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Nigerian Experience with Post-Conflict Peacebuilding: Examining Operation Safe Corridors and the Niger Delta Amnesty Programme.

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Abstract

Upon assuming office in 2007, Nigeria's former President Umaru Yar'adua initiated an amnesty programme for 'repentant' militants in the Niger Delta Region in order to provide them with stipends and training opportunities, as well as reduce the rate and spate of vandalism of oil installations and kidnappings of oil workers. The amnesty also sought to pacify the region after decades of infrastructural neglect and environmental degradation. The amnesty saw a reduction in disruptions of oil explorations, with an attendant increase in Nigeria's oil output. Although there was renewed militancy in the region in the years following President Yar'adua's death, the general consensus was that the programme achieved relative 'successes. Similarly, the government of President Muhammadu Buhari, shortly after assuming office in 2015, initiated a programme aimed at demobilizing, rehabilitating and reintegrating 'repentant'

Boko Haram insurgents whose activities had led to an estimated 30,000 deaths, and the internal displacement of millions of people. The government's aim was to encourage the demobilization, rehabilitation, and reintegration of 'repentant' Boko Haram insurgents who had willingly surrendered to the Nigerian Army and had openly denounced the insurgent group. Using data obtained from personal observation, focus group discussions and interviews, this study examines demobilization, rehabilitation, and reintegration as exemplified by the amnesty programme and operation safe corridor, with the aim of highlighting possible success areas, and areas of shortcomings.

Keywords: *Amnesty, Boko Haram, De-radicalization, Niger-Delta, Reintegration, Rehabilitation.*

Background

Since independence in 1960, Nigeria has grappled with one conflict after the other. Starting from the political violence that greeted her failed First Republic in the 1960s, the nation has barely enjoyed a season of 'rest' from sociopolitical conflicts. Although ethno-religious and political conflicts in Nigeria predate her independence in 1960, it was after independence that her fault lines became clearer. According to Animashawun (2018), signs that the thin thread that held the nascent nation together was weak emerged during the 1963 national census. He describes the crisis that ensued before, during and after the census thus:

...The 1963 population census, for example, ended in crisis as it appeared more as a political exercise than a demographic study. This was because most of the regional leaders unduly falsified and inflated the population figures in preparation for the general elections which formed one of the bases of the electoral sharp practices that took place subsequently. There were some ideological problems in some political parties as was with the case with the Action Group in 1962 when its Democratic Socialism created a crisis in the Western Region thereby leading to the ruin of the regional legislature. The intraregional cases in Western Nigeria later snowballed into major political violence especially in the Western Region House of Assembly (Animashawun, 2018 p. 71).

Consequently, by the time the nation went into her first democratic elections in 1964, shortly after attaining 'Republic' status in 1963, it was almost inevitable that the election was going to be rife with violence and crises. Several alliances were forged in the lead up to the election, and

suspensions were tensely rife. According to Jim-Nwoko (2019), the outcomes of the elections nationwide were considered massively rigged in favour of the Northern Peoples' Congress (NPC) and their allies, leading to widespread protests and dissensions, especially in the Western Region. The crises that ensued after the turbulent elections of 1965 have been cited as one of the many reasons Nigeria eventually experienced a Civil War from 1967 to 1970 (Lodge, 2018). The human and material cost of that war is unquantifiable. It is estimated that close to three million military and civilian casualties were recorded on both the Nigerian and Biafran fronts (Falola & Heaton 2008: 180).

Post-Nigeria's unfortunate Civil War, the conflict in the Niger Delta region is arguably one of the biggest threats to the nation's existence. Age-long feelings of relative deprivation in the Niger Delta have led to frustration-aggression typified by violent conflicts. There is a myriad of reasons behind the protracted nature of conflicts and/or agitations in Nigeria's Niger Delta region, but at its core is the struggle over resource ownership and control, as well as the sharing of rent-revenue concessions from multinational oil companies (Odoemene, 2011). Also, despite accounting for a bulk of Nigeria's foreign earnings, the region has not benefited from the vast wealth created by oil exploration. Koos and Pierskalla (2016) argue that not only has the wealth from oil exploration not trickled down to the majority of the population, most inhabitants of the region who are traditionally farmers and fishermen, have been forced to abandon their traditional agricultural practices due to environmental degradation.

