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# Impact of 2009 Amnesty Programme on Youth Development in the Niger Delta

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## I. Introduction

The Niger Delta, comprising of Akwa Ibom, Cross River, Rivers, Bayelsa, Delta and the Edo States, is blessed with huge oil and gas deposits which are the main sources of revenue contributing 95% of export revenue to the federal government. Nigeria is Africa's largest producer of oil and gas and the country earned more than $26 billion in revenue in the first and second quarters of 2018 (Asu, 2018). Despite its enormous contribution to the Nigerian economy, the Niger Delta has suffered neglect and social deprivation which has given rise to youth restiveness, insecurity, kidnapping, arm robbery, oil theft, piracy, the proliferation of small arms and light weapons.

In response to the poor socio-economic conditions of the area, various militant groups, notably the Movement for the Emancipation of Niger Delta (MEND) Niger Delta People Volunteer Force (NDPVF), Niger Delta Vigilante (NDV), Joint Revolutionary Council (JRC) and many others emerged in the early 2000s intending to protest violently and possibly destabilize the economy against neglect by vandalizing oil installations and kidnapping local and expatriate oil workers in the area. This resulted in a huge reduction in oil production and a sharp decline in foreign exchange earnings and local investment.

Noting the impact of militancy on the economy of the country, the administration of late President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua, in June 2009, initiated and made a proclamation of the Amnesty Programme to pardon all persons who directly or indirectly participated in militant activities in the Niger Delta and were willing to surrender their weapons and renounce armed struggle between 6th August and 4th October 2009 (Uguanyi, 2014). Besides granting reprieve, the amnesty programme sought to reintegrate the repentant militant into the society through skill acquisition, financial empowerment, placement programme, micro-credit facility and human capital development. The scheme has been sustained with each participant earning ₦65,000 monthly. It is estimated that the sum of ₦243 bn was spent by the government in the first five years (2009-2014) of the programme. The federal government also budgeted the sum of ₦70 billion for the programme in the 2019 appropriation, which failed to bring an end to an upsurge of militant attacks in recent years.

As has been stated above, with over 60 years of oil production in the Niger Delta and the billions of naira revenue realized by the government, the region is still plagued by abject poverty and a lack of critical infrastructures such as water, electricity, roads and bridges. The environmental impact of oil exploration and exploitation in the Niger Delta region has contributed immensely to the destruction of the fragile ecosystem of the region regarded as one of the worst petroleum-polluted environments in the world. The emergence of various militant groups, all indulging in violent agitations, deploying various shades of criminal activities such as hostage-taking, oil bunkering, pipeline vandalization, piracy, drug and human trafficking, the proliferation of small arms and light weapons against the government and multinational companies. The impact of militancy on the nation's economy was quite acute and devastating leading to low production of oil between 2006 and 2009. However, due to the amnesty programme and its sustenance by successive administrations, oil output has today risen to about 2.2 million bpd. The programme which commenced in 2009 was initially scheduled to end in 2015. The attempt by the Buhari administration to discontinue the scheme in 2016 did not succeed. Despite the huge gains recorded since the

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inception of the programme particularly in minimizing tension and youth restiveness, the amnesty programme has failed to enthrone lasting peace as there are still renewed militant hostilities in the region.

Given this development, what is the impact of the amnesty programme on the youths of the Niger Delta, has the amnesty programme helped in bringing sustainable peace in the area? to what extent has the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of the ex-militants been achieved, what are the challenges confronting the amnesty programme and how can these challenges be addressed? These are the questions that this work sought to address.

This work seeks to ascertain the impact of the amnesty programme on youths in the Niger Delta, find out whether the amnesty programme has brought about sustained peace in the area, examine the extent to which the disarmament and demobilization and reintegration of ex-militant have been achieved, and examine the challenges confronting the scheme to proffer solutions to them.

This work, will contribute immensely to the body of the existing literature on the amnesty programme, provide useful input to policymakers on Niger Delta issues and give insight into the challenges facing the programme as well as stimulate further research in the area.

## II. Relative Deprivation Theory

The work adopts the Resource Curse Theory as enunciated by Gelb, (1988), Auty, 1993, also called the paradox of plenty Karl. For many people living in poor but resource-rich countries, the natural resource wealth is not a risk but has long become a fact with disastrous consequences. This is especially the case in the World's poorest resource-rich region. Many of those exporting oil has some of the worst development indicators in the world. In areas like Nigeria's Niger Delta, for example, decades of oil production have virtually destroyed the environment, many people's livelihoods and their hopes for a better future (Roll, 2011).

