

Nigeria: The challenges of Reintegrating Niger Delta Militants

Hussain Taofik OYEWO

Abstract

The Federal Government of Nigeria granted amnesty to all persons involved in militant activities in the Niger Delta as a last ditch effort to save the region from continued havoc and devastation. The amnesty led to Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) of ex-militants in order to bring peace and development to the area by transforming ex-militants to meaningful and productive citizens. This study assesses the reintegration part of the DDR process. Analysis of the reintegration of ex-militants in the Niger Delta of Nigeria highlights its uniqueness, slightly different from other reintegration practices in Africa. While the Niger Delta reintegration program targets ex-militants, most practices in Africa are planned towards ex-combatants and other associated with fighting groups including communities. The limited participation of others stakeholders, the absence of a commission on DDR, the training of militants beyond the shores of Nigeria, as well as the exclusive funding of the reintegration program by the Nigerian government without donor support, are special features of the reintegration program in the Niger Delta of Nigeria. It is recommended that community participation and collaboration with the private sector would promote job creation for ex-militants and the committee should as well establish a post reintegration program.

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Introduction

The Niger Delta Region of Nigeria is a densely populated region; it extends over 70,000 km² and houses the world's third largest

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wetland. It consists of Bayelsa, Rivers, Delta, Akwa Ibom, Cross River and Edo in the South-South, Abia and Imo in the South-East and Ondo State in the South-West region of Nigeria. The region has a population of about 29 million people of over 40 ethnic groups including Kalabari, Efik, Ibibio, Ijaw, Isoko, Itsekiri, Ilaje are among the inhabitants speaking about 250 different dialects.

The Niger Delta is known for its unique history of contributions to the Nigerian state from pre-colonial days till date. At present, the richly endowed region is the geographical heart of crude oil exploitation where Nigeria earns 99.7 and 90 percent of its export and annual income respectively (Ogege, 2010). In spite of the benefits of the oil and gas economy to the Nigerian state, the oil-rich Niger Delta communities wallow in abject poverty, reinforced by the progressive downward revision of the derivation principle of revenue allocation with each regime, and reduction in the 'share' of federal allocations to oil-producing ethnic minority states from 50% in 1966 to 3% in the mid-1990s. It was only in 1999 that it was again reviewed upward, to 13% derivation. With agriculture forming the dominant activity in the Niger Delta and engaging the most active labour force, extant extraction and exploitation of oil by various the transnational oil companies such as Shell, ExxonMobil, Total, Chevron, Elf, Agip (Eni) and Texaco since the 1960s has caused an adverse environmental impact on the soil, forest and waterways of the Niger Delta communities, through oil spills and gas flares perpetrated by the transnational oil companies (Oluwaniyi, 2011).

Continued environmental degradation, loss of means of livelihood, unemployment, poverty, loss of lives and general underdevelopment in the region led to organised militant insurgency resulting in sabotage of oil pipelines, bunkering, kidnapping and open confrontation with government forces. The federal government however granted presidential pardon to the militants in 2009 in order to restore peace and stability to the region. The essay intends to outline the possible implications of the amnesty proclamation and the subsequent reintegration program to peace and development in the region. To achieve this, the paper will give a theoretical background to the concept of reintegration, then provide country case experiences of reintegration in Africa, reintegration program in the Niger Delta and conclude with the challenges and recommendations.

Theoretical Background to Reintegration

Reintegration is the third element in DDR (disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration).

DDR is a collection of project initiatives that come early in post-conflict environments to contribute to security and stability so that recovery, reconstruction and development can begin. Simply put, DDR aims to recover weapons, break down armed groups and help ex-combatants. Following on from this, reintegration can be defined as a way in which fighters change their identity from 'combatant' to 'civilian' and alter their behavior

by abolishing the use of violent means and increasing activities that are approved by the mainstream community. The change in behavior is mostly visible in three arenas: social, political and economic. The political dimension involves ending efforts to achieve political goals using violent means. Instead, combatants enter into mainstream politics at the local, regional or national level either as individual voters or as political advocates or representatives of a larger group. In economic terms, reintegration entails a move away on the part of the combatant from the livelihood support mechanism associated with the militia networks. Instead, as part of economic reintegration, combatants seek long-term gainful employment (formal or informal) or initiate other legitimate and legal income-generating activities, including agriculture, which allows them to support him/herself and any dependants. Finally, in social terms combatants reduce their contact and reliance on militia networks and enhance their interaction with mainstream communities and family (Torjesen, 2013). Here is where the key theory of restoration comes in.

