

Amnesty Programme and Security Situation in the Niger Delta Region: An Assessment

Nwoba, M. O. E. Ph.D & Nwokuwu, Paul M.

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Abstract

This study was carried out to assess the implementation of the Amnesty programme with regards to restoration of peace in the Niger Delta region. This study becomes necessary given the importance of the region to economic prosperity and well being of Nigeria. Given the nature of the main objective of the study, content analytical method was employed to review published records (official publications, articles from reputable journals). After critical examination of available records, it was found that the Amnesty programme is just a scratch on the surface of the underlying factors that triggered the conflict; it was also found that the programme was lopsided in approach as victims of environmental degradation who were not members of militant groups were totally excluded from enjoying benefits accruing from the programme; that there was obvious corruption in the management of the programme as its handlers expended about 80% of the programme's budget in consultancy services among others. On the basis of the findings, we recommended as follows: that the root causes of the Niger Delta agitations such as poverty, underdevelopment, environmental degradation, unemployment among the youths, etc should be frontally tackled by government; that government should demonstrate political will by ensuring immediate end to gas flaring in the region; that government should ensure the sustenance of Amnesty programme by expanding its scope and ensuring regularity in the payment of stipends to repented militants, etc.

Keywords: *Amnesty Programme, Security, Niger Delta, Militancy, conflicts*

Introduction

It is no longer news that Nigeria is the largest and most complex country in Africa with an estimated population of about 180 million people. The country has a well over 250 different ethnic nationalities (Echiegu, 2014) with three major ethnic groups namely Igbo, Hausa/Fulani and Yoruba. However, due to some political reasons, the country as it is currently constituted is divided into six geo-political zones. Niger Delta region cuts across three geo-political zones viz – South South, South East and South West. The region consists of nine states of the Nigerian federation – Rivers, Bayelsa, Akwa Ibom, Cross River, Delta, Edo, Imo, Abia and Ondo. The region is a vast swampy terrain that supports more than 20 million people (Okurebia and Ekong, 2013), many of whom live in isolated communities that can only be accessible by boats. It has been argued that the Niger Delta region has remained the economic hub of the Nigerian federation with vast oil deposits.

Ubhenin (2013), opined that the history of oil in the Niger Delta is often traced to 1956, when the Anglo-Dutch oil multinational company, Shell, discovered oil, the high grade 'Bonny light crude' in commercial quantity in Oloibiri in the present day Bayelsa State. This discovery

however, culminated in Nigeria's first export of crude cargo in 1958. It is a generally held view that Nigeria's oil industry has the capacity to produce three million barrels of crude oil per day notwithstanding the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries' (OPEC) limit on the rate of production of crude oil by member states. Out of the total 126.847 billion barrels held by African continent, Nigeria held 37.2 billion barrels which is an indication that the country held 29.3% of the continent's reserve; thus, earning her the status as the second largest oil reserve in Africa after Libya (Ubhenin, 2013). To Bisina (2005), oil from the Niger Delta accounted for about 20% of oil supply to the U.S during the conflict period in the Middle East. Available records show that crude oil from the region accounts for about 85% of the nation's revenue.

Regrettably, this gift of nature to the country in general and the region in particular appears to be a curse to the inhabitants of the area. The Niger Delta is notable for its biodiversity because of the region's high content of diverse plants and animal species including many exotic and unique flowers and birds but the area has become the most polluted region in the world. According to Emaduku (2016), years of exploration and pollution have utterly destroyed the environment as it can hardly sustain the means of livelihood of the people of the region whose major source of subsistence is farming and fishing. He argued that the region has given its all to the nation without adequate compensation in return. In 2009, Amnesty International accused the multinational oil corporations of human rights violation alleging that equivalent of at least 9 million barrels of oil had been spilled in the region. In addition, political corruption and greed on the part of the unscrupulous government officials have kept much of the earnings from the vast oil reserves from getting to the Niger Delta for sustainable growth and development. There is total death of infrastructure and social amenities such as roads, schools, electricity, pipe borne water and hospitals. The sources of drinking water have also been polluted as a result of constant oil spillage even as their farm lands have been destroyed and rendered unfit for agricultural purposes (Emaduku, 2016). The central government, which is often controlled by elements from major ethnic groups seems not be concerned about equitable revenue sharing formula from oil proceeds obtained from the area. More so, they have been accused of sowing seed of discord, hatred, suspicion, distrust among tribes in the region so that they perceive each other from bad light.