Predictably, shortly after Nigeria's return to democracy in 1999, age-long agitations reemerged in the region fueling violence, propagated by militant groups in the region. In an attempt to quell militancy in the region, the then government of President Olusegun Obasanjo adopted repression and militarization as a conflict management strategy, but that did not achieve the needed sustainable peace. Although militarization 'achieved' limited cessation of visibly armed violence, the roots of the underlining issues dug deeper. Consequently, recognizing the fragility of the conflict management strategies adopted by former President Obasanjo, the government of late President Umaru Musa Yar'adua and Vice President Goodluck Jonathan initiated an amnesty programme that encouraged militants in the region to renounce militancy, relinquish their arms and ammunition to the government, and consent to an initiative that involves skills acquisition, provision of stipends, and gradual 'reintegration' into the larger community (Osaghae, 2018). The initiative

was widely celebrated as a success and there was an immediate reduction in violent militancy in the region, resulting in increased oil production.

When it seemed agitation in the Niger Delta region was gradually abating due to the amnesty initiative, the *Jama'at al-Bilad al-Sunna Lidda'awati wal-Jihad* (People Committed to the Propagation of the Prophet's Teachings and Jihad), popularly known as Boko Haram, emerged and quickly metamorphosed from a stick-wielding and stone-throwing group of disgruntled young men (and women) to one of the most terrifying terrorist organizations in the world (Comoli, 2015). The Institute for Economics and Peace, in its 2015 report, declared the group the fiercest and 'deadliest terrorist group in the world', ahead of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). Using the Global Terrorism Index (GTI) as a measurement tool, the report claims that the group's activities accounted for 6, 600 deaths in 2014 alone (Ewi, 2015).

From the foregoing, it is very pertinent to study post-conflict peace building from a Nigerian context, because previous peace building initiatives in Nigeria, and across the continent have only succeeded in birthing 'negative peace', instead of sustainable positive peace. The reason is often that Western ideologies of peace building fail to take into cognizance the need for inclusion and ownership of the peace building process by all stakeholders involved. According to Davies (2016), peace building processes that do not look beyond the narrow interests of belligerents will at best, lead to cessation of visible conflicts, without addressing their root causes. Examples abound of countries where peace was 'imposed' on conflicting parties and/or communities, instead of it been 'generated' from within the communities. Burundi, Central African Republic (CAR), South Sudan and Sierra Leone have at one point or the other gone through a process of post-conflict peace building that failed to stem mistrust and suspicion between and amongst 'former' conflicting parties. The result is a highly flammable sociopolitical milieu that would ignite with the slightest incitement.

This study examines efforts by successive governments in Nigeria to stem the growing tide of militancy (as typified by agitations in the Niger Delta region) and insurgency (represented by the activities of Boko Haram) in the country. Using data obtained from personal observation, focus group discussions and interviews, we examine demobilization, rehabilitation, and reintegration as exemplified by the amnesty initiative for former Niger Delta militants, and operation safe corridor initiated for 'repentant' Boko Haram insurgents, with the aim of highlighting possible success areas, and areas of shortcomings.

Niger Delta Militancy: From Relative Deprivation to Frustration Aggression.

At the core of the Frustration Aggression Theory (FAT) is the premise that when an individual or group feel that they are being prevented from accomplishing their goals, or when they feel relatively deprived when compared to others, they most likely would resort to aggression. The theory, which has its origin in a 1939 study by Dollard, Doob, Miller, Mower and Sears, implies that when people become frustrated (i.e. when their goals seemed blocked or impossible to achieve), they often respond aggressively (Eron, 1994). In so many ways, militancy in the Niger Delta region stems from age-long frustrations from the people of the region regarding [perceived] marginalization, gross underdevelopment and human right abuses meted on the region by successive governments in Nigeria.

Resistance in the Niger Delta dates back many years before oil was discovered in the region, and has festered over the years due to a multiplicity of reasons, chief amongst them being the underdevelopment of the region, as well as continuous calls for resource control. From the 1895 Akassa raid against British traders to calls by leading groups in the Niger Delta for separation from the then Eastern region by the Calabar Ogoja Rivers Movement (CORM) to the revolt led by Adaka Boro in 1966, the region has always made its stance known regarding human rights violations, environmental degradation and the need for resource control. 'Recent' agitations like the largely nonviolent Ken-Saro Wiwa-led Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), and its antithesis, The Niger Delta Avengers (NDA) militant group whose activities from 2016 to 2017 led to the shutdown of oil terminals and a fall in Nigeria's oil production to its lowest level in twenty years, are further testaments to the fact that the root cause(s) of agitations in the region have not been addressed by successive governments (Tantua and Kamruzzaman, 2016).

