

THE IMPACT OF PRESIDENTIAL AMNESTY PROGRAMME ON THE NIGER DELTA MILITANCY.

By

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Abstract

This paper examined the Impact of the Presidential Amnesty Programme on the Niger Delta Militancy. The Niger Delta region of Nigeria, abundant in oil deposits, has historically been a centre of industrial activity. Nevertheless, this affluence has not resulted in extensive advancement for its residents. the paper adopted the Social Contract Theory as the theoretical framework. Both primary and secondary data was employed in the study. The findings revealed that the Presidential Amnesty Programme (PAP) significantly contributed to reducing militancy and improving security in the Niger Delta. Also, the Presidential Amnesty Programme (PAP) reduced militancy, its sustainability in addressing root causes remains uncertain. The paper recommends that the federal Government should establish a more rigorous monitoring and evaluation framework ensure that the benefits of the PAP continue to positively impact ex-militants and communities, establish a comprehensive security sector reform to integrate ex- militants into the formal security forces, fostering trust and reducing the likelihood of relapse into violence. And finally, the federal government should establish a comprehensive environmental restoration programme to be integrated into PAP.

Keywords, Presidential Amnesty Programme (PAP), Amnesty, Militancy, Niger Delta, ex-Militants.

Introduction

The Niger Delta region of Nigeria, abundant in oil deposits, has historically been a centre of industrial activity. Nevertheless, this affluence has not resulted in extensive advancement for its residents. The region has contended with environmental deterioration, poverty, and political marginalisation, resulting in sustained unrest and militancy. In 2009, the Nigerian government launched the Presidential Amnesty Programme (PAP) to mitigate the insurgency and foster peace. The origin of militancy in the Niger Delta stem from grievances regarding degradation, lack of development, and the unequal allocation of oil earnings. Communities in the region have endured oil spills and gas flaring, which have ravaged local livelihoods reliant on fishing and agriculture. Although the Niger Delta serves as the backbone of Nigeria's economy, it remains underdeveloped, engendering sentiments of neglect and unfairness among its inhabitants. These frustrations led to the emergence of several militant organisations, particularly the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), which aimed to confront these concerns through armed conflict. Their actions encompassed assaults on oil facilities, abduction of oil personnel, and oil theft, substantially impairing Nigeria's oil output and economy.

To restore peace and stabilise the economy, President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua announced the Presidential Amnesty Programme in June 2009. The project provided absolute amnesty to militants who consented to disarm within a 60-day period, assuring rehabilitation and reintegration into society. The programme included disarmament, demobilisation, and reintegration (DDR) processes, with the objective of converting ex-combatants into productive citizens. The PAP had significant victories in its early phases. More than 30,000 militants accepted the amnesty, resulting in a significant reduction in violence and an increase in oil output from around 700,000 barrels per day in mid-2009 to between 2.2 and 2.4 million barrels per day since 2011. This revival stabilised Nigeria's economy and highlighted the programme effectiveness in mitigating militancy. The programme provided diverse vocational and educational training opportunities for ex-militants, both nationally and internationally, with the objective of equipping them with skills for profitable employment. This initiative aimed to tackle the root causes of unemployment and insufficient economic opportunities that had incited the insurgency.

Notwithstanding its accomplishments, the PAP encountered numerous challenges. Critics contend that although the programme addressed the manifestations of militancy, it inadequately confronted the underlying causes, including environmental degradation and underdevelopment. Numerous areas in the Niger Delta persist in experiencing poverty and inadequate infrastructure, resulting in sentiments of exclusion from the amnesty benefits. Furthermore, apprehensions regarding the program's viability arose. The dependence on monthly stipends prompted concerns regarding the potential development of a dependency syndrome among former militants, while failing to offer sustainable employment solutions. Furthermore, accusations of corruption and financial mismanagement beset the program, impeding its efficacy and prompting demands for thorough audits and reorganisation. As of March 2025, the PAP remains operational, though discussions regarding its future persist. The Nigerian

government confronts the challenge of shifting from the amnesty phase to sustainable development initiatives that resolve the enduring grievances of the Niger Delta communities. Priority is given to environmental remediation, infrastructure development, and economic diversification to secure enduring peace and prosperity in the region. This study is crucial for assessing the efficacy of the Presidential Amnesty Programme (PAP) in tackling the underlying causes of militancy in the Niger Delta. It underscores the program's influence on security, economic stability, and socio-political advancement. Furthermore, it analyses the sustainability of the PAP, tackling issues of dependency, corruption, and enduring peace, while providing policy recommendations to improve regional stability and equitable resource allocation.

