The Niger Delta Amnesty Program: The Challenges of Transitioning From Peace Settlements to Long-Term Peace

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Abstract

The armed conflict between militias and government forces in Nigeria’s Niger Delta region has spanned for more than two decades, defying all solutions. A disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) program was established in August 2015 in effort to end the violence and has remained in place. It is a radically different approach from past approaches that displayed zero tolerance to all political challenges to oil production or the allocation of oil profits. The approach appeared to be immediately successful in that it forced a ceasefire, engaged militants in planned programs to rehabilitate and reintegrate them into civilian society, and opened up the oil wells (many of which had been shut due to the crisis) with the effect of increasing government revenue, which depends 85% on oil exports. Yet, few studies have attempted to understand the dynamics within the country that are responsible for the design and implementation of this broad policy shift or to understand whether and how the current initiative is able to end the conflict and institute peace beyond the short term. This study, therefore, is important because it provides a critical perspective that anticipates and explains emerging issues with the Niger Delta Amnesty Program, which have implications for DDR adaptation and implementation all over the world. Ultimately, the research demonstrates how the DDR program both transforms the Niger Delta conflict and becomes embroiled in intense contestations not only about the mechanism for transforming the targeted population but also whether and how the program incorporates women who are being deprioritized by the program.

Keywords
Niger Delta, amnesty program, DDR, conflict, criminology, social sciences, violence

Introduction

Disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) describes a cluster of post-conflict interventions that is focused on collecting arms, neutralizing combatants, reintegrating legitimate ex-combatants into the armed forces or civilian life, and preventing a return to armed conflict (Pugel, 2009). DDR has been used and has achieved some level of success in mitigating armed conflicts and sustaining peace in many conflict-ridden countries, including Rwanda, DR Congo, Uganda, Ethiopia, Somalia, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Russia, India, and Bosnia-Herzegovina (Banholzer, 2014; Blattman & Annan, 2008; Muggah, 2009; Pietz, 2004; Rolston, 2007). In 2009, the Nigerian government under late President Umaru Musa Yar’Adua established the Niger Delta Amnesty Program (NDAP), which is Nigeria’s version of DDR, in an effort to mitigate the violence that had racked the region since the early 2000s.

The violence in the region is a result of many related factors, especially what Michael Ross (1999, 2001) calls the “resource curse” debate, which describes a rentier culture where resource-rich countries like Nigeria condition themselves (or are conditioned) to depend exclusively on rents and royalties from a natural resource such as oil as a result of which they lose (or withhold) the initiative to govern responsibly, including failing to initiate programs for the economic and social development of their countries or people. Ross (1999) suggests that the resource curse has inspired violence in the delta through its “repression” and “modernization” effects. In terms of the former, the Nigerian government through its direct control of huge oil assets is able to bankroll excessive military expenditures that are deployed aggressively against opposition to oil excavation or the warped distribution of oil revenue, inspiring defiance among a segment of the population. In terms of the modernization effect, oil revenue/profit forces the state and its corporate allies to focus on energy sector jobs to the detriment of other sectors, especially agriculture thereby making poverty,
unemployment, and food insufficiency mobilizing logics of cult gangs and politicians, leading to large scale violence.

Thus, oil and gas wealth has become a curse in Nigeria due to the social, economic, and political instability as well as policy failures they engender (Robinson, 2006). For example, from 1970 to 1999, oil constituted between 21% and 48% of gross domestic product (GDP) and generated about $231 billion USD for the Nigerian economy. Between 2000 and 2004, oil accounted for 79.5% of total government revenue and about 97% of foreign exchange (United Nations Development Programme, 2006). Yet, the increase in oil wealth did not translate into improved standard of living for Nigerians, especially people of the Niger Delta. Instead, increases in poverty and inequality rates coincide with the discovery of oil and with increases in oil production and oil earnings. According to Sala-i-Martin and Subramanian (2003), in 1965 when oil revenue was about $33 per capita, GDP per capita was $245. But in 2000 when oil revenue had increased to $325 per capita, GDP per capita remained at the 1965 value of $245. Similarly, in terms of purchasing power parity (PPP), Nigeria’s per capita GDP was $1,113 in 1970 but had fallen to $1,084 by 2000. Higgins (2009) argues that evidence such as this leads to the conclusion that Nigeria had suffered from the “resource curse.” Waste, corruption, fiscal irresponsibility, political instability, and poor policy formulation and implementation had become the legacies of the country’s globally acclaimed oil wealth and the veneer of the protracted violence in the delta region.

The issue of resource curse also encapsulates the tension between environmental security, resources, politics, and violence in the delta. Generally, interest in the environment and conflict concatenates around two antiquated ideas: demographically induced scarcity and environmental agency. Since the 1990s, there has been a dramatic increase in interest in the environment as a source of political conflict and as the Cold War security problematic (M. Watts, Okonta, & Kemedi, 2004). Interest in these issues peaked after the publication of Tad Homer-Dixon’s (1999) “Environment, Scarcity and Violence,” Robert Kaplan’s (2000) “The Coming Anarchy,” and Michael Klare’s (2001) “Resource Wars.” These works and many others which focus on the environment raise questions concerning environmental degradation, rehabilitation, and conservation. For example, Kaplan in “The Coming Anarchy” suggested that Africa is affected by severe environmental changes that results from improper exploitation of natural resource wealth. These changes or “eco-demographic” pressures from oil spills, have impoverished, undernourished, and encouraged ordinary people, many of whom were displaced from farmlands, to engage in egregious acts of violence.

Similarly, Khan (1994), Karl (1997), and Coronil (1997) have examined politics dominated by oil revenue and the mechanisms through which rent-seeking produce what M. Watts et al. (2004) call “petrol regimes.” M. Watts et al. (2004), for example, observe that oil rent in Nigeria have historically sustained a “parasitic ruling elite” and enabled the state to fraudulently purchase political consent from exploited minorities while maintaining the “delicate northern hegemony within a competitive multi-ethnic polity” (p. 4). Consent is obtained through a derivation principle that distributes oil rents and royalties to states, and this is complicated by massive institutional corruption. Related to this is Paul Collier’s (2000) “predation” argument in which he suggests that oil-resource dependency encourages and enables powerful people to prey on oil assets and oil revenue, becoming the basis of the protracted violence in the delta. It is the opportunity or feasibility of predation by both governments and militias that inspires violence and ensures that conflicts are never fully resolved.

Finally, ethnicity, particularly the mobilization of ethnic identity has frequently added fuel to the delta conflict. Studies by Mamdani (2000) and M. Watts et al. (2004) suggest a relationship between Nigeria’s post-colonial political structure and the Niger Delta violence. The studies highlight the role that a large (and expanding) federal government, severely weakened states, over-indulged ethnic majorities, and marginalized ethnic minorities play in the delta conflict. For example, Mamdani suggests that cultural indigeneity has become the basis of ethnicity and identifies the multiple ways by which ethnicity is invented and reinvented within the arena of oil politics, often leading to conflict. M. Watts et al. suggest that local forms of community and the mobilization of ethnic identity within these communities have been critical components of the social relations of oil extraction. The way that these relations are forged, negotiated, and reconfigured (including land use and reform, customary laws, territoriality, contact with oil companies, and forms of identification: ethnicity, gender, age, chieftaincy, and clan-ship) and particularly linkages to forms of traditional authority and locally specific forms of capitalist development, have played important roles in the delta’s conflict landscape.

