The use of Indigenous Intelligence and Diplomacy in the Combat of Oil theft: The experience of the Nigeria Security and Civil Defense corps.

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps' (NSCDC) use of indigenous intelligence networks and indigenous diplomacy in combating oil theft in Rivers State, Nigeria. The research employs a multi-disciplinary methodology combining qualitative primary data collection through interviews and field observations with a thorough review of secondary sources encompassing academic journals, policy documents, and media reports. The study is theoretically framed within structural functionalism, which conceptualizes the NSCDC and indigenous community actors as interdependent parts of a social system performing essential functions to maintain security and social order. Findings reveal that the NSCDC's integration of indigenous intelligence leveraging deep local knowledge and community informants and indigenous diplomacy engaging traditional rulers and mediators significantly enhances its operational effectiveness in detecting,

disrupting, and prosecuting illegal oil bunkering activities. This collaboration embeds security efforts within the sociocultural fabric of the Niger Delta, fostering trust and community participation. However, the NSCDC faces substantial challenges including the difficult terrain of the Niger Delta, mistrust and suspicions between communities and security forces, the adaptive tactics of sophisticated oil theft syndicates, coordination difficulties with other security agencies, and resource constraints.

To address these challenges, recommendations propose enhancing community trust through transparent engagement and informant protection, capacity building with improved technology and training, strengthened inter-agency coordination frameworks, formal incentive mechanisms for indigenous informants, community-driven socio-economic development programs, institutionalizing indigenous diplomatic protocols, and expanding rapid response capabilities tailored to the riverine environment.

Introduction

The Niger Delta, where Rivers State is located, is the epicenter of Nigeria's oil production, contributing a significant percentage of the nation's crude oil output. Yet, this oil wealth has been accompanied by deep-seated challenges including pipeline vandalism, illegal oil bunkering, and theft, causing severe economic and environmental consequences, notably revenue losses, environmental degradation, and disruptions to local livelihoods.. The strategic importance of Rivers State in the oil sector makes it particularly vulnerable to the economic sabotage of oil theft, a threat that destabilizes the region's security architecture and undermines national economic stability.

The NSCDC, empowered with mandate to protect critical national infrastructure including oil pipelines, has intensified efforts in Rivers State to combat crude oil theft. Their approach blends formal enforcement mechanisms with innovative reliance on indigenous intelligence networks leveraging local communities' knowledge, observations, and loyalties to detect and preempt acts of illegal bunkering and pipeline vandalism (NSCDC PRO statement, 2025, NAN; ThisDayLive, 2024). This intelligence-sharing approach recognizes the local population not merely as passive subjects but as active partners whose indigenous

knowledge provides critical insights inaccessible to conventional security apparatus. As noted by the FCT NSCDC Commandant, security collaborations with indigenous communities enhance timely and confidential intelligence that heightens the effectiveness of security responses within diverse local contexts, reinforcing communal safety as a collective responsibility (Leadership News, 2025).

In addition to intelligence networks, the NSCDC's operational strategy incorporates indigenous diplomacy a pragmatic framework rooted in culturally respectful engagement with local traditional institutions and leaders. Traditional rulers and community leaders have long played pivotal roles in mediating local conflicts and curtailing illicit activities including oil theft, acting as intermediaries between the state security agencies and local actors.

The NSCDC's partnership with these indigenous authorities channels social leverage and customary sanctions, thereby reinforcing anti-theft campaigns with localized acceptance and communal enforcement, which formal law enforcement alone might struggle to achieve.

The establishment of the Commandant General's Special Intelligence Squad (CG's SIS) is a notable institutional innovation in this regard, combining sophisticated investigative capacities with grassroots intelligence inputs from indigenous networks in Rivers State. The CG's SIS has recorded measurable successes by dismantling large illegal bunkering operations and arresting offenders through credible tips from local informants, showcasing how indigenous intelligence integration strengthens operational outcomes (ThisDayLive, 2024; NAN, 2025). These efforts are further supported by recent state and federal initiatives including the deployment of NSCDC gunboats to secure waterways and improved inter-agency collaboration targeting economic sabotage in the oil sector (Economic Times Nigeria, 2022).