It is believed that the age long criminal exploitations and neglect of the environment coupled with unprecedented deprivation and impoverishment of the people of the Niger Delta region by both Nigerian government and multinational oil giants have elicited agitations for resource control from both local bourgeois and the youths of the region. Their agitations culminated in formation of militia groups who engaged in pipeline vandalism and hostage

taking of expatriate officials working in some multilateral oil corporations. The activities of the groups nearly crippled Nigerian economy in spite of military approach and repressive posture adopted by successive administrations. It was in an attempt to resolve the impasse that the administration of former President Late Musa Yar' Adua showed political will by adopting Ledum Mitee' report and subsequently implemented the Amnesty policy (Mitee, 2008). The policy was aimed at granting a state pardon to those militants who have laid down their arms, never to go back to the creeks. This study is therefore carried out to examine the operations of the programme with regards to security situation in the Niger Delta region.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on Frustration-Aggression theory propounded by Dollard, Doob, Miller, Mowrer, & Sears in 1939. The theory was further developed by Miller, Roger Barker in 1941 and Leonard Berkowitz in 1969. The central message of the theory is that aggression stems from blockage of a person's concerted effort to achieve certain goals or objectives. Put differently, aggression is a consequence of frustration. This implies that occurrence of aggressive behaviour presupposes an existence of frustration and that existence of frustration always results in some form of aggression (Dollard *et al.*, 1939). Some psychologists have viewed frustration as the omission of a customary reward or as a deprivation or as an external instigating condition (Azrin, Hutchinson & Hake, 1966). Aggression on the other hand, is seen by Dollard and colleagues as not merely the delivery of noxious stimuli but as an effort geared towards infliction of injury (Dollard *et al.*, 1939). It is an innate drive response to frustrating external stimuli. It should be pointed out that the nature of this response is not usually the same from one situation to another. Aggressive behaviour is directed in most cases against agents perceived to be the sources of the frustration.

The relevance of this theory is that the Niger Delta people received the cheering news of the discovery of oil in commercial quantity with great jubilation hoping that it would induce unprecedented development in the area. Regrettably, the mineral deposits in the region were exploited and expropriated for the development of other regions to the utter neglect of the goose, which laid the golden eggs. This obvious marginalization coupled with environmental degradation of the region however resulted in frustration and subsequent aggressive tendencies that have overtime dictated the actions of many youths who have formed themselves into groups to wage war against the sources of the injustices (government and multinational corporations). Therefore, government in the course of implementing the Amnesty programme

should endeavour to holistically address the root causes of the frustration, anger, disillusionment, aggression in the region so as to achieve sustainable peace and development.

Niger Delta Crisis at a Glance

The Niger Delta is a densely populated region formerly known as the Oil Rivers. The name was derived from its leading role in the production of palm oil in the pre-colonial and colonial periods. The area became the British Oil Rivers Protectorate from 1885 and 1893, which was expanded to become the Niger Coast Protectorate (Okurebia & Ekong, 2013). Nigerian government's official records show that the Niger Delta extends over about 70,000km² and consists of 7.5% of the Nigerian landmass. Presently, the core Niger Delta comprises Bayelsa, Delta, Akwa Ibom and Rivers States. It was not until year 2000 that former President Olusegun Obasanjo expanded the coverage of the area to include Abia, Cross River, Edo, Imo and Ondo States (Okurebia & Ekong, 2013).

It is believed that the Niger Delta crisis predated formal colonialism of Nigeria. Renowned historians (Ayodele, 1999; Tamuno, 1999; Hargreaves, 1996) argued that agitation in the Niger Delta region could be traced to the period of King Jaja of Opobo, Ovonramwen N'Ogbaisi of Benin when they resisted the British when they showed interest in Niger Delta or Oil Rivers in 1851. The resistance at this point was basically to prevent the British from gaining dominance and control of the oil palm trade. However, those indigenous kings were overpowered by the superior firearms of the whites.

The British having destroyed all perceived resistance from the aggressive indigenous people dominated the Niger Delta trade and demonstrated no serious interest in ensuring adequate development of the region. As we earlier on pointed out, oil was first discovered in commercial quantities in 1956 at Oloibiri in the present day Bayelsa State. The exploitation of crude oil started in February, 1958. Etekpe (2007), reported that there were 24 oil fields by the 1967 and a production of 582,025 barrels per day. The exploration and exploitation of the oil raised the hopes of the people of the region for massive infrastructural and human capital development. Unfortunately, their hopes were suddenly dashed due mainly to neglect, environmental degradation and infrastructure decay in the area. In five decades, oil has brought only abject poverty, environmental degradation, and diseases (HIV/AIDS) (Udonwa, Ekpo, Ekanem, Inem & Etokidem, 2004), hypertension and phobia (Akpofure, Efere, & Ayawei, 2000). Despite huge revenues gotten from the region, it is paradoxical that poverty has continued to be on the increase. To Watts (2008), cited in Ejovi and Ebie (2013), about 90 percent of the local inhabitants of the Niger Delta fall below the poverty line of \$1 US dollar

per day as their sources of livelihood have been destroyed by pollution resulting from activities of multinational oil corporations; a situation which has been variously described with some derogatory words by notable scholars as 'blood and oil', 'the resource curse', 'the oil of poverty' (ANEEJ, 2004). It was argued that a paltry 0.000007% of the value of oil exploited has been used by the oil companies on community assistance, while the state has spent less than 3% of total revenues for development of the region (Rowell, 1994). Instead of the oil resulting in the overall development of Nigeria and particularly Niger Delta region, its proceeds have led to the impoverishment of the masses which have unfortunately nosedived into conflicts and sundry insecurity.

