

The civilianisation of ex-combatants of the Niger Delta: Progress and challenges in reintegration

*Hakeem Onapajo and Abdul-Wasi Babatunde Moshood**

Abstract

The focus of research on the Niger Delta has shifted considerably from the large-scale violence affecting the region, to the effects of the post-amnesty era which followed the introduction of the Presidential Amnesty Programme (PAP) by the government in 2009. Unfortunately, the emergent literature on the amnesty topic has been pessimistic in its reductionist assessment of the whole programme as a mere ‘cash-for-peace’ or ‘settlement’ exercise which can only lead to a fragile peace in the Niger Delta. This paper, being a product of an in-depth investigation of the programme through direct observations and field interviews, presents a different perspective. The paper demonstrates the capacity of the amnesty programme to facilitate and sustain peace in the troubled Niger Delta, with specific focus on the reintegration aspect of the PAP. The paper shows that the reintegration programme has recorded some positive progress which has not been well captured in the literature. Indeed, these achievements are a clear sign of the potential of the PAP to bring about a lasting peace in the Niger Delta. Furthermore, the paper analyses the current challenges bedevilling the programme. Following the highlighted challenges, the

* Dr Hakeem Onapajo is Post-doctoral Fellow in the Department of Politics and International Studies at the University of Zululand, KwaZulu-Natal, and Dr Abdul-Wasi Babatunde Moshood is Lecturer in the Department of Political Science at Lagos State University, Lagos.

paper offers recommendations on how the reintegration programme can be properly utilised to sustain peace in the Niger Delta.

Keywords: Disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR), ex-combatants, Amnesty Programme, Niger Delta

Introduction

In the 2000s, issues concerning the Niger Delta were more popular in research on the Nigerian state. Clearly, this was informed by the fact that the period was synonymous with the age of increased agitations and violence in the oil-rich Niger Delta region. The large-scale violence experienced in the region in that period drastically affected Nigeria's oil production and exportation, with devastating effects on the country's economy given its over reliance on oil earnings as its national income. For instance, Nigeria's oil production sharply dropped from 2.6 million barrels (per day) to 1.3 million barrels (per day) between 2005 and 2009, in the midst of consistent attacks on oil installations and kidnapping of oil workers by the militia groups in the region (Obi 2010). Given this situation, researchers were preoccupied with the task of studying the patterns of violence and agitation in the region, which produced works that analyse the origins of the crisis, the various actors involved in the crisis (their interests, solutions and recommendations), and other topical issues around the Niger Delta conflict (for example, Human Rights Watch 1999; Obi 1997; 2007; 2009; Oyefusi 2007; Omotola 2009; Ikelegbe 2005).

With the introduction and implementation of the Presidential Amnesty Programme (PAP) by the Nigerian government in 2009 – which has become the euphemism for the government's Disarmament, Demobilisation, and Reintegration (DDR) policy on the Niger Delta – the direction of research naturally changed, and attention has increasingly shifted to the post-amnesty era of the Niger Delta. As such, there has been an appreciable development of literature on the topic of amnesty in the Niger Delta (Aghedo 2013; Ushie 2013; Eke 2014; Obi 2014; Agbibo 2014; Oluwaniyi 2011a; Ojeleye 2011; Davidheiser and Nyiayaana 2011). While a handful of work on the topic

has indeed been useful to understanding the background, challenges, and sustainability of the amnesty policy as a peace strategy in the Niger Delta, the main thrust of their assessment emphasises the negative aspects of the policy with some sceptic views of the programme. For example, Cyril Obi argues that ‘... evidence so far suggests that the PAP is at best a fragile basis for sustaining peace and development in the oil-rich region in the medium to long term’ (Obi 2014:254). He further concludes: ‘The PAP has delivered to the government (rather than the people) the type of peace consistent with a status quo that maintains conditions for state ownership of oil, its optimal extraction in partnership with oil multinationals and the sharing of the spoils’ (Obi 2014:254). In a similar vein, Surulola Eke is of the view that ‘the deal was a “cash for peace” programme cloaked in “amnesty”; which has inadvertently increased the appeal of violence for those who seek a slice of the so-called “national cake”’ (Eke 2014:1).

