

An Assessment of the Niger Delta Amnesty Programme in Southern Ijaw Local Government Area of Bayelsa State, Nigeria

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Abstract

The Niger Delta region of Nigeria generates 95% of export earnings and about 40% of the Nigerian government revenue (IMF). This region was known for its calmness and peacefulness until the discovery of oil in the Oloibiri community, Ogbia Local Government Area of present-day Bayelsa State in 1956. The discovery and exploration of oil in the Niger Delta region gave birth to the destruction of the environment, livelihood and agitation for resource control and the development of the region. The continued neglect of the environment by the government and the oil companies coupled with the rise in unemployment and youth restiveness gave birth to militant groups that killed, kidnapped and vandalised oil installations. The Nigerian government in response to the plight of the Niger Delta people introduced the amnesty programme in 2009. This research work, therefore, assesses the Niger Delta amnesty programme in the Southern Ijaw Local Government Area of Bayelsa State. It further assesses the extent to which the amnesty programme has addressed the root causes of the Niger Delta crisis. The study adopted a descriptive research design (qualitative method), using both primary and secondary data collection. The theory of change and utilization-focused evaluation is used for the study. The findings of this research established that the amnesty programme has not fully addressed the root causes of the Niger Delta conflict. Given this, for the amnesty programme to be effective, the government should make provisions for employment and social amenities in the Niger Delta region.

Keywords: Amnesty, Niger Delta, Nigeria, Bayelsa, Southern Ijaw

Introduction

Since the democratic experience of Nigeria, the country has witnessed several conflicts ranging from inter-ethnic clashes, religious violence, assassination, murder and other related conflicts. Many of these conflicts arise as a result of injustice and marginalization from one group or the state itself. The recent crises staged in the Niger Delta over marginalization led to the loss of both public and private properties, this resulted in the introduction of amnesty in the region (Olawole, 2016:116).

For several decades, the Niger Delta region of Nigeria has been a hotbed of conflict in Nigeria. The conflict is between the combatant youths of the region (Militants) on one part and the government and the multinational oil companies on the other part. The core issue of the conflict is the ecological destruction of the degraded environment and resource control. This is as a result of oil exploration and exploitation activities that have destroyed the land, forest, farm and contamination of the rivers and waterways; as the only means of livelihood of the people, who are mostly farmers, fishermen, hunters and timber dealers. Reports are made to the effect that the Niger Delta region is one of the most polluted areas, in the face of the earth (Walsh, *Urban Wastelands: The World's 10 Most Polluted Places*, 2013). The adverse effect of the pollution on the region is poverty, destructive diseases, and in some cases lack of shelter as a result of displacement by oil extraction on the original settlement. The tragedy of the Niger Delta region is that it is one of the poorest regions in Nigeria today. According to Mark and Alabo (2006), despite the vast oil resources of the Niger Delta, the region remains poor.

The Government of Nigeria used several measures to contain the Niger Delta crisis but proved abortive. Such measures include the establishment of the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) in the year 2000 to regulate the use of sums received from the allocation of the federation account for tackling ecological problems which arise from the exploration of oil minerals in the Niger Delta region and for connected purposes (NDDC Establishment Act, 2000). Also, the Ministry of Niger Delta Affairs was established on September 10, 2008, by late President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua to coordinate and handle policies for the development and security of the Niger Delta region (MNDA website, 2018). The continued degradation of the region by the Multinational Oil Companies and constant human rights violations in

form of brutality, arrest, extrajudicial killing by security agents, and rape, in line with the indifferent attitude of the Nigerian Government, to adhere to the agitations of the region, which made the people reverse the nonviolent social movement to become violent on the face of the repressive approach by the Nigeria Government. That was the emergence of militancy in the Niger Delta region.

The Niger Delta is made up of nine states Bayelsa, Rivers, Delta, Cross River, Edo, Akwa-Ibom Ondo, Imo and, Abia States. Bayelsa, Rivers, and Delta are known as the three core Niger Delta states. According to Ama-Ogbari (2009), the Ijaw tribe is the dominant tribe in the Niger Delta region.

Amnesty is a pardon extended by the government to a group of persons. It is a general pardon for offences, especially political offences against a government, often granted before any trial or conviction. Amnesty is carried out all over the world for different purposes. In the 1970s, amnesty was granted in the wake of the Vietnam War to those who refused to perform military service and those that refused to comply with military doctrines by President Carter, to heal war wounds. Amnesty was also granted in the United States in 1868 after the American civil war (1861-1868), as well as the French amnesty of 1905. Those granted amnesties were able to recover their rights to vote and be voted, pardoning past violations without changing the laws violated. In Africa, such as South Africa, Amnesty was granted to prisoners who were given the death penalty (Fuller, 2014).

In Nigeria, Amnesty was introduced by late President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua as an effort to subdue agitations from the oil-rich Niger Delta. One of the major events that led to the amnesty proclamation was the Willink Commission of 1957 to answer the complaints and requests of minority groups in the country (Mark & Alabo, 2007). As a resource-rich region in Nigeria, the request of the Niger Delta people was the development of the Niger Delta region and to alleviate the poverty of the people. According to Odey (2013), the recommendations of the Commission gave birth to the setting up of the Niger Delta Development Board (NDDDB) in the 1960s. The NDDDB was charged with the responsibility of bringing about the rapid development of the Niger Delta region.

