Paying for Peace: The Impact and Limitation of Amnesty for Militants and Averting Further Conflict in Niger Delta, Nigeria

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Abstract: From early 1990 to 2009, Nigeria's oil-rich Niger Delta region was engulfed in conflict between multinational corporations (MNCs) and restive youths (popularly called militants) over the adverse effects of oil pollution on their environment, life and economy. To curtail the conflict, Nigerian government initiated an amnesty programme for the militants in June 2009. This paper examined the impact and limitation of the programme, and measures to avert further conflict. The study was conducted via content analysis of books, articles in journals, editorials, and in-depth interviews conducted in the Niger Delta region between December 2018 and June 2019. This paper detected that the amnesty programme has brought about fragile peace, but the propensity of violence resurging is high, because the prime issues that triggered the conflict remain unaddressed. To forestall further conflict, Nigerian government and the oil MNCs must eradicate environmental degradation and invest in human and community development. Should conflict such as the one discoursed in this paper occur in the future, Nigerian government may grant amnesty, but must avoid 'paying for peace' as such approach is unsustainable. Rather than spend to lure people away from violence, the root cause of the conflict should be addressed.

Keywords: Conflict; peace; multinational corporations; amnesty; oil; Niger Delta; Nigeria

I. INTRODUCTION

Nigeria's oil wealth, located in the Niger Delta region of the country, has been a major cause of conflict between oil multinational corporations (MNCs) and their host communities for over six decades. Since Shell D'Arcy (the precursor of the present Shell Petroleum Development Company of Nigeria) discovered oil in Oloibiri in 1956, (Ogoniland in 1958, and in other communities afterwards), the drivers of conflict in the Niger Delta has ranged from resistance to land grabbing, environmental degradation, destruction of local livelihoods, inadequate compensation, and underdevelopment (Saro-Wiwa, 1994; Douglas *et al*, 2003; Watts 2004; Emuedo, 2010; Mai-Bornu and Ladan, 2020). On each of these issues of conflict, Nigerian government has mainly taken side with the oil MNCs as against the people. Government's protection of the oil MNCs operation was so fierce that the military was deployed to crush non-violent protesters in Ogoniland in the early 1990s. The community experienced human rights abuses and wanton destruction of lives and properties (Osha, 2006; International Crisis Group,

2008). The hallmark of the repression was the execution of Ogoni frontline activist, Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight others by the Nigerian military regime in 1995. This action transmuted the Niger Delta's simmering grievances into fierce militancy against the oil MNCs and Nigerian government (Ushie, 2013; International Crisis Group, 2008).

The militants operation encompass bombing of oil installations, kidnapping of oil workers for ransom, and oil bunkering; all of which destabilized the Nigerian polity and oil-dependent economy (Oluwaniyi, 2018; Adeosun, Ismail and Zengeni, 2016). Militant activities dropped Nigeria's oil production capacity to 900,000 barrels daily (30% of what actual production should be) in 2007 (Golden-Timsar, 2018). In the third quarter of 2008, over 300 persons were kidnapped, more than a thousand were killed, and Nigerian government lost \$23.7 billion from attacks on oil facilities, sabotage and oil bunkering (Report of the Technical Committee on the Niger Delta, 2008). The oil MNCs also incurred loss. Between 2003 and 2007, Shell declared a net loss of US\$10.6 billion (Austine and Sunday, 2013). The oil MNCs, as a whole, lost US\$21.5 billion within the same period (Nwozar, 2010).

These socio-economic fallouts impelled Nigerian government to introduce an amnesty programme in 2009, which many of the militants embrace. They surrendered their arms in exchange for benefits, including monthly remuneration and educational or vocational training in Nigeria and abroad. This paper considers Nigerian government's action of awarding the benefits law-abiding citizens are not enjoying to unlawful militants as 'paying for peace'. Year 2021 marks 12 years since the amnesty programme commenced. This paper reviews the impact and limitation of the programme in stemming the tide of violence in the Niger Delta. Additionally, it explores measures of averting further conflict in the region. The investigation was conducted via content analysis of books, articles in journals, editorials, and in-depth interviews conducted in the Niger Delta region between December 2018 and June 2019. Of significance, this paper exposes the intricacies of eradicating violence through non-violent means. Such exposition would assist nations undergoing similar situation in decision making.

