas of success in the rehabilitation programme should be shared among African states for all to implement while problem areas should be reviewed to correct failed strategies. This framework should be anchored on the platform of the AU and other sub regional bodies.

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