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MILITANCY IN THE NIGER DELTA REGION OF NIGERIA: A REFLECTIVE DISCOURSE ON THE CAUSE, AMNESTY AND IMPERATIVES

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Abstract

The key objectives of the paper is to reflectively discuss the issue of militancy in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria and the underlying cause; critically analyze the appropriateness or otherwise of the amnesty programme as its measure of control and to identify and recommend further imperative measures for more effective and sustainable control of militancy in the region. In doing this, we relied essentially on secondary sources of data and consequently adopted content analysis technique in our analysis and conclusion. Our basic finding is that militancy in the Niger Delta region is a consequence of the inability of the Nigerian state to provide the basic development needs of the people of the region. Our further finding is that even though the amnesty as a measure of control of the militancy has restored relative peace in the region, it nonetheless would not be sustainable unless it is followed up with other policy measures that would adequately address the fundamental problem of underdevelopment in the region. Consequently, the paper recommends, a more effective and sustainable measure of control a systematic and holistic development in the region. In conclusion, we noted that the capability and the political will of the Nigerian state leadership to provide basic services and development needs of the people is necessary and critical not only for the control of the existing militancy in the Niger Delta region but also to forestall the occurrence of other militant activities or violence in other regions in Nigeria that might be induced by similar neglect of development needs.

Keywords: Amnesty, Development, Fragility, Militancy, Niger Delta, Nigeria.

Introduction

Agitation against environmental degradation and poor infrastructural development in the Niger Delta region in Nigeria, particularly by the Ijaw youths, has been a recurring issue particularly from the 1990s. However, the emergence of the new wave of agitation started in 1998. Precisely, in December, 11th 1998, the Ijaw Youth Council (IYC) in the region in its Kaiama Declaration issued an ultimatum to all the oil companies in the region to suspend operations and to leave the region by 31st December, 1998. The basic complaint by the IYC, as contained in the Declaration, is that the oil exploration by oil companies in the region is causing severe land and food shortages and serious environmental pollution (Ezeudo, 2013). The oil exploration in the region is dominated by multi-national corporation such as Chevron, Texaco, Exxon-Mobile, Agip, Shell and Nigeria National Petroleum Corporation. Their other complaint is that there is no serious and systematic effort at meaningful human and infrastructural development in the region both by the government and the multi-national oil companies (Olatoke and Olatunba, 2010; Human Rights Watch, 2002; UNDP, 2006).

It is worthy to note that the oil from the region is the life blood of the Nigerian economy, Nigeria depends up to 90 percent on foreign exchange from oil gotten from the region (Akeem, 2010). Indeed, as reported by Tell (2008), Niger Delta region is the hub of oil and gas production in Nigeria that accounts for 95 percent of foreign exchange earnings, 95 percent of national budget, 80 percent of government revenue and over 80 percent of national wealth. Given this, the people of the region believe that their communities are carrying the burden of development in other parts of Nigeria whilst their own human and material development needs are not being addressed. Indeed, several studies on the Niger Delta Militancy like that of Onduku, (2011), Ojo, (2007), Ikelegbe (2007) and Ibaba (2005) have collaborated the above claims by the IYC through their findings that the environmental pollution associated with the oil exploration and the lack of meaningful development in the region have been the source or the aggravating factors for the past agitations and the contemporary militancy in the region. Ibaba (2005) notes specifically that there are always cases of water and land pollution as a result of spills, installation and location of exploration facilities such as crude oil and gas carrying pipes that criss-cross most of the communities in the region.

