Article

Nigeria’s Amnesty Program: The Role of Empowerment in Achieving Peace and Development in Post-Conflict Niger Delta

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Abstract
This article investigates the role of the amnesty program in sustaining peace and development in post-conflict Niger Delta. The amnesty program introduced a number of strategies including educational and vocational skills training of ex-militants as alternatives to violence and militancy in the region. The introduction of education and vocational skills training to ex-militants is an innovative approach to transforming one of the major stakeholders in the conflict—youths. Youths had hitherto been majorly associated with violence and criminality in the region. These approaches have achieved some level of successes as violence and militancy have greatly reduced in the region. However, there are challenges that need to be addressed before the program can be regarded as fully successful. Employment opportunities must be provided for ex-militants after their training, and combatants who have not been accommodated by the program should be catered for, to prevent a return to violence and militancy. With this, ex-militants will become change agents that will spur peace and development in Nigeria’s post-conflict Niger Delta.

Keywords
amnesty program, education, skills acquisition, post-conflict Niger delta

Introduction
Nigeria’s delta region is located in the South–South axis of the country. The South–South is one of the six regions in the country. The others are the South–West, South–East, North–East, North–West, and North–Central. The South–South comprises eight states, namely, Abia, Akwa-Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross Rivers, Delta, Edo, Imo, and Ondo (Figure 1). It is believed to be Africa’s largest delta covering about 7,000 sq. km (Iwuoha, 2012) and presently holds all of the country’s oil and gas resources. The region is the economic base of the country, and the oil and gas sector, the most attractive sector of the Nigerian economy (United Nations Development Program [UNDP], 2006).

The Niger Delta has been plagued by conflicts and violence as a result of the large deposit of crude oil in the region. Competition for resources is a major cause of conflict in every society, and the competition over the nation’s “black gold” has led to protracted conflict in the region. The causes of the conflict can be directly traced to environmental challenges experienced by communities in the region. David-West (2001) in Iwuoha (2012) states that “most of [sic] environmental pollution of the Niger Delta regions are consequences related to the oil exploration activities of multinational oil companies in the area.” These activities have destroyed the ecological balance in the region (Kuku, 2012), leading to widespread poverty. The attitude of international oil companies (IOCs) and successive governments at the center to the plight of the people also aggravated the situation and led to what has been termed the “struggle” by many people in the Niger Delta. The “struggle” emanated as a result of the people’s displeasure against perceived injustices and their exploitation by oil companies in the region. These injustices included non-provision of amenities, non-provision of employment opportunities, and the refusal or delay in the payment of compensation to communities. The struggle later on expanded to include the desire for the creation of a distinct region with a political and administrative structure for the Niger Delta (Isumonah, 2003; Kuku, 2012; Ogbogbo, 2005), as well as a greater share of the federation’s revenue than was hitherto allocated to them. The struggle involved confrontation with multi-national oil companies and the federal government. Strategies adopted by the people in the course of this “struggle” included dialogue, disagreements, violence, civil unrest, militancy, insurgency, opportunistic...
By the time the country returned to democratic governance in 1999, youth and community restiveness in the Niger Delta had reached an all-time high. Different governments at the center made efforts aimed at combating the crisis in the Niger Delta, but these did not yield positive results. This was probably because the people of the delta did not trust government. Kuku (2012) writes, “Since independence, the people of the Niger Delta have become used to the military being deployed against them by successive military regimes.” This mistrust was extended to civilian governments, especially the Obasanjo regime. His government was accused of using violence and counter violence (force and military action) to address the situation in the Niger Delta (Isumonah, 2003). In 2003, the Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN), headed by President Olusegun Obasanjo, set up the Joint Task Force (JTF) in the Niger Delta, “to safeguard oil production, secure oil installations, crush community protest and deal with any activities that threaten the activities of the oil companies or personnel within the oil industry” (Kuku, 2012). Also in 1999, President Olusegun Obasanjo ordered the leveling of Odi, a riverine community in Bayelsa state, by military personnel. It was estimated that about 2,000 people died in that military action (Human Rights Watch, 2002).

Militant groups in the delta, led by Asari Dokubo of the Niger Delta Volunteer Force (NDVF) and Ateke Tom of the Niger Delta Vigilantes, retaliated with violence. In 2004, Asari Dokubo declared an all-out oil war against the Nigerian state and oil companies operating in the region. He was arrested in 2005 and charged with treason (Kuku, 2012). This was the state of things in the Niger Delta till Umar Musa Yar’Adua came into office as president in May 2007.

