

advantageous for local criminal groups to operate in the area. He argued as follows:

You see, securing the waterways is extremely difficult, there are places that our gunboats cannot navigate, some places speed boats can't get there and these are the places where these boys have their camps, in the swamps. These guys would be in the mangrove since you are not seeing them and they are so sophisticated that if you are coming with your speed boat they can be in that forests or swamp listening to the sound of the boat. They can tell you if that boat is carrying 25 horsepower or whatever. So, from afar they can tell you that this is a gunboat approaching or they can tell you that it can be a passenger boat. That is how sophisticated they have been in their criminality. If the navy is approaching, they would just know that the navy is approaching. So, before you reach there they have gone because they know the area more than you. They know where to go, you don't know where to go. (KII/Male/State Security Agent/Ekeremor).

The criminal activities of militants in Ekeremor, according to the Police Area Commander and the State Security Agent, extends beyond the Ekeremor waterways to parts of Southern Ijaw local government, Brass local government, parts of Delta State, and deep into the Atlantic Ocean on international waterways like the Bakassi peninsula where Cameroonian soldiers have been reportedly killed by militants from Ekeremor. Multiple incidences of militant attacks have been recorded between 2019 to early parts of 2020 along the Ekeremor waterways. On March 22, 2020, militants attacked the Atala oil field at Azagbene community. Houseboats at the flow station were burnt down and few soldiers were declared missing. Before this incident, on March 16, 2020, a transport speedboat heading from Ogbobagbene to Aghoro was attacked and passengers on board were robbed and kidnapped. Similarly, on February 1, 2020, an attack was launched where oil company staff heading to the Tunu flow station were kidnapped along the Egbemaangalabiri waterways. On January 3rd, 2020 three expatriates working for Styling Global Dredging Company were equally kidnapped, resulting in the killing of four naval officers along the Bilabiri-Agge waterway. On November 9, 2019, four soldiers escorting food stuff to Tunu Flow Station were killed and the militants went away with all food items and arms belonging to the soldiers. The dire security situation is