This study adopted the Relative Deprivation theoretical framework which emphasizes socio-economic in politics, the expectations of the people vis-a-vis the stark reality on the ground. The main proponents of the theory of relative deprivation include Emile Durkheim, Robert Gurr, Samuel Stoutfer, Robert K. Merton W.G Runciman, many others. The accessing to the theory violence and counter result from deprivation, neglect frustration, marginalization and inequality in a given society with shared lusting experience Robert Gurr (1970) in his treatise comparing groups expectations and actual access to economic and political power, has covered that violent breakdown of peace, unity and cohesion of a political community occurs when some people are denied their basic ignites including social amenities, oppressed deprived and frustrated while others live in affluence at the determent of the oppressed.

Relative Deprivation – feeling of people of a common liturgical and socio-economic background of being excluded marginalized, oppressed frustrated and consequently exposed to hardship, hunger, disease and death. A deprived person is an alienated and angry individual. He feels humiliated when suppressed by the powerful in the society or a group that feels deprived in comparison with other groups within the same state or nation in the allocation of values is when its expectations are not met (Folarin, 2007). It is the actual or perceived lack of or inequality in the distribution of resources required to maintain quality life in other words.

Folarin (2007) captured relative deprivation as an economy of objection induced by environmental despoliation and dislocation, destruction of the mean of livelihood (farmland, River, streams) without remediation, lack of critical infrastructure, lack of empowerment and empowerment opportunities. Relative deprivation is the feeling of demands and alienation from the commonwealth by a segment of the state. A population who infer from the mode of distribution of amenities that they have been unfairly treated or worse off compared with others. It is a factor that drives social disorder including grievances, noting, looting, kidnapping, banditry terrorism, piracy, oil theft, robbery, insurgency and militancy, the proliferation of small arms and high weapons, drug and human trafficking must make a living.

Relative deprivation explains the Niger Delta situation where the people are subjected to all kinds of frustration and deprivation and neglect in the oil companies and the federal government of Nigeria. Their environment had been mercilessly degraded, they lack critical infrastructure –roads, budges, electricity, clean water, neat and educational facilities, means of communication. The region is invaded by abject poverty. Their means of livelihood have been destroyed by activities of multinational oil companies through an oil spill, gas flaring, seismic operations and effluence discharges. All this and lack of empowerment and unemployment has refilled in the upsurge of violent crimes, poverty, ill-health, lack of infrastructures, agitative, protests and militancy which the amnesty programme granted by Yar'adua's administration sought to address.

## III. Origin of Niger Delta Crisis

The Niger Delta has unique geographic and ecological characteristics that have made development difficult but have abundant natural resources, particularly oil and gas which constitute more than 90% of revenue to Nigeria. The region is noted for several neglected settlements divided by some swamps, creeks



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and rivers, oppressed and marginalized minorities, ravaged by poverty, hopelessness, disease, violent agitation for separate regions before 1965. It was because of these topographical peculiarities that the colonial Government set up the Willink Commission in 1957 to look into ways that could be adopted by the government to bring development to the area and give the people a sense of belonging. The commission noted the difficult terrain of the region and recommended the creation of a special body to be in charge of the development of the Niger Delta region. This recommendation gave rise to the establishment of the Niger Delta Development Board, but the issue of the creation of a separate Niger Delta Region was jettisoned, and this did not silence agitation for the creation of the region in the area.

Today, having been broken into Akwa Ibom, Cross River, Rivers, Bayelsa and Delta States, agitation is no longer for state creation, but resource control, following gross neglect of the region that sustains Nigeria.

Consequently, the Niger Delta crisis predates the discovery of oil in the later part of 1957. Oil was first discovered in commercial quantity in 1956 at Oloibiri, Bayelsa State and exploration began in February 1958. There were 24 oil fields by 1967 with a production capacity of 582,025 barrels per day (bpd) (Etekpe 2007). The discovering of oil promised development to the areas but instead of a blessing, it brought agony and penury to the people. The Niger Delta has used a plethora of means such as petitions, civil agitations and now militant agitation to ventilate their grievances. For instance, Adaka Boro resorted to revolts to seize the state power to affect the development of the Niger Delta. On February 23, 1966, he declared the Niger Delta Republic but the federal government quickly quelled the insurrection within twelve days.

In 1990, the emergence of Ken Saro-Wiwa and the activities of his group, Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP) gave much leeway to the conflict. For Ken Saro-Wiwa, it was a struggle and quest for self-determination. The arrest and death of Ken-Saro-Wiwa gave the Niger Delta struggle an international status and instead of deterring others, myriad militant groups sprang up. According to Ikelegbe (2010), the turning point in the transformation of demands into political and volatile ones in the militant agitation was the Kaiama Declaration of December 1998 made by Ijaw youths. It was this declaration that put resource control on the front burner and marked the beginning of militant agitation and the formation of more deadly militia groups.

