

The Niger Delta Crisis: Taming Violence beyond the Amnesty

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Abstract

The declaration of Amnesty to the Niger Delta Militants by the Federal Government of Nigeria was acknowledged as the needed roadmap to the Niger Delta crisis. It was expected to draw out the militants from the creeks for skill acquisition training and rehabilitation, end violence and pave the way for a comprehensive development of the long neglected Niger Delta Region (NDR). Despite the seemingly overwhelming acceptance of the package by the militants, trademarks of violence reminiscent of the pre-amnesty era are still the lots of the NDR. Against this background, this study was undertaken with the objective of investigating the factors that are responsible for the renewed violence in the region with a view to finding solutions. Using a survey design, we administered questionnaire on 293 ex-militants to elicit information on their socio-demographic background, belief in amnesty, fear about amnesty, perception of amnesty by deserters, as well as the push and pull factors to militancy. Our results indicate a high mean rating of the amnesty package, but with fear about its comprehensive implementation. The fear was derived from lack of trust and confidence in the politicians handling the implementation of the amnesty package, and failure of previous government empowerment programmes. Such fear informed the decision by some militants to withhold their arms and ammunitions, as well as the outright rejection of the amnesty. Given the commodification of violence in the region, arm ownership became a pull-factor in deserting amnesty and in encouraging the emergence of splinter groups whose mission is pecuniary and criminalistic. Allegiance to ex-militants leaders was very strong. Surprisingly, respondents' opinion that the amnesty will not result in the overall development of the NDR was widely shared. Based on these findings, we recommend a supervised financial empowerment to graduates of the amnesty skill acquisition, training and rehabilitation for the purpose of establishing their small scale businesses or outright employment; the mopping-up of arms in the region, the involvement of militant leaders in the negotiation to bring back amnesty deserters, and the extension of empowerment benefits on skill acquisition training to non-militants youth as a part of the comprehensive package on the human and infrastructural development of the NDR, among others.

Keywords: Niger Delta, Militancy, Violence, Amnesty, Criminality

Introduction

The Niger Delta Region (NDR) has a history of strategic economic importance to the Nigerian State. Beside the ignoble slave trade of the 18th century, oil production shaped its destiny and that of its people. The Colonial masters christened it the "Oil River" to mark its role in palm oil production and export – which was then a major foreign exchange earner and source of raw material for the metropolitan industries. Oil also influenced the demarcation of the area as the Oil River Protectorate from 1885 to 1893 when it was expanded and re-named the Niger Coast protectorate. When crude oil replaced agriculture as the main stay of the Nigerian economy, the Niger Delta oil wells replaced palm oil in a more distinguished manner. Current estimates place the Niger Delta as one of the largest oil and gas reserve in the world. According to Robinson, about 34 billion barrels of crude oil are located here; and many more oil wells are yet to be exploited¹. It is a home to about 40 indigenous ethnic groups who speak about 250 dialects. The primary occupation of the people includes farming, fishing, and hunting. These economic activities are adversely affected today by environmental degradation caused by oil spillages and continuous gas flaring².

Ordinarily, such positive role in both the National and international economy would suggest commensurate socio-economic development of the region, but oil wealth is indeed oil curse for the Niger Delta people. Environmental pollution caused by gas flaring and oil spillage exerts its attendant destruction on farm land and aquatic lives. The refusal of MNOCs to fulfill their corporate social responsibilities³, neglect and abandonment by government⁴ renders many of the communities uninhabitable. Evidence of deprivation and mindless looting of revenue generated from the region also exist⁵. The revolution of rising expectations that followed oil discovery in 1958 has been replaced by a revolution of rising frustration. In 2003 about 99 per cent of excess gas was flared in the Niger Delta Region despite its devastating effect on the environment⁶. The Amnesty International (AI) acknowledged that gas is flared into the air at the rate of approximately 70 million m³ per day in the NDR⁷. Such environmental devastation associated with the MNOCs activities and the lack of distribution of oil wealth are seen as the cause of the numerous inter-ethnic violence including the on-going militancy in the region.

In 1999 what started as civil protest movement in the early 1990s snow-balled into outright militancy that believes in Moa Tse Tung's theory that power flows from the barrel of the guns. Militancy became justified by its protagonists on the failure of non-violent actions adopted earlier by youths in the region. The reaction of the government was the use of brute forces to silent them. Rather than secure the needed peace, the use of force resulted in the militarization of the region with more insurgency and violence. The realization by government that militarization can be counter-productive resulted in the declaration of Amnesty for the militants in May 2009. Government solicited for disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of the militants as well as a comprehensive development of the region.

