

AMNESTY FOR SUSTAINABLE PEACE AND **DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA'S NIGER DELTA REGION:**  
PANACEA OR PALLIATIVE?

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**ABSTRACT**

The Yar'Adua administration granted unconditional amnesty to Niger Delta militants as a means of ensuring sustainable peace and development in the oil-producing region. While the granting of amnesty was evidently innovative as a mechanism for peace-building, this study contends that the measure is far from being a masterstroke as many argue. Though the Federal Government now has unhindered access to lucrative oil resources, it must seize the opportunity of the relative peace to address the fundamental issues that gave rise to the conflict initially. This paper posits that the pockets of violence witnessed after the granting of amnesty are only a tip of the iceberg unless the undesirable socio-economic situations, environmental insecurity, underdevelopment and distributional injustice of oil rents are adequately addressed. To ensure enduring peace and stability, the stakeholders must muster the required political will to embark on sustainable peace and development in the region.

**Keywords:** Niger Delta; Militancy; Amnesty; Sustainable peace; Development

## INTRODUCTION

In a bold attempt to mitigate the human and economic costs of protracted youth restiveness in Nigeria's oil-hub, President Musa Yar'Adua (2007-2010) granted an unconditional amnesty to Niger Delta militants on June 25, 2009. The President relied on Section 175 of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria which stipulates that the president can grant pardon to any person concerned with or convicted of any offence. Prior to the presidential pardon, the Niger Delta conflict had escalated manifesting in incessant blowing up of flow stations, kidnapping of Nigerian and expatriate oil workers, and a horrendous theft of crude oil to both local and international apprehension.

The militants were expected to take advantage of a 60-day window (August 6 to October 4, 2009) to surrender their arms and ammunitions and sign the amnesty register as evidence of their acceptance of the peace deal. Over a decade before the amnesty declaration, the Niger Delta had been the epicenter of a low intensity war owing largely to the insurgency waged by militant youths and the counter-insurgency by security agents deployed by the state to protect geo-strategic oil resources. This innovative action by President Yar'Adua was not altogether surprising. On his inauguration on May 29, 2007, President Yar'Adua had pledged his commitment to resolve the crisis in the Niger Delta region. The creation of the Ministry for Niger Delta Affairs in 2008 and the provision of ₦444.60 billion for security in the Niger Delta region in the 2009 budget attest to the commitment of the Yar'Adua presidency.

Despite several failed past efforts at peace-building, the amnesty programme was applauded by scores of observers and analysts locally and internationally as a bold step towards solving the protracted Niger Delta conflict and ensuring sustainable peace and development in the troubled region. But to what extent has the celebrated amnesty programme engendered sustainable peace and development as promised? Is the amnesty programme a panacea for the protracted conflict or a mere palliative measure? This article attempts to answer both questions and by so doing throw light on the problem of peace engineering in the Niger Delta.

## CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL ANCHOR

As deployed here, amnesty is "a guarantee of exemption from prosecution and pardon from punishment for certain criminal, rebel and insurgent actions hitherto committed usually against the state" (Ikelegbe, 2010, pp. 3-4). It is usually granted within a given time frame during which the recipients of the pardon admit their crimes and submit their weapons. It is normally backed by law. Indeed, Section 175 (pp. 1-3) of Nigeria's 1999 Constitution empowers the President to "grant any person concerned with or convicted of any offence created by an act of the National Assembly a pardon, either free or subject to lawful conditions" (Federal Republic of Nigeria Constitution, 1999). However, the President is required to consult with the Council of State in exercising this power.

Perhaps due to the commonality of conflict, several efforts have been made to theorize the phenomenon. One of the earliest explanations for conflicts and rebellion is the frustration-aggression theory. Advocates of this analytic framework argue that it is 'relative deprivation' that induces persons and groups to seek redress through political violence. As noted by one of its strong adherents, relative deprivation refers to "actors' perception of discrepancy between their value expectations and their

value capabilities” (Gurr, 1970, p 24). Advocates of this perspective argue that people get frustrated when there is persistent and marked shortfall between what they are rightfully ‘entitled to’ and what they ‘actually get’ in society. The sense of frustration arising from such structural imbalance becomes unbearable when the affected group discovers that they are treated unjustly compared to other groups they are equal to. Advocates of the frustration-aggression thesis argue that it is this sense of marginalization that makes people to take to aggressive or violent action to seek redress, especially against those responsible for or benefiting from their predicament and exclusion. Such beneficiaries could be government officials, power elite, or even businesses (Frynas, 2005).