The socioeconomic and sociopolitical impact of agitations (especially militancy) in the Niger Delta has been well-researched (Asuelime and Okem, 2017; Cuvelier, et al, 2014; Sutcliffe, 2012; Ogege, 2011; Babatunde, 2010; Epelle, 2010 ;) etc. It is not the intention of the researchers to explore further the discourse. It is pertinent however to note that between 2006 and 2009, coordinated attacks by militant groups within the Niger Delta region led to the death of over 300 people and the

kidnap of about 119 foreign and local oil workers (Niger Delta Technical Report, 2009). During this period, also adversely affected was daily oil production which plummeted to just 700, 000 barrels per day, from previous production figures of 2.6 million barrels per day. The country lost a substantial part of its foreign earnings, and general international perception of Nigeria plunged to an all-time low.

Fubara (2010) avers that years of denial and blame-game by the Federal Government provided latitude for the crisis to become more prevalent and also generate local support for the growing number of militant groups. Military action against protests in the region did little to quell the agitations. Rather, it led to pent-up anger that became evident during the return to civilian rule in 1999. Renewed violence shortly after return to democracy led to wanton destruction of oil installations, disruption of oil production, the kidnapping of expatriate oil workers (and later indigenous ones), lawlessness and criminality. According to Ushie (2013), the violence threw the region into a near-state of anarchy, besmirched the nation's image internationally, and impinged its ability to enforce and maintain law and order in the affected areas, and this gradually spread to other parts of the country.

From the foregoing, it can be argued that the introduction of the amnesty programme by the Yar'adua-led government represented a shift in ideology from repression to collaborative peace building. The idea was to shift away from the militarization approach adopted by previous administrations, to a more participatory tactic that would key stakeholders in the Niger Delta, including militants into formal and informal structures of resource benefit. The amnesty has achieved its first goal — cessation of violent conflict. Although there are still kidnappings and sporadic violence in parts of the region, the fact is the magnitude, rate and spate have drastically reduced. There are concerns, however, that the amnesty programme has only succeeded in reducing visible violence. Dode (2015) is of the opinion that the framers of the amnesty policy did not take into cognizance the need to make provisions for nonmilitant members of the region who are also important key stakeholders. Dode further remarked thus:

Consequently, a policy aimed at stopping violence in that region, which, however, leaves out the non-violent, women and children amounts to adopting a temporary solution to a volatile problem, thus postponing the doomsday. A broader measure (policy) should have made adequate provisions for these non-militants who had gone

through some psychological trauma while the entire agitation process lasted (Dode, 2015).

Boko Haram and the Rise of Militant Religiosity

Religious militancy in Nigeria predates Boko Haram. Increased media attention and the emergence of social media have given a lot of prominence to all forms of violent conflicts globally, thereby making it seem like a new phenomenon. For example, in the first two decades following Nigeria's independence in October 1960, northern Nigeria experienced a violent confrontation between a radical Islamist sect known as Maitatsine and the Nigerian Police Force in Kano (December 1980) and Maiduguri (October 1982). The Maitatsine uprising had its roots in the 'deeply conservative practice of Islam' in Northern Nigeria, which has been dominant in the region since Usman Dan Fodio's holy war. Muhammed Marwa (also known as Maitatsine/'the one who curses'), leader of Maitatsine, was an Islamic scholar who migrated from the town of Marwa in northern Cameroon to the city of Kano in 1945. In Kano, Marwa became an Islamic zealot preoccupied with the purification of Islam. He believed that Islam had come under the corrupting influence of modernization (Westernization) and the formation of the modern state (Agbiboa, 2013).

One of the major assumptions regarding the emergence and modus operandi of the Boko Haram insurgent group is that it is a result of demography, poverty and underdevelopment in northern Nigeria (Akinbi, 2015; Enobi & Johnson-Rokosu, 2016). Undoubtedly, there is a considerable link between poverty and violence. For example, Haugen (2014) in his book *The Locust Effect: Why the end of poverty requires the end of Violence*, argues that 'poverty will not end, until the violence ends' (and/or vice versa). However, Thurston (2017) contends that although poverty may be a causal factor in the emergence of insurgent groups, Boko Haram represents the outcome of 'dynamic, locally grounded interactions between religion and politics' (Thurston, 2017: 3).

Thurston's position is a departure from the dominant narrative which claims that Boko Haram insurgency is a direct consequence of poor governance and terrible socio-economic conditions throughout the country (and especially the north); or as a spin-off of Islamist terrorist groups around the world (Akinbi, 2015; Enobi & Johnson-Rokosu, 2016). Further moving away from the 'poverty as cause' narrative, Thurston (2017) queries why there are not many more movements like

Boko Haram in Nigeria's neighbours, which, according to him, suffer from many of the same socioeconomic problems that plague northern Nigeria and the country at large.