However, oil theft remains a complex challenge fueled by intricate criminal networks, local vulnerabilities, and economic incentives that require sustained multi-dimensional strategies. The NSCDC's dual reliance on indigenous intelligence and diplomacy introduces a nuanced security paradigm that goes

beyond brute force, enabling more culturally embedded, context-specific, and socially legitimate responses to oil theft in Rivers State. This approach also underscores the critical need for security agencies to recognize community knowledge and traditional institutions as vital assets in Nigeria's broader national security framework.

.This research aims to comprehensively analyze the strategic utilization of indigenous intelligence networks and indigenous diplomacy by the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC) in combating the pervasive issue of oil theft in Rivers State. Specifically, it seeks to explore how the integration of local community-based knowledge systems and traditional diplomatic mechanisms enhances the operational effectiveness of the NSCDC in identifying, disrupting, and prosecuting illegal oil bunkering activities. By investigating the dynamics of community engagement, intelligence sharing, and the role of traditional authorities, the study intends to illuminate the practical and policy implications of leveraging indigenous resources within formal security frameworks. Ultimately, the research endeavors to contribute to improved security architecture and sustainable solutions for the persistent challenge of oil theft in the Niger Delta region, with Rivers State as a critical case study.

Statement of the Problem

Oil theft has remained a stubborn and escalating security challenge in Rivers State, severely undermining Nigeria's economic stability, environmental sustainability, and social cohesion. Despite the NSCDC's constitutional mandate to protect critical national assets, including oil infrastructure, the problem persists due to the clandestine nature of illegal bunkering, the involvement of sophisticated criminal networks, and the complex socio-economic conditions of local communities (Gazette Newspaper, 2025). Traditional security measures have often been inadequate because they neglect the vital role of indigenous intelligence and local diplomacy, which provide critical grassroots insights and culturally legitimate frameworks for conflict mitigation. Furthermore, oil theft fuels environmental degradation, human insecurity, and economic loss, while generating tensions between security forces and host communities, often marked by distrust and resistance (Punch Newspaper, 2024). Therefore, this study addresses the gap in understanding how NSCDC's use of indigenous intelligence networks and

indigenous diplomacy can be optimized as a collaborative approach to effectively curb oil theft in Rivers State. It also critically examines the challenges, limitations, and prospects of this community-centered security strategy in the context of complex regional dynamics and the evolving nature of oil-related crimes.

Methodology

The methodology for this research adopts a multi-disciplinary approach that integrates concepts and methods from security studies, sociology, anthropology, political science, and law enforcement research to holistically explore the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps' (NSCDC) use of indigenous intelligence networks and indigenous diplomacy in combating oil theft in Rivers State. This approach recognizes the complex, multi-dimensional nature of oil theft as a security and socio-political problem that demands insights beyond traditional policing or military perspectives.

Secondary sources will comprise extensive literature reviews of academic journals, policy papers, government and security agency reports, and reputable media articles documenting NSCDC's strategic engagements and anti-oil theft campaigns. These sources provide historical and theoretical contexts, highlight institutional mandates, and demonstrate empirical trends of NSCDC's infrastructural protection efforts, grounded within prevailing socio-political challenges in the Niger Delta region.

The multi-disciplinary methodological framework facilitates data triangulation, combining empirical evidence from community interactions and official records with theoretical analysis from multiple academic disciplines. This enhances the validity and richness of the findings, enabling a nuanced understanding of how indigenous intelligence networks and diplomacy can be leveraged effectively to mitigate oil theft in Rivers State. Furthermore, it supports actionable recommendations for policy makers and security agencies aiming to strengthen community-based security governance in a culturally sensitive manner.

Establishment of the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC)

The Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC) is a paramilitary agency of the Federal Government of Nigeria, established to provide protective measures

against threats, attacks, and disasters targeting the nation and its citizens. The origins of the NSCDC trace back to May 23, 1967, during the Nigerian Civil War, when it was first introduced within the then Federal Capital Territory of Lagos (Oladiran, 2021). Initially, it operated as the Lagos Civil Defence Committee with the primary responsibility of educating the Lagos populace on safety precautions amid wartime dangers.

