

Amnesty Programme in Nigeria: The Impact and Challenges in Post Conflict Niger Delta, Region

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Abstract: *The Niger Delta crisis has been a major threat to both socio-economic activities in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. The amnesty is now six years since its implementation however, this study seeks to capture the impact and challenges of the amnesty programme in post conflict Niger Delta region. The qualitative and quantitative method sampling procedure was used for this study. This research study was carried out in Ekeremor Local Government Area of Bayelsa state, Nigeria. The purposive sampling method was used for this research because of the nature of militancy activities in the area. More so, in-depth interview with youth's leaders, community members, elders and relatives of ex-militants was carried out in the area. For decades, the people of the region have long been neglected, marginalized and lacked the basic infrastructure. Since then, the agreement made by the Federal Government is still unfulfilled. Therefore, there is urgent need for the FG to address the problems in the region.*

Keywords: *Amnesty, Federal Government, Niger Delta, Nigeria, Post-Conflict*

I. INTRODUCTION

The Niger Delta crisis has been a major threat to both socio-economic activities in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. At present, the amnesty programme is six years since its implementation in the Niger Delta as the Federal Government of Nigeria through the amnesty package had good intentions for granting militants amnesty with the hope that the gesture would effectively put an end to youths' restiveness in the region. Amnesty therefore is a guarantee of exemption from prosecution and pardon from punishment for certain criminal, rebel and insurgent actions hitherto committed usually against the state. It indemnifies affected persons in terms of safety and protection from punitive actions, retributions and associated losses. An amnesty most often time is usually within a specific time within which offenders admit crime and take advantage of the general pardon (Ikelegbe, 2010: 6-7).

It is on this note that in 2008, following the submission of Ledum Mitee reports with other recommendations the Federal Government after consultation with the council of States and in pursuance with section 175 of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria granted unconditional pardon to all persons who have directly or indirectly participated in the commission of offences associated with militants activities in the region. The amnesty was proclaimed on 25th June, 2009 included forgiveness and automatic freedom from any form of prosecution whatsoever which was expected to run for a 60 day period from August 6th to October 4th, 2009, (Idonor, 2009, Ikelegbe & Umokoro, 2014). During this period, opportunity was given to ex-agitators to surrender their arms and ammunitions in exchange for presidential pardon.

The declaration of the Federal Government amnesty was welcomed by a large section of the society and groups, including several international bodies pledge their supports for the programme. Thus securing lasting peace in the crisis prone region has not been easy as several peace-building efforts aimed at resolving violent agitations in the Niger Delta have failed. But as part of his efforts, Late President Musa Yar' Adua offered state pardon to the militants in a nationwide broadcast that:

The offer of amnesty is predicated in the willingness and readiness of the militants to give up all illegal arms in their possession completely renounce militancy in all its ramifications unconditionally, and depose to an undertaking to this effect. It is my fervent hope that all militants in the Niger Delta will take advantage of this amnesty and come out to join in the quest for the transformation of our dear nation: (Federal Government of Nigeria, 2009).

Also, the Federal Government proclamation of unconditional amnesty for Niger Delta ex-agitators included the willingness and readiness for them to surrender their arms and ammunitions on or before the expiring date October 4th 2009. So far, 30,000 ex-agitators have accepted the FG amnesty programme. In pursuance to the letter, the FG also instituted a Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) package

for those who embraced amnesty before the deadline with a #65,000 monthly stipend being paid to ex-militants who accepted the offer of amnesty (Kuku, 2012).

Prior to this time there was violent agitation by the people in the Niger Delta region as a result of resource distribution and environmental insecurity emanating from oil exploitation. However, regardless of the wealth from the oil bearing area, the Niger Delta still remain one of the poorest and underdeveloped region in Nigeria (Ereibi, 2011). Also, the people of the region lacked basic amenities such as provision of potable water, good roads, health facilities and electricity. The inhabitants also felt neglected, marginalized and their resources being exploited without any compensation or meaningful development for their God given mineral wealth. As a matter of fact, the Federal Government taking into consideration the socio-economic development of the area, engage ex-militants in gainful employment, training and skills acquisition as well as other meaningful activities that will help improve their living condition. With the amnesty programme there is relative peace as sustainable peace in the crisis bearing region is sine qua non to stable growth and development. Thus a major expectation of the program is to ensure the promotion of peace in order to facilitate socio-economic development in the region.

