Maritime security challenges in the African Gulf of Guinea: An assessment of the Nigerian Maritime sector

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Abstract
Nigeria is one of the African countries located on the coastline strips of the Gulf of Guinea. The country's strategic position along the Gulf of Guinea and its natural maritime endowment provides it with enormous advantages to achieve economic development. However, Nigerian maritime sector has been categorized among the worst in the world due to certain challenges facing the sector. The challenges include piracy, poor access roads, pollution, inconsistent policies, inefficiency, corruption, delay of import/export processes, illegal charges as well as illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing. In consonance with this, the paper has critically assessed the challenges facing the Nigerian maritime and recommend useful ways to overcome them. The study employed qualitative method by focusing on secondary data. The secondary data were gathered from books, journals, magazines, newspapers, reports and internet sources that were relevant to this study. The findings reveal that the maritime sector is strategically important within the Nigerian economy that would facilitate growth and development in the country. However, multiple challenges bordering the sector prevents Nigeria from achieving economic growth. The study recommends that the Nigerian government shall urgently reform the maritime sector and formulate policies and regulatory frameworks that will ease and attract Foreign Direct Investment.

Keywords: Maritime, Piracy, Port, Pollution, Nigeria

1. Introduction

In recent years, the world witnesses the rise of pirate attacks and other maritime crimes in Gulf of Guinea waters. Maritime crimes in the African Gulf of Guinea waters surpasses that of Southeast Asia's. The pirate attacks and other related crimes in the GoG waters become serious concern to Africa and world at large. Piracy in African waters is concentrated in three provinces, such as Somali Coast, Mozambique Channel and Nigerian territorial waters (ICC, 2021). It is reported that, since 2007 the sea crimes in African waters exceeds that of Southeast Asia including Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia and Philippines. These waters were previously considered as the most dangerous hotspot of global piracy. The International Maritime Bureau (IMB) (2021) reports that the GoG recorded about half (43%) of all reported piracy cases worldwide in the first three months of 2021. Alessi (2012) posits that about 439 pirate attacks were recorded in 2011, and most of them were ascribed to Somali pirates operating in the Indians Oceans, Gulf of Aden, Red Sea and Coast of Oman. These growing attacks necessitated the initiating international coalition of navies to fight the pirates.

The historical evolution of the Nigerian Maritime sector could be traced back to the period of colonization of Africa by the European colonial powers. During Berlin Conference (1884-1885) the European colonial powers partitioned Africa among themselves as their 'sphere of influence' or colonies. This activity paved the way for the colonial powers to access and exploit African vast natural resources (Rutz, 2018; Carmody, 2016). Within few years, the colonialists (including Britain, Germany, France and Portugal) conquered and dominated about 90 percent of the African continent. The outcome of the Industrial Revolution in Europe necessitated the Europeans to seek market outside Europe, and also to get the raw materials (such as cocoa, cotton, diamond etc.) for their home industries. Most of these activities were carried out by sea with the Africa as a target (Pecastaing, 2013). Additionally, there were intense struggle by the European powers to acquire military and naval bases for strategic and economic interests. For that reason, the coastal states that forms the Gulf of Guinea have become strategically important for the colonialists. The Gulf of Guinea connects maritime passage of many continents, and it is economically important because of its proximity to Europe and America. About 16 African countries have connected with Gulf of Guinea coastline. From the North-Western coast, there are Nigeria, Togo, Cameroon, Benin, Ghana, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Cote d'Ivoire. Others include, the Island state of Sao Tome, Congo, Central African Republic and Angola (Ukeje & Ela, 2013). Approximately, the territory of the Gulf of Guinea has covered 12,754,790 million square kilometers. Also, there are not lessen 435.5 million people residing in the region, and more than one-third of these people are living in Nigeria (Ali, 2015; Hunt et al., 2009; Cowie, 1982).

The coastal communities were the first places visited in Nigeria by the British colonialists. The naval superiority of the Britain gave it ability to exercise enormous control over the territorial waters of Nigeria and beyond (Chijioke, 2016; Rutz, 2018). The British colonialists have succeeded in establishing the colonial administration by forcibly dismantled the chiefdom systems of coastal states in Nigeria. The colonial masters bought items (such as goal, iron ore, cocoa etc) and transport them by sea to their country. Consequently, the colonialist was taken over the vital business activities of the coastal communities in Nigeria. The intrusion of the British colonialists into Nigeria deprived the Nigerians from enjoying free trade (Chijioke, 2016).

