

Gender Mainstreaming and the Impacts of the Federal Government Amnesty Programme in the Niger Delta Region

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Abstract

The Niger Delta people have been in the agitation for justice for over four decades, but the turning point in the crisis came as a result of the emergence of organized pressure groups which witnessed series of protest against human right abuses and environmental degradation in the region. Women and children suffer great hardship in time of conflict and those of the Niger Delta are no exception as they are subjected to all kinds of violence: physical and psychological violence, destruction of properties and loss of loved ones. The level of violence almost tipped to a point of outright warfare, when by June 25th, 2009, the late President Umaru Yar'Adua publicly announced a 60 days amnesty offer to be effective from August 4th to October 4th 2009. This was to halt the hostilities in the Niger Delta region and to show commitment of government towards achieving peace in the region. This work therefore, examined the involvement of women in the amnesty programme and its impact on the region. Secondary sources were used and inferences drawn qualitatively. Findings indicate that women have not been given adequate consideration in the process while most of the men ex-militants have benefited from it immensely.

Keywords: gender, militants, violence, amnesty, Niger Delta

1.1 Introduction

Violent conflict has been occurring since the pre-colonial era in Nigeria as wars were occasionally waged between kingdoms, although the gravity of violence was minimal compared to the contemporary incidence.

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Since its political independence from British in 1960, Nigeria has continued to witness resurgence of violent conflict leading to death of several lives and wanton destruction of properties as could be seen in some parts of the country including the Niger Delta region. The Niger Delta people have been in the agitation for justice for over four decades for the abuse of human rights and environmental degradation in the region which gave rise to the emergence of organized pressure groups and militant activities in the region.

The Niger Delta remained the treasure base of the Nigerian state in the past five decades. The area harbors over 95 percent of Nigeria's crude oil and gas resources, which accounts for 90 percent of the country's foreign exchange earnings. As at 2003, Nigeria's crude oil reserve in the Niger Delta stood at 33 billion barrels, while the natural gas reserve was 160 trillion cu. ft (Onuoha, 2004). The Niger Delta region is therefore, a place of intense exploration and exploitation of crude oil and gas. The consequence has been the massive environmental degradation of the area. The minority status of the people has led to their political and economic marginalization in the larger Nigerian federation. This has bred in them, a feeling of utter neglect, relegation and discrimination. For them, it is a pathetic case of living by the riverside and washing hands with spittle.

Activities of international oil exploring companies have led to unquantifiable environmental damages, such as oil spillage running indiscriminately into people's farmlands, thereby making agriculture a difficult engagement in the region (Faleti, 2007). Fishing which is one of the major occupations of the riverine settlers has also become an impossible activity as a result of oil spills into the rivers and streams all around. This has thus, led to increase in unemployment in the Niger Delta as people could no longer practice their traditional ways of making a living which used to be farming and fishing. The UNDP Human Development Report on the Niger Delta (2006) describes the Region as 'suffering from administrative neglect, crumbling social infrastructure and services, high unemployment, social deprivation, abject poverty, filth and squalor, and endemic conflict.

Obi (2002) posits that, in spite of the overwhelming contribution of the oil minority areas of the Niger Delta to Federal Revenue, they have been excluded from the direct access to oil revenue, except through federal and ethnic majority benevolence. Consequently, according to Ikelegbe (2005), the region in the 1990's was one of the least developed and poorest in Nigeria.

The destruction of livelihoods and lack of accountability without redress, have led people (mostly unemployed youths) to resort to oil bunkering, pipeline vandalism, hostage taking, indiscriminate killing, insurgent militant activities among others.

However, May 2009, witnessed fierce exchange of fire with the Joint Task Force (JTF) of the federal government in Gbaramatu kingdom of Delta State, which led to heavy casualties as innocent citizens were killed, injured and many others were internally displaced.