Following the ultimatum to the oil companies to leave the region and the resolve to fight for improved ecological protection, increased provision of social and economic infrastructures and control of regional petroleum resources was the emergence of armed youth organizations in the region. The most potent of such militant groups include the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) led by Henry Okah, the Niger Delta Peoples Volunteer Force (NDPVP) led by Asari Dokubo and the Niger Delta Vigilante led by Ateke Tom. There are also other smaller armed militia groups such as the Tombolo Boys (TTB), Joint Revolutionary Council (JRC), Matyrs Brigade (MB) and Icelanders Coalition for Military Action (ICMA) (Ogege, 2011). These armed groups engaged in various forms of violent and criminal activities like oil pipe line vandalization, kidnapping of the workers of the oil companies and sea piracy. For instance, between 2004 and 2009, over 600 expatriate workers were kidnapped and over 57 armed attacks were launched on oil installations (Ikein, 2009). The effect of the militant activities on the Nigerian economic was enormous as reflected in the fact that between 2005 and 2008, oil revenue went down by 40 percent (Ikein, 2009) Ojeh (2010) notes too that Nigeria oil production dropped from 2.6 million barrels a day to about 1 million barrels a day at the pick of the Niger Delta militancy between 2006 and 2009.

The initial response to the violent activities of the militants by the Nigerian Federal Government was military repression that involved forceful control of the militant activities through the Joint Military Task Force operations. This approach resulted to monumental loss of human lives with both the militants and the Nigerian security forces claiming to have inflicted heavy casualties on one another (Ikejiani, 2007). However, from 2005, it was becoming clear that the military approach to the control of the violent militant activities in the region was not being effective given its increasing intensity (Kalu, 2014). Following this and the implications of the increasing violence on the socio-economic life of the region and the nation at large, the late President, Alhaji Shehu Musa Yaradua on 8th September, 2008, set up a committee called the Niger Delta Technical Committee to recommend appropriate measures to control the militancy in the region. The fundamental recommendation of the committee was amnesty and disarmament of the Niger Delta militants. In line with this recommendation and precisely on 25th June, 2009, late President Shehu Musa Yaradua granted amnesty to the militants who had directly or indirectly participated in the commission of offences associated with militant activities in the region and who were willing to surrender their weapons and renounce armed struggle within a 60-day ultimatum (6th August – 4th October, 2009) (Akeem, 2010). By the end of the amnesty period in October, 2009, 20,192 militants had surrendered their weapons consisting of 2,760 arms of different classes and caliber to the Presidential Amnesty Committee (Akeem, 2010). The participant demography of the militants across the nine states of the region is as shown below:

Table I. Participant Demography

S/NO	STATE	MALE	FEMALE	REGISTERED
1	Abia	155	8	163
2	Akwa-Ibom	571	19	600
3	Bayelsa	6,900	61	6,961
4	Cross-River	159	1	160
5	Delta	3,361	-	3,361
6	Edo	450	-	450
7	Imo	297	3	300
8	Ondo	1,198	2	1,200
9	Rivers	20,049	39	6,997
	TOTAL	20,049	133	20,192

Source: Niger Delta Amnesty Programme (2009)

The disarmed militants were moved to designated collection points and camps in six Niger Delta States. Each militant was promised a payment of sixty five thousand naira (₦65,000) only monthly, payment of rent and vocational training. The key programmes of the amnesty policy is expected to run for five (5) years and so would, all things being equal, terminate by 2015 (Oтите and Umukoro, 2012). The Amnesty is intended to restore peace in the region, allow for peaceful operation of the oil companies or exploration activities through which the major source of national income is being realized.

However, given that the basic finding in most studies on the Niger Delta militancy is that the fundamental cause of the militancy is the apparent lack of development in its various dimensions in the region, the key objectives of the paper is, therefore, to: (i) Situate and discuss the Niger Delta militancy in the context of the inability of the Nigerian state to provide essential services and development in the region (ii) To analyze the appropriateness and the inadequacies of the amnesty against the background of the cause of the militancy and; (iii) to recommend measures or reforms towards sustainable peace and development in the region. The work essentially relied

on secondary sources of data and information gathering for its discussion and conclusion. Consequently, content analysis technique was adopted for the study.