The people of the Niger Delta adopted several means to vent their discontentment with their parlous conditions of living and underdevelopment in midst of awesome wealth. They included – petitions, civil agitations and lastly militancy. Major Isaac Adaka Boro alongside 53-man Niger Delta Volunteer Services (NDVS) revolted against government by the declaration of the Niger Delta People's Republic on February 23, 1966. The insurrection ended 12 days later on March 6, 1966 as federal government launched a war against him and his cohorts and subdued them (Tebekoami, 1982). The repressive approach adopted by government was believed to be a sure means of sending jitters in the spines of would be criminal elements who may dare the government of the day in the region. Notwithstanding government repressive approach, various groups continued to demonstrate peacefully to draw government attention to their plights. For instance, there was a peaceful protest by Umuechem Community in 1990 at the gate of the Shell Flow Station demanding for electricity, water, schools, and roads. The multinational corporation in a swift move invited the security forces which on arrival killed about 80 unarmed protesters including a king who was killed in front of his palace and destroyed over 350 houses (Emuedo, 2013).

Another notable case of protest was the Ken Saro-Wiwa led Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP). This group carried out protest of passive resistance to draw government attention to the harmful effect of pollution arising from oil corporations' activities in Ogoni land. In reaction, government commissioned a task force headed by Major Okuntimo to crush such agitations. The high point of the military action was the hanging of Saro-Wiwa in 1995. This development sparked off various protests that resulted in the 'Egbesu war' and the Kaiama Declaration which undoubtedly changed the mode of agitations by introducing deepening disorder in the Niger Delta region. Soldiers were deployed by former President Olusegun Obasanjo to bring the situation under control. Actions of the soldiers led to the destruction of Odi town and killing of about 2483 persons in 1999 (Emuedo, 2013). He went

further to argue that the spate of draconian state repressions across the Niger Delta region culminated in the transformation of the crises. The table below shows government repressive approach to Niger Delta legitimate agitations.

Table 1: Militarization of the Niger Delta 1990-2006

Year	Place	Operating Force	Action Carried Out
1990	Umuechem	Security forces	Killed 80 unarmed demonstrators destroyed 395 houses.
1993	Choba	Mobile Police	Razed houses and destroyed properties
1999	Odi	Army	The entire community completely destroyed as only one house remained standing after the attack. 2483 persons killed.
January, 2004	Uwheru	Joint Task Force	20 persons killed and 11 houses burnt down.
July, 2004	Egbema	Joint Task Force	A total of 13 communities destroyed, over 500 buildings razed and over 200 persons, mostly women and children feared dead.
August, 2004	Olugbobiri and Ikebiri	State security forces	About 16 peaceful and unarmed persons killed.
October, 2005	Odioma	Joint Military Task Force	Over 50 persons, mostly women and children killed.
February, 2006	Gbaramatu	Joint Task Force	15 women and children killed in their homes.
October, 2006	Afiesere	Police	Over 80 houses burnt and 20 persons killed.

Source: Emuedo, 2013.

Consequently, many militia groups sprang up to challenge government high handedness as well as prosecute a struggle to redress the deteriorating conditions of the Niger Delta region. However, the most organized and sophisticated among them was the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) led by Government Tompolo. Activities of these groups nearly brought the economy of Nigeria to its knees. Particularly, MEND vowed to attack any oil company that failed to vacate the Niger Delta by February, 12, 2006. To Emuedo (2013:10), MEND made good its threats through:

“Taking of foreign oil workers as hostages to cripple oil activities or as human shield in communities targeted for reprisal attacks by security forces and subversion of oil facilities; blow up of pipelines, flow stations and installations. The indices of MEND’s exploits include: remotely detonated

car bombs (Warri and Port Harcourt), highly sophisticated arms, abduction of over 300 foreign hostages in 15 months and abduction of about 1,000 Nigerian workers and endemic attacks on offshore and onshore facilities. By May, 2008, Angola (900,000 bpd) overtook Nigeria (2.4 million bpd) as Africa's leading oil producer... Warri and Kaduna refineries were crippled due to lack of crude oil supply, while the two in Port Harcourt barely operated at about 20% capacity. Nigeria has since then relied on almost 100% importation of refined petroleum products for domestic consumption as local refining capacity was acutely compromised".

Actions of the Oil Multinational Corporations and Government that Triggered the Conflict in the Niger Delta.

Although on several occasions, oil multinational corporations have claimed that their operations are undertaken in keeping with highest international environmental best practices, it is obvious that pollution arising from their activities have continued to have adverse effect on the environment, agriculture and food production in the Niger Delta region. The environment has been exposed to unmitigated pollution and degradation by the multinational oil companies (Obi, 2008). In addition, many communities rarely get any sufficient compensation for their land taken over by oil companies for oil explorations and exploitations or rendered useless by oil spillage, acid rains and other forms of pollution. Legitimate protests by local communities to draw attention to environmental pollution and loss of land rights have oftentimes been met with stiff repression by security agencies with total support of the oil companies.

