



Beyond the Beauty of Niger Delta Amnesty Program: Post 2015 Challenges and Prospects

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The conflict in the Niger Delta region pre-date the independence period with the agitation for the creation of Calabar, Ogoja, and Rivers States (CORs). Subsequently, the discovery of oil in Rivers in 1957 became the centre of attraction for both national and international economic development. The impact of oil exploration on the communities led to the clamour for the control of the resource by the people. As far back as 1966, Isaac Boro of Ijaw extraction led the first rebellion with his Delta Volunteer Service (DVS) against the Federal Government of Nigeria for the control of oil wells. Since then several other groups with similar ideologies has emerged including the Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP), Movement for the Emancipation of Niger Delta People (MEND), Niger Delta Peoples' Volunteer Force (NDPVF), among others.

However, the perceived inability of the oil companies and the Federal Government of Nigeria to mitigate the negative impact of oil exploration pitted the Niger Delta oil producing communities against the Nigerian State that triggered a chain of events ranging from peaceful protests to violence conflict and upsurge in various elements of criminality including oil bunkering, kidnapping and pipeline vandalism.

Recognizing the dangers of protracted militancy on the oil revenue, late President Musa Yar' Adua declared amnesty on 25th June 2009 for militants willing to surrender their weapons in exchange for skills acquisition, financial and other benefits that would follow. The amnesty programme was categorized into three phases: Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration. The disarmament was August 6th to 4th October 2009; demobilization was to last for a period of six to twelve months; while reintegration was to last for five years. A total of 26,358 militants participated in the post-amnesty programme.

2.0 PERSPECTIVES OF THE NIGER DELTA CONFLICT

Perceived Injustice: The perception along injustice takes its root from the nature and structure of Nigeria federalism. Nigeria has (especially in the political sphere) been historically dominated by the three largest ethnic groups of Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba, and Igbo to the exclusion of the Niger Delta region for four decades. This has made people of the region to perceive

themselves as marginalized groups within the Nigerian State. The constitution provides that mineral right is on the exclusive legislative list and gives the Federal Government absolute control to all resources without recourse to the people. Besides, the Land Use Act strengthens the Federal Government's control of natural resources as it also gives them (central government) the exclusive right and access to all lands.

Poverty/ Compromised means of livelihood: The oil producing communities in the region are regarded as one of the most impoverished regions of the country and adjudged to have suffered years of deprivation and neglect. The effect of oil exploration and exploitation deprives the people of their means of livelihood as the land and water are polluted due to oil spillage thus deepening poverty in the region.

Grudges around development and unemployment: The seeming absence of development in the oil producing states is another element of constant agitation among the communities. The Niger Delta people believe that in comparison to other parts of the country, the region has not been fairly treated in the areas of infrastructure which has continued to raise the unemployment figure in the region.

West Africa Early Warning & EARLY RESPONSE Network (WARN)

The West Africa Early Warning Network (WARN) is an integral part of the West Africa Preventive Peacebuilding Program co-ordinated by the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP). Through its WARN Program, WANEP is setting the stage for a civil society-based early warning and response network in Africa with emphasis on human security.

WARN covers the entire Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) region.

Since 2002, WANEP entered into an agreement with ECOWAS through the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) in the framework of capacity building in Conflict Prevention. One of the goals of

this agreement is to interface WARN with the ECOWAS Early Warning Systems to optimize early warning conflict prevention in West Africa. In view of this development, WANEP has been operating a liaison office located at the ECOWAS Secretariat in Abuja, Nigeria since April 2003.

In recognition of the role and achievements of the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP) in Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding in Africa, particularly in West Africa, the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations at its substantive session of 2006 granted WANEP Special Consultative Status to the UN. WANEP is therefore mandated to designate official representatives to the United Nations in New York, Geneva and Vienna to further its advocacy and outreach strategies for peace and human security.

Besides, the perceived marginalization has also created an army of unemployed and unemployable youths that fuelled the circle of violence.

Leadership Deficit: Analysts have argued that leadership deficit in the Niger Delta makes it difficult for proper utilization of the oil revenue for the benefit the people. Successive governments at various levels of Nigeria has been accused of lacking a framework for the transformation of the region rather they engaged in profligate spending and squandering of the resources to the neglect of the environment. This further manifests in the manner of impunity and its attendant violent conflicts between the oil producing communities and the government forces.

