

The Niger Delta Crises: Youth Intransigence and Opportunistic Ventures in Nigeria

Olufayo, Olu – Olu and Lucy Jegede
Department of Sociology Ekiti State University, Ado – Ekiti Nigeria
Email: threeolus@yahoo.com, iyabest01@yahoo.com,

Abstract

This paper examines the behavioural consequences of the general amnesty programme of the federal government on youth behaviour in Nigeria. For peace to reign, it was generally believed that man should prepare for war. This opinion, one is tempted to believe is the major reason for social upheavals in most part of the country especially in the Niger Delta where the youth seem to have resolved to murder sleep to ensure their own survival. The bizarre killing of their foremost leader and human right activist Ken-Saro Wiwa led to the heightened violence in the land which resulted into incessant killing, insecurity of life, pipe-line vandalization and bunkering, hostage taking, unwanted killing of innocent Nigerians among others. For peace to reign, the Federal Government has employed dialogue in the name of general amnesty for the perpetrators of this crimes and as expected they have embraced this as a better option. The danger this portends is the series of opportunistic ventures such as hostage taking of innocent Nigerians for ransom claims by some unemployed youth in Nigeria. In certain cases, political parties also employ such means of caging their opponents who are considered the people's choice for elective positions thereby robbing the nation of the right caliber of people needed for development. This has implications on the democratization process and our development in general. This paper takes a cursory look at this and offer useful suggestions for curtailing it.

INTRODUCTION: The problem in perspective: Just before the amnesty proclamation by the then late President Shehu Musa Yar'Adua, peace in the Niger Delta Region has become an alternative forgone. It was beyond the reach of both the common man and the rich as it could not be bought with money. So many sovereign states were illegally springing up within the geographical contraption called the Federal Republic of Nigeria. There were declarations of republics within the republic especially by some sections who were or perceived the feelings of marginalization. Funny enough, many of these sectional groups were receiving supports both from within and in diaspora. The government has reacted more violently to what was initially thought to be the tantrums of ants. This no doubt has wretched a lot of havocs on the citizenry and the entire nation due to so many bloodbaths for which accurate data may never surfaced.

With the death toll on the increase coupled with the dented image of the nation at international arena, the ants (so called) became formidable with a change of tactics from vandalization of pipelines and arson to kidnapping and hostage taking for ransom. This soon became a lucrative business that many independent groups started entering into the ventures hunting for expatriate in the country and when expatriates became unreachable they turned against their own flesh and blood. This led to the voluntary withdrawal of many of these foreign firms which has become the conveyor of capital flight from the country. Production went down to as low as 500,000 barrels per day in most cases against the normal rate of over 2.4 barrels thus witnessing the loss of position as first exporter of crude oil in Africa to Angola (Aluede 2012, Amaize 2012)

Sensing the danger which this portends for the country's ailing economy, the then president sued for peace with the militant youths who appeared to have signed a part with death on this issue. This was the beginning of the amnesty programme by the federal government. By this, all ex-militants were to be granted unconditional pardon and be fully re-integrated into the society after laying down their arms and other apparatus of war. This was to be done within the sixty days of the declaration. The disarmament exercise started August 6, following the proclamation in June 25, 2009. Very many ex-militant and of course those who envisaged a colossal largesse from the other party took a bold step forward to earn themselves a living while some who would not trust the government on such promises kept back. Even one of their leaders, Ateke Tom didn't give up until few hours to expiration line on October 3, 2009.

The objective was to give peace a chance thereby contributing to security stabilization in the area through disarmament, demobilization, rehabilitation and re-integration of ex-militant for a sustainable medium and long term development (www.nigerdeltaamnesty.org). In realization of this lofty aim, government started a five year calendar of rehabilitation in the Niger Delta. This is aptly summarized in the table below:

Table. 1 Roadmap to Development in the Niger Delta

June 25, 2009	August 6 – Oct 4, 2009	Within 6 – 12 months	For a 5year period
Official proclamation of unconditional pardon for ex-militants.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collection of arms and ammunitions as well as their destructions. • Registration of participants and biometrics. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Setting up of transformation camps across the nation. • Report of ex-militants to camp as well as transformation training • Assessment of wellness and their reintegration through educational and vocational placement and final demobilization 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge and skill acquisition and financial empowerment through placement programs and micro-credit and education • Reconciliation with local communities • Minority and final exit of amnesty

Source: www.nigerdeltaamnesty.org

It is worthy to note that the number of ex-militants has been on the increase since 2009. As at September 2011, not less than 20,192 ex-militants were demobilized. As at 2012, the number has shot up to 26,368 with the hope of enlisting another 3,642 people to round the figures to 30,000 (www.Channelstv.com).