On assumption of office, late President Umaru Musa Yar’Adua realized that youths were the perpetrators of violence and militancy in the region, and that there was, therefore, a need to address the problem of militancy in the Niger Delta. His government identified that many of these militants were “able-bodied youths whose energies could be harnessed for the development of the Niger Delta and nation at large” (Kuku, 2012). He therefore set up mechanism to tackle the problem of insecurity and youth restiveness in the region. That mechanism is the amnesty program, which was set up on June 25, 2009.

The amnesty program is made up of four components, namely, the environmental, petroleum, infrastructural, and Demobilization, Disarmament, and Reintegration (DDR) components. The DDR component has direct bearing on the successful rehabilitation of armed youths in the region. DDR refers to “the process of demilitarizing official and unofficial armed groups by controlling and reducing the possession of arms, by disbanding non-state armed groups and rightsizing state security services and by assisting former combatants to reintegrate into civilian life” (Ball & van de Goor, 2006). It is used to consolidate peace and to promote stability within conflict-affected communities. The DDR is a proven instrument of conflict resolution and peacebuilding, but it cannot and should not be substituted for peace enforcement activities.

Figure 1. Constituent states of the Niger delta, Nigeria. Source. Google Image (Idemudia and Ite, 2006, 195).
The Niger Delta DDR component of the amnesty program according to Okonofua (2013), though, might not achieve the desired results, which stakeholders expect or desire because it failed to address the causes of the conflict. In other words, Okonofua (2013) is insinuating that the DDR process might not produce the desired stability and consolidation of peace in Nigeria’s delta region because fundamental issues that gave rise to the militarization of youths in the region were not addressed in the amnesty document.

The DDR component of the amnesty program is an integral part of the intervention. The amnesty program was designed and established to tackle the problem of insecurity and youth restiveness in the Niger Delta, and by implication, to restore peace and stability to the region.

In light of the motive for establishing the amnesty program by the Federal Government of Nigeria, this article investigates whether the amnesty program can ensure the successful reintegration of ex-militants back into their society, as well as, whether and how the empowerment process of ex-militants can stimulate peace and development in post-conflict Niger Delta.

**Theoretical Underpinnings**

Conflicts caused by competition for oil and petroleum products, unjust exploitation of resources, environmental degradation, and violence all have their roots in the quest to control resources, thus engendering poverty, inequality, and injustice. The Niger Delta conflict is a clear example of conflict, which emanated from struggles over oil and the unjust and exploitative tendencies of both state and non-state players in the oil industry in Nigeria, resulting in widespread poverty, environmental degradation, violence, and militancy.

The causes of violence and militancy in the Niger Delta can be attributed to triangulation (Okonofua, 2013). Triangulation can be used to explain the reasons for the involvement of youths in violence and militancy in the region. It occurs in family studies “when two people in a family bring in a third party to dissolve stress, anxiety or tension that exists between them” (Charles, 2001, in Okonofua, 2013). It is a technique and process used for transforming a 2-person, 2-group or person—group conflict into a positive “friend” interaction and relationship by identifying a 3rd element in the interaction that can serve as a “target” or focus toward which all negative feelings or expectations can be shifted. (Moffa, 2014)

Triangulation originated from the study of dysfunctional family setups, but can also be applicable to the study of behavior in other setups such as workplace and conflict situations.

Applying triangulation to the Niger Delta conflict suggests the involvement of more powerful third-party stakeholders in the conflict. This suggests that the youths were pawns of these stakeholders who initially used them to prosecute their political ambitions. Okonofua (2013) states that these youths who were recruited from the creeks were used as paid political supporters at political events.

Triangulation is also important to the conflict because it helps to explain how dysfunctional family systems contributed to the upsurge in violence and militancy in the region. The activities of IOCs and their workers negatively affected the host communities and their peoples in different ways. For instance, it is reported that the traditional roles of women in the Niger Delta was to sustain their families through farming, fishing, and trading, all of which have become extremely difficult on account of oil exploration and exploitation. The consequence of this is that their economies are affected, and prostitution became a means of survival for many (Iwuoha, 2012). Iwuoha (2012:25) continues, “The sex industry in Niger Delta is directly linked to the petroleum industry since it is petroleum company employees and the employees of petroleum related service companies that patronize the prostitutes.” The direct fallout of this sex industry is that there are a lot of children sired by expatriates in the region, and more importantly, the rate of abandonment of these children is very high, thus contributing to the lop-sidedness of the family system in the region and giving rise to poverty among the people.