The above factors as well as others produced a new type of resistance movement in the delta. Whereas in the past, resistance to oil production took the form of ideological struggle, aimed at both deconstructing and reconstructing mainstream ideas about the state, the delta’s people and resources, and the logics of oil wealth appropriation and distribution; the new resistance movement is existentialist, showcasing not just the visceral antipathy of the people toward the governance motions of the state but also the location of militias, their sponsors, and members in the entrenched, convoluted rent-seeking distributional coalitions that privilege individuals and groups that are proximate to the political state. Unlike the past resistance that was led by intellectuals like the late Kenule Saro-Wiwa, the Ogoni playwright and activist who was judicially murdered by the Sani Abacha military junta, and which targeted the state, oil majors, and the broader system of mercantile capitalism, the new resistance is led by cult gangs in alliance with politicians and target the state, oil majors, rival cult gangs, and anyone who poses a threat to their clandestine interests. Irrespective of who the target of the new resistance
is, the armed struggle produced, within relatively brief compass, countless deaths as well as unquantifiable economic and social losses (Okonofua, 2011, 2013).

Considering the above and in response to the apparent intractibility of the violence, the government of President Yar’Adua believed that the continued deployment of soldiers and reliance on force to subdue opposition to the prevailing oil regime, including the system of production (that indiscriminately pollutes the delta ecology), allocation of oil mining rights (that discriminates against delta communities), and distribution of oil revenues and profits (that increased the visceral hate for oil majors and the government among local people), would be ineffectual. In place of force, the government established the NDAP: a comprehensive system of dialogue, rehabilitation, and development. Specifically, the NDAP will demilitarize the Niger Delta by encouraging militias to surrender their arms and weapons, break the links between fighters and their militias, reintegrate fighters into civil society by providing them with appropriate social skills, provide direly needed but sorely lacking social and economic infrastructure for the entire region, and restore full oil production activities in the Niger Delta to avoid the looming national economic disaster. The NDAP commenced on August 6, 2009, and was expected to and has been eagerly touted as helping to end or significantly reduce the violence (Ajibola, 2015; Ikoh & Ukpong, 2013; Oluduro & Oluduro, 2012; Sayne, 2013). But the question is, has the NDAP truly ended or significantly reduced the violence?

From the start, the program was conceptualized as a one-stop shop for all activities related to restoring peace to the troubled region. With this broad agenda, however, came enormous ambiguity about the specific purposes, processes, mechanisms, and expected outcomes of the program. The ambiguity or lack of clarity was exacerbated by the government’s apparent failure to incorporate mechanisms or a strategy for assessing the program’s performance and effectiveness, which is a major deficit considering that ambiguous strategic planning throughout a programming and implementation cycle may undermine desired outcomes (Pugel, 2009). This study is conceived as a sort of post-hoc corrective of this deficit by using survey results of program participants as proxy to systematically assess the performance of the NDAP. This will reveal existing gaps between outputs and outcomes, if they exist. More specifically, the study moves beyond what Pugel (2009:70) describes as the “paradigmatic benchmark of DDR success,” which determines DDR success by whether or not a state relapses into war, to focus on whether the program addresses the conditions of dual or multiple sovereignty (Tilly, 1973) that gave rise to the violence in the first place.

There are several reasons why this approach is important. First, research in social psychology and anthropology shows congruence between reintegration success and several factors, including exposure to violence (Dyregrov, Jested, & Rundle, 2002; Husain et al., 1998), age (Richards, Archibald, Bah, & Vincent, 2003), and gender (Mazurana, McKay, Carlson, & Kasper, 2002). Beyond these, however, scholars who have reviewed the literature on demobilization and reintegration are yet to find systematic theories about the conditions under which some combatants but not others will give up their arms and reintegrate into civilian life (Humphreys & Weinstein, 2009). In particular, most efforts to engage the Niger Delta violence have been largely partisan, sensational, emotional, and lacking in empirical and theoretical depth; making it almost impossible to contextualize both the violence and the NDAP or to give the issues theoretical nuance. This study uses John Paul Lederach’s (1997) conflict transformation theory to explain the extent (and conditions) of the NDAP success as well as to frame the general conditions and contributions of DDR interventions in building peace in conflicted African communities.

Second, while selective amnesties like the NDAP are used indiscriminately to form terms of peace settlements and to keep societies racked by armed conflict from slipping back into conflict (Collier et al., 2003; Doyle & Sambanis, 2000; Muggah, 2009), there is great skepticism about their performance in the broader scheme of things, especially given the potential for uneven, short term, and/or unsystematic funding and engagement of these programs. Because of these concerns, there is clearly the need for a thoughtful examination of the NDAP to document what elements operating within or outside of the program contributed to the observed outcomes, which can provide lessons that may support or improve the implementation of this or similar programs. This would offer the best opportunity, yet, for developing distinctive theoretical and practical approaches required to effectively end resource-based conflicts, build sustainable peace, and enable the integrated development of communities affected by armed conflict all over Africa.

Finally, the violence, which appeared to abate immediately following the implementation of the NDAP, has steadily resurfaced, especially in the offshore and many believe that with the outcome of Nigeria’s 2015 presidential election, which did not favor Goodluck Jonathan, the incumbent who is from the region, the violence will resurface on a grand scale. It has, with the Niger Delta Avengers blowing up pipelines and sabotaging oil assets, critically impacting the country’s oil output. Yet, the NDAP was conceptualized and idealized as the long-term solution for the delta “problem” that will survive any presidential administration. In addition, managers of the program as well as top officials of the Nigerian government have been enthusiastically celebrating the “wonderful” successes of the program, which others, especially opponents of the Jonathan government criticize as a huge drain on the country’s resources and incapable of delivering the type of outcomes attributed to it. Considering the above, but especially the vast contributions of time, money, and resources invested by the Nigerian government and other stakeholders in efforts to entrenched long-standing peace in the delta, this study is tremendously important as it offers a means to understand how and where the investments
are being applied as well as whether or not the intervention is achieving the impact in the community that the government and other stakeholders desire.

**Theoretical Framing**

This analysis of the NDAP may be discussed theoretically under the sign of conflict transformation. The theory offers a framework to discuss not only the cause(s) of the Niger Delta conflict but also the appropriate mechanisms for changing the complex conflict dynamics of the delta. Using this approach, it is trite to perceive the NDAP as being wedged in the middle of a major conceptual rift: a historical legacy of ecological abuse mixed with structural violence that has spurred enormous rage, protests, and violence, and the need for order in light of contemporary realities, especially dwindling oil revenue and the potential impact of the delta violence on Nigeria’s economic and political stability. For the NDAP to produce long-standing peace, it must anticipate and engage the host of forces, including cresive structural fissions that gave rise to the conflict in the first place.