After a considerable period of active engagement with the PAP through a series of interviews with ex-combatants and coordinators of the reintegration programme, including direct observation of the skills training centres (for the reintegration programme), the authors of this paper present an alternative perspective to the existing perspective and narratives of the PAP in Nigeria.¹ This study, therefore, demonstrates with empirical evidence the effectiveness of the amnesty programme in peace efforts in the troubled Niger Delta, with a particular focus on the reintegration aspect of the PAP. The reintegration part of the programme is specially chosen for analysis because it represents the most important stage for any DDR programme as it aims to complete the peacebuilding process and prevent a relapse into violence. Moreover, the reintegration stage forms the present stage of the PAP of the Nigerian government. Notwithstanding the aim of the paper, which illustrates some of the progress recorded in the reintegration process, some of the major challenges to the programme

1 The first author was officially assigned the duty of monitoring and evaluating the progress of the training programmes under the amnesty policy in South Africa in 2013. This enhanced a direct assessment of the programme. The second author was on a field study to the Amnesty Office in Abuja, Bayelsa and Rivers States for his doctoral project.

are presented. This offers more support for the paper's objectivity and dismisses claims of a pro-government bias.

To accomplish its task, the paper is divided into five sections (excluding the introductory section). The first section offers a conceptual analysis of reintegration and demonstrates its importance in a post-conflict peacebuilding process. The second section presents an overview of the PAP and DDR strategy of the Nigerian government, showing the process that led to the programme with its objectives as outlined by the government. The third section specifically addresses the reintegration part of the programme and how it is designed to work in the Niger Delta. The fourth section analyses the observable progress and challenges in the process of the reintegration programme. Finally, the last section presents a summary and conclusion of the paper. A set of recommendations is also provided on how to maintain peace in the Niger Delta.

1. Reintegration in a peacebuilding process: A conceptual analysis

'Reintegration' – defined as 'the process by which ex-combatants acquire civilian status and gain sustainable employment and income' (United Nations 2006) – represents a stage in the DDR programme, which derives its origin from the concept of 'peacebuilding', first introduced by former Secretary-General, Boutros Boutros-Ghali, in his proposals for reform in the United Nations (UN). In the report, otherwise known as 'An Agenda for Peace', Boutros-Ghali advocated for 'comprehensive efforts to identify and support structures which will tend to consolidate peace and advance a sense of confidence and well-being among people' in a post-conflict environment (United Nations 1992). For these purposes, Boutros-Ghali identified the following strategies: disarming combatants, restoring order, destruction of weapons, repatriating refugees, advisory and training support for security personnel, human rights protection, strengthening of government institutions, and promotion of public participation (United Nations 1992; also see Knight 2008). Scholars and practitioners have concluded that these strategies represent a basis for the 'Disarmament,

Demobilisation and Reintegration' process that has become a useful tool for conflict resolution and peacekeeping efforts (Knight 2008:26).

Following Boutros-Ghali's report, the UN through its Security Council fully adopted the DDR strategy in 1999 (Knight 2008:26). By 2000, it was reported that the UN had implemented DDR in fifteen peacekeeping operations (United Nations 2000:8). The Brahimi report, an outcome of a high-level panel set up to review the peace operations of the UN in 2000, further emphasised the importance of the DDR, which was seen as 'key to immediate post-conflict stability and reduced likelihood of conflict recurrence' (United Nations 2000:7). The report facilitated the widening of the scope of DDR to include socio-economic dimensions to post-conflict peace operations. This was concretised with the Integrated DDR Standards (IDDRS) report published in 2006 (United Nations 2010:9–10). In 2010, a further advance was experienced in the development of the concept following the introduction of the 'Second Generation' DDR. The Second Generation was conceived to address the shortcomings of the 'traditional model', somewhat narrowly concerned with addressing the military aspects of conflict. Thus, the Second Generation is designed to take a holistic approach to post-conflict peacebuilding and includes the whole community in its scope (United Nations 2010).

The reintegration process, which is the central focus in this study, is indeed important to the DDR process. This is because disarmament and demobilisation of combatants would be meaningless without the creation of fresh socio-economic opportunities for the ex-combatants, which would prevent them from reconsidering their violent past efforts. Indeed, experience has shown that frustrated and unemployed ex-combatants have been involved in activities that ultimately lead to resurgence of insecurity in post-conflict states (Watson 2009). Therefore, reintegration strategies are undertaken after disarmament and demobilisation, which often involve direct monetary packages, provision of job opportunities, skills acquisition programmes, income-generation enterprises and other social reintegration policies to ex-combatants in exchange for their commitment not to take up arms against the state again (Knight 2008:29). Despite the potential of

the reintegration programme in peace-making process, the concept has not been spared of criticism.