These militant groups took up arms to press home their demands. After waiting for over fifty years, they realized that oil has brought untold misfortune and severe misery, their land has been overtaken for exploitation and exploration, their rivers and waters polluted, their occupation, fishing and growing of crops has become practically impossible without any alternative. The grievances of the region have been numerous. These have included disinheritance by federal government laws, loss of control over their resources, marginalization in the oil economy, marginalization within the Nigerian federation and militarization and repression through the military and security agencies. Concerning the multinational oil companies, the region complains of environmental pollution, mistreatment, poor compensation practices, poor benefits, unfulfilled promises, failures to implement memoranda of understanding and inadequate employment and representation in the oil industry without redress.

Other grievances are poverty, deprivation, high youth unemployment and hopelessness, the location of head offices of TNOCs outside the region and the takeover of oil benefits and oil blocks by non-indigenes of the region. The response of the government and the TNOCs led by the Shell has been more crisis, severe repression, suppression, subjugation and inhumane.

## IV. General Causes of Niger Delta Crisis

Consequently, the main causative factors of crisis in the Niger Delta are anchored on the structural deficiency of the Nigerian federation, poverty/deprivation of the masses, environmental degradation, lack of development and unemployment, distortion of the social and economic fabric of the local societies, poor governance and corruption, divide and rule tactics of oil companies and insincerity on part of the government.

i. *Structural deficiency of the Nigerian federation:* One of the factors responsible for the Niger Delta crisis is the structural injustices that led to the marginalization of the Niger Delta region.

Historically, Nigeria was dominated by three large ethnic groups- the Yoruba, Igbo and the Hausa-Fulani. The British colonial government exploited this situation by ruling through the existing aristocracy, thereby reinforcing the historical imbalances already present. Invariably, the postcolonial Nigeria that inherited this structure has been marked by massive instability, including military coup d'etat, as a result of conflict between these three groups. The smaller ethnic groups in the Niger Delta were systematically excluded from power-sharing. Furthermore, under the 1999 Federal Constitution, the Mineral and Mining Act, all minerals are owned and controlled by the federal government, a structure that has been responsive to the Niger Delta grievances. This informed the various declarations like the Ogoni Bills of Right, Kaiama Declaration of the Ijaws, Akakalaka Declaration that requested self-determination and resource control (Marcellus, 2005).



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Almond (2004) remarks that one of the most critical challenges facing political systems all over the world is their inability to build a common identity and a sense of community among their citizens. Conflicts over various resources and factors such as finance, ethnic and religious identities are among the most explosive causes of political turmoil. Most remarkable plural societies like Nigeria are worse for this assertion. Nigeria is a pluralistic nation with more than 200 ethnic nations, with diverse cultures and customs. All her people did not have much in common before British colonialism, the country is sharply divided between Muslims, mainly in the north and Christians who populate the South, there is a significant class division based on income levels creating a high degree of inequality.

These various plural characteristics interact in different ways and are usually exploited by politicians to engineer conflicts. Issues bordering on marginalization and neglect often snowball into youth restiveness and sporadic raging ethnic and religious conflicts that re-emerge in various parts of the country at the least provocation. There is also the problem of political conflicts present at the threshold of any election in the country. The list of these challenges is innumerable.

These challenges persist and in some cases degenerate into more serious crises because of the quest for resource control by the people and environmental degradation, marginalization and neglect.

ii. *Poverty/Deprivation:* Despite huge revenue to the government over the past 50 years the local people have remained in abject poverty and deprivation as they lack basic amenities like water, electricity, hospitals and schools. The World Bank views poverty as one of the key causes of conflict in oil-producing countries. The Bank has asserted that "the key root cause of conflict is the failure of economic development such that many of the world's poorest countries are locked in a tragic vicious cycle where poverty cause conflict and conflict causes poverty" (Shakleman, 2006). Nigerians have little or no access to adequate housing, food, or health care. They live in an unsafe and unhealthy environment, lack access to clean water, which does not make for a decent living. Because of incessant communal clashes and youth restiveness. Niger Delta has been described as a region of frustrated expectations and deep-rooted mistrust. Though the long years of neglect could be adduced for this, it has implanted in the community, a mentality and feeling of hopelessness, and persistent violence has become the order of the day.

iii. *Environmental Damage:* The social and environmental costs of oil production have been very extensive. They include destruction of wildlife and biodiversity, loss of fertile soil, pollution of land, water and air, i.e drinking water, degradation of farmland and damage to the aquatic ecosystem, all of which have caused serious health problems for the inhabitants in oil-producing areas. Environmental regulations are often not respected by the oil companies and resorting to court for redress by the people is difficult due to the lack of the means to institute such a process by the affected communities. As a result, oil companies often evacuate inhabitants from their traditional homelands to strange areas and further marginalize them. The system of oil production in Nigeria is skewed in favour of the Multi-Nationals and government elite who are the direct recipients of oil production revenue. Environmental damage due to the activities of the oil companies has caused other serious environmental problems. Flooding; destruction of the natural ecosystem; fisheries depletion caused by dredging; spilling of toxic waste into the rivers are common phenomena in the region. The local people can no longer take to farming and fishing which are their major occupations. The UNO has warned of the impact of oil activities on the environment and the ecosystem of the region, are pushing the Delta towards ecological disaster".

