A Qualitative Review of the Militancy, Amnesty, and Peacebuilding in Nigeria's Niger Delta

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Most violent conflicts in sub-Saharan Africa relate to natural resource extraction. In Nigeria, oil production raises critical questions of justice, participation, and development. This paper assesses the motivations of former Niger Delta insurgents for engaging in militancy and how the amnesty program promotes conflict resolution and peacebuilding in the region. In-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with ex-militants. The following arguments were tested: (1) participation in militancy is motivated by greed and criminality; and (2) the amnesty program failed to address the sources of conflict in the region. Participants maintained that militancy was motivated by injustice, socio-political exclusion, and lack of avenues for dialogue and democratic expression. The amnesty program has improved conditions for oil production but fails to address the sources of conflict in the Niger Delta.

INTRODUCTION

Oil and the Roots of Militancy

With the discovery of petroleum oil in the late 1950s, the Niger Delta became the economic backbone of the Nigerian state.[1] In the last decade of the twentieth century and in the early twenty-first century, it also became the epicentre of post-colonial resistance and the struggle for democracy and justice in Nigeria.[2] The ensuing environmental issues surrounding the exploitation, control, and management of oil and gas resources presented opportunities for minority group mobilization in the resource-rich Niger

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Delta region,[3] which produces 85 percent of federal government revenue and 95 percent of the country's foreign exchange earnings.[4]

Rather than bring socio-economic development and security to the people residing in the oil producing communities, oil production has caused long-running instability issues, unprecedented environmental pollution, and the depletion of regional ecosystems and livelihoods.[5] Oil has become a curse for the vast majority of the Niger Delta people, especially the youth who make up 62.1 percent of the region's 32 million people and boast an unemployment rate of 40 percent.[6] At various stages, disaffected residents of the region used peaceful protest strategies to express displeasure with the overexploitation of their environment. The initial forms of protest, which consisted of marches and of sending delegations to government and multinational oil companies (MNOCs), soon escalated to more organized and confrontational forms, which included sit-ins and seizures of oil installations, and which elicited patronizing and defensive responses from the government and oil companies.[7]

Government Responses and Militant Reactions

The Nigerian government has historically adopted three standard response approaches—policy, legislative, and punitive—to address popular grievances in the Niger Delta.[8] Policy responses often involve redistribution or reallocation of resources such as oil fields, wells, or other rewards to one community at the expense of other claimants. The government and multinational oil companies use this common divide-and-rule strategy effectively to pit oil producing communities against each another over contested resource rights. Within the policy category, the government designed a variety of development programs over many decades, including the Oil Mineral Producing Area Development Commission (OMPADEC) created by the regime of Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida in 1992, the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) created by the National Assembly in 2000, and the Niger Delta Ministry created by the administration of Umaru Musa Yar'Adua in 2008. Unfortunately, these responses failed to address the sources of conflict in the region, including poverty and environmental pollution.[9] They failed because of underfunding, cronyism, politics, mismanagement, corruption, and lack of accountability and oversight.[10] Oil companies also contributed resources towards development in the region. They worked independently and within partnerships to help implement multiple programs in the

region.[11] As with government initiatives, efforts by MNOCs failed to address economic challenges in the oil-producing communities because of underfunding, politics, mismanagement, and lack of accountability and oversight. Negative perceptions of oil companies in the region also made it difficult for MNOCs to implement sustained development projects that could deliver significant benefits to their host communities.[12]

Legislative responses sometimes involved geopolitical restructuring such as the creation of new states (Akwa Ibom in 1987, Delta in 1991, and Bayelsa in 1996); controlled increases of oil derivation percentages to Niger Delta states from 1.5 percent to 3 percent in 1992 and to 13 percent in 1999; and symbolic gestures of political inclusion, such as the selection of Goodluck Jonathan as the vice presidential candidate of the People's Democratic Party in 2007.[13]

The use of the punitive approach in the Niger Delta is well documented and involves the mobilization of coercive state instruments to sanction individuals or groups deemed threats to state power.[14] The targeting of the Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP) and the killing of their leader Kenule Saro-Wiwa and his colleagues in 1995 is a prominent example. The tendency by government, with support and backing from MNOCs, to meet peaceful protests with heavy handed, punitive, and deadly military raids and other oppressive measures left youth with a siege mentality and drove them to mobilize to seek redress.[15]

In the late 1990s, as the government and MNOCs became increasingly paranoid about concerted and assertive grassroots protest activities, they unleashed troops known as the Joint Task Force (JTF) drawn from the armed forces, Department of State Security, and Nigeria Police, along with private security personnel employed by the MNOCs, who marshaled brutal reprisal attacks that razed entire communities and cost thousands of civilian lives.[16]

In response, youth from street gangs, university campus-based cults, and community vigilante structures mobilized in the late 1990s, formed new militia movements, and deployed violent counter strategies.[17] The new militias, including the Niger Delta Vigilante Force (NDVF), Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force (NDPVF), Niger Delta Strike Force (NDSF), and the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), equipped themselves with machine guns, rifles, dynamite, rocket propelled grenade launchers, gun boats, and other small weapons, and began a deadly

armed struggle with the government and multinational oil companies.[18] They called themselves "freedom fighters." They were widely regarded in the region as champions of a just struggle for greater regional autonomy and control over oil and gas resources.[19] To achieve their objectives, the new militia kidnapped expatriates and government officials, bombed and destroyed oil facilities, and engaged in oil bunkering. They carried out devastating attacks on Nigerian military formations and committed mass killings and targeted assassinations.[20] Thus, "the restiveness which started on a mild note as pockets of peaceful demonstrations . . . degenerated into a state of militancy . . . and unparalleled violence, turning the region into a hot spot."[21] In 2004, in the heat of the simmering conflict, Shell Oil Company admitted that its policies and activities in the oil producing communities did indeed fuel poverty, corruption, and conflict.[22]