Conflict transformation theory is relatively new in the field of peacebuilding. However, the core of the theory draws on many of the familiar concepts of conflict management and conflict resolution. Because of its ideological linkage to these, conflict transformation is not entirely seen as a new approach but as a re-conceptualization of the field to make it more relevant to contemporary conflict situations (Miall, 2004). This re-conceptualization is imperative due to changes in the nature of contemporary conflicts. For example, most contemporary conflicts occur within national boundaries impelled asymmetrically by structural conditions, including inequities of power and resource appropriation and distribution. Also, as Smith (2004) observes, many contemporary conflicts are protracted and marked by sporadic periods of violence and peace. In this case, conflict occurs in waves—rising precipitously until some accommodation is reached and then falling off dramatically (almost to the point that there is a marked absence of conflict) and then rising again. Protracted conflicts not only upset social equilibriums but also ultimately distort society, creating complex emergencies.

The conflict transformation approach embodies three distinct theoretical motions: conflict management (Bloomfield & Reilly, 1998), conflict resolution (Deutsch & Coleman, 2000), and conflict transformation (Lederach, 1995). Conflict management has been defined by Bloomfield and Reilly (1998) as the positive and constructive handling of difference and divergence. Rather than advocating methods for removing conflict ... addresses the more realistic question of managing conflict: how to deal with it in a constructive way, how to bring opposing sides together in a cooperative process, how to design a practical, achievable, cooperative system for the constructive management of differences. (p. 18)

For theorists and practitioners working within this tradition, violent conflicts result from differences in values and interests embedded within the structure of society. Because these differences are entrenched within macro and micro social structures—historical experiences, institutional relationships, resource appropriation and distribution, existing power coalitions, racism/ethnicity/tribalism, egos, and so on—they cannot be eradicated. The best society can do is to manage the conflict and prevent it from escalating in such a way that it potentially disrupts the smooth running of society. Occasionally, as Miall (2004) points out, it may be possible to arrive at a historic compromise resulting in the temporary abandonment or suspension of violence to allow peace to thrive temporarily. The goal of conflict management, therefore, is to achieve political settlements leveraging the resources of certain key actors that are powerful enough to exert pressure on the conflicting parties to settle or to guide the inevitable conflict into appropriate channels.

Conflict resolution theory, unlike conflict management theory, focuses on intervention by skilled but powerless third parties operating outside of the political system who enable conflicting parties to understand, explore, analyze, question, reframe, and synthesize their positions and interests. Theorists working within this tradition denounce the systemic approach of conflict management theorists as ineffectual and incapable of resolving conflicts because they ignore the communal and identity depths from which conflicts spring. They argue that people involved in identity-based conflicts are often unwilling to negotiate compromise; instead, the roots of the conflict must be explored to evolve creative resolutions that the conflicting parties may have missed due to their previously entrenched positions. Therefore, conflict resolution essentially involves helping the parties of conflict to transition from zero-sum destructive engagements to positive-sum outcomes (Deutsch & Coleman, 2000). Lederach (2003) has criticized this approach because of the sense of “definitiveness” or “finality” about it and because its language “implies finding a solution to a problem.” Thus, instead of building “something that is desired,” it fixates on “ending something that is not desired” (p.17). Conflict transformation focuses on how to build the type of peace that all stakeholders desire. Thus, conflict transformation extends conflict management and conflict resolution theories beyond the mere reframing of positions and the identification of positive outcomes to include concern with creating a new system, process, or approach that consolidates and leverages the gains from ending a conflict into building peace. Defined by Lederach (2003) as envisioning and responding to “the ebb and flow of social conflict as life-giving opportunities for creating constructive change processes that reduce violence, increase justice in direct interaction and social structures, and respond to real-life problems in human relationships” (p. 18), it investigates the nature of the conflicting parties, including their operational structures, historical experiences, and relationships that extend conflicts beyond
specific sites. According to Miall (2004), it is a “process of engaging with and transforming the relationships, interests, discourses, and, if necessary, the very constitution of society that supports the continuation of violent conflict.” By interrogating and affecting these domains (i.e., both episodes of conflict such as the actual fighting and the epicenter of conflict such as the web of relational patterns, including the history of lived episodes from which new episodes of conflict emerge), conflicts may be transformed from their virulent, destructive form to situations amenable to all conflicting parties.

I use the principle components of the conflict transformation theory to evaluate the NDAP in order to determine whether it is able to transcend the delta’s conflict episodes and interrogate the epicenter or the core of the conflict. The enormity of the forces at play in the delta, especially the region’s strategic importance to global energy production and the costs of the NDAP intervention, demands this type of assessment.

Literature Review

Origin of the NDAP

The Niger Delta region, the heart of Nigeria’s oil production activities, is one of the most diverse regions in the world in terms of human, animal, and plant life (Okonofua, 2013). The region covers a distance of about 270 miles along the Atlantic Coast and stretches for about 120 miles inland, and is described as the largest wetland in Africa and the second largest in the world after the Mississippi. The region also contains the largest oil deposits in Africa and some of the highest quality oil in the world. It is the delta’s oil, which indubitably has unprecedented economic and geo-strategic significance and value (M. Watts et al., 2004) and associated relationships, especially being the mainstay of the Nigerian economy (Ikein, 1990; Khan, 1994; P. Watts, 2000) that dominated discussions about the region, at least, until the early 2000s.

Since 1956 when oil was first discovered in commercial quantities in Oloibiri, a small rural community in Bayelsa state, an estimated US$1 trillion has been generated from oil exports not including the many billions generated clandestinely from the illegal trade in stolen crude (Okonofua, 2013). Yet, the region is one of the most polluted in the world with daily oil spills, the size of the Exxon-Valdez oil disaster in the United States as well as effluent deliberately discharged into the environment, polluting the delta’s ecology and killing fauna, fish species, and land animals and dramatically reducing the region’s limited stock of arable land. This situation has dislocated millions of local peoples from the local industry (typically farming and fishing) and displaced millions more who are forced to migrate to cities where they have limited skills and resources to survive. Thrust correspondingly into artificial dependent and unproductive relationships in urban shanties and hyperghettoized neighborhoods, millions of the delta’s people, who are some of the poorest people in the world, have developed low self-worth and fatalistic attitudes that lend themselves to the violent defiance of constituted authority. On some occasions, the defiance has acted out as manipulative violence against social objects, especially persons in identical conditions of miserable poverty. Thus, it is the unremitting economic, political, social, and environmental marginality of the people that is the veneer for the militia violence in the Niger Delta. The fight, arguably over control of oil resources, lucrative oil contracts, illicit patronages, and correspondingly stupendous wealth, has come to replace the delta’s significance as an oil-bearing region in global headlines and in discussions about the region.

Between 2002 and 2009, the Delta became what John Keane (1996) calls a “zone of violence,” which describes a gradual but precipitous slide into what the U.S. State Department calls “political chaos.” M. Watts et al. (2004) argue that the chaos strikes at the heart of Nigeria’s political future; a future blighted by unmitigated environmental disaster, dilapidated infrastructure, unremitting poverty and disease, huge debt burden, and legacy of mismanagement and corruption. The human costs of the conflict, including loss of life, socio-economic disparity, rising gender inequality, educational decline, high levels of poverty and disease, and many less tangible costs, have been very high. Also, because of the violence, an estimated 750,000 barrels of crude oil out of the nation’s daily supply of 2.2 million barrels were shut in, and more than 300,000 bpd (or barrels per day) were deliberately discharged into the environment, further depleting the fragile eco-system of the Niger Delta.