The consequence of oil resource extraction on the environment of the Niger Delta has been very glaring in terms of its negative effect on the region. Eteng (1997) stated that "oil exploration and exploitation has over the last few decades impacted disastrously on the socio-physical environment of the Niger Delta oil-bearing communities, massively threatening the subsistent peasant economy and the environment and hence the entire livelihood and basic survival of the people."

> *"the slow poisoning of the waters and the destruction of vegetation and agricultural land by spills which occur during petroleum operations", and observed further that "since the inception of the oil industry in Nigeria, there has been no concerted effort on the part of the government, let alone the oil operators, to control the environmental problems associated with the industry"*

Oil spillage which is a major source of environmental degradation in the Niger Delta has also resulted in the loss of lives and property. For example, the Jesse pipeline explosion fire that killed over 1000 people and the oil-spill fire in Kalabileama community in Nembe Local Government Area of Bayelsa State on September 17, 2003. Also was the Eket oil spill of 1997 which destroyed property with billions of naira.

Most pipeline explosions take place due to drilling activity at the new site, an accidental bursting of pipeline work taking place around the pipeline, an old pipeline that has not been checked for maintenance, vandalization by angry youths and members of the host

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communities, oil bunkers who steal crude oil by intentionally breaking the pipelines. As a result of the consequences of the oil explosion to lives, property and the environment, people of Niger Delta have consistently blamed the oil companies and the federal government of Nigeria for showing a non-challant attitude and lacking any systematic mechanism to address the menace and come to the aid of its citizens when emergency assistance is needed. It was alleged that Government does not respond immediately in most cases to assist those affected like it would have been done in Western and industrialized countries (Torulagha, 2001).

iv. *Lack of Development and Unemployment:* The Niger region is underdeveloped in all its ramifications, although it is the breadbasket of Nigeria. According to Whittington (2001) because of its economic dilemma, "the oil region in Nigeria seems to be stuck in a time warp, with little real change since oil was discovered more than 60 years ago. Away from the main towns, there is no real development, no roads, no electricity, no running water and no telephone". The underdevelopment is indeed severe and the youths of the region are the hardest hit by lack of development. This is why many of them have resorted to militancy to focus national and international attention on their plight. Despite all the claims by the oil companies to be involved in the development of the region, it is the contrary. "The government and oil companies have profited by hundreds of billions of dollars since oil was discovered, yet most Nigerians living in the oil-producing region are living in dire poverty". Also, the anger of the people of the region, especially the youths, derives from the fact that other parts of the country, sometimes the arid regions, are built to the standards comparable to similar cities in the developed world with revenue from the Niger Delta. They have bridges built over dry land and good quality roads, while most of the Niger Delta communities are only accessible by boats and seriously in need of bridges. Unemployment is very high among the people of the Niger Delta as the oil companies do not hire their employees from the region that produce oil, but from the non-oil producing region of Nigeria. Brisibe (2001) has noted that "the majority of the youths from the region are unemployed. They do not benefit from the presence of multinational corporations operating in their communities. Less than five per cent of the oil company workers are people from the Niger Delta. The majority of workers in these companies, who are the beneficiaries are from other parts of Nigeria".

The critical issue in the Niger Delta is not only the increasing incidence of poverty but also the intense feeling among the people of the region that they ought to do far better. This is based on the considerable level of resources in their midst, and the brazen display and celebration of ill-gotten wealth in Nigeria, most of which derives from crude oil wealth by corrupt politicians. Today their farmlands are damaged and fishing grounds destroyed making the traditional occupations such as fishing, farming, lumbering, crafts and small-scale agro-based activities impossible. This has contributed to the indignation, social discontent and frustration, changing deprivation into collective violence by militias.

v. *Distortions in the Social and Economic fabric of the Local societies:* The oil companies have major distorted the social and economic fabric of the local societies. According to Hutchful (1985), "Shell and other companies have perpetuated regional and class inequalities by creating oil colonies in local areas where oil executives live quite lavishly in comparison to the impoverished conditions of the local communities". Besides the oil industry requiring highly skilled workers, local villagers are either forced to migrate to the urban centres after being economically displaced, or become low-skilled workers' depending on the oil company. This structural change in the economic life of the local communities is often along the ethnic line. The new economy that emerged, as a result, coexisted with the depletion of the natural environment by activities of the oil companies.