In its early years, particularly from 1967 to 2003, the Corps functioned predominantly as a voluntary organization focused on civil protection and public enlightenment during emergencies such as bomb attacks and air raids. The Charter of April 6, 1968, empowered states wishing to establish similar corps within their jurisdictions to do so, marking the beginning of the Corps' expansion beyond Lagos. Over this period, NSCDC members used print and electronic media to educate citizens on identifying bombs, surviving bomb blasts, and general civil defence (Alao, 2017).

The Corps underwent significant transformation in 1984 when it was restructured into a national security outfit, culminating in the establishment of regional Commands nationwide by 1988. The restructuring expanded its functions and presence, making it more organized and responsive to security challenges across the federation.

The statutory incorporation of the NSCDC was completed in 2003 when the Federal Government, through Act No. 2 of 2003, formally established the Corps as a statutory security outfit under the supervision of the Federal Ministry of Interior. This Act, amended by Act 6 on June 4, 2007, constitutionally mandated the Corps to bear arms and empowered it with legal backing to carry out its duties effectively (Johnson, 2016). The NSCDC became the 66th member state of the International Civil Defence Organization (ICDO) in Geneva, Switzerland, in 2004, reflecting its alignment with international civil defence standards and practices (Alao, 2017).

Use of Indigenous Intelligence Networks and Indigenous Diplomacy by the NSCDC in Combating Oil Theft in Rivers State

The Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC) has played a pivotal role in curbing oil theft in Rivers State through the strategic use of indigenous

intelligence networks integral to its operational framework. This approach utilizes the unique cultural, social, and territorial knowledge maintained by local communities and traditional rulers, fostering a collaborative environment crucial to intelligence gathering, operational planning, and enforcement activities. The NSCDC's Commandant General's Special Intelligence Squad (CG's SIS), under the leadership of Deputy Commander Apollos Dandaura, exemplifies an intelligence-driven operational paradigm that leverages community-generated information to locate and dismantle illegal refining and bunkering operations, many of which are deeply entrenched in the complex riverine geography of the Niger Delta (Afolabi, 2024; Dailypost, 2025).

A landmark case that underscores this intelligence-led strategy occurred in Omuma Local Government Area, where intelligence from indigenous networks led to the arrest of three suspects engaged in illegal refining activities, including women, which disrupts general perceptions regarding operatives within this illicit trade. Extensive seizures at this site included over 400 liters of refined stolen crude oil packaged in cellophane bags, extensive drum ovens, industrial siphoning hoses, and other refining paraphernalia, illustrating the depth of operational sophistication masked by these criminal enterprises (Afolabi, 2024). The NSCDC's adept use of localized intelligence was critical in facilitating a successful raid that curtailed significant quantities of stolen petroleum products from entering illegal market channels. Further emphasizing the effectiveness of this approach, a subsequent operation in Etche Local Government Area revealed multiple illegal pipeline tapping points connected to clandestine bunkering sites. These sites housed industrial pumping machines and vast stockpiles amounting to tens of thousands of liters of automotive gas oil (AGO) awaiting illicit sale. Despite the repeated destruction of such bunkering sites, community-sourced intelligence allows the NSCDC to mount follow-up operations, a critical factor in preventing the seamless reconstruction and operation of illegal facilities (Afolabi, 2024; Dailypost, 2025). The iterative nature of intelligence collection and enforcement demonstrates the Corps' commitment to sustained interventions, surpassing the intermittent effects of conventional patrols.

The NSCDC's collaboration with traditional rulers provides a fundamental legitimacy and facilitation mechanism vital to community acceptance and

cooperation. Through culturally embedded diplomatic practices, traditional leaders in regions like Degema and Asari-Toru actively reinforce NSCDC directives by publicly discouraging participation in oil theft. Notably, prominent figures such as Alhaji Mujahid Asari Dokubo have issued explicit warnings to oil thieves, declaring "enough is enough," thereby harnessing indigenous authority to complement state enforcement efforts (Punch, 2025). This indigenous diplomacy not only fosters community solidarity with NSCDC operations but also offsets historical mistrust patterns prevalent between state security apparatuses and local populations.