Reintegration could be seen as a restorative measure which promotes the repairing of harm or correction of crime through negotiation. Instead of the offender facing punishable judgment he/she is reintroduced into the society and damage is corrected. The ultimate aim of restorative justice is one of healing. Through receiving appropriate reparation, the harm done to the victim can be redressed; by making good the damage caused, the offender can be reconciled with the victim and reintegrated back into his/her social and familial networks through such reconciliation and reintegration (Wundersitz & Hetzel, 1996). It could also be viewed as a process in which remorseful offenders, victim and affected community work together in the resolution of a criminal matter. According to the theory the emphasis is on restoration: restoration of the offender in terms of his or her self-respect, restoration of the relationship between offender and victims, as well as restoration of both offenders and victims within the community (Haley, 1996). In this case our concern centre on ex-militants in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria who took up arms against the state, vandalized oil installations, illegally stole oil (oil bunkering), kidnapped foreign and local oil workers and engaged in other activities which destabilized the region and reduced oil production which is the main source of government revenue.

Reintegration is the reinsertion into civilian life of former combatants, together with their families, in order that they resume, economic, social and political life. This generally entails the provision of packages, including cash, in-kind compensation, training on the job and encouragement to embark upon self-help, income generating projects (Macartan & Jeremy, 2005). Reintegration is a long-term and complex social, economic, psychological and political process by which ex-combatants acquire civilian status, through gaining access to civilian forms of work and income and becoming productive members of the society. It is the process through which ex-combatants leave their fighting units, rejoin and are accepted by civilian social group such as families or communities.

Reintegration is multifaceted and includes the ex-combatants vocational training and education, absorption into social and economic activities, reconciliation, psychosocial healing and political participation (Date-Bah, 2010).

Reintegration programs sometimes address the psychological impact of conflict on ex-combatants. In some cases, ex-combatants are traumatized by brutal experiences of conflict and may experience depression, drug and alcohol abuse, violent behavior or even suicide. In this regard it is important to give particular attention to youths affected by conflict (Paul, 2012).

Community acceptance of ex-combatant is and his/her family and the ability to participate in local events and decision making to the same extent as other as other community members are features of social reintegration. Economic reintegration on the other and is geared to the ex-combatants obtaining sustainable jobs and thus having a means of livelihood. Reintegration of ex-combatants requires a comprehensive and coordinated approach: involvement of many bodies – not only national, but also community-based structures (public and private), strong political support, the ex-combatants' personal initiatives, a focus on tackling both the psychological residue of the conflict in the ex-combatants mind as well as in other citizens too (Date-Bah, 2010). These are essential components to be considered in a reintegration program in order to divert their attention from destructive to constructive activities.

Country Case Experiences of Reintegration

African countries like Angola, Burundi, Central African Republic, Congo-Brazzaville, Democratic Republic of Congo, Eritrea, Cote d'Ivoire, Liberia, Rwanda, Somalia, Sudan, Uganda, Guinea Bissau, Mozambique, Namibia, Sierra Leone, Zimbabwe and South Africa have had violent conflicts that have led to reintegration programs which are a fundamental precondition for peace, stability and human development in emerging post-conflict societies.

The experiences in West African countries of Liberia and Sierra Leone would be discussed.