Some of the issues raised about reintegration by scholars and practitioners are the following: ambiguity in the timeframe for reintegration – whether it is in the short-term or long-term; imprecision about the basic elements of reintegration and how to measure the success of the programme; its inadequacy in addressing the root causes of the conflict; over-concentration on armed groups and neglect of other social groups affected in conflict (Hazen 2011; Jennings 2008). In response to some of these concerns, significant policy measures have been taken by important multilateral agencies, national governments and non-governmental agencies. For example, the concept of ‘reinsertion’ was introduced to differentiate between the short-term and long-term aspects of reintegration by the UN. The reinsertion was defined as ‘short-term material and/or financial assistance to meet immediate needs’ (United Nations 2006). It is aimed at keeping ‘ex-combatants off the street’ and providing ‘transitional assistance’ to ex-combatants and their families before reintegration is fully implemented (Hazen 2011:199). In addition, the Swedish government through the Stockholm Initiative on DDR (SIDDR) recommended the inclusion of ‘neglected beneficiaries’ such as women, children and landless youth in the reintegration process (Ministry for Foreign Affairs Sweden 2006). Indeed, this particular recommendation has been included in the framework of Second Generation. Also, there have been calls for mainstreaming reintegration programmes into national poverty eradication and socio-economic development schemes in order to guarantee the sustainability of the reintegration programme (International Labour Organisation 2009).

2. Amnesty programme and DDR in Niger Delta

As alluded to earlier, the volley of violence in the Niger Delta has been well captured in numerous studies. For this reason, we do not see any reason for much repetition here. It is, however, incontrovertible that the Niger Delta conflict marks a major chapter in Nigeria’s history. Nigeria experienced the intensity of the crisis in the 2000s. For example, it was reported that

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ninety-two attacks on the oil industry were carried out in 2008 alone, and almost one thousand people were killed in the period (International Crisis Group 2009:2). In a bid to find a solution to the crisis, several measures were taken by the government. These measures were undertaken through violent and non-violent approaches. First, the non-violent approach: the government established some developmental agencies to address rising concerns over developmental challenges in the Niger Delta. The agencies include the Niger Delta Development Board (NNDB) established in 1961; the Niger Delta Basin and Rural Development Authority (NDBRDA) established in 1976; the Oil Mineral Producing Areas Development Commission (OMPADEC) established in 1992; the Petroleum Trust Fund (PTF) in 1995; the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) established in 2000; and the creation of the Ministry of Niger Delta Affairs in 2008. Other non-violent mechanisms employed were the occasional increment in revenue allocations to the Niger Delta and transitional justice and constitutional conferences (see Omotola 2007; Oluwaniyi 2011a; Adeyeri 2012).

The violent approach to resolving the crisis manifested in the promulgation of military decrees criminalising local protest groups in the region. This created an avenue for massive clampdown on the protest groups, given their rigidity on addressing the environmental problems arising from oil explorations in the region. This event culminated in the execution of the leaders of the Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP) otherwise known as the 'Ogoni 9' by the military dictatorship of General Sani Abacha in 1995, which attracted international condemnations. A special military force, the Joint Task Force (JTF), was later created during Olusegun Obasanjo's democratic rule, which signified a total declaration of war on the increasingly sophisticated and militarised protest movements in the Niger Delta. Unfortunately, these measures escalated the crisis rather than solving the problem.²

2 Human rights abuses alarmingly increased at that time, which further fuelled the anger of the peoples of the area; hence the occurrence of an increased rate of violence in the Niger Delta.

The ineffectiveness of the military approach necessitated the search for a different approach to resolve the crisis. Towards this end, the administration of (late) Umar Musa Yar'Adua set up the Niger Delta Technical Committee (NDTC) – after a rejected peace summit to be headed by Nigeria's UN staff member Ibrahim Gambari – in September 2008 to come up with suggestions on conflict resolution in the Niger Delta (International Crisis Group 2009). In order to find legitimacy for the NDTC amongst the indigenous peoples of the region, the government strategically ensured that all members of the committee have their origins from the nine states that characterise the Niger Delta (Abia, Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo, Imo, Ondo and Rivers States). The main task of the NDTC was to examine the report of a previous commission – the Willinks Commission in 1958 – and to consolidate the recommendations of that report for government action. Amongst other important suggestions, the offering of amnesty to the combatants and implementation of DDR were central in the recommendations provided by the NDTC (International Crisis Group 2009). Granting amnesty to the combatants, as well as the acceptance of the amnesty by the combatants, would create the needed environment for the implementation of the DDR and address the major grievances fuelling the age-long conflict.