Incidentally, women and children more than men, often bear the full brunt of the consequences of conflicts. Thus, the Niger Delta women were not exceptional as they generally, suffered great hardship during the conflicts. They were subjected to all kinds of violence; physical and psychological violence, destruction of properties and loss of loved ones (probably their husbands), which made them assumed the responsibility as heads of households. Most women have support roles apart from combat roles. A large number of women, compared with men, operated as cooks, messengers, spies, sex slaves and were not directly engaged in fighting and therefore, tend not to carry weapons. Without a weapon, they often cannot prove that they have participated in fighting and thus, got excluded from Disarmament Demobilization and Re-integration (DDR) assistance after conflict.

Niger Delta women suffered unimaginable human right abuses for which redress is unattainable because the agents of government who perpetrate the abuses cannot be subjected to the Rule of Law. Though, these conflicts affect men and women differently, the studies conducted on them so far are not gendered oriented. This perhaps, is as a result of the general apathy shown to women. The only social conflict issue that seems to have been sufficiently gendered by those who studied them is the Shariah justice system which was introduced by some northern Nigerian governors in 1999 and 2000 (Ezeilo, Ladan & Afolabi, 2003). Even then, the only aspect of the conflict that was gendered is the application of the system on women (Alemika & Okoye, 2005).

As part of his determination and desire to put an end to the agitations and violence in the region, the late President, Yar'Adua Musa initiated an amnesty programme on the 25th of June, 2009, with the aim of disarming, rehabilitating and re-integrating militants into their communities with a promise to tackle head on, the challenges facing the region.

This amnesty programme was meant for both women and men who in one way or the other, were involved in the militant activities. However, the implementation process, especially after the surrendering of arms in the context of sustainable peace and development in the region, has become lopsided whereby men only, were considered in the entire amnesty programme. In general, intervention implementing organizations have not planned for the inclusion of women's needs and concerns in DDR programme. In fact, the impact of returning male combatants on women and even the existence and needs of female combatants have historically been overlooked. This neglect of the many and complex role that women play during war and peace leads to a less effective, less informed DDR that does not fully extend to the community level and, may not lead to long-term or sustainable peace.

In the declaration of the amnesty, the word 'people' meant men and women, but so far the amnesty program has concentrated on men only, to the exclusion of women. Yet, some of these women have served as wives, girl friends, combatants, slaves, concubines, cooks, some taken into forceful slavery, while others were physically and psychologically abused. Where are these women? How come they do not have a place in the whole amnesty exercise? This study therefore examined the impact of the amnesty programme on the female gender and the militants in the Niger Delta region.

1.2 Objective

To analyze the Niger Delta crisis and the activities of the militants in the Niger Delta region.

To briefly explain the concept amnesty.

To examine the Nigeria amnesty programme with reference to gender issues

To evaluate the impacts of the amnesty programme

1.3 Research Methodology

Secondary source was used for data collection. This include library sources, books, journals, magazines and other periodicals, conference papers and other unpublished works relevant to the research topic. The internet was also very relevant for this topic. These gathered data were rigorously analyzed and we arrived at a logical conclusion and recommendations.

1.4 Scope of Study

As the topic suggests, this study covered the Niger Delta region in general but with reference to the three states (Bayelsa, Delta and Rivers) where the militant activities and other problems were particularly frequent.

2.1 Brief History of the Niger Delta Crisis

By popular perception, the marginalization and balkanization of the peoples of the Niger Delta, the despoliation of their environment and resultant conflicts, have their roots in the discovery of oil exploitation and production activities by the oil multinationals in the late 1950s. The Niger Delta, a lush of mangrove swamps rainforests and swamp land, is the site of rich oil and natural gas reserves in Nigeria. Oil accounts for about 90% of Nigerian exports and more than 80% of government revenue.

Despite being the richest geopolitical region in terms of natural resource endowment (in Nigeria), the Niger Delta's potential for sustainable development however, remains unfulfilled, and is now increasingly threatened by environmental devastation and worsening economic conditions (www.nigerdeltaonline.com).

