

Amnesty Programme and Youths' Empowerment in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria: A Critical Appraisal

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Abstract: *This study is on Amnesty programme and Youths' empowerment in the Niger Delta region of Niger. The federal Government of Nigeria had introduced this Amnesty programme to curb youths' restiveness which had prevailed in the Niger Delta region before the late President Yar'Adua's administration. An important part of this Amnesty programme is youth empowerment. The extent to which this Amnesty programme has empowered the youths of this region constitute the broad objective of this study. Specifically, the research sets out to determine whether the Amnesty programme has been effective in training and creating jobs for the youths of the Niger Delta region. The study relied on Marxian Political economy approach as a theoretical framework. Using qualitative method anchored on secondary means of data collection. The study reveals that though a lot of youths from the Niger Delta region has benefited from the training programmes packaged by the Amnesty office, the modality of selection and placement is still marred with controversy. Further, a lot more of the youths of the region especially the non-militant youths are completely left out of the scheme. This sends a wrong signal to the up-coming youths across the country. It is therefore recommended that government need to deepen the programme to accommodate the non-militant youths of the region, ensure transparency and fairness in the process of enlistment and placement and systematically address the salient issues that necessitated the breach of peace that was witnessed in the region.*

I. Introduction

Amnesty Programme is an initiative of Nigeria's Federal Government aimed at curbing youths' restiveness in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria and revamp revenue accruing to the Federation Account via oil exploitation in the region. This became necessary following sustained attacks on oil installations in the Niger Delta region by militant groups operating in the region. Before the introduction of the Amnesty programme, the Niger Delta region had become very volatile with rising insecurity. This manifested in forms of bunkering, hostage takings, bombardment of oil installations etc. Essentially, the activities of violent groups in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria had led to the initiation of the Amnesty Programme for the militants in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. The Amnesty Programme entails 'Disarmament', 'Demobilization', and 'Reintegration'. Recall that the militancy was ostensibly a war against the Nigerian state and the multinational corporations, whose oil exploration had orchestrated severe environmental degradation, stifled the industries in the region which were agro-based and necessitated terrible poverty amongst the people of that region. A lot of the youths resolved to get back from the multinationals and the Nigerian government what had been stolen from them. This resolve of these youths was fuelled by the fact that the activities of the multinational corporations have not only affected negatively, their means of livelihood but the government's apparent nonchalance to the plight of people of that region. According to Niger Delta Human Development Report (2006), "*Long years of neglect and conflict have promoted especially among youths a feeling of a bleak future, and thus see conflict as a stratagem to escape deprivation.*" This led to the growth of criminal activities in the region which ranged from armed robbery, bunkering, kidnapping and full blown militancy. More so, the successive Nigerian administrations and the multinational companies who are the beneficiaries of the oil exploration in the Niger-Delta region had not shown sincere purposeful efforts in tackling the socio-economic, health and infrastructural problems prevalent in the region. Rather, the Nigerian government employed repressive measures with the tacit influence and support from the multinational corporations to contain the emerging agitations in the Niger-Delta region of Nigeria. This manifested in the following actions of successive Nigerian governments: The Umuechem Massacre of 1990 (African Concord, 1990; Suberu, 1996), the Ogoni genocide (The News May, 1993; Suberu, 1996) the execution of Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight other Ogoni leaders in 1995 by the Military government of late Gen. Sani Abacha (Olubayo, 2012), the Odi Massacre of 1999 (Aghalino, 2009), the Odioma killings in 2005 (Aghalino, 2009) and Gbaramatu Massacre of 2009 (Adebayo, 2009), to mention but a few incidents in the Niger-Delta region. Any of these Niger Delta communities visited with the state wrath usually come out with sore tales of woes. Lives were wasted, properties destroyed, women raped, and a lot more of the people displaced or forced into exile (See Oshionebo, 2009; Ekine, 2008). These greatly shaped the mentality of the youths in the Niger-Delta region who began to perceive their environment as war zone. This much was inferred by Oshionebo (2009), in the following words:

... the government cracking down with the strong support, active influence and connivance of the oil multinational corporations (MNCs), which reached a crescendo with extra-judicial hanging of the Prize nominee Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight other kinsmen in November 1995, by the infamous government of the maximum ruler – General Sani Abacha...

The scholar observed that the resultant effect was the outbreak of armed conflicts in the area, abduction and kidnapping of oil workers, especially the expatriates. This was gravitating into a very alarming proportion when late President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua's administration initiated the Amnesty Programme for the militants in the Niger-Delta region of Nigeria. It had become very clear to the Nigerian government and even the multinational corporations that the use of brute force was not achieving the much desired result given the fact that increasing number of the youths of that region were buying into the militant life-style as the only means of survival. This is anchored on the belief that despite the fact that they (the Niger-Delta people) are the goose that lay the golden eggs, their farmlands and seas can no longer offer them any meaningful means of livelihood, while foreigners cart away the proceeds of their land unabashed. Watts (2008) noted, "Almost 90 percent of the local inhabitants of the Niger Delta fall below the poverty line of \$1 dollar per day as they depend on the aquatic resources for their livelihoods". Apart from this, a very large percentage of the youths are not educated and therefore cannot compete with the more educated youths from other parts of the country for very limited vacancies elsewhere. So, the risks of militancy and the threats posed by the Joint Task Force (JTF) then made no difference from that posed by poverty, hunger, deprivations and frustrations.

Prior to the proclamation of this Amnesty Programme in 2009, the Nigerian government had in the past attempted to introduce some palliative measures intended to douse tension in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. According to Ukiwo (2010), "several developmental initiatives have been taken by the Nigerian government to enhance the socio-economic development of the region, such as the establishment of development boards, provision of basic infrastructural facilities etc". It is however pertinent to note that much as those initiatives were laudable, they failed to achieve the desired result because of endemic corruption and poor approach to the root causes of the militancy in the Niger Delta region. The Amnesty Programme therefore was intended by the Yar'Adua's administration to heal wounds, suit fraying nerves, and reconcile the militants, and indeed the people of Niger Delta with the State for a sustained and hitch-free exploitation of the resource endowment of the region. The Yar'Adua administration, in line with this therefore proclaimed Amnesty in June 2009 for the militants in the Niger Delta region, who had been at war with the state, in exchange for disarmament, rehabilitation and reintegration into the society. One incontrovertible fact is that this Amnesty programme was intended to curb criminal activities prevalent in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. These ranged from all forms of armed violence, kidnapping, robbery, bunkering and militancy. In this work, we shall be looking at the Amnesty Programme and Youths' Empowerment in the Niger Delta region, to determine whether the Amnesty programme has emowered the youths of Niger Delta region of Nigeria.