Though popular, analysts have criticized the frustration-aggression theory, noting that most people do not take to political violence even when they know that they are marginalized. Several factors abound why some aggrieved people find it hard to take to aggression. These include socioeconomic status, political leadership, relative military capability, psychological correlates, etc (Cederman, Wimmer and Min, 2010; Dowse and Hughes, 1972). However, at the turn of the millennium, there arose an antithesis to frustration-aggression theorists’ emphasis on grievance as a source of rebellion. The World Bank and some scholars led by Paul Collier came up with a counter-thesis by arguing that greed rather than grievance is more plausible in making sense of rebellion especially in naturally endowed contexts.

They argued that resource conflicts are caused and prolonged by the greed of rebel actors to capture wealth extra-legally (Collier, 2000). According to these analysts, even when a rebellion claims to be justice-seeking, the main actors cannot but embrace criminality to drive through their ambition because they would need a lot of revenues for membership recruitment and arms purchase. That is, the ‘*dramatis personae*’ of the insurgency must rely on criminal activities such as theft of natural resources to succeed (Collier and Sambanis 2002). They hold that the discourse of rebels is always characterized by the rhetoric of grievance even when their strategic operations are manifestly marked by greed, adding that such narratives of grievance are functional: aimed at acquiring legitimacy and support (Said, 2007). Adherents of the Greed Model therefore dismiss grievance, arguing that “justice, revenge, and relief from grievance” are public goods and are therefore susceptible to collective action, time-consistency and free-rider problems” (Collier, 2000, p. 98).

Thus, the transition from conflict to peace in the context of greed is a herculean task because the conflict ‘entrepreneurs’ (beneficiaries) would do their utmost to protect the ‘status quo’ and their vested interests in conflict economy. As a result, advocates of the Greed Antithesis hold that such societies are vulnerable to conflict trap (recurrence) at a ten-year interval, especially in the absence of effective peace-building, sustainable development, post-conflict economic reconstruction, democratic governance, and transparent leadership (Collier, Hoefler and Soderbom, 2008; Collier, 2007). Attempts have been made to blend the Grievance Thesis and the Greed Antithesis, producing a sort of synthesis (Korf, 2005). Such integrationists argue that both Grievance and Greed often interact in the course of time. In this direction, Malone (2003, p. 111) states that the “pursuit of economic self-interest and of redress for legitimate grievance is neither mutually exclusive nor static goals. Indeed, the character and dynamics of conflict have been known to be highly fluid as the cases of Angola, Sierra Leone and the Democratic Republic of the Congo demonstrate (Ballentine and Sherman, 2003).

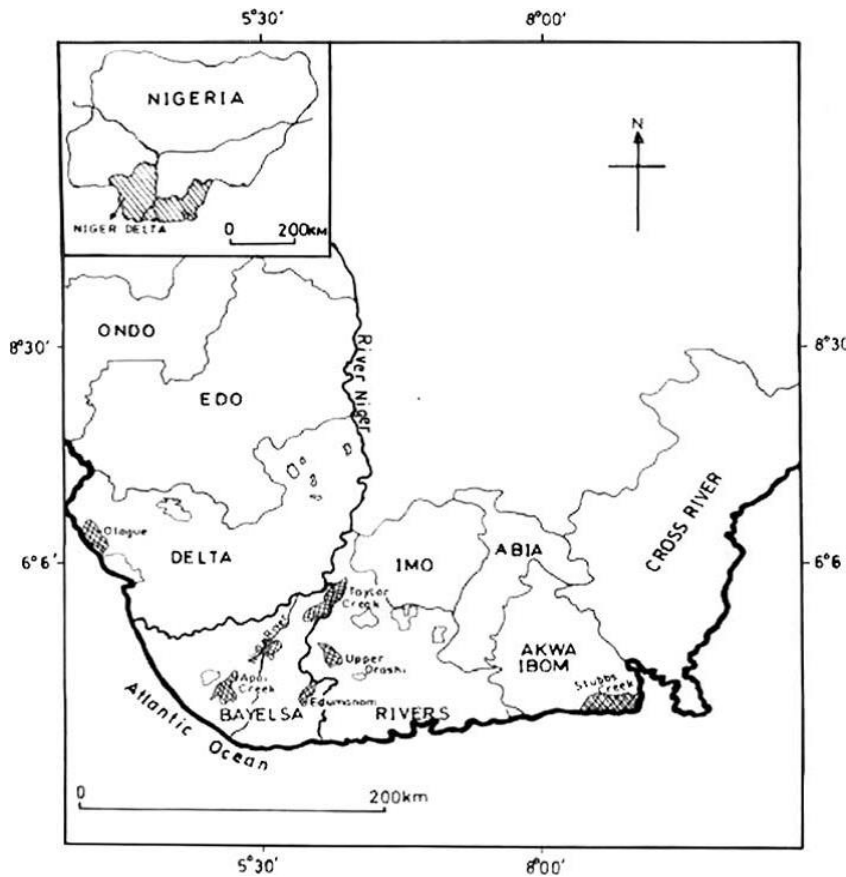
Puzzlingly, scholars have always restricted the theoretical assumptions of the Greed and Grievance Model to conflict initiation and escalation only. As shown with ex-militants’ state re-engagement in post-amnesty Niger Delta, the Grievance-

Greed dynamic remains apt in throwing light on the challenges associated with peace-building in resource-rich environments as manifestations of the model do not end with conflict situations as hitherto believed by analysts. Instead, as we contend here, such agendas continue to unfold and impact on the post-conflict peace process.