Method

The researchers adopted a qualitative research methodology. In order to capture the selected communities' behaviour on their terms, the researchers visited and conducted participant observation, in-depth interviews and focus group discussions in selected communities in Yenagoa LGA of Bayelsa State. The fieldwork was for a period of six months in 2018 (between March and August). The researchers chose Yenagoa as research field because of their familiarity with the sociopolitical milieu, and also because of the ease of contacting participants. Participants were selected purposively because of the information they possessed, and because of their historicity regarding the Niger Delta conflict. The study population included purposively selected 170 members of the communities in Yenagoa LGA, including ex-militants, religious leaders, and leaders of market organizations, as well as youth and traditional leaders.

Table 1: Breakdown of the interviewed members of the selected community

Respondents	Number	Percentage%
Ex-militants	62	37
Religious Leaders	11	6
Youth Leaders	53	31
Traditional Leaders	11	6
Market Organization	22	14
Others	11	6
Total	170	100

As can be observed from table 1 above, the researchers interviewed 62 ex-militants, 11 religious leaders, 53 youth leaders, 11 traditional leaders, 22 members of various market organizations, and 11 random members of the community.

Given the sensitive nature of the Boko Haram insurgency, the researchers were not permitted to conduct field study at the Malam Sidi operational camp for *operation safe corridors*, in Gombe State, Northeastern

Nigeria, or at selected prisons where Boko Haram insurgents were incarcerated. However, one of the researchers was able to obtain archival materials, and also interviewed selected rank and file of the Nigerian Army, who pleaded anonymity and was able to win the confidence of the soldiers because he had observed his mandatory National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) programme in Gombe State, and had built relationships with some of the soldiers.

Repression as a Conflict (Mis) management Strategy

Successive military and civilian governments in Nigeria have adopted military over-bearingness as a default conflict management strategy to address regional grievances such as the Niger Delta crisis and the Boko Haram insurgency. What repression ‘achieved’ during this period can best be described as ‘negative peace’, a term coined by renowned Austrian peace scholar, Johan Galtung (1967), to describe the absence of organized collective violence between major groups, particularly nations, but also between classes and racial groups. Galtung argues that negative peace is not sustainable, as the structural root causes of conflicts and divisions are often left unaddressed.

The state has often relied on its military might to suppress the demands of people in the midst of a lack of political will to tackle the fundamental issues raised (Chukwuemeka, Anazado and Nzewi, 2011). For example, the Ogoni crisis undoubtedly brought to the public view the undesirable human and environmental conditions in the Niger Delta. The late Ken Saro-Wiwa provided leadership that culminated in the formation of the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni Peoples (MOSOP) in 1990. He articulated the issues confronting the Ogoni people and mobilized them to protest the policies of the federal government in relation to the control of Ogoni oil wealth, and actualize the Ogoni Bill of Rights. The activists and some of the leaders of the group were harassed and detained several times by the military regime of General Ibrahim Babangida. The repressive policies of the military régime did not deter the group from pursuing its demands. The Abacha regime then decided to impose stricter measures which saw the creation of an Internal Security Task Force in January 1994 through the office of the Rivers State Military Governor to specifically deal with the situation, ultimately leading to the arrest, detention and execution of Ken-Saro Wiwa and other prominent members of MOSOP by the government (Chukwuemeka, Anazado and Nzewi, 2011).

Perhaps one of the most brazen shows of military highhandedness as a conflict management strategy was the infamous Odi Massacre of November 1999 which led to the death of over 2500 civilians, and the displacement of thousands (Human Rights Watch, 1999). The massacre resulted from the military's attempt to quell militant groups in the region who were agitating for greater resource control and especially for the protection of their environment from inconsiderate oil exploration. In a style akin only to the Nigerian Civil War era, Nigerian soldiers stormed the town with an estimated population of 15,000 inhabitants (Al-Chukwuma and Orinya, 2013). Nnimmo (2006) recalls that the military, supposedly acting on the directives of the then Commander-in-Chief, General Olusegun Obasanjo, burned down every building in the town except the Anglican Church, a bank and the town's only health centre at the time.