Statement of the problem

The Presidential Amnesty Programme (PAP) was established in 2009 to mitigate the widespread militancy and insecurity in Nigeria's Niger Delta region. Before its adoption, insurgent operations had profoundly interrupted oil production, resulting in considerable economic losses. Although the PAP attained initial success in diminishing violence and enhancing oil production, enduring problems including degradation, poverty, and underdevelopment persistently undermine long-term peace and security in the region. The sustainability of the Presidential Amnesty Programme (PAP) in addressing the root causes of conflict in the Niger Delta remains questionable. While it reduced militancy, it failed to tackle underlying issues such as poverty, environmental degradation, and underdevelopment (Obi & Rustad, 2019). Without sustained economic empowerment and inclusive governance, the region risks renewed instability (Ukiwo, 2019), making PAP's long-term developmental impact uncertain. It is against this background that the paper raises the following Research Questions.

Research Questions

- a. To what extent has the Presidential Amnesty Programme contributed to the reduction of militancy and improved security in the Niger Delta?
- b. How sustainable is the Presidential Amnesty Programme in addressing the root causes of conflict and fostering long-term economic and social development in the Niger Delta?

Literature Review

Amnesty

According to Gardner et al. (2009; Fagge and Alabi, 2016), amnesty is a governmental pardon granted to a specific group or class of individuals, typically for political offences, representing the official act of a sovereign power forgiving a certain class of individuals who are subject to trial but have not yet been convicted. It is the action of a government that grants immunity from prosecution to individuals or certain groups who have committed a criminal offence, typically of a political nature, that jeopardises the sovereignty of the state. Instances of such offences include treason and sedition. Amnesty permits a nation's government to "forgive" criminal offences, typically prior to trial. An act of amnesty is typically conferred upon a collective of individuals who have perpetrated offences against the state, including treason, insurrection, or military desertion (Epiphany, 2013).

O'Shea (2002) perceives amnesty broadly as a political instrument of reconciliation and compromise conferred by a sovereign to persons who have perpetrated acts against the State, typically involving treasonous offences and/or insurrection. O'Shea defines amnesty as legal exemption from criminal or civil repercussions, or both, for offences committed in a political setting in the past. Olatoke and Olotokunba (2012) assert that the aim of amnesty is not retribution but rather to select a course that will produce the most favourable outcome for the achievement of peace. Consequently, amnesty prioritises the superiority and practicality of fostering an environment that enhances public welfare over prosecution. They additionally noted that Nigeria has utilised the instrument of amnesty on two times during its post-colonial experience. The initial instance pertained to the Nigerian civil war. Upon the conclusion of the war in 1970, the federal authorities proclaimed the result as "no victor, no vanquished." This was a general amnesty intended to conclude the terrible chapter initiated by the war. Fagge and Alabi (2016) assert that amnesty may be granted to a person or a collective when the authorities deem that ensuring compliance with the law is more imperative than penalising them for previous offences. Amnesty following the cessation of hostilities aids in resolving a war. A government may initiate amnesty for several reasons. This entails circumventing costly prosecutions (particularly given the multitude of violations); encouraging offenders to come forward who may otherwise evade justice; and fostering reconciliation between offenders and society. The Federal Government's declaration of amnesty was embraced by a significant portion of society and many groups, including several foreign organisations that pledged their support for the initiative. Consequently, achieving enduring peace in the crisis-prone region has been challenging, as numerous peace-building initiatives intended to address violent unrest in the Niger Delta have been unsuccessful. As part of his initiatives, the late President Musa Yar'Adua granted state pardon to the militants on a countrywide broadcast that:

The offer of amnesty is predicated on 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”
(Sahara reporters, 2009)

The amnesty programme aimed to restore peace and security in the Niger Delta while fostering socio-economic development in a region historically plagued by violence and underdevelopment. Following the attainment of relative peace, Nigeria's oil production, which had decreased from 2.2 million barrels per day (bpd) to 700,000 bpd during the conflict, had a resurgence in the post-amnesty era. By 2013, production escalated to between 1.9 and 2.4 million barrels per day (bpd), then increasing to 2.6 million bpd in 2014 and 2.7 million bpd in 2015 (NNPC, 2009; Kuku, 2012; Amaize, 2016). The disarmament and reintegration initiatives mitigated violent actions, including assaults on oil facilities, illicit oil bunkering, and abductions of oil personnel, thus fostering regional stability (Onukwughu, Eke- Ogiugo & Okhomina, 2014). Furthermore, the programme has contributed to the advancement of human capital development by providing training and capacity-building opportunities for youngsters.