The amnesty extended to different ethnic militant groups in the Niger Delta such as the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), Egbesu, Niger Delta Volunteer Force and Niger Delta Vigilante etc. These militant groups emerged in the Niger Delta region and were known for their violent attacks on oil infrastructures and kidnap of foreign oil workers for ransom. The continuous violent attacks of the militant groups on oil infrastructures and workers caused a drastic fall in the production and export of crude oil in the region. The Amnesty Programme was therefore set up to end such violent attacks, with the main objective to disarm, demobilize and reintegrate/rehabilitate the militants and return them to the communities from the creeks to start normal lives as civilians as well as the infrastructural development of the Niger Delta region. The programme provided benefits such as educational opportunities, monetary benefits and skill acquisition to those militants who gave up their weapons. The programme resulted in a sharp reduction of violent attacks on oil companies and workers, thereby leading to an increase in oil production (Marclint, 2017). This study, therefore, assesses the effectiveness of the amnesty programme in the Southern Ijaw Local government area of Bayelsa State Nigeria. The study also determines the success of the Niger Delta Amnesty Programme with the objectives of the amnesty programme in the Southern Ijaw Local Government area. The study further determines the challenges confronting the implementation of the Niger Delta amnesty programme in the Southern Ijaw Local Government Area. Also, the study determines the extent to which the Niger Delta amnesty programme has been able to address the causes of the conflict in the Southern Ijaw Local Government Area.

Study Area and Scope of the study

The study assesses the Niger Delta amnesty programme in the Southern Ijaw Local Government Area of Bayelsa State. The study focused on the rehabilitating aspect of the amnesty programme from 2009 to 2013 since the period under review was the peak of the amnesty programme

Bayelsa State is one of the cores Niger Delta states. It was created out of old Rivers State on 1st October 1996. The name Bayelsa State is an acronym of the former local government areas, Brass, Yenagoa and Sagbama (BALGA, YELGA, SALGA- BA+YEL+SA)

in the then Rivers state which now constitute the area Bayelsa state. Bayelsa state covers 21,100 Square Kilometres of land. It shares boundaries with Delta State on the North, Rivers State on the East and the Atlantic Ocean on the West and South (NigeriaGalleria, 2017). Bayelsa is made up of eight (8) local government areas- Yenagoa, Brass, Sagbama, Ekeremor, Nembe, Ogbia, Kolokuma/Opokuma, and Southern Ijaw Local Government Areas, with Yenagoa as its capital city and Southern Ijaw as the largest local government area. According to the National Bureau of Statistics 2012 annual statistics, Bayelsa state has a total population of 1.9 million people (2010 estimate). Bayelsa State has one of the largest crude oil and natural gas deposits in Nigeria, which makes petroleum production extensive in the state (Clever, 2009). The preoccupations of the people were fishing, farming, palm oil and kernel production, hunting etc.

Southern Ijaw Local Government Area is the largest local government area in Bayelsa State. Its headquarters is at Oporoma. It shares a boundary on the west with Brass LGA, Sagbama on the north and East and Yenagoa on the south. The people of Southern Ijaw LGA are known as the Izon people. The Southern Ijaw people are mainly farmers, fishermen, hunters etc. According to the 2006 census, the total population of the area is 319,413, (Clever, 2009). The Niger Delta amnesty programme was also carried out in the Southern Ijaw Local Government Area of Bayelsa State where militancy was very prominent.

Literature review and theoretical framework

The term “Amnesty” is derived from the Greek word *amnestia* meaning “forgetfulness or passing over.” According to the black’s law dictionary, (2009), amnesty is a pardon by the government to a group or class of persons, usually, for a political offence, the act of a sovereign power officially forgiving certain classes of persons who are subject to trial but have not yet been convicted. It is also a period during which people can admit to the crime and give up weapons without being punished. Nada (2017) explains amnesty as a law brought by an act of parliament, which grants to an undefined number of persons released from being persecuted, full or partial release for the execution of the penalty and replacing the penalty with a more favourable one or

annulations of the legal consequences from the verdict. To the Federation for America Immigration Reform (FAIR, 2014), Granting amnesty erases crime committed by the person the amnesty is being granted to, and also, the punishment associated with the crime is forgotten.

The concept is politically used for compromise and reunion following the war. Amnesty is, therefore, a blanket abolition of political offence by the government with the legal result that the group charged with convicted have the charge or conviction wiped out, amnesty may be granted afterwards and it, in general, is given to a whole class of criminals, either before judgment or charge with a political offence against the state to restore tranquillity in the state (Igeiwari, 2014).

In Nigeria, the government declared a state of amnesty in the Niger Delta region to militants who were operating in the region and the nation at large. Amnesty promotes reconciliation and social cohesion (Olawole & Omadia, 2016). It is a reminder that without peace, there can be no development. To bring peace to the region, therefore, the Nigerian government used amnesty and rehabilitation programmes to help the people recover from the past.