3.0 CURRENT CONFLICT DYNAMICS

Political Tensions: The democratization process in Nigeria is under threat with the incessant attacks by a religious sect known as *Boko Haram* that calls for political power shift to the North in 2015, a refrain from any form of western education, and total Islamization of the country among others. As the country is grappling with this, there is internal struggle within the ruling political party on who will be the presidential flag bearer in 2015. This later manifested in the parallel convention that was held by a faction of the ruling party. While the division in the party continues to generate tension in the country, other opposition parties decided to form a merger with the sole aim of wresting power from the ruling party. Besides, the recent crisis in the Rivers State House of Assembly points to the fact that the Niger Delta issue generally and Rivers State in particular may be used by factions both from the ruling party and the opposition party as 2015 draws nearer. All this portends great danger for orderly succession of power in the

country in 2015. In addition, the pronouncement by the leader of Movement for Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) that fresh attacks will resume if President Jonathan is not re-elected in 2015; the return of one of the militant leaders of Urhobo extraction to the region who has given sixty days ultimatum to the Federal Government to address the problem of environmental degradation and to grant him amnesty, all constitute great threat to the stability of the region especially in the post amnesty period.

Security Challenges: The militarization of the Niger Delta and the entire country through kidnapping and bombing remains major security threats. Although kidnappings in the Niger Delta may have abated but there is the common believe that some militants may not have surrendered all their weapons in the amnesty programme, which makes the region vulnerable to arms insurgency. Similarly, the attacks on oil installation may have reduced since the amnesty programme but adequate attention has not been given to ex-militants who deserve to be rehabilitated and reintegrated and thus portends great danger as this may likely lead to an increase in criminal activities such as armed robbery, drug trafficking and hostage taking among others in the country.

Economic Issue: Nigeria's economy depends primarily on oil exploration and exportation. The significant reduction in attacks on oil installations since the amnesty programme has reflected in a steady increase in the oil revenue but for the recent upsurge in the oil theft and bunkering. The country is now facing economic challenges and may not be able to sustain its budgetary projections if the current skirmishes in the region are not addressed. It could even be worse in the days leading to the end of the amnesty program and the period of the election in 2015.

4.0 IMPLICATIONS

Major critical issues such as the roots of alienation, marginalization, exploitation, corruption, unemployment, poverty, youth and women's issues are still not dealt with, and they jeopardize the possibility of future peace, security and development in the Niger delta region. The bulk of the Niger delta budget goes towards paying ex-militants' commanders, managers of the programme and the surging number of consultants and contractors – to the extent that the programme itself is now perceived as being a very lucrative business, rather than a transformational strategy¹.

The Nigerian economy is a mono product one, with a high level of dependence on oil. The sector is responsible for 90% of exports, 80% of government revenue and 40% of GDP. A reduction in production therefore has international implications on an already volatile international oil market under supply strains, though profitable for producing countries in the short term, can lead to long-term damage to world economies, and a reduction in oil demand in the long run.

Majority of contractors in the region will relocate their businesses when the criminal activities will increase again. Those who will have the courage to remain working in key upstream projects will now factor in a “Niger Delta Premium” to cover such eventualities as possible ransom for kidnappers, community demands as well as higher insurance premium. This drives up the overall cost of doing business in the region. Indeed, ***the post-amnesty programme will be jeopardized if the Government is not able to create opportunity for employment to absorb all those who are undergoing training.*** No doubt, the oil companies cannot employ all those who have acquired different skills considering their number. This is why it is important for the Government to create the enabling environment for economic growth and development. The attention of the government should not just be on the known militants and their leaders but also on the avalanche of youths in the region without basic skills and means of

¹ Oluwatoyin, O. (2011); “Post-amnesty Programme in the Niger Delta: Challenges and Prospects”. Conflict Trends- Issue 4 (2011)

livelihood and with the tendencies of forming other groups as long as they feel alienated. This has grave implication for the stability currently enjoyed in the region. The nexus between the end of the amnesty program and the political dynamics in 2015 especially in the fate of President Goodluck as a candidate of the ruling party provides a dimension that could either make or mar the political process and transition.

