

Exploring Funds: A Mitigation towards Sustaining the Niger Delta Amnesty Programme

Annamarie Nkem Okoli, PhD

Department of Criminology and Security Studies,
Dennis Osadebay University, Asaba, Delta State, Nigeria.

Edafe Ulo

Department of Sociology and Social Studies,
Dennis Osadebay University, Asaba, Delta State, Nigeria.

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ABSTRACT: *The amnesty programme in the Niger Delta is expected to improve the human capital development of the region and the country, which is presently low. Hence, the study investigated exploring funding mitigation for sustaining the Niger Delta Amnesty Programme. The study critically examined the role of private sector funding to the amnesty programme. The study was anchored on public-private partnership theory with the assertion that a philosophical approach to actualizing infrastructure services by leveraging private capital, know-how, and effectiveness while merging the advantages of the public and private sectors. The study adopted a qualitative approach for data collection. An in-depth interview (IDI) was used for data collection. The populations of the study were ex-militants in the Niger Delta state. The sample size is 15 ex-militants in the Niger Delta who have benefited from the amnesty programme. The IDI questions were structured in line with the two research questions. The findings revealed that private sector funding of the Niger Delta amnesty programme in the region would lead to continuity of the programme's burden of funding on the part of the federal and various states. It concluded that there is a need for the federal and state governments to seek funding from the private sector in areas of manpower training and reintegration of trained ex-militants into the world of work with appropriate functional skills. It was recommended that the government sensitise the public and private sector companies, in particular, to the need for support through funding in terms of financial or material goods that will help enhance the programme.*

KEY WORDS; exploring, funding, Niger Delta, amnesty programme

INTRODUCTION

The crux of the Niger Delta crisis has always been the concentration of power and resources in the hands of the centre through decrees and constitutions, and both the wealth from oil and the Land

Use Act of 1978, which states that all lands and minerals belong to the federal government, prevent the people from extracting wealth. Touitou and Ojunta (2016) argue that the Niger Delta crisis is anchored on the logic that despite the vast wealth produced in the area and the negative impacts of the oil industry, the people remain poorer than the national average. Deprived youths now resort to hostage-taking, prostitution, armed robbery, drug trafficking, and militancy as means of escaping poverty and deprivation. These youths are also refused significant education and work opportunities. Successive governments had at one point or another tried to resolve the Niger Delta challenge. This was in recognition of the implications of the prolonged absence of peace, security, and stability in the region for the Nigerian economy. A plethora of strategies were deployed to resolve the Niger Delta conflict, dating back to the colonial era (Paki & Edoumiekumo, 2011).

Nigeria gaining independence, the agitation for equity for the Niger Delta did not subside because the Nigerian state continued with the British colonial policies in the regions (Paki & Edoumiekumo, 2011). Over the years, the military regime, highhandedness, and divide and rule have remained the strategies of choice of successive governments in dealing with the region. However, several development initiatives have been taken by the Nigerian government to enhance socio-economic and infrastructural development of the people, such as the establishment of development boards and the provision of basic infrastructural facilities, among others. While some of these initiatives are laudable and need to be strengthened (Ukiwo, 2015), they have, however, failed to provide the antidote that will produce enduring peace needed for the region's development because they couldn't provide cogent solutions to the root causes of the conflict in the Niger Delta.

The pursuit of a long-lasting and stable peace in the Niger Delta area resulted in President Umaru Yar'Adua granting amnesty to the insurgents in June 2009, contingent on their disarmament, rehabilitation, and reintegration, the belief that peace will return back to the region. During the declaration, the President acknowledged the fact that challenges in the Niger Delta arose as a result of the inadequacies of the previous attempts at meeting the yearning of the people, this is cause attributed to the restiveness in the region. It can be seen that a major drive for the use of amnesty in the management of oil-related conflicts is the belief that it is only through peace that sustainable development can be guaranteed for the region. This understanding and the pressure from the international community were what finally motivated the state to finally settle for a political solution known as the Niger Delta Amnesty Programme.

The establishment of the programme in 2009 has not been able to accentuate meaningful developmental progress in the region, reference to the reliance on aquatic resources; about 94% of the locals in the Niger Delta live below the poverty line, which is set at \$1 per day (Watts, 2020).