Overview of Rehabilitation

From the word rehabilitate, rehabilitation is derived from the Latin prefix *re*, meaning “again” and *habitare* meaning “make fit.” It is defined as an act of bringing someone or something back to a good condition. According to World Health Organization (WHO, 2011), “Rehabilitation is a process aimed at enabling disabled persons to reach and maintain their optimal physical, sensory, intellectual, psychological and social functional levels”.

Rehabilitation is a process of adaptation or recovery through which an individual suffering from disabling or functionally limiting conditions, whether temporary or irreversible, participates to gain maximal function, independence, and restoration. Kristen, 2011 describes rehabilitation as activities or programmes designed to assist individuals who have experienced a trauma that results in damage or hurt and as a result, creates a loss of function (physical, psychological, social or vocational).

Vaughan, (1961) refers to rehabilitation as the fullest possible restoration to normal life and working efficiency of a person incapacitated by disease or injury. Rehabilitation is aimed at restoring something to its original state through achieving compensation of lost functions, maintenance of current functions and improvement or restoration of functions. Thus, the aim of rehabilitation has traditionally been seen as facilitating the normalization of human functioning after injury, disease or defect.

Historical Analysis of the Niger Delta Conflict

The Niger Delta is the homeland of interrelated people with a closely knitted historical background. According to Alabo & Mark (2008), the Niger Delta problem is not just one, but a complex of many interrelated problems. However, violence in the Niger Delta could be traced back to the discovery of crude oil at Oloibiri town in present-day Bayelsa state in 1956 and the beginning of oil exploration in the region in 1958. To Francis & Akpan (2003), the Niger Delta crisis is caused by land alienation, political marginalisation, socio-economic inequalities and dishonest leadership.

The Niger Delta region is an area endowed with natural resources; crude oil in particular. The discovery of crude oil by the Royal Dutch Shell Company at Oloibiri in present-day Bayelsa state attracted other multi-national companies such as Total, Fina, Elf, ExxonMobil, and Texaco amongst others to the region (Simon, Bassey, Odika, 2013). Oil exploration activities grew sharply with the production rising from 1million barrels per day to 2.4million barrels per day within 4 years (Alabo & Mark, 2008). According to Simon, Bassey & Odika (2013), since then, production has increased tremendously, generating huge revenue for the government, yet the communities from which the oil was extracted continued to live in abject poverty coupled with the divested socio-economic environment. This situation led to the emergence of agitations and contentions in the region in the 1990s.

Francis & Akpan (2013:4) opines that the people of the Niger Delta are socio-economically neglected, they do not sufficiently benefit from the oil proceeds, because oil is extracted from the region. Instead, the people's sources of livelihood have been paralyzed due to environmental degradation caused by the activities of oil exploration.

“The peoples’ consciousness of the fact of degradation, exploitation, and pollution of their environment without due compensation from the oil companies, or the federal government responsible for the company’s operation in the region, compels them to resort violent conflicts and militancy, as ways of getting their essential problems resolved.” The people of the Niger Delta region experienced serious environmental hazards such as; lack of access to clean water and sanitation, indoor air pollution from business stores, deforestation and severe soil degradation. The Niger Delta is also opened to the spread of infectious diseases. A major impact of the oil industry on the Niger Delta environment is oil spillages. Oil spillage is, therefore, a natural by-product of petroleum exploration, exploitation, refining, and marketing.

The 1990s marked the emergence of agitations in the Niger Delta in form of non-violent protests by ethnic militant groups such as the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP), the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), Bakasi, Ijaw Youth Council etc. Most prominent among them was the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP), led by Ken Saro-Wiwa, protesting against environmental degradation on the lands and waters of Ogoni people, Rivers state. Their protests succeeded in kicking out Shell from Ogoni land. However, Ken Saro-Wiwa, along with four Ogoni agitators were tried and killed by the Nigerian government. In Bayelsa State, the Ijaw Youth Council (IYC) carried out a procession in the state capital parallel with the Kiama Declaration of 1998 for oil companies to cease operation and withdraw from Ijaw territory, but the government responded with violence. Ekumaoko (2013) argue that activities of the Movement for the Emancipation of the Ogoni People (MOSOP) gave much leeway to the conflict in the Niger Delta. He argues further that the arrest and death of Ken Saro-Wiwa gave the Niger Delta struggle an international status and instead of deterring others, several militant groups started emerging. Most prominent among these ethnic militant groups are Movement for the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB), Movement for the Reparation to Ogbia (MORETO), The Chicoco Movement, Movement for the Survival of Ijaw Ethnic Nationality (MOSIEN), The Supreme Egbesu Assembly (SEA), The Niger Delta Vigilante (NDV), Niger Delta

Volunteer Force (NDVF), Egbesu Boys of Africa (EBA). Chukwuka & Oben (2010) categorized the Niger Delta militants into different groups:

- 1) Resource agitators' militant category (General Tompolo, Alex Preye, Asari Dokubo, Henry Okah, etc).
- 2) Cult groups militant category (Ateke Tom, Soboma George, etc); and
- 3) The political thug's militant category (General Africa, Commander Joshua, etc).