Amnesty Program

The government response to the campaign of violence by the Niger Delta militias drew local criticism and international condemnation, backlash, and pressure. The violence resulted in heavy losses of lives and oil revenue. Within the first nine months of 2008, for example, one thousand people were killed by the clashes and three hundred people were kidnapped as hostages. Many oil fields and wells were closed and the daily oil output dropped drastically from a high of 2.5 million barrels to fewer than one million barrels. About US $23.7 billion in oil revenue was lost due to attacks, oil bunkering, and sabotage.[23] Desperate to restore the revenue stream, the Yar'Adua government recognized that only political settlement, rather than military force, could resolve the conflict.

In September 2008, Yar'Adua commissioned a special committee to study the situation in the Niger Delta and make recommendations to resolve the impasse. The committee produced a report that collated all previous efforts and recommendations and recommended an amnesty program that would disarm, demobilize, and reintegrate the insurgents. The committee also articulated a comprehensive plan for regional development and transformation.[24] Having adopted the committee's report, Yar'Adua set up a Presidential Panel on Amnesty and Disarmament of Militants in the Niger Delta on 5 May 2009 with a mandate to specify the terms, procedures, and processes of an amnesty to Niger Delta militants. On June 2009, he invoked his authority under Section 175 of the Nigerian Constitution to

grant pardons and proclaimed an unconditional amnesty effective from 3 August 2009 until 4 October 2009.[25] Yar'Adua pledged to contribute an additional 5 percent of royalties from oil revenue for the development of oil producing communities. The implementation of the amnesty was based on a three-phase framework of disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration.[26] The amnesty was a radical departure from hardline approaches adopted by Yar'Adua's predecessors, who were mostly military generals.[27] In his proclamation, Yar'Adua acknowledged that the insurgency in the oil region arose from "the inadequacies of previous attempts at meeting the yearnings and aspirations of the people."[28] He implored all combatants to lay down their arms, renounce violence, and accept "amnesty and unconditional pardon" for offences they had committed and become partners in regional and national development.[29] Thousands of insurgents heeded the call, surrendered their weapons, and embraced amnesty.[30]

During the first phase of the program (disarmament), which ran from 6 August to 4 October 2009, about 26,000 male and 133 female militants surrendered their weapons and registered in the amnesty program.[31] Altogether, militants surrendered "287,445 rounds of ammunition, 3,155 magazines, 1,090 dynamite caps, 763 explosives, and 18 gun boats."[32] They also surrendered "communication gadgets, bullet-proof vests, and tear gas equipment."[33] Attacks on oil facilities, kidnapping, and hostage-taking ceased and oil production rose.[34] Disarmed ex-militants were sent in batches for reorientation that lasted for at least four weeks. At the end, they selected a skill area in which they would receive three to eighteen months of training in the last phase: reintegration.[35]

Perspectives on Militancy and Purpose of Paper

Paul Collier has theorized that rebellion in the Niger Delta was driven by greed and the opportunities to benefit from engaging in a war, rather than by the existence of historical and social grievances.[36] Similarly, Esther J. Cesarz, Stephen Morrison, and Jennifer Cooke claim that the Niger Delta militancy was driven by criminal opportunism.[37] Others, however, have dismissed these explanations as naive and simplistic analyses of a complex social phenomenon. Ukoha Ukiwo, for example, argues that contemporary conflicts in the Niger Delta have roots in the history of economic deprivation, environmental degradation, and socio-political exclusion that have marked the experience of the Deltans since colonial Nigeria. He maintains

that militancy was a last resort, deployed only in the first decade of the twenty-first century, after decades of nonviolent action that attracted more government repression than reprieve.[38] Similarly, Jeremiah Dibua rejects the greed and criminal opportunism argument, and attributes the militancy to the perception by the oil producing communities that their citizenship rights were infringed on by the state because of their ethnic minority status.[39] The greed and criminal opportunism explanations reflect the perspective of the dominant groups in Nigeria, who tend to see the struggle of the Niger Delta people as "retrograde resistance to natural processes of nation-building and assimilation,"[40] even as ethnicity remains the predominant frame of reference in the country's national politics.[41]

This paper assesses the former insurgents' motivations for engaging in militancy. In other words, were the Niger Delta militants motivated by greed and criminality or genuinely political reasons in fighting the Nigerian government and multinational oil companies? The paper also assesses how the militants utilized the amnesty program to benefit their lives and their communities. It argues that understanding the insurgents' motivations for fighting and their perceptions of the amnesty program can provide an important basis for building a strong peace framework that supports conflict resolution, peace, sustainable development, and security in Nigeria.