The NSCDC further integrates indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms within its operational design. The Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni region provides an instructive example where the Corps faced violent resistance resulting in the deaths of four NSCDC operatives in 2016. Following this tragedy, traditional leaders initiated dialogues that tempered community hostility and enhanced cooperation, enabling the resumption of intelligence-driven security operations. Such diplomatic interventions underscore the strategic value of indigenous systems in mediating conflict and sustaining long-term operational engagement (Okpara, 2016).

Environmentally, traditional rulers in the Kalabari communities emphasize oil theft as a severe threat to ancestral lands and aquatic livelihoods, noting that "illegal oil bunkering destroys the environment and pollutes the waters which affects the livelihood of our people who are fishermen." This framing enables the NSCDC to position oil theft as a socio-environmental menace, deepening community resolve to support law enforcement measures (Asari-Dokubo, 2025). The environmental narrative, underpinned by indigenous legitimacy, enhances NSCDC outreach and fortifies community resistance to oil theft syndicates.

Operational data validate the efficacy of this partnership approach. In March 2025, NSCDC interceptors impounded a truck transporting approximately 70,000 liters of stolen crude oil in Port Harcourt. This seizure emerged directly from actionable intelligence provided by indigenous networks. The stolen crude had been siphoned from pipelines compromised by vandals, showcasing the NSCDC's capacity to trace illegal oil transportation through community cooperation (Channelstv, 2025; Nairametrics, 2025; Businessday, 2025). Between 2023 and 2025,

the Corps disrupted over 65 illegal refining sites, arresting multiple offenders and considerably diminishing the operational span of oil theft syndicates. These results are attributed to the robust intelligence nexus and trust cultivated with community and traditional authorities, which continues to erode the socio-economic base of illegal oil activities (Vanguard, 2024; Authorityngr, 2024).

Challenges Faced by the NSCDC in Using Indigenous Intelligence and Indigenous Diplomacy to Combat Oil Theft in Rivers State

The Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC) is constitutionally empowered and operationally engaged in protecting Nigeria's critical oil infrastructure, particularly in the Niger Delta region, including Rivers State. Its strategic integration of indigenous intelligence networks and indigenous diplomacy has proven formidable in the fight against oil theft. Nonetheless, the Corps continues to face significant challenges that undermine the optimal utilization of these community-based approaches.

One predominant challenge is the hostile and complex operational terrain of Rivers State, characterized by dense forests, swampy creeks, and labyrinthine waterways that provide natural cover for illegal refiners and oil thieves. This geographical complexity severely hampers surveillance, intelligence gathering, and timely operational response, often putting NSCDC operatives at physical risk. For example, NSCDC personnel have suffered fatal casualties from ambushes or armed confrontation with criminal gangs operating these areas; a recent incident involved the killing of four operatives during a mission in the Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni region (Vanguard, 2024). The terrain complicates not only physical movement but also limits communication links with indigenous intelligence informants scattered in remote areas, constraining effective coordination.

A second major challenge concerns trust deficits and community-relations dynamics. Though indigenous intelligence and diplomacy hinge on community cooperation, historical grievances, socio-economic deprivation, and suspicions of state security forces create barriers to information flow and collaboration. In some oil-producing communities, residents perceive security operatives as outsiders or even adversaries due to past neglect, alleged human rights abuses, or collusion

accusations involving security personnel and oil theft syndicates. This mistrust impedes communities' willingness to serve as reliable informants, diminishing the quality and timeliness of intelligence. Suspicion extends to indigenous leaders as well, whose motivations may be questioned, especially when they are perceived to have connections with illicit networks or political interests (Punch Ng, 2024).

Another operational difficulty lies in the sophistication and evolving tactics of oil theft syndicates. These groups continually adapt to enforcement efforts by employing advanced technology, better concealment methods, and decentralized organizational structures that diffuse the risk of intelligence penetration. Syndicates are also known to infiltrate community leadership and sometimes employ intimidation or bribery to suppress informers, complicating the role of indigenous diplomacy (ThisDayLive, 2024). The continuous cycle of bunkering site destruction and rapid reconstruction, fueled by profits from oil theft, demands sustained intelligence efforts, which stretch the resources and stamina of the Corps.