Nonetheless, six years now into the amnesty programme there are fears bearing in mind the method of implementation that sustainable peace may not be realized when the programme comes to an end. However, the post-conflict era of the Niger Delta region has witness various kinds of social unrest which has hampered development ranging from kidnapping, illegal oil bunkering, piracy, bombings, disruption of pipeline facilities and other crimes (*wikipedia.org*). Therefore, this paper seeks to examine the amnesty programme in Nigeria, the impact and challenges in post conflict Niger Delta.

II. OBJECTIVES

This study seeks to investigate the amnesty programme in Nigeria within the context of exploring the following:

- Impacts of Amnesty
- Post-conflict Niger Delta Challenges

III. METHODOLOGY

This research study is a part of the larger research project titled “Amnesty for peace in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria”. However, for the larger project, twelve Local Government Areas were selected in three states of the Niger Delta region. They are: Yenogoa, Sagbama, Southern Ijaw and Ekeremor LGAs of Bayelsa State; Warri South, Warri South West, Bomadi and Burutu LGAs of Delta State; Okrika, Port-Harcourt, Asari-Toru and Gokana LGAs of Rivers State, including Nembe. The survey instruments employed were; In-depth Interview, Community/House hold, Social Activist, Institutional, Key informant interview and Focus group discussion. Also, the In-depth interview has one of the largest sample size per case study for each region.

For the purpose of this research, the information/data gathering adopted the mixed method sampling procedure. This includes using the purposive sampling method. Out of the aforementioned LGAs where this research was conducted Ekeremor LGA of Bayelsa state was selected for the purpose of this study. This is because of the nature and level of militancy activities that was prevalence in the area. Subsequently, in-depth interview with youth’s leaders, community members, elders and relatives of ex-agitators was carried out to know more about the amnesty programme.

3.1 Background Interview of Respondents

The in-depth interview was fairly spread across a broad range of demographic characteristics. Of the 207 respondents there were 71% male and 29% female mostly in the age group between 15 to 55 years and above. However, 63.2% were married, 34.2% were unmarried, and 2.4% were widowed while none were divorced. More so, among the respondents who were interviewed 1.9% have no formal education, those with primary and secondary education were 3.4% and 36.2% while those with tertiary education were 7% (OND/NCE), 18.4% (HND/B.Sc) degree and 0.48% with post graduate education. Among those interviewed that were employed and working in the private sector companies constitute 15.5%, those who were self employed in business, commerce and artisanship were 5%. Only 6.3% were in Agro-business, 30% were majorly into trading while those employed in the public service are 16.4% and the unemployed were 27.1%.

IV. IMPACT OF AMNESTY

No doubt, scholars are of the opinion that the amnesty package initiated by President Musa Ya’Adua Administration has brought some level of success that has impacted positively on the lives of the repentant militants in the Niger Delta. They also agreed on the following impact of the programme.

It is a known fact that with the proclamation of the amnesty there seems to be relative peace and security have since returned to the region. Furthermore, the FG has therefore met with the aim of restoring peace and safety as the nation’s economy has return to normal. Consequently, at the height of the conflict in 2009,

Nigeria crude production dropped from 2.2 million to 700,000 barrel per day and as a result of the post amnesty period, crude oil production increased from 1.9 to 2.4 million bpd in 2013. In 2014 it also increased to 2.6 million and in 2015 it further rose to 2.7 million bpd (Amaize, 2016).