It was ostensibly to cut the oil losses and the corresponding steep decline in revenue that the Nigerian government, under the leadership of late President Shehu Musa Yar’Adua inaugurated the NDAP. The president’s move may have been nothing more than a pacifist strategy designed only to guarantee access to the delta oil wells, shore up oil revenues, and mitigate some of the human costs of the conflict, and not toward any meaningful long-term solution to the violence. In exchange for a surrender of arms and a pledge to end the fighting, combatants were to receive amnesty (or freedom from prosecution), rehabilitation, and reintegration into civilian society. In addition, the government was to institute an elaborate program of political and social reforms and economic reconstruction, a huge departure from its prior zero tolerance policy to all legitimate or illegitimate challenges to the authority of the political state. The government’s reversal of its policy of non-negotiation, which may have been informed by mounting evidence (Collier, Hoeffler, & Rohner, 2006; Humphreys & Weinstein, 2009; Lederach, 1997; Muggah, 2009; Ukeje, Oddebiyi, Sesay, & Aina, 2009) that traditional approaches and instruments for dealing with intra-state armed conflicts are inadequate or too ill-suited to effectively address the multifaceted causes of these conflicts, especially in deeply divided states like Nigeria, is certainly refreshing, but opens up debate about what specific interventions may now be applied successfully to reverse the delta violence.
**DDR Interventions and the Challenge of Peacebuilding**

Although many organizations, including multilateral and bilateral agencies, continue to prioritize democracy and governance as key to long-term stability in Africa, many shorter term mechanisms for conflict prevention and peacebuilding are assuming growing importance (Muggah, 2009). Selective amnesties, smart sanctions, and interventions such as DDR are increasingly being used to form terms for peace, to keep post-conflict societies from slipping back into conflict, and to stimulate economic growth and development (Doyle & Sambanis, 2000). Paradoxically, as investments in such conflict prevention and peacebuilding initiatives are growing, there are increasing doubts about whether they are capable of achieving the outcomes desired or the successes attributed to them. For example, critics claim that DDR programs are too often narrowly conceived, inflexible, technocratic, bureaucratic, and detached from the political transition or broader recovery and reconstruction strategies (Muggah, 2009). Because of these concerns, scholars seek more evidence that DDR can achieve what is expected and often is ascribed to it. Although Collier and Hoeffler (2004), Berdala (1996), and Muggah (2009) argue that the chances for DDR success increase when they are undertaken in collaboration between national governments and national and international agencies, the reality is that many interventions are planned and implemented locally or nationally without input from critical segments of society.

From a political economy perspective, DDR encapsulates the strategic and bureaucratic priorities of the security and development sectors of a state. Because of this, Nigeria’s adoption of DDR to solve the perennial Niger Delta violence ought to stimulate discourse about the policy priorities of the Nigerian government and particularly its political class or governing elites toward genuinely addressing the structural challenges of the delta. If according to Duffield (2007), DDR is at the heart of neo-liberal forms of power and governance, how is the Nigerian government using the NDAP to alter the conflict dynamics of the delta, including providing visibility for a government that is mostly absent except when extracting rent or as part of a “broader ‘Weberian’ project of securing the legitimate control of force” from combatants on behalf of the state (Muggah, 2009, p. 2)?

Contemporary DDR approaches typically consist of a series of carefully designed and phased activities aimed at creating a suitable environment that would encourage stability and development. Advocates of DDR believe that the three components of the program (disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration) interlock and are mutually reinforcing activities. Disarmament has been defined as the collection of small arms, ammunition, explosives, and light and heavy weapons from combatants and at times from civilians with the goal of reducing the number of weapons in circulation (Nillson, 2005; United Nations [UN], 1999). Because the relinquishing of weapons, which are typically tied to the identity of the combatant is often traumatic for combatants, the disarmament process is first and foremost a confidence-building exercise (Hithcock, 2004). DDR advocates argue that disarmament is a critically important component of peacebuilding, but emphasize the generation of visible and tangible evidence of success in terms of arms and munitions collected. Yet, they recognize that this component alone is incapable of providing the desired outcomes and must be complemented with parallel activities such as demobilization, reintegration, economic reconstruction, confidence and security enhancing activities, and the promotion of democracy and the rule of law (Muggah, 2009; Spear, 2006). Although, disarmament when undertaken with concrete verification mechanisms and when arms are actually destroyed has the potential for building confidence in the peace process among belligerents, it is more beneficial for ex-combatants due to improved socio-economic and political conditions to abandon their desire to acquire weapons to press their demands.

Demobilization on its own, like disarmament, can potentially generate unintentional security dilemmas (Collier & Hoeffler, 2004). Demobilization is seen as the process of disconnecting combatants from their armed groups or units or significantly reducing the number of combatants serving in armed units (Berdala, 1996; Hithcock, 2004; Nillson, 2005) with the objective of giving back to the state its monopoly of violence. Governments emerging from war frequently demobilize ex-combatants from their militias before reintegrating them into the military or civilian communities. Yet, demobilization is often misunderstood and implemented as a substitute for disarmament. Thus, when governments have disarmed ex-combatants, they have construed this as demobilizing them when, in fact, the ex-combatant remained firmly imbedded in their organizations and the structures used by these organizations to create violence. In this sense, it becomes even more challenging for the state to achieve full reintegration of ex-combatants because reintegration may only occur after ex-combatants have been disarmed and demobilized from their prior militias or from the individuals that were part of those militias. There is high possibility that ex-combatants who remained partially organized within their existing command structures can play the role of peace spoilers as happened in Sierra Leone in 2000. In some cases, Knight and Ozerdam (2004) suggested that ex-combatants unintentionally reinforced latent command structures, especially when precautions to prevent this from happening were not adopted in advance. In contrast, if ex-combatants were too hastily demobilized especially when the process failed to adequately dismantle command and control structures as happened in Angola, they could trigger insecurity in the communities of return (Spear, 2006).

Reintegration, which is defined as the political, economic, and social integration of ex-combatants, their families, and primary support network into civil society (Nillson, 2005), is a critically important component of DDR interventions and takes several forms: political integration (in which ex-combatants,
their families, and support structure become part of the decision-making process of their communities; economic integration (in which ex-combatants, their families, and support system are enabled to develop their livelihoods); social integration (in which local communities accept ex-combatants, their families, and primary support system as members of the community). Muggah (2009) argues that the challenges accompanying reintegration into either category are immense. Depending on the context, the process is often heavily politicized and the absorptive capacities of communities for civilian reintegration are often greatly limited (Azam, Bevan, & Collier, 1994). Conventional DDR, therefore, envisions a continuum that extends from a narrow minimalist (establishing security) to a broad maximalist (incorporating development) perspective (Jennings, 2008). The minimalist approach, according to Muggah (2009), is “focused on expedience, where the program aspires less to creating a lasting impact on the lives of ex-combatants and more to time-limited gains” (p. 23) such as removing weapons, cantoning ex-combatants, and generally fulfilling the terms of peace agreements. Although the broad strategic goals of the minimalist approach includes reducing the likelihood that war will occur, the micro objectives focus on de-linking the command and control of armed groups. In contrast, the maximalist approach “implies a more ambitious, transformative reintegrative agenda” (Muggah, 2009, p. 23) to include more ambitious interventions. They seek not only to rehabilitate ex-combatants but also to reinforce public institutions and their legitimacy by promoting markets, property rights, and socio-economic and political infrastructures. Maximalist approaches are able to achieve the goals partly by redressing distortions in state spending and promoting policies and activities that stimulate economic growth and enhance human capacities and endowments.