Youths who often get involved in militancy and violence include those “who have no parents, youths who have extremely poor parents (such that parents lose control over their kids) and uneducated and unemployed youths desperate for some kind of subsistence” (Okonofua, 2013). Corroborating this position on parentless and poor youths and violence and militancy in the Niger Delta is this statement from an ex-commandant, also in Okonofua (2013):

> It’s easy for some youths to be sucked into the whole militancy game. Many of these boys fend for themselves. They have no education . . . They have no rich father or mother or uncle to look up to. Many of them have no parents.

Other theories also suggest that conflicts in the Niger Delta are caused by environmental factors. Scholars have since established that the environment can be a source of conflict and violence (Homer-Dixon, 1999; Kaplan, 2000; Klare, 2001). The Niger Delta environment in which IOCs operate has become a source of conflict because of the activities of these companies, which have negatively affected the people. These activities have resulted in economic losses as well as other health and social challenges and pushed the people, especially the youths, into resorting to violence and militancy.

Kaplan (2000) in Okonofua (2013) supporting the above view states that “eco-demographic pressures have created numerous emergencies within African states, including poverty and malnourishment, and these challenges have forced many African societies into acts of violence.” The peoples of
the Niger Delta have been forced into acts of violence because of the unjust exploitation of their environment, which has affected their sources of livelihood, thus leading to widespread poverty in the region.

However, although some scholars believe that violence in the region is a result of the unjust exploitation of the environment and its consequences on the lives of the people, others attribute violence in the region to greed (Collier, 2000; Keen, 2005; Reno, 2005). It is believed that most resource-based conflicts in Africa are caused more by greed than by grievance (Collier & Hoeffler, 2004). They posit that armed conflicts are mainly caused by the desire of militants to enrich themselves rather than any altruistic reasons. Greed in conflict is fueled by opportunities available in armed conflict. These opportunities may be in terms of financing, recruitment, or geography. Of relevance to this article is the issue of recruitment as an element of greed in armed conflict—this is in terms of the ability to attract fighting manpower, “something made easier when there is a high proportion of young unemployed males in a population, in a setting of endemic poverty and poor education” (Collier & Hoeffler, 2004: 563-595). In the Niger Delta, majority of the perpetrators of violence are able-bodied youths who have no source of income, are not educated, and have not gone through any form of skills training.

David Keen (2000) does not support the position of Collier and Hoeffler (2004) that greed is the major fuel for armed conflicts, but that both greed and grievance are motivations for armed conflict. He says that because the two are powerful incentives, the result is that “greed generates grievance and rebellion, which in turn further legitimizes further greed” (Keen, 2000:32). The conflict in Nigeria’s Niger Delta is a continuous cycle of both greed and grievance. The grievance of the people toward IOCs and the Nigerian state has resulted in the “struggle” being hijacked by their leaders who exploited it to their own advantage.

The grievances exploited include injustices meted out to the people and exploitation of host communities by oil companies operating in the region; anger at the force and military action used by the Federal Government of Nigeria against the people of the region; desire for the creation of a distinct region with a political and administrative structure for the Niger Delta; and the desire for total control of their resources, with appropriate tax paid to the federal government (Isumonah, 2003).

In checking restiveness in the communities, the federal government employed the use of force and deployed security agencies to restore “peace” in the region. Kuku (2012:119) states,

In 2003, in an operation titled Operation Restore Hope, the Federal Government of Nigeria set up a task force, the Joint Task Force (JTF) in the Niger Delta to safeguard oil production, secure oil installations, crush community protest and deal with any activities of the oil companies or personnel within the oil industry. This drew the ire of youths in the region who were aggrieved at the high-handedness of government.

However, despite the fact that the people had legitimate reasons for their grievances, these factors are closely related to greed, especially the desire by stakeholders to benefit personally from new opportunities that open from the “struggle.” An ex-combatant says in Okonofua (2013),

Let no one be deceived, it is all about oil. If there is a separation between political power and oil, a lot of Niger Delta politicians will not contest elections and there will be no militancy. Militancy is the child of greedy and corrupt politicians who will stop at nothing to make money for themselves, their families, and their friends.