### THE NIGER DELTA PEOPLE AND THE CRISIS OF PEACE AND DEVELOPMENT

The Niger Delta is one of the largest wetlands in the world. It is located around the tributaries of the River Niger in South of Nigeria. The Niger Delta covers an area of 70,000 kilometres with an estimated population of nine million. Most of the ethnic minorities in southern Nigeria are concentrated in the Niger Delta region. Amongst these are the Ijaw (4<sup>th</sup> largest ethnic group in Nigeria and the largest in the Niger Delta), Edo, Ogoni, Ilaje, Ibibio, Itsekiri, Urhobo, Isoko, Ikwerre, amongst others. This region contains approximately 15 percent of the Nigerian population. Politically, the Niger Delta refers to the nine oil producing states of Nigeria. These states are Abia, Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo, Imo, Ondo, and Rivers (see map below).

Map of the Niger Delta region



The Niger Delta is the bearer of the nation's rich oil wealth (with proven reserves put at 35 billion barrels, making Nigeria to be a major player in the global oil economy). The region holds 95% of Nigeria's known oil reserves which account for 90% of Nigerian government revenue and 95% of its export receipts (Ikelegbe, 2005; Ikein, 2009)). Despite these impressive

figures, the region is one of the poorest and least developed in Nigeria. Most of its inhabitants lack basic amenities such as the provision of electricity, potable water, and health facilities. Besides, the people suffer enormous negative externalities engendered by oil extraction and production including oil spills and gas flaring which destroy the local livelihoods (Ojo, 2010). This environmental degradation and food insecurity had predisposed the local people to militancy and agitation for equitable oil revenue allocation from the lopsided Nigerian federation and insistence on Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) from the oil companies.

The disconnection between the huge wealth in the Niger Delta and the paltry sum disbursed for the development of the region has been the basis of agitation of the people since the 1960s. These agitations included “petitions in the early 1960s, Isaac Adaka Boro’s revolt of 1967, and protests since the 1990s involving mass demonstrations, sabotage, violent attacks on personnel and equipment of oil companies, hostage taking, etc” (Isumonah, 2005, p. 173). However, the 1990s onwards marked a turning point in highlighting problems of environmental governance, economic marginalization, and failing corporate social responsibility in the Niger Delta (see Table 1 below). The conflict became highly volatile and militarized with the emergence of several militant groups. Prominent among these militant groups are the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), the Niger Delta People’s Volunteer Force (NDPVF), the Niger Delta Vigilante Service (NDV), Iduwuni Volunteer Force (IVF), Butcher Squad, Martyr Brigade, Coalition of Militant Action of the Niger Delta (COMA), and several others (Watts, 2007).

Table 1: Youth Unemployment and Underemployment Rates in the Region in 2006

S/N	State	Unemployment	Underemployment
1	Akwa Ibom	11.3(33)	33.7(24)
2	Bayelsa	6.8(19)	19.4(16)
3	Cross River	1.8(5)	12.0(9)
4	Delta	9.3(21)	29.2 (27)
5	Edo	8.0(22)	30.9(37)
6	Rivers	11.4(29)	25.3(20)
7	South-South	8.8(24)	26.2(22)
8	Nigeria	5.3(14)	20.2(17.2)

Source: Francis Paul, Deirdre Lapin, and Rossiasco (2011, p. 30)

Basically, the demands of the Niger Delta people have not changed since the 1960s. These demands were again stated in their memoranda to the National Constitutional Conference in 1994. These demands are by no means outrageous. They are simple demands to propel government to ensure that the people of the Niger Delta have a fair share of the oil wealth through an increase in the weight attached to the principle of derivation as a basis for sharing federally collected, accelerate development of the region through the provision of basic social infrastructures and amenities, and protection of their environment from further pollution and degradation by oil companies operating in the region.