Although the government did not officially accept the recommendations of the NDTC, it embraced the idea of amnesty for the combatants as a measure to encourage negotiations; hence its announcement of a 60-day amnesty period (August to October 2011) to combatants willing to accept unconditional amnesty in order to kick-start the peace-making process. The amnesty simultaneously included a disarmament process as the state's amnesty policy required that the combatants lay down their arms and sign the amnesty register indicating their acceptance of the offer (Oluwaniyi 2011b). At the end of this process, a total of 20 192 combatants came out to accept the amnesty and surrendered their weapons to the government. Two other phases followed in 2010 and 2012 to accommodate groups that were excluded in the first phase given their earlier scepticism about government's intention with the policy. In 2010, 6 166 combatants were included, while

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3 642 combatants were considered for the third (and final) phase in 2012 (Oluwaniyi 2011b).

The demobilisation process immediately followed the disarmament exercise. The government set up demobilisation camps as centres for the demilitarisation and rehabilitation of the ex-combatants for a period of time, with the aim to prepare them for a new civilian life. In this process, the government offered to pay a sum of N65 000 to the ex-combatants as monthly stipends to cater for their immediate needs and discourage them from engaging in criminal activities until the end of their reintegration (Oluwaniyi 2011b).

In contrast to other DDR programmes in post-conflict states, which are usually managed and funded directly by international organisations and donor states, the implementers of the Nigerian DDR define the programme as 'home-grown'. This is because the programme is seemingly designed and financed in its entirety by the Nigerian government. According to Kingsley Kuku (then the Special Adviser to the President on Amnesty and Niger Delta Affairs), 'the Amnesty programme is the only DDR programme in the world that did not rely on the expert advice from the United Nations. It has been acknowledged as a unique Nigerian-made peace model, proclaimed, funded and managed by Nigerians to this level of success so far without any tragic incidents'.³ However, the fact that the programme has sufficient connection with external agencies and individuals in its foundational designing, as well as government's collaboration with the multi-national oil companies operating in the Niger Delta on the project, may counter the government claims that it was 'home-grown'. It should be noted that the oil companies, which include SPDC, Chevron-Texaco, Total, AGIP, ConcoPhillips Oando and Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG), set up the (Oil and Gas International Foundation) OGIF to train 3 000 ex-combatants in the reintegration process (which is discussed in the next section) (Abazie-Humphrey 2014).

3 'Government justifies foreign trainings for former militants', <<http://www.oyibosonline.com/cgi-bin/newsscript.pl?record=9480>>

The immediate success of the disarmament and demobilisation (DD) stages of the peace programme can be judged from the sharp decline in violent activities – ransom kidnapping, raping, pipeline vandalism, and assassinations – which were alarmingly high in the Niger Delta. Of course, this revitalised the dwindling oil production in the region. Oil production soared from 700 000 barrels a day to 2.4 million barrels (Abazie-Humphrey 2014). Besides the oil industry, the peaceful environment generated by the DD processes also assisted the local fishing economy, which is the main source of livelihood for the peoples of the region. For example, research conducted on fishing business in Niger Delta communities after the amnesty programme was implemented demonstrated that the local fishers recorded about 200 per cent increase in their weekly income (Achoja et al. 2013:12–16). Also, the successful completion of the DD stages – despite immediate challenges including public mistrust of the programme, legitimacy issues, implementation problems and logistical hitches (Aghedo 2013; International Crisis Group 2009; Oluwaniyi 2011b) – and the eventual transition to the reintegration stage should also count as an achievement for the amnesty programme. Indeed, this is evinced by the eventual acceptance of the government’s peace initiative by the remaining combatants who were initially sceptical about the programme.

3. The reintegration process

It is useful to note that most of the existing studies on DDR in the Niger Delta do not take into consideration the reintegration stage in their analyses. The fact that this study is a product of more direct observation and assessment of the reintegration process is one of its major contributions to the existing literature.

The reintegration programme has two dimensions. First, the government formulated a novel strategy of ‘constructive engagement’ with the leadership of the combatants by employing them to establish their own private security firms that would be hired to secure oil pipelines and other installations on a multi-billion Naira contract agreement (International Crisis Group 2009). The logic behind this strategy is to find a meaningful

avenue for the militant leaders, who had been exposed to stupendous wealth and lifestyle – given their incomes from ransom kidnapping, oil bunkering and political patronage – to now have alternative and legitimate sources of income after renouncing violence. This will prevent them from returning to their violent past. In addition, it is believed that these individuals, given their experience with vandalising oil pipelines and installations, would better provide the needed security in that regard. According to the Special Adviser to the President on Niger Delta and Amnesty Affairs, Kingsley Kuku, ‘I believe that only the people of the communities where the pipelines crisscross their backyards can conveniently work with the security agencies to stop oil theft and protect the facilities’ (Daniel 2013). Indeed, the fact that leaders of combatants in conflict are not usually given special economic opportunities in reintegration arrangements has often been one of the reasons for the collapse of DDR in many countries.