The rest of this paper is considered in this manner: the next section, section 2, discussed the environmental, socio-economic and developmental attributes of the Niger Delta. Section 3 discussed the amnesty programme. In section 4, the impact and limitation of the programme was examined. Section 5 explored measures of averting further conflict and 6 presented the conclusion.

II. STUDY AREA

Nigeria has over 200 million population, which is the most populous in Africa and the highest concentration of dark race globally. The nation has the largest oil and gas reserves in West Africa and produces over 2.4 million barrels per day in the Niger Delta region (Mai-Bornu and Ladan, 2020). Oil was discovered in Nigeria by Shell in 1956. Other oil MNCs, including Chevron, Mobil, Agip, Total, etc are operating in the Niger Delta today. The Niger Delta region is made up of nine out of Nigeria's 36 states. The nine states includes Akwa Ibom, Cross River, Delta, Edo, Ondo, Abia, Imo, Bayelsa, and Rivers state. Oil explored in the nine states accounts for over 90 percent of Nigeria's foreign exchange earnings and about 80% of budgetary revenues (Mai-Bornu and Ladan, 2020; Adeosun, Ismail and Zengeni, 2016).

The people of the Niger Delta are ancestrally farmers and fishers. This implies that they solely depend on their ecosystem for survival, but incessant oil spills have degraded the lands and marines from which they source livelihood (Okonkwo *et al*, 2015; Kuenzer *et al*, 2014). As a result of degradation, Nigeria's Niger Delta region lacks every indices of development. Crucial infrastructures such as roads, hospitals, electricity, etc are either inefficient or unavailable. These challenges puts the oil-producing communities in conflict with the oil MNCs and Nigerian government. Scholars asserts that militancy in the region is a reaction to the repression, unemployment, underdevelopment, and near extinction of the environment and agricultural occupation that has sustained the people for centuries (Okeke-Ogbuaforet *al*, 2018; Omojimit, 2012; Ojajorotu, 2011). Ushie (2013) asserts that the amnesty

programme introduced to address the crisis is Nigeria's most prominent peacebuilding infrastructure since the nation returned to democratic rule in 1999.

III. THE AMNESTY PROGRAMME

Pursuant to section 175 of the 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, President Umaru Yar'Adua, on 15 June, 2009, granted "amnesty and unconditional pardon to all persons who have directly or indirectly participated in the commission of offences associated with militant activities in the Niger Delta" (FGN, 2009). Yar'Adua declared that the amnesty programme is government's contribution to "security stabilization in the Niger Delta region through the DDR programme, as a precondition for medium and long term development" (FGN, 2009). A new position of 'Special Adviser to the President on the Niger Delta' was created in the Nigerian presidency to oversee the execution of the amnesty programme. The programme was to be operationalized via a Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) scheme illustrated below:

Disarmament	Demobilisation/Rehabilitation	Reintegration
Duration: 6 August to 4 October 2009	Duration: 6 to 12 months	Duration: Up to 5 years
Collection of arms, ammunition, explosives	Ex-militants report to camp	Knowledge and skills acquisition
Biometrics	Verification and documentation	Financial empowerment
		Placement programmes
		Microcredit
	Transformational training	Education
	Peacebuilding and conflict resolution	Reconciliation with local community
	Counselling	Conflict resolution framework/mechanism
	Career guidance	Monitoring and evaluation
	Wellness assessment	Exit from amnesty
	Reintegration classification	
	Education and vocational placement	
	Graduation and demobilisation	
Key enablers		
Disarmament camps	Transformational training centres	Partenering government agencies, NGOs and private organisations
	Rehabilitation camps	Oil and gas institutions (OGIs)
		Tracking and support system

Niger Delta Amnesty Programme of the Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN). Sourced from Ushie (2013)

The DDR is a potent means of reconciling conflict and managing post-conflict matters. It has been used by the United Nations and several countries to achieve sustainable peace. This made Nigerian government to adopt it for the Niger Delta amnesty programme (Ibaba, 2011). After the amnesty was declared, militants publicly renounced violence and surrendered their arms and ammunitions to the security agencies. Records from the office of the Special Adviser to the President on the Niger Delta indicates that a total of 26,358 ex-militants, in two batches, have participated in the amnesty programme since 2009 (Ushie, 2013). The first batch, totalling 20,192 persons, were demobilised in 2009, while the second batch, numbering 6,166 persons were demobilised in 2011. Both batch emerged from eight, out of the nine Niger Delta states. Abia state did not participate as none of the residents owned up to being a militant (Austine and Sunday, 2013; Ushie, 2013).