METHODOLOGY

Twelve in-depth, face-to-face semi-structured interviews and follow-up unstructured interviews were conducted with Niger Delta ex-militants from five militant groups in Port Harcourt, Nigeria. Participants were affiliated with the Icelanders/Niger Delta Vigilante Force (both Ateke Tom's and Soboma George's factions), the Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force under Mujaheed Asari Dokubo, Soboma George's Outlaws, the Niger Delta Strike Force under Prince Fara, and the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta. All participants had disarmed under the terms of the federal amnesty program, had participated in the reorientation exercise, and had completed or were waiting to be called up for reintegration training. Whereas recent studies of militancy and amnesty in Nigeria's Niger Delta draw largely on anecdotal evidence and secondary document analyses,[42] this paper is based on direct interaction with former militants.

To be eligible, the interviewees had to have participated in the armed militancy and the government-sponsored amnesty program. Most were

recruited from a seminar that was given by the author in Port Harcourt. Other interviewees were colleagues of the initial participants, recruited at the request of the investigator. Although the intent was to include male and female ex-militants in the study, it was not possible to locate females who were available and able to participate in the study. The participants ranged in age from twenty-three to forty-seven years and included some who had joined the militancy as minors. Most had either junior or senior secondary-level education, one held a bachelor's degree, and all were unemployed. Participants included militant commanders, gunmen, domestic staff, liaison officers, camp security men, and administrators. During their amnesty reintegration they elected to train as entrepreneurs, traders, pipeline welders and fabricators, and rig technicians.

A 32-item semi-structured interview protocol was created and used to assess the participants' motivations and experiences as former militants, to gather information regarding their transitions from militancy to peace and cooperation, to elicit information regarding their participation in the Amnesty Program, to assess the skills they acquired through the Amnesty Program, and to understand how they have used these skills to benefit their lives and benefit their communities.

All participants were interviewed in a secure room in the offices of a non-profit organization in Port Harcourt. Before each interview, the researcher carefully reviewed the aims of the study and the informed consent form with each participant, advising him of his rights and the possible risks involved in participating in the study. The researcher also asked and received the participant's permission to audio tape each interview. Since English was not the first language for any of the participants, each person was informed that he could speak his responses in Pidgin English, official English, or a mix of both. All participants were assured that their answers would be used solely for the purpose of research. The participants approached the first interviews with apprehensiveness and initially sounded cautious in giving their responses. Many appeared to be concerned that the researcher might be sent by the government to test their commitments to the amnesty program. They relaxed when the researcher showed them the letter of approval from the Institutional Review Board of his university authorizing the study. They gradually became engaged and in the end spoke honestly and freely regarding their participation in militancy and amnesty. It did not appear that concern about the government inhibited their participation.

After the audio files were transcribed, the researcher again listened to the audio files while reading the transcripts to ensure accuracy of interpretation. The transcriptions were standardized; where the participants responded in Pidgin English, the researcher revised into official English, maintaining fidelity to the participants' original responses. Areas that needed further clarification were noted and the researcher conducted follow-up phone interviews with the participants after obtaining their verbal consent. Open coding was conducted to examine and iteratively break down, question, name, categorize, and identify similarities and differences in the factors and circumstances described by participants in the data.[43] Recurring phrases, words, and thoughts were organized into provisional categories and themes.[44] The transcribed data were imported into NVivo Software, 10th edition, and annotations were created to aid with coding and retrieval of significant references. Coding was based on the predetermined and emerging themes and categories, as well as specific words, phrases, and statements that directly pertained to or potentially addressed the purpose of this study. Eight months after the first interviews, a final, face-to-face follow-up meeting was organized with participants in Port Harcourt to discuss the analysis. Participants gave verbal consents before they participated in this meeting. By the time of the follow-up interviews, they had established considerable rapport with the researcher and felt free to volunteer additional information and suggest resources that helped to structure the analysis under specific categories and themes.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

The interviewees offered the following information regarding the sources of conflict.

Sources of conflict

Oil company policies. Many have cited the business practices of multinational oil companies as a key source of instability and violent conflicts in the Niger Delta. The interviewees echoed Shell Oil Company's 2004 admission that its policies and activities in the oil producing communities fueled poverty, corruption, and conflict.[45] As shown in Table 1, five of the twelve ex-militants interviewed blamed the conflicts in the region on the policies of oil companies. Interviewee 7, aged 25, said, "It's them (oil companies) that cause the crisis in the communities because each community has oil wells.

We have problems because of the oil companies. . . . Since Shell entered the community, there is nothing like a memorandum of understanding (MOU). They are not writing MOUs with the communities. They are doing nothing for the communities. Shell is supposed to employ our youth and give scholarships. But the scholarships they give, they are sending them out to Shell police, instead of giving them to the youth. . . . They only bring a list and say to our community, this is for scholarships. But they give the scholarships to outsiders, outside the state, and even outside the Niger Delta. This is what is bringing problems in the communities. But if they gave to the majority of the communities, we would achieve something, but they don't want the youth to achieve anything in the communities. The companies know the right things to do but they are not doing it." Interviewee 9, aged 31, added that a major source of conflicts is "intimidation in the community, the process whereby some people are marginalized while some people are carried along by the oil companies." Interviewee 4, aged 24, stated that during situations of dispute in the community, "Shell, NDPR (Niger Delta Petroleum Resources), Elf, and Agip empower the wrong people. Instead of these companies to call the two parties and ask why they are fighting, they are taking sides with one to fight the other. The companies could have asked, is it because of the oil wells; is it why you are killing yourselves? And help us to find a solution. But they do not do that. What they do is to focus on one group, give them money, and at the end of the day, there is big violence."

