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Reducing 'sea blindness' in the Gulf of Guinea: Leveraging the role of non-state actors.

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ABSTRACT

The blue economy holds a vast potential of wealth for countries along the Gulf of Guinea - GoG. However, these countries have for a long time either neglected or failed to recognise and invest in their maritime spaces as strategic economic and security assets. Consequently, the challenge of sea-blindness has created opportunity for criminal networks to exploit the vulnerabilities of the maritime domain to create further insecurity in the region. Safeguarding the maritime domain is often perceived as the sole responsibility of the state, leaving out a critical mass of actors. Focusing on Nigeria, this paper explores the complementary roles of non-state actors in maritime security governance. It further argues for enhancing stakeholder engagement; collaborative approaches in combating maritime crimes; building and improving trust between state and non-state actors; and incorporating gender perspectives as part of efforts aimed at reducing sea-blindness and creating a safe and secure maritime domain.

Keywords: Non-State actors, maritime security, sea-blindness, Gulf of Guinea, stakeholders, collaboration.

INTRODUCTION

Countries along the GoG have over the past decades suffered from "sea blindness" - a phenomenon characterised by a focus on land-based security threats to the neglect of security threats in the maritime space. Understandably, due to a complex mix of factors, notably managing landward security and governance related threats, states across the region traditionally were unable to prioritise their maritime spaces or did almost nothing to pursue interests at sea. This also means that, GoG countries have not prioritized their maritime domains through national policies and actions necessary to curb maritime crimes and to derive benefits from the maritime economy. This general neglect of the maritime space is further reinforced by a gap in the conceptual approach to maritime security in the GoG. The concept of maritime security in most GoG states is often driven by an euro-centric definition, which focuses on the projection of state power at sea.[1] Until recently, this concept focused on the capacity and capabilities of national navies and coast guards to protect territorial waters and vessels on the seas. Inadvertently, this conceptualisation of projecting 'sea power' leaves out a critical mass of actors, including the private sector in the maritime industry, civil society and coastal communities as important actors in sustainable maritime governance. In the past decade, civil society's participation in other aspects of security governance has seen an appreciable increase. This has however not translated into the maritime security domain.

Despite the vast resource potentials of the GoG States in the region remain some of the poorest in the world[2]. The problem of sea blindness has resulted in missed opportunities for the region to take full advantage of the wealth of marine resources to advance development. The absence of a broader maritime culture also means that countries along the Gulf of Guinea are exposed to a range of maritime security threats and challenges including; maritime piracy, armed robbery at sea, kidnapping for ransom, illegal oil bunkering and Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing among others.

The high incidents of piracy off the coasts of Gulf of Guinea have prompted swift international, regional and national responses to maritime insecurity in the region as well as accelerated the development of maritime domain awareness in the last few years. Several international and regional frameworks give impetus to efforts aimed at improving Maritime Domain Awareness. For instance, United Nations Security Council Resolutions 2018 (2012)[3] and 2039 (2013)[4] all recognise the importance of cooperation and information sharing in improving maritime security in the region. Similarly, the African Union's Integrated Maritime Strategy (AIMS, 2050)[5] also emphasizes the importance of the blue economy as the key to foster wealth creation from Africa's oceans and seas in a secure and environmentally sustainable manner. While the Code of Conduct Concerning the Repression of Piracy, Armed Robbery Against Ships, and Illicit Maritime Activity in the West and Central Africa (Yaoundé Protocol)[6] emphasizes cooperation, coordination and information sharing in curbing maritime piracy and improving interdiction. Other multinational cooperation efforts among countries such as Ghana, Benin, Togo and Nigeria in the interdiction of the MT Maximus and more recently, the cooperation between Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana, Benin, Togo and Nigeria in the arrest and prosecution of the Hailufeng II case all attest to operational improvements in maritime security as well as the strengthening of legal frameworks for prosecution.