The foundation of modern Nigerian maritime industry was established when the MacGregor Laird created the Royal African Steamship Company with British subsidy in 1849. The expansion of trade required the establishment of British and American Stream Navigation Company (Ukwuegbu, 2015). The first indigenous maritime transport industry was created in the mid-1950s by Mr. Patrick Osoba in collaboration with the Finnish Firm, Nordstrom and Company. The industry was known as Nigerian Line. By 1959, the Nigerian government established the Nigerian Shipping Line Limited (NNSL) in partnership with Palm Line Limited and Elder Dempster Limited. The shipping industry commenced its operation with only two secondhand ships, increased to 27 ships in 1980 and dropped to 13 ships in 1992. To invigorate NNSL, the Ship Building Fund (SASBF) and Ship Acquisition was invested $65 million. In spite of that, the NNSL was liquidated in 1995 due to the maladministration and unprofessionalism (Ukwuegbu, 2015; Faith, 2019).

Nigerian has about 8,600kms internal waterways, and its coastline along the Gulf of Guinea is stretched to about 850 km. The country has endowed with six key seaports, including the Tincan Island port, the Apapa port, the Warri port, the Calabar port, the Onne port and the Port Harcourt port. Additionally, there are other several inland ports that include the Onitsha port on the River Niger (HSN, 2018). The coastline is bordering Atlantic Ocean and that makes it strategically important for trade. Therefore, maritime transport industry has significantly contributed to the Nigerian economic development. Maritime transport records about 95 percent vehicular means of Nigerian international trade (Faith, 2019). Furthermore, Nigeria is a major oil producing country and large market for foreign goods. The oil has been extracted and exported to foreign countries via sea (Carmody, 2016). Arguably, the maritime business provides job opportunities, alternative means of transportation and mode of revenue generation for the Nigerian government. The Nigerian Bureau of Statistics (NBS) has reported that 43, 019, 889 metric tons of cargoes were managed in the six Nigerian ports in 2017. Out of that number, Tincan port managed 14,623,239, Apapa port managed 17,523,313, Rivers port managed 2,332,967, Calabar port managed 2,078,542, Onne port managed 1,947,347 and Delta port managed 4,514,481. Recently, Nigeria accounts for over 70% of the volume of cargo and vessel traffic in the entire West African sub-region with 96% of her import cargos being transported through maritime channels (HSN, 2018; Buhari, 2013).

To enhance maritime transportation, the Nigerian Port Authority was established in March 1954 via the Port Act of 1954. Subsequently, the name was changed to NP Plc in 1992, but it was later revised to it former name (NPA) in 1998 (Badejo, 2019). The agency has been saddled with the responsibility to control and manage maritime commercial activities in Nigeria. Additionally, the Nigerian government has enacted the Coastal and Island Shipping (Cabotage) Act to improve indigenous involvement in commercial activities in Nigerian maritime. It equally aims to facilitate efficiency, manpower development and diversification of the Nigerian economy. However, the Word Bank's Annual Ease of Doing Business Report of 2017 rates Nigeria low at 183 out of 185 countries trading across borders, thereby measuring a country's maritime transport efficiency (World Bank, 2017). Similarly, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) reports that Nigeria has the largest economy in Africa with GDP of $413 billion in 2017. In spite of that, it lags behind many smaller economy in the continent in terms of maritime trade. The report of the Lagos Chamber of Commerce & Industry (LCCI) reveals that the entire maritime sector contributed only 0.05% to the Nigerian economy. Whereas, South Africa and Kenya maritime sectors contributed about 1.4% and 3% respectively to their economies. Currently, Nigerian maritime sector is classified among the worst in the world, because of the challenges bedeviling the sector (LCCI, 2018: NBS, 2016). The challenges include piracy, sea armed robbery, traffic congestion, poor access roads, pollution, legislation, manpower, corruption, delay of import/export processes, illegal charges as well as illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing. Although substantial efforts were made to reform the maritime sector through partial privatization of the ports in the 2000s. Yet, 20 years later, no significant improvement has been recorded (Faith, 2019; LCCI, 2018). It is against the foregoing background this study motivates to critically evaluate the challenges facing the Nigerian maritime industry and recommend strategic ways to overcomes those challenges.