5.0 SCENARIOS

Best Case:

- The amnesty program ends with a lot of optimism for the youths and ex-militants are reintegrated into the various states of Niger Delta and beyond; the ex-militants are offered various jobs including the safeguarding of the oil facilities and some oil companies. This translates to increase in oil production and maintenance of peace and stability in the region especially during and after 2015 elections.
- The government embarks on massive infrastructural development of the Niger Delta region and addresses the prevailing issues of poverty, environmental degradation and various levels of perceived injustices; similarly, the oil companies become more responsive to the host communities through its cooperate social responsibility scheme and involve the communities more in the discourse of its development agenda.
- President Jonathan declines from contesting the 2015 presidential elections due to pressure from his kinsmen and leaders of the ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP); the Niger Delta Leaders prevail on the youths and "militants" to accept the decision in the interest of national peace and security; a Northerner becomes the presidential flag bearer of PDP and returns the gesture of the Niger Delta aggrieved youths by negotiating an end to the *Boko Haram* insurgencies.

Realistic Case:

- Ex-militants monthly stipend is stopped based on the amnesty timeframe; the trained militants return and take middle-income jobs which is not comparable to the monthly stipend or the largess of oil bunkering and kidnapping; dissatisfaction and grudge ensues; government extends their monthly payment beyond 2015 and secures a "peaceful election" (**Very Plausible**)
- The ruling PDP adopts President Goodluck as its Presidential candidate even with the grumbling of some governors and other leaders especially from the north; the party uses the power of incumbency and ensure that the president wins at "all cost"; the return of the president reduces tension in the region as they see their "son" in power. The president uses his good offices to prevail on the ex-militants and youths to embrace peace; oil production is maintained with less percentage lost through theft and bunkering (**plausible**)

Worst case:

- Amnesty ends without proper reintegration and job for the "boys"; new set of militants under various nomenclature and guise springs up and hostilities in the region is reinvigorated. Pipeline vandalism, oil theft and insecurity on the rise again and the agitation for resource control heightens as the people of the core Niger Delta states are unsure of President Goodluck's re-election.
- The current clamor for national dialogue and conference produces unrealistic revenue allocation formula which other regions reject and leads to threat by the region to secede from the rest of the country. The central government resists any attempt to disunite the country and the unity of the Nigerian state is tested leading to serious security threats.
- President Jonathan contests the 2015 Presidential elections and emerges winner; violence erupts in the northern region with southerners and Christians as core targets. The Militants in the Niger Delta retaliate in equal measure; a state of emergency is declared to combat the security situation and the unity of Nigerian state

is put to test (**very plausible**)

6.0 OPTIONS FOR RESPONSE

To the Government:

- An inclusive development plan and strategy for Niger Delta. The plan should involve the key stakeholders and should target the most vulnerable groups including the women and youths
- A post amnesty plan especially on how to integrate the ex-militants who now have skills and assures them of continued means of livelihood
- State governments of the oil-producing areas provide complementary roles to the federal Government by initiating youth engagement program that would create opportunity for empowerment of upcoming youths and ensure that education particularly in the areas of oil and gas is given adequate attention and priority

Oil Companies:

- Partnership with the government in the provision of infrastructures and development of the citizenry and ensure that employment of qualified indigenes is prioritized
- Be more transparent in the exploration of oil; declaring its royalty to government and its corporate social responsibility to host communities.
- Employ ex-militants in various areas of the oil industry including in the safeguarding of oil facilities and provision of security

Communities:

- The host communities should provide an enabling, friendly and conducive environment for the exploration of oil. They should cooperate and assist the oil companies in the needs assessment study in order to cater for their immediate and long term needs where oil spillage may occur.
- Community leaders should establish peace platforms where

grievances between oil companies and communities are addressed in the interest of peace and sustainable development

Civil society:

- CSOs should promote the establishment of community early warning systems to provide timely information to policy makers for response.
- Assist in the development of a post amnesty plan in an inclusive and empowering manner
- Draw government and international community attention to the dangers of allowing the current peace effort to degenerate at the end of the current amnesty

7.0 CONCLUSION

Although the Nigerian government nearly succeeded in ending violence in the Niger Delta with the amnesty program, however, the Militants are not completely disarmed and the issues that led to the challenges in the region are far from being resolved. The amnesty program still remains one major score card for the current administration; how it manages the post amnesty period especially with the current security challenges in the build up to the 2015 election depends on how well, proactive and inclusive the stakeholders are



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