The 26,358 ex-militants received N3,000 (US\$8) daily allowance during the reintegration phase, and another N65,000 (US\$180) monthly (Okonofua, 2016). As observed in the table, one of the most prominent feature of the amnesty programme is its emphasis on educational, and vocational training (encompassing skills acquisition and entrepreneurial development) for the ex-militants. Akinwale's (2010) appraisal of the ex-militants career goals revealed they are mainly interested in working in eight sectors, which includes oil and gas; exploration, processing and production engineering; welding and fabrication technology; and maritime services.

The amnesty programme started in 2009, and as indicated in the table, the total period of implementation of the DDR is about six years, hence the 26,358 ex-militants has undergone all the phases of the DDR. In spite of this, the amnesty programme is still on as the ex-militants and Niger Delta leaders are prevailing on government not to end it. The ex-militants want the programme sustained because most of them are yet to get a job or start up capital after training. They claim they are living on the amnesty's stipend and stoppage of it would push them into economic hardship. Backing the ex-militants claim, the political, religious and traditional leaders of the Niger Delta want Nigerian government to sustain the amnesty programme as ending it without meeting the needs of the ex-militants could revive violence.

IV. IMPACT AND LIMITATION OF THE AMNESTY PROGRAMME: A REVIEW

Ogege (2011) argues that the amnesty programme is government's deceitful antics to calm restive youths and pave way for unhindered oil operations, while crucial issues of degradation and underdevelopment remain unaddressed. In agreement, Aghedo (2012) contends that even though the amnesty programme somewhat eased the conflict between the oil MNCs and their host communities, peace remains subtle as the Niger Delta region is in a 'no-peace, no-war' situation. Sustainable peace can only manifest when: (1) the motivations

for hostility are identified and addressed; (2) when underdevelopment and environmental insecurity are tackled; (3) when people who have suffered psychological and physical damages are compensated; (4) when extra-judicial killings and human rights violators are prosecuted and; (5) when Nigerian government increase the revenues allocated to the nine oil-producing states (Aghedo, 2012).

Avowing that the amnesty programme ignored the cause to focus on symptoms of militancy, Ogege (2011) asserts that for lasting peace to be attained, Nigerian government must: (1) desist from favouring the oil MNCs at the expense of the people's welfare; (2) improve on stakeholders consultation and participation; (3) efficiently rehabilitate the ex-militants; (4) focus on youth employment through creation of small scale industries; (5) ensure fair allocation of revenues; and (6) create a holistic framework for the development of the Niger Delta and implement it.

Appraising the effectiveness of the amnesty programme, Eke (2014) contends that when multiple petitions and non-violent protests yielded no positive result for the people of the Niger Delta, violent agitations evolved and militants began to profit from the conflict, but the amnesty has calmed the restiveness. In agreement, Ubhenin (2013) posits that the threat the militancy posed to Nigeria's economy and national security impelled government to initiate the amnesty programme. Buttressing the claim, Eke (2014) asserts that oil production, which dropped to 1.4 million barrels per day during the militancy rose to 2.2 million after the amnesty was initiated (Eke, 2014). Of one mind, Ogege (2011), and Ajayi and Adesote (2013) proclaimed that the amnesty programme has brought about relative peace and an appreciable boost in oil production.

Assessing the amnesty programme's impact on peace-building, Ekumaoko (2013) asserts that the programme is a credible path to peace, but not an end in itself. The scholar argues that the negative peace the programme has created is making government feel relaxed and accomplished. So long as the programme enables unhindered oil exploration by the MNCs, Nigerian government would continue to wrongly think that adequate security and peace has been achieved (Ekumaoko, 2013). In agreement, Ajayi and Adesote (2013) posits that the amnesty programme is a short-span functional approach that cannot comprehensively address the environmental and developmental problems of the Niger Delta. Calling for overhaul, Ekumaoko (2013) warns that the amnesty programme may collapse and such would have a catastrophic effect on national income and security.