But despite the great enthusiasm about DDR, especially its utility in conflict prevention or post-conflict intervention, a body of critical literature that questions and challenges core DDR assumptions is emerging (Jennings, 2008; Pouligny, 2004). A major concern is that DDR glosses over the complexity of conflict and programs or interventions are artificially grafted onto volatile conflict and post-conflict societies. Case studies (Humphreys & Weinstein, 2009; Pugel, 2009), for example, demonstrate the genuine risks that accompany the imposition of DDR interventions from the top, especially if they are divorced from the political, social, and economic context in which violence or conflict is imbedded. Muggah (2009) suggests that DDR is “too often resorted to in a knee-jerk fashion and launched in such a way that it is isolated from the broader clutch of processes associated with governance, state consolidation and economic recovery” (p. 3). Apart from this, critics also quarrel with the conceptual dimensions of certain aspects of DDR, especially the aspect that concerns the reintegration of former combatants (Jennings, 2008; Pouligny, 2004; Willibald, 2006). They contend that generic approaches to reintegration are inadequate for dealing with the heterogeneous and differentiated motivations of armed groups, which is why combatant-centric approaches to reintegration, like the NDAP, misfire completely. Thus, these critics who specifically target the rational choice models and monetary incentives, such as payments to combatants that dominate the field, argue that DDR investments should be directed, instead, to more inclusive or area-based programs that focus on employment, infrastructural development, and economic growth.

Finally, critics and practitioners worry that DDR lacks clear benchmarks or metrics to determine success. Muggah (2009) argues that while this is also true of other development interventions initiated by multilateral and bilateral contributors in complex environments, the “fact that DDR deals specifically with weapons and armed groups suggests an extra layer of caution is warranted” (p. 3). This extra layer of caution is warranted more so in the Nigerian context, where the intervention was imposed from the top with little or no contribution from below and considering the multiple ambiguities associated with its conceptualization, implementation, and management.

The Challenge of DDR in Nigeria

Although the Nigerian government has been commended for reversing the obtuse policy of non-engagement with insurgents that stood for more than five decades and through 11 administrations, there is great suspicion that the Nigerian government’s DDR program is capable of engaging the wider context of the conflict. In fact, there are strong indications that the government’s conceptualization and implementation of the DDR program is on all fours with historical criticisms of DDR interventions broadly speaking (see Humphreys & Weinstein, 2009; Jennings, 2008; Muggah, 2009; Pouligny, 2004; Pugel, 2009). For instance, the government’s framing and conceptualization of DDR and economic reconstruction isambiguous and contradicts theories of peacebuilding (Collier, 2001; Collier et al., 2006; Knight & Ozerdan, 2004; Lederach, 1997, 2003, 2005; Reychler, 2008; Spear, 2005; M. Watts et al., 2004). The lack of conceptual clarity about program goals or processes has the potential to confuse program implementers, ultimately producing negative outcomes (Reychler, 2008). Because of this, the NDAP may be incapable of delivering peace beyond the short term.

For example, the government’s framework for disarmament and demobilization was inadequately specified. It was articulated as the return of arms and the dissolution of armed groups. One problem with this simplistic conceptualization is that it did not properly anticipate or articulate potential risks with disarmament and demobilizing ex-militants. As scholars observe, it is common for ex-combatants to rearm themselves to take advantage of expanding political opportunities (Alden, 2002; Gamba, 2003; Mehlum & Ragner, 2002; Spear, 2006) and fighters who did not enter DDR may recruit rearmed former fighters to cause trouble (Mehlum & Ragner,
been shown to display difficulties in reconciling with their communities especially in cases where such communities were intensely victimized during the conflict. This was the case in Angola where ex-combatants belonging to the Jonas Savimbi National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) engaged host communities in violence following the implementation of DDR (Nilsson, 2005).

Also, after being disarmed and demobilized, some categories of ex-combatants (especially women, children, and disabled ex-combatants) constitute a weak and marginalized group in need of economic, psychological, and social assistance (Nilsson, 2005). This situation is often exacerbated by wartime illnesses that continue to plague ex-combatants in post-conflict periods. This was the case in Uganda and Ethiopia where a large portion of the demobilized combatants were HIV/AIDS positive (King, 2000). Similarly, the war between Ethiopia and Eritrea produced about 18,000 disabled ex-combatants in Ethiopia alone (Colletta, Kostner, & Wiederhofer, 2004; Collier, 1994). Apart from these, there is also the need to pay serious attention to political reintegration as the failure to incorporate ex-combatants into the political mainstream can provoke violence. This was the case in Mozambique where demobilized guerrilla fighters from the Mozambican National Resistance (RENAMO) were shut out of the political process and reacted with violence (Nilsson, 2005). These reintegration challenges provide the rationale for understanding how reintegration is conceptualized and implemented in this DDR program and whether these have any impact in altering the conflict landscape of the Niger Delta. This study has the potential to develop a useful definition of reintegration that encapsulates the entire complex of economic, social, and political reintegration and that potentially roadmaps the effective reintegration of ex-combatants in the Niger Delta.

Finally, studies of the Niger Delta conflict implicate economic cleavages (i.e., poverty, unemployment, etc.) for the conflict (Okonta & Douglas, 2003; Osaghae, 1998; Osaghae et al., 2007; Saliu et al., 2007; P. Watts, 2009; M. Watts et al., 2004). Yet, the government’s economic reconstruction plan is expressed fully as activities for ex-militants rather than as targeted macro outcomes. This minimalist approach (Muggah, 2009) that ignores the wider context of the conflict may have little impact in reducing the conflict related risks or in positively altering the conflict dynamics. Moreover, the parlous economic conditions of Niger Delta people are caused and exacerbated by the indiscriminate oil excavation procedures by oil companies that pollute the Niger Delta ecology, killing animal and fish species and rendering the soil infertile. Yet, the conceptualization of economic reconstruction was ominously silent on how economic reconstruction will be performed, what specific projects will be undertaken, and how the revenues bases of communities and people which were disrupted both by oil production and the resulting violence will be regenerated.

Considering the above and in the light of suggestions by Howard Wolpe and Steve McDonald in their 2008 article “Democracy and Peace-Building: Rethinking the Conventional
Dependent variables.