Clarification of Major Concepts

The Niger Delta region in Nigeria extends over about 70,000km² and makes up about 75 of Nigerian land mass. It consists presently of nine (9) states namely, Rivers, Cross River, Akwa Ibom, Imo, Delta, Edo, Ondo, Abia and Bayelsa. The region has a population of 30 million people in 2006 which is about 23 percent of the total Nigerian population of 140 million. The people of the region rely mainly on farming and fishing as their major source of livelihood (SaroWiwa, 1998). Niger Delta Region is the geographical heart of crude oil exploration in Nigeria from where the nation earns up to 99.7 and 90 percent of its export and annual income respectively (IMF, 2003; Azaiki, 2007).

Amnesty refers to a general pardon of offence by government or deliberate overlook of offences against the state. It means to cancel or not to exact punishment due for an offence (Ojite and Umukoro, 2011). So the amnesty for the militants of the Niger Delta entails a pardon for their offence and consequent freedom from punishment. The amnesty policy has three major strands that include disarmament, demobilization and re-integration of the militants (Kuku, 2014; Ojeh, 2010). The key programmes of the amnesty are as indicated below:

Table ii: Programmes of the Amnesty Policy

Disarmament	Demobilization/Rehabilitation	Reintegration
Duration: AUG 6-OCT. 4 2009	6 TO 12 MONTHS	UP TO 5 YEARS
KEY ACTIVITIES	KEY ACTIVITIES	KEY ACTIVITIES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collection of Arms and Ammunition, Explosives, etc • Documentation and Biometrics 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ex-Militants Report to Camp • Verification and Documentation • Transformational Training • Peace Building and Conflict Resolution • Counseling • Career Guidance • Wellness Assessment • Reintegration Classification • Education and Vocational • Placement • Graduation and Demobilization 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge and Skills Acquisition • Financial Empowerment • Placement Programme • Micro-credit • Education • Reconciliation and Local Community • Conflict Resolution Framework/Mechanism • Monitoring and Evaluation • Exit of Amnesty
Key Enablers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key Enablers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key Enablers
Disarmament Camps Massive Campaign	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transformational Training Centres • Rehabilitation Camps 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partnering Government Agencies, NGOs And Private Organizations, OGIS. • Tracking and Support

Source: Niger Delta Amnesty Programme (2009)

The conceptual framework of analysis for this study is state fragility or simply, fragility as it may be subsequently called. There is no one internationally accepted definition of the term fragility as it is conceptualized in different ways by scholars and organizations. For instance, OECD (2007) maintains that a state is fragile when it lacks the ability or political will to provide basic functions needed for poverty reduction, development and to safe guard property and the lives of its population. OECD (2013) again described a fragile state as one having weak capacity to carry out basic governance functions and lacks the ability to develop mutually constructive relation with the citizens. From these foregoing definitions, one can infer that fragility entails principally a fundamental failure of the state to perform functions necessary to meet the basic needs and expectations of the citizens. Specifically, fragile states are incapable of assuring security, maintaining rule of law and justice or providing basic services and economic opportunities for their citizens. In fact, a state labeled fragile carries the stigma of incapacity and lack of progress, violence and poor governance. The strongest concentration of fragile states is in Africa and Nigeria is classified as one (OECD, 2013).

There is a great diversity of fragile situations with varying characteristics or features. Indeed, fragility among states varies along a continuum of performance as well as across areas of state functions and capacity. However, there are some common basic underlying assumptions about states of fragility or better still, basic features of fragile states. These basic features have been indentified in the institutional works of World Bank (2005) and OECD (2013) as well as in the scholarly works of Hangman and Hoechine (2009); Rothberg (2004); Tom and Torsten (2011), Grazielle and Andrea (2013) and Steward and Brown (2010). An articulation of the features as identified respectively by them yields a list of key features of fragile states as below:

- (1) Persistent war, crisis or violent conflicts.
- (2) Inability of government to deliver the most basic services and meet vital development needs.
- (3) Inability of government to maintain a monopoly of the possession and use of instruments of violence.
- (4) A persistent condition of extreme poverty.
- (5) Persistent social tensions.
- (6) Insecurity of lives and property.
- (7) High political instability.
- (8) inability of government to fight lawlessness or crime
- (9) Pervasive electoral fraud
- (10) Low political will and administrative capacity to improve the workings of the state.
- (11) legitimacy failure and limited support from the people
- (12) Undemocratic governance.
- (13) Low human development
- (14) Wide inequality in income.