Evaluating the DDR strategy's potency to curtail militancy in the Niger Delta, Agbibo (2015) asserts that the amnesty is a non-killing approach to eradicating insurrection; a means of 'bribing' the militants so that the oil MNCs can operate unhindered. Doubting the amnesty's potency to achieve peace beyond the short term, Okonofua (2016) argues that the programme was tactically instituted to: (1) save Nigeria from

sliding deep into socio-economic confusion; and (2) erase the oil MNCs fear of being attacked. Okonofua stated that the amnesty programme has restored fragile peace in the onshore, while offshore sabotage and violence are still being perpetrated by some of the militants who embraced the amnesty, those who rejected it, and those that emerged after the programme was launched. Okonofua warns that the probability of violence re-erupting is very high. Should that happen, the 'repentant' militants would return to their rebellious acts; thinking government would call for dialogue and pardon them again (Okonofua, 2016). This argument gives credibility to Agbiboa's (2015) assertion that government's patronage has wrongly signalled the youths that rebellion and militancy is rewarding. His assertion ratifies Aghedo (2012), and Ajayi and Adesote's (2013) argument that the amnesty programme has not provide satisfactory solution to the Niger Delta conflict, rather, it portends fresh threat to peace and renewed hostility due to the lop-sidedness and youth-focused approach that ignores the rest of the populace.

Eke (2014) asserts that Nigerian government's failure to commit to sustainable development would resurrect the conflict. The rising post-amnesty unrest in the Niger Delta is proving Eke right. Agbiboa (2015) proclaims that the death of the amnesty initiator, late President Umaru Yar'adua, led to a wreck in the programme's rehabilitation and reintegration, such that the ex-militants are complaining of: (1) irrelevant and inadequate training; (2) delayed remuneration; and (3) mismanagement of their allowances by their commanders who are already earning huge from the pipeline protection contracts awarded to them by government. Consequently, some of the short-changed ex-militants have chosen to make a fortune from oil theft, even while still participating in the amnesty programme (Olaniyi, 2011). Agbiboa (2015) proclaimed that 80 percent of the amnesty programme's fund were used to hire consultants, administrators and ex-commanders, leaving an insignificant 20 percent for the ex-militants' rehabilitation.

Agbiboa's (2015) revelation ratifies Olaniyi's (2011) assertion that "the amnesty programme is not a transformational strategy, but a lucrative business" (pg. 52). Also, Eke (2014) posits the amnesty was a "cash for peace" programme; which triggered more violent demands from those seeking to have a taste of the 'national cake'. Warning that the amnesty may distract attention from the core issues of peace, security and development, Hinshaw (2012), who is an ex-mediator for government, asserts that 'everyone appears to think the Niger Delta crisis is over, but it is just on pause, the main task is to progress from pause to stop'.

Examining the amnesty programme's effectiveness against the recurrence of kidnapping for ransom in the Niger Delta, Aghedo (2015) posits that while the programme have significantly reduced the resentment between the militants and Nigerian military, violence has been promoted by government's resolve to reward those who committed heinous crimes against the state. The scholar reveals that through kidnapping, some of the rebellious youths (militants) became

millionaires to the envy of the non-rebellious ones, who are now also going into crimes such as kidnapping, piracy and oil theft. Aghedo affirms that the main complaints that triggered the militancy, such as widespread poverty, marginalisation, environmental degradation and unemployment still persist and continues to propel conflict. Condemning the 'excess' devotion of energy and resources to the amnesty programme, Ubhenin (2013) advocates for anabolition of the Nigerian 'rentier' system. In contrast, Aghedo (2015) advice government to desist from enriching individuals via the amnesty programme, and focus on infrastructural development. He argues that such action would eradicate violence as everyone -- rather than a class of people -- would benefit from the development.

Assessing the credibility of the amnesty programme, Ajibola (2015) proclaims that the inclusion of educational and vocational skills acquisition in the programme is helpful for youth transformation and crime reduction. He however stressed that adequate post-amnesty employment opportunity is pivotal to the overall success of the programme. In high hopes, Ajibola argues that if proper structures are put in place, the ex-militants would transform into agents of change and collectively work towards the attainment of peace and development in the Niger Delta. To the mind of the authors of this paper, Ajibola's assertion undermines the complexity of the Niger Delta situation by ignoring or failing to acknowledge that it would be difficult to transform majority of the ex-militants into progressive citizens because they are used to living extravagantly on crime.