Statement of Problem:

Since the introduction of Amnesty programme by Nigeria's Federal Government as a means of resolving the militancy in the Niger Delta region, scholars have done quite a lot in studying the Amnesty programme and its tendency to resolve the militancy in the Niger Delta Region. Most of the studies had focused on the devastating effects of the militancy in the Niger Delta region on Nigeria's economy, (Akinwale, 2010; Amaize 2011; Ogege, 2011), Nigeria's corporate existence (Osaghe, Ikeleghe, Olarinmoye & Okhonmina, 2011; Ako, 2011), and on Nigeria's foreign relations (Nwajiaku 2010; Ukiwo, 2011). Emphasis had been on the impact of oil prospecting in the region on the prevalent industries within the region (farming, fishing, etc), on the environment, (Mahler, 2010; Obi, 2010; Dadem, 2009), the restiveness of the people, the attitudes of the multinational towards the people, the apparent neglect of the region by successive administration and the need to find ways of ameliorating the problems emanating from crude oil exploration and exploitation on the people of Niger Delta region, vis a vis the corporate existences of Nigeria (Allen, 1999; Ekine, 2008; Ibaba, 2011; Ikelegbe, 2011).

High rate of unemployment among the youths of the Niger Delta is a major reason for the growth and spread of militancy in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. The Amnesty programme is time bound and is approaching its time limit. One aspect of the programme deals with Youths' Empowerment. This is necessary because when the youths are gainfully employed, the lure to violence/militancy will be minimized. Whether the government is actually doing enough in this critical aspect of the Amnesty programme constitute the problem of this study.

Thus, nearly half a decade into the implementation of the Amnesty programme, its impacts on youths' empowerment in the Niger Delta region has not received significant attention. Given the fact that this programme is billed to end by 2015, it becomes necessary to assess how the programme has fared in terms of empowering the youths of the Niger Delta region. Upon this backdrop, this study is intended to critically evaluate the Amnesty Programme of the Federal Government of Nigeria as introduced by the previous

administration (Late President Yar Adua) and continued by the present administration (President Goodluck Jonathan), as it affects youths' empowerment in the Niger Delta region of the country. To achieve this, the following *Research Question* was posed:

- 1) Has the Amnesty Programme of Nigeria's Federal Government been able to empower the youths of the Niger Delta region?

Objectives of the Study:

The broad objective of this study is to determine whether the Amnesty Programme of the Federal Government of Nigeria has been able to address the problem of unemployment among the youths in the Niger Delta region.

The specific objectives of this study include the following:

- To determine whether the Amnesty programme has been effective in facilitating training programmes for the youths of the Niger Delta region.
- To ascertain if the Amnesty programme has addressed the problem of youths' unemployment in the Niger Delta region.

Significance of the Study:

This study has both theoretical and practical significance. Theoretically, this study will surely enrich scholarship as it is going to fill a yearning gap in literature regarding the Amnesty programme and Youths' Empowerment both in the Niger Delta region and Nigeria in general. The study will definitely contribute to knowledge as it concerns the Amnesty programme and Youths Empowerment in Nigeria. The study will provide research material for studies in Amnesty, Youths' Empowerment and related areas.

Practically, this study will be very useful to the Federal Government of Nigeria as it would provide an insight into the performance and challenges of the Amnesty programme especially as it affects Youths' Empowerment and the best way of tackling same. The study will x-ray the implications of Amnesty programme on the Niger Delta region, thus, serving as a guide to policy makers in the country. It will also be very useful to the multinational corporations operating in the Niger Delta region especially in determining their Corporate Social Responsibilities [CSR] and the environmental impact control measures.

II. Literature Review

This study examines the impact of the Amnesty programme of Nigeria's Federal Government on youths' empowerment in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. It is pertinent to note that the Amnesty programme was an initiative of Nigeria's Federal government aimed at solving daunting security challenges in the Niger Delta region which was threatening national income. Accordingly, the aim of this review is to examine pertinent literature with respect to the following research question in order to locate a gap in the literature:

Has the Amnesty programme successfully empowered the youths of the Niger Delta region?

Owing to paucity of literature assessing the impact of the Amnesty programme on youths' empowerment programmes in the Niger Delta region, this review will encompass the pre-amnesty efforts of Nigeria's government to assuage the feelings and empower the people of Niger Delta region, the imperative of this Amnesty programme and the modalities adopted to demobilize the youths and facilitate skill acquisition/training programmes for the youths of that region. Obviously, scores of writers had written on the Amnesty programme, especially as it concerns its efforts and strategy for the demobilization and reintegration of the ex-militants in the Niger Delta region. According to Interagency Coordination report (2009), in an attempt to stem the tide of debilitating security challenges in the Niger Delta region, the Nigeria's Federal Government on September 8, 2008 inaugurated 'The Technical Committee on Niger Delta region.' The then President, late President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua adopted the Amnesty programme for the Niger Delta militants as recommended by the 'Technical Committee' as a way of arresting the security challenges in the region. The Amnesty programme recommended by the committee entails 'Disarmament', 'Demobilization' and 'Reintegration' into the Nigerian society (DDR). It is comprised of two phases. The first phase would include the 'Disarmament' and 'Demobilization' while the second phase entails the 'Reintegration' which is often times referred to as the post amnesty phase.