The second dimension is the more popular one, which targets the general combatants and non-combatant youths for socio-economic empowerment. It is instructive to note that one of the major criticisms of the traditional model of DDR is its focus on the combatants alone in the reintegration process while neglecting the other members of the society (United Nations 2010). The fact that this gap is meaningfully addressed in the Niger Delta’s reintegration programme is indeed one of its strengths. The reintegration programme also includes non-militant youths of the Niger Delta. According to the (then) Head of Reintegration of the amnesty programme, Lawrence Pepple, the reintegration progress included ‘people who did not bear arms (non-combatants) that were drawn from what we call “impacted communities” – communities [in] which militant agitation has dwindled their economy, stopped their family from doing what they are expected to do’ (personal communication, 2014). In this category of the non-militants, women are also included. According to the Head of Reintegration, ‘over 742 women were covered in the programme’ (personal communication, 2014). The inclusion of women, according to Pepple, is in contrast with the Liberian reintegration policy which was based on the expression of ‘one man-one gun’ as a basis to preclude women. In confirmation of this claim,

we observed a number of women (although insignificant) at the training centres in South Africa during our visit. The consideration of women in the reintegration process addresses gender bias, one of the major concerns of scholars and practitioners on reintegration (see Knight 2008).

The reintegration process involves vocational training and formal education programmes for its beneficiaries. The vocational training involves a wide range of vocations that would potentially empower ex-combatants upon their reintegration into society. These include piloting, carpentry and furniture making, welding, boat building, marine operations, heavy duty operations, automobile technology, agricultural operations, oil and gas technical operations, electrical and mechanical engineering, and other relevant skills. In formal education, the reintegration process creates the opportunity for ex-combatants willing to pursue formal education to acquire quality education up to tertiary levels (undergraduate and postgraduate) in local and foreign universities. A document from the Amnesty Office indicates that the education and skills training programmes cover 157 universities and 22 vocational skills training centres in thirty countries across the world. The local education and vocational training programmes involve nine universities and nineteen vocational training centres in eight states in Nigeria (Office of the Special Adviser to Nigeria President on Niger Delta 2014).

The reintegration process is anchored by two important agencies: the Presidential Amnesty Office and the OGIF. The Presidential Amnesty Office is the governmental agency established under the presidency to solely administer the reintegration programme. The agency is headed by the Special Adviser to the President on Niger Delta and Amnesty Affairs. On the other hand, the OGIF is a foundation created by twelve notable oil companies operating in the area (Oando PLC, Niger Delta Petroleum Resources Limited, Chevron, Exxon-Mobil, Shell BP, Total, Nigerian Liquefied Natural Gas Limited, Schlumberger Oilfield Services, Pan Ocean Oil Corporation, Nigerian Petroleum Development Company, Nigerian Agip Oil Company, and Addax Petroleum) to work in partnership with

the Presidential Amnesty Office to train and empower three thousand ex-combatants and youths (Abazie-Humphrey 2014).

As of November 2014, official reports indicate that a total of 18 706 ex-combatants and youths have acquired formal and informal education, out of which 15 392 have graduated in the reintegration programme. Another 11 294 individuals are being enlisted into the reintegration programme. It is noteworthy that the government has indicated an intention to close the reintegration programme at the end of 2015. In this regard, the then Special Adviser to the President remarked that: 'It will be in the best interest of Nigeria for government to terminate the presidential amnesty programme by 2015. If it is not closed by 2015, it will lose its taste. This is because it will become an alternative government in the Niger Delta' (Ehigiator 2013). However, this has been a source of controversy as many actors in the region are calling for the extension of the programme for more years. Considering the many voices who oppose the discontinuation of the programme in 2015, and a noticeably weak disengagement plan proposed by the government, the new government under President Buhari in February 2016 announced an extension of the programme for another two years (until 2018) while describing the present phase as an 'exit strategy' (Olokor 2016).

4. Appraisal of the reintegration process: Progress and challenges

In the analyses of the existing works on Niger Delta's DDR, the programme is often described as a mere 'cash-for-peace' or 'settlement' exercise that will only produce a fragile peace. A more pertinent assessment of the programme arising from direct observation and field interviews by our researchers provides a different insight into the DDR. It shows that the understanding of the programme should go beyond the existing views in the literature. There has been progress, which has not been adequately captured in the existing analyses. This does not mean that there are no remaining challenges in the actualisation of the objectives of the programme and the whole peace move in the Niger Delta. Therefore, this section will use a

thematic analysis format to more fully identify the observable progress of, and challenges to, the reintegration exercise.