According to Francis & Akpan (2013), increased militancy and agitations in the Niger Delta can be blamed on the attitude of oil companies, the attitude, and policies of the government and the greedy behaviour of some militants. First, it has been argued repeatedly that oil companies operating in the Niger Delta are not carrying out their social and environmental responsibilities appropriately. The pollution of water, land, and vegetation from the oil well, and the devastation of crops and trees by the intense heat resulting from gas flaring are serious issues. These exploitative activities are viewed as frustrating the welfare of the oil-producing communities. Because of the negative impacts of the activities of the oil companies on the peoples' environment, their major occupations of farming and fishing declined severely. With these hazards and without appropriate compensation, some indigenes of the Niger Delta region seriously aggrieved resorted to violence as the last resort (since peaceful agitations were ignored) aimed at attracting the attention of the oil companies and the federal government to their problems. Sufficient enough to say that the selfish motive of the oil companies in their oil exploration and undue disregard to the dangers their activities posed to the oil-producing communities, contributed in no small measure to the violence experienced in the Niger Delta.

Second, the federal government had failed to bring out an equitable sharing formula in the distribution of oil proceeds, thus placing the oil-producing communities in a disadvantaged position. Furthermore, the federal government neglected its legislative responsibilities that would have regulated the activities of the oil companies and reduced damages to the oil communities.

Finally, greed has been identified as a contributing factor to the crisis in the Niger Delta. This factor is manifested in kidnapping and hostage-taking. Apart from the militants engaged in kidnapping in the creeks, youths in the cities and villages have bought into the business, which has come to be viewed as the quickest and most handy means of poverty alleviation. From agitation for resource control and compensation for environmental hazards, the militants diversified into kidnapping adults and children for financial gains.

It can also be argued that militancy in the Niger Delta region is a result of the Nigerian government's application of force in quelling non-violent protests for development and resource control as identified in the time of Ken Saro-Wiwa. Also, militancy in terms of kidnapping, hostage-taking, pipeline vandalization is a result of frustration due to unemployment, poverty, idleness and lack of education of youths in the region.

The granting of Amnesty

Amnesty has been used by many African nations as a tool for building reconciliation and peace after conflict. Amnesty as a tool of conflict resolution has been adopted by many nations, South Africa and Angola for instance. South Africa had to reach out to violence perpetrators after attaining its democracy in 1994, and this was from all parties involved and hence, amnesty was granted based on the condition that the perpetrator had to fully disclose their politically motivated crimes, (Kituri, 2016). Amnesty promise for all offences, acts, and omissions related to political objectives as well as committed in the conflicts past course was considered to be an integral deal part. The granting of amnesty promised protection from civil claims as well as from criminal prosecution but based on full public (or private) admission of their guilt and offences, (Fred, 1999).

In the case of Nigeria, the federal government employed several strategies to contain the insurgency in the Niger Delta to no avail. The late President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua in May 2007 introduced the Niger Delta Technical Committee (NDTC). The committee recommended amnesty with incorporated disarmament, demobilization, and rehabilitation of the militants among others. The Federal government of Nigeria acknowledges that the challenges of the

Niger Delta arose as a result of inadequacies of the previous attempt to meet the needs, yearnings, and aspirations of the people, and therefore set in motion machinery for sustainable development of the Niger Delta states. The government, therefore, desires that those who had engaged in militancy directly or indirectly in the Niger Delta should return to respect constituted authority and desire to apply for amnesty and pardon on such persons”

The amnesty Programme proclamation did not compel any of the militants to accept the offer of amnesty. The government rather signed a contract with only those who voluntarily accepted the offer, and they were taken through a proper and non-forceful DDR process. The militants were given 60 days to accept the amnesty offer which was between August 6 and October 4, 2009, and anyone caught in the act of militancy thereafter will be prosecuted. They were to be trained home and abroad which was a mechanism to bring relative peace to the region. The amnesty programme is made up of four components, which include environmental, petroleum, infrastructural and DDR, (Ajibola, 2015).

The Niger Delta Amnesty Programme

The terms of the amnesty included willingness and readiness of the militants to surrender their weapons, unconditionally renounce militancy and sign an undertaking to the effect. The government in return pledged its part to institute rehabilitation programmes for repentant ex-militants. The key objectives of the Nigerian amnesty programme are to stabilize, consolidate and sustain security conditions in the Niger Delta as a prerequisite for promoting economic development in the area and the country. According to Paul Oghenero (2014), Disarmament, Demobilization, Reintegration and Rehabilitation (DDRR) are one of the most important strategies for the resolution of conflict and management of post-conflict situations in the world today. He explains further that there are three majors' Phases to the Niger Delta amnesty programme, namely the disarmament and demobilization of militants: the rehabilitation and reintegration of ex-militants and, the post-amnesty package of huge infrastructural development. Below is the agenda of the Federal Government of Nigeria on the Niger Delta amnesty programme.