Key Challenges Facing the Nigerian Maritime Sector

Maritime sector is the life-blood of most nations. It provides numerous opportunities to the governments and citizens. The sector equally provides platform for renewable energy, fisheries, maritime transport, waste management, tourism, and marine biodiversity. If the sector harnessed judiciously, it will create jobs, reduce poverty, create wealth and encourage entrepreneurship. Consequently, there would be economic development and increase in national gross product (GDP) (Ekpo, 2012). Furthermore, maritime sector has been regarded as a driving force of economic development and prosperity. Vanguard News (2019) reports that about 90 percent of world commercial activities by size is carried-out by sea. It maintains that more than 60 percent of all imports to West Africa are Nigerian bound. Therefore, the Nigeria has enormous opportunities to boost its economy by virtue of its strategic position along the coastline of the Gulf of Guinea (Brick Stone, 2018). However, the Nigerian maritime sector has been facing myriads of challenges that thwart any effort to utilize the sector toward achieving economic growth and create wealth for its citizens (CIPE & LCCI, 2018). These challenges include, but not limited to the following:

2. Literature Review

This section appraises and discusses the relevant literature written in relation to this research topic and its key concepts. It is divided into sub-sections. The first section discusses on piracy and insecurity inconsistent policies and regulatory frameworks. This part also reviews illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing. Furthermore, it contains literature on marine pollution and inefficiency, corruption and high tariff syndrome.

Piracy and Insecurity

The sequence of marine pirate attacks along the coastline of West Africa have centered around Gulf of Guinea. About nine countries share coastlines along the Gulf of Guinea including Nigeria. Nigerian seawaters have been regarded among the most alarmingly unsafe in the world. The International Maritime Bureau rated Nigeria first in global maritime pirate incidents and sea armed robbery until it was surpassed by Somalia in 2008 (Blanchard & Husted, 2016). Ploch (2013) posits that Nigeria has increasingly become transshipment hub for narcotics trafficking. The major difference between piracy on Nigerian and Somalian seas is that Nigerian pirates largely concerned about hijacking the ships to draw off the crude oil and sell in local black market, whereas Somali pirates capture ships as part of kidnap-for-ransom tactics (Starr, 2014). On December 17, 2013 Reuters news reported that the Greek engineer and Ukrainian captain were kidnapped from the ship carrying crude oil on the Nigerian coast (Reuters, 2013). The two men were released 3 weeks later after ransom have been paid to the pirates. Similarly, in 2014, a United Kingdom leading maritime intelligence provider (Dryad Maritime) warned on the proliferation of crew kidnap in the Gulf of Guinea. The agency added that about ten pirate attacks occurred in December 2013 alone. Few weeks after the Dryad's warning two Nigerian-flagged ships were attacked by the pirates and kidnapped six crew members (MSR, 2014). Most of the maritime piracy attacks in West Africa have occurred on Nigerian waters. The Nigerian Navy laments that about 200,000 barrels of crude oil estimated value of about $200 billion have been lost annually to pirates and thieves (NIALS, 2015; Bsure, 2016; Starr, 2014). Bridger (2014) submits that, although many cases of piracy are not officially reported, yet the Nigerian pirates have hijacked about 12 ships and kidnapped around 20 crew members in early 2014. Likewise, thirty-four pirate ship attacks were reported in 2018. Also, about 20 sea robbery attacks were registered in 2018 (Safety4Sea, 2019).

Inconsistent Policies and Regulatory Frameworks

The Nigerian Maritime sector has been suffering from numerous inconsistent policies and regulatory frameworks that negatively affect its productivity and efficiency. For example, as far back as 2001, the Nigerian government declared the policy of allowing all importers to bring used vehicles with no age limits into the country. The policy was meant to boost the Nigerian economy through the use of maritime sector. However, few weeks later the government revised the policy and thereby banning importation of all used vehicles that was five years old into the country. The policy was initiated without consideration of the revenue which government collected from those items. This led to enormous port congestion in 2001, and that offered an opportunity to the neighboring countries such as Togo, Cotonou and Ghana to import the vehicles with no age limits through their ports. This policy led to the great loss of revenue for the Nigerian government and increased smuggling of the vehicles via porous borders (Ndikom, 2004; Obed et al., 2017). Faith (2019) argues that Nigerian maritime sector has capacity of generating N7 trillion ($ 194.9 billion) annually. However, lack of good policy, regulatory and legal frameworks generate inefficiency and low performance in the sector. Additionally, lack of operational shipping policy framework has produced indifferent behavior among ship-owners, ship agents and other stakeholders. This has negatively affected the development of maritime sector in Nigeria (Obed et al., 2017).