Incidental to and indeed compounding this ecological devastation, is the political marginalization and total oppression of the people and especially the denial of their rights, including land rights. In spite of the enormous wealth accrued from their land, the people continue to live in pristine conditions in the absence of social amenities such as electricity, pipe borne water, hospitals, housing and schools.

The late environmentalist and minority rights crusader, Ken Saro-Wiwa summed it up by describing the pitiable condition of his 500,000 Ogoni people in the Niger Delta as being cosigned to slavery and extinction (www.nigerdeltaonline.com). The internationalization of the Ogoni case in the 1990s committed a global audience into the Niger Deltans' plight.

The peaceful clamors for change and justice for the population of the Niger Delta was led throughout the 1990s by the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP), headed by Ken Saro –Wiwa.

Their struggle received international attention and when Ken Saro-Wiwa was hanged, on 10th November 1995, with eight other Ogoni activists, the world responded with collective condemnation. This peaceful action for change continues to date in the region, but is considered by many as having failed to deliver, and therefore, violence is regarded to be more attractive and acceptable option for many of today's unemployed youths.

The use of political thugs to secure the 2003 and 2007 elections led to the rise of the first seriously recognized militia group calling for substantive restructuring of the Niger Delta society and the removal of the oil companies. Alhaji Dokubo Asari was said to turn against his political paymaster, and created the Niger Delta Peoples Volunteer Force (www.nigerdeltaonline.com). The international prominence of this group grew as they threatened the western oil infrastructure, contributing to global oil prices rising above the unheralded \$50 per barrel. Throughout 2004, the NDPVF fought not only the state security forces but also, the right-wing Niger Delta Vigilante Services (NDVS) headed by Ateke Tom, a self confessed political thug (www.nigerdeltaonline.com). The conflict between these two groups directly claimed hundreds of lives.

However, 2006 witnessed an increase in the boldness of militia groups and the intensity of the damage they inflict on the oil industry and the state. The arrest of Asari and Alamiyesigha were followed by the rise of a new militia, the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND).

Since January 2006, the latest wave of violence has resulted in at least ten kidnappings a month and numerous battles between the State Security Services (SSS) and militia groups, increasing the pervading sense in society that the conflict will steadily increase. The impact of this violence has not only been huge on the lives of the population; it has also had a significant impact on world oil prices by locking in 800,000 barrels per day (www.nigerdeltaonline.com).

2.2 Brief explanation of the concept 'Amnesty'

The word 'amnesty' is derived from Greek word *amnestia* which means 'pardon', especially for those who have committed political crime. It is a period during which crimes can be admitted or illegal weapons handed in without prosecution.

An amnesty is also considered to be a legislative or executive act by which a state restores those who may have been guilty of an offence against it, to the positions of innocent persons. In other words, for an amnesty to be offered to an individual, such a person must have committed an offence punishable by law (Nigerian voice, 2011). Amnesty in international law refers to an act of effacing and forgetting past offences, granted by the government to persons who have been found guilty of offences against the state or criminal acts, usually applies to rebellious acts against the state. Amnesty is usually offered in order to restore tranquility in a state.

A study of amnesty law adopted since the Second World War concludes that, there are an increasing number of amnesties that exclude some, or all crimes under international law. In practice, amnesties have taken several legal forms. The two most common methods of adoption since the Second World War have been through (a) executive degree or proclamation and (b) parliamentary enactment into law (Louise, 2008).

Amnesty has also been accorded pursuant to a peace agreement or other negotiation such as agreement between the incumbent government, opposition groups or rebel forces. According to Louise (2008), amnesty refers to an official act that exempt a convicted criminal or criminals for serving his/her or their sentence(s) in whole or in part, without experiencing the underlying convictions. The term amnesty is also an initiative where individuals are encouraged to turn over illicit items to the authorities on the understanding that they will not be prosecuted for having been in possession of those items.

Reasons for this is to reduce the escalation of crisis, mop up the circulation firearms and work against abuse of human rights especially the girl child and women, who fully bear the brunt of violent conflict atrocities.