Also interesting to note is the number of females involved in amnesty programme; some of whom served as informants as well as cooks and bedmates of these warlords. According to available statistics, 133 of the 20,192 militants were women cutting across nine states and the NDDC (www.punchng.com). We must also bear in mind that some of these women are now pregnant for their lovers who have either absconded or deserted them to embrace the amnesty policy. This brings the questions of who shall be responsible for the upkeep of these women and the fruits of the womb when they finally join the teeming population of youths in this oil region.

Let me also add that the enviable life styles of ex-militants is now sending a signals to the non-militants that exhibition of a high nuisance value is all that is required to be relevant in the scheme of things(www.chanelstv.com).

It is on the basis of the above that this study examines the behavioural consequences of the general amnesty programme on the Nigerian youth. Flowing from the above, the following questions come to mind.

- a) Is the amnesty programme only directed towards empowering the ex-militants in the troubled region?
- b) How adequate is the amnesty programme in solving/arresting youth restiveness in the Niger Delta?
- c) What is the mechanism for proper incorporation of ex-militants into the main-stream of productive economic activities giving the colossal amount being received as stipends even while on training?
- d) What future awaits the envious non-militants in the area given the enviable life styles of their dangerous colleagues in a country with a minimum wage of eighteen thousand naira a month?
- e) What jobs awaits the ex-militants on training in a country with a high rate of unemployment?
- f) Going by the encanterous nature of our politics which has elevated party politics as the best profession in Nigeria, how sure are we that these youths would not become ready -made puns in the hands of desperate politicians in realizing their inordinate ambitions?

From the above, the study therefore seeks the following objectives:

- 1) Examining how youth intransigence in the Niger Delta paved way for opportunistic ventures in Nigeria.
- 2) Highlighting the various measures put in place in solving youth restiveness in the troubled region and explaining how adequate these are in achieving this objectives.
- 3) Knowing the state of preparedness of the government in absolving the troubled youths in the oil rich region now on various training across the globe.
- 4) Pinpointing the danger of the seemingly neglect of the non-militants in the area under study.

GOVERNMENTAL EFFORTS AT REHABILITATION

With the disarmament of the thousands of the militants in the Niger Delta, it is imperative that government embark on a process of reintegrating them back to their various communities. This explains why the government set up transformations centers (camps) for skill upgrading of these people. This again was done with fifty-four (54) working partners majority of whom are from the southwest and southern Nigeria to help in the process of transformation. They were engaged in counseling, career guidance, wellness assessment, and training of the people. All over the camp centres, according to the Tribune Newspapers of 17th November 2012, even though

the participants include graduates with universities degree up to Master's and Ph.D levels, only 15% of all are literate. Of this number, about 85% shows preference for formal education. The implication of this is that a vast majority of them are illiterates who must be taught how to fend for themselves without the use of arms and ammunitions. They were therefore opened to a variety of skills and vocational building programmes such as artisanship, oil and gas; transportation and marine business, environment and sanitation management, agriculture, and tourism, creative arts, information technology, building and construction and small scale manufacturing among others. The table below gave a brief summary of this:

Table 2: On Skills and Vocation Building

Artisanship	Oil and Gas	Maritime	Agriculture	Culture & Tourism
Tilling, Basket making, mat making, photography, printing, leather works, scaffolding technology, painting, industrial tailoring, computer appreciation, pipe welding, plumbing, pipe fitting, bead making etc.	Fire prevention and control, swimming and offshore survival, diving operations, generator maintenance, underwater welding technology, offshore fire and emergency response, seismic data acquisition, first aid treatment, purchasing and supplies management etc.	Maritime navigation, marine engineering, nautical science, shipping business, sand blasting of vessels, marine research and development, boat building, maintenance and operations etc.	Food processing, animal feed formulation, rabbitery, Rice processing, fishing, piggery, poultry, snail farming, cassava processing, palm oil processing, bee keeping, grass cutter farming, etc.	Event management, interior decoration, arts and crafts, cosmetology and hair dressing, music recording studio, laundering and dry cleaning, make-up, photography and event coverage, outdoor catering services, baking and confectioneries, etc
Environment and sanitation management	Transportation	Professionals	Building and Construction	Creative and Arts / Theatre Arts
Waste disposal landscaping cleaning and fumigation services, car wash, cooling van, travel agents car hire services, etc.	Towing services, boat transport, motor mechanic, keke napep. Etc.	Lawyers, Doctors, Accountants, Engineers, Teachers, Nurses and Midwives, pharmacist, etc.	Building engineering, Masonry, plastering, bricklaying, real estate agents, quantity surveying, etc.	Movie making, film acting, singing, dancing, modeling story board, camera operation, presenting and public speaking, sound and music production, movie marketing production, Television/Radio and video production and editing, comedy making, programme directing etc.
Information Technology	Educational services	Small scale manufacturing		
Cyber café, graphic and multimedia design, business centre, internet service providers, mobile phone repairs, computer repairs and recharge cards. Distributorship/retailing	Vending services, nursery and play group services, book stores etc.	Candle Making, making, nylon Bag making, Block Industry making, ice block making, sachet water making, tissue paper making,		

Source: www.nigerdeltaamnesty.org

Apart from the above, there were other short term courses designed for youth of 18 years and above without formal education. These include, slinging and rigging, swamp buggy, fork lifting, pay loading, excavating and crane operating. All these only last a period of six months to learn and they require no special skills.