Indeed, efforts at addressing maritime security challenges in the Gulf of Guinea has attracted a lot of attention at the highest international and regional levels. However, responses and efforts at improving maritime security have mainly been state-centric with the sole responsibility usually arrogated to state security agencies, leaving out a critical mass of other actors, including civil society. While we agree that the state has primary responsibility for securing the maritime domain and for formulating and implementing the necessary policy frameworks to reduce maritime

[1]Interview with maritime security expert. August 2021, Lagos.
[2]Fiorelli M. (2014). Piracy in Africa: The case of Gulf of Guinea. KAIPTC occasional paper No. 37.
[3]United Nations Security Council, Security Council resolution 2018 (2011) [on acts of piracy and armed robbery at sea off the coast of the States of the Gulf of Guinea], 31 October 2011, S/RES/2018(2011) available at: https://www.refworld.org/docid/4ec4ef142.html accessed 28 April 2022.
[4]United Nations Security Council, Security Council resolution 2039 (2012) [on acts of piracy and armed robbery at sea off the coast of the States of the Gulf of Guinea], 24 May 2012, S/RES/2039(2012), available at: https://www.refworld.org/docid/4fbe210f2.html accessed 28 April 2022.
[5]AU (2014) Africa's Integrated Maritime Strategy 2050 (2050 AIM Strategy). Available at: 33832-wd-african_union_3-1.pdf (au.int). Accessed Sept. 2021.
[6]Yaoundé Code of Conduct (2013). the Code of Conduct Concerning the Repression of Piracy, Armed Robbery Against Ships, and Illicit Maritime Activity in the West and Central Africa

insecurity and tap off the wealth of the oceans and seas, we also argue that, non-state actors can play significant roles in mitigating maritime security challenges including piracy and human trafficking among others to contribute to a safe and secure maritime space. Drawing on primary data from Nigeria, this paper explores the complementary roles of non-state actors in reducing sea blindness and their contributions to improving maritime security. It further argues for enhanced stakeholder engagement, building and improving trust between non-state and state actors, and leveraging the roles of non-state actors as part of efforts aimed at creating a safe and secure maritime domain.

The paper is organised into four parts. The introduction discusses the phenomenon of "sea-blindness" and highlights its associated impacts on states on the Gulf of Guinea. Secondly, using Nigeria as a case study, we examine national level initiatives to secure maritime spaces, while outlining the gaps and challenges. The subsequent section, maps and analyses the roles and contributions of different non-state actors and highlights their levels of collaboration with state security agencies and their specific contributions to maritime safety and security. The final section provides some policy recommendations for the way forward.

State Capacity in Combating Maritime Crimes: the Nigerian Experience

Among the Gulf of Guinea (GoG) states, Nigeria remains one of the countries with the highest records of maritime crimes.[7] Currently, Nigeria accounts for 80 percent of reported maritime piracy in the GoG.[8] The otherwise, petty theft onboard ships on onshore, has rapidly grown into violent armed robbery at sea, kidnapping of crew for ransom, attacks on offshore oil installations and targeting of vessels carrying petroleum products.[9] In the 2019 reporting period, 16 incidents of piracy were reported in Lagos Port alone, making it the most susceptible hotspot in any port in the world.[10] By the end of the 2019reporting period, 44 confirmed cases of crew's kidnap had been recorded within Nigerian waters.[11] Several factors account for this, including levels of high youth unemployment which is linked to poverty, weak law enforcement, porous borders, environmental degradation, transnational trafficking, human rights issues, and border disputes.[12] In terms of prosecuting maritime offenders, weak state capacity was identified as one of the key challenges. State weakness manifested in the lack of appropriate legal framework, and was compounded by institutional weakness as well as logistical and financial challenges.[13] To respond to these and particularly the legal lacuna, the Nigerian government took a bold step to sign into law the Suppression of Piracy and other Maritime Offences Act, 2019 known as "SPOMO" or simply the "Act". By this Law, Nigeria became the first GoG member state to have domesticated a global legal framework. Specifically, the SPOMO Act aims to:

- Curtail illegal activities of pirates at sea as well as to reduce the incidence of other maritime offences in domestic and international waters;
- Domesticate the provisions of United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) and the Convention for the Suppression of Unlawful Acts Against the Safety of Maritime Navigation (SUA);
- Define the roles and responsibilities of each maritime stakeholder to avert conflicts of roles and overlapping responsibilities vis – a – vis piracy and maritime crimes; and
- Provide for appropriate administration.

