

Introduction

The discovery of oil in Oloibiri, a small town in the Niger Delta region, in 1956, generated hope, optimism, expectations and opportunities to improve the welfare of the local people. However, the reality is that national elites and the Nigerian state have been the principal beneficiaries of oil revenues in contrast to local communities, who so far have little or no benefits Onuoha, 2005. This has been one of the key factors for various aspects of grievances and feelings of marginalisation among local communities in the region, particularly the Ijaws and the Ogoni Oluwanyi (2010 Obi, 2009; Tamuno, 1970). It is argued that such grievances and marginalisation have triggered the emergence of protests against the Nigerian state (Watts, 2007; Omeje, 2005). Initially, the protests were non-violent but later assumed a violent dimension where the protesting groups engaged in the bombing of oil pipelines, kidnapping of oil workers and violent confrontations with the Nigerian military (Cuvelier, 2014). Conflicts generated from oil-governance policies, therefore, can be seen from multiple lenses. On the one hand, it may appear as a rebellious action of protesting groups engaged in criminal activities for private gains, often described as ‘militia’ activities while on the other hand, it might appear to be the case where some groups are fighting for their ‘rightful share’ expressing their grievances, frustrations, and resistance from a distorted livelihood and lack of participation in the oil and natural resource management (Ferguson, 2015).

Violent conflicts in the Niger Delta region are grounded in historical discontent over resource ownership (Ako, 2011). The demand for access to resource control offers a common platform for different militant groups who share the common perceptions of exploitation and limited spaces for political inclusion (Wood, 2015). The feeling of being politically oppressed among the ethnic minorities is a key component of the Niger Delta conflict.

Militancy in Nigeria's Niger Delta region is a complex issue with a long history. The region, rich in oil and gas resources, has been involved in decades of conflict fueled by a sense of marginalisation, environmental degradation, lack of development and political disenfranchisement (Odukoya, 2006). Several militant groups have emerged, demanding greater control over resources and a fairer share of the wealth generated by the multinational oil companies. Their tactics have included attacks on oil installations, kidnapping of oil workers and pipeline vandalism, leading to significant disruptions in oil production and economic losses for Nigeria and the militarization of the Niger Delta region (Boas, 2012). Militant groups, such as the Movement for the Emancipation of Niger Delta (MEND) have emerged, driven by both grievances and the pursuit of pecuniary gains. The Nigerian state's inability to address the aspirations of citizens and promote development has laid the foundations for militancy. The political economy of oil within Nigeria plays a significant role in the dynamics of militancy. The Federal Government's control over oil wealth has led to a situation where local communities in the Niger Delta feel alienated (Ukiwo, 2011). This has led to feelings of grievance and resistance among ethnic groups. Youth in the Niger Delta have become a significant force in the region's conflicts. They are often depicted as restive youths, but their role as political actors is crucial for understanding the rise of militancy (Francis, 2011). The youth's involvement in militancy can be seen as a response to a lack of economic opportunities, political representation and demands for remediation of the environment and distributive equity.

The Niger Delta contains crude oil, which, since 1970, has generated over US\$40 billion in revenue for Nigeria and billions more in profits for oil companies (Aghedo and Osumah, 2009). Yet its host oil communities are mired in poverty and pollution. This paradox stirred militancy in the region, which initially adopted legal instruments, party formation and dialogue in the 1970s and armed rebellion in the early 2000s with hostage-taking and attacks on oil facilities. Though

some of the militants in the Niger Delta still hang on, there has been a considerable decline in their combative activities since the declaration of amnesty for repentant fighters in 2009 by the late President Umar Musa Yar'Adua.

This study, therefore, examines the extent to which the amnesty programme addressed disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of ex-militants in the Niger Delta Region as well as its impact in achieving sustainable peace in the Niger Delta Region. The study is a survey which has utilized quantitative method of data collection involving document analysis, archival library search, electronic and print documents, the use of published and unpublished articles, academic journals, books, magazines and other relevant literature to obtain data on the impact of amnesty on militancy in the Niger Delta, and data were analyzed using a descriptive method of data analysis.

Theoretical framework

Frustration Aggression Theory by Dollard is used in this study as a framework for analysis.