It is worthy of note that land ownership right is central to conflict in the Niger Delta region. The federal government through the machination of the Land Use Act and Petroleum Act divested Niger Deltans' lands, accruable incomes and advantages thereof (Emuedo, 2013). The result is that the federal government and the oil companies share accruing revenues on a ratio of 60:40 percent without anything left for owners of the land. Commenting on the plights of the people, Bisina (2005) observed that oil spills and other debilitating problems caused by oil exploration and production are unattended to, so that the area is left in much worse shape than before the oil reserves were discovered. To Mmaju (2007) when oil production activities are intensified, river bank erosion results, gas flaring occurs, deforestation results, rivers and streams are dredged, turned into canals or blocked and then polluted. He maintained that farm lands and sacred lands are not spared. They are in most cases acquired for oil and gas development. Available records indicate that 56.6 million cubic metres of natural gas is flared

on daily basis (Gerth & Labaton, 2004) which is about 17.2billion cubic metres of gas annually. It is argued that gas flaring constitutes the largest single source of global warming (Hunt, 2000). General Yakubu Gowon in 1969 ordered oil companies operating in Nigeria to stop gas flaring by 1974. Unfortunately, there has been repeated shift in dates of the deadline such that till date the multinational companies have not demonstrated reasonable will towards ending the menace to the environment. They have instead settled for payment of fines since it would rather cost them less than spend huge amount of money to procure the equipment that is used to end gas flaring. Besides gas flaring, there are notable cases of oil spillage arising from aged pipelines, decayed infrastructure and corrosion. Shell admitted to have spilled 1,626,000 gallons of oil into the environment from 1982-1992 in 27 separate incidents alleging sabotage (Emuedo, 2013). Recent records obtained from the Department of Petroleum Resources (DPR) revealed that between 1976 and 2005 no fewer than 3,121,909.80 barrels of oil were spilled in the Niger Delta region by oil companies in about 9,107 cases. The table below shows the figures in details.

Table 2: Records of Oil Spillage in Nigeria, 1976 – 2005

Year	No of Spills	Qty Spilled (Barrels)	Qty Recovered (Barrels)	Year	No of Spills	Qty Spilled (Barrels)	Qty Recovered (Barrels)
1976	128	26,157.00	7,135.00	1991	201	106,827.98	2,785.96
1977	104	32,879.00	1,703.01	1992	378	51,187.96	1,476.70
1978	154	489,294.00	391,445.00	1993	428	9,752.22	2,937.08
1979	157	694,170.00	63,481.20	1994	515	30,282.67	2,335.93
1980	241	600,511.00	42,416.83	1995	417	63,677.17	3,110.02
1981	238	42,722.00	5,470.20	1996	430	46,353.12	1,183.02
1982	252	42,841.00	2,171.40	1997	339	81,727.85	
1983	173	48,351.30	6,355.90	1998	399	99,885.35	
1984	151	40,209.00	1,644.80	1999	225	16,903.96	
1985	187	11,876.60	1,719.30	2000	637	84,071.91	
1986	155	12,905.00	552	2001	412	120,976.16	
1987	129	31,866.00	6,109.00	2002	446	241,617.55	
1988	208	9,172.00	1,955.00	2003	609	35,284.43	
1989	195	7,628.16	2,153.00	2004	543	17,104.00	
1990	160	14,940.82	2,092.55	2005	496	10,734.59	
Total					9,107	3,121,909.80	550,232.90

Source: Egberongbe, Nwilo & Olusegun (2006).

In his contribution, Mmaju (2007) opined that oil companies are primarily concerned with recouping their investments and repatriating their profits overseas, hence they are not concerned about payment of compensation or engaging in gigantic developmental projects to cushion the adverse effects of their activities on the living conditions of their host communities.

This posture could be appreciated from the standpoint that federal government is the sole landlord of oil companies to whom they are responsible to. This may have explained why claims and demands from the host communities are not taken serious or better still considered outlandish.

It has to be pointed out that in the face of environmental degradation in the region, oil workers especially the expatriates live in opulence, clean environment which frequently reminds the indigenous people that their sufferings are not necessarily an act of gods but wholly manmade. Worst still, revenues from the oil have been used by successive governments to fund industrialization, environmental reclamation and agricultural development of other regions to the neglect of the Niger Delta region. Even within oil industry, the indigenous people are not considered for appointment in both management and unskilled cadres (Onwubiko, 2007). The above expositions elicited disaffection from the youths against both government and oil companies. Their dissatisfaction was expressed through sporadic restiveness across states in the region. The demands of the youths were very simple. They were of the view that tenets of federalism which our constitution deferred to should be strictly practised. In line with principles of true federalism, there should be total control of the resources found within the territory of federating states, while the states in turn pays an agreed percentage as tax to the central (federal) government.

Government Responses at Resolving the Niger Delta crisis

The response of government to the resolution of Niger Delta problems could be broadly categorized into four namely – legal response, project response, agency response and lastly Amnesty programme.

The legal response encompasses various laws enacted to control the ownership of minerals or to regulate and control the operations of oil companies. Such laws include- the Mineral Act of 1914, the Minerals Oil (Safety) Regulations 1968 among others.