Liberia's fourteen years civil war finally ended with the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) signed in Accra on 18 August 2003. Before then and following a lull in the conflict, a DDR program was hastily implemented from 1994 to 1997, but with limited results. The 1997 DDR process was such that reintegration of ex-combatants was focused on while abandoning the needs of refugees, returnees and Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs). The National Transition Government of Liberia (NTGL) and the international community developed the Result-Focused Transition Frame work (RFTF) as the overarching framework and planning tool for setting goals and actions in ten priority areas called clusters. Cluster two dealt with disarmament, demobilisation, rehabilitation and

reintegration (DDRR). In the RFTF, DDRR corresponds to cluster two. However, in the Community Resettlement and Reintegration Strategy (CRRS), developed by the NTGL and the international community, the rehabilitation and reintegration of ex-combatants was aligned with cluster three, which dealt with refugees, returnees and Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs). The reintegration of ex-combatants was linked to the resettlement process as a way to create a strong framework that will accommodate all groups and facilitate the physical, economic and social reconstruction of the entire society. This approach was justified by the experience of the 1997 DDR process, which showed that “programs aimed only at ex-combatants divided communities and caused considerable resentment on the part of civilians who received no special assistance (Sany, 2006). By 31 December 2004, the official end of the disarmament and demobilization phase, the DDR program had disarmed about 103,019 ex-combatants, which far exceeded the envisaged 38,000 (Date-Bah, 2010). In addition, 28,000 weapons had been collected. The reintegration component of the initial DDR program was not successful as unemployment rate among the ex-combatants was as high as 80 percent at the end of the program. A special reintegration project for residual caseload of demobilized combatants was implemented in 2008 to 2009, among other things. It conducted skill training activities in all the counties of the country and built the capacity of the local implementing partners to deliver such training. It also conducted opportunity mapping and SME training for the trained ex-combatants to facilitate their job absorption, in addition it tried to organize the trained ex-combatants into co-operative grouping. At the end of the program in June 2009, only few of the ex-combatants had achieved job absorption. This included a small number that had received apprenticeships and on the job placement in private company (Date-Bah, 2010).

Among the projects major challenges were its rather short duration and the basic level of the skills provided, which did not make the ex-combatants marketable in the highly competitive Liberian labor market. While the project recognized that most of the ex-combatants had to enter into self-employment, the ex-combatants had, however not been linked to a micro-credit institution to facilitate this process (Date-Bah, 2010).

Sierra Leone’s eleven years civil war initially ended with the signing of Lome Peace Agreement (LPA) in 1999. The subsequent resumption of the war from 2000 to 2001 finally ended with the Abuja Protocols in 2001. The LPA included provisions for a comprehensive Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Program (DDRP) for combatants of the various factions. Its main goal was to disarm, demobilize and reintegrate the ex-combatants in order to ensure security and peace in Sierra Leone. Its key area of focus were to a) collect, register, disable, and destroy all conventional weapons and munitions retrieved from combatants during the disarmament period; b) demobilize approximately 45,000 ex-combatants of the Armed Forces of Sierra Leone, Revolutionary United Front (RUF), Civil Defence Force (CDF) and paramilitary forces; and c) prepare

and support ex-combatants for reinsertion and socio-economic reintegration upon discharge from demobilization centers.

Among the strategies adopted for the program implementation were the establishment of an institutional arrangement which combines national ownership, partnership with key international and national partners, and coordination between the diverse bodies. Overall responsibility of the programs implementation was in the hands of NCDDR (National Commission for Disarmament, Demobilization and reintegration) and UNAMSIL (UN Mission for Sierra Leone), supported by UN bodies and non UN bodies like USAID, GTZ, EU and NGO's (Date-Bah, 2010).

The reintegration program which ended in 2004, encountered a number of setbacks, including the fact that it was not very comprehensive. Its total duration was four years, a duration that was considered not long enough for a program that requires an open time frame. On the whole, the DDR program was eventually able to setup several disarmament and demobilization centers across the country, it disarmed and demobilized over 71.000 ex-combatants, provided economic reintegration programs covering public works, vocational and apprenticeship skill training, as well as formal education. Social reintegration measures were also implemented, including, promoting forgiveness and reconciliation. Additionally, former child soldiers were provided with family reunification assistance. On the whole, most of the ex-combatants chose to resettle in towns as opposed to rural arrears (Date-Bah, 2010).