Instances where amnesty has been used in the 17th and 18th centuries include: Napoleon's amnesty of March 13, 1815; the Prussians amnesty of August 10, 1840; the general amnesty proclaimed by the emperor Franz Josef 1 of Austria in 1857; the general amnesty granted by President of the United States, Andrew Johnson after the American civil war (1861-April 9, 1865) in 1868 and the French Amnesty of 1905. Amnesty was also granted in U.S. politics in 1872, which meant restoring the right to vote and hold office to ex-confederates which was achieved by act of congress.

However, in recent times, amnesty has been applied in different circumstances, for political reasons aimed either at ending hostilities or in the control of illegal possessions of firearms. For instance, the Lome' Peace Agreement of 7 July 1999 between the government of Sierra Leone and the Revolutionary United Front of Sierra Leone (RUFSL) included a provision pursuant to which the government undertook to grant absolute and free pardon, and reprieve to all combatant and collaborators in respect of anything done by them in pursuant of their objectives. This is to ensure that no official or judicial action is taken against any member of specific forces. Attempt was also made by the Ugandan Parliament to end insurgencies in the north and west of the country when a bill was passed, offering amnesty to northern rebels of Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) and Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) who have been fighting President Museveni's government since its inception in 1986. The rebels were given six months from the date at which the president signed the bill into law to claim amnesty, and hand in their weapons.

In 1995, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) of South Africa introduced a mechanism that offered a morally compromised for accountability which is amnesty, in exchange for public disclosure of truth. This was spelled out in the National United and Reconciliation Act of 1995 (Backer, 2003). The South African model of accountability through conditional amnesty, required perpetrators to apply for amnesty in relation to each of their offences, provides full disclosure, and prove that it was politically motivated. It is this amnesty process of South Africa that made the transition to democracy possible (Gibson, 2002).

The South African Parliament also passed firearms amnesty that allows authorities to destroy as many illegal weapons as possible. The first initiative was the 'sweep' in 2005 which destroyed 33,000 illegal weapons and about 46,000 legal weapons. The exercise was again repeated in 2010 from January - April. The step was aimed at reducing violent crime in the country through a reduction in the number of firearms in circulation.

Nigeria is not left out in the effort at granting amnesty to offenders. At different times in the history of the country, amnesty has been proclaimed. One of such was the granting of amnesty to military officers who participated on the side of secessionist Biafra during the Nigerian civil war 1967-1970 (Duru, 2009).

Again, a special amnesty proclamation was made by the Shehu Shagari led administration in May 1982 for the leader of Biafra secessionist, late Dim Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu and former head of States, General Yakubu Gowon, who was allegedly implicated in the coup attempt that claimed the life of former military head of States, General Murtala Mohammed on February 13, 1976. In these cases, the amnesty was aimed at reconciliatory purposes. In recent time, amnesty has also been proposed for the members of the Boko Haram insurgents causing havoc in the northern part of the country.

2.3 The Nigerian Amnesty Programme

In what appears like the futility of violent response, Late President Umaru Yar'Adua on 25 June, 2009 publicly announced a 60 days Amnesty offer to be effective from August 4 to October 4, 2009. The Amnesty programme for ex-militants was not an event, but a declaration to show the commitment of government towards achieving peace in the Niger Delta Region. Though referred to as Amnesty programme, the logic is to ideally integrate the Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) process into the overall implementation. Many militants accepted the offer and conditions spelt out by the Federal Government. About 26,358 militants received the amnesty and were sent out to different countries for training; 933 were sent to South Africa, 172 were sent to Benin Republic, 34 sent to Sri Lanka, 21 sent to Poland, 65 sent to Russia, 56 sent to U.S.A and 22 sent to Israel. However, no European country accepted the repentant militants for training.