What this suggests is that the militancy in the Niger Delta region is fueled by corrupt politicians who use the excuse of environmental degradation and exploitation to incite youths to further their own ambitions and interests.

**Method**

The study employed the use of both qualitative and quantitative methods. The use of this mixed-method approach incorporating semi-structured in-depth interviews (IDIs) and a structured questionnaire is the only way to understand the deeply complex Niger Delta conflict and the amnesty program. Six semi-structured IDI sessions were conducted with ex-militants on the Amnesty Scholarship Program in privately owned Nigerian tertiary institutions to get their views about the amnesty program as a veritable DDR tool and the importance of empowerment of the delegates to lasting peace and development in the delta region.

The structured questionnaire comprised 16 questions, divided into 2 sections. Section A had three questions that focused mainly on the gender, age, and educational qualification of respondents. These variables are germane to the study because the amnesty program is basically targeted at youths in the Niger Delta. The other 13 questions examined respondents’ perception of the amnesty program, the DDR process, and the importance of empowerment to the successful rehabilitation of ex-militants.

A total of 100 questionnaires were administered to respondents; out of these, 50 were administered to youths in the amnesty program in privately owned universities. The choice of youths in privately owned university was hinged on the fact that one of the elements of the DDR program is educational empowerment for ex-militants, and majority of them were awarded scholarships to study at privately owned universities in Nigeria. The remaining 50 questionnaires were administered to youths who are indigenes of Niger Delta resident outside the region (in Ibadan). This category of respondents was chosen because they are youths of Niger Delta origin who also have a stake in the
future stability of the region. It aimed to find out whether their opinions on the amnesty program, the DDR process, and the importance of empowerment of youths to peace and development deviated from the reasons for setting up the program and the views of the direct beneficiaries, that is, ex-militants.

Ninety-eight copies of the questionnaire were retrieved, making it 98% retrieval rate. One copy out of the 98 was rendered invalid because it was improperly filled. The data were analyzed using the descriptive statistics and presented using graphs and diagrams. Thematic analysis was performed on the qualitative data (which includes secondary open source data), and the results were used to frame the discussion of findings, becoming the basis for the qualitative analysis. In other words, the results of the qualitative study were tested with the quantitative study, which helped to strengthen the overall findings and conclusions of the study. Finally, the results of the qualitative and quantitative studies were combined at the initial stage by the theoretical discourse and later by the methodological approach known as triangulation, which helped to anchor both the findings and discussion of findings.

**Brief Literature Review**

*Previous Approaches to the Niger Delta Problem*

The Nigerian government had tried to address the problems in the Niger Delta, before the problems escalated to conflict and violence, prior to the intervention by the Yar’adua government in 2009. The report of the Technical Committee on the Niger Delta (The Niger Delta Technical Committee Report [NTDC] Report, 2008) highlights some previous reports of committees and interventions. Some of these are enumerated below:

1. 1958—Willinks Report of the Commission Appointed to Enquire into the Fears of the Minorities and the Means of Allaying Them
2. 1994—Don Etiebet Report of the Ministerial Fact-Finding Team to Oil Producing Communities in Nigeria
3. 1997—UN Report of the Special Rapporteur on Human Rights Situations in Nigeria
4. 1998—Popoola Report (Presidential Committee) on the Development Options for the Niger Delta
5. 2001—Ogumudia Report of the Special Security Committee on Oil Producing Areas
6. 2003—Sustainable Development Report on First International Conference on Sustainable Development of the Niger Delta, NDDC, UNDP
7. 2004—The NDDC Niger Delta Regional Development Master Plan
8. 2005—Nikki Tobi Report on National Political Reform Conference

9. 2006—UNDP Niger Delta Human Development Report
10. 2006—Report of the Presidential Council on the Social and Economic Development of Coastal States

In 1957, the colonial administration set up a commission headed by Sir Willink to investigate the developmental challenges facing the region. The report of the Willink Minorities Commission made a number of recommendations such as the following:

- Setting up of a Board to attend to the peculiar developmental needs of the region;
- Creating the Niger Delta Development Board (NDDB) and the Commission recommended the inclusion of a clause in the Independence Constitution of 1960 that would establish the NDDB (Kuku, 2012; Ogbogbo, 2005).