The devil's excrement is an example of a "resource curse" scenario. Therefore, instead of blessing and prospering Nigerians, the mineral earnings have led to widespread environmental degradation, impoverishment and numerous crises in the Niger Delta area. Without a doubt, the amnesty plan is anticipated to raise the low level of human capital development in the nation and the area. Repentant militants gave the Government thousands of rounds of arms, when the Amnesty Project was launched. Many of these militants submitted themselves to the ideals of the Amnesty Project, though major militant groups like the 'Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta' (MEND), which viewed the policy with suspicion, promised to cease fire but not disarm the group because, according to them, the policy had no room for dialogue and did not address the root issues that gave birth to the struggle (Ogege, 2011).

However, the institution of Amnesty brought relative peace to the long-troubled region for the first time. The issue, however, is whether the Programme has addressed the root cause of the crises and if it is sustainable with regards to providing peace in the region. Following the 'success' of the Amnesty Programme, the post-amnesty phase saw the Federal Government release the sum of 50 billion naira to the Presidential Committee on Amnesty (PAC) to begin implementing the post-amnesty programmes for the repentant ex-militants (Akpan & Ering, 2010).

Oil firms have contributed unidentified funds to the amnesty project, Uwakwe (2016); top former insurgents were kept at bay by government and oil company payments. In 2009, Shell "spent US \$75 million on other unexplained security expenditures," despite the government paying US \$35 million annually to four warlords. Shell had already expended over US\$400 million in safeguarding its oil sites between 2007 and 2009. This means that instead of considering the challenges facing the region or addressing the root causes of the war, the amnesty idea has been reduced to a mere attempt "to buy short-term cease-fires with too little government commitment"(Newsom, 2011).

Etekte (2012) investigated how amnesty affected the Niger Delta's peace and prosperity. A personal interview was conducted to supplement the secondary data utilised in the study. He

discovered that while the government and oil firms, the two main players, benefited from the amnesty plan, neither the host communities nor the militants, who have shielded their swords,. Also, Olukayode (2012) investigated the region's environmental crisis after the launch of amnesty. He concluded that despite the allocation of huge sums of money for developmental projects and training of the militants, like in the past, the supervision and judicious implementation of such projects are not accorded great attention by the government, and as such, yet to recognized the remarkable impact of the programme on the people 's lives. This study fills a research vacuum by investigating private financing as mitigation strategy for continuing the Programme of the Niger Delta Amnesty. The study analysed in detail how the corporate sector provided funding for the amnesty programme. Nigerian officials have not ended the plan despite its inability to guarantee long-term post-conflict stability.

The Niger Delta amnesty programme came at a high price, however. While at its conception in 2009, the government estimated that the entire programme would cost about US\$360 million, it actually cost much more. In particular, the changes introduced in 2011 by Kingsley Kuku led to a significant increase in the cost of the programme. Thus, the programme has been considerably more expensive than initially planned and much more expensive than comparable programmes operated by international institutions (Giustozzi 2016). Despite the ambitious funding allocated to the programme, and the initial reduction in violent attacks and hostilities in the region, the positive impact on the security situation has not endured. The researcher suggests private sector funding can be a key lever in the reinforcement of amnesty programmes if properly administered with a sense of sincerity.

Development everywhere is open to private sector involvement in a number of ways, especially as it functions as a fund supplier. To address Africa's significant development demands over the medium to long term, the private sector is increasingly seen as a crucial partner. To solve the expensive infrastructure gaps, boost economic development in Africa, and encourage a job-rich recovery from the COVID-19-induced depression, billions of euros are required. It is not possible

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to accomplish this lofty goal by using only conventional public funding sources. A significant portion of the extra funding and investment will have to come from the private sector. The foundation of development models supported by a number of international organisations and initiatives, including the Compact with Africa (AfDB, IMF, and WB 2017), is accelerating private finance to promote equitable growth. One can draw from the suggestion as postulated above, understanding that the merger financial provision from the government isn't enough to actualize the core mandates of the programmes.