Progress

Quality training

One good way to assess the reintegration process of the DDR is to look at the quality of training being designed for the ex-combatants. It should be noted that many reintegration exercises, especially in post-conflict African states, only offer low-quality training programmes (in both formal and informal education) to ex-combatants. This is usually due to a paucity of funds for broad and competent training. The result is that opportunities for reintegration into civilian life are severely limited. For example, many Sierra Leonean ex-combatants ended up as small-scale artisans, entrepreneurs and farmers because of the kind of training they were offered in the reintegration process. For this reason, many of them have been unemployed in Freetown and vulnerable to violent activities (*Africa Renewal* 2005). This also represented one of the challenges of reintegration in Liberia (Alusala 2011:66). In the Nigerian case, the reintegration process is characterised by high-quality educational and vocational skills training programmes that have the capacity to empower the demobilised combatants after their training programmes.

Although there is no accurate data on the distribution of beneficiaries under the reintegration programme in terms of formal and informal education training, it is useful to state that the universities being offered to the demobilised combatants and youths of the Niger Delta are some of the high-profile and expensive universities in the world. Some of them are Coventry University, Portsmouth University, Salford University, Bradford University, University of Liverpool, University of Reading, University of Newcastle, University of Dundee, University of Kent, Leeds University, Kings College and others in the United Kingdom. Others include high-profile universities in Malaysia, Dubai and Sweden (Office of the Special Adviser to the President on Niger Delta 2014). It cannot be disputed that

a graduate from any of these universities has better prospects for job and economic independence than reintegrated combatants in other parts of Africa. This also goes for some of the vocational and skills training institutes available to the beneficiaries of the reintegration programme. Some of the training centres include Schlumberger Technologies based in France (for drilling engineering), Lufthansa Aviation Academy based in Germany (for advanced pilot training), CAE Oxford Aviation Academy in the United Kingdom (for advanced pilot training), Schneider Electric in France (for electrical engineering), Institute of French Petroleum in France (for petroleum industry technicians), Airstar Flight School in Italy (for pilot training), Comair in South Africa (pilot training), Flight Simulation Company in Netherlands (for pilot training), Africa Union Aviation Academy in South Africa (pilot training), Adcorp Technical Training in South Africa (mining industry technicians), Furntech Furniture in South Africa (for furniture making), and a host of others in different parts of the world.

Behavioural change and academic performance

One of the major concerns of scholars and practitioners in the early days of the reintegration process was the seeming difficulty in transforming the behaviour of the demobilised combatants into that of a decent civilian. Truly, this represented a major challenge at the different camps and training centres. However, a personal observation of the activities of the ex-combatants at their different training centres shows an improvement in their dispositions to life. In South Africa, the researchers were able to access all such centres and discovered a surprising change in their attitudes. For example, as evaluator of training programmes in South Africa, the first author asked one leader of ex-combatants if there were frequent cases of fights among them. The reply was (in the broken English Language popular in Nigeria), 'It is only someone who does not understand the reason why he is here that will engage in unnecessary fight ... for me I am not here for that'. In an encounter with ex-combatants undertaking diploma and degree programmes at a university, one of them told the researcher,

‘There is no type of gun that I have not used before ... just name it. But I am now a changed person. I thank the government for this opportunity’. These and other responses show improvement in the behaviour of the ex-combatants.

The above is also corroborated by their instructors at the centres. For example, an official of the International Students Office in one of the universities stated that the students under the reintegration programme were ‘very eager to learn the new environment. They want to be successful’. This behavioural change is also reflected in the academic reports to which the researcher had access. The reports on individual conduct and academic performance are quite impressive. This also includes their individual academic performance. For example, of the fifty-one of the beneficiaries of the programme who graduated at a Nigerian private university, Novena University, seven had second-class Upper Division passes in subjects as Intelligence and Security Studies, Political Science, Energy and Petroleum Studies, Accounting or Computer Science (Naij.com 2016). However, this does not suggest that there are not a few cases of misbehaviour amongst the trainees. In the periods when they were being evaluated, there were one or two specific cases of errant behaviour. What is however clear in our observation is that some of the trainees were challenged by culture shock and sudden environmental change in their new abodes. For instance, a prominent complaint by the trainees was the absence of Nigerian dishes, which they were promised before they arrived in South Africa for training. Also, they were struggling to adapt to the new academic environment and challenges since many of them had long gaps in their schooling because of the years they spent in the creeks as militants.