The Nigerian state's response to the Boko Haram insurgency has also been that of repression by the security forces. Since the 'transformation' of Boko Haram into a full-fledged militarized Islamist group, the Nigerian government has responded by increasing its defence budget from \$625 million in 2010 to over \$1 billion in 2012 (ICG, 2014). Many are of the opinion that the escalation of the Boko Haram insurgency to its present state as the deadliest terrorist organization in the World (Ewi, 2015), may not be unconnected with the attack by Nigerian forces on the hideout of the sect in Maiduguri, in June 2009. According to Last (2009), the military destroyed multiple Boko Haram positions in Maiduguri and environs, capturing the sect's leader at the time, Mohammad Yusuf. Although the military subsequently handed over the captured leader to the police, he was summarily executed by the police without trial. Before long, YouTube videos of Yusuf's execution, as well as the torture and execution of his followers emerged. Subsequently, months after Yusuf's death, Boko Haram became increasingly violent, first attacking military and police formations, and later attacking religious places of worship (Last, 2009). Today, the sect has transformed into one of the most dreaded terrorist organization in the world, and its activities have spread beyond the shores of Nigeria to neighbouring countries of Chad and Cameroun.

The Need for a 'New' Approach

Cognizant of the futility of continued aggressive military action as a method of quelling militancy and insurgency, and in a desperate bid to

improve economic activities in the country, the government initiated two major conflict management strategies to stem the activities of Niger Delta militant groups, and Boko Haram insurgents. President, Umaru Musa Yar'adua, acting on the recommendations of a Technical Committee on the Niger Delta (TCND), adopted the committee's recommendation for amnesty for militants in the region (Babatunde, 2010). The initiative was to provide a platform for tackling the protracted insecurity challenge in the region while jump-starting the process of willing and unconditional surrender of arms by militants. The government also promised monthly stipends to 'repentant' militants, provided they surrendered their arms and submitted to a process of skill acquisition that would equip them with requisite skills with which to lead purposeful lives. With the submission of large amount of arms and ammunition by the militants, there was a drastic drop in criminality and hostilities such as illegal oil bunkering, oil pipelines blowouts, kidnapping and hostage-taking of oil workers and others, while there was increase in the daily crude oil production, from less than 1 million barrels per day (BPD) to over 2 million BPD, translating to an increase in the country's foreign exchange earnings (Ushie, 2013).

As part of efforts to conciliate militants in the Niger Delta, the government allocated about N127 billion between 2009 and 2011 from the nation's annual budget. The government also had a laid-out process by which the money was to be spent; the initial takeoff grant was N3 billion, N30 billion was spent to offset militants' stipends, while N96 billion was allocated for feeding the militants during their camping exercises at the many skill acquisition centres set up in the region (Ushie, 2013).

Adeyemo and Olu-Adeyemi (2010) questioned the rationale behind the Amnesty offer to militants by the Federal Government when there was never a plan laid out to resolve the lingering problems of endemic poverty and environmental degradation in the region. They argued that political amnesty is usually a product of two contexts; the first being a negotiated settlement in which the two parties in a conflict must have arrived at a dead-end and both parties decide to settle their differences politically. The second they said is one of "a victor and a vanquished", in which a party overwhelms the other, claims victory and then magnanimously offers amnesty to some or all of the combatants on the defeated side. They, therefore, asserted that the amnesty offer was not predicated on any of the contexts, as there was no negotiated settlement between the state and the militants neither was there any outright victory

by either of the parties prior to the offer (Adeyemo and Olu-Adeyemi, 2010).

The ‘blanket offer’ of amnesty by the government without drawing a clear cut line between criminality and genuine agitations, in the view of this article, can be viewed as an acceptance of guilt on the part of the state and a show of desperation to stop the economy from grinding to a halt. For Haden (2004), there are always divided opinions on the issue of amnesty as some see it as the opposite of justice in that it encourages individuals to act out criminal or anti-social behaviour, knowing they will not be sanctioned if they simply refrained. The State, under President Yar’adua, was inclined to the latter argument in the case of the Niger Delta conflict and adopted the amnesty initiative as an intervention measure built around the principle of targeted-assistance to individual militants.

Operation Safe Corridor

The Operation Safe Corridor is a rehabilitation programme aimed at assimilating surrendering Boko Haram fighters back into society. The main goal of the scheme is to help ex-combatants with post-war psychotherapy, while at the same time, offering them rudimentary vocational training skills, with the aim of providing them with a means of livelihood outside the Boko Haram trenches. According to Bukarti (2019) participants in the scheme are asked to choose from skills such as carpentry, tailoring, welding, poultry, shoemaking etc.