The private sector is the portion of the business that are individually or group owned, aside of government. It consists of companies, businesses, and, by extension, goodwill individuals that are managed for financial gain by private persons or organisations. The public sector consists of businesses and institutions that are under state control. In civilizations that are founded on capitalism and free markets, the private sector often comprises a far greater share of the economy than the governmental sector. The financial and non-financial contributions provided by the private sector to leverage other economic activity are known as private sector finance. These private sector fundings can come in the form of financing some of the programme's activities or implementation, setting up infrastructure that can engage the militants in terms of empowerment and engagement, and lastly, non-financial donations apart from their actual corporate social responsibility.

Why the private sector is considered important? The private sector is a large employer and job generator in addition to contributing significantly to the national income, making it a crucial player in both urban and economic growth. Approximately 90% of businesses in emerging nations are sustained by the private sector. Moreover, the bulk of future development will be handled by it (Venables, 2015). Utilising this advantage opportunity is necessary to improving the Amnesty Programme and other sector of the economy. The question here: will private sector funding encourage the sustainability of the programme? The region's evidence of violence and militia activities points to some serious problems with the long-term viability of amnesty as a peace initiative. The study's author was inspired to investigate financing mitigation for the continuation

Publication of the European Centre for Research Training and Development-UK of the Programme due to likely financial constraints from the government to sustain the programme.

Theoretical Base

Public–Private Partnership

Landow and Ebdon (2012) and PPIAF (2009) maintained that utilising private innovation and funding for public infrastructure is not a novel idea; rather, it is an ancient custom that is currently undergoing revitalization. Stated differently, it's unclear exactly when public-private partnerships first emerged, but they have been used for millennia as a means of project delivery in countries and nations around the world. Klijn (2010) poses a profound question: Where do public-private partnerships' (PPPs) basic assumptions start off? This is not as simple a question as it appears. PPP is a mixture of theoretical blend that draws assumptions from other theories. For emerging countries to be competitive, thrive, and combat poverty, they must invest in infrastructure and human capital. However budgetary limits have hampered the process followed by the rising demand of the region. PPP thus becomes an alternative financing source mobilizer (Uzunkaya, 2016).

PPP is centred on the philosophical approach of actualizing infrastructure services by leveraging private capital, know-how, and effectiveness while merging the advantages of the public and private sectors. PPPs are required because they leverage contractual agreements for risk-sharing between the public and private sectors (Fourie, 2008). These agreements extend beyond the construction but also to the operation and management, providing the private partner with the means to cover its costs through user fees and/or government procurement of services.

PPP is an arrangement for public entities and the private sector to mobilise funds for public asset financing and/or related services that the public receives from private sector investment and/or management (Uzunkaya, 2016). The private sector is much less likely to invest in unproductive

ventures since they are profit-seekers. PPP is a strategic strategy for attracting private capital for specific sectors or subsectors for both material and nonmaterial interventions. Funding education programme, allowances to candidates, playing supervisory & advisory roles, and employment of trained candidates. PPP was adopted for this work because of its philosophical base of mobilizing financial leverage (material and values) to support the public sectors. It becomes pertinent to explain that if the NDDC/Amnesty Programme is to succeed, there is a need to involve well-meaning Nigerians at the individual level and the private sector, such as group corporations, companies, and businesses, as a sort of mitigation in managing the programme since the funds from the government are not enough.

Objective of the Study

The objective of the study is to explore funding and a mitigating approach to sustaining the Niger Delta Amnesty Programme. Especially, the study sought to:

1. Private organisation funding of training programmes for ex-militants in the Niger Delta
2. A private organisation donated training equipment for a training programme for ex-militants in the Niger Delta.

Research question

Two research questions were formulated in line with the objectives of the study.

1. Will private funding of the amnesty programme in the Niger Delta make it more sustainable in the region?
2. Will skill acquisition programmes by the private sector make the Niger Delta amnesty programme more sustainable in the region?

METHODOLOGY

The study employed a qualitative research approach to sort out the opinions of beneficiaries of amnesty programmes on how challenges facing the scheme can be identified. The population of the study were ex-militants in the Niger Delta state. The sample size is 15 ex-militants in the Niger

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Delta who have benefited from the amnesty programme. An in-depth interview (IDI) was used for data collection. The IDI questions were structured in line with the two research questions. An audio recorder device was used in recording the various interview sessions with respondents; it was also transcribed in written form. Content analysis was also used to analyse the qualitative data generated from the field.