The military response to the Niger Delta question is aimed at militarizing the area through establishment and deployment of task forces to suppress and repress citizens who protest over the neglect and environmental degradation in the region. Consequently, the whole of the Niger Delta region became militarized with the proliferation of small arms and light weapons and formation of armed militia groups who engaged in pipeline vandalism and hostage taking of oil workers especially expatriate officials (Igbuzor, 2006). Details of repressive actions of government against the Niger Delta people's agitations could be seen in table 1 above.

The project and agency response involves the establishment of development agencies to bring development to the nooks and crannies of the region. Such agencies include – Niger Delta Development Board (NDDDB), Niger Delta Basin Development Authority (NDBDA), Oil Mineral Producing Area Development Commission (OMPADEC) and Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC). It was alleged that all these agencies failed due mainly to factors which include imposition from outside the region, politicization, patronage, inadequate funding and sabotage (Iyaye, 2005). The latest agency approach was the establishment of the Ministry of the Niger Delta Affairs.

The latest in the series of responses to the Niger Delta problems was the adoption of the Amnesty policy option. To Ekumaoko (2013:5), Amnesty is “an exoneration and pardon from punishment for certain criminal, rebel and insurgent actions committed usually against the state and society.” He added that amnesty is always backed by law and has specific period for the alleged offenders to admit the offence and accept pardon. Amnesty may be taken to mean a legislative or executive act by which a state restores or pardons those who may have been guilty of offence committed against the state or her citizens. It ensures a period of relative peace, cessation of hostility and a condition of unsecured quietness which necessitates a post crisis scenario for peace building (Ekumaoko, 2013). It is believed that granting amnesty to the militants will serve as a means to foster development-induced alliance between the government and the people in the region.

In line with the resolve of the administration of Late Musa Yar'Adua to bring to an end the agitations that have drastically reduced oil production and revenues accruable to the federal purse, he recognized it as one of the seven point agenda of his regime. The president inaugurated a technical committee on the Niger Delta. The 45-man committee was inaugurated on 8th September, 2008 to collate and review all past reports on Niger Delta, appraise their recommendations and make proposals that will assist the federal government to achieve sustainable development, peace, human and environmental security in the Niger Delta region (Report of the Technical Committee on Niger Delta, 2008). The committee, which was chaired by Ledum Mitee, MOSOP president submitted its report on 1st December, 2008 (Mitee, 2008). The recommendations of the committee include among others – appointment of a mediator to facilitate talks between government and militants, granting of amnesty to some militant leaders, launching of a disarmament, demobilization and rehabilitation campaign and increase in percentage oil revenue to 25 percent from the 13 percent, establishing of regulations that should compel multinational oil companies to have insurance bonds, making reinforcement of critical environmental laws a priority; laying bare fraudulent environmental clean-ups of oil spills and

prosecuting operators, and ensuring an end to gas flaring by 31st December, 2008 as initially ordered by the federal government (Report of the Technical Committee on the Niger Delta, 2008). However, the Late Musa Yar'Adua yielded partly to the report of the technical committee by instituting a presidential panel on amnesty and disarmament of militants in the Niger Delta on 5th May, 2009 to among other things implement the recommendation that borders on granting of amnesty to Niger Delta militants. This policy was particularly adopted in pursuance of section 175 of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria which provides that the President may after consultation with the council of state (a) 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; (b) grant to any person a respite, either for an indefinite or for a specific person of the execution of any punishment imposed on that person for such an offence, (d) remit the whole, or any part of any punishment imposed on that person for such an offence, or of any penalty of forfeiture otherwise due to the state on account of such an offence. The president (Late Musa, Yar'Adua) granted unconditional amnesty to Niger Delta militants on June 25, 2009. The condition attached to the amnesty programme was that all militants should surrender their arms and ammunitions and sign the amnesty register within a 60-day window i.e. from August 6 to October 4, 2009 (Emuedo, 2013). The Amnesty plan had it that those who surrendered their arms were to be enrolled in rehabilitation programme and be given a stipend of sixty five thousand Naira (65,000.00) each per month (Reuters, 2009). In explaining the goal of the Amnesty programme within the context of the plights of the people of Niger Delta, the Late President stated inter alia:

“This administration understands the challenges of the Niger Delta region and the challenges the people are facing and that is why from the beginning, I made Niger Delta a top priority in our seven-point agenda. I want to say that the amnesty is not an end in itself but a means to an end. It is a means to peacefully and lovingly with brotherly understanding bring to an end all insurrections and misunderstanding between brothers. It is a means of making the two of us work together to ensure that our youths do not take up arms again” (Nosike, 2009:36).

From the above assertion, it could be deduced that amnesty is designed to bridge the unfriendly lacuna between the government and the people agitating for environmental, political and cultural freedom. It intends to discourage the youths from destructive tendencies but to have a meaningful live anchored on legitimate businesses. Thus, the amnesty programme advocates youth capacity building through working together with the people by knowing their problems and laying down arms against the state. This was later followed by

rehabilitation and re-integration. To Thomas (2009), there was scepticism in the beginning as to the sincerity of the proverbial olive branch that dangled before the freedom fighters (militants). But at the end of the deadline, 20,192 persons came out from their various states, camps and embraced the programme. The agitators were led by their leaders such as Chief Tompolo, Chief Ateke Tom, Boy Loaf, Fara Dagogo and so many ex-agitation leaders (This day Live Feb., 17 2013). There was agitation for inclusion into the programme by some militants. Thus, the total figure was pushed further as at December 2010 to 26,358 ex-agitators.