The *Operation Safe Corridor* initiative has its roots in the 2014 National Security Strategy which proposed a ‘soft approach’ to countering violent extremism, especially considering that military actions had not achieved the desired outcome. Although a negotiated deal and group-level amnesty remain elusive, a defectors programme for “repentant” low-risk Boko Haram combatants has operated since 2015 (Felbab-Brown, 2018). The programme, which is administered by the Office of the National Security Adviser (ONSA), targets Boko Haram insurgents within selected prisons across the country, and applies an individualized approach, identifying the risk-related needs of each prisoner, in order to implement interventions to reduce their risk of engaging or advocating violent extremism. The overarching de-radicalization initiatives in Nigeria have the intended goal of supporting the reintegration of former combatants into society through educational support, although it is recognized that

full re-integration may be a longer-term objective and community needs would have to also be taken into account (Anyadike, 2016:5).

Felbab-Brown (2018) argues that although the programme has its many positives, it is nonetheless riddled with a myriad of challenges, including highly opaque and unclear criteria as to who constitutes 'low risk' and 'high risk', making it near-impossible for a potential defector unable to judge what category or fate he will be assigned if he does indeed defect. A narrow eligibility criteria that exclude men who had to endure Boko Haram rule when their villages were taken over but did not have an opportunity to "defect," i.e., to run away; programming that is too heavily skewed toward religious reeducation and under-provides vocational training and psycho-social therapy; and, crucially, extensive problems with reinsertion and reintegration.

It should also be noted that operations are primarily characterized by former combatants who are largely defectors and are seeking an exit from Boko Haram and not just seeking to continue fighting for the cause by different means, as would have been the case for active former combatants. The focus on encouraging defectors as opposed to collective disengagement (which tends to involve re-integrating active former combatants) can be understood in the context of unsuccessful attempts by the previous Nigerian government to engage in negotiations and offer an amnesty to the Boko Haram leadership (Agbiboa, 2015).

Discussion of Findings

The Niger Delta conflict and the Boko Haram insurgency have been long drawn. At the root of both conflicts are ethnic, economic, religious and political incompatibilities. Governments over the years, wittingly or unwittingly, have failed to properly evaluate and appropriately respond to the environmental, socio-economic and political challenges of the Niger Delta region, and the most impoverish north (although one can argue that poverty is a general challenge across all geopolitical zones of Nigeria). The rising rate of social discontent, poverty and inequality have breed an 'army' of disgruntled citizenry with a deep feeling of frustration-aggression, occasioned by a feeling of relative deprivation.

Pruning the branches, while ignoring the roots

During fieldwork in the Niger Delta region, researchers found that an overwhelming majority of the respondents agreed that the rehabilitation

of ex-militants was not yet as successful as it was expected, thus the on and off resurgence of militancy in the region as seen in the (re)emergence of groups like the Niger Delta Avengers (NDA) and occasional bombings of oil installations. This correlates with the views of some of the interviewees who affirmed that the government's amnesty focus was solely on ensuring that the disruptions of oil exploration stopped, not on taking practical steps to ensure historical redress of the lingering socioeconomic and environmental problems in the region. According to one of the interviewed respondents:

The government did not see the need to resolve the lingering crises from the root by addressing issues of marginalization, environmental degradation and widespread poverty in the region. The reintegration of the ex-militants and the entire amnesty programme was faulty in that it employed a top-bottom approach of conflict resolution that did not take into cognizance inputs from members of the community on how to permanently resolve the crises. This process is simply branch - cutting; the root is still there, after a while, the branches will sprout again" (Mr Lulu (not real name)).

It was also discovered during the course of the study that community members frowned at the way the amnesty programme excluded key opinion leaders and the 'ordinary' members of the public. Respondents unanimously claimed that if the government had consulted widely with major stakeholders in the conflict, like market women and religious leaders, the initiative would have achieved more success. One of the interviewed women remarked thus:

It was funny how they brought people from other communities within the Niger Delta to help us analyze our problems. There was this arrogant ignorant belief amongst all those involved in the programme; they believed the Niger Delta was one, and that our problems were the same. They failed to recognize our differences and every community's unique grievance(s). It would have been better if they had consulted community members before implementing the programme in every community. The Niger Delta is geographically and culturally diverse, and our challenges are equally diverse" (Mrs. Keyamo (not real name)).

On the resurgence of militancy in the region and the success or otherwise of the amnesty programme, most of the respondents were of the opinion that the amnesty initiative, as put forward by the government, lacked the capability to address the root causes of the

conflict. There was a general consensus that the amnesty programme failed to fulfill the yearnings and aspirations of the Niger Deltans, thus the resurgence of militancy almost a decade after.