The heightened pace of construction activities in the burgeoning oil and industrial cities created huge and unprecedented demands for land and construction materials such as sand, clay and wood. Local people are easily seduced by the lure of easy money in the growing urban centres. The large rubber and palm plantation, in fact, general agriculture, was abandoned and subsequently trespassed by local people. They sold the land to speculators in the urban periphery and contractors for quarrying sand, clay and other construction materials. Some local landowners turned into contractors themselves. Thus, the local farmers and landowners mortgaged their future by destroying their land inheritance and throwing away perhaps forever, their means of livelihood. More so, the demand for high-quality fine sand also led to the mining of river channels. River sand mining destroys the aquatic habitat and disrupts the hydraulic capacity and relationships in the river channels. The fishing communities suffer as a result, in addition to the destruction caused by the oil industry.

More so, the migrants from other parts of the country who relocated to both the cities and rural areas of this region, seeking opportunities in the related activities, aggravated the pressure on land and water resources because most of the migrants relocated for economic reasons and hence are less concerned about



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issues of resource conservation and environmental protection.

The consequences of these dislocations are environmental deterioration, poverty and under-development which this region has been experiencing since the past six decades of intensive exploration/ exploitation of oil and gas.

vi. *Human Rights Violations:* Violations of the human rights of the local populace can be cited as one of the factors responsible for the militancy in the Niger Delta region. The human rights of the people are constantly violated by security forces, at the behest of the companies. For instance, in an attempt to suppress the Isaac Boro rebellion in 1966, Nigerian troops terrorized entire communities including the raping of innocent women. The peoples of the region viewed all these as assaults and an attempt to annihilate the people because they belonged to ethnic minority groups in the Nigerian federation. The Udi tragedy is another example of deliberate infringement of the people fundamental rights.

vii. *Bad Governance/Corruption:* The Niger Delta is riddled with bad governance/corruption on the parts of government officials, both at the state and local government levels. Under section 16 of the 1999 constitution, all revenues of the Federation are paid into the Federation Account.

Among the principles for the distribution of the funds in the Federation Account are derivation (not less than 13%), equality of states, internal revenue generation, landmass, terrain, population density and ecological damage. These revenues are shared vertically among tiers of government and horizontally among states and local governments. It has been argued that if government officials in the region have judiciously utilized their monthly allocations, to better the lots of the ordinary people, through the creation of jobs, and infrastructural development of the region, the situation would have been better than the current sorry state. Rather, the monthly allocations are spent on frivolous items that have no corresponding bearings on the life of the people.

viii. *Divide and Rule Tactics of Oil Companies:* One of the reasons that have been adduced for the Niger Delta crisis is the divide and rule tactics of some oil firms operating in the area. The oil companies rather than involve themselves in the development of their areas of operations prefer to give financial gains to some local chiefs which usually result in crisis. This informs why local and other prominent people of the Niger Delta bankrolled by oil companies' ever criticized or condemned the oil companies policies even if such policies directly affect their people, health, environment or the youths who are supposedly leaders of tomorrow.

ix. *The insincerity of the Government:* The alleged insincerity of the Federal Government of Nigeria to develop the region in partnership with the state governments is one of the factors responsible for the Niger Delta crisis. The government set up a commission like the Oil Minerals Producing Area Development Commission (OMPADEC) and Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) to bring development to the communities. However, the activities of the agencies were and are hampered by a lack of funds which become an obstacle in pursuing the goal of developing the region. Furthermore, these commissions are riddled with endemic corruption. Of particular note is the embezzlement of more than ₦81bnby officials of the Interim Management Committee of the NDDC in 2020 for which the NASS instituted a public inquiry and its report indicted the officials of ministry for Niger Delta and NDDC management.

## V. Government Intervention

Several efforts, beginning even before independence, have been made by the Federal Government to end conflicts in the region. In 1957, the government established the Willink Commission to look into the problems of the minorities, and this Commission acknowledged the utter neglect of the region and, among other proposals, recommended the creation of the Niger Delta Development Board (NDDB). This Board could not achieve its aims for many reasons, one of which was the fact that its headquarters were located in Lagos, far from the problem area. With the creation of twelve states in 1967 and the establishment of the Niger Delta River Basin Authority (NDRBA), the NNDB became moribund. In the second Republic, 1.5% of the Federation Account was allocated for the development of the Niger Delta region. This was grossly inadequate and no meaningful result was achieved.