These objectives, as articulated in the SPOMO, do not only demonstrate Nigeria's commitment to domesticate international legal frameworks, but also a capacity through appropriate legal means to fight piracy and related maritime offences. SPOMO empowers relevant security agencies like the navy to arrest and prosecute Nigerian nationals who are engaged in piracy as well as foreigners whose countries are signatory to UNCLOS and SUA conventions. To practically confront the challenge of piracy, the government of Nigeria, under NIMASA has a flagship project known as the Deep Blue Project

[7]Essien, B. S., & Adongoi, T. (2015). Sea piracy and security challenges of maritime business operation in Bayelsa state, Nigeria: An empirical study. International Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences, 5(2), 213-221. See also
Onuoha, F. C. (2012). Piracy and maritime security in the Gulf of Guinea: Nigeria as a microcosm. Report for Al Jazeera Centre for studies.
[8]Ali, K. (2015). The anatomy of Gulf of Guinea piracy. Naval War College Review, 68(1), 93-118. Available at: https://login.proxy.wmu.se/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx? direct=true&AuthType=ip,uid&db=a9h&AN=99608317&site=edslive&scope=site Ali, K. (2015). Maritime security. Accessed Sept. 2021.
[9]Onouha, F.C. (2021). Nigeria's ambitious new maritime security project must avoid old traps. Available at: Nigeria's ambitious new maritime security project must avoid old traps (theconversation.com). Accessed: Oct. 2021.
[10]ICC-IMB Piracy and Armed Robbery Against Ships – 2019 Annual Report, page 9
[11]ICC-IMB Piracy and Armed Robbery Against Ships – 2020 Annual Report, page 23.
[12]Lopez-Lucia, E. (2015). Fragility, violence and criminality in the Gulf of Guinea. Rapid Literature Review, GSDRC, University of Birmingham, 12.
[13]Interview, Legal Practitioner, July 2021, Lagos, Nigeria.
[14]See 'NIMASA: Reinventing war against piracy with Deep Blue Project' 24 August 2021
https://guardian.ng/news/nimasa-reinventing-war-against-piracy-with-deep-blue-project accessed 29 September, 2021

otherwise called the Integrated National Security and Waterways Protection Infrastructure. Through this project, the capacities of the navy and other actors have been enhanced with two Special Mission Aircrafts for surveillance of the country's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), three Special Mission Helicopters for search and rescue and four Unmanned Aerial Vehicles.[14] In addition, two Special Mission Vessels and 17 Fast Interceptor Boats have been secured.[15] Other infrastructure includes the Command, Control, Communication, Computer, and Intelligence Centre (C4i) for intelligence gathering and data collection for land operations; 16 armoured vehicles for coastal patrol and about 600 specially trained troops for interdiction, known as Maritime Security Unit.[16]

At the launch of the Project, President Buhari expressed hope in the robustness of the maritime security architecture in prosecuting suspects under the 2019 SPOMO Act.[17] To give impetus to this political remark, and to further inspire hope among interest groups, the Director General of the Nigerian Maritime Administration and Safety Agency (NIMASA), Dr. Bashir Jamoh, noted that the new security approach, under the Deep Blue Project, is important to tackle security challenges encumbering the shipping business in the country. He reiterated that

> "the Deep Blue Project is a significant initiative in dealing with piracy and armed robbery in Nigeria's territorial waters frontally. He also underscored the importance of partnership between the Nigerian Navy and NIMASA".[18]

Conspicuous in these remarks are political and institutional commitments by the president and the head of NIMASA. This, they demonstrate by referring to the adoption of the SPOMO logistical support to the security agencies, as well as frameworks for establishing partnership between the navy and NIMASA. The question is whether these reflects the usual rhetorical flourishes characteristic of politicians and their appendage public servants, and what the current empirical realities are. As Emem notes, despite the adoption of the SPOMO in 2019, Nigeria recorded the highest piracy attacks within its waters with a total of 35 attacks in 2020.[19] In the same year, 62 crews were kidnapped.[20] However, it is reassuring to note that, the SPOMO is operational and is being used to prosecute piracy offenders in the country.[21] Emem corroborates this assertion and noted that on 13th July 2020, Nigeria's security forces arrested and prosecuted ten suspects under the SPOMO, and in July 2021 sentenced to 12 years in prison for the kidnapping of the crew of the fishing vessel *Hailufeng II*.[23]