Eco-violence, the umbrella Frustration Aggression Theory, was first developed by John Dollard and his research associates in 1939. It is one of the best explanations for violent behaviour arising from the inability to fulfil needs. In explaining aggression, the arguments point to the difference between what people feel they want or deserve to what they get, the want-get ratio. (Feierabends, et al, 1969). And the difference between expected need satisfaction and actual need satisfaction (Davis, 1962). This implies that where expectation does not meet attainment, the tendency is for people to confront those they hold responsible for frustrating their ambitions Ted Robert Gurr, 1970).

Frustration Aggression theory was propounded by John Dollard, Neal Miller, Leonard Doob, Orval Mowrer and Robert Sears in 1939 and further developed by Neal Miller in 1941 and Leonard Berkowitz in 1989. The theory argues that aggression is the result of blocking or frustrating a person's efforts to attain a goal. It suggests that aggression is a response to the frustration of achieving a goal (Hokanson, 1961). The theory suggests that frustration always precedes aggression, that while frustration creates a need to respond, aggression is one possible outcome. According to Dollard et al, frustration is defined as the condition where a goal response suffers interference, while aggression is an act whose goal response suffers interference. When first formulated, this theory stated that frustration always precedes aggression and that aggression is the sure consequence of frustration. Two years later, however, Miller and Sears reformulated the theory to suggest that while frustration creates a need to respond, some form of aggression is one possible outcome. Therefore, this suggests that while frustration prompts a behaviour that may or may not be aggressive, any aggressive behaviour is the result of frustration, making frustration not sufficient but a necessary condition for aggression. It is important to note that not all instances of frustration result in what we normally identify as aggression. Moreover, there are notable other factors that influence how individuals respond to frustrating situations. According to Dollard et al, it is used to explain riots and revolutions, which are both believed to be caused by poorer and more deprived sections of society who may express their bottled-up frustration and anger through violence. (Dollard, et al. 1939),

Berkowitz (1989) argued that frustration causes a negative effect, and this negative effect elicits aggression. Others have argued that frustration also has effects on cognition and physiological arousal (Anderson and Bushman, 2002; Breuer and Elson, 2017). Unlike Dollard et al., who implied that aggression is the exclusive result of frustration 1939, Berkowitz reformulated

that insults, anxiety, unpleasant environmental conditions, and aversive effects and circumstances can cause aggression (Breuer and Elson, 2017). Morlan (1949) argues that the expression of aggression sets up a vicious cycle that leads to further aggression, as aggressive acts rarely occur or exist in isolation and have consequences for future interactions (Breuer and Elson, 2017).

Frustration Aggression theory offers a lens through which to understand the complex dynamics of the Niger Delta conflict, with the aim to espouse the dynamics of exploitation of natural resources by the multinational companies without commensurate benefits to the local people, which fueled feelings of resentment and deprivation. This frustration has often manifested in aggressive behaviour, such as militant activities and violence, by various emerging groups seeking self-recognition. By offering amnesty to militants and providing them with opportunities for rehabilitation and reintegration, the government aimed to reduce the levels of frustration and aggression in the region.

Scholars have critiqued this theory on various grounds. Breuer and Elson (2017) suggested that aggression cues are not necessary for aggression to occur. Berkowitz 1989 argued that frustration can lead to a need for a response, but aggression is not the only possible outcome. These criticisms, though valid, do not necessarily discredit the theory as it remains relevant in understanding the Niger Delta conflicts in Nigeria.

Conceptual Framework

Militancy

Militancy refers to a violent mode of action of aggrieved people, groups or activists geared towards political, social, economic or religious emancipation (Arowosegbe, 2009). This definition suggests a broader sense as it sees militancy as the quality or state of being combative, aggressive, or

vigorously active, especially in support of a cause or a particular viewpoint. This can include the use of forceful methods, including potentially confrontational or violent means, persistent and unwavering to achieve an end, typically in political, religious or social contexts. These actions are purported to defend a cause which includes, but is not limited to, deprivation, persistent injustice, inequality, marginalisation, illiteracy, diseases, malnutrition, joblessness and poverty (Egbezor & Ololube, 2014). Some of the aggrieved groups are the Niger Delta Vigilante Force (NDVF), Movement of the Niger Delta People (MONDP), Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), Niger Delta People Salvation Front (NDPSF), Niger Delta Avengers (NDA), and the Movement of the Survival of the Ijaw Ethnic Nationality (MOSIEN). Egbe (2014) opines that militancy is the willingness to engage in oppositional rhetoric and action often used in the context of trade-union activities. It can be either industrial, focusing on advancing wages and conditions or political, concerning the position of the working class as a whole. The emphasis on industrial versus political militancy can vary based on national cultures and traditions as well as economic conditions.