Employment

The high quality training acquired by the beneficiaries of the reintegration programme is, of course, providing good employment opportunities for them (although enough achievement is yet to materialise in this area). Some examples include the following: fifty of the trainees that went for welding and fabrication training at Proclad Group in Dubai were

automatically offered employment by the institution upon completion of their training; forty-nine trainees who underwent training at Scuola Edile Genovese in Italy also gained employment at different shipping companies locally and internationally after their training; fourteen trainees who trained as mechatronics and welding engineers got employed at Samsung Electronics (Office of the Special Adviser to the President on Niger Delta 2014); and Schneider Electric in France employed fifteen trainees in power management after their training at the company (Daniel 2014). In addition to the direct employment offers, the government is also making available some funds for business set-ups in small-scale enterprises for four thousand beneficiaries of the reintegration programme (Office of the Special Adviser to the President on Niger Delta 2014). In summary, it is reported in December 2014 that ‘a total of 2 072 ex-agitators have since secured gainful employments or have been empowered to set-up their own businesses’ (*Vanguard*, 14 December 2014).

Challenges

Of course, the reintegration programme has a number of challenges which explain the huge number of criticisms of the programme. The following are some of the challenges observed while studying the reintegration process.

Corruption

Corruption is a major problem in all facets of the Nigerian society. The problem of corruption is also increasingly permeating the reintegration programme of the DDR. This manifests in several ways. According to its design, the Amnesty Office contracts with private agencies to train ex-combatants at training centres including universities and vocational skills training centres both locally and internationally. In bidding for the contract, which is usually competitive, some accounts suggest that bribes are offered to the government officials in order to secure the huge budget contracts. As a result, inexperienced people who lack the capacity to train the ex-combatants secure the contracts. In this regard, the researchers were informed of some cases where trainees were flown abroad ostensibly for

training only to be stationed in a hotel accommodation where they received the monthly stipend for a long period of time without being trained. This partly explains the reason for setting up independent monitoring and evaluation teams (in which the first author took part) to sanitise the system.

In a similar vein, some news reports suggest that the money budgeted for the reintegration programme was embezzled by government officials and contractors. For example, a news report claimed that eighty per cent of the N50 billion budgeted for the take-off of the reintegration process was pocketed by consultants and contractors (*The Guardian*, 14 November 2010, cited in Aghedo 2013).

Another dimension of corruption in the programme manifests in the process of selection of trainees for programmes, especially in respect of attractive skills and degree programmes at high-profile universities and training centres abroad. Although the researchers do not have concrete information of the illegalities around this process, it was alleged by a number of the trainees that individuals are usually selected for programmes on the basis of favouritism. A close observation at the centres also confirms the allegation because a number of the trainees at the high-profile schools and centres appear to be ineligible for the programme because they are neither ex-combatants nor youths of the Niger Delta. The researchers were also informed that some names are often smuggled into the list of those to be trained outside the country.

Problem of inclusion and placement

The issue of inclusion and placement of ex-combatants for training programmes marks another major challenge to the reintegration programme. Official reports indicate that 30 000 combatants were demobilised in different phases after the declaration of amnesty in 2009. Of this number, only 18 706 demobilised combatants have been included for reintegration programmes (out of which 15 392 have graduated while 3 314 are still undergoing training). This suggests that only 62 per cent of the ex-combatants have been considered for reintegration, while the government has indicated that the programme would officially end in

2015. The fact that a considerable number of the ex-combatants are yet to be enlisted for programmes portends a great danger to the peace efforts in the Niger Delta.

Related to this problem is the continuous agitation for inclusion into the reintegration programme by ex-combatants that initially refused to be demobilised in 2009. Following government's refusal to consider this group for reintegration because they did not sign up during the 60-day period (between 6 August and 4 October 2009) earmarked for the acceptance of amnesty by the combatants, the group has gone to court to challenge the decision of the government. The fact that there is still an emergent group of aggrieved ex-combatants in the region represents another danger to the sustainability of peace in the Niger Delta.

Given the above, it is not surprising that oil theft has steadily been on the rise in the Niger Delta after the amnesty policy was implemented. According to reports, an estimate of 100 000 barrels of oil is stolen in Nigeria on a daily basis. Furthermore, it is estimated that Nigeria loses about 8 billion USD a year to oil theft (Havoscope [2015]). The existence of neglected members of the society including youths, women and children that were not sufficiently taken into account in the process of reintegration contributes to increasing oil theft in the region. Research conducted on oil theft in the area by Ben Naanen and Patrick Tolani revealed that '[w]omen play pivotal roles in the transportation and marketing of the refined products, as well as cooking and provision of sexual services for the predominantly male operators' in the illegal oil fields. In addition, '[c]hildren, mostly orphans and aged between 10 and 13, also work in the illegal bunkering sites and run errands at the camps, while absentee owners of illegal refining sites always appoint managers to run the operations' (see Olaniyi 2014).