Before embracing amnesty, the ex-militants daily routine revolves around smoking; consuming hard-drugs and alcohol; buying and selling dangerous weapons; perpetrating violence; and making an outrageous 'free' money from oil theft. Ajibola failed to come to terms that it would be difficult for the 'repentant' militants to desist from their dishonourable acts and lavished lifestyle. Upon completion of their educational and vocational programs, the ex-militants would find it uneasy to survive on wages lower than what they were earning from oil theft, artisanal refining and kidnapping. Ajibola did not fathom that the profitability of crime has a high potency of luring the ex-militants back to crime, regardless of how much they are pampered or persuaded not to. This will hinder the realization of peace and development.

Oluyemi (2020) examines the impact of military operations in the Niger Delta conflict and discovered that the operations were "terrifically counterproductive." The scholar denounced the deployment of military to stem environmental and economic insecurities. He calls on government to equip the police and "expand the agenda of security beyond the military" in the interest of Nigeria's democracy. Examining communal perceptions about the existence and causes of structural violence, Okeke-Ogbuafor *et al* (2018) asserts that structural violence manifests in both visible and invisible forms. Elites blamed the violence on exogenous factors, while the masses blamed it on exogenous and endogenous factors.

Both factors can be exterminated by reducing inequality and increasing democratization (Okeke-Ogbuafore *et al*, 2018).

Examining the relationship between oil production, grievances and attitudes towards anti-state violence in the Niger Delta, Koos (2017) argues that collective grievances (such as unfair distribution of oil revenues) and individual grievances (such as destruction of livelihood by oil spills) are causing people to support anti-state violence despite the amnesty. Examining the factors influencing and shaping community perceptions of oil MNCs in the Niger Delta, Odera *et al* (2018) argues that poverty, environmental degradation, and destruction of cultural, emotional and spiritual valuables such as land have created a negative perception of the oil MNC. Thus, to operate successfully in the Niger Delta, beyond amnesty, the oil MNCs must strive to build a cordial relationship with their host communities by taking up socially and environmentally responsible practices (Odera *et al*, 2018).

The review done so far highlights that the amnesty programme has a major impact of reducing the spate of violence in the Niger Delta, and a major limitation of not being a sustainable path to peace. In the next section, we discourse measures of improving the efficiency of the amnesty programme and averting the resurgence of militancy.

V. AVERTING THE RESURGENCE OF VIOLENCE

The amnesty programme has prompted a decline in hostility, but the plights of the Niger Delta people -- particularly their demand for an end to environmental degradation and underdevelopment -- remains unaddressed (Aghedo, 2012; Mai-Bornu & Ladan, 2020). Although the reduction in violence has paved way for Nigerian government and the oil MNCs to accrue more profit, nothing significant has been done to eradicate the plights of the oil-producing communities. The inhabitants cannot endure this for long, therefore Nigerian government must swiftly address their grievances to prevent a resurgence of violence. If their grievances are not promptly addressed, in a matter of years, another round of hostility would emerge, and by then, 'paying for peace' may no longer be effective, just as the approach preceding it (repression) is ineffective today.

Nigerian government's failure to establish a systemic means of providing social goods and services is decreasing the efficacy of the amnesty programme. Socioeconomic ills such as lack of infrastructure, poverty, unemployment and inequality are endemic in the Niger Delta. These ills are brewing communal disenchantments that may erode the fragile peace the amnesty has established. Some of the displeased populace would overtime emerge as (new) militants, even if the repentant ones do not return to violence. Ajayi and Adesote (2013) argues that "only development can ensure lasting peace in the Niger Delta region, therefore a robust development agenda that will tackle unemployment, degradation and socioeconomic underdevelopment must be formulated and implemented swiftly" (p. 518). Indeed, some form of comfort -- such as

provision of portable water, electricity, etc -- must be provided and gradually improved on for peace to persist in the Niger Delta.