Acceptance of the amnesty was expected to herald in peace that had eluded the NDR for many years. It was supposed to end hostage taking and the demand for ransoms and bring to an end pipeline vandalization and oil bunkering. Recent development in the NDR suggests that these expectations are far from being realized. The continued militancy despite the amnesty declaration demand explanation. For three years now since the re-eruption of violence (as witnessed in kidnapping, piracy, oil bunkering, etc) in spite of the amnesty declaration, scholarly silence has remained regarding its explanation. It is in attempt to providing such explanation that this research was undertaken.

The paper argues that amnesty package have focused almost entirely on military and security objectives. This is as expressed in the disarmament, demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) programmes. Unfortunately, the emergence of militancy did not consist in the acquisition of small arms and light weapons alone, neither was the causative factor entirely poverty that empowerment programmes can cushion. The militarization of the NDR had resulted in formation of different militant groups with irreconcilable leaders; and the commodification of violence. Apart from the fact that each of the ethnic groups in the NDR tends to raise its own militant youth, some militant groups' mission was less than the emancipation of the NDR. The DDR programmes executed by the amnesty package tend to neglect the consideration of these historical factors, which could have engendered bottom-up input into the programmes.

To provide a context for our analyses, we provide a brief description of the background of study, followed by literature and conceptual explanations of amnesty within the theoretical framework of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) and Emerson's theory of power. This is followed by methodology and findings. The paper concludes with recommendations. Our study contributes to empirical literature on the relationship between amnesty declaration and the realization of peace. It exposes mediating variables that could constrain the realization of amnesty goal.

Literature Review, Theory and Hypotheses

The crisis in the NDR has been subjected to several academic analyses as well as bureaucratic reports⁸. Several newspaper commentaries have also been written⁹. In all these reports and lots more¹⁰, the findings have been consistent on the causative factor of the crisis: cumulative neglect and alienation of the region by the Federal government. The analyses of these reports provide firmer understanding of the socio-economic and political realities that gave birth to and still sustain the on-going violence in the region. In order to persuade the militants to abandon violence and arms (their valued tools) in exchange for skill acquisition training, rehabilitation and the development of the NDR, an amnesty declaration was made by Government in May, 2009.

Amnesty can be defined as a legislative or executive Act which enables a State to grant pardon to those who may have been guilty of an offence against it and to restore them to the positions of innocence. It includes more than pardon, in as much as it obliterates all illegal remembrance of the offence¹¹. An amnesty may also be declared when the authority decides that bringing citizens into compliance with the law is more important than punishing them for the past offence¹². Amnesty promotes reconciliation between offenders and society; it prevents expensive prosecution, especially when massive numbers of violators are involved. It could also enable alleged violators of the law who had hitherto eluded the authorities to come forward for reconciliation¹³.

The amnesty components include disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) of the ex-militants. Disarmament consists of the collection and destruction of small arms, ammunition, explosives, light and heavy weapons, while demobilization includes disarming and dismantling of militant camps. The reintegration consists of several phases: the initial camping for briefing, registration and payment of monetary assistance to assist the ex-militants' reinsertion into the society, selection for different aspect of skill acquisition training within and outside the country, and rehabilitation that will include job placement, credit scheme and scholarships¹⁴.

The conception of the amnesty package drew its strategies from the traditional DDR programme which focuses mainly on the militants and the need to disarm, demobilize and reintegrate them into the society. This focus failed to take cognizance of a range of factors that facilitated and strengthened militancy in the Niger Delta Region. The militant groups were not homogenous. They belong to different factions with different leaders. While some campaigned for the overall development of the NDR, others were interested in making wealth for themselves through oil bunkering, kidnapping and piracy. Such differences complicate the definition of the militant groups to the conflicts. This observation suggests that a successful amnesty package should seek to incorporate the inputs of the different militant groups into the programmes. As the UN report on the second generation DDR observes, a paradigm shift that create room for bottom-up inputs is a sure guarantee for DDR success. This is because such opportunity provides an in-depth understanding of the dynamics surrounding the different militant groups. It can also provide the opportunity to understand why different groups take to arms, their perceived threats and fears; and develop programmatic intervention aimed at stabilization¹⁵. Elsewhere Theido argued that a successful DDR must be conducted in consultation and collaboration with all members of the community and stakeholders and that locally appropriate incentives must be accommodated¹⁶.