Table 1: Federal Government's Agenda on the Niger Delta Amnesty Programme (Target: 30, 000 Ex-militants)

Duration: August 6 – Oct 4, 2009 Disarmament	Duration: 6 to 12 Months Demobilization	Duration: Up to 5 Years Reintegration /Rehabilitation
Key activities	Key activities	Key activities
Collection of arms and ammunition, explosives etc.	Ex-militants report to camp, Verification, documentation, Transformational training, Peacebuilding & Conflict Resolution Counselling, Career guidance, Wellness assessment, Reintegration, Clarification, Educational & Vocational placement, Graduation & demobilization	Knowledge & skill acquisition, Financial empowerment placement programme, Microcredit education, Recommendation with local community conflict resolution Framework/mechanism, Monitoring & evaluation, The exit of amnesty.
Key enablers	Key enablers	Key enablers
Disarmament camps massive campaigns	Transformational training centres Rehabilitation camps	Partnering government agencies, NGOs, and private organizations Tracking & support framework.

Source: Office of the Special Adviser on the Niger Delta Amnesty Programme (OSAPND) Index: The Niger Delta Amnesty Programme

Table 2: Total targets of participants in the Niger Delta amnesty programme (Participant Demography)

S/N	State	Male	Female	Total
1	Abia	155	8	163
2	Akwa-Ibom	571	29	600
3	Bayelsa	8,900	117	9,017
4	Cross River	159	1	160
5	Delta	4,396	20	4,416
6	Edo	450	0	450
7	Imo	297	3	300
8	Ondo	2,198	2	2,200
9	Rivers	8,963	89	9,052
Total		26,089	272	26,361

Source: Asua 2013: Niger Delta Crises and National Security in Nigeria: Appraisal of the Amnesty Programme.

At the commencement of the programme, the government of Nigeria demonstrated commitment to the programme through the financial allocation of N127billion to cover the programme through 2009 and 2011. From the N127 billion, N3 billion was used as take-off in 2009. This covered training in various skills within and outside the country, payment of stipends, payment of the leaders of various militant groups and a few were given contracts to protect the oil pipelines from vandalization. In 2012, N74 billion was allocated for the amnesty programme which covered feedings, payment and rehabilitation of ex-militants. In 2013, N66 billion was allocated for the same purpose. At the end of the amnesty, when the amnesty offer was closed, over 8000 militants surrendered their arms and ammunition and pledged allegiance to the federal government (Simon, et al, 2013).

The first programme been disarmament commenced June 25, 2009, to October 4. This involved the voluntary surrendering of arms by ex-militants. Between June 25 and 4 October 2009, about 20, 192 militant agitators had accepted the offer of amnesty and handed in their firearms and ammunition which were more than 20,000 items. At the end of the cessation, over 20,000 militants were disarmed and registered. The highest numbers of the ex-militants registered during the first phase of the disarmament exercise came from Rivers State, with 6,997, closely followed by those of Bayelsa State origins, with 6,961, and those from Delta with 3,361. The others came from the other Niger Delta six states. This number included 133 women, but no record of child soldiers. At the end of the exercise 18 gunboats, 299,032 rounds of ammunition, 3,831 weapons, 2,072 explosives, and several rocket launchers were reported to have been surrendered by the militants to the Government security agencies. In November 2010, the second phase of 6,166 came from several militant groups that claimed to be disarmed after the period of grace had elapsed. Consequently, the number rose to 30,000 in December 2012, when another 3,642 were included in the programme as the third phase (Goodnews & Amakihe, 2014).

Table 3: Descriptions of Key Militants that Accepted Amnesty in 2009

S/N	Names	Date of Acceptance	Estimated Arms and Ammunitions Surrendered
1	Solomon Ndigbara alias Osama bin Laden	26 June 2009	Gave up 11 arms and 1,000 ammunition
2	Henry Okah	13 July 2009	Though the supposed leader of MEND, Okah did not surrender any arms because he had been arrested in Angola and extradited to Nigeria since February 2008; where he was detained and was facing a closed trial on 62 count charges.
3	Victor Ben Ebikabowei alias General Boyloaf and 31 other militants; including African Owei, Joshua Macaiver, and Ezizi Ogunboss	7 August 2009	Surrendered an assortment of arms totalling 520, ammunitions valued at 95,970 rounds and 16 gunboats.
4	Soboma George of Outlaws cult group.	13 August 2009	Surrendered 36 assorted weapons
5	KileSilkeyTorughedi (Young Shall Grow)	5 September 2009	Gave up an assortment of arms totalling 100 weapons, ammunitions worth 100,00 rounds and 3 gunboats
6	Ateke Tom of NDV	3 October 2009	The exact number is unknown but it included: anti-aircraft launchers, GPMG, Ak-47 rifles, Mark 4 rifles, pistols and loads of ammunition
7	Manfimisebi Othello and the Gwama Boys of Ilaje	3 October 2009	Surrendered different weapons, such as submachine guns, AK-47 rifles, hundreds of live ammunition and arrows

Source: Chukwuka & Oben, 2010: An Assessment of the Niger Delta Amnesty Programme Implementation in the Niger Delta of Nigeria

The second phase being demobilization of the disarmed militants commenced in May 2010. Participants were moved to the demobilization camp by the Amnesty Implementation Committee. The reason for this phase was to adequately carry out intensive non-violence transformational training and reorientation programme per batch of about 1,000 to 1,500 ex-militants. A centre at Obrubra in Cross River State was chosen as a single processing camp. The camp was officially opened on June 28, 2010. Militants who were disarmed in the first phase were admitted to camp in a total of 17 batches (Goodnews & Amikihe, 2014).