Amnesty

The word amnesty is derived from the Greek word “amnestia” or “amnesis”, which means forgetfulness, oblivion, or to lose memory. It is an official pardon for people who have been convicted of political offences, an act of sovereign power designed to apply the principle of “tabula rasa” to past offences usually committed against the State, to end proceedings already initiated or that are to be initiated or verdicts that have already been pronounced. According to (Nussio, 2017), successful amnesty frameworks are often embedded in comprehensive disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) processes, which involve not only the surrender of arms but also the provision of vocational training, psychosocial support and mechanisms for societal

acceptance. Generally, political offences such as treason, militancy, sedition, rebellion, draft evasion and are often conditioned upon their return to obedience and duty within a prescribed time. As noted by (Ojielo and Adebayo 2018), African amnesty programmes often grapple with issues of impunity, inadequate reintegration support and weak state institutions which undermine their effectiveness. Moreover, the lack of inclusive community participation and justice mechanisms frequently limits their legitimacy and long-term impact.

Niger Delta

Geographically, the location of the Niger Delta region of Nigeria is situated in the South-South geo-political zone. It is known for its high level of crude oil reserve and production, which is the heart of the Nigerian economy. The 1956 discoveries of oil in commercial quantity in Oloibiri, which is currently situated in Bayelsa State, crude oil and its products have been the major sources of income for the Nigerian government (Peel, 2015). Apart from the supposed benefit of this natural endowment, the Niger Delta region has been noted for its growing conflict situation. The region comprises six states from the South South zone, namely Akwa Ibom, Delta, Bayelsa, Edo, Cross River, Rivers, Ondo State from the South West zone, Imo and Abia states from the South East. The oil-rich region of the Niger Delta is inhabited by numerous ethnic nationalities that are very heterogeneous, with over 40 ethnic groups who speak more than 250 mutually diverse languages and dialects (Obani, 2018).

Environmental degradation and the emergence of Militancy in the Niger Delta region

The history of environmental degradation started long ago as a result of the explorative activities of the multinational oil companies. The nature of the oil business, coupled with unconcerned attitudes to the environment on the part of the corporations and ineffective state control since the

late 1950s, led to massive pollution and degradation of the lands, water, and air of the area (Sutcliffe, 2012). This has impacted the farming and fishing activities of local people, who are mostly agrarian by vocation. They became poorer since they were no longer able to engage in farming and fishing, also due to a lack of state support. The continued environmental degradation led to the emergence of environmental activists, who are committed to raising local and international awareness of the problems caused by oil corporations (Ballestine & Sherman, 2003).

What the activists did was to weave the narratives of general poverty and suffering around the activities of oil exploration. A picture was painted of how oil production destroys the environment (agricultural land and water) and sacred sanctuaries of the people, and how the Nigerian state was complicit in the matter. These narratives worked towards mobilising the people against the state and the oil corporations. The motives of the first-generation environmental activists in the Niger Delta were altruistic and devoted to righting the wrongs done by the multinational oil corporations. The first agitation, led by Isaac Adaka Boro, an Ijaw nationalist and military officer who pioneered minority rights activism and led the initial struggle for resource control and development in the Niger Delta region in Nigeria and was expressed through marshalling violence and a declaration of secession from the larger Nigerian state in the early 1960s (James, 2020). This led to military action that quelled the uprising within 12 days (Kew & Philips, 2013).

The second generation adopted an intellectual and pragmatic approach, as exemplified in the efforts of Ken Saro-Wiwa, a novelist, who took the struggle to the international arena. For their role in environmental activism, Saro-Wiwa and eight of his Ogoni compatriots were arrested on trumped-up charges and gruesomely executed by the General Sani Abacha military regime (Osaghae & Olarinmoye 2017). However, the killing of the environmentalists did not stop the

agitation. It led to the emergence of a plethora of activists and agitators, amongst whom are a motley of militants whose demands, motives, style, and operational tactics draw largely from Adaka Boro's strategy of armed struggle. Ballestine & Sherman (2003). The style of the "militant activists" also moved sharply away from the intellectual approach of Ken Saro-Wiwa. It involved the use of maximum violence as an instrument of protest. This includes large-scale and sustained vandalism of oil pipes and other property of the government and oil corporations (Wasser, 2014).

