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Niger Delta Crisis and the Amnesty Programme: Evolution, Challenges and Prognosis

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Abstract:

This paper offers a critical account of the Niger Delta Crisis and amnesty programme introduced by the Nigerian state in 2009. It examines its evolution, challenges and prospects of the amnesty as an instrument of peace-building, and emphasizes the need for wider reforms that address underdevelopment and poverty in the Niger Delta region. The paper argues that the amnesty programme is a commendable effort that majority of the people in the locality are living in abject poverty where there is no meaningful development as well as victims of the conflict were not compensated while some of the youth were empowered with various skills acquisition through the amnesty package. Arising from these therefore and based on the above data and discussions it is therefore concluded that the amnesty programme has significantly reduced the crisis but did not totally eradicate the crisis as there are still issues and problems facing the Niger delta region; to a considerable extent. The hope includes the utmost need for the Nigerian state to take very pragmatic steps in consolidating on the gains of the amnesty programme by implementing and sustaining the post amnesty projects to their logical conclusions in the Niger-delta and to ensure that the root causes of the problems which were the drivers of the conflicts are adequately addressed.

Keywords: Amnesty, peace-building, Nigeria, oil, conflict, Niger Delta

1. Introduction

The un-remitting agitations for better living condition of the Niger Delta people has turned the region to a famous snag spot of pipeline sabotage, kidnapping and armed struggles for more than three decades in Nigeria. Indeed, over 90% of Nigeria's revenue is derived from the oil and gas of the Niger Delta region, which has recently reduced due to incessant and protracted militancy. Its attendant implication is economic and developmental woes or shortcoming for the extant Nigeria State.

The Niger Delta region, also referred to as the South-South geo-political zone is made up of six states – Akwa Ibom, Delta, Bayelsa, Cross River, Edo, and Rivers States (Banigo, 2005, Dakjumbo, 2006 and Ering & Akpan, 2012). All these aggravated the agitations which resulted to a lot of crises in the region. Consequently, restiveness of the people culminated in vandalism, disruption of oil firms' operations, kidnapping and hostage taking of both local and expatriate workers of oil companies, and the seeming endless demand for ransom for huge their release. However, the Amnesty programme of the Federal Government was established to foster peace in the region.

2. Theoretical Clarification

The theoretical perspective adopted the Conflict Theory in explaining the Niger Delta situation and its allied effects, in the region. The conflict theory, which views activism, militancy, thuggery and kidnapping as products of audacious capitalism and overt selfishness that manifest in the subjugation and alienation at both micro and macro levels of society leading to surplus value for government's agencies and multinational companies operating in the region (Shell BP; Exxon Mobil, Chevron and others). The underlying assumptions of the theory is that conflict is inevitable in resource-based economy because the rulers in such states, example Nigeria and others, mentioned above, usually connived with foreign extractive industries to exploit their own people. The attempt by the people to resist such exploitation usually leads to conflict (Ering & Akpan, 2012). It also shows that in spite of the huge resources being taken out of the Niger Delta Region, the many communities and people in the region still disparages in abject poverty, high level of unemployment and devastated environment.

The environmental degradation in the Niger delta has indeed drummed up the cry against marginalization and domination by those in the majority. Although, recently led by the Vice President Prof. Yemi Osibanjo; the present government has initiated a program to clean up the Ogoni land by addressing one of the major agitations of people. The prolonged delay in the clean-up of the oil polluted region of Niger Delta, in Ogoniland, is likely to trigger COVID-19 deaths, indicated environmental experts. The clean-up exercise has not seen much progress since the process was initiated five years ago (Guardian Nigeria Report, 2020). Today, the delay has added a new layer of hardship to the Ogoni people. Since the local community resort to poisoned waters for regular hygiene, hand washing with contaminated water may halt the ongoing fight against the novel coronavirus.

This article examined the relevance of amnesty program in the resolution of Niger delta crisis. It will also examine the causes of the crisis, the issues bothering on the sustenance of the amnesty program as well as the prospects this intervention presents.