Militancy

Quamruzzaman (2010) defines "militancy" as the actions of individuals, groups, or parties that exhibit or participate in violence, typically in pursuit of a cause, which may be religious, political, intellectual, economic, or social in nature. Currently, the term militant is used interchangeably with the term terrorist. Ashimolowo and Odiachi (2012) assert that the impetus for militancy arises from individuals' desire for their rights, which, if unattainable through discussion, may be pursued through violent means against the established authorities. Contemporary insights regarding militants suggest that they are either coerced or willingly enlist in an organisation or militia. Chindah and Braide (2000) define militancy as a condition characterised by a readiness to engage in fighting for a cause or belief. It can also be characterised as a violent reaction by a person, group, or sect within a region, community, state, or nation in response to allegations of underdevelopment, political oppression, religious convictions, and segregation. The impetus is that individuals seek their rights, and if diplomacy fails to secure them, they will resort to violence against the authorities.

Presidential Amnesty and Militancy in Niger Delta

Ikein (2009) asserts that the disparity between the economic benefits of the Niger Delta and the volume of resources allocated for its development has resulted in structural imbalances in Nigeria. As a result, the Niger Delta of Nigeria is gaining notoriety due to substantial oil reserves and persistent conflict in the area. Estimates indicate that the Nigerian government derives over 90% of its revenue from a region marked by underdevelopment crises. The region continues to be underdeveloped despite the substantial wealth it generates for the affluent social class, including governmental leaders, civil servants, and beneficiaries of multinational oil businesses. The Nigerian government and multinational corporations are the primary beneficiaries of the substantial oil reserves in the region, while the majority of the populace struggles with destitution caused by exploitative oil extraction, environmental degradation, climate change, insufficient infrastructure, unemployment, and poverty. Measures implemented to tackle this predicament are varied, encompassing state-led initiatives, identity-based social movements, and interventions by civil society, including families, educational institutions, and religious organisations. A significant issue that seems insurmountable in Nigeria is the growth of violence, particularly due to the rise of lethal militant organisations in the Niger Delta since the 1990s. The most alarming insurgent activity in the region encompass oil pipeline vandalism, hostage-taking, massacres, and assassinations. The recognition of the necessity to pursue redress for years of neglect and marginalisation of resource-rich communities in the Niger Delta stimulates the rise of young militancy and a new generation of social movements in Nigeria. The Niger Delta populations, located throughout nine of Nigeria's thirty- six states, mostly depend on fishing and agriculture for their livelihoods. The settlements exhibit environmental degradation, persistent poverty, and increasing violence, despite the substantial resources generated by the Federal Government of Nigeria from the region (kelegbe, 2001). The Nigerian government's military strategy and other top- down initiatives to mitigate the violence in the region have not produced the intended outcomes, prompting the state to implement a Presidential amnesty to foster peace. O'Shea defines amnesty as legal exemption from criminal or civil repercussions, or both, for past wrongs in a political setting, and asserts that the granting of amnesty necessitates the following considerations:

- a. That its grantee has committed some form of offence which is identifiable and punishable under some national criminal legal system or in other cases a crime recognised and punishable under international law.
- b. That the granting authority forgoes all legal sanctions or remembrance of the offence(s) committed by the offender.
- c. That the grantees are given a clean slate in the eyes of the law.

Mallinder (2009) characterises Presidential Amnesty as a compromise on justice aimed at facilitating transition, peace, healing, forgiveness, and truth. The pursuit of peace in the Niger Delta was the primary impetus for the establishment of the Presidential Amnesty programme in Nigeria, as it is essential for the optimal extraction of oil resources necessary to meet the diverse interests of the federal government, oil multinationals, and the global community, which demands a consistent supply of this resource. The Federal Government's amnesty initiative aimed to mitigate the violence originating from the Niger Delta region, where residents sought economic self-determination to ascertain whether and to what degree their demands could be met.