The Interagency report cited above maintained that the 'Disarmament' is the process through which the arms, ammunitions and all the war devices used by the militant groups are recovered or mopped up as a way of disarming the youths of those dangerous weapons used to met-out terror and take oil workers hostage. The report maintained that a time frame to surrender their weapons and enlist in the Amnesty programme was given to the militants. It was recorded that at the end of the disarmament period of 60 days, 2760 guns of different caliber, 287, 445 round of ammunition, 18 gun boats, 763 explosives and 1090 dynamites caps were recovered (Wikipedia, 2009).

The next in line according to the Interagency report (2009) was 'Demobilization'. The Interagency report (2009) explained that this involved registration and gathering of necessary information from those who have voluntarily surrendered their arms and other instruments of militancy. This phase prepare the ex-militants for re-integration into the normal society through training to equip them with skills and requisite education and entrepreneurial support. To achieve this, camps were opened to admit the ex-militants, documentation, identifications, counseling and training on non-violence behavior were carried out for effective transformation of the ex-militants (See AllAfrica.com, 2008). The last is 'Reintegration' of the ex-militants in social and economic sphere of the society. This is done through the involvement of government institutions and all stake holders including the civil society groups. The emphasis is on social and economic initiatives necessary to encourage the ex-militants to develop and deploy their potentials into some lucrative economic ends. The ex-militants are thus placed on schools and skill acquisition programmes of their choices based on the outcome of the counseling and classification reports. In line with this, "the Amnesty office has successfully placed a total of 17,500 out of the 26, 358 ex-militants who accepted amnesty and have been enrolled for degree and vocational skills acquisition training programmes in Nigeria and abroad" (Pointer, 2011).

According to Mosop (2008), The Technical Committee on Niger Delta recommended the following for effective realization of the Amnesty programme.

- A: Establish a credible and authoritative DDR institutions and processes including international negotiator to plan, implement and oversee the DDR programme at regional, state and local government levels.
- B: Provide for open trial and release on bail with a view for eventual release of Henry Okah and others involved in struggles relating to the region.
- C: Grant Amnesty to all Niger Delta militants willing and ready to participate in the DDR programme.
- D: Address short term issues arising from amnesty to militants by promoting security for ex-militants and rebuilding of communities destroyed by military invasions.
- E: Work out long term strategies for human capacity development and reintegration of ex-militants.
- F: Reflect on a time-line with adequate fund for the DDR programme to take place.
- G: Stop the illegal demands put on youths from the region by prosecuting the suppliers of small arms and light weapons and also those involved in oil bunkering by identifying highly placed sponsors of violence for economic and political reasons.
- H: Exclude from amnesty and criminalize the activities of those militants not committed to the DDR process and unwilling to surrender their arms.
- I: Ensure that signatures to the DDR programme show clear commitment to the entire process.

These are targeted at solving the precarious security situation in the Niger Delta region which had degenerated to such an extent that the region began to attract global attention. In addition to that, the security situation in the Niger Delta region had begun to weaken the Nigeria's economic base (Ogege, 2011; Akinwale, 2010; Idowu, 2012; Etekpe, 2012). According to the scholars mentioned above, given the fact that oil has become the mainstay of Nigeria's economy, the incessant abduction of oil workers, especially the expatriates of the multinational oil companies had began to stall oil production and affected negatively the income level of the Nigerian Government such that government had no other option but to seek immediate solutions to the problems so that oil production could return to normalcy or improve.

To strengthen this the rationale, Otite and Umukoro (2011) note that prior to 'Oil' exploration/exploitation in the Niger Delta region, Nigeria relied on products like coal, cocoa, rubber and other agro-based products for foreign exchange earnings in the country. These created a lot of employments and engaged the youths including those from the Niger Delta, in very useful ventures mainly revolving around agriculture until the activities of the multinational oil companies began to impoverish the region and its people. Further, Olatoke and Olokooba (2012) maintained that the huge income that began to accrue to the Nigerian state upon oil exploitation led to the neglect of the other sectors of the economy and created unimaginable inequality in the incomes of oil and non-oil workers especially in the Niger Delta region. The scholars also argued that in addition to this, the impacts of oil exploration and exploitation on the environment, on the prevalent industries within the region (i.e. fishing and farming), and on the psyche of the people was so adverse that within a short period, overwhelming number of the population began to perceive the multinational corporations operating within the region as enemies. The youths consequently began to brace up for war and mobilize themselves against this perceived common enemy. Placing the blame squarely on leadership failure, Olatoke and Olokooba (2012) posit that:

The collapse of social values, failure of leadership, and neglect of the youth is now a current problem in Nigeria. This vice now increases the spate of unemployment, abject poverty, illiteracy, frustrations and the resurgence of many militant and terrorist groups in different parts of the country.

For Saro-Wiwa (1995), First of all, oil exploration and exploitation orchestrated unemployment and abject poverty in the region. This was done through various means among which are: the environmental

degradation and pollution which rendered farmlands useless and destroyed aquatic life via oil spillages. The prevalent industries (fishing and farming) which had provided gainful employment for the youths of that region was badly affected. In his words:

We in Dere, a community in Ogoni today are facing a situation which can only be compared to that of a civil war....the ocean of crude oil had emerged, moving swiftly like a great flood, successfully swallowing up anything that comes its way; crops, animals, etc....There is no pipe borne water and yet the streams, the only source of drinking water is coated with oil. The air is filled with crude and smells only of crude oil. We are thus faced with a situation where we have no food to eat, no water to drink and no air to breathe.

The aforementioned scholar led a non-violent agitation for redress and empowerment in the Niger Delta region prior to his demise which saw the eruption of militancy in the region.