3. The Niger-Delta Amnesty Programmes

Disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) describes a cluster of post-conflict interventions that is focused on collecting arms, neutralizing combatants, reintegrating legitimate ex-combatants into the armed forces or civilian life, and preventing a return to armed conflict (Pugel, 2009). In 2009, the Nigerian government under late President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua established the Niger Delta Amnesty Program (NDAP), which is Nigeria's version of DDR, in an effort to mitigate the violence that had racked the region since the early 2000s.

Amnesty programmes is like an activity like post-war activities. It involves decommissioning, disbandment, restoration and recuperation. It also requires a formal control from armed forces or armed groups. It gives support packages, financial assistance for their families (Bryden, 2007). Defective political programme is causing problem to Nigeria's Delta amnesty programme. The technical committee that was constituted by the Federal government benefited more than the militants (the beneficiaries). The amnesty programme in an environment bedevilled with different controversies, policy ambiguities and poor focus (Ogundiya, 2011).

Those who have been in-charge of NDDC have been accused of fraudulent practices and embezzlement of funds. The commission has, however, been plagued by corruption, while the people in the region continue to live in poverty and the commission's uncompleted projects are found in almost every community (Ukpong, 2020). The National Assembly launched a corruption probe of the agency which later became controversial, with the commission's management accusing senators and House of Representatives members of cornering for themselves several contracts. A forensic audit of the NDDC is yet to commence, several months after it was approved by President Muhammadu Buhari. An acting Managing Director of the commission admitted recently that the commission spent N1.5 billion for its staff as 'COVID-19 relief funds'. A report by the Senate said top management of the NDDC paid themselves N85.6 million to attend a graduation ceremony in the United Kingdom at a time Nigeria was on lockdown and airports shut because of the COVID-19 pandemic (Ukpong, 2020). These have left the programme suffering from inordinate implementation.

It is very important to understand that without peace, proper planning, and developmental strategy it is not possible to achieve the development of the Niger Delta region. It is utmost important to adopt certain developmental policies by Federal government and oil companies. Many initiatives those have social implications like roads, schools, establishment of developmental board etc. The Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) have been many failures. According to Ogundiya (2011), developmental regulatory mechanism needs to be properly enforced. The amnesty programme, instituted by the late President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua in 2009.

Many factors like poor policy design has affected the implementation. Governmental or administrative bottlenecks and political exploitation have created severe hazards. Subsidization in actual sense still there to achieve. Many illegal activities like paying lip service, crooked performs and scandalous looting should be stopped. These types of activities always give birth to economic crises as well as national insecurity. Human suffering continuously increases. The problem of water pollution needs to pay serious attention.

Declaration of amnesty depend on many factors like socio-political domain, legal aspects etc. Peaceful negotiation and agreement help it to gain more success. For some people, amnesty could be an attempt to cover-up certain crime, or, to connive with the criminals (Adedoyin, 2014). It provides support packages (Bryden, 2007).

4. Issues and Policy Goals of Amnesty Program

The Presidential Amnesty Programme (PAP) which is the main instrument of the management of the post conflict transition has engaged in disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programme for ex-militants in the Niger Delta region. While the immediate goals of cessation of hostilities, restoration of the oil and gas infrastructure, oil and gas production and increasing revenues has been achieved and is driving economic growth in Nigeria, it is necessary to critically interrogate the programme in the context of the nature of conception, content, management and outcomes and how these are impacting on the long term goals of a post conflict transition which includes conflict resolution and transformation, sustainable development, security and peace and strong prospects of non-violent conflict re-occurrence.

Peace building is an all-encompassing whole process of facilitating and strengthening enduring peace. According to Fischer (2007) peace building involves understanding program designed to address the causes of conflict and the grievances of the past and to promote long term stability and justice. It is an effort to ensure socio-political and economic stability of the society. Peace building is proffering durable solution to a conflict-ridden society to achieve durable peace. It further stated that peace building does not only address conflict behaviors but more importantly the underlying context behaviors that gave rise to violence.

The amnesty program is now on the third stage of transition which is reintegration but what is worrisome is the success of disarmament and demobilization because the overall success is dependent on the success of each. Other worries include the legality of the amnesty, who and who are truly the militants? The amnesty is not backed by law or even gazette; meaning it is not an established policy. It is only a presidential proclamation without any legal status and in Nigeria where there is no policy continuation by succeeding governments what happens to amnesty and the militants when a new president assumes power.