The dependent variables for this study are adult females, out of which 86 were married, 75 have children, and identify as former combatants and entered the NDAP. The sample comprises of 224 adults from the delta region who entered the NDAP \( (n = 224) \). Only the survey data acquired at baseline of combatants who entered the NDAP \( (n = 122) \) through face-to-face computer-assisted interviews. In-depth interviews with important stakeholders, including government officials, community leaders, academics, activists, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), as well as secondary open source data comprising interviews conducted with managers of the NDAP, oil executives, and combatants complemented the surveys. Only the survey data acquired at baseline of combatants who entered the NDAP \( (n = 224) \) are analyzed in this study. This sample comprises of 224 adults from the delta region who self-identify as former combatants and entered the NDAP between 2009 and 2011, including 201 adult males and 23 adult females, out of which 86 were married, 75 have children younger than age 17, and 166 were ethnic Ijaws.

Method

The peacebuilding literature generally asserts the influence of DDR programs in ending conflicts and entrenching peace. Yet, the literature appears to be silent about the specific aspect(s) of DDR that contributes peace. This study attempts to fill this gap. The prospective study began in the fall of 2010 and focused on two categories of principal actors: combatants who entered the NDAP and those who did not. A baseline sample of 346 combatants was drawn from combatants who entered the NDAP \( (n = 224) \) and combatants who did not enter the NDAP \( (n = 122) \) through face-to-face computer-assisted interviews. In-depth interviews with important stakeholders, including government officials, community leaders, academics, activists, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), as well as secondary open source data comprising interviews conducted with managers of the NDAP, oil executives, and combatants complemented the surveys. Only the survey data acquired at baseline of combatants who entered the NDAP \( (n = 224) \) are analyzed in this study. This sample comprises of 224 adults from the delta region who self-identify as former combatants and entered the NDAP between 2009 and 2011, including 201 adult males and 23 adult females, out of which 86 were married, 75 have children younger than age 17, and 166 were ethnic Ijaws.

Independent variables. Several indicator variables were used in the regressions, including whether respondents entered the NDAP, ethnicity, community exposure to pollution, length of involvement in militancy (TIMEINV), benefits enjoyed as members of militant groups (INGROUP), and state of residence. Additional independent control variables included dichotomous measures for gender and marital status.

Analysis. For this study, SPSS v22 logistic regression analysis estimating a linear trend from the observations for each person and then modeling the intercepts and, particularly, the slopes in a regression on individual- and community-level characteristics was used to test the main hypotheses. The operations are performed hierarchically and framed in terms of the effect of adding predictor variables to a base equation. The base equation regresses the outcome variables on several predictor variables in phases or steps and then evaluates the amount of the incremental explained variance by subtracting the squared multiple correlation in the base equation from the squared multiple correlation in the expanded equations. The difference in the squared multiple correlations is the amount of incremental explained variance due to the additional predictors.

Results

Tables 1 and 2 present the results of this study. Due to concerns with space and brevity, only the final models are presented, but it should be understood that the hierarchical operations for each outcome variable generated three results.
corresponding to the variables included in each phase of the operation. For all outcome variables, the final models, which include outputs for all of the independent variables are the best models based on the simultaneous measure of sensitivity (true positive) and specificity (true negative) for all possible cutoff points. In addition, I present both the Beta values, which are in log odds and predict the outcome variable from the predictor variable and their exponential values $\beta$, which are in brackets and are the odd ratios for the predictors. Although Beta tells the amount of the increase (or decrease if the sign of the coefficient is negative) in the predicted log odds of the outcome variables, the $\beta$ reports the odds ratio for the predictors.

Table 1 presents results for the first 3 outcome variables for the study: DISARMED (which measures disarmament), DEMOBILIZED (which measures both demobilization and social reintegration), and REINTEGRATED (which measures economic reintegration). All outcome variables are predicted from seven independent variables: STATE (state of residence), MARRIED (marital status), COMEXPO (community exposure to oil pollution), INGROUP (comparing conditions outside to militias), TIMEINV (time spent in militias), ETHNICITY, and GENDER. The results for disarmament shows that MARRIED, INGROUP, and TIMEINV are significant predictors of successful disarmament. Thus, married ex-combatants and ex-combatants who had spent more than 5 years (compared with those who had spent less than 5 years) in their militias have significantly lower odds of rearming themselves in pursuit of their objectives, controlling for all other variables. Conversely, ex-combatants who feel they are worse off outside the militias than inside have significantly higher odds of rearming themselves to pursue their objectives. State of residence, community exposure to pollution, ethnicity, and gender do not contribute anything of significance to the model.

| Variables  | Disarmament | Demobilization | Reintegration |
|------------|-------------|----------------|---------------|
| STATE      | $-0.138\times10^{-1}(871)$ | 0.063(1.065)** | $-0.169(845)$ |
| MARRIED    | $-0.841(431)**$ | 0.995(2.705)** | 2.629(13.861)* |
| COMEXPO    | $-0.271(762)$ | 0.465(1.593) | 0.041(1.042) |
| INGROUP    | 0.809(2.246)** | $-1.036(355)**$ | 1.105(3.31) |
| TIMEINV    | $-0.1215(297)**$ | 0.956(2.602)** | 0.900(2.459) |
| ETHNICITY  | 0.548(1.730) | 0.105(1.111) | 0.141(1.152) |
| GENDER     | 0.593(1.809) | $-2.285(102)**$ | 1.161(3.194) |
| $N$        | 224         | 224            | 224           |
| $-2\log$ $\text{likelihood}$ | 262.822 | 249.272 | 249.272 |
| Nagelkerke $R^2$ | .195 | .233 | .232 |

Note. NDAP = Niger Delta Amnesty Program.
*p < .05 **p < .01.

Table 2. Estimated Odds Ratios From Logistic Regression Analyses of Self-Reported Outcomes of the NDAP’s Transformation Credentials Among Participants.

| Variables  | NDAP’s Potential for non-violence | NDAP’s potential long-term success | NDAP’s potential for transformation |
|------------|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| STATE      | $-0.024(977)$ | $-0.100(905)$ | 0.174(1.190) |
| MARRIED    | $-0.799(450)*$ | $-0.303(739)$ | $-0.871(419)*$ |
| COMEXPO    | 0.171(1.186) | $-0.172(842)$ | $-0.125(883)$ |
| INGROUP    | 0.369(1.446) | 0.608(1.836)* | 1.413(4.109)** |
| TIMEINV    | $-1.268(281)**$ | $-0.653(521)*$ | $-1.293(274)**$ |
| ETHNICITY  | 0.153(1.165) | 0.831(2.296)* | $-0.124(883)*$ |
| GENDER     | 1.101(3.006) | 0.241(1.272) | 0.513(1.671) |
| $N$        | 224         | 224            | 224           |
| $-2\log$ $\text{likelihood}$ | 5,261.596 | 282.326 | 235.919 |
| Nagelkerke $R^2$ | .162 | .102 | .234 |

Note. NDAP = Niger Delta Amnesty Program.
*p < .05 **p < .01.
In terms of demobilization, married ex-combatants as well as ex-combatants who spent more than 5 years in militias have significantly higher odds than unmarried ex-combatants and those who have spent less than 5 years in militias to demobilize and reintegrate into civilian society. Conversely, ex-combatants who feel worse off outside than inside the militias and females have significantly lower odds of demobilizing and reintegrating into civilian society, controlling for all other factors. Finally, married ex-combatants have significantly higher odds of reintegrating economically (i.e., getting a job) than unmarried ex-combatants, controlling for all other variables. All other variables in the model are not significant and contribute nothing to the model.