Nevertheless, Nigerian Maritime Administration and Safety Agency (NIMASA) Act 2007 has established NIMASA. It is an agency saddled with the responsibility to develop and regulate shipping matters relating to commercial shipping and seafarers in Nigeria. There is also the Coastal and Inland Shipping (Cabotage) Act 2003, it was law formulated to encourage Nigerian participation in domestic maritime trade. The Act discourages use of foreign vessels in national coastal trade and thereby promoting indigenous capacity and development. Additionally, there is National Port Authority (NPA), the NPA Act established to uphold, develop and regulate the usage of Nigerian ports. This is to ensure effective control and utilization of the ports (Brick Stone, 2018). Likewise, there is Merchant Shipping Act of 2007, which has been established to regulate merchant shipping and other related matters. The Act permits only registered Nigerian ships to carry out commercial activities in Nigeria, except stated otherwise. However, this Act has to be executed by NIMASA. The NIMASA stipulates the rule and regulation for ship operations in Nigeria relating to registration, certification and punishment for violating the Act. Therefore, there exists various government agencies in maritime sector that perform similar functions (Faith, 2019; Brick Stone, 2018).

Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) Fishing

Fishing has significantly contributed to the revenue of many developing countries (Okafor-Yarwood, 2017). Most of the countries from the Gulf of Guinea drives their animal protein from fishery resources. African waters are endowed with abundance fishery resources. Fishery provides source of income or livelihood support to more than 35 million African fishers. Three of the Large Marine Ecosystems (LMEs) of Africa have been rated as the four most productive LMEs worldwide. If the fishing sector is properly managed in Africa, it could contribute to about $20 billion to the domestic economies. (Belhabib, Sumaila & Pauly, 2015). Nigeria and some other countries in the Gulf of Guinea region (such as Ghana, Senegal and Guinea Bissau) depend on fishing for foreign direct investments. They generate millions of dollar via license levies and exports. Also, they make a lot of money from Fisheries Partnership Agreement (FPA) with Distant Water Fishing Nations (DWFN), including China, Russia, South Korea and European Union (EU) (Ilnyckyj,2007; Tsamenyi, 2014; EU, 2017; Belhabib et al, 2015). For instance, between 2000 to 2010 European Union paid about $307 million per year for fishing permit in West Africa (Belhabib et al, 2015; Okafor-Yarwood, 2017).

However, the prevalence of inappropriate activities such as illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing hampers the capacity of the Nigeria and other countries of the Gulf of Guinea to fully utilize their marine resources (Okafor-Yarwood, 2017). These illegal, unreported and irregulated fishing is a great challenge to marine ecosystem and those who benefiting from it (Petrossian, 2014). Onuoha (2012) laments that Nigeria losses about $800 million annually in activities related to UUI fishing. Although his assertion could not be validated due to the lack of substantial data. Even though, the data from the Nigerian Department of Fisheries reveals that UUI fishing makes Nigeria to loss about $29 million in shrimps alone each year. Conversely, this is related to fragile government institutions, insincerity of fishing officials and lack of cooperation among the countries in the Gulf of Guinea region (Telesetsky, 2015; MRAG, 2016).

Marine Pollution

Nigerian Petroleum Industry is the major source of the Nigerian economy. Therefore, oil has significantly contributed to the economic grow and development of Nigeria. The country generates most of its wealth from the production and sale of oil, in which operation comprising on-shore and off-shore (Aghalino& Eyinla, 2009). Despite the advantageous benefits of the oil, it has negative consequences such as oil spillage and discharge of sewages (marine pollution) (Ekpu, 1996; Aghalino, 1999). Accordingly, the challenge of the Nigerian marine pollution is aggravated by oil exploration and production. The marine pollution causes environmental degradation on Nigerian coastal areas such as Niger Delta region (Faith, 2019).

Furthermore, fish enormously contributes to food security of millions of Nigerians and other countries in the Gulf of Guinea. It provides about 80 percent of the animal protein consumed in coastal area of Nigeria such as Niger Delta. However, the sustainability of the fishing is alarmingly deteriorated in the Niger Delta region, because of the harmful environmental pollution in the areas. The marine pollution from oil spillage has spoilt the environment and thereby intensifying food insecurity in the region (Okafor-Yarwood, 2018). Thus, lack of environmental regulations or implementation undermines any effort for a sustainable marine environment (Faith, 2019). Ugwu (2005) argues that there is no specific act of parliament or body of law dealing with the degradation of Nigerian marine environment. Though, there are international conventions or regulation for that issue.