The bombing of oil platforms and supply routes, the breaking of pipes to cause oil spillage, the setting up of illegal refineries for bunkering, as well as the kidnapping of expatriate oil workers. Through bombings, oil pipe breakages, and vandalism, the militants release large volumes of oil and gas into the environment. These cause further degradation. Through the burning of buildings and offices belonging to the state and oil corporations, the land and air are further polluted. The illegal refineries being operated in the bush further destroy the mangrove forests in the area, which are rapidly dwindling. Kidnappings and unrestrained violence have prompted a large presence of troops and other security operatives (Ukiwo, 2007). This militarisation of the area also has significant environmental consequences. The military and militants are engaged in deadly encounters in the creeks and the mangrove forests, and several of the illegal shanty refineries have been destroyed by security operatives, with serious effects on the environment.

The Presidential Amnesty Programme (PAP)

The amnesty programme in the Niger Delta was introduced as a non-kinetic approach to address the conflict in the region. This initiative was launched in October 2009 by the Nigerian government under the former President, Umaru Musa Yar'Adua. On assumption of office on May 29th 2007, President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua included the Niger-Delta as part of his

administration's seven-point agenda. To address the worrisome situation in the Niger-Delta and considering the failure of previous efforts at resolving the conflict, the government set up the Niger-Delta Technical Committee, which was mandated to collate and review all previous reports and recommendations on ways of resolving the conflict. Thereafter, the Presidential Committee on Amnesty and Disarmament of Militants in the Niger-Delta was mandated to design a framework of disarmament, demobilisation and rehabilitation and reintegration of the militants. This culminated in the Presidential Proclamation of Amnesty on 25 June 2009 to encourage non-state combatants in the region to abandon violence, which lapsed on 4 October 2009. The government acknowledged the inadequacies of previous state interventions in meeting the population's needs (Imobighe, 2021). The government also noted the threat to peace, security, order and good governance and the Nigerian economy by militant agitation of certain elements in the region. The amnesty proclamation also acknowledged the need to harness the energies of able-bodied youths for development in the region. Consequently, all persons who have directly or indirectly participated in the commission of offences associated with militant activities in the Niger Delta were to surrender and hand over all equipment, weapons, arms and ammunition, including the execution of the Renunciation of Militancy. The programme aimed to demilitarise the region and reintegrate ex-militants who surrendered their arms in exchange for training and rehabilitation programmes into civilian life, thereby reducing violence and oil theft to promote peace and development. The Amnesty Programme included educational and vocational skills training for ex-militants, which was considered an innovative way to transform the youth who were previously associated with violence and criminality into productive members of society. The Amnesty Programme had several phases, such as pardon and voluntary renunciation and disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR), Odukoya (2016). The Amnesty Programme was

perceived as a significant shift from previous government approaches that relied on military force to manage the conflict. It aimed to address the grievances of the people of the region through non-kinetic means, focusing on disarmament, rehabilitation and reintegration rather than punishment.

Amnesty Programme and Its Role in Addressing Militancy in the Niger Delta

The Niger Delta Amnesty Programme was conceived as a disarmament, demobilisation, and reintegration (DDR) framework intended to grant conditional pardon to youths engaged in armed resistance against the Nigerian state and multinational oil companies. Adetayo (2018) highlights that the amnesty initiative provided a structured path for militants to surrender arms in exchange for vocational training, psychological rehabilitation, and social reintegration. The initiative was not only aimed at halting hostilities but also designed to address the historical grievances associated with resource control, environmental damage, and marginalisation.

A key component of the programme was its direct impact on militancy reduction. Uloko (2017) found that amnesty succeeded in curbing militant activities in Bayelsa State by offering a tangible alternative to armed conflict. Participants reported reduced hostility and increased civic engagement following their enrollment in the programme. Similarly, Chinonso (2018) observed that the Amnesty Programme facilitated the disarmament of ex-militants in Cross River State, thus helping to create a more peaceful environment. The disarmament aspect was not merely a symbolic process but a strategic step in restoring state authority and opening space for dialogue and reconciliation between the state and disenfranchised youth. (Mensah, 2020). emphasised the importance of post-conflict amnesty frameworks in Ghana's Northern Region, which, although outside Nigeria, offered comparative insight into how structured disarmament can catalyse long-term peace. The research corroborated the view that amnesty, when implemented with institutional

