

THE CRIMINAL ENTERPRISE OF KIDNAPPING IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The goal of this study is to explore kidnapping as a social problem in Nigeria and critically analyse the root implications to the country's economy and possibly proffer solutions to what looks like a bush fire engulfing the whole country. The paper uses documented reports from newspapers, internet and other electronic media as well as the general accounts of kidnapping incidences by witnesses. The paper is divided into seven sections. Immediately following the introduction is the literature review, next is the general background to kidnapping in Nigeria. The third section attempts to explore the various forms and motivation for kidnapping in the country. The fourth section looks at the general implications of kidnapping to the Nigerian economy. The next section is on remedies and suggested solutions. The last section is on surviving kidnapping in case it happened, and a conclusion is drawn. The study revealed that kidnapping has a very terrible effect on the economy as potential investors are scared away. The volume of investments and capital flow has reduced significantly. The government should therefore square up to the situation to quickly eradicate this scourge so that the economy will not collapse.

Keywords: Kidnapping, abduction, hijacking, hostage taking, social problem.

INTRODUCTION

"Kidnapping" according to the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary means taking somebody away illegally and keeping him/her as a prisoner, especially to get money or something else for returning him/her. It means to abduct somebody, to take somebody away by force and hold him or her prisoner usually until a ransom is paid. The kidnapping

phenomenon in Nigeria has taken an alarming dimension, such that it now rivals for the first place business in Nigeria. Nigeria today is one of the major kidnapping capitals of the world; a criminal act which first attracted national attention on 26th February 2011 (Jidefor Adibe, 2006).

This was when some Niger Delta militants first kidnapped foreign oil workers to press home their demand. This has since become ubiquitous and commercialized. It has spread from the Niger Delta to virtually all parts of the country. Victims are no longer only foreign oil workers, but also Nigerians, old and young. In some cases, toddlers, grandparents and especially aged parents of the well-to-do in the society that could be blackmailed into coughing out a ransom are kidnapped. The perpetrators of the heinous crime have also changed from Niger Delta Militants to 'dodgy elements' from deferent walks of life — armed robbers, the unemployed, professional 4l9ers, Boko Haram, and so on. It is distressing that kidnapping for Journal On Environmental Management And Disaster Risk Reduction Institute Of Nigeria (JEMDRRI) Vol. 4 No.1 2024 15 ransom has become a burgeoning business in many parts of the country. A young couple in Lagos announced recently that their only child, a 10-months old Enioluwa, has been kidnapped (Ifedayo Adebayo). Investigations would later reveal that the kidnapping was planned across three West African countries - Nigeria, Cameroun and Republic of Benin. This case shows how large the business of kidnapping has become, how well planned and intricate it has become. Enioluwa's kidnappers executed their crime through a nanny agency. Thus kidnapping has metamorphosed over these few years in Nigeria. What sprung from the struggle for resource control in the Niger Delta region has invariably spread to other parts of the country; Port Harcourt, Enugu, Awka Ibom, Benin, Lagos. Bauchi, Jos, Maiduguri, Kano and Sokoto have been hotbeds of commercially motivated kidnapping. In an attempt to increase the ransom payable the kidnappers now kidnap Monarchs, Traditional rulers, high profile business tycoons, children of wealthy politicians and actors.

LITERATURE REVIEW

There is the common tendency to blame this pervasive wave of kidnapping on the agitation that existed for decades in the Niger Delta. It is blamed also on the high rate of unemployment in the country or on the ostentatious displays of wealth by the negligible upper class in the society or on the loss of our African value system or on the youths inordinate desire for affluence. However, the root and rise in kidnapping in Nigeria can be traced to what Townsend (2008) referred to as "natural resource nationalism," that is, the tendency to seek bigger shares of the returns from natural resources. It is also compounded by what Omeje (No date) termed "accumulation politics," that is, the tendency for the ruling class to be involved in endless accumulation of natural resource rents accruing from the land through deliberate act of marginalization and deprivation.