Use of military force by government and oil companies. Nine of the twelve ex-militants attributed conflict in the region to the use of military force by government and MNOCs. Interviewee 7 said, "If this pen belongs to you now and the oil companies are going to take this pen that belongs to you, they come with soldiers wearing khaki with their guns. If you don't want that gun to shoot you, you don't go near them. So they come to the community, carry the Joint Task Force and do everything as they like and take everything away." Interviewee 8, aged 26, added, "Even now we have amnesty, they are still intimidating us with soldiers and with our brothers who are partnering with them." Interviewee 9 said, "The oil companies are adamant; they don't want to do anything for the community. We see them in the morning. They still carry their military men and come to do work."

Lack of transparency and inclusion. Nine ex-militants identified continued

exclusion of youth from oil industry-related employment, even in the post-amnesty era, as a critical source of conflict. Interviewee 8 said, "Even as I am talking to you now, there are many jobs in our community which they don't even disclose to the community—it's within their circles. So if you are not with them in that cartel, there is nothing for you. So such kinds of things can raise conflict and anger at the end of the day. People are going into these communities to make money and run away. Some of them run to Abuja. You know Abuja is a growing place so they hijack community money and run to Abuja and go to invest. You go to some Western countries, you see them using our money to go and invest there. Why? Meanwhile there are some people dying. When you want to tackle the problems of the Niger Delta, government should go inside the communities where the oil is being extracted, go there and see what is going on there—there is nothing going on there. Instead they go there and steal the money and we the poor ones are suffering. Such things can bring about conflict." Interviewee 7 added, "Shell is supposed to employ youth and provide scholarships. All these things I am calling now are supposed to come out after four years from each company. But these scholarships, they are sending them out to Shell police instead of giving them to the youth. They are sending them out to outsiders . . . outside the state, or even the Niger Delta. They just bring a list and say this is for scholarship." Interviewee 9 said, "As we . . . submitted our guns to the government, that is how the companies turned to worse. That time we were in the bush, they were complying with us small, small; but since we embraced amnesty, it's been worse. Instead of changing, there is much corruption in the oil companies. They are very corrupt." Corrupt practices identified by the interviewees included embezzlement of public funds, leadership failures, bribery, divide-and-conquer strategies and practices by oil companies, and the work of traitors-saboteurs within the communities. These reports confirm the findings of Samuel Aghalino, who urges the integration of the ex-militants into the operations of the oil industry so that they feel that oil production is benefiting them.[46]

Table 1: Sources of Conflict: Motivations for Joining Militancy and Activities as Militants

Motivations for Joining Militancy/Sources of Conflicts	**Number of Interviewees**	**Number of Times Mentioned**
Resource control and justice	12	21
Lack of employment	9	28
Poverty and exclusion	9	42
Use of military force by government and oil companies	9	16
Lack of transparency and inclusion	9	89
Social and economic neglect Lack of avenue for peaceful dialogue	8 7	20 14
Human rights abuses by government and oil companies	5	14
Oil company policies	5	6
Quest for material gain	3	3
Activities in Militancy		
Kidnapping and Killings	9	12
Pipeline vandalization and bunkering	6	11

Motivations for Militancy

The interviewees offered the following information regarding their motivations for militancy.

Quest for material gain. Interviewee 10, aged 44, said, "For me what made me join the militancy is because of the lack of help and jobs. I had to join so that I could get something." The theme of unemployment was echoed by interviewee 4: "Because of no jobs, we joined this street cult. From there fight in the village started and, as we were fighting, the leaders stopped us not to fight. They said that there is another thing coming, that we should come together as one and fight the government because we have oil; we have many things here, yet we don't have jobs and we are not enjoying the oil and nothing is happening. That is why all of us came out and joined

together and became one body; . . . that is how it happened." Interviewee 11, aged 27, added, "After I was driven out of the community, there was no way to eat. So instead of me to go to the roadside and steal or kill for food, I had to go to the people that would help me. I cried to them because I cried to government and government did not intervene. I cried to the local government, they did not intervene. So the only way was to attack them by force. So I said let me follow this violence, this militancy."

Justice and resource control. All twelve ex-militants indicated that they were fighting for resource control and for the good of the wider community. Interviewee 12, aged 26, said simply, "We were fighting for resource control." Interviewee 8 elaborated, "We did not fight the fight for individual interest. We fought generally so that everybody can benefit; because the oil is not only my own—all of us are from here. We are from the Niger Delta. What we are fighting for is resource control. And it's not for one person, the struggle was actually for everybody." Others expressed the struggle as a fight for equity and justice. Interviewee 10 stated, "I was fighting for justice because now there is no job, no help, and the oppression is too much." Said interviewee 8, "So, I was protesting that there should be equity, based on the fact that they are collecting oil from our community—so there should be equity. And that is why we joined the militancy." Participants were fed up with hunger, humiliation, and intimidation. To this, interviewee 8 said, "They say a hungry man is an angry man. Based on the hunger and intimidation and the humiliation, we had to react and we fought them and were able to have the crisis, and the crisis lasted for six years. So that is how the militancy started."