Our theoretical framework builds closely on Emerson's theory of power. In its contemporary form, the theory applies to structural dependencies and the use of power in interaction¹⁷. Structural power determines the opportunities for and constraints on power use, but how actors use their power resources can affect the inequality of exchange and opportunity for peaceful outcome¹⁸. How actors use power depends on the form of exchange. Exchanges can be either negotiated or reciprocal. Here we are interested in the former. In negotiated exchange, actors engage in explicit bargaining to determine the terms of exchange. This enables both parties to know what they are getting for what they are giving before they agree to an exchange. This position is supported by emerging paradigm shift in contemporary literature on DDR which argues that peace and security cannot be guaranteed by top-down implementation of government programmes alone. It requires the inputs and an in-depth understanding of dynamics surrounding each militant group, their fears and perceived threats¹⁹. By focusing amnesty principally on dismantling the machinery of militancy, therefore, the programmes failed to adequately consider how to move beyond disarmament and demobilization to providing the needed assurances for a comprehensive development of the NDR and the confidence that can earn the trust of many militants and their leaders.

The theory therefore suggests that the declaration of amnesty and peace realization is positively related only if subterranean factors are taken into consideration in the amnesty packaging. As we argue in detail below, certain mediating factors are theoretically plausible: antecedent factors which weaken and provoke fear of failure; inability to address socio-cultural and economic factors that trigger militancy and serve to sustain it, and poor perception of amnesty package by the ex-militants.

Belief in amnesty

In order to foster trust between government and the militant groups, the United Nations Integrated DDR Standards (UNIDDRS) advised that all parties to a conflict be brought to the negotiating table, where the trigger of conflicts and the security of the armed groups can be discussed and guaranteed²⁰. Such discussion serves to create room for all parties to become stake holders in the amnesty package.

Available literature in the NDR struggle suggests that a comprehensive development of the NDR was what the militants canvassed for and that that realization (benefits) sustained the struggle²¹. Unfortunately, the multiplication of the militant groups tend to negate this objective, as some militant groups have mission that was less than the overall development of the Niger Delta region. Taking cognizance of this, we predict that:

H1: The militants had different beliefs (expected benefits) from the amnesty package

Fear about amnesty failure

The DDR programme suggests a commitment that requires reciprocation. In their work on social exchange, Cook and Gilmore argued that exchange whose actors have huge power differentials that make one dependent on the other is often fraud with the fear of net-profit loss by the dependent party²². Such fear is more pronounced where past government programmes were implemented in breach. This antecedent factor hinder trust in new government programmes. In their analysis, Cook and Emerson argued that dependence and power are inversely related, as the partner with greater power (who has the resources) often tend to show less commitment in the relationship because they have relatively greater control over the outcome available to the partners²³. This therefore has consequences on trust element. McMullin provides empirical evidence in Namibia, as militants assembled for demobilization exercise doubted the sincerity of government and justified their doubts on past failed programmes of government²⁴. He argued that trust will enhance acceptance of amnesty as the ex-militants will be less calculative in expecting positive longer-term outcomes. The expectation of fairness and justice in the long term delays the demand for immediate gratification. On the other hand, trust can enhance assurances and evoke mutual commitment that will enable the parties to work for the realization of the amnesty package²⁵. Thus we hypothesize that:

H2: The antecedent of programme failures may exert negative influence on the acceptance of amnesty.

H3: Militants, who deserted the amnesty programme did so due to poor planning, poor allowance, lack of confidence on amnesty official and the belief that amnesty will not improve their overall well-being.

Socio-political economic factors to militancy

The availability of small arms and light weapons in the Niger Delta Region surges when violent erupted. They become not only the sources of strength and power but also the sources of illegal income as violence become commodified. One goal of amnesty is disarmament which suggests curbing the sources of strength and power of these militants. Such realization evokes fears of being deceived and feeling of being tricked among the militants²⁶. Research evidence reveals that may not wish to surrender all their weapons²⁷. For instance, in Afghanistan, many militants had refused to relinquish their weapons which they perceive as the sources of power for fear that the government cannot be reliable and that their promises may not be fulfilled²⁸. Thus we predict that:

H4: Many militants found it difficult to delay gratification, and had seen the delay experienced in the assembly stage as a delaying tactics, and so would no return all their arms and ammunitions.