Table 2 above presents the results of the last set of outcome variables: FUTVIOL, LONGTERM, and TRANSFORMED; all a function of participating in the NDAP. The results, which are presented below are very illuminating. In terms of ex-combatants potential future resort to violence, the results show that married ex-combatants had significantly lower odds than unmarried ex-combatants to revert to violence, controlling for all other variables. Similarly, ex-combatants who had spent more than 5 years in their militias had significantly lower odds of reverting to violence in the future than ex-combatants who had spent less than 5 years in militias, controlling for all other variables. All other variables were not significant and, therefore, cannot contribute toward the prediction of ex-combatants future recourse to violence.

The result for the outcome variable LONGTERM, which measures ex-combatants conviction that the NDAP will be able to achieve long-term peace for the region, is also illuminating. Of all seven predictor variables, only INGROUP, TIMEINV, and ETHNICITY are significant predictors. Thus, ex-combatants who feel they are worse off outside the militias than inside them and non-Ijaw ethnicities in the delta have significantly higher odds of believing that the NDAP will not be able to achieve long-term peace for the delta, controlling for all other variables in the model. Conversely, ex-combatants who had spent more than 5 years in their militias have significantly lower odds of believing that the NDAP will fail to achieve long-term peace in the delta compared with ex-combatant who had spent less than 5 years in militias prior to entering the NDAP.

The survey results also have very interesting findings in terms of the overall transformative character of the NDAP. The odds that ex-combatants will continue to espouse violence for the settlement or resolution of disputes with the state/oil companies are significantly lower for married ex-combatant than singles, for ex-combatants who had spent more than 5 years in militancy than those who had spent less than 5 years, and for ex-combatants who are ethnic Ijaw than other Niger Delta ethnic nationalities, controlling for all other variables. Conversely, ex-combatants who feel they are worse off outside the militias than inside them have significantly higher odds of continuing to espouse violence for conflict/dispute resolution, controlling for all other variables in the model.

Discussion

The primary purpose of this study is to examine the NDAP to determine whether or how well it contributes to establishing long-lasting peace in the Niger Delta. My interest in the Niger Delta peace process stems from the observed negative effects of prolonged violence on Niger Delta communities as well as earlier interest by researchers in the program and non-program effects of DDR on protracted conflicts. For example, Humphreys and Weinstein (2009) focused on the individual-level determinants of demobilization and reintegration in Sierra Leone, showing that wealth, education, age, gender, and ideology were significant determinants of successful demobilization and reintegration in that country. Similarly, Pugel (2009) assessed the impact of DDR on post-conflict reintegration and demobilization in Liberia and found significant empirical evidence to support the conclusion that former combatants who entered the Liberian DDR program and completed a course of reintegration training, reintegrated more successfully than former combatants who chose not to enter the program but reintegrated on their own. Although these studies yielded useful results, they both focused on demobilization and reintegration. DDR as conceptualized by the UN and acknowledged by scholars, including Humphreys and Weinstein (2009) and Pugel (2009) involves three related activities: disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration. Understanding DDR outcomes can only be complete if all aspects are examined.

The literature depicts DDR as an important effective strategy for ending protracted armed conflicts or for preventing a return to conflict in post-conflict societies (Doyle & Sambanis, 2000). Studies of post-conflict demobilization and reintegration show that ex-combatants who enter DDR programs are more likely to remain non-violent than ex-combatants who disarmed, demobilized, and reintegrated on their own (Humphreys & Weinstein, 2009; Pugel, 2009). Yet, there is skepticism that DDR achieves what is increasingly ascribed to it. Critics argue that DDR programs are too often narrowly conceived, inflexible, technocratic, bureaucratic, and detached from the political transition or broader recovery and reconstruction strategies (Muggah, 2009). As a result of concerns such as these, policy planners seek more evidence that DDR programs are effective at ending protracted conflict and establishing peace in the long term. More importantly, policy makers seek information about what aspects of DDR, either alone or acting in concert with other program and non-program factors, account for DDR outcomes. This study is one response to that quest.

The results of the study are consistent with widespread views about the status of the Niger Delta violence and scholarly views about the NDAP. Without doubt, the NDAP within relatively short time affected the violence in many positive ways and its achievements have continued to be asserted by former and present managers of the program and by academics (Ajibola, 2015). But, if it is considered that as much as 60.7% of this study’s respondents believe that the NDAP will
be unable to entrench long-standing peace, 90.6% are unemployed, and 82.6% believe that the current unemployment situation in the delta is worse than before the NDAP was instituted, then, program managers and the government must exercise caution in touting the success of the NDAP. Moreover, 99% of this study’s respondents admitted that their organizations only submitted a fraction of their arms, which means that the militias continue to maintain the ability to engage in armed violence despite participating in the NDAP and receiving all of the benefits of participation, including monthly reintegration stipends and huge oil pipeline security contracts from the state. If this is analyzed in relation to the fact that the NDAP deliberately routes the payment of reintegration allowances or stipends through the militias (Okonofua, 2011, 2013), effectively rendering the demobilization aspects of the program defective from the start, then, the weakness of the NDAP in terms of its ability to entrench long-term peace should become glaring.

The result of the logistic regression is consistent with the above but goes a step further to illuminate certain aspects of the NDAP, especially revealing the type of combatants that are more likely to disarm, demobilize, and reintegrate than others. It also shows the type of ex-combatants that are more or less likely to view the NDAP as potentially a long-term success and capable of transforming ex-combatants from purveyors of violence to individuals vested in peaceful settlements and peace processes. Perhaps, this is the main contribution of this research, which will enable scholars, policy makers, program managers, and DDR intervention analysts to target intervention to particular vulnerable groups. The results particularly suggest that DDR participants should not be considered as symmetric but asymmetric, in which case certain individuals, cohorts, or groups may have more capacity than others to internalize DDR processes and have their behavior modified accordingly.

More specifically, the results for disarmament or the likelihood that participants will acquire more weapons in future to pursue their objectives show strongly that married ex-combatants as well as ex-combatants who had more than 5 years’ experience in militancy are more likely to disarm than others. This is not surprising; many ex-combatants have detailed the very treacherous conditions under which combatants lived in the swamps of the Niger Delta during the peak stages of the violence (Okonofua, 2013). The mean conditions of the camps and the uncertainties involved in their violent campaigns against a brutal Nigerian Army must exert a huge toll on combatants and their families. The tolls are heavier, however, for married combatants who are alienated from their wives (or husbands) and children. Thus, this category of former fighters is more likely to seize opportunities for peaceful settlements and to not desire to rearm in pursuit of some future objectives. It is also not surprising that the people who are more likely to rearm themselves are ex-combatants who enjoyed better conditions as militants than they are getting from the NDAP. For instance, after John Togo, the leader of the Niger Delta Liberation Front (NDLF) entered the NDAP, he discovered that he was better off (economically) as a fighter than as an ex-combatant. Because he lacked direct contact with the leadership of the political state, he was deprivileged from the intricate patronage coalition that had been formed to strengthen relations between certain influential ex-combatants and top Nigerian officials. He promptly left the program, rearmed his group, and began to engage security forces in hostilities. This is consistent with the literature where ex-combatants have rearmed themselves and broken the terms of peace accords due to their desire for material gain (Alden, 2002; Gamba, 2003; Mehlem & Ragner, 2002; Spear, 2006).