Etekepe (2012) noted that the activities of these groups continued to gather momentum as more youths of the region continued to identify/enroll in the militant activities owing to its 'gains'. Militancy became a lucrative business. The militant activities, even though very risky, provided quick cash to the members thereby providing income comparable to those of the oil workers who were intimidating (*oppressing*) them with ostentatious lifestyle. According to him, the militant activities reached a crescendo in the year 2008 when it grossly affected the national revenue, leading to a drop from 1.2 million barrels per day in 2004 to about 0.80 million barrels per day in by the first quarter of 2009 (Etekepe; 2012). This compelled the Federal Government to take a more serious step to curb militancy in the region. Etekepe (2012) observed that before the Amnesty programme, the Federal Government in the year 2004, made attempts to buy over the prominent leaders of these militant groups like Ateke Tom and Asari Dokubo by paying to them, the sum of \$2,000 for each of the 360 AK-47 they surrendered to the government. But this failed to stop militancy and other earlier measures of government to checkmate the rise of militancy in the Niger Delta region date back to the Willinks Commission of 1958 set up by the colonial administration to proffer solution to the issues arising from the agitations of the minorities over economic and political structural imbalance in Nigeria.

Otite and Umukoro (2011) Also pointed out that as early as 1962, the Niger Delta Development Board (NDDDB) was set up to serve in advisory capacity and provide government with information that would lead to the alleviation of the plight of the area in conjunction with the Development Act of 1961. According to him, the reports of the NDDDB died with the first republic following the military intervention of 1966. He argued that from then till 1989 when the military government of General Ibrahim Babangida set up the Oil Minerals Producing Areas Development Commission (OMPADEC), nothing meaningful was done with respect to the agitations of the Niger Delta region. All the same, this commission (OMPADEC) failed to actualize its objectives owing to allegations of corruption. Otite and Umukoro (2011) further opined that the military administration of late Gen. Sani Abacha worsened the injury of the Niger Delta region by executing Ken Saro Wiwa (MOSOP leader) and other Ogoni elders for championing the course of the Ogonis of the Niger Delta region. For them, even the establishment in the year 2000, by President Olusegun Obasanjo, of the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) in an attempt to ameliorate the perceived injustice perpetrated on the people of Niger Delta region could not abate the spread and allure of militancy. The scholars contend that seeing that the commission was not delivering the goods as desired, a whole ministry was created in 2008 to address developmental issues in the Niger Delta region. According to them, these steps failed to assuage the feelings of the Niger Delta people as these were easily hijacked by the politicians who constitute an infinitesimal percentage of the population thus living the greater percentage of the people in the cold, especially the youths who are at the centre of the militancy. The Nigeria's government therefore came up with the Amnesty programme for the militants of the Niger delta region.

Contributing to this, Okonta and Douglas (2003) explained that, oil exploration and exploitation in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria resulted to the destruction of aquatic lives and farmlands of the people of that region. This grossly affected their primary means of sustenance. According to them, the region which was once the agricultural pride of West Africa because of the fertile agricultural land, forest, rivers, creeks, and coastal waters teeming with fish and sundry water creatures is one of the most polluted places in the world today and one of the poorest regions in Nigeria (Okonta and Douglas; 2003). The scholars are of the opinion that these wanton destruction of means of livelihood created mass unemployment prompted restiveness in the region.

Corroborating the sorry state of live in the region, Akinwale (2010) stated that "*the quality of human capital in Nigeria is presently low. Nigeria's human capital is underdeveloped as it ranked 151 out of 177 countries listed in the 2004 United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)'s Human Development Index (HDI)*".

Akinwale, (2010), further stated that as a strategy to tackle militancy in the Niger Delta region, the President (Umaru Musa Yar 'Adua) who had 'Human Capital Development' as one of his seven point's agenda in 2007 initiated the Amnesty programme. In Akinwale's words, "*human capital development is one of the seven points' agenda of the Vision 202020 designed by Yar' Adua, the president of Nigeria who died in February 2010*". It was believed that the development of human capital is necessary for the maintenance of peace in the region. Also in agreement with this is the UNDP report on human capital development in Nigeria.

According to UNDP (2011), Without doubt, the Amnesty programme is expected to improve the human capital development of the country which is presently low. Nigeria's Human Development Index (HDI) Value (Comprising Home basic dimensions of human development: a long and healthy life, access to knowledge and a decent standard of living) for 2011 stands at 0.459, positioning the country at 156 out of 187 countries and territories.

Akinwale (2010) maintained that after passing the first phase of the Amnesty programme which is disarmament and demobilization of the militants, the next in line became Rehabilitation and Reintegration of the ex-militants. The scholar noted that this involves identification of skills acquisition / training needs of the ex-militants. Elaborating on the matter, Akinwale cited above observed that a survey of the career aspiration of the ex-militants shows a wide preference for about ten (10) sectors ranging from oil/Gas, Maritime Services, Fabrication and Welding Technology, Exploration and Production and Processing Engineering.

Nonetheless, having run the Amnesty programme for about four years now, it has become necessary to review the successes and hiccups of the programme especially as it affects youths' empowerment in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. The reports from the panel set up in January 2010 to review the rehabilitation aspect of the 'DDR' revealed some inadequacies, leading to calls by elders in the Niger Delta region for the dissolution of the Presidential Amnesty Committee. The report noted inter-alia, that eighty percent of the budget had gone on payments of consultants and contractors with only twenty percent committed on rehabilitation of the ex-militants; the over bloating of the numbers of registered ex-militants; the continued detention of several militants, some of the training centers falling short with acceptable standards and operating with inadequate facilities (Obi & Rustad, 2011). According to Nwajiaku-Dahou (2010) "*allowances unpaid or not paid regularly, huge disparities between payments made to foot soldiers and former militant commanders, limited access to rehabilitation training and allowances for those who surrendered weapons after the deadline, inappropriate training provision, limited employment prospects, the absence of a broader political settlement involving the broader Niger Delta population that has burn the costs of conflict, and the politically motivated staffing of bodies responsible for implementing and coordinating the amnesty program, are among the numerous flaws of the Amnesty.*"