Another factor that the amnesty package failed to take cognizance of is the existence of a powerful occult economy that sustains each militant group and its hierarchical power structure. Every militant owe allegiance (often through blood ritual) to the leadership of his/her group. In the face of disarmament and demobilization, it may be difficult to dismantle such command structure except the amnesty package creates room to accommodate the interest of the different militant groups' leaders. As Molm, Quist and Wisely report, respecting the interest (or values) of the leaders can have effect on the success of DDR because the leaders could help to reduce uncertainties and enhance trust²⁹. The failure to accommodate the interest of militant leaders in Liberia resulted in remobilization of militants in organized gang structure, particularly for arms and drug trade³⁰. Militant members were less willing to abandon their leaders who provide them opportunity for crime enhancing career in robbery. One major side effect of militancy that occurs in nearly every post conflict State is that of a surge in crime and other forms of violence. Demobilized young men, socialized to violence and brutality during wars are more likely to form gangs and can pose a constant threat to peace in the country. Given this realization, we predict that:

H5 (a): The retention of arms by ex-militants is significantly associated with commodification of violence.

H5 (b): Certain pull factors (retention of arms and commodification of violence) and push factors (criminal vocation and social/blood bonding) influence the rejection of amnesty and are contributory to he continuous violence in the NDR.

In his analysis of major side effect of militancy in post conflict States, Adonis locates the proliferation of crime and violence in “at-risk-youth” (youth who are likely to take up arms so that they too can be recognized)³¹. Ekeh observes that such situation can be avoided:

when obligation to reciprocate is not necessarily directed at the ‘ex-militants’ whose action is going to contribute to the public good, but also to others ‘members of the community’ by virtue of their association with the ‘ex-militants’³².

Such observation suggests the emergence of the possibility of free-riders. Here benefiting is not conditional to one being an ex-militant, but extends to other Niger Delta youths who did not carry arms. It could help to prevent the emergence of other violent groups in search of recognition. As the amnesty declaration emphasized, “the overall development of the Niger Delta Region is the ultimate yardstick by which the success of the amnesty package can be measured.

Methods

Data for this study were collected as part of a larger study on the “response of ex-militants to amnesty declaration” in the NDR. Respondents were recruited through the assistance of the Camp Management at the Obubra Non-violent and Reformation Center during the 9th and 10th batches of the ex-militants’ skill acquisition and rehabilitation training. Participation in the study was voluntary and respondents were assured of their total anonymity and of the complete confidentiality of the information requested of them. Three hundred and forty respondents completed and returned their questionnaires. One item on the questionnaire requested that respondents divulge knowledge of militants who have not accepted the amnesty or had accepted the amnesty initially but abandon it later. Certain consideration informed that request: to use them to sneak in and out of minds of the amnesty deserters and find out the reason(s) for their action. Of the 340 questionnaires that were collected, 67 were excluded from further analysis because their responses to the question would not yield the needed data for the realization of the objective of the study. The exclusion left us with 273 questionnaires which represent 80.29 per cent response rate.

Measurement

The questionnaire was divided into segments which covered socio-demographic, belief in amnesty, fear about amnesty, perception of amnesty by deserters and socio-political and economic factors that make militancy attractive. Socio-demographic questions which included age, gender, education, marital status and occupation were categorically coded. The other four variables, viz: belief in amnesty programme, fear of amnesty failure, perception of amnesty by deserters, and the socio-political and economic factors that make militancy attractive were measured on a 6-point Likert scale rating. The coding of the Likert scale ranged from “very strongly agree (VSA) with a score of 6 to strongly agree (SA) with a score of 5, agree (A) with a score of 4, disagree (D) with a score of 3, strongly disagree (SD) with a score of 2, and very strongly disagree (VSD) with a score of 1”. The questions were both positively and negatively worded. A positive response to a positive assertion received a highest score of 6 for very strongly agree (VSA), and a negative response to a negative assertion also received a highest score of 6 for very strongly disagree (VSD). All other scores followed that arrangement.

Belief in amnesty programme (BAP) questions examined three items: the belief by respondents that the amnesty program is comprehensive enough and would succeed; would result in the development of the Niger Delta Region; and would improve their socio-economic status. The fear of amnesty failure (FAF) questions were constructed from an already validated instruction by Rosenthal and Health on the impact of fear from past government programme failures³³. The failure questionnaire has been used on youth and yielded a Cronbach alpha of .85. Three of the items included here are: Government has never been serious with their empowerment programme; the amnesty is full of delaying tactics; and amnesty is a ploy to abandon the struggle for the emancipation of the NDR.