Everything has a price, including peace

A community leader who was interviewed had this to say about the monetization of the amnesty initiative:

The moment money was included in the amnesty programme, I knew it would not last, and I immediately doubted the government's sincerity. How do you sustain the doling out of money? For how many years? What happens when a new government comes into power and stops giving out money? Have you noticed that politicians who have stolen billions from the public's purse have found a way of including their children and wards in the scheme? Once the money is involved, everyone would want a share, and the real issues would be swept under the carpet until a future time. That is the sad reality of the amnesty programme, the monetization is unsustainable. It was a bad idea" (Bishop Okpokori (not real name)).

Ushie (2013) provides a breakdown of the total amount plunged into the amnesty programme by the Federal Government of Nigeria.

The Nigerian state has devoted substantial resources to the amnesty programme. Between 2009 and 2011, the programme was allocated N127 billion (US\$819 million) in the national budget. Of this amount, N3 billion was the 'take-off' grant, N30 billion was spent on militants' stipends and N96 billion on feeding the militants. In 2012, a massive N74 billion (US\$477 million) was allocated to the amnesty programme. When this is juxtaposed with similarly humongous fiscal transfers to the Niger Delta region between 2009 and 2012—for the Ministry of Niger Delta Affairs, N241 billion (US\$1.55 billion), and for the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) N 246.6 billion (US\$1.6 billion)—the scale of state largesse is astonishing. These fiscal transfers are separate from the sub-national budgets of the six core oil-producing states in the Niger Delta, which totaled N1.74 trillion (US\$11.2 billion) just for the fiscal year 2012 (Ushie, 2013).

It is the view of the researchers that the amount spent on the amnesty programme could have gone a long way in addressing the issues that gave birth to militancy in the first place. The government's choice of monetization provided financial gains for a few members of the public

(militants) while neglecting the underlying issues that have historically plagued the region. Ushie (2013) provided a lucid position on the futility of monetization as a conflict management strategy when she remarked thus:

...The state's monetization of community grievances is unsustainable because it implies that the state is simply paying militants to be peaceful based on oil revenues which are finite and volatile. The transformation of Niger Delta militants and activists into genuine power-brokers with previously aloof hegemonic interests in the state has altered the political calculus in Nigeria. Thus, in the aftermath of the crisis that buffeted the region, the Niger Delta has emerged as a credible power bloc, exemplified by the ascendancy of Goodluck Jonathan, an Ijaw from Bayelsa state, to the presidency of Nigeria in 2011. The political elevation of the Niger Delta has also positioned ex-militants and their acolytes as government contractors, middlemen, private militia and leading political actors. This redistribution of political power, influence and patronage have occurred against the backdrop of the deployment of the amnesty programme as the major instrument of conflict resolution and peace building in the restive Niger Delta”(Ushie, 2013).

Repentant Insurgents: ‘We have forgiven, but do not force us to forget.’

The operation safe corridor initiative for ‘repentant’ Boko Haram insurgents has been greeted with mix reactions from members of the community, especially communities in the Northeast that have been worst affected by groups ceaseless acts of terror. One of the major concerns raised by community members, as observed from secondary data obtained by the researchers, was the fear that reintegrated former Boko Haram fighters would turn against the community after winning their trust. The community members claimed that they were willing to forgive former insurgents, but the pains inflicted on them by the group was hard to forget. According to Felbab-Brown (2018), one of the difficulties which undermine the rehabilitation programme’s efforts is the push-back against the reintegration of former Boko Haram. Communities fear that re-integrated former combatants will continue to spread Boko Haram’s support for violence even if the group is defeated, and there is skepticism of those former combatants who do denounce violence as an ideology.

Felbab-Brown’s (2018) views resonate with similar opinion held by Anyadike (2017), who argues that While the surveillance of re-integrated

former combatants may reduce the likelihood of them re-engaging in violence (even if there is no actual intent), community suspicion and poor discipline among the security forces may lead to quick relapse, with adverse effects on the communities. Public displeasure and/or suspicion against the programme also extend to the prisons where Boko Haram fighters are incarcerated, while awaiting 'admission' into the operation safe corridor programme. Hinshaw and McGroarty (2015), claim that there is a general feeling of dissatisfaction amongst other inmates who feel that captured Boko Haram insurgents receive 'preferential treatment' from the prison authorities. Anyadike (2017) questions the rationale behind the government's offer of skills acquisition opportunities for repentant Boko Haram insurgents, while millions of Internally Displaced Persons in the region, as well as millions of jobless youths in the region, have never been offered similar opportunities.