Among the programs challenges were inaccessibility to parts of the country, which limited full coverage of some program activities, inadequate capacity of local implementing partners, poor understanding of eligibility criteria and inability to address the war's root causes and to apply the various recovery measures – political, social and economic. Other essential ongoing measures in the country which needed to be taken into account by the reintegration process include security sector reforms, commission, judicial reform and decentralization of government.

It is important to note that the National Commission on Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration in Sierra Leone and Liberia provided direction in terms of structure, framework and the implementation of the program in collaboration with other relevant stakeholders, leading to a more imperative planning and coordination. Similarly, multi-donor trust fund helped Sierra Leone and Liberia to carry out DDR program which ordinarily would have been difficult considering the expensive nature of embarking on DDR program anywhere in the world. Social and economic reintegration in Sierra Leone and Liberia helped the various categories of ex-combatants to engage in meaningful and productive ventures that improved their livelihood. Community Participation of reintegration program in both countries also enhanced the success and credibility of the program.

Amnesty Program and Reintegration in the Niger Delta

On the 25th of June, 2009 President Umar Musa Yar'Adua granted amnesty to all persons who have been directly or indirectly involved in militant activities in the Niger Delta. It became necessary as a last ditch effort to save the region from the continued havoc and devastation that was been caused by the activities of the militants which ranged from kidnapping of expatriates and Nigerian oil workers to blowing up of oil installations and direct confrontation with government forces. Their agitation was the constant neglect of the government to environmental degradation, social dislocation and poverty escalation.

In 1966, Isaac Adaka Boro, a former police officer from the delta, recruited, trained and armed men into an organisation known as Niger Delta Volunteer Force. They blew up oil pipelines and engaged the police in gun battle and declared the Niger Delta a republic (Sampson, 2009). Although this only lasted for 12 days as they were arrested and tried for treason, it was enough to create consciousness in the minds of the people.

Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP) was founded in 1990 following the signing of Ogoni Bill of Rights which called for political and economic control of Ogoni affairs by Ogoni People. Ken Saro Wiwa a human rights and environmental activist used this platform to demand for a fair share of the proceeds of oil exploration and redress of environmental damage in the Niger Delta. He organised protests in Ogoni land and attended various international forums to voice the protest of Ogoni people to the international community. The development was worrisome to the military government of late General Sani Abacha. On the 10th of November 1995, Ken Saro Wiwa along with eight others was hanged, after been found guilty of killing four Ogoni chiefs by a special military tribunal (Ibeh, 2012). The act ignited worldwide condemnation and Nigeria was suspended from the common wealth of nations and sanctioned by some other international bodies.

From 2004, many militant groups emerged in the Niger Delta composed mostly of young men displeased with the high rate of underdevelopment, environmental degradation, political marginalisation and unemployment.

Niger Delta Peoples Volunteer Force was founded by Alhaji Mujahid Dokubo-Asari. Asari and his group were players in the lucrative bunkering trade (breaching pipelines to steal crude then refine it locally or selling it abroad) and he openly admits to funding his group through sale of stolen oil, claiming that he is just taking back what had been stolen from Ijaw people (Malina, 2010). In 2004 he threatened to attack oil workers and launched a guerrilla war, he was arrested in 2005 by the Nigerian government on treason charges but was released in 2007.

The Movement for the Emancipation of Niger Delta (MEND) launched itself onto the international stage in January 2006 by claiming responsibility for the capture of four

foreign oil workers (Hanson, 2007). Among its demands are the demilitarisation of the Niger Delta; upgrading of infrastructure such as schools, roads, clean water, electricity; and social improvements in the shape of jobs for local communities, the release of jailed activists and compensation for oil pollution (Nodland & Hjellestad, 2007). The group's primary tactic is kidnapping foreign oil workers; it sometimes attacks pipelines and is responsible for at least two car bombings (Hanson, 2007). MEND is a conglomeration of distinct militant groups without a clear hierarchical structure and no single individual head. Its subsidiary groups include Federated Niger Delta Ijaw Communities (FNDIC), Boyloaf, Outlaws and Niger Delta Strike Force (Malina, 2010). Other militant groups are Niger Delta Vigilantes (NDV) formed in 2003 by Tom Ateke and People's Liberation Force (PLF) led by Egbiri Papa.