Poverty and exclusion. Nine of the twelve participants said they fought because of poverty and a feeling of being excluded. Interviewee 1, aged 30, who was unhappy about being unemployed and lacking the opportunity to attend university, explained, "I am a brilliant person. By right, at this time since I finished school, I am supposed to have graduated, but because I came out from a poor family I could not. That is why God gave us the oil resources to help us go where we want to go. By right the companies operating in our communities are supposed to give scholarships for my education." He went on to explain that his father was "a poor man" and his mother "died prematurely" when he was in primary school. This left him impoverished

and motivated to join the militancy. Interviewee 3, aged 31, who felt that the government was cheating the oil producing communities, explained, "We know that we are the oil producing state and normally the government is achieving something from us but they don't want to help us. That is why everybody was annoyed. Me, I was annoyed. Then we joined hands to fight this problem." Citing neglect as a motivation to join the militancy, interviewee 1 decried the lack of basic infrastructure in his community: "My community is a remote area. What is mostly there are mud houses and thatched houses. It's not supposed to be that way. Some mature boys in my community don't have houses to live in. . . . That is what makes us engage ourselves in militancy." Interviewee 2, aged 23, added, "In the community we don't have light, no electricity, no roads, no schools, no water. At least as a treasure community, we are meant to have all these things." Interviewee 6 said, "We have told them to come and build houses for us, they refuse. Like this Christmas, our mothers, fathers, everybody is dying of poverty, dying of hunger because there is no money. But we have something that can give us money."

Lack of employment. All of the participants in this study were unemployed and depended on monthly pay-outs from the Nigerian state. Nine of the twelve named unemployment as a reason for joining the militancy. When asked why he fought, Interviewee 2 said simply, "I don't have work." Further, his brother "was killed because of oil companies in 2000, in front of the oil company, Total E & P." Interviewee 3 added, "In the community, they are not empowering youth. Many youth are not doing anything in the community. In Rumuekpe community where we have four major oil companies, even inside the companies themselves, oga (sir), we don't have Rumuekpe people inside these companies employed as a staff; they are only running contractors." Interviewee 5, aged 31, said, "We looked for job, no way. When we tried to find work, no work; they don't want to give us work. We are the Niger Delta. We know that we are the oil producing state and normally the government is achieving something from us but they don't want to help us." Interviewee 8 stated, "What I want government to do is to provide jobs for us so that we cannot be idle. Because if you don't have work, you will eventually form a group and from there plan how to go and bust a place and get money." The participants indicated that they would prefer to be employed than to depend on monthly subsidies from government.

Lack of avenues for peaceful dialogue. Seven participants reported that they joined the militancy because they had no other way of expressing their grievances. Interviewee 6 stated, "Why we became a group is because we have seen our resources going to the wrong people. We said, my brother this kind of thing cannot be taking place like this. We met our elders and our elders said we should go to the government. We met with the government and they said we should go to the oil companies that have installations in our communities. We went to the oil companies and they refused to talk to us. They started using violence, the JTF and all the rest of the things. So we had to decide and say, okay, if it is like this let the federal government come because we are feeding the rest of the nation. You know what crude oil means today. You know what gas means. . . . That is what made us to carry arms." Interviewee 7 added, "Instead of them (oil companies) to talk to the landlords direct, they are not doing that, they are talking to people that are not landlords." Interviewee 10 elaborated, "For instance, inside Shell now, it's one person who has the land and because one person is higher than the other person, intimidation comes in, and when you talk they say you are putting your eyes where you are not supposed to put your eyes—and they will kill you. People are dying every day, dying because of hunger and people are afraid to talk. You don't know if you talk they will kill you." These reports confirm the findings of Aghalino and other scholars who suggest that the government and oil companies failed to engage disaffected youth in dialogue.[47]

Human rights abuses and use of military force. Nine participants stated that residents of the oil producing communities suffered human rights abuses and military violence at the hands of the oil companies and the government. Interviewee 8 explained, "We are from oil producing communities. Although the companies are there and are working, they don't want anything good for the community. They use the women and they abuse the elderly men; they don't want anything good for us. They choose to carry armed men, like military men, to guard them to come and collect the oil. Then, after servicing their oil facilities, they will go away with their military force. And so there is nothing we can do. So what we did was to make sure that we fought for our rights and we cannot fight for our rights with ordinary hands. We had to join and form a group called Icelanders. And we used that group

to fight them. And when they saw us, that we were fighting them, they had to buy some of our people over; the oil companies, they called some of our people over and started giving them bribes." Interviewee 7 stated, "The oil companies do not recognize our people. If they are going to the community, they will carry JTF to oppress the communities. We are not happy about it." Interviewee 12 added, "If you look inside the companies, what they are doing is really bad. They don't come to the community to know the welfare of the people. If you go to my community you will see that people are dying of hunger. Yet after Oloibiri in Bayelsa State, my community is the second place where they discovered oil in Nigeria. If you go to my community today, you will see that people are dying of hunger." These statements support prior analyses "that residents of the oil producing communities faced intimidation, exploitation, and violence by oil companies and the government."[48]

Activities in militancy

The interviewees offered the following information regarding their activities in the militancy.