Aside addressing the people's socio-economic challenges, Nigerian government must address the shortcomings of the oil MNCs. There has been no significant change in the modus operandi of the MNCs despite persistent oil spills. Oil bunkering, which is a major source of oil spills is also gaining prominence because there is no reprimand or incentives to discourage people from the act. Lack of commitment to eradicate environmental degradation (Okeke-Ogbuafore *et al* 2018; Nwozor, 2019; Mai-Bornu & Ladan, 2020) which would give live back to the people is making illegal means of survival, such as oil bunkering and artisanal refining rampant in the Niger Delta.

Oil bunkering must be eradicated, otherwise several vulnerable persons would embrace the act due to its profitability. Nigeria is losing over 300,000 barrels of oil to illegal activities in the Niger Delta daily (Campbell, 2015; Oluyemi, 2020). This loss is more than Ghana's total daily production of 120,000 barrels per day (Ushie, 2013). Nigeria's over 300,000 barrels per day loss is about 15% of the nation's daily production of 2.4 million barrels. Fiscally, the loss amounts to over \$1.7 billion monthly (Campbell, 2015) and \$42bn in the last decade (Hazardex, 2019). The loss is mainly sold to artisanal refiners in Nigeria and neighbouring nations, including Benin Republic, Cameroon and Cote d'Ivoire (Human Rights Watch, 2003). The funds accrued from the illicit trade is not only being used for pleasure, but also for arms purchase. Eradicating oil bunkering would reduce the influx of arms, otherwise insecurity would increase overtime and become insurmountable.

Monetization of peace is a recipe for conflict resurgence. To ensure disagreeing parties do not elongate conflict for personal gain, their bone of contention must be strategically resolved in such a way that each of the parties would want the conflict to end. In the case of the Niger Delta, Nigerian government played into the hands of the ex-militants. When oil production dropped from 2.4 million to 700,000 barrels per day at the heat of the militancy in 2008, Nigeria government was willing to do anything to save the nation's mono-product economy from collapse without considering the consequences (Agbibo, 2015; Oluyemi, 2020). Clearly, the government of Nigeria and the oil MNCs wanted the conflict to end in order to keep accruing profit, but the ex-militants have no such strong reason. Continuation of the conflict is what brings them income, either through the amnesty's largesse, or criminality.

For this reason, the ex-militants would not want the conflict to end because they are profiting from it. Some of them who are yet to get a job after training are surviving on the amnesty's largesse and would do anything to keep the programme running for as long as possible. However, if Nigerian government had used the funds spent on the programme to provide infrastructure, the ex-militants will want

the conflict to end so that their community can experience more development. In the early years of its commencement, between 2009 and 2012, a massive N127 billion (US\$819) was assigned to the programme. N74 billion (US\$477 million) was allocated to it in 2012 (Ushie, 2013; Ajibola, 2015). These huge resources should have been used to tackle Niger Delta's environmental and developmental challenges – an action that would be of benefit to the whole population rather than the youth-centred amnesty. Addressing the challenges could have eased the militancy since that was the militants' core reasons for perpetrating violence.

Since the amnesty programme is monetary based, government officials and non-state actors such as contractors and service providers would do all within their capacity to elongate the programme, or create violence that would necessitate the declaration of another amnesty. The appointment of ruthless ex-commanders as political office holders and contractors is both a means of stemming the tide of the conflict, and sustaining it. The ex-commanders would not want the conflict to end since government's patronage – which is their new source of livelihood – depends on continuance of the conflict. Furthermore, the disbursement of money to persons whose only service to the nation is to stay off violence sends a wrong signal to decent citizens that violence is rewarding.

But then again, The N65,000 stipend being paid to the ex-militants monthly is measly, compared to what they were earning from violence -- a factor that may resurge the militancy. Pre-amnesty, the ex-militants often collect hundreds of thousands of dollars before oil workers held hostage are freed. Schmidle (2009) uncovered that oil MNCs in the Niger Delta paid over US\$100 million to secure the release of their abducted workers during the heat of the militancy between 2006 and 2008. Except Nigerian government pays the ex-militants something close to what they were earning before signing up for the amnesty programme (which is impossible), it would be difficult for them to desist from violence, even if they wish to. Their monthly stipend is too meagre to dissuade them from returning to violence. This is a challenge for the country.