In line with the second recommendation, the Balewa administration set up the NDDB in 1961 (Isuomah, 2003). In 1992, the Babangida administration set up the Oil Minerals Producing Areas Development Commission (OMPADC) to provide infrastructure for the Niger Delta.

In 2001, former President Olusegun Obasanjo set up a Security Committee on Oil Producing Areas, chaired by Lieutenant General Alexander Ogomudia. The committee recommended short-term, medium-term, and long-term measures (Kuku, 2012) to attend to the problem:

*Short-term measures*

- An upward review of the 13% derivation fund to a minimum of 50%
- Government should enact laws that would make it compulsory for manufacturing companies operating in the delta to produce local content for oil producing communities
- Communities should be made to diversify into agricultural production unique to their environment
- Civic centers should be set up to develop sports and extracurricular activities of youths
- Youths should be mobilized for community development
- Indigenes of oil producing communities must be trained for employment in oil companies
- Provision of marine/coastal mass transit transportation system
- The Eastern Obolo (Akwa-Ibom State), Ayetoro water-way should be dredged
- Police stations should be established in oil producing communities

*Medium-term measures*

- Swamps should be sand-filled to create new towns
- Erosion control
The Amnesty Program

The amnesty program for the Niger Delta derived from the recommendations of the Presidential Panel on Amnesty and Disarmament of Militants in the Niger Delta. The panel was set up on May 5, 2009, to implement the recommendations made by the NTDC regarding the granting of amnesty to Niger Delta militants. Subsequently, President Umaru Yar’adua on June 25, 2009, made a proclamation on the Amnesty for the Niger Delta militants.

The proclamation relied heavily on powers vested in the office of the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria as enshrined in Section 175 of the 1999 constitution:

1. I hereby grant amnesty and unconditional pardon to all persons who have directly or indirectly participated in the commission of offenses associated with militant activities in the Niger Delta.
2. The pardon shall take effect on the surrender and handing over of all equipment, weapons, arms, and ammunition, and execution of the renunciation of militancy forms specified in the schedule hereto, by the affected persons at the nearest collection center established for the purpose of government in each of the Niger Delta states.
3. The unconditional pardon granted pursuant to this proclamation shall extend to all persons presently being prosecuted for offenses associated with militant activities.
4. This proclamation shall cease to have effect from Sunday, October 4, 2009.

The amnesty program proclamation did not compel any of the militants to accept the offer of amnesty. The government signed a contract with only those who voluntarily accepted the offer; and these were later taken through a proper and non-forceful DDR process (Udeme, 2013).

The militants were given a 60-day window period to submit their weapons (i.e., to accept the offer of amnesty). The 60 days were between August 6 and October 4, 2009.

The amnesty program is made up of four components. These are environmental, petroleum, infrastructural, and the DDR subcommittees (Akinnaka, 2013). However, the DDR component has direct bearing on stability and peace in the Niger Delta.

The DDR Process

The DDR process started with the disarmament phase. This involved the voluntary surrendering of arms by ex-militants. Boyloaf from Bayelsa State was the first militant leader to embrace the amnesty program, followed by others, and “between June 25 and 4 October, 2009, some 20, 192 militant agitators had accepted the offer of Amnesty and handed in their firearms and ammunition which were in excess of 20,000 items” (Kuku, 2012:127).
The disarming phase was followed by comprehensive programs such as workshops and incentives aimed at positively transforming the ex-militants. The Kernigan and non-violent program that took place in Calabar in 2009 focused on counseling and attitudinal change while agreements were signed at the Obubra rehabilitation camp. Subsequently, the ex-militants became known as the amnesty program delegates.

The amnesty agreement reached made allowances for the delegates to be given a monthly stipend, the opportunity to live as free citizens, and contest (political participation) and freedom to travel out of the country if they so wished. They also have the opportunity to undergo educational or vocational training, depending on their preference, and these were either within or outside the country.

Results and Discussion of Findings

There have been a number of previous approaches to the Niger Delta problem, before the current intervention. These have been highlighted in other sections of this article. However, a major area in which the amnesty program appears to be different from these other approaches is the introduction of educational and skills training (empowerment) for the amnesty delegates. It is important to note that the Niger Delta struggle was majorly spearheaded by unemployed youths in the region.

Youth can be a phase or time when someone is young. It can also be a young person within a specific age range generally believed to be between 18 and 35. Youth, according to the United Nations Education, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), is a period of transition from the dependence of childhood to the independence of adulthood and awareness of our interdependence as members of a community. A youth is a person between the age where he/she leaves compulsory education, and the age at which he/she finds his/her employment (www.unesco.org/new/en/social-and-human.../youth-definition/).