Defining what is kidnapping poses a number of definitional problems in relation to a country's legal and moral viewpoints as well as the availability of other viewpoints. Mohammed (2008) attempted some clarification of the definitional position of the term with respect to the legal point of view of some countries. He used Malaysia, for instance, to illustrate that the kidnapping of adults within the borders of Malaysia comes under the heading of abduction in sharp contrast to the United Kingdom meaning. Chitterbuck (1987:4 cited in Mohammed) also attempted to clarify some terminological differences between kidnapping, hostage taking and hijacking. He argued that where hostage taking and hijacking are concerned, the victims are held in a known location, such as a plane, a ship, or a building. He further noted that hijacking may be thought of as a refinement of hostage taking when a vehicle of some kind is seized along with its passengers. Perceived economic marginalization gave rise to militant agitations which gave birth to kidnapping in the Niger Delta. After the Federal Government introduced the amnesty programme, which was embraced by militants, the 'left overs' of the militants, the political thugs, who were not hitherto part of the militancy agitations, but appear to have been those used and dumped by their political godfathers now picked up the vice. They became an army of unemployed youths who now started to engage in this nefarious activity.

GENERAL BACKGROUND TO KIDNAPPING IN NIGERIA

What began in the South-South geo-political zone gained entrance into the South-East Zone spreading gradually into the South-West, and then to the Zones in the North facilitated by the Northern variant as the Boko Haram. By 2010, all the major cities in the country has become hot spots and dreaded places for kidnapping.

Kidnapping in Nigeria has taken on an alarming and disconcerting dimension that a former Inspector General of Police, Ogbonnaya Onovo, said "it tends to threaten the substratum of our national security". Kidnapping has grown over the years as an industry involving every level of the society and motivated by many reasons. Kidnapping has taken such an alarming dimension in Nigeria, such that it has become a big business. However, it is believed that the spread of kidnapping to other parts of the country is a fall-out of the militancy confrontation between the militants and the Federal Government. The militants, who were discharged from their Niger Delta bases like Gbaramatu kingdom, etc, were forced to relocate to other areas where they continued their trade of kidnapping as a means of survival. There is yet another group of kidnappers who though are not militants, believe that kidnapping as a business pays with minimum risk of being caught. This group follows the general trend of Nigerians who like to go into any business that they consider lucrative. When the 'pure water' business first started in Nigeria, many Nigerians became pure water manufacturers with some going to the ridiculous extent of bagging untreated water as 'pure water'. When finance house business was the 'in-thing' in the early 1990's, many Nigerians had also owned finance houses; the rest is history. The

same goes for kidnapping which many idle, and unemployed young men and women believe is lucrative and so have equally embraced it.

The ogre has broadened and taken unfathomable derivation in the land where many able-bodied but unemployed youths proliferate. Within the South-east, Abia State is the epic centre followed by others in the region. Just as it is in that region, so it is in the other regions of the country. Everybody is now concerned. It is expected against obtainable verification that rich government officials, traditional rulers, elected politicians, and their immediate families are now the target of these men of evil intentions.

There appears not to be a hiding place for the rich, even though some of them have relocated their families to Abuja and the very rich outside the country. Recently, the genuine profit-making activities in Aba, the commercial nerve centre of Abia State, were crippled as banks were forced to close their doors against demanding customers after frequent violent attacks on banks. As it is in Aba so it is in Uromi, Ora, Auchi and Ekpoma all in Edo State; where for days and sometimes for weeks running the banks will close their doors to customers who require daily banking transactions for business survival.

Kidnapping has generated serious frightening thoughts in the minds of Nigerians and foreigners alike. This has resulted in investors being afraid to establish industries on our soil. This has gone beyond the abduction of oil workers to kidnapping of top government functionaries, wealthy clergymen, royal fathers, eminent jurists, journalists, actors, high profile businessmen, even lecturers or anybody who by imagination has a relation in Nigeria or overseas who can cough out huge monetary ransom.

Other factors aiding the proliferation Of kidnapping include amongst others, the alarming unemployment situation in the country, the poor value system in the land and government insensitivity to the plight of her citizens and unfaithfulness to her policies.