To demonstrate its commitment to ending the crisis and ensuring the development of the area, the Federal Government established some other Commissions such as the Oil Mineral Producing Areas Development Commission (OMPADEC) which was in operation from 1992 to 1999. OMPADEC was set up by the Ibrahim Babangida Administration under the chairmanship of Chief Albert Horsefall. Like its predecessors, it failed to achieve its mandate owing to official profligacy, corruption, excessive political interference and lack of transparency. After this, the Niger Delta Environmental Survey was set up in 1995, followed by the Niger Delta Development Commission, established in 2000 by President Olusegun Obasanjo to offer a lasting solution to the socio-economic difficulties of the Niger Delta Region' and a mission 'to facilitate the rapid, even and sustainable development of the Niger Delta into a region that is economically prosperous,



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socially stable, ecologically regenerative and politically peaceful' (Niger Delta Development Commission 2000). The government also put in place other mechanisms such as the Task Force on Pipeline Vandalisation (April 2000) operated by the Nigeria Police Force in collaboration with the NNPC. Similar task forces were also set up by the navy, Army and State Security Service (SSS) in various states of the Niger Delta. The Special Security Committee on Oil Producing Areas was also set up by the Federal Government in November 2001 to address the prevailing situation in the oil-producing areas. Other efforts include the convening of the First Niger Delta Peace Conference in Abuja in 2007, a Joint Task Force (JTF) in 2008, and a Technical Committee made up of stakeholders and the Niger Delta ministry in 2008. In other words, the response of the government to the plight of the region started with the Willink Commission and has been going on at a small speed.

Following criticisms of the military option, especially when it became obvious that the use of force by the JTF was aggravating rather than resolving the conflict, an amnesty programme was proclaimed on 25 May 2009 by President Umar Musa Yar'Adua. Amnesty was the Federal Government's effort towards bringing enduring peace, security, stability and development to the region.

It involved granting unconditional pardon to all armed militants in the Niger Delta region, who in turn, were to surrender their arms and ammunition, sign an undertaking not to return to the creeks and continue with the struggle.

Amnesty followed the recommendations contained in the 2008 report by the Niger Delta Technical Committee (NDTC) initially established by the Federal Government, and chaired by MOSOP president Ledum Mitee, to assess initiatives taken in the Region and provide for a comprehensive report and recommendations. The 45-member committee was inaugurated on 8 September 2008 to collate and review all past reports in the Niger Delta, appraise their recommendations and make other proposals that will help the Federal Government achieve sustainable development, peace, human and environmental security in the Niger Delta Region. The amnesty programme included disarmament, demobilization and reintegration processes. The actualization of the initiative was carried out by the Amnesty planning committee chaired by General Godwin Abe and the author was a member and later Akwa Ibom coordinator of Amnesty.

The first stage of the programme led to 26,808 ex-combatants accepting the offer. Of this figure 20,192 accepted the offer on or before 4th October 2009 and 6 616 in November 2009.

The second stage involved the government setting up demobilization camps for the demilitarization and rehabilitation of the ex-militants; while the third stage involved the government's engagement with the. the leadership of the ex-combatants, as well as non-combatant youths, for employment and empowerment, thus reducing drastically the bombing and kidnappings in the region, Despite this seeming success, amnesty was still to be riddled with cases of corruption which five years later new militant groups emerged in the region, namely; the Niger Delta Avengers (NDA), The Joint Niger Delta Liberation Force (JNDLF), the Niger Delta Red squad (NDRS), the Adaka Boro Avengers (ABA) and the Niger Delta Greenland Justice Mandate (NDGJM). In response, the Federal Government deployed 3 000 military personnel to the region with a projected deployment of 10000 more by the year 2017 in addition to launching Operation Crocodile Smile aimed at restoring peace in the region (Utebor, 2016). Criticisms have however trailed the deployment of troops and, particularly, the use of maximum force in the region. Critics are of the view that the new security measures will further worsen and escalate the security situation in the Region and therefore call for dialogue. In response to this call, the government proposed a $10 billion (N4 trillion) ultrastructural rebirth investment programme for the region. Leaders and stakeholders from the region rejected this because they were not consulted before it was proposed (Omotayo, 2016). In addition, the Federal Government in November 2016, convened a peace dialogue in which President Buhari met with leaders from the region in Abuja to discuss the way forward. At the meeting, leaders of the region led by Edwin Clark presented a 16-point agenda to the Federal Government and although the president welcomed the requests, peace remains elusive. Some critics have attributed the rise in militancy to the failure of the 13% derivation principle and amnesty to product development in the region. The result has been pressure and a call for 'resource control' or 'fiscal federalism' (Akintunde and Hile, 2016).

## VI. Prospects and Challenges of the Amnesty Programme

Reports from the government indicate that following the relative peace ushered in by the cease-fire as a result of the amnesty; the country's oil output rose to 2.3 million barrels a day in 2010 from 800,000 barrels per day (in the 2006—2008 period) and there was a tremendous improvement in security in the oil region. A good number lot of oil companies have even engaged in meaningful turn-around maintenance of their facilities. The Amnesty Programme has improved human capital development in the oil industry in the country. The Human Development Index (HDI) had valued Nigeria to have a long and healthy life, access to knowledge and a decent standard of living in 2011 at 0.459, positioning the country as the the156$^{th}$ out of 187 countries and territories (UNDO, 2011).