## ATTEMPTS TO RESOLVE THE NIGER DELTA CONFLICT BEFORE THE AMNESTY

Since 1960, government has taken several measures to address the Niger Delta problem. Government measures to address the aspirations of the Niger Delta people have by and large been institutional (Omotola, 2009). The Willink Commission of 1958 proposed the Niger Delta Development Board (NDDB) to function as the engine room of social and economic development in the region. In response to the 1.5% Presidential Committee set up in 1989, the Oil Mineral Producing Areas Development Commission (OMPADEC) was established in 1992 (Oloya and Ugbeyavwighren, 2009). The Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) was established in 2000 to replace OMPADEC with the same mandate to bring about the much needed development in the Niger Delta. Under the President Obasanjo administration (1999-2007), the derivation principle received a boost to 13%, which made available to the people of the Niger Delta region huge funds hitherto not available to the region for development (Egwemi, 2009). In a bold attempt to resolve the problem of the Niger Delta, President Yar'Adua made the development of Niger Delta as cardinal programme of his Seven-Point Agenda. To actualize this cardinal point of the seven-point agenda, President Yar'Adua set up the Niger Delta Technical Committee and mounted the Niger Delta Master Plan (Ikenya and Iwuagwu, 2009; Omotola, 2010). The institutionalisation effort of government at resolving of the Niger Delta crisis got to its apex with the establishment of Ministry of Niger Delta in 2008 by President Yar'Adua.

Most of these efforts did not yield the desired result. Peace remained a dream in the region. The crisis degenerated into an armed conflict with militants becoming more active and destructive. The top down measures approach by government could not alleviate the spate of violence in the region. The economy was in danger of grinding to a halt. Between 1999 and 2007, attempt by the President Obasanjo administration to broker peace in the Niger Delta failed woefully because of the politicization and commoditization of the exercise by local power elite who exchanged large sums of money for arms submitted by insurgents. These huge sums were later used by militants to buy more sophisticated weapons (Eberlein, 2006; DonPedro, 2006).

The attack on militant camps by the Joint Task Force set up by the federal government could not dislodge the militants. In response to the Joint Task Force attack on militant camps, the Movement for the Emancipation of Niger Delta (MEND) launched a series of well calculated attacks on petroleum infrastructure and destroyed Nigeria Gas Company Pipeline, Escaravos to Warri Petroleum Products Marketing Company pipeline, Abiteye-Escaravos 121 inch pipeline, Utona flow station, Makarabo-Abiteye pipeline, Makaba 5 and Abiteye wells, Abiteye jacket 1 Christmas tree, Shell pipeline conveying crude oil from Bille-Krama to Bonny Export Terminal, Shell's forcados offshore platform, Chevron's Okonmanifold, and Atlas Core depot in Lagos (Bassey, 2010). The ability of MEND and its affiliates to successfully launch an offshore attack deep into Nigeria's Exclusive Economic Zone in the Gulf of Guinea on Bonga Oil Field Platforms (200 nautical miles) in 2009 clearly shows that government was not winning the war. Clandestine militant transnational activities in the contiguous sea of piracy, kidnappings, banditry, arms and drugs trafficking became a source of embarrassment to the Nigerian government (Bassey, 2010). Several communities were destroyed as a result of the bloody clashes between militant insurgents and state counter-insurgent troops, and the supremacy wars for spoils by various militant groups as well as intra and inter-ethnic communal rivalries also took its toll (Okonta, 2008). Many companies relocated to other parts of Nigeria, while many wound up their operations in the country and relocated to nearby African states (Maass 2009; DonPedro 2006). The economic loss to country was huge as shown in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Quantity of Oil Loss in Barrels per Day and Amount in US Dollars for 2008 in Nigeria

S/N	Month	Estimated Qty of Barrels of Oil Loss Per Day	Total Barrels of Oil Loss for the Month	OPEC Basket Price for Bonny Light Crude Oil for the Month in US Dollars	Total Amount Loss for the Month in US Dollars
1	January	700,000	21,700,000	88.35	1,917,195,000
2.	February	700,000	20,300,000	90.64	1,839,992,000
3.	March	700,000	21,700,000	99.03	2,148,951,000
4.	April	700,000	21,700,000	105.16	2,208,360,000
5.	May	700,000	21,700,000	119.16	2,590,763,000
6.	June	700,000	21,700,000	128.33	2,694,930,000
7.	July	700,000	21,700,000	131.22	2,847,474,000
8.	August	700,000	21,700,000	112.41	1,633,793,000
9.	September	700,000	21,700,000	96.85	2,439,297,000
10.	Grand Total				\$20,720,842,000

Source: *Newswatch*, (Lagos), May 4, 2009, p. 19.

In an attempt to put a stop to militant activities in Niger Delta once and for all, in May 2009, the federal government launched a full-scale military offensive against the militants. The spate of wanton destruction of oil infrastructure and the new dimension of kidnapping of oil workers introduced by the Niger Delta militants became unbearable for the federal government. This assault on the militants by the federal government led to enormous casualty on both sides. There was also the refugee dimension to the offensive of the federal government. There was a humanitarian tragedy in the region as many Niger Delta people became refugees in their own land. The attempt of the federal government to exercise its right to stem criminality in the region was accompanied by high casualty, human suffering and further depletion of inadequate infrastructure (*The Nation* 2009a, b; Oladesu, 2009). Things got worse and the state of anarchy which has existed in the region since 2000 heightened.