5. Failures and Problems of Amnesty Programme

One major problem is that the Nigerian government failed to tackle wider socioeconomic grievances. These include the lack of social development in local oil communities, environmental pollution and the exclusion of local communities from the governance of oil production in the Niger Delta region. New militant groups emerged in the last 2 years. They claim to represent the grievances of local oil communities. Their activities could explain the reduction in the apparent daily oil production in Nigeria. The country's oil Crude Oil Production in Nigeria decreased to 1310 BBL/D/1K in September from 1368 BBL/D/1K in August of 2020 (OPEC, 2020). The Post Amnesty Conflict has been set up in the Nigeria's oil production Management Framework by the Shehu Musa Yar'Adua-led administration in 2009. This governing body should have an objective to restore full-scale oil production.

6. Financial Participation of the Government on Amnesty Program

A total of thirty thousand people took participation in the Amnesty Program as at 2013. Many malpractices have been reported in these types of programme. Many jobless youths in the region threatening to go back to their arms if payments are not made to them. Huge poor coordination has been noticed through this programme. Some of them are as follows:

- The 80% of the amnesty programme fund with beneficiaries just 20%;
- The amnesty programme plan has failed to take cognisance of those who lost their means of livelihood and bread winners as dead militants, such as: fathers, mothers, wives, children and siblings;
- The status of the training given to the repentant militants fell far short of acceptable standards. It can neither be certified nor awarded as an acceptable institution certificate;
- d. Most of their training camps or centres are inadequately facilitated for proper impartation of knowledge and skills;
- The 30,000 numbers of repentant militants recorded by the presidential amnesty technical committee were over bloated estimate;
- The repentant militants require further academic education to get better and need proper evaluation and monitoring phases or frameworks.

7. Suggestions

To reduce lingering diffidence, poverty and wrongdoing propagations, proper implementation of amnesty programme is mandatory. If this step can be followed properly sustainable peace can be spread in Niger Delta region.

Following are some of the suggestions:

- A transparent and structured definition of amnesty frameworks. It also requires involvement from sectors on long-term basis.
- Investment required in the field of human growth, training and empowerment.
- Many people from different areas like community leaders, village heads and local government need to be associated in this programme.
- Common citizen needs to understand the benefits. Hence, awareness programmes should be conducted.
- Infrastructure facilities need to be improved.
- Transparent law system needs to be enforced.
- Proper planning-based revenue allocation need to be allocated.
- Pre-planned periodic evaluation or audit is important in the Niger Delta Region.
- A technical committee can be set up for efficient implementation of Amnesty committee.
- Good leadership is also crucial here for successful achievement of this effort.

8. Conclusion

The study has been revealed that the Region's Amnesty Programme has not implemented properly. More careful supervisions are required from the Presidential Technical Committee. Proper evaluation and scrutinization is required in this regard. Although funding is present from the end of the federal government, still proper supervision is absent. Many corrupt practices are present in the system. Even improper allocation of resources is also present. Cooperation from people are being required in this regard.

9. The Way Forward

Another point raised by this paper is the core issue plaguing the region for which the militants capitalized on to cause mayhem in the region. This needs to be addressed properly. These issues involve:

- Tackling the problems of underdevelopment in the region. These will include strategies to solve problems of infrastructural decay. To provide basis essential infrastructures. Even a community Driven Development Approach, (CDD) can be started. It helps to bring sustainability of development projects in the region.
- The government along with the assistance of the oil companies, should bring some strategies to solve unemployment and promote mass illiteracy and the widening inequality.
- Both at local and state levels, proper and enhanced budgetary allocation and financial accountability need to be enforced. This will also improve the quality of living standard of local citizens.
- Encourage the multinational oil companies to embark on a number of corporate social responsibilities. The companies must as a matter of necessity embark on the massive clean-up of the environment.

- Collaboration should be set up between the police and local security including private and community-based security organizations.
- Government along with the multinational oil companies should come up with strategies that will involve the youths (male and female) in the region.

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