First, the stipend cannot be sufficiently increased as doing so will hinder government from fulfilling its obligation to other sectors such as education. Secondly, government's monetization of the people's grievance is unsustainable. The ex-militants are being paid from the revenues generated on oil, a commodity that is limited and volatile. In addition, the amnesty is inhibiting broader engagement with other aggrieved persons. Aside the youths, other cadre of persons, especially women, children and the elderly have been left unattended to. Aside the Niger Delta, other regions facing security challenges -- such as Boko Haram terrorism in the Northeast -- may demand for amnesty and the benefits the Niger Delta youths enjoyed.

Evidently, paying for peace is unsustainable, especially after the unexpected depletion of revenues due to the drastic fall in

global oil price after Covid-19 emerged. Even if the price of oil appreciates again, global demand for the commodity would reduce in the next years as the demand for rechargeable cars and renewable energy increases. As revenue depletes, government's inability to promptly remunerate the ex-militant may bring back violence. Thus, other means of achieving sustainable peace such as eradicating environmental degradation, under-development, and providing an enabling environment where everyone can thrive according to their capacity, skills and expertise must be established.

Despite the peace understanding between Nigerian government and the ex-militants, soldiers continue to maintain an intimidatory presence in some parts of the Niger Delta. Although the soldiers' mandate has changed from quashing a ruinous insurrection to securing oil installations and tackling oil theft, innocent people suffer from their high-handedness daily. For instance, at every (unwarranted) checkpoint the authors passed through during fieldwork in the hinterland, soldiers were ordering people to disembark from their motorcycles (the most common means of transport in the rural areas) for no concrete reason. People had to push their motorcycles past the checkpoints with the engine switched off. Putting people through such stress in a no-war situation is unnecessary. In addition, pushing the motorcycles was an uneasy task for people carrying goods as they have to either unload or push the motorcycle past the checkpoints with the help of other travellers.

Furthermore, the soldiers are fond of dehumanizing people at the slightest altercation. This needless intimidation is causing disenchantment that may transmute into conflict someday, perhaps soon. High-handedness is a feature of the military, while extortion is an attribute of the police. Transporters are brazenly extorted on the highways and failure to comply often results in harassment and brutality. To eradicate the immoderations of the security agencies and enhance the safety of lives and properties, Ushie (2013) asserts that Nigerian government needs to consider the ex-militants, community leaders, youth groups, and civil societies as important partners in security matters and get them actively involved in the protection of their communities.

VI. CONCLUSION

The amnesty programme should be a first instrument of conflict resolution, and not the final, as the lack of further major action by Nigerian government since 2009 is making it appear to be. The inaction is a pointer that the amnesty programme was mainly instituted to ensure unhindered exploitation of oil and gas resources in the Niger Delta. Nevertheless, the programme is a commendable departure from Nigerian government's typical hard approach to tackling conflict, which often aggravates tension rather than eradicate it. The soft approach, amnesty, has effectively stemmed the tide of violence in the Niger Delta. However, Nigerian government's monetization of the programme makes it unsustainable as the ex-militants rescind from violence

based on financial enticement, not out of personal conviction. Once the instrument of enticement (money) is no longer available, the ex-militants would most likely return to violence. For instance, they returned to violence when their stipends was delayed in 2016 and retreated after they were paid in arrears.

If urgent action is not taken, the probability of violence reoccurring is quite high as the environmental, social and developmental issues that triggered the militancy are yet to be addressed. Addressing these issues largely determines how cordial Niger Delta populations' relationship with Nigerian government and the oil MNCs would be. It also determines the future of oil operations in the region. The plights of the people must be swiftly addressed as the reward of maintaining a good relationship with them outweighs the gains of having a strained one. If Nigerian government and the oil MNCs have a good relationship with the Niger Delta populace, both will experience unhindered oil operation and make huge profit for years. But if they have a strained relationship with the populace, they may still make profit if force is applied, but it will be for a short term; before the conflict escalates. The gains of having a good relationship with the host communities outweighs that of having a strained relationship with them. Hence, the oil MNCs must independently strive to make their relationship with their host communities cordial. The amnesty's potency to institute lasting peace in the Niger Delta is dependent on Nigerian government and the oil MNCs ability to address the substantive operational, developmental, economical and environmental issues in the region. Failure to address these issues would generate violence at some future time.

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