#### THE AMNESTY PROGRAMME AND ITS CHALLENGES

President Yar'Adua was evidently frustrated with the state of anarchy in the Niger Delta region. He clearly saw the futility of a military option to the crisis. The military option to the crisis by the federal government attracted local and international sympathy for the militants. Eccentrically, it seems the militants were comfortable with the federal government force strategy and in fact relished the local and international sympathy for their cause. President Yar'Adua took the militants, the Nigerian nation and the international community by surprise when decided to toe a civil path by granting amnesty to the Niger Delta militants on June 25, 2009. By the terms of the amnesty, all offences committed before were forgiven unconditionally. However, after the October 4, 2009 deadline, further offences would be visited with the full weight of the law. This

spectacular step by President Yar'Adua was expected to usher in sustainable peace which would pave the way for the stoppage of disruptions to oil production; lead to increase in government income; and create the possibility for the economic growth and development of the Niger Delta. Not all the militant groups accepted the amnesty offer. The leadership of MEND cites government insincerity to develop the area as its core reason for not accepting the amnesty programme (Kelvin, 2010).

With the granting of amnesty, a post-amnesty programme was put in place to prepare militants who accepted the presidential pardon for reintegration into the society as well as deliver peace and order in the Niger Delta. To cement the granting of amnesty, a Presidential Amnesty Implementation Committee was set up to oversee the Amnesty and Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) phase of the programme. The Committee was headed by Major General Godwin Abe, (rtd). Designated depots were set up in six Niger Delta states of Edo, Delta, Rivers, Bayelsa, Akwa Ibom and Cross River for militants to submit their arms and ammunition. At these centres, the ex-fighters were documented and fingerprinted.

The federal government stated clearly that there would be no cash for arms. However, it provided a feeding budget of ₦1,500 (about \$10) per day and additional ₦20,000 (\$133) per month, making a total of ₦65,000 per month. This was expected to last for a minimum of 3 months per militant – the period slated for disarmament and demobilization. The government had expected about 10,000 militants in the region. Far above the projection, 20,192 had accepted the peace deal before the October 4, 2009 deadline. Additional 6,166 ex-militants were granted the peace offer in November 2010 by President Jonathan Goodluck after persistent agitations against their initial exclusion from the programme, bringing the total number to 26,358 recipients (Akpan, 2010). The sum of ₦50 billion (\$333 million) was approved for the exercise. The ex-militants were accommodated in their various states initially before they were sent in batches to the Obubra Post-Amnesty Transformational Training Camp in Cross River State for the rehabilitation and reintegration phases of the amnesty package (*The Guardian* November 5, 2009). It was hoped that at the end of the programme many of the ex-fighters would be gainfully employed either in existing firms or be in self employment.

While a critical and empirical assessment of the post-amnesty programme is beyond the scope of this work, an overview is inevitable. There have been social challenges. Facilities at most ex-militant rehabilitation centres have been inadequate owing to poor planning. For example, at the Aluu Leadership Training Centre in Rivers State, the centre could only accommodate a maximum of 1,000 persons out of over 3,000. The poor conditions at the rehabilitation centre coupled with inadequate accommodation led to various protests, after which the ex-militants were asked to return to their former camps and homes until the centre was put in order. The marginalization of some militant groups also created a huge challenge. Some militants who submitted their weapons and accepted the amnesty after the October 4, 2009 deadline were asked to wait for documentation and inclusion in the benefits accruing to those who had accepted the amnesty earlier.

However, one year after that promise, they were not documented and there was no pronouncement on their fate by the Presidential Amnesty Implementation Committee. This made them to resort to protest. They barricaded the busy East-West Road at a point near Mbiama in Rivers State on November 8, 2010 (*Business Day* November 9, 2010). On the economic front, inadequate funding posed a huge challenge to the programme. The huge take-off budget of ₦50 billion was



mismanaged and became inadequate for effective implementation of the programme. For example, 80% of the ₦50 billion was allocated to consultants and contractors rather than the beneficiaries, while 20% was set aside to establish businesses (*The Guardian* November 14, 2010).

These challenges had implications for the Niger Delta region and the Nigerian economy that relies heavily on oil rents. Incessant protests by ex-militants have made lives largely unbearable for several members of the public. Some ex-militants who were camped at the Aluu Rehabilitation Camp near the University of Port Harcourt went on the rampage to protest the non-payment of their allowances. In the course of the protest, the militants allegedly vented their anger upon innocent members of the public, damaging vehicles, looting properties and most heinous of all, raping some female students of the University of Port Harcourt, forcing both staff and students to vacate their homes and hostels for safety (*The Guardian* September 17, 2009). A similar protest by ex-militants resulted in the closure of the busy East-West Road for over four hours in Rivers State.