By 2009, the level of insecurity caused by the activities of these militant groups had climaxed to a point where the entire world became apprehensive of the nature of the calamity. Nigeria's crude oil production dropped from 2.3 million (bpd) to 700,000 (bpd), as at May, 2009, Nigeria was losing about N8.7 billion (\$58 million) daily due to the violent conflict in the region (Abel, 2011).

In finding lasting solution to the crisis the government of President Yar'Adua set up the Technical committee on Niger Delta headed by former MOSOP leader Ledum Mitee and made up of 45 wise men and women in September 2008. The committee was to collate past records on the Niger Delta issue and advise the federal government forward (Aghalino, 2012). The committee assembled and reviewed over 400 reports, memorandum and other documents from local, national and international stakeholders. These included the Arewa Consultative Forum (ACF) in northern Nigeria, Afenifere – the pan-Yoruba socio-cultural body in western Nigeria, Ohan'Eze Ndigbo and the Movement for Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) in the southeastern Ibo and oil companies operating in the Delta (Omunu, 2008). After due analysis, it presented its report in three parts comprising compact with stakeholders in the Niger Delta, the second part laid broad themes and roles for stakeholders in a regional transformation agenda and the third part recommended that the federal government create institution and mechanisms to implement the compact and other medium term processes. The high point of the report is the recommendation of amnesty for militants within a comprehensive demobilization, disarmament and rehabilitation programme and a negotiated undertaking by militant groups to stop all kidnappings, hostage taking and attacks on oil installations (Aghalino, 2012). With Federal Government commitment to bringing peace and stability into the Niger Delta region and the country in general, the Federal Government on the 25th of June, 2009, declared unconditional amnesty to all Niger Delta militants in the creeks as well as those facing prosecution in the law courts, including Henry Okah who was standing trial, Government Ekpemupolo (Tompson), Tom Ateke and other militant leaders declared wanted by the Niger Delta security unit,

Joint Task Force (JTF). The President, however, gave an October 4, 2009, deadline for all those who wanted to enjoy the amnesty to take advantage of government magnanimity.

The reintegration of ex-militants in the Niger Delta of Nigeria was a component of the amnesty granted to the militants that was followed by DD&R program. As discussed in an earlier section of this paper, certain factors must be taken into consideration in order to achieve a measure of success in the implementation of reintegration. While it may be difficult to apply the same approaches in all cases, it is important and necessary that lessons from other reintegration programs should be put into consideration in the course of the planning. Reflections on such lessons can assist in reducing challenges in the areas of planning, implementation, framework and management. To what extent has the current reintegration program in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria been able to meet the important elements in reintegration?

By the end of the amnesty period in October 2009, 20,192 ex-militants (and non-militants) comprising 20,049 males and 133 females respectively across the nine states of the Niger Delta denounced militancy, registered for the amnesty programme and surrendered their weapons – consisting of 2,760 arms of different classes and calibre, 287,445 ammunitions, 3,155 magazines, 1,090 dynamite caps, 763 explosives and sticks of dynamite, and 18 gun boats – to the Presidential Amnesty Committee (Oluwaniyi, 2011). In November 2009, 6,166 former militants were added, another 3,642 former militants were added in October 2012 constituting the second and third phase of the amnesty programme and bringing the total to 30,000.