Also, Obi & Rustad, (2011) noted that the consultations and negotiations were done at a very high level. In their words, "*Rather than engage in open negotiations or a formal peace agreement with the militants, the consultations were at the highest levels of federal government, involving Niger Delta elites/elders and top government officials of Niger Delta origin negotiating with the militant commanders*". The scholars maintained that it lacked grassroot participation. This approach according to them gave room for a feeling of alienation and cheating by a large portion of the Niger Delta people who believed that the recognized commanders of militant groups are only interested in their self aggrandizement. For Olubayo & Olubisi (2012), the recent spate of bombings across the region shows that all is not well with the Amnesty programme. Supporting this, Ofehe (2010) pointed out that 'MEND' set off two car bombs on 15 March, 2010 in Warri and the Delta State Capital, where a post amnesty dialogue was being held and these left one person dead and several others injured. Also, the Vanguard news paper of 2nd October, 2010 reported that Nigeria's 50th independence anniversary was marred with car bombing that killed about 12 people in the nation's capital for reasons arising from dissatisfaction over the mode of implementing Amnesty programme. Mamah & Amaize (2012) also observed that Militant group bombed a trunk pipeline at Brass in Bayelsa state belonging to Italy's Eni SPA, ENI from which it lost around 4,000 barrels per day of '*equity production*'. To further buttress the displeasure of some of these militant group, The Nation, 30th Jan. 2012 reported that the country home of the Minister for Niger Delta, Elder Godsdoy Orubebe was bombed in Burtutu local government area of Delta State on the 28th January 2012 as a mark of dissatisfaction of the militants. Also, Daily Independent News Paper of 7th April 2013 reported the killing of 12 policemen on April 6, 2013 by some ex-militants along the water ways of Azuzuama community in southern Ijaw local government area of Bayelsa state to demonstrate that the amnesty programme may not have proffered the desired solution for insecurity in the volatile region. "*the attack on the policemen occurred barely three days after the movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) warned that it would resume destruction of oil platforms in the region*" (Daily Independent News Paper, April 7th 2013).

The Gap:

In as much as a lot have been written about the Amnesty programme of the Federal Government of Nigeria, the impact of Amnesty programme on youths' empowerment in the Niger Delta region is yet a yearning gap to be attended to. Scholars have dwelt more on how the activities of the oil companies have crippled the local economy of the Niger Delta people, created unemployment, poor health conditions and poverty in the region (Akinwale, 2010; Amaize, 2011; Ogege, 2011). Scholars have also dwelt so much on how the activities of the militants had affected the volume of oil production and export in the country, how social mobilization and persuasions failed to yield desired result and the lure to violence for the youths, how the youths resorted to hostage takings, pipeline vandalization, armed robbery and perpetrated terror in the region with the attendant

military operations (Nwajiaku 2010; Ukiwo, 2011; Ikelegbe 2011). Many other scholars wrote on how the programme appeared to have reduced the activities of the militants in the region (Otiye and Umukoro, 2011; Etekepe, 2012), but nothing has been done on the impact of the Amnesty programme on youths' empowerment in the Niger Delta region owing to the fact that the programme was still young for its impact on youths' empowerment to be assessed.

The Amnesty programme is expected to wind up by 2015, thus the time is just ripe to examine the progress made so far and the achievements of this programme especially as it affects youths' empowerment absence of which necessitated high security issues in the region. The programme evidently has succeeded in addressing to a large extent the problem of youths' restiveness and appear to have improved security in the region, but sustainability of the relative peace that appear to have been achieved in the region is dependent on the successes of the programme in the area of youths' empowerment which is a critical aspect of the programme. This aspect constitutes the gap that this work seeks to fill. In other words, this work would assess the impact of this Amnesty programme on the youths' empowerment in the Niger Delta region.

Theoretical Framework: Marxian Political Economy

A basic assumption of this theory is that material conditions determine man's consciousness and not the reverse. In other words, Marx averred that "*it is not the consciousness of men that determines their social existence, but on the contrary, their social existence determines their consciousness.*" The theory presupposes that the economy is the sub-structure while the political is in the super-structure. As such, the economy gave rise to the political and sustains it. The Political in turn, determines the nature and form assumed by the economy and gives dynamism to it.

Essentially, the theory highlights the primacy of the material conditions of life (Asobie, 1990; Ake, 1981; Onomide, 1985; Okolie, 2000). The nature of the interaction between the state (Political) and economic structures, and how these shape the character of the state, the emergent ruling class and the form of class domination that ensue. Here, attention is drawn to the imbalance/inequalities that naturally arise from the social relations of production, the ensuing competition and the role of the state in the melee. Primarily, the theory maintains that the economic basis of individual, group, etc directly affects their social/political behaviours. Thus Marx (1859) argued that:

The mode of production in material life determines the general characteristic of the social, political and spiritual processes. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence but in the contrary, the social existence that determine the consciousness.

In line with this, Ake (1981) affirmed that dialectical materialism, is characterized by the following: the dynamic character of social reality; the inter-relatedness of different levels of structure; and the primacy of material condition.

Despite the fact that, this theory has been criticized on its analysis on the relationship between the sub-structure and the super-structure, especially as it affects developing economies where it was argued that in such societies, it is not primarily the sub-structure that determines the character of the super-structure. Generally, the reverse is the case. (Ezeibe, 2009; Alavi, 1973;), Ezeibe, (2009), Ekekwe, (1986) and Miliband (1969) explained that the problem of the relationship between the state and the underlying economic structure is more complex than the context in which it was posed.

Therefore, the framework is still very relevant as a tool of analysis especially as it affects the Amnesty programme and youths' empowerment in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria bearing in mind the fact that, man is driven by the passion for survival. The survivalistic instincts impel man to channel much of his energies into production and creation of material values. Indeed, man naturally enters into social relations in the process of eking out a living. However, the nature and pattern of these relations are patterned and conditioned by existing laws governing production, distribution and exchange (Okolie, 2005).