The resurgence of militancy has also led to an upsurge in various criminalities including armed robbery and ransom kidnapping. For instance, on November 4, 2011, “about 100 suspected former militants allegedly carried out a robbery operation” along Otor Udu Road in Delta State. Thirteen of them were arrested according to the State Police Command’s spokesman, Charles Muka (Ogwuda 2010:11). Kidnapping for ransom remains rife in the region despite government claim to the contrary. In one fell swoop in 2010, 19 persons comprising 12 Nigerians, 2 Americans, 1 Canadian, 2 French and 2 Indonesians were kidnapped presumably by youths in the Niger Delta. The hostages, who work for Exxon Mobil, Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC) and Julius Berger Construction Company, were seized at different locations between November 4 and 10, 2010 (Gbemudu, 2010). Ransom kidnapping has become one of the quickest means for many unemployed youths to become millionaires in Nigeria (Osumah and Aghedo, 2011).

Also, new militant camps have resurfaced in the region. The re-emergence of militant camps fuels illegal oil theft. According to industry experts, the country loses as high as 300,000 barrels daily to this illegal business. In 2009, Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC), a subsidiary of oil giant Royal Dutch Shell, had disclosed that Nigeria lost about \$1.5 billion yearly to crude theft (Okere, 2011). Also, the elimination of militancy has not removed sea piracy which has involved some so-called ex-militants in the Niger Delta. According to the Malaysia-based International Maritime Bureau, Nigeria’s 853-kilometre coastline remains a high-risk area as a result of incessant sea piracy. The Bureau puts the number of post-amnesty attacks at about 50 cases of attacks on fishing trawlers in January 2010 alone, resulting in 10 deaths and provoking a strike by the Nigerian Trawlers Owners Association. This has led to higher shipping costs and insurance premiums for Nigerian-bound ships (*The Punch* Editorial November 5, 2010).

Terrorist operations including bomb blasts have become a routine in the post amnesty era. The MEND claimed responsibility for the terrorist bombings in Warri on March 15, 2010. The bombs were in a gathering of prominent Nigerians, including state governors and ministers (Abu 2010:49). Similar bomb attacks had been targeted at the Atlas Cove Jetty in Lagos. Several homes and offices of political opponents were bombed in Bayelsa State before and during the 2011 elections.

Perhaps taking a cue from terrorism in the Niger Delta, members of the fundamentalist religious sect, Boko Haram, have been carrying out bomb attacks in several northern states as Borno, Bauchi, Yobe, Gombe, Plateau and even the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja. Some people have even started to agitate that members of the Boko Haram should be granted amnesty like the Niger Delta militants.

#### EXPLAINING THE CHALLENGES OF PEACE-BUILDING IN THE NIGER DELTA

Ensuring lasting peace in the Niger Delta is no doubt dire. Several explanations could be advanced for the failings of the amnesty programme. First, the programme just came from the blue. It was handed down by the federal government without the involvement of those who were supposed to be beneficiaries and participants. Actors with vested interests in the conflict – the so-called stakeholders – were not engaged in any negotiation or planning of the programme, despite the crucial role of dialogue in the DDR process. Even the client group (the militants) was not consulted. As a result, the government lacked adequate data on the militant groups in terms of camp size, membership strength, education level of members, their training and skills acquisition needs. This lack of data on the part of the government has undermined effective implementation of the package. The speaker of the Niger Delta youth Parliament, Mr. Imoh Okoko, attributed federal government inability to fulfill its promise of providing accommodation and protection of repentant militants as the reason for going back to the creeks (*Saturday Punch*, 2010).

Second, flowing from the audit and planning deficit corruption has become rife in the amnesty programme. The non-availability of these specific data has given room for corrupt practices such as the inclusion of non-militants in the payroll of the ex-fighters by those implementing the programme. For shady deals, the amount budgeted for accommodation was so outrageously high that many people believed that the revenues were meant to be embezzled: “The amount of money allocated for only accommodation amounting to N6.730 billion is indeed a ridiculous figure as this figure alone can go a long way to build all the destroyed towns in Niger Delta” (*The Guardian* November 28, 2010:13). Corruption has also fuelled insecurity by leading to a bloody conflict between some former warlords and their foot soldiers. For example, ex-MEND field commander Soboma George was murdered by his former ‘boys’ for allegedly shortchanging them.

Furthermore, some local politicians also recruited ex-militant leaders as thugs preparatory to the 2011 elections especially in Bayelsa State, forcing the federal government to issue a stern warning to the politicians (Akpan 2010). This kind of collusion between state officials and militants has been on in the Niger Delta for years. As noted by Watts, some of the ethnic militias in the Delta, specifically the Niger Delta Vigilante (NDV) and the Niger Delta People’s Volunteer Force (NDPVF) were bankrolled by machine politicians in Rivers State and that several members of the Nigerian security forces, prominent politicians and international criminal syndicate have been involved in oil bunkering (theft) in the Niger Delta. Therefore, “the very idea of an impermeable membrane separating or opposing two discrete entities – government and rebels – breaks down immediately” (Watts 2007, p. 650). Such collusion undermines sustainable peace-building.