The Amnesty programme in Nigeria could serve to negate the 'resource curse' theory that resource-rich



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economies such as Nigerian, Congo, Angola, are more prone to mismanagement, underdevelopment and violence. The curses from the resources from the Niger Delta Region is avoidable if there are strong institutions, good, governance, equitable distribution of income, respect for the social, economic and political rights of the citizens.

Notwithstanding the achievement of the programme, reports from the panel set up in January 2010 to review the rehabilitation aspect of the DDR revealed some inadequacies which were responsible for the criticism by the citizens of the area for allocating about 80 per cent of the budget for payments to consultants and contractors, 20 for rehabilitation of the ex-militants; over a bloated number of registered ex-militants; the continued detention of several militant leaders; lack of equipment at the training centres. Other challenges include, the irregular release of funds, paid and unpaid allowances, huge disparities between payments made to foot soldiers and former militant commanders, limited access to rehabilitation training and allowances for those who surrendered weapons after the deadline, inappropriate training provision, limited employment prospects, the absence of a broader political settlement involving the broader Niger Delta population that bore the costs of conflict, and the politically motivated staffing of bodies responsible for implementing and coordinating the amnesty programme, are among the numerous flaws constraining the smooth implementation of the programme.

The Federal Government on 2 December 2009 scrapped the Presidential Committee on Disarmament and Amnesty for Militants in the Niger Delta and in its place set up five new committees to handle the Post-Amnesty Programmes and fast track development in the region. These were the Presidential Monitoring Committee on Amnesty; the infrastructural Committee; the Disarmament and Reintegration Committee; the Oil and Gas Assets Protection Committee; and the Environmental Remediation Committee.

One of the major challenges of the amnesty package is in the area of poor implementation. The amnesty programme was not implemented as recommended in the report of the Niger Delta Technical Committee. Rather than engaging in Open negotiations or a formal agreement with the militants, the consultations made up the officials of the Federal government, Niger Delta elites/elders and top government officials of Niger Delta origin who negotiated rather with the militant's Commanders (Obi and Rustad, 2011). This top-down non-inclusive approach, through the militant commanders who were only interested in what could come into their pockets, or for their aggrandizement, is a serious challenge to the Amnesty programme as the militants on the ground felt cheated and sidelined by the government. It shows that the Nigerian government has not learnt any lesson from the previously failed development programme such as the Niger Delta Development Board (NDDB), Niger Delta Basin Development Authority (NDBDA), Oil Mineral Producing Area Development Commission (OMPADEC), which have failed to deliver based on a top-down approach and even the current NDDC.

Furthermore, the total number of ammunitions/ weapons handed in by the militants totalling 1,798 riffles, 1981 guns of various types, 70 RPGs, 159 Pistols, one spear and six cannons were certainly not all, when compared with 26,358 militants that registered for the amnesty programme. The region is still ridden with arms and this is evident in the various attacks that have been carried out even after the disarmament exercise. The recent spate of bombings across the region shows that all is not well with the Amnesty Programme. For instance, MEND set off two car bombs on 15 March 2010 in Warri, the Delta State Capital, where a post amnesty dialogue was being held and this left one person dead and several others injured (Eyo, 2010) Also important is the October 1, 2010 Car bombing that killed about 12 people and disrupted the Nigeria 50th anniversary celebrations. This led to the trial, arrest, prosecution and conviction of the leader of MEND; Henry Okah in South Africa. His brother Charles Okah also suffered the same fate alongside three others before the Abuja Federal High Court on suspicion of involvement in the dastardly act. Also on 4th February 2012, the militant group bombed a trunk pipeline at Brass in Bayelsa state belonging to Italy's EniSPA, from which about 4,000 barrels per day of 'equity production were lost in the incident. The group further claimed responsibility for the bombing of the Ogbogbabere country home of the Minister for Niger Delta, Elder Godsday Orubebe in Burutu local government area of Delta State on 28 January 2012.

Most importantly, Amnesty is exclusive, it targets only militants without consideration for the victims of militancy and hostage-taking in the region (Akinwale, 2010) Mothers and Children who had lost fathers and sons and homes and have been displaced by the conflict were not included in the amnesty package presumably as a result of their non-involvement in militancy. The surrender of arms and renunciation of violence by the militants have not brought an end to the frustration of the entire population and the citizens suffering from the loss of loved ones and property. The attention given to the ex,-militants is rather reinforcing the frustration of those who did not take up arms against the country. Violence could rear up or reoccur in the region if the frustration that reinforces insurgency is not resolved. Resolving these frustrations is, therefore, a requirement for peace-building in the region". (Ibaba, 2011).