The DDR process started with acceptance of the Amnesty Program after which ex-militants were promised N65, 000 daily and a promise of vocational training and awards of legitimate contracts to camp leaders pending the end of reintegration. Unlike previous experience in other African states where reintegration programs are driven by donors because of the huge resources to implement, the Nigerian government took total ownership of the whole process. The cost of the program in 2012 alone was \$405 million and well over \$1 billion since the program started (Omojuma, 2012). The government did however seek the international community's support in seeking visas to ex-militants due to travel abroad for educational and vocational training. Oil companies were also charged to develop the Niger Delta region through economic empowerment and job creation for youth. Herbert Lurtini Non-Violence Centre, South Africa and Rhode Island Centre for Non-Violence and Peace Studies, Kingston, Rhode Island, United States also collaborated with the government in the reintegration process (Oluwaniyi, 2011).

The planning and administration of the amnesty program is administered by the Chairman of the Presidential Amnesty Program who is also the Special Adviser to the president on Niger Delta Affairs. It is important to note that other relevant government agencies like the Institute for Peace and Conflict Resolution, The Ministry of Niger Delta,

Niger Delta Development Commission, National Directorate of Employment, National Poverty Eradication Program are not involved in the program. These are agencies with professional staffs whose knowledge and experience would make meaningful contribution to the program.

In keeping up with the key components of reintegration program which are social and economic support to ex-combatants through education support and vocational training, the Presidential Amnesty Office has placed 11,525 of the 30,000 ex-militants in skills acquisition/training centers, as well as in formal education within the country and offshore. Of this number, 4,929 are trained abroad while 6,382 are either in educational institutions or placed in skill acquisition centers in Nigeria. Another set of 6,067 ex-militants were set for deployment within and outside of the country in 2012. While 113 had been assisted in securing employment with maritime, welding and fabrication companies another 30 out of 150 ex-militants trained by Proclad Academy were employed by Proclad Group of Companies in Dubai, United Arab Emirates. The office facilitated the employment of 40 maritime trainees by the Century Energy Group in Nigeria.

From the analysis of the reintegration of ex-militants in the Niger Delta of Nigeria, it is clear that the program has its uniqueness, slightly different from other reintegration practices in Africa. While the Niger Delta reintegration program targets ex-militants, most practices in Africa are planned towards ex-combatants and other associated with fighting groups including communities. The limited participation of others stakeholders, the absence of a commission on DDR, the training of militants beyond the shore of Nigeria as well as the exclusive funding of the reintegration program by the Nigeria government without donor support are special features of reintegration program in the Niger Delta of Nigeria. The next section of this paper will highlight other issues pertaining to the reintegration of ex-militia combatants from the Niger Delta.

Highlight of Issues in the Reintegration process

An important observation in the reintegration program is the obviously low number of female militants and women generally involved in the process. The vulnerability and roles of women and girls during the conflict and post-conflict were overlooked during the reintegration process. They may not have participated in direct physical combat but were possibly associated with various warring factions as porters, spies, cooks, sex workers. These sets of women were likely rewarded from proceeds from oil bunkering and ransom. It is important to note that these set of women having lost their jobs due to the ending of the insurgency and with the possibility of discrimination or stigmatization from their host community and with no provision for them in the amnesty program they might have no other alternative but deplorable survival options like crime and sex work. The program is also not committed to UNSCR 1325 which specifically recognizes the distinct role of women and girls as agents in armed conflict and emphasizes the

importance of recognizing the special needs of women and girls in the negotiation and implementation of peace agreements including in disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) process (United Nations Security Council, 2000) .

The Objective of reintegration is to incorporate the ex-combatant and his/her family into civilian society (Social Reintegration) and to attain financial independence in productive activities (Economic Reintegration) (Body, 2005). In terms of economic reintegration the Amnesty Programme is doing fairly well especially with training of professional skilled force. Some of them have graduated but are unable to secure job. The Ledum Mitee committee that preceded the Amnesty program had recommended Amnesty as well as other plans which included undertaking New Town Development, building the Coastal road, building regional railway network, encouraging the private sector to develop industrial clusters, and to complete the long-drawn East-West road. These are macro measure which would not have only created job opportunities for members of the community as well as ex-militants on completion of their trainings but would have led to greater development of the area which in essence would address some of the main issues for the agitation.