Remarkably, at the root of the need for this Amnesty programme arose owing to the security problems in the Niger Delta region which was necessitated by economic issues namely, – poverty orchestrated by unemployment and environmental degradation; - socio-economic inequality created by stupendous oil revenue that disappear into the purse of a few in the mist of impoverished many; - psychological abuse resulting from state oppressive and carefree tendencies; - mass illiteracy arising from dearth of educational facilities and high cost of education; - dissatisfaction and growing discontent arising from lack of social amenities and basic infrastructure; - survivalistic instincts leading to agitations and militancy. *The Niger Delta region of Nigeria is most vulnerable to these threats, ranging from health concerns to infrastructural challenges, bad governance and human rights abuse. The threats also include unemployment, social exclusion to massive poverty* (Enu & Ugwu; 2004). In the words of Alamieyeseigha (2005), *long before the oil boom era, the Niger Delta people was almost economically self sufficient. Our people were accomplished fishermen, canoe-carvers, and salt boilers. In 1956, as fate would have it, crude oil was discovered at Oloibiri here in Bayelsa state, since then the*

economic life of our people has suffered a shattering blow and the people themselves have been subjected to the crudest form of deprivation and injustice.

The oil exploitation/exploration in the Niger Delta region, the huge financial accruals to the state and the multinationals and the devastating impacts of oil prospecting on the environment and thriving industries in the region obviously altered the material conditions of life and in turn the consciousness of the people. Prior to oil exploitation and its attendant consequences, the region was relatively peaceful and content with their material condition. Oil exploration and exploitation apart from orchestrating mass poverty and massive unemployment by stifling the prevalent industries in the region, introduced a sharp contrast and rising inequality in income levels of the Niger Delta dwellers. The few oil workers live in flamboyant affluence owing to their fat wages from the multinationals. The non-oil workers, deprived of their natural means of livelihood via oil spillages and environmental degradation, wallowed in abject poverty and idleness. To make the matters worse, the region continued to lack basic social amenities, infrastructure, basic educational and health facilities, while huge revenue obviously accrue to the state and the multinationals on account of their operations in the region. “*it is unfortunate that the region which is seen as the treasure base of the nation has the highest number of the poorest of the poor*” (Enu & Ugwu; 2004). The scholars further observed that social injustice is the crux of the crisis in the Niger Delta as the region is contributing so much to the economic development of Nigeria but getting very little. The result is a people totally disoriented, psychologically traumatized, economically raped, politically deprived thus, the lure to violence not minding the risks becomes profound.

Put differently, the youths of the Niger Delta region, having been serially abused by both the ‘state’ (which ought to protect) and the rapacious activities of the multinational oil companies operating in the region, and having lost their original means of livelihood were confronted with life threatening conditions and are wont to struggle for survival. Kalu (2008) “*identified the following as constituting serious security issues in the Niger Delta: protracted poor governance, social injustice, poor development, environmental degradation, social and family dislocation as well as bad and corrupt leadership.*” Evidently, the youths of this region resorted to violence and militancy as a survivalistic strategy. They were threatened by hunger and deceases, misguided by ignorance/illiteracy, dehumanized by oppressive state and demented by prebendalism. The youths of the Niger Delta region decided to take their destiny into their own hands by hook or crook, hence the making and promotion of militancy as a means of sustenance. The youths of this region therefore kidnap for ransom, engage in oil bunkering to improve their economic conditions, and so on.

Hypotheses:

- 1) Amnesty Programme of Nigeria’s Federal Government has been able to address the problem of youths’ empowerment in the Niger Delta region.

Research Design:

This work is expository in nature. The researcher made use of secondary data and interview in sourcing for information required for the study. The researcher attempted to gather and put together, disparate pieces of information concerning the Federal government Amnesty programme, especially as it affects its youths’ empowerment schemes for the youths of the Niger Delta region. In doing this, published reports/periodicals of the Presidential Amnesty office and relevant newspaper articles/reports were used.

III. Method of Data Collection

The study shall be adopting qualitative method of data collection. This implies that this study shall generate data based on careful analysis of documents and materials unstructured elite interview. Explaining qualitative method, Leedy and Ormord (2001) observed that it is a detailed and systematic examination of the contents of a particular body of materials for the purpose of identifying patterns, themes or biases. Also, Strauss and Corbin (1990) defined qualitative research as “any kind of research that produces findings not arrived at by means of statistical procedures or other means of quantification”. For Biereenu-Nnabugwu (2006), qualitative method is used to obtain in-depth information and concept clarification so as to facilitate instrument design for this study, owing to the fact that qualitative method is well suited for contextual analysis and also very useful when trying to illuminate, interpret and extract valuable information necessary in drawing inferences for logical conclusions. This perhaps informed Obikeze’s (cited in Nnabugwu, 2006) argument – that a strong advantage of qualitative method lies in the fact that it is able to gain access to organization structure, bureaucratic process and so on, and can more readily lead to the discovery of the unexpected phenomenon.

The adoption of this method therefore becomes imperative owing to the fact that the study shall rely mainly on qualitative data generated from secondary sources, and the fact that the method facilitates the data analysis. Remarkably, this study shall rely on secondary sources of data. According to Ikeagwu (1998), and Asika (2006), secondary data refers to a set of data gathered or authored by another person, usually data from the available data, archives, either in the form of document or survey results and code books. The advantage of

this as articulated by Selltiz et al (1977) include that of economy. Given that the information of this sort is collected periodically, thereby making the establishment of trends over time possible. Also, this method saves the researcher the trouble of requiring the cooperation of the individuals under study. The researcher will make use of secondary data as that guarantees adequate access to relevant information required for the study. The research will attempt to gather and put together, pieces of information concerning the Federal Governments Amnesty programme especially as it affects youths' empowerment programmes for the Niger Delta region. In doing this, published reports/periodicals of the Presidential Amnesty Office and newspaper articles/reports become invaluable.

IV. Method of Data Analysis

Qualitative data generated in the course of this study was analyzed using qualitative descriptive analysis. According to Asika (2006), the qualitative descriptive analysis has to do with summarizing the information generated in the course of research verbally. Altheide (1987) maintained that it is a dynamic form of analysis of verbal and visual data that is oriented towards summarizing the informational contents of that data. In the contrary, qualitative descriptive analysis is one in which the researcher systematically applies a pre-existing set of codes to the data, qualitative descriptive analysis is data-derived: that is, codes also are systematically applied, but they are generated from the data themselves in the course of the study (Sandelowki; 2000). Qualitative descriptive analysis moves farther into the domain of interpretation because effort is made to understand not only the manifest but also the latent content of data with a view to discovering patterns or regularities in the data (Egonu; 2013). Also, the researcher used tables and figures to further shed light on some salient points in the study.