Successes of the Amnesty Programme

It has been generally adjudged that the amnesty programme has brought relative peace to the troubled Niger Delta region. The successful implementation of the programme has equally led to increase in oil production and corresponding increase in foreign exchange earnings of the country. Specifically, the volume of production of oil increased to about 2.3 million barrels per day (Emuedo, 2013). On Tuesday February 21 the former Petroleum Resources Minister, Alison-Madueke in a key note address maintained as follows:

“The nation’s actual crude oil (+condensate) production rose to an average of 2.39 million barrels per day, consistently maintained above the budgeted production of 2.30 million bpd...similarly gas sales rose by more than 70 percent to an average 4 billion standard cubic feet per day in 2011 and for the first time, industry supplied more domestic gas than was consumed by the power and industry sector. The Nigerian Liquefied Natural Gas Company (NLNG) had one of its most successful years, with production peaking at 21.2 million cubic metric tons in 2011 alone. Thanks, in no small part, to the amnesty programme which allowed unhindered access to oil and gas operations and activities” (The News, 2012:49).

In his view on the substantial gains of the amnesty programme, Sayne (2013) maintained that the programme helped to cut armed attacks on oil installations to almost zero. He further added that between 2007 and 2009, government records showed that such attacks led to shut down of nearly half of Nigeria’s 2,000-plus oil fields and lost billions of dollars in revenue – perhaps \$24 billion in the first months of 2008 alone. Continuing, he stated that oil productions which at some points in 2009 have dipped below one million barrels per day has returned to pre-militancy levels owing to the amnesty programme. In addition to oil sector rebound, it was observed that kidnappings, particularly of expatriates, fell sharply in late 2009.

Conflict-related deaths also sharply dropped. Investors in non-oil sectors began to show interest in the delta, private security relaxed and foreign staff started to visit the region again (Sayne, 2013). It was argued that the amnesty programme was partly responsible for improved elections in the core Niger Delta states of Rivers, Bayelsa, Delta, Akwa Ibom in 2011 as some violent actors were paid so as to discourage them from engaging in voters' intimidation, snatching of ballot boxes and assassination of opposition leaders as has been the trend in the region during polls.

The Presidential Amnesty Programme has vigorously pursued human capital development which was aimed at producing an army of intermediate and high level manpower in under water welding, sea fearing, marine engineering and piloting. Thus far, the Amnesty office reported that more than five thousand (5,000) ex-agitators have travelled abroad to the United States of America, United Arab Emirates, South Korea, South Africa, Ghana and other countries for education and skill training programmes. Plans were announced that over 200 participants would be trained as pilots in Greece, Saudi Arabia, Dubai, Jordan, Nigeria, etc. One striking feature of the capacity building programme under the amnesty is that ex-agitators were given free hands to choose their own trade with no strict guidance. The presidency had argued that the amnesty could be a prototype for Niger Delta human capital development. It was further reported by the Amnesty office in 2012 that about one hundred to two hundred ex-militants have secured long-term jobs in maritime services, fabrication and related fields.

Nevertheless, the Presidential Amnesty Programme has come under scorching criticisms for its failure to seek permanent measure to address critical issues underlying the Niger Delta question. Critics are in agreement that the core causes of the militancy, insecurity and criminality, which have served as cogs in the wheel of progress in the region such as provision of adequate basic infrastructure, quality education, jobs and environmental degradation have not been squarely addressed by the programme. The programme has equally been accused of corruption. In 2010, 80% of the Amnesty Committee's budget was for consultancy while only 20% was for the beneficiaries (militants) (The Guardian November 14, 2010). More so, it has been alleged that the programme has suffered from poor implementation. The Amnesty programme is perceived to be restrictive as it targeted only militants to the neglect of the victims of militancy and hostage taking. The training and capacity building programmes were adjudged to be lopsided as only the ex-militants were covered to the exclusion of other members of the region. This situation is believed to reinforce frustration and aggression on the part of some law abiding Niger Delta people. The rehabilitation centres were seen to be lacking in basic facilities for proper training and re-

orientation as well as reintegration of the ex-militants into the larger society. The implementation of the DDR failed to move the ex-militants away from their natural habitats for purpose of transformation and reintegration.

The inability of government to permanently put to end the root causes of agitations may have been blamed for resurgence of militancy in 2015 immediately after the emergence of President Muhammadu Buhari.