Moscow was to offer them training in medical services and Tel Aviv farming experts, while Washington agreed to issue pilots' license to militants taking flying courses at the Daytona Aviation Academy (Nigerian Voice, 2011) while the others were trained on different skill acquisition within the country. The programme, no doubt, has considerably improved peace and security in the Niger Delta, but the implementation of the amnesty programme has not transcended beyond the collection of weapons to providing sustainable livelihood alternatives to ex-militants and affected Niger Delta communities.

Before now, the Niger Delta region of Nigeria was noted for its restiveness as different militant groups carried out damaging attacks on oil installations and created a general attitude of hostilities, both to the natives and non-natives, thereby causing violent activities in the region. Indeed, attacks since December, 2005 which included a spate of kidnappings, shut down of oil production, sabotage of oil facilities, illegal bunkering, vandalism of oil pipelines, clashes with Joint Military Task Force (a special unit of Nigerian Armed Forces specially established to check violence) and various attacks on contractors and even innocent people portrayed the region as dead zone. It was actually a worrisome situation.

In spite of all the hostilities recorded in the area, President Umaru Musa Yar 'Adua, in realizing his presidential mandate of bringing lasting peace, progress and meaningful development to the area, proclaimed the unconditional amnesty to all Niger Delta militants in the creeks as well as those facing prosecution in the law courts.

The proclamation of the President followed the ratification of the amnesty terms by the Council of State, while the details of the amnesty package were worked out by the Presidential Panel on Amnesty and Disarmament of militants in the Niger Delta, headed by Major General Godwin Abbe, the then Minister of Defence. Essentially, the presidential panel recommended that the president's proclamation should give the militants a period not exceeding 75 days but not less than 60 days within which to renounce militancy and subscribe to the oath of renunciation.

Specifically, the post amnesty programme was a testimonial of the readiness of the federal government to attend to the unique ambition of bringing lasting peace and progress to the Niger Delta region by ensuring calmness in the oil rich area.

There were series of meetings with the leaders of the area on how best to accomplish lasting peace. Sixteen major militant leaders led by Chief Government Ekpemepolo (Tompolo) had dialogue with the President on how to achieve peace. Other militant leaders in the peace talk were Ebikabowie Ben (Boyloaf, Bayelsa), Ateke Tom (Rivers), Franklin Duduku (Cross River), Bonny Gawei (Delta), Africa Ukparafa (Bayelsa), Farah Dagogo (Rivers), Sagboma George (Rivers), Erefimudie Olotu (Bayelsa), Ezekiel Akpabowei (Delta), Kenneth Dan Opsingi (Rivers), Bibowei Ajube (Ondo), Henry Egbema (Edo), Omo Tom Tonwerigha (Edo), Solomon Indigbena (Rivers) and Selky Kile Torugwedi (Bayelsa).

The terms of the Amnesty include: the willingness and readiness of militants to surrender their arms; unconditionally renunciation of militancy and signed undertaking to this effect. In return, the government pledged its commitment to institute programs to assist their disarmament, demobilization, rehabilitation and provision of reintegration assistance to the militants. These are major preconditions put in place to address wider development challenges in the Niger Delta.

In the remarkable conviction and sincerity that peace can reign in the Niger Delta, a steering committee comprising of government and oil companies was set up to identify projects, pool resources and execute laudable programmes in the area. The chairman of the committee was Dr Emmanuel Egbogah, the then adviser to the federal government on petroleum, while other members include Mr. Philips Chukwu of the Nigeria National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) and Mr. Mutiu Sumonu of Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC). A passionate intensity at achieving lasting peace and development was again revealed when the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) made open its plans to begin the implementation of a \$3.28million initiative to attain impressive development.

The initiative, according to the Managing Director of NDDC, Mr. Chibuzor Ugwoha was to be executed in partnership with the United Nations Institute of Training and Research (UNTAR), and it was meant to focus on creating a new generation of skilled workers from among the youth population of the region. While the intervention agency would be contributing 30 percent initiative, the NDDC would provide the balance of 70 percent funding. The reasonableness of the post amnesty plans of the Federal Government got more relevance when the Federal Executive Council (FEC) also approved N200 billion for the execution of 44 projects in the nine states that made up the Niger Delta.