Finding from In-depth Interviews (IDIs)

Reports from beneficial of amnesty programme

Will private funding of the amnesty programme in the Niger Delta make it more productive in the region?

In the case of private funding, the government of today is finding it difficult to even pay the stipend promised to repented ex-militants. Wealthy Nigerians who believed in enduring peace in the Niger Delta region could come to support in areas like skills training and job placement for ex-militants so they would not go back to the creek again and cause trouble for the state government. (IDI/Male/35 years)

Another beneficiary of the programme reported that,

Another source of funding for the programme outside the government is essential; there are even times when the government delays the payment of stipends for ex-militants in the region. There is virtually nothing you can do today without NDs. Most often, when there is a payment delay, most of the ex-militants threaten to pick up arms again. You know this is not good for the region. (IDI/Male/53 years)

Third Respondent

There is absolutely nothing wrong if top non-governmental organisations assist the government in Programme. In the past, they had support, but the cabal in the region hacked all support for their selfish interests. If the government and private sector should work out a plan on how to reach not just ex-militants in the region but also victims of people who lost their lives, (IDI/Male/43years)

Fourth Respondent

The amnesty programme is becoming a burden alone for the federal and state governments. Private funding can come in the areas of relevant skills acquisition for repentant ex-militants to enable them to fit optimally in society. Most government programmes are not in tune with economic realities, and competent people are not allowed to manage them. (IDI/Male/22 years)

Research Question Two:

Will skill acquisition programmes by the private sector make the Niger Delta of the amnesty programme more sustainable in the region?

Fifth respondent

Though various organisations have been around all these years to train ex-militants in skills acquisition, most of these private organisations do so with a hidden agenda, with the intention of securing government contracts. Not minding their intentions, the skills acquisition programme tends to be more robust than the conventional government training package. (IDI/Male/31 years)

Sixth respondent

I personally have benefited a lot from various training programmes organised for ex-militants in the region. One unique feature of private sector training is the provision of the right manpower for the job, and we are also given adequate learning gadgets to enhance our learning and practical skills. With the knowledge I gain from their training, I can fabricate any kind of metal into any design, and I am using it to benefit my family. (IDI/Male/ 43 years)

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Findings revealed that private sector funding of the Niger Delta amnesty programme would lead to continuity of the programme's burden of funding on the part of the government and various states. The current economic realities on ground, various governments have defunct at various times, paying the monthly stipend to repentant militants in the region. Venables (2015) supported the findings that the private sector is a large employer and job generator in addition to contributing significantly to national income, making it a crucial player in both urban and economic growth. These private sector funding can come in the form of financing some of the programme's activities or implementation, setting up infrastructure that can engage the militants in terms of empowerment and engagement, and lastly, non-financial donations apart from their actual corporate social responsibility.

Giustozzi (2016) reported the financial burden on the part of the federal government, which affirmed the findings of this study that, due to this increase, the government budgeted US\$2.714 billion for the PAP between 2011 and 2017. The training programmes and the monthly stipend payments have been the main expenses in the budget. Thus, the programme has been considerably more expensive than initially planned and much more expensive than comparable programmes operated by international institutions.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that for the amnesty programme in the Niger Delta to have a lasting impact in the region, private funding of the scheme is essential, as the government alone can no longer bear the burden. This will help leverage and further encourage the government to do more with improving the programme's funding. Hence, there is a need for the federal and state governments to seek funding from the private sector in areas of manpower training and reintegration of trained ex-militants into the world of work with appropriate functional skills. Universities, Churches, banks and small and large scale companies can support financially and skill wise.

Recommendations

1. The government at all levels should encourage the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) by funding the programmes.
2. The government and private sectors should partner in the effective and efficient rehabilitation of ex-militants so they can cogently reintegrate back into mainstream society.
3. The government and private sectors should also employ trained ex-militant into their institution.
4. The government should sensitise the public especially private sectors (NGOs/ companies) on the need to fund the programme materially and non-materially.

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