Kidnapping and killings. Nine ex-militants claimed to have committed serious atrocities during their participation in militancy. They gave detailed accounts of their bombing campaigns, kidnapping, and assassinations. Interviewee 6 said, "The part I played, when the oil companies were coming to work, sometimes I stopped them. They used violence and I would order my people and they would start shooting. Yes, we start shooting. Sometimes they carried white men (expatriate oil workers) with them. By the time we are shooting them, we can go after the white men, seize them and carry them into the creek and we tell them to bring so and so amount of money, or if it is like that, we can kill the white men. Sometimes we used to go and stand on the roads. Any government person we saw, we killed because we were looking for our rights and they refused to give us our rights." Interviewee 10 added, "Like now, if we find that you are in a position to help us and make peace in the community and you don't want to do it, we will come to you. We will make some noise so that you know that people are there dying of hunger because they have nothing to eat. By the time we finish with you, as a human being and not wanting to die, you would give us a call and we would listen to you. When you find something for us that would help us take care of ourselves, we will leave you alone." Interviewee 1 lamented,

"Some mature boys in my community don't have houses to live in. They roam about doing things to some people. You can hear about them doing all this kidnapping to earn a living; they are supposed not to do that, based on the natural resources that we have in our community."

Pipeline vandalization and bunkering. Six ex-militants described their campaigns of pipeline vandalization and bunkering. Interviewee 6 said, "So, sometimes, we went out and destroyed oil installations and came back to make sure that the nation heard our voice." He elaborated, "Yes of course, because that is the main thing, like personally, I have destroyed different pipelines before the amnesty took place. I destroyed them because when I called them to come and take care of the community, our fathers and mothers who are dying, the youth who are dying, they said no they were not coming. The available place is what my father gave to me and then we would now enter that place, blast the place until the oil came out. If you are saying the oil is not a value for you, let the oil go to waste. So if we wanted to use the oil for another business, we could invite the white men to deal with us direct. So if the government said no we could not deal with the white men direct, we said na lie (you are lying), it's our own thing. We could invite white men to come inside our place, show them what we had. We asked them if we could do business with them. If they refused we started shooting at them." Interviewee 10 stated, "Because some oil companies are concentrating on certain people and taking sides; because they do not want to carry everybody along, we go to the nearest pipelines and blow them up. We will leave the pipelines alone once they give us our due." Interviewee 1 said, "I played an administrative role. For example when we vandalize pipelines, when the government or the oil company comes, I am among those people that will stand and negotiate with the company or the government."

Strengths of the Amnesty Program

The interviewees offered the following information regarding the strengths of the Amnesty Program.

Improved security and oil revenue. In general, all participants supported the amnesty program as a positive event in Nigeria and the Niger Delta. Five affirmed that the amnesty improved security and oil revenues for both Nigerians and the oil companies (see Table 2). Interviewee 1 said, "For one thing,

this amnesty, I can say, has helped Nigeria. It helps the federal government because when this program wasn't there, the number of barrels of oil Nigeria had, I can say from 2008 down, was below what we are having now. They get more barrels of oil than before. That is an achievement for the federal government. . . . The oil companies are gaining well-well because since we accepted the amnesty, we cannot tamper with their facilities." Others believe that the amnesty has caused specific violent and criminal activities to cease. Interviewee 10 said, "There is a difference because during militancy there were kidnappings, shootings, and killings everywhere, but now those kinds of things have stopped." Interviewee 12 said, "Some things that used to happen in the streets, kidnapping, robbery, killing people, not having peace, are reduced." Interviewee 6 added, "We don't rob any more, we don't kill people any more. Before, we used to kidnap white men. Now we can see a white man now and make him a friend, shake hands, and let him try to empower us because agreement is agreement."

Possibility for peace, unity, and development. All twelve ex-militants reported that the amnesty program has had some positive effects on their lives. Interviewee 1 stated, "The program changed my life because right now I cannot carry gun and kill somebody, I cannot engage myself in vandalizing company's property, that is, I can't involve in bunkering because all those things are against the amnesty program." Interviewee 5 said, "It brought us out of the creeks. At least they helped us and now we can move freely; even the people we fought with, the different cultism groups, we are no longer fighting one another. Even the troubles we caused, we are no longer causing trouble. Everywhere is in peace, no more bloodshed. Everybody is in peace—that is what the amnesty program mostly did. On our own side changes have come because as ex-militants we have changed." Interviewee 6 added, "Since Amnesty came up, everywhere is calm and I like that because before we couldn't walk like this. I could not come to this office like this. I could not dress like this. You would be seeing me in rags, different ugly things. But now since amnesty came up, we are living well and we don't want to go back to the creeks." The participants reported that the amnesty has united them and taught them to love, not hate. Interviewee 7 said, "The program gave us courage, understanding, to come together and unite. When we were not together, there was no peace because we had many factions—Soboma group, Ateke group, Tompolo, Fara group. There were

many groups and we were enemies. So we are now one. We can eat together, sleep together, bathe together, and bring love to one another because they say togetherness is love. So when we come together, we know that we have one voice. Before, I would not stay with Fara boys and talk to them, but now the federal government has brought us together as one." These reports confirm recent research findings that the amnesty program has brought relative calm, resulting in more security and increased daily oil output and revenue for the country.[49]

Table 2: Strengths and Limitations of Amnesty Program

Strengths of Amnesty Program	**Number of Interviewees**	**Number of Times Mentioned**
Improved security and oil revenue	5	12
Possibility for peace, unity, and development	12	92
Limitations of Amnesty Program		
Insufficient time and equipment	4	6
Monthly stipend inadequate and cut	8	11
Too narrowly conceptualized and implemented	5	7
No follow through	12	79

Limitations of the Amnesty Program

The interviewees offered the following information regarding the limitations of the amnesty program.