The disarming phase was followed by comprehensive programs such as workshops and incentives aimed at positively transforming the ex-militants. Rehabilitation is the third phase of the Niger Delta amnesty programme. This phase involves the inclusion of ex-combatants/ex-militants into civil society through gainful training and empowerment. It addresses the specific needs of ex-militants by offering them support in terms of skill development, education, professional training and any assistance to peaceful and sustainable livelihoods. It is broader in scope than disarmament and demobilization cutting across the economic, psychological and social life of the demobilized persons. It aims at rehabilitating not only the ex-militants but also the families and communities of ex-combatants. An amnesty agreement was reached and it made allowances for the delegates to be given a monthly stipend, the opportunity to live as free citizens, and contest (political participation) and freedom to travel out of the country if they so wished. They also have the opportunity to undergo educational or vocational training, depending on their preference, and these were either within or outside the country (Ajibola, 2015).

In implementing the rehabilitation aspect of the amnesty, Kingsley Kuku stated that about 30,000 persons enlisted and registered for the amnesty programme and more than 12,000 persons had undergone vocational training within and outside Nigeria. 5315 are in the universities in the US, UK, South Africa, Canada, Malaysia etc, as well as private universities in Nigeria (Olawole & Omadia, 2016:126). In rehabilitation camps, ex-militants were paid N15, 000 per day feeding allowance and N20, 000 per month for a maximum of three months for the period of rehabilitation. Stipends were increased to N65, 000 and also N15billion contract was awarded to Global Vessel Specialist Limited

(GWVSL), a firm believed to be owned by Tompolo, one of the militant leaders, to supply vessels for the use of national military authority to secure the waterways (Augustine & Andrew, 2016).

By April 2013, it was reported that 5,067 persons had already graduated in fields such as entrepreneurship, welding, plumbing, fabrication, electrical installation, oil drilling and Information Communication Technology (ICT). In parallel with the amnesty programme, the budget of key Niger Delta development institutions like the Ministry of Niger Delta Affairs (MNDA) and Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) was increased from 2009, along with the state allocation for development (Kathryn, 2014). According to Osah & Amakihe (2014), so far, about 200 Nigerians from the Niger Delta have either been trained or are in training under the presidential amnesty aviation programmes.

Theory of Change (TOC)

Theory of Change (ToC) was developed in the United States in the 1990s and it was popularized by Carol Weiss as an approach to improve evaluation theory and practice in the field of a community initiative. Weiss described the Theory of Change as a theory of how and why an initiative works (Stein & Valters, 2012). Stein and Valters explain further that the ability to formulate the connection rests on the idea that social programmes are based on how and why they work. According to Vikram Patel et al (2014), the Theory of Change is a theory of how and why an initiative works, which can be empirically tested by measuring indicators for every expected step on a pathway to impact. Vogel (2012) described the Theory of Change as a description of the sequence of events that is expected to lead to a particular desired outcome and an on-going process of reflection to explore change and how it happens. Change is thus the result of a plan.

A theory of change explains how an intervention is expected to produce results. The theory typically starts with a sequence of events and results (outputs, immediate outcomes, intermediate outcomes and ultimate outcomes) that are expected to occur owing to the intervention. This is commonly referred to as the “program logic” or “logic model.” However, the theory of change goes further by outlining the mechanisms of change, as well as the assumptions, risks, and context that support or

hinder the theory from being manifested as observed outcomes. This opens the black box of change and allows evaluators to better examine the causal link between the intervention outputs and the observed outcomes (Canada.ca, 2012).

The theory of change forces stakeholders in the process to be explicit about how resources will be used to achieve the desired goal. It also helps a group develop a realistic picture of the difficulty of the change process required to produce their desired long-term results. It also helps program stakeholders develop a shared understanding of what they are trying to accomplish, by making everything clear to everyone involved. It is critical that the plans for an initiative are sound and that the results to be achieved are defined clearly beforehand so that everyone will know the success when they see it, (Vikram et al, 2014).