Third, the amnesty programme has also excluded some groups which suffered a lot of damage and trauma during the conflict. This is a violation of a proper DDR programme that is supposed to be comprehensive and inclusive as the experiences of

Sierra Leone and Rwanda show. Those excluded from the programme in the Niger Delta included women who lost their children, husbands and breadwinners in the conflict. Also, many children were orphaned during the low-intensity war and cannot now get proper education and adequate care. The re-marginalization of these groups is unjust and does not aid peace-building. A strong feeling of injustice does re-ignite violent conflict. In Sierra Leone, both regional and international agreements and declarations reached a “consensus on the need to include women in all aspects of the decision-making and peace process” (Cheo 2009, p. 175). This crucial element is absent in the Niger Delta peace-building case.

Lastly, despite the supposed removal of arms from the militants, the region remains awash with small arms and light weapons. A large cache of these arms are in the wrong hands: armed robbers, political thugs, street urchins, gangsters, new militants, and ex-fighters. This is obvious from daily newspaper reports of killings by ‘unidentified gun men’ in the region and from observation of the protests of ex-militants. When ex-militants protested in Bayelsa and Rivers States in 2010, they fired sporadic gun shots into the air, dramatizing in broad day light that they are still in possession of arms and ammunition (*Business Day*, November 9, 2010). This cheap availability of firearms in the post-conflict era makes security and sustainable peace-building elusive.

#### TOWARDS SUSTAINABLE PEACE AND DEVELOPMENT

There is no doubt that the granting of amnesty to the Niger Delta militants has brought about relative peace and stability to the Niger Delta region. It was a bold and commendable peace-building effort. The almost whole scale embrace of the amnesty by the repentant militants was a great act of patriotism which has been a great relief for Nigerians (Ajaero, 2010). Oil production which was at its low ebb when amnesty was granted in June 2009 steadily improved and has stabilized to the benefit of the Nigerian economy. From paltry 700 barrels of crude per day before amnesty, oil production has soared to 2.6 million barrels per day. With the current selling price at about \$110 per barrel and estimated cost of production at \$55, production savings have increased tremendously. Thus, the granting of amnesty to the militants and the post amnesty programme has helped to stabilise, consolidate and sustain security and safety in the Niger Delta thereby creating an enabling environment for promoting economic development in the area (Ogunmade, 2011).

While the Federal Government gave the impression that amnesty was the panacea to the Niger Delta crisis, there were Nigerians who from the very beginning opined that amnesty was only a palliative and may not be an end to crisis in the region (Adaramola, 2009; Nigerian Compass, 2009, *Vanguard*, 2009; Olowu, 2009). The manner in which the programme and its corollary DDR processes have been implemented leaves much to be desired. A full and proper implementation of the DDR programme would have been a more effective peace-building and long-term stability tool in the region (Ojeleye, 2011). Owing to the numerous social, economic and political challenges that characterize the Presidential Amnesty Programme and their attendant security implications, there is a strong need for the programme to be seriously overhauled, expanded, and depoliticized.

Daunting as the challenges confronting peace-building are in the Niger Delta, they are not insurmountable if the conflict entrepreneurs who stand in the way of sustainable peace because of their greed and huge benefits from the criminal political

economy are identified and brought to book regardless of their social status. Except this is done, militancy and criminality will continue to remain attractive and profitable thereby encouraging the flourishing of new militant camps and illegal firearms. There is also need to re-examine the grievances of those who have suffered enormous physical and psychological damage (e.g. women and children who lost breadwinners) and such people compensated despite the fact that they are not militants.

The composition of the Presidential Amnesty Committee needs to be broadened for optimal effectiveness. There is a plethora of non-governmental organizations (NGO) and civil society groups which have been at the forefront of the Niger Delta struggle for decades, such as the Environmental Rights Action (ERA). Such groups should be involved in strategizing sustainable peace in the region. The vital role of such civil society organizations in peace-building and conflict management in Nigeria has long been stressed (Ikelegbe, 2003). Civil society groups are familiar with the terrain; they work directly with the people; and are abreast with the yearnings and aspirations of the locals. The ex-militants should be given long-term skills and economic empowerment to prevent relapse into criminality. The centrality of “youth empowerment” to sustainable peace in the Delta region cannot be over-emphasized (Okumagba, 2005:604). Sending ex-militants to Russia, Malaysia, South Africa, and elsewhere for a short course cannot guarantee sustainable future for the ex-combatants.