The establishment of a national commission on DDR in post-conflict countries allows for better planning and management of reintegration program. Such Institution provides opportunity for stakeholders to operate in a collaborative manner as the case in Liberia and Sierra Leone. DDR programs are modeled in different countries according to the level and damage of conflict. Nigeria didn't have a full scale war and so it shouldn't have an elaborate DDR program like what is obtainable in Liberia and Sierra Leone. However, the Amnesty Program Office should involve a wider range of actors, including from the public sector, private sector, civil society as well as the agitators.

Finally, reintegration programs require huge resources to implement and are mostly driven by donors. Nigeria government should have allowed donor agencies to handle the reintegration process because of their experience in program delivery and accountability. Experience in Liberia and Sierra Leone has shown that donor agency involvement would not deprive us of local ownership and the billions of Naira spent on the reintegration process would have gone into much needed enduring and inclusive developmental projects in the region.

Challenges

In spite of the remarkable gains of the amnesty program in terms of peace, security and development, there are some challenges that must be noted:

The amnesty program did not incorporate in its package credible and comprehensible consultation with a wide range of stakeholders. It refused to use the bottom-up approach which would address the main issue and have a wider range of ownership. First, the

opinion of the inhabitants who suffered the brunt of the environmental degradation was ignored. Secondly, the ex-militants who were the foot soldiers were not also involved in planning; rather the government collaborated with their commandants who seemed to be only interested in their personal expansion of wealth and power. The commanders were also accused of multiplying the number of their followers in order to get a bigger share of the amnesty fund.

The third phase of the amnesty program has been besieged with series of issues on ex-militants agitation to be included in the amnesty program. They claim that some of the people that were included in previous phases were not actually ex-militants but those that were favored by the amnesty office or ex-militant commanders. Some of them stormed the National Assembly to appeal their case and have vowed to return to the creeks if they were not included in the next phase. It remains unclear if these are indeed ex-combatants or just youths that want to benefit from the program.

There have been complaints about the privileged access to reintegration enlistments by some ex-militant leaders and their camp at the expense of others. For instance, the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) awarded pipeline surveillance contract to companies owned by ex-militants Leaders Government Tompolo Ekpumopolo, Mujaheedin Asari-Dokubo, Ateke Toms, Bipobiri Ajube and Ebikabowei Victor Ben (Boyloaf). These contracts and other possible benefits have been protested as being discriminatory. For example ex-militants in Aqua Ibom State protested in Uyo in September 2012 over non-inclusion in surveillance contracts awarded by the NNPC and lopsided and deliberate neglect of Aqua Ibom people in the Amnesty Program.

The Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) has threatened to resume hostilities in the Country. This is in response to MEND leader Henry Okah who was convicted for the October 1, 2010 bombing in Abuja. They said the organization would target multinational oil firms and South African firms operating in the country. This has great tendency to disrupt the reintegration process as some of the ex-militants on training could be recalled.

The amnesty program exclusively targeted only militants without consideration for the victims of militancy and hostage taking in the region. Mothers who have lost children, children who had lost fathers, families that have lost homes and persons who have been displaced by the conflict were not included in the amnesty package, presumably as a result of their lack of means of violence. Inclusive amnesty programs normally provide benefits and assistance packages for disabled combatants, dependent children of ex-combatants, female ex-combatants, child soldiers, women partners of ex-combatants, vulnerable persons, internally displaced persons, war affected civilians, ex-combatant communities, amnestied political prisoners, and elderly persons connected to armed groups.

It is also important to note that there are youths in the Niger Delta that did not join the militant groups to cause havoc against the state. These are young, hardworking men and women, some of them are university graduates. This group of people feels disenfranchised, as they were totally sidelined in the process. This sends a worrying message that for youths to benefit from trainings that would further develop their potentials as Niger Delta indigenes they must raise arms against the state.