The above characteristic features are seen as both symptoms and causes of fragility. This is because some features of fragility have the tendency to further reinforce the weakness of the state to work and thereby fostering a vicious circle of dysfunction and state ineffectiveness. Specifically, for instance, inability to provide basic services and infrastructures is a feature of fragility. Non-provision of basic services can reinforce state fragility in situation of persistent violence arising from demand or agitation for the provision of such services. This is because

protracted violence could lead to further impoverishment, deprivation and decay of infrastructure and to the further weakening of the ability of the state to effectively govern.

The concept of fragility has in relatively recent times become a topical issue in academic discourse. This is because of its relevance on development policy, conflict and conflict management studies. It has also become of immense concern to the international aid donors as it assists them in deciding the possibilities and appropriate strategies for donor engagement in fragile states.

The Amnesty Programme: The Necessity

There are, no doubt, inadequacies and ambiguities in the conception and implementation of the amnesty programme. Nevertheless, it has at least been able to pave way for cessation of armed conflict, wanton destruction of lives and property and other forms of criminality in the region (Ogege, 2011). Further and emanating from the restoration of peace and stability in the region is the boast in the Nigerian economy through uninterrupted oil exploration and subsequent realization of revenue (Ogege, 2011).

Beyond the above socio-economic advantages, the amnesty option appears inevitable since the military or coercive option for controlling the militants was not very effective. The military option was not significantly effective because the militants are more versatile to the conditions and nooks and crannies of the creeks and so were easily out manoeuvring government forces. Again, an attempt to prosecute the militants might not only have been difficult but could have further alienated the militants and aggravated the situation because almost as many as 26,000 militants were involved. Prosecuting such high number of violators might have been too expensive and likely ineffective.

Again, the human capital development content of the amnesty programme would create opportunity for the youths in the Niger Delta region to channel their energies to positively productive activities from activities of oil bunkering, pipe line vandalism, disruption of exploration activities and kidnapping of employees of the multi-national oil companies.

Finally, the expectation is that the amnesty initiative would serve as basic framework to build peace and stability in the region which are necessary for effective implementation of further initiatives, policies or reforms to address the fundamental problem of poverty, deprivation and underdevelopment in the region.

The Amnesty Initiative: The Inadequacies

There is abundant evidence in literature on the Niger Delta militancy that the major demand of the people of the region is development as would be reflected in availability of basic infrastructures and services, improved sanitation of the environment, enhanced human development opportunities etc. Against this, the basic concern has been that the amnesty programme, as it is, cannot actually address the demand for development in the region. Egu and Ugwu (2011), expressing this doubt, argues that government hurriedly granted amnesty to the militants and engaged in cash lobbying and settlement of the militants and their leaders without corresponding policy measures to address the root cause of the militancy in the region. Again, the gains of the amnesty is exclusively for those who renounce militancy and those who renounced militancy and became beneficiaries of the programme of the amnesty programme constitute a very infinitesimal part of the population of the region. So taking them to camp and reintegrating them does not in any way address the general problem of underdevelopment of the majority of the people in the region.

Further and still in the above respect, it has even been observed that the money that actually goes to the commanders of the militants, contractors and consultants is more than the one that goes to the militants. In this case, the amnesty programme is being seen as a lucrative business opportunity rather than a transformational strategy. Indeed, according to the panel set up in January, 2010 to review the rehabilitation aspect of the amnesty programme, about 80 percent of the budget for the amnesty programme had gone for payment to consultants and contractors leaving just a paltry 20 percent for the rehabilitation of the ex-militants (Oтите and Umukoro, 2011). Even beyond this, the argument has again been that the financial advancement to the militants does not constitute an adequate compensation for the socio-economic deprivation in the region that underlies the militancy.