Not with standing this effort, judges and lawyers lack the necessary training to adjudicate and defend maritime cases effectively.[24] Under the Act, only high courts have jurisdiction to prosecute maritime cases. This poses a challenge relating to potential backlog of cases. Cases may linger on for years and alleged criminals might remain in detention for a much longer time — a situation that may affect the fundamental human rights of suspected criminals. To address this difficulty, a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was signed between NIMASA and the Nigerian Navy to train judges on the technicalities of maritime issues, as a way of enhancing their capacities to adjudicate maritime cases effectively.[25] While this is significant for the Navy, they still contend with several challenges, including limited patrol boats, helicopters, and gunboats.[26] Although the Deep Blue Project has provided logistical support, it remains inadequate to confront the challenges.[27] Moreover, budgetary allocations are limited to ensure the effective implementation of the law.[28] These challenges are enormous and are beyond the financial and technical capacities of state actors. Adopting a multi-layered and an integrated approach is imperative, and this requires a bottom-

[15]Ibid
[16]Ibid.
[17]Ibid.
[18]Ibid.
[19]Emem, T. (2021). An Appraisal of Nigeria's Suppression of Piracy and other Maritime Offences Act 2019. Available at SSRN 3845452.
[20]ICC-IMB Piracy and Armed Robbery Against Ships – 2020 Annual Report, page 23
[21]FGD, legal team, NIMASA, July 2021, Lagos, Nigeria.
[22]Emem, Op Cit, 2021.
[23]See 'Nigerian Court Sentences 10 Pirates to 12 Years in Prison' July 23, 2021
https://maritime-executive.com/article/nigerian-court-sentences-10-pirates-to-12-years-in-prison (accessed 24 February, 2022)
[24]Interview with a Private Legal Practitioner, July 2021, Lagos, Nigeria.
[25]FGD, NIMASA, July 2021, Lagos, Nigeria.
[26]Ibid
[27]Ibid.
[28]Ibid.
[29]Lopez-Lucia, E. (2015). Fragility, violence and criminality in the Gulf of Guinea. Rapid Literature Review, GSDRC, University of Birmingham, 12.

up perspective that recognizes the involvement of key non-state actors.[29]

Non-State Actors and Nigeria's Maritime Security

This section identifies key non-state actors that operate in Nigeria, and examines the level of collaboration with state actors in contributing to maritime safety and security in Nigeria. It also examines the challenges faced in such collaborations. Although different types of non-state actors exist and operate in Nigeria, this paper focuses on the category of non-state actors described as neutral, which include; coastal communities, Civil Society Organizations (CSOs)/Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs), private shipping lines, Private Maritime Security Companies (PMSCs), researchers, and independent media. While coastal communities, for example, get recruited into acts of piracy, overall these actors play important roles in mitigating maritime security challenges such as illegal fishing, piracy, human trafficking among others.

Like any other maritime zone across the globe, the involvement of these non-state actors in Nigeria's maritime domain has become increasingly important due to two main factors. First is that, the notion of security has expanded from just protecting defined geographical territories, and in this case territorial waters of states to human security concerns. Defined by the United Nation's Development Programme (UNDP) as consisting of seven key elements – economic, food, health, environmental, personal, community and political security[30], human security concerns remain a veritable challenge in Nigeria. Maritime criminalities such as Illegal Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing, piracy and armed robbery at sea, human trafficking, marine pollution and toxic waste dumping have had devastating socio-economic impacts on citizens. In the Niger Delta, for example, oil theft, pipeline vandalism, and kidnapping for ransom has been a recurrent challenge.[31]

As argued by Moneke, the most obvious and direct impact of these piratic activities is the destruction of livelihood sources and more tellingly the loss of human lives,[32] which requires the involvement of non-state actors in addressing them. Second is that Nigeria's territorial waters is vast, with a coastline of 420 nautical miles, a sovereign claim to 12 nautical miles of territorial waters, and jurisdictional claim to 200 nautical miles of Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). [33] The sheer expanse of the territorial waters poses significant challenges in maintaining force projection and situational awareness. An interviewee observed:

> "The sea is so wide and the boats so small. It is impossible for the state to have control. Two-hour sailing before you get there. Though there is electronic surveillance, yet difficult to reach. Before you reach, the pirates are long gone; it is difficult to achieve physical convergence."[34]

Gleaned from the above is an apparent deficiency in the state's capacity in dealing with maritime insecurity in Nigeria. Like many other territorial waters in the GoG, such weaknesses requires the involvement of non-state actors in playing complementary roles.