With this description of youth, it shows that youth is actually not restricted to age.

The involvement of youths in militancy and violence in the Niger Delta can be traced to powerful stakeholders within the conflict zone who hid under the guise of the “struggle” to brainwash young, unemployed youths in the region to fight for what were regarded as genuine grievances by the youths but a means of self-enrichment for their leaders. A respondent in Okonofua (2013) said,

Let me tell you, for many years we fought someone else’s war. They gave us the guns and the bombs. They mark the targets and tell us when to attack . . . They write the messages that we send to the press to threaten or explain an attack. It is their war that we were fighting . . . All those years; we fought their war thinking . . . They gave us the guns and the bombs. They mark the targets and tell us when to attack . . . They write the messages that we send to the press to threaten or explain an attack. It is their war that we were fighting . . . All those years; we fought their war thinking . . .

It can also be traced to the fact that there are many unemployed youths in the region who lacked academic and vocational skills to improve their lives and who, because they were jobless, were ready to take arms against perceived enemies of their communities—the IOCs and the Nigerian state.

Themes

The conflict is generally believed to be as a result of grievances of the people. Both greed and grievance are motivators for armed conflict (Keen, 2000). In this instance, grievance against the state was a major reason why youths in the region took to arms. However, although some schools of thought believe that the conflict came up as a direct consequence of the peoples’ grievances, others say that greed cannot be separated from the struggle, especially because it is believed that most resource-based conflicts in Africa are caused more by greed than by grievance (Collier & Hoeffler, 2004). Greed in conflict is fueled by opportunities available in armed conflict. And in the instance of the Niger Delta crisis, opportunities in terms of recruitment and resources abound because of the allure crude and the availability of able-bodied young people who are poor and who come from dysfunctional backgrounds to be used as instruments of violence. Okonofua (2013) aptly captures it:

It’s easy for some youths to be sucked into the whole militancy game. Many of these boys fend for themselves. They have no education . . . They have no rich father or mother or uncle to look up to. Many of them have no parents.

If the empowerment process fails, there will be more than enough manpower to prosecute violence in the region. A respondent says, “About 80 percent of the ex-militants have not been carried along. There are still many that have not benefited from the program.” If these 80% go back to the creeks, or if they are employed by more powerful third-party stakeholders in the guise of continuing the “struggle,” then there is no hope for peace in the region.

A recent survey conducted by the researcher with beneficiaries of the amnesty program and young people of Niger Delta extraction shows that the people believe that the conflict is majorly about resource control (62.8%) and development (77.6%), and development in this instance includes environmental security and empowerment (57.4%). The survey also indicates that (79%) respondents believe that the amnesty program addressed the agitation of the people of the region (Figure 2).

Environmental security has also been adduced to be a major source of conflict and violence (Homer-Dixon, 1999; Kaplan, 2000 & Klare, 2001) as it can lead to economic, health, and social challenges as it has been the case for the people of Niger Delta.
Peace and Development

Opinions are almost divided equally about the amnesty program as it is currently implemented being able to sustain peace and development in post-conflict Niger Delta. Respondents who believe that it will help achieve sustainable peace are 48%, whereas those who do not believe it will help achieve sustainable peace and development are 46% (Field Survey: 2014). Reasons given for either stand are wide and multi-faceted. Respondents believe it will help achieve sustainable peace basically because of the DDR process. The DDR process involved counseling and training workshops to re-orientate ex-militants, the voluntary submission of arms by ex-militants, and the withdrawal of these arms from circulation, provision of monetary incentive, empowerment programs (education and skills acquisition), and the provision of job opportunities for ex-militants in the future.

All these things have led to the positive transformation of the conflict. As it stands presently, violence has reduced drastically in the region.

Other respondents who do not share the opinion of the previous group gave reasons why the amnesty program cannot spur sustained peace and development in the region as corruption in the process (respondents claim that the process had been hijacked by politicians and funds siphoned through the programme); it is only one component in the program, that is, the DDR, that is effective; the other components that address infrastructural development, environmental degradation, and petroleum have not been tackled with as much seriousness as it had been done with the DDR component. It is believed that the Niger Delta conflict is not about militancy in the region but about core developmental issues as it affects the daily existence of the people. Other reasons given are that not all the ex-militants benefitted from it, and there are still about 80% ex-militants who were excluded. What this portends is that, because the program revolves basically round the ex-militants, the 80% that have been excluded might take up arms in the nearest future and at the slightest excuse.