Politicisation of the programme

Politicisation of government's management of the reintegration policy is another clear problem bedevilling the programme. Given the huge budget allocation the programme attracts, suspicions arise within competing ethnic groups, regions and political actors in the country. Some groups

perceive the programme as a project used to specially empower youths of the Niger Delta and a conduit to enrich elites of the area from the national oil wealth while neglecting other ethnic groups and regions of the country. Thus, there have been increasing demands for the extension of empowerment programmes to other parts of the region. It is for this reason that some elites in northern Nigeria have been calling for the introduction of another DDR programme for the Boko Haram insurgents in the north-eastern part of the country (see Onapajo and Usman 2015).

Also, in this regard, the federal government under the presidency of Goodluck Jonathan saw the opportunity of using the multi-million Naira projects around the reintegration programme to secure patronage and political support from leaders of the ex-combatants. The ex-militants' leaders were used to threaten the opposition and garner support for the president in his bid for re-election in the 2015 general elections. These individuals ostensibly re-armed the youths to orchestrate attacks against the opposition. This partly explains the source of the violence that surfaced in some states of the Niger Delta, especially in Rivers State, during the 2015 electoral period.

Post-training opportunities

A general challenge facing DDR programmes in post-conflict states is the availability of job opportunities for reformed combatants. Clearly, this represents a major challenge to peacebuilding efforts in the states. In this light, Watson (2009:8) noted that in post-conflict states 'economic systems are often in disarray, afflicted by the breakdown of economic markets and the development of non-monetary economies, combined with minimal levels of public and private investment and low levels of government revenues. In such a situation job opportunities are rare'. In one study conducted on Liberia's ex-combatants, the ex-combatants confessed that they were ready to fight again because of unemployment and lack of sustainable income (Hill 2008).

The Nigerian case may not be an exception in respect of job scarcity after training. Worse still, Nigeria is a country where there is a worrisome high

rate of unemployment. Thus, securing jobs for the former combatants represents a major challenge despite the fact that a few of them have already been employed. Some of the problems border on the issue of stigmatisation from the community. Indeed, the fear of securing suitable jobs after the training programmes featured prominently in a series of discussions with the ex-combatants. For example, a group of trainees at their graduation in Cape Town, South Africa, appealed to the government that 'now that we have completed our trainings in various fields, we passionately appeal to you to grant us the enabling environment to be able to practicalize the skills acquired'.⁴

5. Conclusion

The thrust of this paper was to analyse the progress being made, and challenges experienced, in the Nigerian amnesty programme. The paper shows that the policy's successes contradict many of the critical views advanced by scholars. Our assessment is that the programme is yielding noticeable positive outcomes when its progress is assessed. Indeed, the outcomes are a reasonable guarantee that the policy will be instrumental to the sustenance of peace and stability in the Niger Delta. However, for the amnesty programme to effectively achieve its objectives, there is need for the challenges highlighted in the paper to be properly addressed. Given the emergence of a totally new government from a different political party (following the loss of the president to the opposition candidate in the 2015 presidential elections) it is quite certain that there will be radical changes to the previous government's policies, including the amnesty programme. The governance of the amnesty programme will likely be subjected to reform by the new administration. This is reflected in the appointment of Brigadier-General P.T. Boroh as the Coordinator of the PAP in June 2015. It is recommended that the new administration should not jettison the whole idea of the programme given its achievements in rehabilitating ex-combatants of the Niger Delta. Rather, the amnesty programme should

4 Welcome Address Presented by the Niger Delta Amnesty Trainees on the Occasion of Our Graduation Ceremony 26 March 2013 at Northlink College, Cape Town, South Africa.

be transmuted to usher in a new phase beyond 2015 and consolidate the peaceful environment achieved. The process should be capacitated to spearhead human capital development in the Niger Delta. Also, it is important that the government further reconsiders the neglected members of the society including women and children and other aggrieved youths in the empowerment programmes.

In addition, addressing corruption is ostensibly a major agenda for the new administration. It is expected that the government will take the issue of corruption in the amnesty programme very seriously and block the leakages that not only encourage corruption in the programme but also affect the success of the programme.

To guarantee all-round development, there should be a synergy among the existing agencies responsible. These include the ministry of Niger Delta, The Niger Delta Development Commission, and the Presidential Amnesty Office. While the ministry of Niger Delta should oversee the development activities in the region, the Niger Delta Development Commission should assume its primary function of coordinating development activities in the region. The amnesty agency should continue with the training and capacity building of the youths and the people in the region. This is to ensure that there is no duplication of efforts, and that the development drive of the local government, the state government, the federal government, the oil multinationals, and the international agencies should be coordinated by, and channelled through the aforementioned bodies.

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