Unemployment of graduates has assumed an alarming situation in the country. Many young and able-bodied graduates do not any longer have a sense of belonging. They are idle, very idle. No jobs and no hope in our Hobbesian jungle, where life is nasty, brutish and short. There is no capital to venture into a productive business.

Conversely, they erroneously believe that the way out is to kidnap and thereby begin to live in affluence on 'unearned income'. This is because the value system in Nigeria has dropped drastically. Nobody seems to bother anymore as to how his neighbour made it. Once one begins to live in affluence, he is invited to be Chief launcher of that and Chairman of the other occasion. The African value system which emphasizes morality, faithfulness, and communalism, 'being your brothers' keeper has been jettisoned. People now betray their relations, kill and kidnap to get a booty from the ransom.

Nobody now cares whose ox is gored; very poor. The government has a blame in this matter of kidnapping since it has consistently been unfaithful to her policies. Year's back the government came up with a policy that any Nigeria graduate with second class upper

and above will be given automatic employment while the other graduates will be employed eventually. This has not happened.

The people of the South-South region have complained of marginalization, neglect, deprivation and dehumanization since 1956 when oil was first discovered in Oloribiri (Ojeifo: 2008:46). Yet with all the promises, policies and what have you no adequate pipe borne water to show, no good roads, no good health facilities, no good schools. This is what led to the agitations in the first instance.

VERSIONS OF KIDNAPPING IN NIGERIA

Kidnapping which has assumed alarming dimensions in the country has taken on different forms and shades in the country. As mentioned earlier, its occurrence and impact started to be felt in this country when agitation for resource control started. However, there are some other factors that may have contributed to the emergence of kidnapping in the country. According to Akpan (2003) apart from the wider consciousness of the people over the years, social, economic and political' reasons have come to play prominent roles for the rise in the kidnapping dairy of recent. These factors are explored under separate headings as follows:

- a.** Kidnapping as a General Liberation Struggle: Earlier versions of kidnapping in the Niger Delta region had no monetary attachment as the key motivating factor. It was seen as part of the liberation struggle by the movement for the Emancipation of Niger Delta (MEND) for the development of the state. In most cases, it was part of the outcome of a confrontation between MEND and oil interests or the Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN).
- b.** Kidnapping for Economic Reasons: Zanelli (2006, citing Gerth and Mills 1948:56-57) has raised the idea that kidnapping is regulated by the laws of demand and supply and is a type of social action that involves the calculation of the most efficient means to the desired ends. Kidnapping in Nigeria is become a social enterprise. According to The Nation (10th May, 2002), "Kidnappers are business men, they just Journal On Environmental Management And Disaster Risk Reduction Institute Of Nigeria (JEMDRRI) Vol. 4 No.1 2024 18 happen to be on the illegal side of it... if you deprive them of the demand then there is not going to be any supply. Why should I kidnap somebody who will not pay?" (The Nation, 10th May, 2002, cited in Zanelli 2006). As kidnapping was first used as a weapon to fight for economic and environmental justice in the Niger Delta, the economic motivation was intermittently used as a means to find and sustain the fight.
- c.** Kidnapping as a Political Tool: This case is what Turner (1998) describes as "money and politics". Where there are political reasons for kidnapping but at the same time ransoms are also demanded. The money gotten or sums realized are used to further the kidnapping organization or simply to facilitate the survival of

the organization. Here kidnapping is seen as an instrument of political vendetta and to settle political scores. The operation is targeted mainly at key politicians, or foreign contractors working for Government. Once there is a victim, a high-level negotiation is gone into which ultimately leads to heavy ransom. Such a ransom is used to further the political goals, self settling of aggrieved groups or a way of crippling a serving politician financially. d. Kidnapping to Extract Money from Mentors or the Government: Most of the notable kidnapping gangs in the country today, particularly in the Niger Delta were “used and dumped” political thugs. Most of them were used by their mentors during elections but dumped after swearing-in. But because they are still aimed and there is no adequate compensation, they regroup against their mentors. These groups specialize in high profile kidnapping. They own very powerful sophisticated weapons which surpasses the capabilities of the state security agents.