The Resurgence of Militancy in the Niger Delta Region

The resurgence of militancy in the Niger Delta could be linked to the political tensions generated by the outcome of the 2015 presidential elections. There is no doubt that the ex-agitators were placated through monthly stipends of N65,000.00 and pipeline surveillance contracts during the reign of President Goodluck Jonathan. However, with the emergence of President Muhammadu Buhari in 2015, the pipeline surveillance contracts were cancelled as the amnesty programme was suspended for purpose of review. Another factor that could be responsible for the renewed tension may be the indictment of prominent ex-militant leader, Tompolo's as part of the President's anti-corruption campaign. The face-off between Tompolo and the federal government, including his evasion of an arrest warrant and prosecution, has coincided with the emergence of the new militant groups (Foundation for Partnership Initiatives in the Niger Delta, 2016). The new militant groups had called on the federal government to de-freeze Tompolo's bank accounts as a major condition for a ceasefire and dialogue with her. It was also alleged that the recent resurgence of militancy may be linked to the arrest and detention of Nnamdi Kanu, a popular pro-Biafra activist.

In February 2016, a new militant group known as Niger Delta Avengers (NDA) was formed which culminated in the return of full-scale militancy in the Niger Delta region. The group had carried out series of coordinated attacks on strategic oil and gas installations in the area. More so, other groups with similar interests equally surfaced with their own demands and attacks on oil facilities. The militant groups that have emerged include - Isoko Liberation Movement, Red Egbesu Water Lions, Suicide Squad, Egbesu Mightier Confraternity, Joint Niger Delta Liberation Force (JNDLF), and the Ultimate Warriors of Niger Delta (UWND) (Foundation For Partnership Initiatives in the Niger Delta, 2016). These groups claim to fight for environmental protection and the economic and political liberation of the region. According to the NDA, for there to be peace and cessation of hostilities, the following conditions must be satisfied:

1. Immediate implementation of the report of the 2014 National Conference.

2. Change in ownership of oil blocks to reflect 60% for individuals from oil producing regions and 40% for individuals from non-oil producing regions.
3. Commencement of academic activities at the Maritime University in Delta state.
4. Clean up of Ogoniland and other polluted areas, and payment of compensation to all oil producing communities.
5. The release of Nnamdi Kanu, the detained leader of the Indigenous Peoples of Biafra (IPOB).
6. Continuation and funding of the Niger Delta Presidential Amnesty Program.

In government's usual character, it responded with the use of force to suppress the agitations despite calls from well meaning Nigerians to adopt dialogue to resolve the impasse. However, an examination of these demands show that some of the items listed have nothing to do with the region and this is an indication that the group was formed to destabilise the administration of President Muhammadu Buhari by some politicians whose present administration's anti-corruption policy did not go down well with (Adeosun, Ismail & Zengeni, 2016). It therefore follows that this administration should ensure that the root causes of the militancy such as poverty, unemployment, environmental degradation, underdevelopment, resource control and political restructuring of the polity are properly resolved in order not to give room in future for another group to emerge and wreck havoc in the region (Adeosun, Ismail & Zengeni, 2016). The table below shows the time lines of the Niger Delta Avengers violent activities.

Table 3: Timelines of Niger Delta Avengers Violence Activities in the Niger Delta

S/No	Date	Nature and location of Attack
1	14/ 1/2016	Several gas pipelines and oil installations in Warri south-west were blown-up.
2	10/2/ 2016	The group blew up the Bonny-Soku Gas Export Line.
3	14/2/2016	Militants from the group destroyed Shell's underwater Forcados 48- inch Export Pipeline at the Forcados Export Terminal
4	19/2/2016	They blew up Eni's Clough Creek-Tebidaba Pipeline in Bayelsa State
5	4/5/2016	They attacked and heavily damaged the Chevron Valve Platform located at Abiteye, Warri South. This platform serves as a connecting point where all of Chevron's other Niger Delta platforms link-up.
6	4/5/2016	The militants blew up Shell's underwater Forcados 48-inch Export Pipeline shortly after repairs commenced following the February 14 attack.
7	5/5/2016	The Escravos-Lagos Pipeline System, linking Warri to Lagos was destroyed by the militants.
8	5/5/2016	The group attacked several Chevron oil installations situated in Abiteye, causing the destruction of Chevron Well D25 and several other major pipelines in the area.