The region remains underdeveloped despite the huge revenue it provides for the privileged social class including the public figures, public servants and beneficiaries from multinational oil corporations. The Nigerian government and multinational corporations are principal beneficiaries of the massive oil deposits in the region, while the majority of the people there battle against squalor occasioned by exploitative oil exploration, environmental degradation, climate change, inadequate infrastructure, unemployment and poverty. Essentially, the need for sustainable peace in the Niger Delta would be achieved if the living standards of the majority of people in the region drastically improve. Infrastructural development is a critical factor and it must be a driving force for peace making efforts in the region.

Rapid transformation of the Niger Delta is likely to motivate the ex-militants to maintain peace and contribute towards the development of the region. The Nigerian government and multinational oil companies should unanimously agree to put the Niger Delta at the centre of their priorities. Furthermore, there is a need for private-public partnership to reinforce the implementation of human capital development agenda for the Niger Delta. Emphasis should be placed on the provision of modern technological facilities and social welfare package that can transform the region from its present situation to an industrial area. The hide out of ex-militants should be opened up and replaced with attractive development projects such as broad streets, tarred road, regular lights, modern schools and centers for information and communication technology.

The huge sum of money invested in military hard wares and contractual defence agreements with foreign countries to ensure the Nigerian military continue to have the capacity to annihilate any insurgency that attempts to disallow the Federal Government access to the oil and gas resources in the region is counter productive because it only confirm the thesis that the Federal Government is more interested in unhindered access to the oil and gas resources rather than resolving the root causes of the Niger Delta crises (Whyte, 2009). This raised some fundamental issues bearing on the perception of the nature and

causes of the conflict in the Niger Delta. Basically political and economic factors are the root causes, with environmental and social factors as the proximal and trigger causes respectively. Thus the use of force and palliative measure only confronts the symptoms rather than the cause of the crisis. What this implies is that to solve the conflict in the region the security policy of the Federal Government must go beyond the traditional concern for defence of the state and oil infrastructures against internal subversion and external complicity and attack. Thus, the path to peace and sustainable development of the Niger Delta communities lies in empowerment through a policy regime which recognizes the organic linkage between economic empowerment and development.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

The granting of amnesty to the Niger Delta militants was greeted with so much enthusiasm and hope. For some, it was the ultimate panacea to the long crisis in the Niger Delta. Like several other policy strategies of the federal government, amnesty did not achieve anything significant in terms of sustainable peace and development. This may primarily be attributed to the fact that the character and attitude of the Federal Government to the agitation in the region has not changed. This study posits that, like all other actions of the federal government, amnesty was a palliative measure to buy time to exploit the oil and gas resources in the region. Successive governments (civilian and military) since independence have failed to demonstrate sincerity and muster the required political will to solve the Niger Delta problem. This explains why the institutionalization effort by the federal government over the years has not been driven to deliver development to the Niger Delta region. In contrast, successive governments since Abuja was designated as the country's capital have taken concrete steps and demonstrated the political will to develop the Federal Capital Territory (FCT). The consistent progress that has been in the development of the FCT over the years is evident for everyone to see. The same cannot be said of the Niger Delta. Some have argued that the lack of development in the Niger Delta is because of the activities of militants. This is far from being true. Before militants entered the scene, there was absence of tangible development and environmental degradation of the region was escalating. The fact that militant activities could not completely stop oil production, clearly shows the strong political will of the federal government to keep the oil flowing.

The conflict in the Niger Delta can only be addressed satisfactorily if the Federal Government is sincere and ready to resolve the political, economic and environmental factors that ignited the crisis by engaging all stakeholders. The Master Plan for the Niger, Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) and Ministry of Niger Delta may give the impression that the federal government has put in place structures that can deliver development to the Niger Delta people, but these institutions will be no more than window dressing if the federal government does not back it up with the required political will. The huge sum of money invested in military hard wares and contractual defence agreements with foreign countries to ensure the Nigerian military continue to have the capacity to annihilate any insurgency that attempts to disallow the federal government access to the oil and gas resources can also be deployed to protect contractors executing development projects in the region. More attention should also be on the state and local governments in the region to ensure that they properly utilize the resources at their disposal in the development of the region.

The amnesty granted to the Niger Delta militants three years ago is a palliative which created the well needed golden opportunity for the federal government to consult with all stake holders to deliver the much needed massive development to the region. So far, the federal government is yet to take advantage of the opportunity because of lack of political will. The political will of government should be reflected in the determination to ensure equitable distribution of revenue derived from the region, massive infrastructural development, job creation and confidence building measures. This inaction is particularly dangerous because the storm of militancy is looming again. The resumption of hostilities by MEND on February 5, 2012 (*Vanguard* February 6, 2012) by bombing a trunk pipeline in Brass, Bayelsa State belonging to an Italian oil multinational company is an indication that the amnesty granted to the Niger Delta militants is a palliative that is at the verge of turning sour.

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