- d. Kidnapping as a New Habit of Crime: It is not uncommon these days for unemployed youths to take leisure or substitute kidnapping for robbery or pickpocketing. These groups are not necessarily interested in high profile kidnapping for huge ransoms but those with little lucrative ransom. These group abduct children, adults and known relations of colleagues even if it is for some recharge cards of between 20,000.00 and N30,000.00 (Twenty Thousand and thirty thousand Naira) only. Robbers and other criminal groups have taken advantage of this new trend for earning a living.

IMPLICATIONS OF KIDNAPPING TO THE NIGERIAN ECONOMY

Kidnapping has affected development in the country in very negative ways. Daily, Nigeria loses billions of naira. Closure of local and multinational businesses has caused rising cost of living. Insecurity of lives and properties is the norm rather than the abnormal.

According to the former Minister of State for Petroleum, Odein Ajumogobia (Nigeria Tribune, May 21, 2009, P. 1), Nigeria loses N8.7b daily as a result of the ongoing kidnapping and hostage taking. This according to him is something to be sad about because Nigeria has the capacity to produce 3.2 mbd. Today the country is down to about less than half of that in terms of production, but it is picking up since the amnesty programme of the Federal Government. According to Jamiu (2009) Oil Companies operating in the Niger Delta are being hit with increased costs of production due to kidnapping of their staff. In the face of growing insecurity, it is becoming very difficult to keep fearful staff. So, more payment is made by way of insurance, salaries, and other perquisites to retain some of them.

Journal On Environmental Management and Disaster Risk Reduction Institute Of Nigeria (JEMDRRI) Vol. 4 No.1 2024 19 Amiefon Udoh, daughter of the Chairman of Abak Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State was murdered and kept at the gate of her school

even after her father had paid a ransom of N10,000.000.0 (Ten Million Naira) only to the kidnappers (Saturday, Tribune May 30, 2009. p. 3). Similarly, four members of Nigerian Union of Journalist (NUT) and their driver were kidnapped and held hostage by the kidnapper at A Sate for about a week before they were released due to pressure mounted on them by the Federal Government and the Media (This day Newspaper, July 18, 2010 pp. 1-2). Earlier the Chief Medical Director of University of Benin Teaching Hospital (UBTH), Professor Michael Ibadin was kidnapped in Benin and. released days after.

This was after the family has paid a ransom to the abductors (The Nigerian Observer, April 19, 2010, pp 1- 2). This incidence made the doctors in TJBTH to go on strike for some days with the health of patients in jeopardy. In. fact, the authorities of UBTH discharged the patients in their sick condition because they would not be attended to. Insecurity has disrupted socio-economic activities in the country.

The pace of economic growth and development is slowing down gradually. Many investors continue to flee the country relocating to neighbouring West African Countries, like the Michelin Tyre Industry that relocated to Ghana from Nigeria. The National Association of Chambers of Commerce, Industry, Mines and Agriculture (NACCIMA) had expressed regret over the serious security problems in Nigerian particularly, in the Southeast.

The criminal enterprise of kidnapping is making industries close shops and investors not forthcoming to the country because of insecurity and other attendant problems faced by businesses. The socio-economic and political milieu of a community or society change is because of the existing realities of the society. Therefore, the kidnapping experiences in Nigeria should not be seen as a surprising thing. Looking back, we find that this phenomenon is a fall out of the man-made inherent inequalities in the Nigeria socio-political system. To say the least, these inequalities or if you like call them irregularities for so they have become, give impetus to the rising waves of crimes in our society. Kidnapping has now become a common crime because of the ill-gotten gains by the perpetrators.