In all, the amnesty programme has a short term goal which is the cessation of hostilities in the region. In essence, it is not so much forward looking in terms of ensuring long and sustainable development in the region. By inference, the major objective or motivation behind the policy is just to return peace to the region for the oil exploration to continue and not to address fundamental development demands and aspirations of the people of the region. Indeed, as Oтите and Umukoro (2011) argue, the amnesty policy does not constitute a long term solution to the Niger Delta militancy that is a product of neglect and underdevelopment. So the relative peace brought about in the region by the amnesty programme if not followed by immediate general development of the region may remain precarious and fragile.

The Niger Delta Militancy as a Consequence of the Nigerian State Fragility:

Some of the key features of a fragile state as pointed out earlier in the paper include inability to deliver the most basic services and meet vital development needs, inability to maintain a monopoly of the possession and use of instruments of violence and high propensity for persistent violent conflicts or agitations for justice and social needs.

It is pertinent to observe that the situation in the Niger Delta region is, indeed, a paradox of poverty and underdevelopment in the mist of plenty. This is because in spite of oil wealth in the region, it still remains one of the least developed parts of Nigeria, apparently characterized by widespread poverty (Ogege, 2011; UNDP, 2006). It is the deep rooted sense of neglect and marginalization by the government in providing or supporting critical human development and provision of basic social amenities that underlay the persistent militancy in the region. Ndoma-Egba (2004) collaborates this argument as he contends that it is the inability of the Nigerian state to address the development needs of the region that has led to the persistent agitation and violent crisis in the region. The agitation according to him becomes more violently expressed on the belief that the failure of the Nigerian state to meet their basic development needs is deliberate and a consequence of sheer lack of political will on the part of government leadership. In essence, the militants feel that they are in unjust situation and need to rise up in arms to redress the situation (Smith, 2002). Nigerian government itself clearly acknowledged this as President Shehu Musa Yaradua noted in the 2009 Independence Day broadcast that the militants took up arms as a way of drawing attention to the plight of the people of the region.

Generally, it is note worthy that the very core reason for the existence of the state and peoples' obedience to the state is the expectation that the state will provide the basic necessities of life. Consequently, in the environment of the states' inability or unwillingness to provide the basic needs for the citizens, armed groups may start to emerge as a means of getting answers to their agitation for the protection of their vital interests. This tendency is usually, reinforced by the fact that in such a situation of fragility, the state do not maintain a monopoly of possession and use of

instruments of violence. For instance, the magnitude of arms surrendered by the Niger Delta militants following the amnesty indicates that the Nigerian state has come to lack the ability to maintain a monopoly of the possession and use of instruments of violence. Indeed, the much that was surrendered is possibly not even all that the militants had in their arsenal.

Clearly, the Niger Delta militancy is a consequence of the Nigerian state fragility with particular reference to its unwillingness and inability to provide basic development needs of the people of the region. Indeed, the people of the region have come to consider it reasonable to form armed groups or join militant groups as a means of meeting their justice and social needs. And if the militancy is allowed to persist, it has the potential to further weaken the power of the Nigerian state to perform its functions of providing basic services or development.

The Underdevelopment State of the Niger Delta Region as a Consequence of the Poor Political Leadership in Nigeria

No doubt, huge financial resources have, over the years, been voted to address the development needs of the region. Such financial votes have been spent through the Oil Mineral Producing Areas Development Commission (OMPADEC) set up in 1993, the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) established in 2000 with the sole mandate of developing the region and the Ministry of Niger Delta established in 2008 to address Niger Delta issues. The existence of these institutions and the huge financial allocations to them have not yet translated to any meaningful development of the region as a result of general poor political leadership (Oтите and Umukoro, 2011). So even in the event of increased derivation beyond 13 percent or resource control by the states in the region as being demanded by the militants, such may not yet translate to any meaningful development in the absence of good political leadership. Indeed, effective and efficient use of resources within the framework of given institutions, policies or programmes is dependent on the existence of good political leadership (Dike, 2003; Achebe, 1983; Derin, 2007).