Educational and Vocational Skills Training

The reason for embarking on educational and vocational skills training as rehabilitation and socialization strategies in the amnesty program (Figure 3) is because, according to a respondent, “it is only through education and skills training that the Niger Delta people can be truly and fully empowered.” With education and skills acquisition, a majority of the youths will become gainfully employed on graduation, and they will be able to provide for themselves and their families. The provision of educational and vocational skills will also keep Niger Delta youths busy and out of the clutches of powerful third-party stakeholders who normally use them to prosecute their own political and personal agenda.

Making use of both education and vocational skills acquisition as instruments of rehabilitation and reintegration of youths is a positive in the DDR process; however, out of the two strategies, respondents prefer education (55.3%, skills acquisition—31.9%, both—12.8%) because there is an almost 70% chance of ex-militants getting good jobs on graduation (IDI: 2014).

Of the respondents, 44.7% feel that empowerment of ex-militants will stimulate peace and development in post-conflict Niger Delta as indicated in Figure 4 below. This is because presently, the level of violence in the region and militancy has decreased as a result of the intervention. The energies of ex-militants who are the major beneficiaries have been re-channeled into other avenues. They have been engaged positively through the empowerment program.

However, it should also be noted that the empowerment will only work if opportunities for employment and setting up their own small scale businesses are provided after training. A respondent shares this view that “provision of jobs for
delegates by the Federal Government . . . that is the only way that lasting peace will be restored in the Niger Delta.”

However, and more importantly, more than half of the respondents (yes—44.7%, no—53.1%, partially—1.1%, no response—1.1%) feel that empowerment is not enough to stimulate peace and development in post-conflict Niger Delta because the problem in the Niger Delta is multi-dimensional (Figure 4). Other areas pertaining to the development of the region, which are very fundamental to the problem, have not been addressed. It is also believed that the program is selective, in that it catered only to ex-militants rather than to the generality of youths in the region; environmental challenges such as gas flaring and improving the lives of the people in the Niger Delta have not been addressed, and allegations of corruption have dogged the entire amnesty program. The only area that the intervention addressed is militancy, and it did not extend to all the ex-militants in the region. This is a major potential problem because other ex-militants who have not benefitted from the program might once again resort to violence and militancy to attract attention and get what they want from the federal government and multi-national oil companies operating in the region. So, from that perspective, the empowerment of ex-militants is not enough to stimulate peace and development in post-conflict Niger Delta.

Corruption

Corruption has been identified as one of the reasons the empowerment process of the DDR component might not work. Of the respondents, 72.4% believe that it will not work, whereas 29.6% feel that it might work.

The program has been dogged by allegations of corruption leveled against some top ranking officials in government and the fact that the amnesty agreement between the government and ex-militants was signed by the ex-generals on behalf of the militants, and a majority of the militants were not privy to the content or details of the agreement, especially the part that pertains to the empowerment process does not indicate transparency in the process. This supports the position of Collier and Hoeffler (2004) that greed is the motivating factor for armed conflict, especially in the Niger Delta. These scholars believe that armed conflicts are mainly caused by the desire of militants to enrich themselves rather than any altruistic reasons.

Conclusion

This article examined the role of the empowerment process in the DDR component of the amnesty program on the successful reintegration and rehabilitation of ex-militants in the region. According to Ball and van de Goor (2006), DDR is “the process of demilitarizing official and unofficial armed groups by controlling and reducing the possession of arms, by disbanding non-state armed groups and rightsizing state security services and by assisting former combatants to reintegrate into civilian life” (www.clingendael.nl/sites/default/files/20060800_cru_paper_ddr.pdf). In line with this submission by Ball and van de Goor, the DDR component of the program was used to disarm, rehabilitate, and reintegrate militant youths in the region. The inclusion of the empowerment of ex-militants in the component has direct bearing on peace and stability in the region because DDR is used to consolidate peace and to promote stability within conflict-affected communities.