Inter-agency coordination presents additional challenges. While NSCDC collaborates with agencies such as the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and the Nigerian Police Force to tackle oil theft holistically, jurisdictional overlaps, competition, differing operational protocols, and information silos sometimes impede seamless cooperation. The result can be duplication of efforts or lack of unified follow-through, compromising the overall effectiveness of intelligence-driven operations (EFCC News Release, 2024).

Finally, resource constraints hinder the full potential of indigenous intelligence utilization. The Corps often grapples with insufficient funding, inadequate equipment, limited modern technological tools for intelligence analysis, and a shortage of trained personnel capable of both managing indigenous relations and executing complex field operations. These limitations affect the scale and durability of community engagement programs and the capacity for sustained surveillance and rapid response (Vanguard, 2024).

Recommendations to Address Challenges Faced by the NSCDC in Using Indigenous Intelligence and Indigenous Diplomacy to Combat Oil Theft in Rivers State

To effectively overcome the challenges hindering the optimal use of indigenous intelligence networks and indigenous diplomacy by the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC) in combating oil theft in Rivers State, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Enhanced Community Engagement and Trust-Building:

The NSCDC should prioritize sustained community engagement initiatives aimed at rebuilding and strengthening trust between security operatives and local populations. This could include transparent communication regarding operational intentions, protecting informant anonymity, offering incentives or social support for whistleblowers, and involving community representatives in security planning. Trust restoration is essential to overcoming historical grievances that impede intelligence flow and community cooperation.

2. Capacity Building and Resource Provision:

Adequate funding must be allocated to equip NSCDC operatives with advanced technological tools such as drones, surveillance gadgets, and secure communication devices to operate effectively within the challenging Niger Delta terrain. Additionally, training programs focusing on culturally sensitive intelligence handling and community diplomacy skills will enhance the professionalism and effectiveness of NSCDC personnel in leveraging indigenous knowledge .

3. Strengthening Inter-agency Collaboration:

Institutionalized frameworks for seamless inter-agency cooperation with entities such as the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), Nigerian Police, Nigerian Navy, and Department of State Services should be reinforced. Joint intelligence-sharing platforms, unified operational command centers, and harmonized legal procedures will reduce jurisdictional conflicts and enhance coordinated crackdowns on oil theft syndicates .

4. Incentivizing Indigenous Intelligence Networks:

The NSCDC should develop formal mechanisms to recognize and reward reliable indigenous informants and community leaders who facilitate intelligence gathering. This may encompass monetary rewards, community development projects, or formal acknowledgment, thereby motivating sustained participation and protecting informants from reprisals.

Conclusion

The study concludes that the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC) employs a pragmatic and culturally integrated strategy through indigenous intelligence networks and indigenous diplomacy to effectively combat oil theft in Rivers State. The combination of deep community knowledge, collaboration with traditional authorities, and intelligence-led operations underpins enhanced detection and disruption of illegal oil bunkering activities. However, challenges such as difficult terrain, community-security mistrust, sophisticated criminal tactics, inter-agency coordination issues, and resource constraints persist, limiting the full potential of these approaches.

Overcoming these challenges requires a multifaceted effort to rebuild community trust, invest in operational capacity and technology, strengthen collaboration among security agencies, incentivize community informants, and institutionalize indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms. The NSCDC's experience underscores the importance of embedding security efforts within the socio-cultural contexts of the Niger Delta to foster sustainable peace and protect Nigeria's vital economic resources. Continuous adaptation and systemic reforms will be essential to sustaining and enhancing the Corps' successes in the ongoing fight against oil theft.(Donbraye, 2022, Journal of Political and Security Studies; ThisDayLive, 2024). The strategic importance of Rivers State in the oil sector makes it particularly vulnerable to the economic sabotage of oil theft, a threat that destabilizes the region's security architecture and undermines national economic stability.

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