Theory of change, therefore explains the intervention of the Federal government of Nigeria in the long-protracted conflict of the Niger Delta with the amnesty programme. The grievances of the people have been with the government for perceived marginalization and the multi-national oil companies for environmental degradation, poverty, unemployment, lack of education of the Niger Delta region. The intention of the government through the intervention is for the amnesty programme to produce a positive result in form of bringing relative peace to the Niger Delta region and the nation at large. The federal government has been specific about the change it wants to achieve through the amnesty intervention, which is to bring relative peace to the Niger Delta region. Consequently, change is expected of the beneficiaries of the amnesty programme to embrace the amnesty offer and live like civilians in civilian society. The federal government has so far been explicit with both human and financial resources to achieve the desired goal of amnesty. It is important for the government to clearly define the goal to be achieved beforehand so that everyone will know the success of the programme when they see it. According to Omokhoa (2015), the current state of security is attributed to the amnesty programme particularly the DDR package. The amnesty package has been able to bring youth restiveness under control. The amnesty involved surrender, demobilization, disarmament, and subsequent training of ex-militants. It has also been successful in bringing about a very significant reduction in the disruption of oil production and damage to facilities.

Methodology

A descriptive research design (qualitative method) was adopted for this study. The target population of the study involves communities in the Southern Ijaw Local government area of Bayelsa and it covers both direct and indirect beneficiaries of the Niger Delta amnesty programme as well as the development agencies in the Niger Delta. The primary source of data was gathered from direct and indirect beneficiaries of the amnesty programme as well as other relevant Niger Delta development agencies with the use of the semi-structured open-ended interview was also used to gather data. Fifty (50) people were interviewed. The secondary source is from journals, textbooks, the internet, newspaper articles, policy briefs, edited books and reports, as these seemed the most appropriate tools for gathering data.

Findings of the study

The research work seeks to know if the amnesty has been able to address the root causes of the Niger Delta conflict, as well as the challenges confronting the implementation of the amnesty programme.

Table 4: Percentage Analysis of Respondents

S/N	Objectives	Percentage of Respondent (%)
1	The success of the amnesty programme in relation to the amnesty objectives.	Out of 50 respondents, 70% believes the amnesty programme has been successful in achieving its objectives. 30% believes the amnesty programme is a failure.
2	Challenges confronting the implementation of the amnesty programme.	80% of the respondents believe that the amnesty programme is all about favouritism. 10% believes that the amnesty programme causes criminality. 10% opines that the government did not fulfil its promise.
3	The extent to which the amnesty programme has addressed the root causes of the Niger Delta conflict.	90% Of the respondents believe the amnesty programme has not addressed the root causes of the Niger Delta conflict (employment, environmental degradation, development). 10% believes the programme has addressed the causes of the Niger Delta conflict.

Table 5: Thematic Chart

Objective	Theme1	Theme2	Theme3
The success of the amnesty programme in relation to the objectives.	Peace and tranquillity	Reduction in oil-related crime	
Challenges confronting the implementation of the amnesty programme.	Favouritism and nepotism	Causes criminality in the region	Disappointment
The extent to which the amnesty programme has addressed the root causes of the Niger Delta conflict.	Employment	Environmental Degradation	

The Success of the Amnesty Programme to the Objectives

The Niger Delta region has been agitating for years, demand for resource control, development, and poverty alleviation; employment and education opportunities. Their agitations and demands soon became a threat to peace and security in the Niger Delta region and the nation at large. Amnesty was granted to the militants in the region by the federal government of Nigeria. The amnesty programme was expected to eliminate conditions that motivated and sustained militancy in the Niger Delta region. The intention of the government through the amnesty deal was to restore the broken peace in the Niger Delta region.

The objectives of the amnesty programme are to address the root causes of the Niger Delta conflict (demands of the people), to see to the reduction of oil-related conflict in the Niger Delta and to restore peace and security to the Niger Delta and Nigeria at large through Disarmament, Demobilization, Rehabilitation (DDR), making DDR the main objective of the programme. That is to say that the amnesty relied heavily on disarmament, demobilization, rehabilitation to achieve its objectives. The amnesty programme is still ongoing and 70% of the respondents believe so far, the programme has been successful to some extent because of the tremendous increase in oil production and relative peace being restored in the region. 30% believes the amnesty programme is a total failure because the programme has not addressed

the root causes of the Niger Delta conflict and just a handful of persons are benefitting from it.

Peace and Tranquillity in the region

40% of the respondents believe that before the granting of amnesty in the Niger Delta region, criminal activities of militants such as kidnapping and hostage-taking had become an embarrassment to the Nigerian state. People were afraid to live or establish a business in the Niger Delta region because they did not feel safe in the region. With the introduction of the amnesty programme, international organisations, bodies and companies now freely interact with the people which in turn has led to increased employment opportunities for the people.

Reduction in Oil-Related Crime and Illegal Bunkering

To call the attention of the government to address their demands, the people of the region (youths particularly) resort to oil-related crimes such as pipeline vandalization, the kidnapping of foreign oil company workers for ransom as well as chasing oil companies out of their communities. Some started illegal bunkering businesses as the only source of livelihood. During this period, Nigeria suffered a major loss and decline in oil production and export in the international market, (Alabo & Mark, 2007). 30% of the respondents believe that following the granting of amnesty, there has been a tremendous reduction in such activities. As such, there is an increase in oil production in the country. He said further that the reduction in this oil-related crime and bunkering is because the youths that were carrying out these illegal activities, who have voluntarily dropped the gun has been trained by the federal government and are well to do in society.