Insufficient time and equipment. Four participants lamented that the time and resources allocated for the implementation of the amnesty program were insufficient. Interviewee 1 explained, "This amnesty program, I am sure, is not working because the time is very short. The time they give us for the training was four months. But it was not up to four months because when we started, there were periods of good two, three weeks during which we did nothing. So it was after two, three weeks that we could do something. They say it is four months but we did not achieve what we went there for because of the time. The time was too short. Like now in one company, we

are more than sixty and eighty apprentices. So if we choose to learn typing, for example, the company is not able to afford a computer for each person. So during the training, they give one computer to four to five persons. So one cannot achieve something—the training is not okay." Interviewee 5 added, "Even when we went for the training, before we started the training, the company that they sent us to, the manager they sent us to did not even train us. Nothing. . . . For one month they left us in a hostel where they just kept us. We were arguing with them because mosquitoes were biting us as if we were inside the creek again. We were making problem with them—that they should let us out from the place. Before they found a hotel to put us, we had only one month left and we were one month behind before we started training." Interviewee 9 said, "After Obubra, they said I should come to Lagos on 8th of December. When I got to Lagos, we were 101 persons. Some people were under welding, some people water diving. So when we went there, we did tests. Some people their test came out and some people their test did not come out. At the end of the day, they sent some people back home because they could not take care of everyone. So for those of us who returned home, we told the government that sending us home could make us angry and with that anger we could do bad things." These reports confirm the findings of Akeem Ayofe Akinwale[50] and Joab Peterside,[51] who argue that preparation, implementation, and equipment available for the rehabilitation and reintegration phases of the Amnesty Program were inadequate to support meaningful training and development among the beneficiaries.

Monthly stipend inadequate and embezzled. Eight of the twelve participants stated that the monthly allowance given to them by the government was inadequate. Interviewee 6 explained, "They are giving us sixty-five thousand naira per month but what we have given to them is arms. One AK47 costs half a million naira so we have not achieved anything." Some noted that not all the monthly stipends got to them. Interviewee 2 said, "Actually the government is paying sixty-five thousand naira per month. I myself am not receiving sixty-five thousand; sometimes I receive forty-five thousand. Our leaders like Ateke Tom and Tompolo take twenty thousand to settle the government sometimes. They also settle some boys who don't have amnesty. They have no work. They don't have help. The only way is to give them the little one we have. I understand. We are all brothers because they say you must give to your brother." Others were less happy about the reduction in

their stipends. Interviewee 6 said, "Sometimes our leaders give us ten thousand naira or fifteen thousand or twenty thousand per month. We made a complaint to our various training supervisors from government and they said they would call our leaders. The leaders said they are paying the money to the wives of most of the people they killed, the people that were fighting that time—that they are using the money to settle their wives." Some preferred that the government pay directly to the rank and file, not through the leaders. Interviewee 6 explained, "What we want the federal government to do for us is collect our numbers, our account numbers. If they want to deal with Harry, let the federal government deal with Harry direct. If they want to deal with Dick, let them deal with Dick direct so that at the end of the day, after dealing with Dick, he would go and get rest and achieve something. But this one if they want to go to Harry, they will go through Dick and Dick cannot give Harry what he deserves. So the government should pay directly to us so that other people would not cut it." Interviewee 5 said, "Now you cannot use the money to do any reasonable thing. At least if we received that complete sixty-five thousand naira little things can be done, even to use and start up a small business." The participants agreed that the money was one of the reasons they stopped fighting. Interviewee 1 said, "If they stopped giving us the stipends, I know that peace will not reign in Niger Delta. The Niger Delta youth will then go back to the creek. . . . If they failed we would all go back to creek and start where we stopped." These complaints corroborate Akinwale's findings that the monthly stipends given by government are insufficient compensations for ex-militants whose activities in militancy, including oil bunkering, created alternative paths to wealth and influence.[52]

Amnesty too narrowly conceptualized and implemented. Five ex-militants emphasized the importance of extending support to the wider community. Interviewee 10 said, "Like in my place we have four multinational oil companies. For me I would like the federal government to go and talk to them to carry our fathers and mothers along because we are not all militants. Those who are not militants still have nothing. They should carry the community along. Like now, if you go to my place, every place is bushy, no houses, nothing is happening. People are managing with thatched houses. There are mosquitoes everywhere. Meanwhile, all the companies are there. It was because they did not want to carry everybody along that we went to the

nearest pipelines and blew them up. We will leave the pipelines alone once they give us our due. We are begging the government to go and ask the companies to help the community so that peace will reign." Interviewee 6 called on the government to "give us our own rights. It's not all about looking at amnesty; they should give us our own rights. It is the people that own the oil treasure, not just the militants." Interviewee 5 added, "Right now there is war going on in the community. They are not giving us anything. When we talk they say you people have done amnesty. Let the federal government talk to the companies because the companies are looking at if I can do amnesty and all problems will go away. It is the people that fought, the ex-militants, so let them know, yes, the treasure—it's the people that own it." These reports corroborate the analyses of scholars such as Emmanuel Duru and Ufiem Maurice Ogbonnaya, and Solomon Ojo, who argue that resource control, increases of oil derivation percentages, the Land Use Act, election rigging, government accountability and transparency, and responsiveness to the needs of the people have all been ignored.[53] Like previous attempts to address the Niger Delta question, the amnesty program focuses on negative peace or absence of manifest violence rather than building "cooperative and constructive relationships" and transforming the underlying sources of violent conflict.[54] Like past efforts, the program has been severely limited by the fact that it is not "people-centered and participatory" and is not based on a "bottom-up and down-to-earth" model of peace building and development.[55] It relies too heavily on the opinions of privileged and elitist governors and traditional rulers who are part of the problem in the region.[56]