The projects involved the construction of bridges, roads, hospitals, the provision of portable water and environmental impact assessment which was jointly executed by the NDDC and the Petroleum Technology Development Fund (PTDF).

The breakdown of the projects to be executed indicated that Abia got four projects valued at N9billion, Akwa Ibom, four projects valued at N10.2billion, Bayelsa, six projects at N2.9billion, Cross rivers, three projects at N6.6billion, and Delta, six projects at N50billion.

Other states were Edo with three projects at N7billion, Imo, four projects valued at N56billion, Ondo, three projects at N22.5 billion and Rivers with eleven projects at N35.6billion. Also indicated in the project was an N14.9billion contract for the development of the newly established Federal Polytechnic of Oil and Gas sited in Bayelsa. There is no exaggeration that late President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua paved the way for peace and progress in the Niger Delta, a project which the current regime is trying to follow up to its logical conclusion.

3.1 Assessing Gender (Female) Issues in the Nigeria Niger Delta Amnesty Programme

Gender refers to the socially constructed roles ascribed to women and men, as opposed to biological and physical characteristics. It varies according to socio-economic, political, and cultural contexts, and are affected by other factors, including age, class, and ethnicity. Gender roles are learned and negotiated, or contested. Besides, differences in roles between women and men, and roles among women and men differ as well, while both women and men may also combine different roles individually over time or even simultaneously. Gender could thus be said to be an organizing principle of social life that affects different levels of social reality, not only individual people. In this connection, gender relations cut across other social factors and processes based on class, age, and ethnicity, each of which may have gendered qualities. Gender issues involve at least, two different frames of reference: "gender equality and the mainstream". Gender equality relates to the equal rights, responsibilities, and opportunities of women, men, girls, and boys.

It is often regarded as a human rights issue and considered a precondition for an indication of sustainable, people-centered development. As Grosser and Moon (2004) argue, mainstreaming gender benefits both the individual and the wider society.

There has been a growing consensus around the need for inclusion of gender issues, which is about having access to opportunities, options and choices in life which aids individual's self esteem, self worth and self employment in order to inspire the individual to re-engage with society.

Gender mainstreaming on the other hand, is seen as the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies, or programmes in all areas and at all levels.

It is a strategy for making women's as well as men's concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of policies and gender programmes in all political, economic, and societal spheres, so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated (UN Economic and Social Council (UNESCO) 1997). This usually involves considering special measures to improve women's access to decision making, services, and resources.

Gender mainstreaming therefore, seeks to empower women by removing societal obstacles that operate to their disadvantage, while focusing on the participation of women, their rights, views, and interest, which ensure that there is increase in the role of women in decision making processes that will effectively and efficiently empower them. World Bank (2001) report distinguishes equality under the law, equality of opportunity (equality of rewards for work and equality in access to human capital and other productive resources that enable opportunity), and equality of voice (the ability to influence and contribute to the development process). It is likely that, without a clear gender equality focus, interventions will fail to capitalize on opportunities to decrease disparities between women and men and to build on their potential to sustain peace and development.

The practice within gender mainstreaming is often one of looking for the points of overlap of the agenda of gender equality and mainstream. In policy practice, the duality between gender equality and the mainstream can sometimes be expressed as the promotion of gender equality and gender justice as an end in its own rights, and making mainstream policies more effective in their own terms by the inclusion of gender analysis. Gender inequalities are exacerbated during period of violent conflict and continue during post-conflict reconstruction.

Again, women in violent zone often experience physical and sexual abuse by male who have been demeaned by violent conflict, crippled by guilt and anger for having failed to assume their perceived responsibility of protecting their women (El Jack, 2002).

Though, there is a growing evidence and recognition that women as well as men are actively involved in fighting during conflict (Goldstein, 2001) little consideration is given to them when granted an amnesty programme.