Inefficiency, Corruption and High tariff syndrome

Corruption, inefficiency and high tariff have become the prevailing challenges facing the Nigerian maritime sector. Rampant corruption exists among the officials of the Nigerian maritime industry. Many credible reports have testified that there are social extortion and bribery among officials of the industry, and that makes Nigeria the most challenging country to do business (CFC, 2019). The report of the Maritime Anti-Corruption Network (MACN) has summarized the situation as follows:

> *Nigeria is one of the most challenging countries to do business in as requests for cash and in-kind payments are very common. Many government agencies frequently make corrupt demands during port calls related to alleged irregularities of documentation (e.g. yellow fever certificates, crew contracts) or operations (e.g. ballast water discharge documentation, onboard practice in general). When practices are challenged,*

> *threats of heavy delays are common. One of the main challenges faced by shipping companies is the officials' wide individual discretionary powers. This leads to unpredictable interpretation of laws, making it difficult to prepare for port calls and governmental actions. (MACN, 2018: 2).*

The corruption and exorbitant tariff have produced inefficiency and lack of performance in the Nigerian maritime sector (Obed et al, 2017). The LCCI (2018) reports that Nigerian ports has categorized among the worst in the world because of the challenges relating to corruption and illegal charges by port officials. The exorbitant cost remains impediment to trade in the Nigerian ports. The importation attracts extra cost related to yard handling fees (which comprise demurrage and storage), which "represents an odd 77% of the total cost, driven by longer-than-ideal border clearance times, yard handling procedures, and informal payments to customs and other government agencies" (LCCI, 2016: 2). The extra charges associated with conveyance of goods from port to warehouses estimate 94% of the total cost (LCCI, 2016). Similarly, MACN has revealed that, in Apapa ports many officials demanded up to $25,000. The reasons behind these demands involved purported missing registrations in seaman's books, discrepancy in crew contracts, irregularities in medicine lists and yellow card document (MACN, 2018). This has significantly affected the operational efficiency in the sector, which resulted to the diversion of Nigerian bound cargo to the ports of neighboring countries such as Cotonou, Togo, and Ghana (Obed et al., 2017).

3. Conclusion and Recommendations

Conclusion

The Nigerian maritime sector has the capacity to boost the Nigerian economy due to its strategic importance. It is located along the coastline corridor of the Gulf of Guinea. The country is equally blessed with natural maritime endowment base covering more than850kms. The Nigerian maritime provides numerous opportunities that comprise fishing, marine transport, tourism, renewable energy, marine biodiversity and waste management. Arguably, the sector has the capacity to reduce poverty, create jobs and wealth to the Nigerians. Moreover, maritime sector has been regarded as a driving force of economic development and prosperity. Vanguard News (2019) reports that about 90 percent of world commercial activities by size is carried-out by sea. Therefore, with Nigerian total annual shipping cost, estimated at between $5billion to $6 billion annually, there is no doubt that shipping is of great importance to the Nigerian economy. However, Nigerian maritime sector faces many challenges that hindered full utilization of the sector to achieve economic development. These challenges comprise inefficiency, corruption, inconsistent policies, environmental pollution, piracy among others. Currently, Nigerian maritime sector is classified among the worst in the world, because of the challenges bedeviling the sector (LCCI, 2018: NBS, 2016). This underlines the need to immediately take steps towards reforming the Nigerian maritime sector to be able to develop the Nigerian economy.

Recommendations

Accordingly, this study recommends the following:

- The government needs to formulate policies and regulatory frameworks that will ease trade and attract Foreign Direct Investment (FDI). This will provide enabling environment and encourage private sector participation for sustainable maritime trade and investment.

- The government shall tackle the challenges of piracy, sea armed robbery and other insecurity in the Nigerian waters and the entire Gulf of Guinea. To achieve that, the Nigeria need to collaborate with all the state members in the Gulf of Guinea. Managing the insecurity requires effective and broad regional measures that are essential to national and regional security.
- It is essential for the government to synergize all the fragmented activities and eliminate duplication of duties that produce inefficiency and corruption in the maritime sector.
- Global competitiveness could only be achieved if there is efficiency in the sector. Therefore, the government need to improve transparency in the operation of maritime sector. Certainly, this will increase confidence in the sector that will lead to more revenue earning.
- With regards to the environmental pollution, the Nigerian government requires to formulate a legal framework or impose a strict policy for the environmental pollution. The oil companies operating in Nigeria need to abide by the best practices of global oil exploration and avoid anything that will cause environmental degradation.
- The cost of doing business in the Nigerian maritime industry need to be reduced to a bearable level. High charges or illegal charges scare people from doing business in Nigerian waters.

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