The researchers also found that there was a deep-seated feeling of dissatisfaction and disappointment from members of the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) who have been actively involved in the fight against insurgency in their communities. The CJTF members have been credited for providing members of the Nigerian Army with the needed on-the-ground information regarding Boko Haram's modus operandi and are also actively taking part in actual combats against the sect. According to Oduah (2017), the government has put in place a gradual process of absorbing members of the CJTF into the Nigerian armed forces, but questions still abound about government's financial and material wherewithal to absorb an estimated 26,000 strong CJTF. There are fears amongst community members that aggrieved CJTF members may turn against the community out of discontent, thereby creating a 'bigger monster'.

The amnesty initiative, and to a smaller extent, the operation safe corridor initiative have 'succeeded' in reducing the violence that plagued the Niger Delta and parts of the Northeast. However, the recent upsurge in militancy and sporadic cases of Boko Haram attacks, have questioned the efficacy and sincerity of both processes. The amnesty programme for example, has not achieved the needed goal of durable peace in the Niger Delta region because it was prosecuted as a stand-alone conflict management strategy, instead of being part of a peace process that involves the people of the region, not just the militants. Most of the interviewed community members believe the renewed militancy in the region is not unconnected to the failure of the government to carry every member of the community along in the implementation process. Similar

opinions were raised in the communities recovering from post-Boko Haram governance.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Broadly speaking, peace building is often undertaken after visible violence has ceased with the aim of healing the wounds of the conflict, rebuild a more just sociopolitical order, and prevent a relapse into violent conflict. Whilst it would be safe to say there has been a reduction in violent conflicts in the Niger Delta and most of Nigeria's northeast, the conflicts cannot be said to be over. Boko Haram insurgence still carry out guerrilla-like attacks against the military and communities especially in Borno State, while the sociopolitical milieu in the Niger Delta is so fragile, and would flare up at the slightest provocation. Why then do we need a peace building initiative in a condition of negative peace? 'Negative peace' is often the foundation of sustainable or positive peace. It is often only when cessation of violence is achieved that real peace building begins.

Ensuring sustainable peace in the Niger Delta, the northeast, and Nigeria in general was the major motivations for this study. We were interested in the sustainability of the amnesty programme and the *Operation Safe Corridors*, vis-à-vis their sustainability, and whether or not they can be replicated in other conflict communities in Nigeria and beyond. It is not the intention of the researchers to make comparisons between militancy in the Niger Delta, and insurgency as represented by Boko Haram. That would be imprudent. We recognise that the ideologies are completely different, although it may be argued that both are fuelled by social inequality, injustice and poverty. However, during the course of the fieldwork, the researchers found similarities in grievances amongst community members. Like the amnesty programme, community members in former Boko Haram occupied territories wondered why they were left out of the *Operation Safe Corridors* scheme. One respondent remarked thus: "Suddenly, it is more fashionable and profitable to be a terrorist."

The government's approach in both interventions was targeted at former combatant, neglecting other members of the community. This unfortunately has bred a 'new' form of anger against the government and former combatants. What this type of intervention communicates to the members of the communities is that the former combatants are 'special', thereby unwittingly glamorising criminality. The factors that gave rise to

militancy in the Niger Delta and insurgency in the northeast are still there. There is poverty, inequality, corruption, environmental degradation etc. Pruning the branches, as represented by the amnesty and operation safe corridors would only ensure fleeting peace. If the root causes of the issues are not addressed, a new wave of militancy and insurgency would arise, especially given that governments in Nigeria have been mostly reactive, rather than proactive to the salient issues.

There is also a need for a peace building initiative that emanates from the communities. As observed during the study, community members complained of not been carried along in the design and implementation of peace interventions. One of the most common errors in peace building is the assumption that an 'outsider' knows the solution to a community's challenges. Most interventions by international organisations are at best 'cut and paste' approaches that do not take into cognisance communities' peculiar socio-cultural and socio-political uniqueness. For example, the Nigerian military started to record major victories against Boko Haram insurgents when they co-opted hunters and volunteer community members who later metamorphosed into the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF). The hunters knew the terrain, they understood the languages, and they knew what to do. Sadly, we have no records that they were involved in any way in the rehabilitation of ex-insurgents at the operation safe corridors camp in Gombe. Only when community members take part in the design, planning and execution of peace building initiatives can we have positive peace.

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