Defined as individuals or institutions not directly aligned to a state government, non-state actors have been identified as key factors that could make significant contributions to maritime safety and security. Generally, across the Gulf of Aden and the GoG, they contribute to advocacy and agenda setting, logistical support to security systems, and direct provision of security services.[35] Although in Nigeria, with the exception of private actors, most non-state actors such as CSOs/NGOs in the past were not active in maritime security issues, a Focus Group Discussion with the legal team of NIMASA suggests that, there is increasing recognition of their role in current policy discussions and actual implementation of programme activities.[36] Such recognition is translating into partnerships and collaborations with state actors in ensuring maritime security in Nigeria.[37]

Private Maritime Security Companies

[25]Allison, S. (2019). Stemming the tide of illegal trawling in Sierra Leone. ISS. Retrieved from https://issafrica.org/iss-today/stemming-the-tide-of-illegal-trawling-in-sierra-leone
[26]Ibid.
[27]Merem, E.C et al (2019). Analyzing the Tragedy of Illegal Fishing.
[28]Yeung, P. (2022, February 1). Illegal overfishing by Chinese trawlers.
[29]UNODC. (2022). UNODC commits to supporting the Government of Côte d'Ivoire against transnational organized crime and terrorism. Retrieved from https://www.unodc.org/westandcentralafrica/en/cote-divoire-and-unodc-against-toc.html
[30]Interview with a senior official of the Sierra Leone National Drug Law Enforcement Agency, June 2021.
[31]Ibid.
[32]Global Organized Crime Index on Côte d'Ivoire. Retrieved from https://ocindex.net/country/cote_d_ivoire
[33]Ibid.
[34]Ibid.
[35]See the Report (2021) 'Maritime Criminality in West Africa: Setting the Periscope on Maritime Zone E and F, A Maritime Security and Capacity Development for Safety and Security in the Gulf of Guinea Project Paper, KAIPTC.
[36]FGD, NIMASA August, 2021, Lagos, Nigeria.
[37] Ibid.
[38]Op.Cit KAIPTC (2021)
[39]Interview, Naval Officer, July, Lagos, Nigeria.

One example of non-state actors that collaborate with state security agencies in Nigeria is the Private Maritime Security Companies (PMSCs). Although many stakeholders do not accept them as the best protection strategy, they have emerged in response to hikes in violent attacks at sea.[38] Primarily, they provide commercial security services to shipping, oil and gas, marine transportation and fishing companies, for an agreed fee, outside the ambits of any state actor. They are often sub-contracted, and their activities are purely profit motivated unlike other actors such as NGOs and CSOs. In Nigeria, for example, they have provided the bulk of offshore oil field security, and increased the amount of merchant vessel protection in- and outbound from Nigerian ports.[39] These activities are undertaken within the framework of memoranda of understandings (MoUs). Even though the Nigerian Navy and NIMASA are the recognized bodies to maintain safety and security of Nigerian territorial waters, an MoU signed between the Nigerian Navy and PMSCs in 2012 and subsequently revised in 2016 and 2019 allows for partnerships and hybrid security provision.[40] The MoU allows PMSCs to provide patrol boats, which provide security for offshore installations, export terminals, or the escort of merchant vessels within Nigeria's territorial waters.[41]

Civil Society Organisations /Non-Governmental Organisations

Civil Society Oganizations (CSOs) and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) are key actors in West Africa's security environment, and increasingly being recognized in the GoG's maritime security domain. They provide services to local communities and also play watchdog roles in ensuring that vulnerable communities are not unduly marginalized by policies of states. Within the GoG, they constitute powerful non-state actors who operate to fulfil their advocacy roles. Broadly categorized to include community-based organisations (CBOs), women and youth associations, traditional chiefs and ethnic interest group,[42] they play multiple roles in complementing state efforts in maritime security. In Nigeria, Lopes-Lucia[43] identifies groups such as the Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD), Civil Society legislative and Advocacy Centre (CISLAC), and Environmental Rights Action (ERA) as key non-state actors in the maritime space. While CISLAC, for example, works on maritime security, development of coastal communities and oil governance, ERA also works on similar issues, with specific focus on the Niger Delta.[44] One key area where Nigeria's CSOs have been active is in the area of oil transparency, which has implications on poverty and maritime insecurity. Given the persistent allegations of corruption within the oil sector, CSOs such as CISLAC have called for full disclosure from the state on issues related to accounting for natural resource wealth revenues.[45]