The amnesty package should not be seen as a stand-alone act but must be carried out within a



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comprehensive peace process, as recommended by the Technical Committee. Thus, the government must not only publish the white appearance on the recommendations of the Niger Delta Technical committee but also embark on a holistic rather than the current fractured approach to the implementation of the report. The report is believed "to offer an opportunity to reduce the violent conflict significantly and begin long term regional development in the oil-rich region and could help to 'save the region from further violence and organized criminality.

Efforts should be taken to remove the Niger Delta people from what Sacs (2005) refers to as a poverty trap, a situation in which degraded environment, poor health, poor education, poor infrastructure and poor standard of living reinforce one another (Ogege, 2011).

In addition, it was revealed that some of the rehabilitation centres are lacking in even the basic facilities for the proper impartation of knowledge and skills. Shortages of space, beds and other basic facilities in some of the centres made only a few militants be accommodated (Ikelegbe, 2010). Also in compliance with the UN code of DDR, it is expected that in the implementation of the DDR programmes, the ex-militants should be taken to a neutral environment quite far away from their natural habitats for transformation and reintegration purposes. Three requirements are complied with.

Amnesty, it has been observed, is incapable of yielding sustainable results. This is because the few militants who have handed in their weapons only turn-in rusty and old ones and these are not from the major militant groups. Again, the main actors in the vociferous and nefarious militant groups are still very adamant in their struggles. There is no guarantee that the oil facilities and the workers are free from attacks by militants in the Region.

Deprived of unemployment, hungry and angry youths of the Niger Delta Region decided to pick up arms against oil companies operating in the area by initially asking them to stop petroleum prospecting in the region since their operations with attendant sophisticated technologies have not only caused the inhabitant their farmlands/fishing creeks but also short-changed the suffering people of the Region without providing alternative sources of livelihood. Many Niger Deltans have been killed, maimed, harassed, molested, extorted, raped, and several villages and communities have been sacked by the Nigerian security operatives attached to oil companies and deployed to the Niger Delta Region.

The existing relationship amongst the oil-bearing people of Niger Delta, the multi-national oil companies and the Government is getting tensed up daily, like three strange bedfellows, of which without urgent investigation of the causes towards finding a concrete solution, may result in anarchism. As Ibeanu (2000:1), aptly captured the situation: the Niger Delta, a sensitive ecosystem rich in biodiversity, has witnessed considerable violence as a result of the tense relationship among oil companies, the Nigerian State, and oil-bearing communities. The environmental damage from the extraction and movement of fossil fuels is a central point of dispute among the parties while the precise extent of ecological damage remains unknown.

## VII. Conclusion and Recommendations

The amnesty programme has immeasurably assisted in empowering and developing the youths, particularly the ex-militants, by offering scholarships for training in both local and foreign tertiary institutions in various academic and professional areas; as well as vocational training in agriculture, pipeline welding. Besides, peace had been restored in parts of the Niger Delta. However, the cardinal objective of the second phase of the programme name, rehabilitation and reintegration are yet to be accomplished, and this has forced the ex-combatants back to the creeks, as a meaningful development of the area is still on the drawing board. Despite this, kidnapping, pipeline vandalization, armed robbery, oil theft, piracy are at the increase. Besides, those who did not participate in the militancy were left over and they are also looking for an opportunity for engagement with the multinational corporations and the governments for their benefit.

However, the amnesty programme would still impact the youth gainfully if the following recommendations are adopted by the governments.

Providing all persons affecting militant activities with the opportunity to earn a sustainable livelihood.

Implementation of policies and strategies that promote adequate and sustainable levels of funding, and focus on integrated human development policies, including income generation, increased local control of resources.

1. Developing all poor areas through integrated strategies and programmes to ensure sustainable management of the environment, mobilization. poverty eradication and alleviation, employment and income generation, women and youths empowerment.
2. The total number of weapons handed is were fee less than the number of ex-militant who registered by the programme. This presupposes that more arms and ammunitions are still in circulation the Niger Delta government should devise a mechanism to meet up the vast catch or arms in the area.
3. The ex-militants who have undergone disarmament and demobilization should be properly integrated into the society and exposed to skill acquisition



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particularly in oil and gas-related aversive skill requisition should be adequately funded and provided with the relevant equipment.

4. They should be regularly in the payment of allowances to the ex-militant and about 70% of the provisions for the programme should be for allowance and the outstanding 30% to the consultants.
5. Leaders of the ex-militant groups who are still incarceration by the security agencies should be released and made to sign undertaking those of good conduct and denounce militancy.

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