Given all these, it appears the government actually meant business at improving the lives of these miserable youths for the better. Very many of these youths have been deployed to various countries for training and skill acquisition. Not less than 1,136 participants are studying in various universities abroad this year alone; and it is envisaged that about five hundred (500) scholars would be studying in the united kingdom by the year 2013.

Others are spread in private universities such as Redeemers University (100 students) and Novena University (75 students) (Kuku 2012 and Alaude 2012). By December 2012, it is envisaged that a whopping sum of seventy two billion naira (#72 b naira) would have been spent on the ex-militants alone while the year 2013 foretells another boom of 88 billion naira on the hard and fortunate participants. The question on everybody's lips is whether this colossal amount would yield the desired result given the situation on ground as at now (Salaudeen 2012)

ASSESSMENT OF THE PROGRAMME

Many opinions have greeted the presidential amnesty programme ranging from harsh and negative comments to positive comments. While this paper intends not a wholesale support of these two opposing views, it attempts a synthesis of the two under many broad sub-themes as follows:

Amnesty Project: A financial gain or loss? When one looks back at both human lives already claimed by the struggle, and the colossal loss of property by both sides, one would be tempted to quickly applaud the programme as a right step in the right direction. Again, no amount could be said to be too much in the pursue of knowledge. Given the statistics on spending on the ex-militants there appears a boom period for them at the moment to the neglect of other projects which deserve urgent attention. Such astronomical spending of 72 billion naira on some 26, 358 ex-militants amount to serious over pampering in a country with over 150 million people battling with environmental degradation, unemployment, health problems, and other indices of underdevelopment. One wonders the type of jobs they would be doing to earn them a more comfortable living they are enjoying now given a huge amount of 23.6 billion naira as stipends while on training. This to these authors is an invitation to future trouble in a county with a minimum wage of 18,000 naira per month.

Secondly, three years into the programme which is expected to last only five years, there is less of developmental projects visible in the trouble zone. One would have expected some industries springing up in many communities in the area to absolve many on their return. The absence of this portends the danger of wanting to come back into full politics which appears the only lucrative business around the area for now. Elective positions, since it cannot go round brings trouble between the people themselves on the one hand and the people and government on the other hand. This again foretells doom for our nascent democracy.

Thirdly, servicing some of the warlords to maintain peace in the area is not only unconstitutional but anti-development. A warlord (Dokubo Asari) earns \$9 million yearly to protect pipelines while Tom Ateke and Tompolo earns \$3.8 million and \$22.9 million as a year contract for the same purpose respectively. After amnesty, what jobs would pay better this who only sits to collect their money? Nigeria appears to be postponing the evil day. Another angle to look at this is the job it is creating for the boys. Politics is looming ahead and the battle for governorship race and other races appear inviting. The boys must be more militant to fascinate huge investment from desperate politicians. Militancy therefore is becoming a fascinating and lucrative profession. Only time shall tell. Non – militants as well would soon discover their stupidity by being law abiding when those sent abroad for training are back with kinds of assorted life styles.

This explains why it would have been better as Salaudeen (2012) posits that the training would have been better delivered at home with expatriates being brought abroad than what it is now on. Perhaps the above explains why developed countries are not even involved in training of the deadly guys for fear of exposing them to their installations and security networks. This has implications on our image as a nation as it tells the whole world that our so called image laundering is not yet convincing.

TOWARDS A CONCLUSION

As things are presently in the Niger Delta, the federal government appears to be in search of peace at all cost. This explains our seemingly purchase of peace with money which we as a nation may not be able to sustain for long. The loss of over 150,000 barrels of oil per day still portrays a leaking roof in our house (shell oil company 2012). The implication is that those paid to do the jobs are doing less than that. Our security outfit as a nation is daily being downgraded rather than being upgrade for challenges ahead. We are now at the mercy of private security and sometimes amorphous faces posing as task masters of the nation. No sooner has the Niger Delta boys laid down their arms than the Boko Haram group in the northern part started their own menace and government has not been able to curtail their excesses since.

It is in the light of all this that this paper suggests a reinforcement of its intelligence network to know how to combat the resurgence of security attack on the nation. Anything short of this would in the shortest possible time incur the wrath of the masses who are daily been taxed through fuel hike to prosecute an unholy alliance with tyrannical few. Should this happen, it would confirm the prediction of our doom prophets and Masters that Nigeria would break by the year 2015. A stitch in time saves nine.

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