As has been found in the studies on Nigerian government and development by scholars like Derin (2007) and Dike (2003), Nigerian underdevelopment is a consequence of bad leadership principally characterized by corruption and prebendalism. Therefore, the assumption by the militants that once fiscal federalism or resource control by states is embraced, their development plights would become a thing of the past, contradicts the reality of political life in Nigeria as a whole and even in the region itself. This is because the political leaders in the region have not shown that they are in any way different from their counterparts in other parts of the nation especially when it comes to sacrificing the basic development needs of the masses on the alter of personal greed and aggrandizement. Indeed, the 13 percent derivation and the statutory allocations from the federation account being received by the states in the region and the internally generated revenue would have significantly resulted to improvements in their development state if large chunks of such funds are not being looted by the political leaders. This situation is attested to by the facts that Dieprege Alamiesiegha, ex-governor of Bayelsa state who, at several points claimed to be championing the development cause of the region, was convicted of stealing stupendous amount of state money that would have ordinarily been used for development in the region. Also, James Onanefe Ibori, ex-governor of Delta state and an acclaimed Ijaw youth leader, misappropriated substantial chunks of state government fund. Timipre Sylva, ex-governor of Bayelsa state and lucky Igbinedion, ex-governor of Edo state were all accused of laundering state fund (Tell, 2008). As well, Asari Dokubo, Ateke Tom and other militant leaders are known for utilizing their prominent positions to acquire personal wealth rather than for effective agitation for the general development of the region (Lain, 2010).

The Findings

From the foregoing discussion and analysis, it is found that even in the context of huge commitment of resources to develop the region over the years, the situation has remained unchanged. This shows that the lack of development of the region is not a selective malicious political neglect by the national government. Rather, it is actually a reflection of the general situation of Nigerian state fragility as it manifests in lack of political will and ability to administer meaningful development in the country by political leaderships both at the national, state and local government levels.

The Future Imperatives

Basically, effective control of the militancy and the realization of sustainable peace and stability in the region require a rapid and integrated development of the region through the provision of social and physical infrastructural facilities, ecological/environmental remediation and creation of opportunities for human capital development. Government need to realize that development is not an event but a process and so it has to create a holistic framework or strategy to ensure sustainable and adequate provision of the development needs of the people of the region.

Beyond government's direct efforts in the development process of the region, government has again to put in place mechanisms or strategies to ensure that the oil companies in the region abide strictly by the environmental standards for air, land and water pollution. There is equally the need for strategies to ensure that oil companies increase their overall contribution towards human and infrastructural development in the region.

The extent to which the above recommended development can be realized, however, is dependent on the determination and resolve of both the national government as well as the government leadership of the states and local government within the region to institutionalize good governance which is a veritable framework for effective and efficient development administration. So the basic challenge for both the national, state and local government leadership should be on how to strengthen accountability in government institutions like the OMPADEIC, NDDC and the Ministry of the Niger Delta to facilitate effective service delivery and development in the region.

For the people of the region, their agitation should also focus on "forcing" the political leaders in the region to always prudently use available fund for development of the region. This could principally be done through initiating and engaging in political activities to engender greater accountability and more effective representation by their political leaders.

Conclusion

The Niger Delta Militancy is a consequence of the failure of the Nigerian state to deliver basic services and development in the region. An effective and sustainable control of the militancy in the region requires, therefore, an accelerated and holistic development of the region to compliment the successes of the amnesty policy. Achieving this development basically requires a positive attitudinal change on the part of the state and national political leaderships in the direction of using effectively the available resources for socio-economic development. Such is not only necessary for the control of the existing Niger Delta Militancy but for forestalling future ones that may be induced by similar neglect of development needs of people in the other parts or regions of Nigeria.

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