The perception of amnesty by deserters (PAD) questions were constructed on five item including an open-ended one as follow: 1) the violent demonstrations and protests that rocked the onset of amnesty were warning signs of failure; 2) the compensation/stipend paid in the camp was inadequate; 3) the politicians handling the amnesty implementation cannot be trusted; 4) amnesty will not improve participants’ overall well-being; 5) many militants did not surrender all their weapons.

The socio-political and economic factors that make militancy attractive were divided into two: push factors to crime (PFC) and push factors to organized criminality (PFOC). The PFC questions seek to measure the utility of violence subculture acquired by ex-militants through the ownership of arms and ammunitions, and hence the commodification of violence. The “Commodification of violence” was measured on the existence of belief among the ex-militants that using individual personal experiences in violent exploit to engage in paid political thuggery, paid assassination, bunkering and kidnapping, could generate more pecuniary benefit than accepting amnesty for skill acquisition training. The push factor to organized criminality (PFOC) was examined in two ways: consideration for joint-criminal vocation, and existence of social blood bond (oath) that can be used for criminal purpose. The consideration for joint-criminal vocation (CJV) questions belief by ex-militants that militancy experiences can be used in other criminal activities like belonging to criminal gang or teaming up with others to form and own gangs. The social /blood bond(SBB) measures the existence of and belief in irreversible oath and allegiance to militant leaders.

Variables and Models

The dependent variables in this study include belief in amnesty, fear of amnesty failure, perception of amnesty by deserters and socio-political and economic factors to militancy. The independent variables are defined in Tables 2, 3, 4 and 6. We estimated the contribution of each independent variable to the dependent variables by mean-rating of the respondents. In the regression models in Table 6, we examine the extent to which the independent variables (PFC and PFOC) influence the rejection of amnesty and hence the continuation of violence in the NDR.

We employed four models in the analysis. The first model regress the mean score on the “commodification of violence” variables against the rejection of amnesty. This has been shown to be especially important in post conflict States where ex-militants use their background experience in violence to engage in crime and other related violent activities³⁴. In the second model, we added gun ownership/ammunition to capture the importance in the push factor to crime.

The temptation to form organized criminal gang having made much money from oil bunkering and kidnapping during the militancy years is also expected to affect acceptance of amnesty. The UN guidelines on second generation DDR practices warns that ex-militants leaders and” high ranking officers have the status and connections to engage in illicit activities and may remobilize organized crime structure³⁵.” In our third and fourth models therefore, we included variables to control for joint-criminal vocation and social/blood bonding to militant leaders

Findings

We tested five hypotheses using mean rating and moderated multiple regression .All mean rating results are presented in Tables 1,2 and 3. While table 4 presents descriptive statistics and inter-correlation matrix, table 5 presents multiple regression estimates.

Evaluation of hypotheses

In attempt to find out how ex-militants received the amnesty package, respondents were asked to evaluate the package in term of content, perceived self-benefits and benefits to the NDR. The responses are summarized in Table 1. About 60 per cent of the respondents agreed that the amnesty package was comprehensive in content but only to the extent of solving their individuals’ socio-economic problem. Opinion differs widely when it comes to evaluating the perceived benefit of the amnesty package to the Niger Delta Region as a collective. While 53.3 per cent of the respondent agreed that the package would improve the socio-economic condition of the Niger Delta Region, 46.7 per cent disagreed with that assertion. These differences in rating of perceived benefits support the position of hypothesis 1

Table 1: Respondents' rating of belief in Amnesty package (%)

	Amnesty package is ...		
	Comprehensive enough	Will improve my socio-economic status	Will result in the development of the Niger Delta
Very Seriously Agree	17.9	20.1	11.9
Seriously Agree	27.1	59.0	23.4
Agree	15.0	20.9	18.0
Disagree	24.9	-	29.0
Seriously Disagree	5.9	-	15.0
Very Seriously Disagree	9.2	-	2.9
Mean Score	3.9	4.9	3.8