Additionally, with the declaration and implementation of the amnesty package, ex-agitators who embraced the amnesty offer had since been disarmed, demobilized and are either undergoing training or have been trained in their respective training centres. Presently, it is evident that the Federal Government has so far enlisted 30,000 ex-fighters in the amnesty programme (Onukwugha, Eke-Ogiugo & Okhomina, 2014).

The amnesty is supposed to improve the human capital development of the country which is at present low. In a way the programme has presented an opportunity to build capacity of youths as well as reintegrate agitating youths of the Niger Delta into the mainstream in Nigeria as a confidence-building strategy while gradually addressing the root causes that necessitated the conflict in the first place, (Akinwale, 2010: Osah & Amakihe, 2014: Atumah, 2015). If well implemented, Amnesty could serve to negate the 'resource curse' theory in Nigeria that resource-rich economies such as Nigeria, Congo, Angola, etc. are more prone to mismanagement, underdevelopment and violence.

According to Onukwugha, Eke-Ogiugo & Okhomina (2014), amnesty package has helped in the reduction of violent crime as most youths who were involved in anti-social activities have been integrated into the programme thereby making violence unattractive such crimes include; attacking oil installations, engaging in illegal oil bunkering and kidnapping of oil workers. It is however a fact that violence has now declined but not disappeared.

To this end, there is no gain saying that amnesty has made significant impact on the socio-economic activities and lives of the people in bringing stability in the Niger Delta. As a result, the remarkable achievements and stability generated considerable goodwill for Nigeria among international partners and friends. Besides, amnesty package rebranded and gave Nigeria a positive image among the comity of Nations (CPED, 2015).

V. POST-CONFLICT NIGER DELTA CHALLENGES

The amnesty recorded a number of successes but there are still some challenges thereafter. Therefore, below are statements and observation made by respondents that were interviewed viz a viz the challenges in post-conflict Niger Delta.

"There are no jobs in this community, unemployment rate is still very high and most of the youths are not employed"

"The money meant for these boys (ex-militant) are not directly paid to them, and in most cases they are short-charged"

"In our community some group of boys were excluded from the amnesty benefits, this is painful because slots meant for them were given to non ex-militants and relatives of big politician for over sea training"

"There is no hope of training"

"Many of our youths have not been trained, they need training and entrepreneurial skills in areas like welding, boat building sea faring, crane operation amongst others. They also want to be empowered as well so that they can start business of their own"

"Most of the youths who returned from training abroad up till now have not been empowered or engaged."

"Some persons who did not partake in the struggle are the beneficiaries of the amnesty programme while those who were involved in the fight have not benefited anything. This is because of corruption and greed on the part of the management of the programme"

"Our communities need compensation from the Federal Government and oil companies. There is no compensation for conflict affected communities, victims and those who lost their properties. Also, mothers who have lost children, children who had lost fathers, families that have lost homes and persons who have been displaced by the conflict are not compensated"

"A major problem why our boys are angry is that most of the terms and agreement reached before the boys lay down their arms have not been met by the Federal Government"

"The major challenges we have is that our communities are not develop. We don't have good roads, schools, electricity and health care facilities. Our children have to walk several miles to the stream to fetch water. So, for this reason our community needs to be provided with the desired development".

The findings from this research revealed that majority of the people in the locality are living in abject poverty where there is no meaningful development of whatsoever. It is also gathered that victims of the conflict were not compensated while some of the youths were empowered with various skill acquisition through the amnesty package. Although, there is significant achievements on the impact of the amnesty programme as many urge the Federal Government to create more jobs for the unemployed.

VI. CONCLUSION

This research seeks to address the amnesty programme in Nigeria within the context of exploring the impact and challenges in post conflict Niger Delta region. As it stands, the post amnesty needs of the Niger Delta people have not been met and some of the promises made by the Federal Government during the consultation preceding the amnesty have not been redeemed. Therefore, the resolution to the crisis in the region goes beyond amnesty programme to the substantive solution, the solution is for the FG to create employment opportunities for the youths and develop the region.

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