Logical Data Framework:

| Question. 1 | Hypothesis. 2 | Variables.3 | Main Indicators. 4 | Sources of Data. 5 | Method of Data Collection. 6 | Method of Data Analysis. 7 |
|--|---|---|---|---|------------------------------|----------------------------|
| Has the Amnesty Programme of the Federal Government been able to address the problem of youths' empowerment in the Niger Delta region? | The Amnesty Programme has been able to empower the youths of the Niger Delta region | (x)Amnesty Programme of Nigeria's Federal Government | *Grant of pardon for the ex-militants; *Demobilization of the Ex-militants (surrender of weapons); *Rehabilitation of the Ex-militants. | *Journal articles; Conference Papers; Official Documents; Periodicals; News paper articles; Internet materials. | *Qualitative Method | *Qualitative Analyses |
| Question. 1 | Hypothesis. 2 | Variables.3 | Main Indicators. 4 | Sources of Data. 5 | Method of Data Collection. 6 | Method of Data Analysis. 7 |
| Has the Amnesty Programme of the Federal Government been able to address the problem of youths' empowerment in the Niger Delta region? | The Amnesty Programme has been able to empower the youths of the Niger Delta region | (x) Amnesty Programme of Nigeria's Federal Government | *Grant of pardon for the ex-militants; *Demobilization of the Ex-militants (surrender of weapons); *Rehabilitation of the Ex-militants. | *Journal articles; Conference Papers; Official Documents; Periodicals; News paper articles; Internet materials. | *Qualitative Method | *Qualitative Analyses |

V. Empirical Verification

Hypothesis: Amnesty Programme of Nigeria's Federal Government has been able to address the problem of youths' empowerment in the Niger Delta region.

The Human Capital Development Issues in the Niger Delta region

- "The delta's human development dilemma raises the question of why abundant human and natural resources have had so little impact on poverty" (UNDP; 2006). The Niger Delta region of Nigeria, froth with security challenges apparently occasioned by miss-governance, had posed serious socio-economic concerns for Nigeria which prompted the Amnesty initiative in the year 2008. Critical to the success of this Amnesty programme is the human capital development question in the Niger Delta region, bearing in mind the fact that previous efforts of both federal and state governments and even the multinational oil companies operating in the region had failed to stem the ugly tide in the region. According to UNDP (2006), The imperative for a new development agenda arises from the fact that past development planning efforts have failed to adequately address the region's needs. In spite of the efforts of the federal and state governments, the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) and oil companies to enhance the well-being of people in the delta, wide disparities in development outcomes persist, the region compares poorly with the progress in other oil-producing countries in the world. This informed the UNDP's proposal of a paradigm shift. This report recommends a new development paradigm to address these concerns. In a seven-point development agenda, it proposes using the region's vast oil wealth to create an environment that allows people to flourish, live valued and dignified lives, overcome poverty, enjoy a peaceful atmosphere and sustain their environment. The agenda is a people-centered and sustainable framework requiring the involvement of all stakeholder, including local, state and federal governments, the NDDC, the oil companies and the entire private sector, civil society organization, the people of the region and development partners (UNDP; 2006).

Evidently, poor condition of life in the Niger Delta region occasioned by adverse effects of oil exploration/exploitation had led to youths restiveness in the region (see Watts, 2008; Oshionebo, 2009;). The increasing large pool of unemployed youths of the Niger Delta region provided endless supply to militant groups who had drawn a battle line with both the Nigerian governments and the multinational oil companies operating in that region (UNDP, 2006; Aghalino, 2009; Olubayo, 2012). Confronted with downward turn of the economy arising from the relentless attacks of the militant groups, and given that oil exploitation and trade is the mainstay of Nigeria's foreign exchange earnings, the Nigeria's federal government in 2009 came up with the Amnesty initiative. Central to this Amnesty programme of Nigeria's federal government is the reintegration aspect which talks about empowering the youths of the Niger Delta region. Youths empowerment is so central to the success or failure of the Amnesty programme since the very problem that necessitated this amnesty programme was born of large scale youth unemployment in the Niger Delta region. In other words, were the youths of the volatile region gainfully employed, the militant groups would obviously lack manpower to prosecute their attacks. Olatoke and Olokooba (2012) put it this way: the collapse of social values, failure of leadership, and neglect of the youth is now a current problem in Nigeria. This vice now increases the spate of unemployment, abject poverty, illiteracy, frustrations and the resurgence of many militant and terrorist groups in different parts of the country. Also buttressing this fact is Kalu (2008) when he identified the following as constituting serious security issues in the Niger Delta: "*Protracted poor governance, social injustice, poor development, environmental degradation, social and family dislocation as well as bad and corrupt leadership*". Obviously, lack of requisite skill, illiteracy and unemployment railroaded the teeming youths of the Niger Delta region into militancy.

Therefore, to counter restiveness in the region, efforts should essentially be directed at rationally seeking ways to engage a large population of the youths in healthy and useful ventures that will keep the youths busy and take their minds permanently out of militancy. This, the Amnesty programme seek to achieve.