Challenges Confronting the Implementation of the Amnesty Programme

As stated earlier, the amnesty programme to some extent has been successful, but no doubt, challenges are confronting the implementation of the Niger Delta amnesty programme. According to respondents, the amnesty programme was aimed at eradicating militancy and oil-related conflicts in the Niger Delta region. However, some of the challenges

confronting the implementation of the Niger Delta amnesty programme are as follows:

Favouritism and Nepotism

80% of the respondents believe that the actual youths on the creeks have been neglected; it is only propelled by some top politicians and other members of the Presidential Amnesty committee to enrich themselves and their families. The Niger Delta region still feels marginalized by the federal government and feels the government is not playing its role as promised in the amnesty deal. If this factor is not addressed, the ones that are not benefitting are likely to take up arms again.

The Programme Causes Criminality in the region

10% of the respondents believe that the amnesty programme causes criminality in the Niger Delta region. The amnesty deal is for the whole Niger Delta region but only a few persons are benefitting from the programme. The government only identified weapon bearers (militants). Since the Government only recognized weapon bearers, kidnappers, and youths in the communities that were not recognized in the region will also resort to criminal activities and possess harmful weapons and form groups to kidnap, vandalise pipeline to attract Government recognition. Years after the granting of amnesty, there have still been incidences of kidnapping, pipeline vandalization, and hostage-taking by youths of the Niger Delta. These are people who want to have a taste of the economic benefits of the amnesty programme since they have been left out by the government. The criminal activities seem to be the only resort to call the attention of the government to their plight.

Disappointment

Another challenge of the amnesty programme, according to respondents, is disappointment. 10% of the respondents believe the government did not fulfil its part of the amnesty deal because of this; beneficiaries have been disappointed by the government. He went further to say that the agreement with the government was that they will take you to school or vocational training, but even “if they don’t take you to school, they will be paying you your N65K each month and they

will pay you till you die. But if they take you to train, after the training, they will empower you.” Findings further showed that some students that have been sent abroad for educational training were sent back because the government failed to pay their fees and, as such, the schools could no longer accommodate them.

The Extent to which the Amnesty Programme has Addressed the Niger Delta Conflict

Violence and militancy in the Niger Delta started following the discovery of oil and oil exploration by oil companies. Conflicts in the Niger Delta are caused by environmental factors. Activities of international oil companies were not favourable to the host communities. The major source of livelihood for the average Niger Delta person is farming, fishing, and trading. The source of their livelihood became extremely difficult on the account of oil exploration and its consequences, being environmental degradation, water, land and air pollution, thereby subjecting the people to abject poverty and unemployment. Despite the exploration activities in the oil-rich Niger Delta, the region remains underdeveloped and poor. People from the region lack education and low political representation. The federal government showed little or no interest in the people’s plight and the host communities were not compensated by the government.

After several attempts in addressing the Niger Delta conflict, instead of solving the problem, it aggravated. Amnesty was granted in the Niger Delta with a post-amnesty package of economic opportunities as a measure of the federal government to address the Niger Delta conflict. 90% of the respondents believe the amnesty programme has not fully addressed the root causes of the Niger Delta conflict. Some of the problems identified are explained below:

Employment

90% of the respondents believe that the amnesty programme has not addressed the causes of the Niger Delta conflict in Southern Ijaw Local Government Area of Bayelsa State because employment opportunities are not provided. The amnesty programme has been successful in sending people of the Niger Delta to schools and vocational training within and

outside Nigeria. Some of the trainees have graduated and are still unemployed. Because of unemployment after the training, some have the thought of returning to the creeks and continue the illegal bunkering business.

The reason for this is the government's fear of further agitation and violence in the region. The finding showed that the government feels that after undergoing vocational and educational training, and if employed, their agitations for development will become more severe in both violent and non-violent ways because they would have fully been exposed to know their rights (Ekumaoko, 2013).

Environmental Degradation

20% of the respondents opined that the amnesty programme is aggravating the Niger Delta conflict in the Southern Ijaw Area of Bayelsa State. Findings showed that the demands of the Niger Delta people being environmental, infrastructural development and community rehabilitation remain. The water is still polluted and the area is still underdeveloped. For instance, in the Agricultural sector, the people in the communities have been deprived of their source of livelihood because the water is polluted and the soil is destroyed. The farmers in the localities are left out in the amnesty programme. With the amnesty deal, the government is only concerned about the peace and security of Nigeria. Through the amnesty deal, government has awarded the contract to top militants leaving out the larger population in the communities. It can, therefore, be deduced that the government is bribing militants for peace (Ekumaoko, 2013).

Conclusion

The study was successful in assessing the Niger Delta amnesty programme. The amnesty programme has been successful to some extent. It has helped in restoring peace to the Niger Delta region. However, the root causes of the Niger Delta conflict have not yet been fully addressed. The inability of the government and the various stakeholders in addressing these root causes has led to continuous agitation despite the robust amnesty offer. To bring durable peace to the region is to address the root causes of the Niger Delta conflict which is the origin of the amnesty programme.

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