As shown in the findings, youths were the perpetrators of violence and militancy in the Niger Delta, and their involvement can be traced to the influence of powerful third-party stakeholders in the region. These powerful stakeholders, which included politicians and elites, incited youths to take up arms against IOCs and Nigerian State. Okonofua (2013) discusses this as triangulation to include the deliberate insertion of youths into stakeholder political and economic disagreements.

Applying triangulation to the Niger Delta conflict suggests that youths involved in militancy were victims of more powerful third-party stakeholders who initially used these youths for political brigandage. Triangulation also helps explain how dysfunctional family systems in the Niger Delta contributed to the upsurge in militant activities in the region. Iwuoha (2012) notes that the activities of oil companies operating in the region and their staff have negatively affected the family system in the region. These activities made a number of women and young girls go into prostitution. “The sex industry in Niger Delta is directly linked to the petroleum industry since it is petroleum company employees and the employees of petroleum related service companies that patronize the prostitutes” (Iwuoha, 2012:25). The women and young girls often gave birth to children for expatriates, many of whom were abandoned. These children often grew up to become instruments of terror and violence, and as
Okonofua (2013) says, youths who often get involved in militancy and violence include those “who have no parents, youths who have extremely poor parents (such that parents lose control over their kids) and uneducated and unemployed youths desperate for some kind of subsistence.”

The involvement of youths in militancy can also be traced to the fact that the region is populated by many unemployed youths who lack academic and vocational skills to improve their lives. The DDR component has tried to address this by providing academic and vocational training opportunities for vulnerable youths in the region.

Other findings indicate that the DDR component is relatively successful, despite the shortcoming highlighted by Okonofua (2013) where he states that the “Niger Delta DDR component of the Amnesty Programme might not achieve the desired results which stakeholders expect or desire because it failed to address the causes of the conflict.” The DDR component, however, has been able to address areas of counseling and training, re-orientate ex-militant, facilitate the voluntary submission of arms by ex-combatants and the withdrawal of these arms from circulation, and put an empowerment process in place. This has spurred the de-escalation of violence in the region. There are concerns, however, that the empowerment process might not fully achieve its objectives if employment opportunities are not provided for these ex-combatants after their training. If the empowerment process fails, then youths in the region might revert to violence and militancy.

There are also concerns that many of the ex-combatants have not been catered for by the program. A respondent says, “About 80 percent of the ex-militants have not been carried along. There are still many that have not benefited from the program.” If these 80% go back to the creeks, or if they are employed by more powerful third-party stakeholders in the guise of continuing the “struggle,” then there is no hope for peace in the region.

Respondents also allege that core developmental issues in the region, which led to the aggravation of conflict, have not been addressed. Theories underscore the importance of environmental factors to resource conflicts (Homer-Dixon, 1999; Kaplan, 2000; Klare, 2001, in Okonofua, 2013). The activities of IOCs had negative effects on the delta people and their communities. Kaplan (2000) in Okonofua (2013) corroborates this statement when he states, “eco-demographic pressures have created numerous emergencies within African states, including poverty and malnourishment, and these challenges have forced many African societies into acts of violence.”

Because environmental factors also contributed to militancy in the region, it is important to nip in the bud issues pertaining to environmental degradation and underdevelopment in the region that might make youths revert to militancy and violence.

Based on the above, this article submits that the empowerment process of the DDR component has contributed to the partial successes recorded in the reintegration and rehabilitation of ex-militants in the Niger Delta. However, the reintegration and rehabilitation can only be considered fully successful if there is no recourse to violence and militancy in the region. To fully achieve peace and stability in the region, ex-militants undergoing training must be provided with opportunities for gainful employment and enabling environments to apply their acquired vocational skills after training, the influence of powerful third-party stakeholders in the region must be whittled down, the impact of political control on the empowerment activities of ex-militants must be investigated and addressed, core developmental issues pertaining to environmental degradation and infrastructural development which might make youths return to militancy should, as a matter of urgency be addressed.

There is still need for further research because of the constantly changing contexts of the conflict. It will be ideal to investigate the consequences of political control, monetization, contracting of pipeline security to ex-militants and political contestation to the success of the amnesty program, and by extension, the future peace and stability of the Niger Delta.

Acknowledgment
The author wishes to acknowledge the contributions of the article editor and the two anonymous reviewers for their roles in improving the quality of this article.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests
The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding
The author(s) received no financial support for the research and/or authorship of this article.

Note
1. The identities of the private universities are not disclosed to protect the identity of the respondents. This is in line with the agreements reached with them by the author.

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