Victims of this commercially induced crime include traditional rulers, high profile businessmen, children and relations of wealthy persons. Husband/wives are kidnapped to extort money from their spouses, children are kidnapped to extort money from parents and aged parents are kidnapped to extort money from their children. Chelsea's management company confirmed on Thursday 22' August, 2011 that Chelsea's midfielder John Obi Mikel received a "sizeable" ransom demand for the return of his kidnapped father (Vanguard Sports, Friday, August 23, 2011). The father of the Nigerian Chelsea Star, Michael Obi was abducted on 12th August 2011 in Jos on his way from work. Police spokesman, Olusola Amore told The Associated Press that detectives found Michael Obi in Kano.

Kidnapping for ransom in Nigeria is now a full-blown business. In the case of Obi's father, the abductors demanded the sum of 80,000 pounds. This case has even introduced a twist in the whole set-up as two military personnel are among the five abductors arrested. These criminals are becoming more daring and deadly by the day. The kidnappers now even go to sacred places of worship like Churches to look for prospects (victims). This has left a general sense of insecurity in the land. This is forcing some prominent Nigerians to relocate to Abuja on almost permanent bases. It is making potential investors not to ever contemplate coming to the country. What? This is certainly not a good omen.

In discussing this obnoxious social stench, which has eaten into the fabrics of our values and morals it must be mentioned that kidnapping as a phenomenon is a socio-economic and political problem. Kidnapping is playing a very negative role in the economic activities of the country. For example, it is scaring away foreign investors, hindering economic growth, since even the local investors or businessmen are afraid to invest in new businesses as they could be the next target.

At this point, foreign and home investors have reduced significantly. Kidnapping is causing a lot of economic hardships to the nation. In most of the cities mentioned earlier the string of armed robberies and kidnapping is causing so much of insecurity driven by criminality and violence. People cannot go to the banks Business premises are closed for days. Banks operate underground and for very few influential people. Criminal gangs have left residents of Aba, Bauchi, Jos, Kano, Auchi, Uromi, and Ekpoma living in a state of insecurity. Very recently the Nigerian upper house of parliament (Senate) had to summon Security Chiefs for a briefing on the growing insecurity in the country, particularly in the southeast.

The National Association of Chambers, Commerce Industry Mines and Agriculture (NACCIMA) recently, expressed regret over the serious security problems in the South-East region. It said that "the security challenges have worsened the already bad and unfriendly business environment. And this is negatively affecting the growth of business and socio-economic activities in the area". The statement continued, "if industries are closing shops and investors are not forthcoming because of insecurity and other attendant problems faced by businesses, then the future, particularly that of the children should agitate the minds of everybody."

REMEDIES AND SUGGESTED SOLUTIONS

Kidnapping is negatively impacting the entire nation. The three tiers of government should see the problem of kidnapping as a national problem and tackle it as such. It is not insurmountable. After all when relations of high profile government officials are picked they are recorded almost immediately as in the case of the father-in-law of the Deputy Governor of Edo State, Chief Felix Okungbowa. In a jiffy the culprits were apprehended

paving way for other kidnapped persons discovered in the hide-out to be freed. No ransom was, paid. (The Nigerian observer, June 28, 2011). So, if the government takes up the problem with all the seriousness it deserves and addresses it squarely kidnapping will be a thing of the past very soon in Nigeria. The call in some quarters that Nigeria should restructure into a true federation, including true fiscal federalism should be heeded at this time. Imagine the problem of the payment of the 2011 new minimum wage where almost all the state governors, apart from some few, kept saying unless there was additional money from the centre only then would they be in a position to pay. Classically, federalism is regarded as a system of government in the centre and the federating units are each, within a sphere, coordinate and equal.

According to Jideofor Adibe “a true federalism cannot work in Nigeria under the present condition where the federating units are atomized into 36 unviable states, which are dependent on the centre for their survival”. This is seen as the bases for the inequality in the country. In this sense, true federalism may involve merging of some states in the present unwieldy number of 36 States to between 10 and 12 regions. This would make them to be financially independent. This done, the federating units should be allowed to run their own police force and to take appropriate sanctions within the ambits of the law, to protect the citizens within their territory.