and community support, minimises the allure of armed struggle, reducing incidences of violence and fostering social cohesion. Furthermore, Chukwuma (2023) focused on the Niger Delta and reinforced the argument that the Amnesty Programme played an essential role in fostering sustainable peace. According to his study, communities that had higher levels of ex-militant reintegration reported significantly fewer violent outbreaks compared to areas where amnesty implementation was weak or incomplete. This finding underscores the argument advanced by Festus (2019), who linked post-amnesty peacebuilding in Cross River State to systematic reintegration policies and effective monitoring of ex-combatants.

The amnesty programme also contributed to a temporary stabilisation of the region and created pathways for youth empowerment and social rehabilitation. Nevertheless, the programme has faced numerous criticisms and operational challenges. One major concern has been the alleged corruption and mismanagement of funds meant for training and reintegration. Reports of favouritism, exclusion of certain militant factions and poor monitoring mechanisms have undermined the efficiency of the programme (Okon, 2021).

Conclusion

The Amnesty Programme in the Niger Delta has been a valuable tool in managing militancy in the short term. It has successfully reduced violence and created a more stable environment. However, it is not a panacea for the complex problems facing the region. To achieve lasting peace and stability, it is crucial to address the root causes of militancy through comprehensive and sustainable development initiatives that benefit all communities in the Niger Delta. A more holistic approach is needed, one that combines security measures with investments in education, healthcare, infrastructure and economic diversification. It is also essential to promote good governance,

transparency and accountability to ensure that resources are used effectively and that the benefits of development reach all segments of society. Only through such a comprehensive approach can the Niger Delta region achieve lasting peace and prosperity.

It is important to note that amnesty alone is not a sufficient solution to the underlying issues fueling militancy in the region. Factors such as widespread poverty, environmental degradation, lack of economic diversification, and perceived marginalisation continue to be significant drivers of unrest. Studies emphasising these root causes suggest that without addressing these fundamental socio-economic and political grievances, the potential for militancy remains. Furthermore, this research has pointed to challenges in the program's implementation, including allegations of corruption, inefficiency and a lack of transparency in the disbursement of funds and opportunities. These issues have eroded public trust and hindered the programme's overall effectiveness. While the Amnesty Programme undeniably contributed to a significant reduction in armed violence and disruption of oil production in the short to medium term, its long-term effects and overall success remain a subject of ongoing debate. It is argued that the programme's initial success stemmed from the direct financial incentives and opportunities for reintegration offered to ex-militants. However, this approach also created a dependency model.

Recommendations

Based on research into the impact of the Amnesty Programme on militancy in the Niger Delta region, this research proffers the following recommendations:

Environmental Remediation. Implementing comprehensive plans to address the severe environmental degradation caused by oil exploration and exploitation, restoring ecosystems and

providing alternative livelihoods for affected communities is crucial towards attaining sustainable peace in the region.

Community Engagement and Participation. It is important to ensure that local communities are actively involved in the design and implementation of development programmes, fostering a sense of ownership and ensuring that projects meet their needs.

Address the Root Causes of Militancy. The Amnesty Programme should be part of a broader strategy that tackles the underlying grievances driving militancy.

Good Governance and Transparency. Promoting good governance, transparency and accountability in the management of resources and the implementation of development projects will build trust and reduce corruption.

Strengthen Reintegration and Rehabilitation Programmes. Reintegration programs for ex-militants should be strengthened and made more comprehensive, and also promote initiatives that foster reconciliation and social cohesion between ex-militants and their communities and provide targeted Support for Vulnerable Groups, including women and youth, who may have been disproportionately affected by the conflict.

Diversification of the economy. There is a need to promote diversification of the Niger Delta economy beyond oil and gas, supporting sectors like agriculture, fishing and small businesses. This will create alternative livelihoods and reduce dependence on the oil industry. Furthermore, there is a need to invest in critical infrastructure, including roads, electricity and healthcare facilities, to improve the quality of life and create a more conducive environment for economic activity. By implementing these recommendations, future interventions can move beyond short-term fixes and contribute to lasting peace and sustainable development in the Niger Delta. A shift

towards addressing root causes, empowering communities, and promoting good governance is essential for long-term stability and prosperity in the Niger Delta region.