No follow-through. All twelve participants raised concerns that the government was not following through on the promises it made during the amnesty. Interviewee 5 observed, "The thing that is not good is that after the training everybody is left like that for one year, two years—we are still in the house after training and nothing is happening. What they promised us did not happen." Interviewee 2 said, "Like for the training we have finished, at least the government promised us that they were going to find us work after the drilling school which was six months. Now we are expecting the government to do something, to call us for work because I myself I don't have work but they have issued me a certificate but I don't have work." Interviewee 1 said, "That is what I am saying, if they can fulfill all their promises, like now after training, they empower you and maybe those of

us that learned handwork, after learning, they engage them somewhere for them to earn money. Somebody that is earning money cannot go back and do all those bad things because by the end of the month you earn money for you to earn a living." Interviewee 5 added, "I wanted to choose hand work but they said even if you choose business that there was no problem—that the government would give you money for you to start up whatever business you wanted to do, so that you can be doing something. Till now since I left the training last year December, roughly one year now, nothing has happened. They did not call us to say come; still there are no jobs, no nothing." Interviewee 2 stated, "The federal government should do what they promised us they would do—that is the only way peace can reign in the Niger Delta, I know they are trying their best but we are still begging them to do more." These voices confirm research findings that suggest that the amnesty may be unraveling because the government is not following through on its promises to the ex-militants. For example, according to Paul Francis, Dierdre Lapin, and Paula Rossiasco, the skills and certification given to the ex-militants during the reintegration program are not being recognized and utilized by the government and oil companies.[57]

CONCLUSION

In this study participants identify oil company policies, the use of force in response to peaceful protests, and the lack of transparency as sources of conflict in the Niger Delta. They cite poverty, unemployment, neglect, and government repression of dissent as key motivations for participating in militancy. Most acknowledge that the amnesty program improved security and oil revenue in Nigeria and created an enabling environment for peace and development in the Niger Delta; it created a society where killings, kidnapping, pipeline vandalization, and bunkering were no longer practiced by militants. Nevertheless, the participants also recognize the implementation of the amnesty program as flawed; the program's scope, time, equipment, and other resources were inadequate and the government failed to keep the promises it made to participants and their communities.[58]

Collier[59] and Cesarz, Morrison, and Cooke[60] suggest that rebellion in the Niger Delta was driven by greed and criminal opportunism rather than by the existence of historical and social grievances. These explanations appear to ignore the preponderance of evidence chronicled in this study and in reports on the Niger Delta that span more than half a century.[61]

These reports, supported by numerous studies,[62] offer compelling evidence of historical and social neglect and popular grievances. Three interviewees do indicate that they joined the militancy for personal gain, but this may be common to contemporary conflicts and does not diminish the saliency of the broader issues they championed. Military campaigns by even the most established democracies, despite their ideals, are also often believed to be motivated in part by greed and personal interests. For example, many believe that the 2003 Iraq war campaign by the US government and allies was motivated by greed and oil interests and many soldiers enlisted because of promises of scholarships and other benefits.[63] Mixed motives do not negate the presence of issues and the need to address injustice.

Despite many limitations, the amnesty program has been a noteworthy departure from previous responses to the crisis in the Niger Delta, which were widely criticized as confrontational, patronizing, and oppressive. Although the amnesty program failed to address the sources of conflict in the Niger Delta, it provided a foundation for peace and a more realistic assessment of strategies to promote sustainable development in the region and the country.[64] To achieve these goals, the following specific steps are needed.

First, future programming for continued peace and development should recognize the importance of grassroots and stakeholder participation. Interviewee 7 mentioned the importance of this participatory approach: "Let the companies and government recognize the people that have the land, not one person, everybody. It's not one person who owns the land, don't deal with one person. We have elders, we have youth, we have women, we have old people, we have chiefs. Let the companies and government call these people together and ask them, what do you people want us to do for you and we will tell them."

Second, it is important to acknowledge and respect the right of aggrieved communities to protest peacefully. When dialogue overtures are spurned and voices of dissent are violently suppressed, people are driven to seek redress through violence. Third, the government needs to focus on resolving the sources of conflict in the Niger Delta, which include leadership failures, environmental pollution, unemployment, poverty, and corruption. Fourth, government and oil companies need to find more effective ways to support infrastructural development and provision of social welfare such as direct housing, food, and education subsidies to members of the

oil producing communities. Fifth, efforts must be made to integrate the ex-militants and other youth into the mainstream of the oil industry to give them a sense of belonging.

Finally, the Nigerian government should follow through with the promises it made to the militants, especially the promise to help them find employment to sustain themselves and their families. It is important to ensure that the stipends paid to the ex-militants are not embezzled by the militant leaders or government officials managing the amnesty program. This can be achieved by making the implementation of the program more transparent and by appointing an oversight committee that the ex-militants can trust.

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