C	STATES	MALE	FEMALE	REGISTERED
1.	Akwa Ibom	155	8	163
2	Bayelsa	6,900	61	6,961
3	Cross River	159	1	160
4	Delta	3,361	-	3,361
5	Edo	450	-	450
6	Imo	297	3	300
7	Ondo	1,198	2	1200
8	Rivers	6,958	39	6,997
9	NDDC	571	19	600
	TOTAL	20,049	133	20,192

The table above is a breakdown of Timi Alaibe, former special adviser to the President on amnesty programme - figure of ex-militants who embraced the amnesty programme. This comprised of 20,049 male and 133 female bringing the total figure to 20,196 ex-militants from different states for the DDR programme in Obubra, Cross River State. The report submitted by Timi Alaibe (www.nigerdeltaamnesty.org) in the table above, shows that the total number of registered male ex-militants is 20,049 in addition to the 6,000 male and 133 female ex-militants who later joined the programme. One then wonders if the Nigeria amnesty programme can be said to be a success if significant gender issues and women's involvement are not substantial.

Though it can be said that the amnesty programme has brought relative peace to the Niger Delta region, however, its impact cannot be said to have been extended to the women in the region especially the female ex-militants just as their male counterpart. Women have been marginalized, discriminated and given less attention.

With a total of 26,358 documented (including women) only two have been sent abroad for training as against 645 male.

From the above, it could be said that the implementation of the amnesty has been lopsided with its particular consideration of men in the entire programme at the exclusion of women.

This is contrary to late President Yar'Adua statement that he hereby grants amnesty and unconditional pardon to all persons who have directly or indirectly participated in the commission of offences associated with militant activities in the Niger Delta region (Ndidi, 2010). This declaration is misunderstood as being granted to men only.

The word 'persons' in this declaration included both men and women, but so far, it has been interpreted in rather misleading manner. The programme has proceeded with only the male militants given priority attention and the women given less attention or excluded, forgetting that these group of people were either as conscripted or recruited wives, girlfriends, concubines, sex slaves, spies, cooks to mention but a few.

In the same vein, there have been several incidents where the militants attacked fisher women, gang raped them and took them hostage. Although, some of these women can be said not to have committed offences as prerequisite for inclusion in the amnesty programme, but it can be argued that majority of them were victims of militant activities. Yet, these women do not have a place in the amnesty exercise. Is it possible to maintain sustainable peace at community level without involving the women who constitute the majority of the population in these communities as they were the first to organize non-violent resistance about the impact of the extractive industry on them (Oil watch, 2002) by besieging chevron platform half naked chanting war songs?.

3.2 Impact of the Amnesty Programme on the Militants in the Niger Delta Region

The ex-militants responded positively and surrendered different calibers and types of arms and ammunitions. A total of 8,299 militants excluding women, were reported to have registered after the pronouncement and embraced the amnesty (Imuetinyan, 2011). With regard to each state, a total of 4,869 militants surrendered from Bayelsa State; 1,061 from Delta; 1,047 from Rivers; 750 from Ondo; 250 from Edo; 162 from Akwa Ibom and 160 from Imo State, respectively.

Records tendered also indicated that arms surrendered included 287,445 different types of ammunitions, with about 2,760 assorted arms, 18 gunboats, 763 dynamites, 1,090 dynamite caps, 3,155 magazines and other accessories like RPG charger, 1 bullet proof jacket, walkie-talkies, dynamite cables, cartridges, knives and AK 47 bayonets. A breakdown of the submission showed that 82,406 ammunitions were received from Rivers State, 52,958 from Delta, 139,877 from Bayelsa, 9,748 from Cross River, 9,725 from Ondo, 959 from Akwa Ibom as well as 722 from Edo State (Ifeatu, 2010)

The ex-militants willingness to embrace the amnesty programme can be seen in their wholesome renunciation of militancy, surrender of arms and agreement to cease hostilities in the creeks. The programme involved re-orientation, rehabilitation and capacity building, training and skill acquisition.