The Amnesty Programme and Youths Empowerment in the Niger Delta region

Four years into the implementation of the Presidential Amnesty programme for the Niger Delta ex-militants, the records as contained in the special report of the Presidential Amnesty Office on the Guardian of May 29th 2014, highlights the achievements of the Amnesty programme as follows:

The Amnesty Programme of Nigeria's Federal government through the Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) Components, have enlisted about 30, 000 ex-militants of the Niger Delta region. In just about four years of its implementation, Nigeria's home grown Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) component of the Presidential Amnesty programme, under which about 30,000 former agitators in the oil-rich Niger Delta region were enlisted, has attracted global recognition and applause (The Guardian; May 29, 2014). The special report on Presidential Amnesty Programme in the Guardian of 29th May, 2014, noted that the programme in Nigeria under the leadership of Hon. Kingsley Kuku is at the critical reintegration phase with 13, 145 youths already graduated in various skills acquisition fields while 4, 698 youths are currently undergoing skills acquisition training or formal education within and outside the country in career choices ranging from marine, heavy duty operation, welding, diving, agriculture and boat building. Others include oil and gas technicians, automobile technology and aviation. According to the report, among the 13, 145 youths who have graduated from vocational training are 169 in Agriculture, Automobile Mechanics (331), Welding & Fabrication (4095), Entrepreneurship (2028), Carpentry, Plumbing & Pipefitting (287), Electrical Installation/ Maintenance (442), Information & Communication Technology (249), Crane/Heavy Duty operations (1269), Health safety & Environment (80), Music/ Fashion/ Entertainment/Catering (838), Oil & Gas / Marine (1768), Aviation (177) and others (310) (See Guardian, May 29, 2014). The paper further reported that a total of 2,535 of the 4, 698 currently in training are in formal education, with 1, 440 delegates offshore and 1, 095 onshore, studying courses such as Law, Political Science, Business Management, Mass Communication, International Relations, Public Administration, Accountancy, Information & Communication Technology, Medicine, Engineering, Applied Sciences, Radio Electronics, Building & Construction Technology, among others.

According to the same paper, 477 youths out of 2087 delegates presently deployed for vocational training are offshore, of which 110 are engaged in specialized training. These include 22 at the prestigious Lufthansa flight Training Institute in Frankfurt, Germany, undergoing Instrument Rating, Type Rating and Fixed Wings courses; 9 at the CAE Oxford Aviation Academy, Kinglington, United Kingdom, also participating in aviation Type Rating courses; 30 being trained in Power Generation & Management Process/Machine Management at Schneider Electric in France; 40 studying Geo-Sciences, Reservoir Engineering, Gas Exploration, Production, Refining, Engines and Hydrocarbon utilizations, at the Institute of French Petroleum (IFP), also in France, and 9 undergoing helicopter training at the Airstar Flight school, Italy (Gaurdian, May 29, 2014). The report maintained that 29 of the 139 delegates deployed for specialized training have graduated in Drilling Engineering at Schlumberger Technologies in Melun, France. The delegates in Training are spread

across 104 universities, 22 skill acquisition training institutions in 28 countries globally, while onshore those on the special scholarship scheme are in six universities, including the Benson Idahosa University, Igbinedon University, Novena University, Lead City University, Niger Delta University, and Redeemers University. Delegates in vocational training within the country are spread across 19 training institutions in eight states (Gaurdian, May 29, 2014).

VI. Conclusion

In a nut-shell, this study has revealed that, though the amnesty programme has remarkably brought the restiveness of the youths of Niger Delta under control, sustainability of the apparent peace enjoyed from the region is not yet guaranteed. The fear of relapse is largely anchored on the fact that the amnesty programme has not affected reasonably the infrastructural development of the region. The programme has not provided educational facilities nor built good schools within the creeks, the programme has not provided good health facilities for the people in the hitherto volatile parts of the region. Poverty and diseases occasioned by environmental degradation are still very pandemic. The programme has not opened up the creeks with good network of roads. Life in the creeks has not really changed on account of the programme. The non-militant youths have not benefited directly from the amnesty programme. Against this backdrop Ejovi and Ebie (2013) lamented that the empowerment policy of the government through the training programme and job opportunities must not be limited to the militants. It must be extended to all the local inhabitants in the region, otherwise, it could send a wrong signal to others who have been excluded from the exercise that crime pays and may serve as a driving force for others to want to take arms for recognition.

Moreso, allegations of misappropriation have continued to trail the Amnesty programme. The process of placement and disbursement of funds are seriously politicized. Lack of transparency in the process of resource allocation is negatively affecting the credibility of the Amnesty programme. Of the N63, 281, 093, 786 billion allocated to the presidential Amnesty programme in the 2013 National budget, not even a kobo was voted for capital expenditure. While N23,625,000,000 billions were voted for stipends and allowances of 30,000 Niger Delta ex-militants, operational cost received N4,699,933, 814 billion, N35,409, 859, 972 billion was voted for reintegration of transformed ex-militants whereas, N546, 300,000 billion was vote for reinsertion/transition safety allowances for 3,642 Ex-militants (3rd phase). (see- Nigeria's Appropriation Bill 2013).

Evidently, larger chunk of the fund appropriated for the amnesty programme in last fiscal year is billed to end up in the hands of the political class with the huge percentage of the youths within the creeks still living in inhuman conditions without good roads, water, electricity, hospitals, school and even telecommunication services.

VII. Recommendations

The Amnesty Programme was designed to tackle youths' violence in the Niger Delta region which had affected negatively, Nigeria's revenue accruals from crude oil exports. The Programme is one of many strategies employed by the Nigeria's Federal Government to curb militancy, assuage the Niger Delta people, who are at the receiving ends of adverse effects of oil exploitation in Nigeria and ensure a hitch-free oil exploitation and exportation for economic buoyancy of the Nigerian State.

Among the lapses observed is that the programme has nothing for the non-militant youths of the Niger Delta region. This in essence is an endorsement of lawlessness. It sends the negative signal that it pays to engage in violence. The year 2013 Nigeria's Appropriation Act clearly shows that government voted zero naira for capital expenditure for the Amnesty programme. This is improper. The appropriation ought to make some provisions for capital expenditure to enable government provide schools/skill acquisition centers, health facilities, road networks, pipe borne water etc for the people within the creeks.

Moreso, the allegations of misappropriation raises serious questions of credibility on the programme. It is therefore recommended that independent forensic experts be made to review the account books of the Presidential Amnesty office. Any proven case of misappropriation should be prosecuted. This would restore reasonable credibility to the programme. Finally, Amnesty programme arguably, have ignited youths' violence in the Northern part of the country. This has necessitated the call for dialogue and amnesty for the 'Boko Haram' insurgents in the North. A more lasting solution to this would be devolution of political powers in Nigeria such that each geo-political zone controls the accruals of the natural resources from the zone. This would make for a more responsible government and inheres more patriotic feelings in the people.

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