Each federating unit should have a Journal on Environmental Management And Disaster Risk Reduction Institute Of Nigeria (JEMDRRI) Vol. 4 No.1 2024 21 database of people living in its territory, including information about those gainfully employed or otherwise. There should be a combined team of Soldiers, Policemen and State Security Agents to conduct covert operations as was the case when the eleven-year-old Jamila, daughter of the former Registrar, Corporate Affairs Commission was recovered in Bauchi.

A clear antidote to kidnapping is for the culprits to be apprehended either at the point of abducting the victim or at the point of collecting their ransom as was the case of Jamila mentioned above. The intelligence and surveillance units of the security agencies should be overhauled to live up to expectation by giving intelligence reports before these things happen.

Security agents especially policemen at checkpoints should be more vigilant than ever by observing the faces of the occupants of vehicles, especially when there is an alarm of a kidnap in the area. This scourge of kidnapping is racing for the front seat of the insecurity problems bedevilling the country. It will therefore not be out of place to invite the assistance of the international community in dealing with this problem. Our former colonial masters, Britain and Israel that has indicated interest to assist can be contacted in this regard so that sanity can return to the country.

Finally, the bill on terrorism of which kidnapping is a component part recently passed by the National assembly should be allowed to see the light of day. Punishment for kidnappers must be enforced. State Houses of Assembly in the country should follow the

example of Delta State House of Assembly by enacting laws that would make kidnapping punishable by death.

SURVIVING KIDNAPPING

Kidnapping is rampaging many parts of the world. In fact, it is a thriving business in many countries, Nigeria inclusive. The following is an attempt to let a kidnap know what to do in case he is kidnapped.

According to the U.S. Department of Security, remember you are only of value to them alive and they want to keep you that way. Therefore, passive cooperation is the best. You may be blindfolded, drugged, handled roughly or even stuffed in the booth of a car. If you are drugged, do not resist. Their purpose will be to sedate you and make you more manageable. These same drugs may actually help you to get control of your emotions.

In fact, this should be your immediate goal. And then you will be able to consciously follow your captor's instructions. However, each case of kidnapping is different, but the following will assist when you find yourself in a quagmire:

- a. Try to establish some kind of rapport with your abductors. Avoid political discussions but listen to their point of view. If you know their language, listen and observe and if addressed use it.
- b. Plan for a lengthy stay. The more time that passes, the better your chances of being released alive. Your captors may adopt the strategy of confusing your time by taking your wristwatch from you, keeping you in a windowless cell or serving meals at odd hours. What you do is to approximate time by noting changes in temperature between night and day. The frequency and intensity of outside noises, e.g. traffic, birds, will further assist you. Journal On Environmental Management And Disaster Risk Reduction Institute Of Nigeria (JEMDRRI) Vol. 4 No.1 2024 22 3.
- c. In most cases, you may be isolated. Your captors may try to disorient you, but it is important you mentally maintain control.

CONCLUSION

Conclusively, it must be said that kidnapping is alien to the culture of Nigeria. Every part of the country - the West, the East, and the North are known for living communal life, of being our brothers' keeper. The various ethnic groups in this country practice communalism more than anywhere else in the world.

This is why all well-meaning Nigerians including the clergymen and Royal fathers should join the Government in fighting vigorously to put this menace to an end. Kidnapping,

which has become a serious criminal problem has many implications on the economy and the general developmental efforts of the nation. Most kidnappings, especially in the South-South involve foreign workers and development partners. The effect on the economy is very enormous as it scares away potential development partners and robs the country of the benefit of such development alliances and opportunities. With a daily rise in cases of kidnapping; it is very clear that available and potential investors fear doing business in Nigeria.

Now foreign and home investors to the country have reduced drastically. Oil company workers and other businessmen and women have fled the country. The volumes of investments and capital flown have reduced significantly. Time has come for the government at all levels to tackle the problem of kidnapping with all seriousness and address it squarely. The law enforcement agents should be adequately armed for this purpose. Journal On Environmental Management and Disaster Risk Reduction Institute of Nigeria (JEMDRRI) Vol. 4 No.1 2024 23.

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