The registered militants were initially camped in two holding centers: in Aluu, Rivers State and Agbarho in Delta State and were rehabilitated centrally in Obubra camp in batches. The rehabilitation lasted for two weeks for each batch and involved reorientation, counseling and moral/spiritual regeneration of the ex-militants. At the end, they were made to take an oath of allegiance to the state and afterwards, reintegrated into the state (Daily champion, 27 October, 2009). Furthermore, the core of the programme was to remove the belief of the ex-militants in violence. It was also to liberate the pardoned from the burden of guilt from their past crimes.

They were taught to avoid not only external physical violence but also internal violence of the spirit using the power of love. In a nutshell, this stage of engagement prepared the spirit of the former illegal combatant for normal day-to-day living as free law abiding citizens, free to strive for living like any other person. Much as it were critical to change the mindset of the former militants, it was even more crucial to arm them with skills that would give them financial freedom on a sustainable basis. In support of this argument, Daily Champion (2009) asserts that the amnesty training/skill acquisition has made a great impact on the ex-militants.

According to the paper, survey of the needs of the youths in the Niger Delta Region conducted by the Ministry of the Niger Delta Affairs, indicated that the youths were interested in oil/gas, marine services, fabrication and welding technology, exploration and production, processing engineering.

Besides, amnesty skill acquisition programme has been complimented by the NDDC with the training of no less than 8,000 youths of the Niger Delta who have benefitted from its various schemes. For instance, 7,732 youths were trained in diverse skills and out of this number, 2,204 were trained in computer literacy, 1,929 in welding, while 3,599 acquired skills in such areas as automobile mechanics, aluminum and furniture works, electrical installation and maintenance, home management skills, outboard engine maintenance, printing, photography as well as refrigeration and cooling technology.

Similarly, a total of 1,920 welders have so far been trained by the NDDC under its Human Capacity Development and Empowerment programme (Ifeatu, 2010)

Some of the ex- militants however, chose formal education as against vocational training. This category consists mainly of those who did not complete school, either at the primary or secondary and even post-secondary education. With the dawn of a new era, they want to return to school and in line with the amnesty proclamation, the Federal Government is said to be ready to assist them achieve this goal. The classification team in the camp therefore, verified the qualifications of the ex-militants who have passed out of the Obubra camp and recommended some of them to undertake courses in some schools in the country and abroad. So far, 8,595 former combatants who graduated from the rehabilitation camp in Obubra, effectively demobilized are now being placed in vocational/skills acquisition centers and institutions within and outside the country.

4.1 Recommendation

Base on the conclusion above, the following are therefore recommended;

Gender issues should as a matter of urgency be given priority attention, to aid sustainable peace building in the region;

There should be equal representation of both men and women in policy planning and implementation;

Women should be involved in rehabilitation and development activities;

Increase women's participation and empowerment in community driven development;

4.2 Conclusion

Though, conflicts affect both men and women, the women folk and children more often than not, feel the impacts of conflict which brings untold hardships on them. This study thus assessed the amnesty programme on female gender as a national peace building policy in the Niger Delta region and also the impact of the amnesty on the repentant militants in the region.

Based on the findings, the amnesty no doubt brought relative peace to the Niger Delta region. However, its impact was not fully extended to the female ex-militants just as their male counterpart. The women so far, have been marginalized, discriminated and given less attention as shown in the ratio of the total number of militants given training home and abroad. This is as a result of the organizers neglecting gender issues in the planning and implementation of the programme. It is found on the view that women have a strong commitment to the cessation of violence and the maintenance of long term peace, often constituting a highly motivated and able group of stakeholders in all aspects of processes leading to sustainable peace. This study therefore, charts a part for concrete, peace building policies that take their key from international resolution and conventions, and make recommendations which will begin to redress this persistent gender inequality and widespread failure to tackle issues relating to women.

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