9	6/5/2016	The crude oil pipeline linking Warri to Kaduna was blown up by the group as well as a gas line that supplies both Lagos and Abuja with electricity.
10	6/5/2016	The militants blew up oil pipelines located near the villages of Alero, Dibi, Otunana, and Makaraba.
11	9/5/2016	Three Nigerian soldiers were killed during a shootout with NDA militants in the village of Foropa, Southern Ijaw LGA, Bayelsa
12	13/5/2016	The Chevron pipeline at Makaraba was blown up for a second time in 7 days following repairs done by Chevron.
13	20/5/2016	The Escravos-Lagos Pipeline System was once again blown up by NDA militants following the commencement of repairs being done on the pipeline following the May 5 attack
14	25/5/2016	NDA militants blew up Chevron's main electricity feed pipeline, located at the Escravos Tank Farm at Ciera Creek.
15	27/5/2016	NDA militants blew up Eni and Shell's pipelines 1, 2, and 3 located at Nembe, Bayelsa State
16	27/5/2016	The group militants blew up several gas and oil pipelines belong to the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation located near Warri
17	30/5/2016	NDA militants were forced to retreat from the villages of Gulobokri and Eweleso, Brass following a series of clashes with Nigerian soldiers, resulting in the deaths of approximately 20 civilians, 2 police officers, and an unknown number of militants/Nigerian soldiers.
18	31/5/2016	The group militants blew up Chevron's Oil Wells RMP23 and RMP24 located near the village of Dibi, Warri South-West, Chevron's highest producing wells in the Niger Delta.
19	2/6/2016	NDA militants blew up the Ogboinbiri-Tebidaba and Cough Creek- Tebidaba pipelines, belonging to Eni, in Bayelsa State.
20	3/6/2016	NDA militants blew up Shell's Forcados 48-inch Export Pipeline for a third time following a series of repairs done by Royal Dutch Shell.
21	3/6/2016	The group militants blew up Eni's Brass-Tebidaba oil pipeline in Bayelsa State.
22	8/6/2016	They blew up Chevron's Well RMP20, located 20 meters from the Dibi Flow Station in Warri North LGA.
23	9/6/2016	NDA militants blew up the Chanomi Creek oil facility, belonging to Royal Dutch Shell, near the village of Ogidigben, Warri South-West.
24	10/6/2016	They blew up the Obi Obi Brass trunk line, belonging to Eni. It is one of Eni's most significant crude oil pipelines in Bayelsa State.
25	16/6/2016	The group's militants blew up a crude oil pipeline belonging to the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation in Oruk Anam LGA, Akwa- Ibom State.
26	1/7/2016	The group blew up a crude oil trunk line belonging to the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation linked to the Warri refinery.
27	2/7/2016	NDA militants blew up two major crude oil trunk lines belonging to the Nigerian Petroleum Development Company, located near the Batan flow station in Delta State.
28	3/7/2016	The group blew up Chevron Wells 7 and 8, located near the Abiteye flow station in Warri South West LGA.
29	5/7/2016	NDA militants blew up Chevron Well 10, located near the Otunana flow station.
30	5/7/2016	The militia group blew up a manifold belonging to the Nigerian Petroleum Development Company, located near Banta, as well as two crude oil trunk lines belonging to the Nigerian National Petroleum Company
31	6/7/2016	The group blew up Chevron manifolds RMP 22, 23 and 24 in Delta State. These manifolds are major convergence points for numerous crude oil pipelines operated by Chevron Corp.
32	8/7/2016	The militants group blew up Nembe pipelines 1, 2, and 3, belonging to Shell and Eni, in Bayelsa State while simultaneously blowing up the Brass-Tebidaba trunk line in Rivers State
33	11/7/2016	NDA militants blew up Exxon Mobile's "Qua Iboe 48" crude oil pipeline
34	12/7/2016	The group blew up a natural gas pipeline belonging to the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation located in Ogiyo, Ogun State.
35	18/7/2016	NDA militants blew up a crude oil trunk line belonging to Shell located near the Batan Flow Station in Warri South West LGA.
36	24/7/2016	The group blew up a natural gas pipeline belonging to the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation located in Nsit-Ibom LGA, Akwa- Ibom State.
37	31/7/2016	NDA militants blew up the Trans Ramos crude oil pipeline, owned by Royal Dutch Shell, located near the village of Odimodi, Burutu, LGA, Delta State.

Source: Adapted from Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Niger_Delta_Avengers
 Accessed on 06/07/2017.

Conclusion and Recommendations

There is no doubt that the Amnesty programme implemented in the Niger Delta has helped in no small measure to reduce tensions, conflicts and insecurity in the region. However, sustainable security and development could be entrenched when the following among others are religiously enforced:

1. The root causes of the Niger Delta agitations such as poverty, underdevelopment, environmental degradation, unemployment among the youths, etc should be squarely tackled by government to avoid future occurrence of crises in the region.
2. Government should demonstrate political will by ensuring immediate end to gas flaring, which as we all know is significantly contributing to atmospheric pollution and ozone layer depletion.
3. Government should ensure the sustenance of Amnesty programme by expanding its scope and ensuring regularity in the payment of stipends to repented militants. This is imperative because the resurgence of militancy in the region was partly blamed on temporary suspension of the programme by Buhari's administration. Again, ex-agitators should also be awarded contracts to provide security and surveillance over the pipelines crisscrossing the Niger Delta area. This is because when a thief is given the mandate to guard valuables, he/she stands in a better position to ensure maximum security.
4. As a matter of public interest, the multinational corporations operating in the region should be forced to adhere strictly to minimum international environmental best practices so as to save the land from environmental pollution and other sundry consequences thereof.
5. Government should as a matter of urgency implement the recommendations of the report of the Niger Delta technical committee as it captures the yearnings and aspirations of the people of the Niger Delta area.
6. Government should desist from the use of force to suppress agitations from any part of the country as such repressive approach has not yielded positive results. Dialogue should always be adopted to resolve any contending/conflicting issues.
7. Finally, those ex-agitators who have benefitted from various capacity building programmes courtesy of the amnesty programme should be assisted to gain paid employment in any sector of the economy which matches their newly acquired skills.

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