Theoretical Framework

Social Contract Theory

The Social Contract Theory, originally developed by Thomas Hobbes (1651), John Locke (1689), and Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1762), serves as a suitable theoretical framework for examining the impact of the Presidential Amnesty Programme (PAP) on Niger Delta militancy. The theory suggests that individuals surrender some of their freedoms to a governing authority in exchange for security, order, and social benefits. Hobbes argued that without a social contract, society would descend into chaos, as individuals act primarily in their self-interest. Locke expanded this idea by asserting that governments must protect natural rights life, liberty, and property or face resistance. Rousseau emphasized that governance should be based on the collective will of the people and that social contracts should be revised when they no longer serve the public good. The Presidential Amnesty Programme (PAP), introduced in 2009 under President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua, can be interpreted as an attempt to renegotiate the social contract. The programme offered militants unconditional pardon, monthly stipends, vocational training, and reintegration opportunities in exchange for disarmament and a cessation of hostilities. The amnesty initiative was effective in reducing large-scale militant attacks on oil facilities and improving national oil output. However, it has been criticized for focusing on a select group of ex-militants while neglecting broader structural reforms. The lack of job creation, continued degradation, and corruption in the management of PAP funds have weakened the programme's long-term effectiveness. This reflects Rousseau's argument that when a social contract fails to serve the common good, dissatisfaction and rebellion persist. The Social Contract Theory is relevant to this study because it explains the root causes of Niger Delta militancy as a reaction to state failure and justifies the amnesty programme as a governmental strategy to restore order. The theory also highlights the need for continued investment in governance and development, as mere financial incentives cannot permanently secure peace. Without fulfilling broader socio-economic obligations, the fragile peace established by PAP remains at risk of collapse.

Methodology

This study adopted a survey research design to investigate the impact of the Presidential Amnesty Programme (PAP) on Niger Delta militancy. The choice of this design is justified as it allows for the collection of primary data from respondents who have firsthand knowledge of the amnesty programme and its effects on the region. The survey approach enables the study to capture diverse perspectives, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the subject matter. The study location is Bayelsa State, one of the core oil-producing states in the Niger Delta region. Bayelsa is a suitable location because it has been a stronghold of militant activities and a primary beneficiary of the PAP. Many ex-militants, government officials, and community stakeholders involved in the amnesty programme reside in the state, making it an appropriate setting for gathering relevant data. The targeted population include; Ex-militants enrolled in the PAP, Community leaders in oil-producing areas, Officials of the Presidential Amnesty Office, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) working on conflict resolution and Academics and researchers specializing in Niger Delta militancy. Data collection involved oral interviews with key informants selected through a purposive sampling technique. This method ensures that only individuals with in-depth knowledge of the amnesty programme are included. The study will employ content analysis to examine responses, identify recurring themes, and interpret the findings in line with the objectives of the study.

Opinion of respondents on the extent the Presidential Amnesty Programme contributed to the reduction of militancy and improved security in the Niger Delta.(oral interview, 2025).

According to an ex-militant, who is now a small-scale entrepreneur in Yenagoa, stated: "The amnesty programme gave us a second chance at life. Many of us were tired of fighting, and the monthly stipends helped us transition. But after the training, some of my colleagues struggled to find jobs." This aligns with Obi and Rustad (2019), who argue that while PAP facilitated disarmament and reintegration, it fell short in providing sustainable employment, leading to periodic agitations.

A traditional ruler in Southern Ijaw remarked: "Initially, the amnesty programme reduced violence, but it did not address the root causes of militancy—poverty, environmental degradation, and marginalization." This resonates with Posey, G. M. (2022) who emphasize that while PAP lowered armed confrontations, it failed to transform structural conditions that fuel militancy.

An official of amnesty noted: "The programme was a success in disarmament and training. However, the challenge remains in long-term employment and economic integration." Iwilade (2021) contended that elite capture and mismanagement limited PAP's effectiveness in addressing post-militancy economic concerns. A government official commented: "We have seen a relative drop in insecurity, but the programme should be restructured to focus on economic empowerment, not just monthly stipends." This aligns with Ukiwo (2019), who argues that PAP should be complemented with broader economic policies to sustain peace. An NGO representative stated: "PAP created temporary stability, but without land reforms and environmental restoration, militancy may resurface." This echoes Obi (2018), who stresses that sustainable peace in the Niger Delta requires addressing ecological and socio-economic grievances. A researcher at Niger Delta University observed: "The amnesty programme was effective in demobilization, but failed in economic reintegration, making ex-militants dependent on government stipends." Oyefusi (2019) corroborates this, asserting that PAP mitigated violence but did not create sustainable economic opportunities, leaving ex-militants vulnerable to re-engagement in militancy.