Moreover, CSOs created platforms to discuss oil and gas issues, and have contributed to lobbying for new legislation and publishing papers to raise awareness.[46] They have also featured in humanitarian efforts supporting pirate hostages both during their captivity and after release.[47] However, because CSOs and NGOs are largely externally funded, they sometimes face financial difficulties to sustain their advocacy. In addition, state-imposed legal and political constraints; disconnect between CSOs/NGOs and communal organisations; problems of legitimacy, and accountability also militate against their effectiveness[48]

Coastal Communities

Many scholarly studies on maritime security in the GoG and particularly in Nigeria have identified governance deficits as underlying reasons for the emergence of maritime crimes.[49] In Nigeria,

[40]Skuld (2021) Nigerian: Guidance on contracting government security forces, retrieved February 22, 2022 https://www.skuld.com/topics/port/piracy/nigeria-guidance-on-contracting-government-security-forces/
[41]Siebels, D. (2020), b, in Varin C & Onuoha, F, Security in Nigeria: Contemporary Threats and Response [Kindle] I.B. Tauris, retrieves February 22, 2022 https://ijmcs.co.uk/cdn/article_file/2020-03-02-13-44-43-PM.pdf ·
[42]Ajayi-Mamattah, T. (2014). Building Civil Society in West Africa: Notes from the Field. In: Ebenezer Obadere (ed.). The Handbook of Civil Society in Africa. New-York: Springer, 143-156.
[43]Lopez-Lucia, 2015, Op Cit.
[44]Ibid.
[45]Ibid.
[46]Interview, Legal Practitioner, August, Lagos, Nigeria.
[47]See the Report (2021) 'Maritime Criminality in West Africa: Setting the Periscope on Maritime Zone E and F, A Maritime Security and Capacity Development for Safety and Security in the Gulf of Guinea Project Paper, KAIPTC.
[48]Lopez-Lucia, 2015, Op Cit.
[49]Onuoha, Freedom C. (2013). Piracy and Maritime Security in the Gulf of Guinea: Trends, Concerns, and Propositions, The Journal of the Middle East and Africa, 4:3, 267-293.
[50]See 'Nigeria's ambitious new maritime security project must avoid old traps', July, 21, 2021. https://theconversation.com/nigerias-ambitious-new-maritime-security-project-must-avoid-old-traps-163989 (accessed 22 February, 2022)
[51]Onuoha, 2013, Op Cit.
[52]Interview, Private Legal Practitioner, August 2021, Lagos, Nigeria.
[53]Interview, Senior Lecturer, August 2021, Lagos, Nigeria

despite the availability of vast natural resources, it continues to face challenges of unemployment and poverty. Poor environmental management also characterizes the country's maritime domain. The complex relationship between environmental threats like oil pollution and climate change and socioeconomic indicators like poverty has thus taken a toll on the well-being and security of some coastal communities in Nigeria. In addition, unsustainable practices of oil companies have been identified as having destructive effects on traditional farming and fishing as livelihood sources in coastal communities.[50] This has resulted in several young persons, being recruited into maritime criminality as a survival strategy, especially in the Niger Delta region since the 1990s.[51] Others engage in the acts because of private gains to 'make money' by kidnapping those private actors coming to 'steal oil'."[52]

Indeed, while engaging in maritime criminality has legal consequences when individuals are arrested, the implications of destroying farms and fishing sources through environmental pollution may be enormous. Therefore, rather than relying on farming and fishing as sources of livelihood, youth groups prefer to join piracy groups, which though illegal can guarantee sustenance at least temporarily. An interviewee corroborates this viewpoint and explained, "What is the use of going to catch fish [which may be non-existent] when you can catch men and get money." [53]

Thus, 'catching men'- kidnapping them for ransom has become lucrative for some vulnerable populations. Addressing this challenge with hard-core military approaches like in the case of Boko Haram in northern Nigeria has been counter-productive. State agencies, including NIMASA and the Nigerian Navy recognize the importance of collaborating with coastal communities in tackling the menace. This collaboration is important because crimes committed at sea are planned, initiated on land and only executed at sea. Recognizing that most pirates come from the coastal communities, NIMASA, under the on-going Deep Blue Project seeks to empower the youth by establishing a maritime university.[54] In the past, President Goodluck Jonathan established structures that assisted pirates to pursue university education abroad as a way of dealing with the menace of piracy. While that initiative was seen as laudable, it was criticised as discriminatory and not addressing the real challenges on the ground.[55] As an interviewee explained:

> "What is important was to have general projects to benefit all. Those students who went to South Africa were living in hotels. The important thing was to provide good roads, hospitals etc. The Niger Delta Commission—What have they done, not much even though more money has been allocated"[56]

A deduction from the above extract suggests that, the initiative was populist possibly intended to scuttle the leadership of the militants, or better still to address the symptoms of piracy, rather than the root causes. In addition, as Lopez-Lucia points out, the root causes are not limited to socio-economic exclusion, poverty and unemployment, but also proximate causes, including weak law enforcement, porous borders, transnational trafficking, human rights issues, and border disputes.[57] To address these challenges comprehensively, the Nigeria Maritime Association made proposals to government on how maritime piracy can be addressed. This led to the presentation of papers in conferences. Whiles it created platforms for policy debates, most often "conferences and presentation of papers don't address the socio-economic challenges unless there is willingness of stakeholders."[58] Besides, "unscrupulous government officials don't help matters [as corruption remain pervasive in government circles].[59]" A respondent thus concludes "where there is no willingness of the state, the effort of the non-state actors is a waste of time"

Despite these challenges, an interviewee concluded:

> "coastal communities are helping us in combating insecurity. Because of our outreach programmes, they are ready to provide us with information"

Conclusion and Way Forward

[54]Ibid.
[55]Ibid.
[56]Ibid.
[57]Lopez-Lucia, 2015, Op Cit.
[58]Interview, Legal Practitioner, August 2021, Lagos, Nigeria.
[59]Ibid.

Drawing on Nigeria's experience of non-state actors in the maritime security space, it is evident that non-state actors can potentially play an important role in addressing maritime insecurity in the Gulf of Guinea. Addressing the problem of 'sea blindness' and its resultant effects such as piracy, IUU fishing, human trafficking and kidnapping for ransom in the GoG requires a holistic and inclusive approach as well as a reconceptualization of maritime security which recognizes non-state actors as stakeholders in ensuring the security and safety of the maritime domain. Both state and non-state actors have roles to play and the roles of non-state actors such as civil society organisations NGOs, lobby groups, private maritime security companies and coastal communities cannot be overlooked in curbing the myriad of maritime security threats and challenges that confront the region. The following recommendations may therefore be useful for providing a way forward.

- Nigeria's experience for instance, demonstrates that non-state actors such as private maritime security companies and telecommunication companies can provide services and other logistical and technological support to complement the existing roles of state security agencies. Therefore, relevant state agencies must develop the appropriate formal as well as informal policy frameworks to engage these actors towards improving maritime safety and security. on land, implying that the process of deterrence usually stops in the GoG's waters.

- Coastal communities constitute a critical mass of actors who are impacted by the effects of maritime insecurity and whose activities impact the maritime domain. It is therefore important that maritime security strategies adopt appropriate structures and channels to engage coastal communities as partners in addressing maritime insecurity. Specifically, such strategies must focus on economic and livelihood opportunities development of coastal communities as well as programmes that target women and youth as possible agents of change.

- A key entry point to addressing the problem of sea blindness and its resultant effects is to strengthen research and advocacy campaigns to attract attention of stakeholders to the need for strengthening collaboration between state and non-actors as indispensable partners in fighting maritime crimes and insecurity in the region.

- It is also imperative that GoG countries design national maritime strategies that encourage collaboration and coordination of all actors in the maritime domain. To this end, national maritime strategies should incorporate the role of non-state actors in combating maritime insecurity. This will help to bring them on board to complement state efforts.

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About the Project

The three-year project on "Enhancing Regional Research, Capacity Building and Convening of Stakeholders towards a Safer Maritime Domain in the Gulf of Guinea", covers the coastal countries in West and Central Africa and is being implemented through three key approaches: research, dialogue and capacity building. The project is primarily aimed at promoting a safer maritime security domain in the Gulf of Guinea. Knowledge-based products highlighting key maritime security issues are part of the research outputs in an effort to raise awareness at a policy, technical and operational level. Overall, the project recognizes that piracy and armed robbery in the Gulf of Guinea continue to be significant threats not only to the economies of Guinea countries, but also regional and international shipping, necessitating a harmonized regional response to counter these threats.

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