The role of communities in facilitating resettlement and reintegration of ex-combatants into civilian and community life is very important to any sustainable and effective amnesty program. The host communities are regarded as part of reintegration program and should be empowered to participate in the design, planning and execution of reintegration programs. In the Niger Delta amnesty program, poor community reintegration makes for reluctance of ex-militants to return to home communities. The lack of good community integration program is a big factor in the relocation of ex-combatants to urban areas with less likely concern for social stigmatization rather than return to home communities.

Some of the ex-militants have been showing unruly characters in their various training centers, causing disruptions and embarrassing the government. Twenty eight out of 100 ex-militants sent for a training program in Trinidad and Tobago have been deported. Trinidad and Tobago considered them inimical and threatening the good relationship between Nigeria and the country. Eight ex-militants were deported by the Sri Lankan government for breaching ethical contract. The Chief Executive Officer of the Presidential Amnesty Program had to travel to secure the release of twenty seven ex-militants from detention in Ghana. They were accused of unruly behavior in the hotel where they were staying as part of their welding training course. Some ex-militant have also been caught with illicit drugs in Nigerian Camps. All of these have been posing challenges for the Amnesty Program Office as some countries are reluctant to accept them cause of negative experiences from other countries.

No concrete measure has been taken by the federal government to address the root causes of the conflict and proffer solutions as to how the whole region can be reintegrated back into the system. Main critical issues such as poverty, corruption, unemployment, alienation, exploitation, marginalization, degradation, health amongst other issues are not tackled and they endanger the unstable peace and security in the Niger Delta region. The foregoing have shown community members, ex-militants that are still alienated from the amnesty program and the only way you can be sure to keep them off arms against the state is for there to be meaningful development in their area that would give them the opportunity to harness their potentials. If not the post amnesty program would become a vicious circle to benefit a few. Like the stories of Isaac Adaka Boro and Ken Saro Wiwa has shown us the Niger Delta agitation would continue, probably in more sophisticated ways until the root causes are resolved.

Conclusion

This essay critically assessed the reintegration of former militants in the Niger Delta of Nigeria, focusing on the root causes and the trend that led to the amnesty program and the implementation of the post amnesty program. The reintegration program focused mainly ex-militants without involving members of the community. It is important to note that the neglect of unemployed youths or those that suffered damages in the cause of conflict might lead to resentment among the communities. It is important that the program should be communal in nature, meet the needs of the communities as well as that of the ex-militants.

The Niger Delta reintegration program has low women participation. Women and men assume different roles in combat and should not be seen from socio-cultural angle only. The program should be all embracing to accommodate women needs which are sometimes different from men's need. It is also important to engage the stigmas and community cultures that retrain women and girl's successful reintegration. Unsuccessful reintegration of women may result in them having to resort to sex work or other activities that might constitute security risk in future.

At the root of the Niger Delta conflict are widespread poverty, poor sanitation and waste disposal infrastructure, low enterprise development outside oil and gas sector, poor electricity and pipe borne water distribution due to the terrain, poor quality educational and health facilities, and severe environmental degradation. The reintegration process should be holistic in dealing with all this agitation through the construction of social amenities such as good roads, schools, hospitals, housing, electricity, water, well distributed economic growth, improvement in security and transparent governance.

The government should adopt a fair revenue allocation formula. Those whose communities have abundant oil and gas deposits as natural endowment should be compensated. A credible revenue allocation formula would lessen agitation, tension and perception of unfairness on the part of the Niger Delta inhabitants.

The eventual success of the programme to me is based on genuine democratic principles of participation accountability and transparency. The committee should work closely with other relevant public institutions with professional and experienced staff that can contribute to the ongoing programme. It is also important that the committee work closely with private sector in order to absorb the militants at the end of their training.

Finally, programs like this stand to face challenges especially in the course of implementation. At this point, it is my opinion that the Amnesty committee should address some of the identified inadequacies in the program in order to make it more effective. Notwithstanding these challenges, the bold initiative by the Nigerian government should be commended. Since the commencement of the amnesty programme the country has enjoyed relative peace in the Niger Delta area.

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