Opinion of respondents on how sustainable the Presidential Amnesty Programme in addressing the root causes of conflict and fostering long-term economic and social development in the Niger Delta(oral interview, 2024).

"The amnesty programme helped us leave the creeks, but many of us are still struggling. Some training programs were good, but without jobs, how do we survive?" This aligns with Obi and Rustad (2019), who argue that PAP focused on short-term disarmament but failed to provide sustainable employment opportunities, leaving many former militants in economic limbo. A community leader in Nembe noted: "The root causes of conflict poverty, environmental destruction, and lack of development are still present. The amnesty programme did not address these structural issues." This supports Aaron and George (2020), who emphasize that while PAP reduced armed confrontations, it did not transform the economic and political conditions that sustain grievances in the region. A senior official at the amnesty office remarked: "We have trained thousands of ex-militants, but sustaining economic empowerment has been a challenge. Many trained beneficiaries do not have access to capital or jobs." Iwilade (2021) corroborates this, arguing that the programme lacked a clear post-training job placement strategy, making its impact unsustainable. A state government official stated: "PAP created temporary stability, but it is not a permanent solution. Without major infrastructural investments and economic diversification, the Niger Delta will remain volatile." This is in line with Ukiwo (2019), who contends that amnesty alone cannot replace structural reforms needed for long-term peace and development.

An NGO representative working in conflict resolution observed: "The programme was a good initiative, but it mainly benefited ex-militants. It did not address the concerns of the wider Niger Delta communities that still suffer from oil pollution and economic neglect." This echoes Obi (2018), who stresses that sustainable peace in the Niger Delta requires addressing the broader socio-economic and environmental grievances, not just those of former combatants. A researcher at the University of Port Harcourt noted: "The amnesty programme was effective in reducing violence, but it was not a long-term development strategy. The region still lacks sustainable economic opportunities." (Ukiwo, 2019) supports this, asserting that while PAP helped reduce militancy, its failure to integrate broader economic and environmental policies limits its long-term effectiveness.

Discussion of Findings

Findings indicate that the Presidential Amnesty Programme (PAP) significantly contributed to reducing militancy and improving security in the Niger Delta. Ex-militants acknowledged that disarmament and reintegration programs reduced armed confrontations. Community leaders and government officials affirmed a decline in violent attacks on oil installations. These findings align with Obi and Rustad (2019), who argue that PAP led to temporary stability by demobilizing militants. However, Aaron and George (2020) note that while security improved, unresolved socio-economic grievances pose risks of renewed militancy. This suggests PAP's effectiveness in short-term peace but its limitations in ensuring long-term stability.

Findings also revealed that while the Presidential Amnesty Programme (PAP) reduced militancy, its sustainability in addressing root causes remains uncertain. Respondents, including ex-militants and community leaders, highlighted unemployment and environmental degradation as persisting issues. This aligns with Ebiede (2018), who argues that PAP's focus on short-term benefits neglects structural inequalities. Similarly, Ikelegbe and Umukoro (2016) emphasize the need for broader economic reforms. Thus, without long-term development strategies, PAP's impact on sustainable peace and economic stability remains fragile.

Conclusions

The Presidential Amnesty Programme (PAP) has contributed significantly to the reduction of militancy and improved security in the Niger Delta, though its sustainability is limited. While the programme addresses immediate concerns, it struggles to tackle the root causes of conflict, such as unemployment and environmental degradation. For lasting peace and development, a more comprehensive approach, focusing on economic empowerment and environmental restoration, is crucial to ensure long-term stability in the region.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations were made;

- a. The federal Government should establish a more rigorous monitoring and evaluation framework and that the benefits of the PAP continue to positively impact on the ex-militants and communities.
- b. The federal government should establish a comprehensive security sector reform to integrate ex-militants into the formal security forces, fostering trust and reducing the likelihood of relapse into violence.
- c. The government should prioritize infrastructural development and create an enabling environment for local businesses in the Niger Delta. This can reduce the dependency on oil revenues and offer the population sustainable livelihoods
- d. The federal government should establish a comprehensive environmental restoration programme to be integrated into PAP. This programme should focus on cleaning oil spills, reclaiming affected lands, and supporting alternative livelihoods like agriculture and ecotourism, helping to restore the region's ecosystem and boost local economic development.

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