The observed disarmament pattern is similar to the observed pattern for demobilization. The study finds that married ex-combatants and combatants who had spent more than 5 years in militias are more likely to disarm than unmarried ex-combatants and ex-combatants who joined militias less than 5 years before entering the NDAP. Also, ex-combatants who feel that conditions within their militias (where they had considerable opportunities to make huge sums of money through kidnapping for ransom, crude oil theft, and other criminal enterprises) were better than the post-NDAP conditions as well as female ex-combatants are less likely to demobilize and reintegrate into civilian society than others. As with John Togo, many ex-combatants, particularly those in the smaller organizations, were deprivileged in the patron–client system of the NDAP. The NDAP privileged relations with the more influential insurgents such as Mujahid Asari-Dokubo, Ateke Tom, and Government Ekpemupolo (Tom Polo) over relations with some less influential militia commanders. The more influential militia commanders became beneficiaries of huge security contracts and made more money from engaging the peace than from continuing to fight. Thus, unless ex-combatants are able to replace the war incomes that they lose from embracing peace, they are more likely to maintain their former command structures and to resume fighting at the slightest provocation. Moreover, because the NDAP did not explicitly seek to delink or disconnect former fighters from their erstwhile groups as scholars recommend (Berdala, 1996; Hithcock, 2004; Nillson, 2005), but in fact maintained these groups, it unwittingly created conditions unfavorable to the effective demobilization of ex-combatants.

Even more worrisome than the above is the fact that the NDAP, from the very beginning, appeared to deprivitize women in the scheme of things. In the first phase, the NDAP admitted only 133 (0.6%) women out of the 20,192 ex-combatants who entered the program. The small number of women admitted into the program is certainly not reflective of the rate of participation of women in militancy in the region or of women’s involvement in civil wars generally (Nillson, 2005; Ortega, 2009). For instance, about 30% of the Sandinista army in Nicaragua and between 25% and 30% of the guerillas in El Salvador were women. Thus, the finding that female ex-combatants are less likely to demobilize and reintegrate into Niger Delta communities may be
suggestive of the fact that the NDAP deprioritizes women who are also likely to receive less reintegration support than males. There are several likely reasons for this. First, female combatants are not considered to pose the same level of threats as male combatants. As a result, men have always been given priority in terms of reintegration assistance (Colletta et al., 2004; IPRI, 2002; Nilsson, 2005). Second, female combatants in the Niger Delta live in masculinized societies with gendered institutions and symbolic systems. As a result, female ex-combatants are often alienated for breaching “societal norms,” which do not glorify women warriors. Because of this, many female ex-combatants are reluctant to disclose their status and fail to reintegrate through DDR. Instead, they often reintegrate into prostitution and drug addiction, or reemerge as mercenaries in another conflict (Bernard et al., 2003). Third, female ex-combatants may be constrained by gender-specific obstacles in the post-conflict period because they tend to have less access to knowledge, skills, information, resources, work opportunities, and support structures than males (Nilsson, 2005). Because of these gender-specific discriminations, female ex-combatants often feel empowered by war and may not want to return to their traditional roles, which in most instances affirms men’s gender power over women. Yet, the failure to accommodate women in DDR programs and to effectively demobilize and reintegrate them into society may create unanticipated consequences as was the case in Eritrea where the divorce rate for married ex-combatants rose to 27% (King, 2000) or in Chad, Namibia, and Nicaragua where domestic violence rate involving female ex-combatants spiked significantly.

For economic reintegration, the study finds that married ex-combatants are more likely to gain employment than unmarried ex-combatants. Perhaps this is so because they benefit from scale, which in this case means that married former fighters are likely to have much larger social networks (when their spouses’ networks are factored) for getting a job. This expanded network may open doors that unmarried ex-combatants are unable to access and with such economic access, married ex-combatants are less likely to want to return to insurgency. The reintegration challenges of Niger Delta ex-combatants are not novel in themselves. Azam et al. (1994) showed that reintegration programs are often heavily politicized leading to the marginalization of groups crucial to the peace process. For example, the failure to accommodate the interests of RENAMO dissidents in Mozambique spurred another round of fighting even after the peace agreement had been signed (Nilsson, 2005). Not only has this program defect prevented the proper absorption of potential spoilers into the program but has also given ex-combatants the opportunity to reorganize latent command structures as happened in Sierra Leone in 2000. And as Knight and Ozerdham (2004) have argued, even where ex-combatants did not intentionally set out to reorganize latent command structures, the fact that program managers and influential politicians were deliberately creating bottlenecks for would-be repentant combatants was an incentive to reorganize and reactivate violence.

In terms of ex-combatants’ overall assessment of the NDAP, the results also show some interesting dynamics. For instance, ex-combatants who identified as ethnic Ijaw are more likely to hold favorable views of the NDAP, specifically believing that the NDAP will succeed in establishing long-term peace in the delta, although they are less likely to be transformed by the NDAP than members of other ethnicities. This finding suggests that Ijaw former fighters, because they share ethnicity with ex-President Goodluck Jonathan, have been the main beneficiaries of the NDAP. The top managers of the program, from Timi Alaibe (the pioneer coordinator of the program) to Kingsley Kuku (the immediate past program coordinator) are mainly Ijaw who are also the dominant ethnic group in the region and in the NDAP. Thus, they are more likely to view the program as a success. However, because Ijaw communities continue to experience the negative effects of oil production, including poverty and unemployment disproportionate to their role in generating much of the nation’s wealth, Ijaw former fighters are less likely to be transformed by the NDAP. Thus, if the program is discontinued, Ijaw former fighters are more likely than other groups to revert to violence to pursue their goals.

Finally, like the first set of variables tested, marital status, time invested in militias, and ex-combatants perception of their situation outside of their militias compared with situations within their militias are important factors to consider in assessing the overall performance of the NDAP. In context, this would suggest as, indeed, Lederach (1997) has urged that a more holistic approach that accounts for conditions in the community (i.e., poverty, pollution, disenfranchisement, etc.) must be adopted to gain any credible, long-term benefit from the NDAP.

Conclusion

The NDAP was instituted at a time of great social, political, and economic ferment and trepidation. Since its inception, the program has had measured impact on the violence, helping to bring about the fragile peace existing in the region today. The peace is fragile because while the NDAP drastically reduced the onshore violence in the delta, the violence shifted to the offshore where oil assets are daily being sabotaged by former fighters and fighters who refused to enter the program including new parties that entered the violence after the adoption of the NDAP, particularly after the 2015 presidential election. This study validates the little success achieved by the NDAP but shows that the potential for violence to return is high. If violence returns, many former fighters who are presently participating in the NDAP will get involved, especially the more inexperienced former fighters, women, unemployed former fighters, and those who benefitted more from waging than engaging the NDAP-induced peace.

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.

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