Source: Field survey

In the assessment of the socio-demographic characteristics of respondents, we found that majority of the respondents were either unemployed or engaged in apprenticeship at the time they joined militancy. The termination of apprenticeship may have been due to lack of money. Others were applicants who may have finished apprenticeship but had no money to start the practice of their trade. Other structural problems such as lack of education and low earnings from their occupation may have constituted limiting factors to earning their way out of poverty. Since amnesty package include a training programme and a promise for gainful employment, it suggests enablement towards the realization of their dreams. The route to militancy must have been paved by lack of what to do and lack of means to eke out a living. To the extent that amnesty package can enhance the continuation of the apprenticeship they terminated and or bring about gainful employment inform the high positive mean rating of 4.9 and 3.9 respectively. Unfortunately these benefits are packaged only for the ex-militants, thus suggesting that other Niger Delta youths who are exposed to similar socio-economic deprivation but did not resort to arms to challenge the State are excluded. Such realization may have influenced the dissenting opinion among the respondents on the ability of the amnesty programme to serve as the needed catalyst for the overall development of the NDR.

Notwithstanding the attractiveness of the amnesty package, respondents expressed fear in its success. Table 2 provides a fascinating insight into these fears. The most commonly cited reason for fear was the "failure of past government programmes". About 86 per cent of the respondents expressed this fear with a high mean score of 4.4. Another 52 per cent of respondents were afraid that amnesty may be a ploy by the government for militants to abandon the struggle, while 77.2 per cent of them observed that many of their colleagues did not accept amnesty and were still in the creek. Given this result hypothesis 2 was supported. The early hiccups experienced during the mobilization of militants to camp were misconstrued as a "delaying tactic". They heightened the fear that amnesty may fail afterall. This is consistent with McMullin's findings in Namibia, that ex-combatants were restless during the assemble phase of the disarmament³⁶. Available evidence of performance failure of previous youth empowerment programmes in NDR seems to have confirmed such fear³⁷. These performance failures include the skill acquisition programmes sponsored by the National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP) and those by the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC). A few evaluation studies done on these programmes found discontinuities that bordered on the inability of the beneficiaries to practice their trade due to lack of fund to buy needed tools³⁸ and or fund to rent an office space³⁹. Such development leaves the beneficiaries worse off with skills they were unable to practice.

Table 2: Respondents' reasons influencing the fear that Amnesty programme may fail

Reasons	Rating scale %						
	VSA	SA	A	D	SD	VSD	Mean
Failure of past government programmes	16.8	27.1	42.1	5.9	8.1	-	4.4
May be a ploy to abandon the struggle	5.9	15.0	31.9	27.1	11.7	8.4	3.5
Full of delaying tactics	9.2	21.6	16.8	35.2	8.1	9.2	3.6
Many militants did not accept amnesty	25.5	20.5	31.2	12.1	9.2	1.5	4.3

Source: Field survey

Having examined the fears associated with the amnesty programme, it was necessary to investigate whether such fears equally influenced the decision of the militants that returned to the creeks. This was the concern of hypothesis 3. Our finding is summarized in Table 3. It reveals respondents' reaction to "perception of amnesty packages by deserters". One factor that received a wide rating across the mean was the initial hiccups that constrained the commencement of the amnesty programme. More than 62 per cent of the respondents cited it as the reason why their friends dumped the amnesty package. However, the strength of opinion that cited "inadequacy of allowance" and lack of trust on the politicians implementing the amnesty programme strike common cord as about 70 per cent of the respondents believed these were the major causative factors that make their colleagues to abandon the programme. Many of the respondents (68.20%) were of the opinion that the ex-militants headed back to the creeks because they believed that amnesty would not improve their overall well-being. Again, there was the general belief among respondents (86.0%) that many militants did not surrender all their weapons.

As predicted, the findings on lack of trust and reliability on the part of the implementers of the amnesty package exerted adverse impact on acceptance of the amnesty. Most of the ex-militants had worked for these politicians as thugs/body guards during electioneering campaigns and elections⁴⁰. As Ukpong argues, "when the followers know that their leaders are not reliable, their credibility as sources of assurances for the satisfaction of any raised expectation becomes doubtful"⁴¹.

Table 3: Perception of Amnesty by deserters

Thinking about your colleagues who have deserted the Amnesty programme, how strongly would you agree with the following:		Strengths of agreement %						
		VSA	SA	A	D	SD	VSD	Mean
1	The demonstration and protest that were experienced at the onset of the Amnesty discouraged them	15.0	12.1	35.2	17.2	10.9	9.5	3.7
2	The allowance paid in the camp is too small	26.0	20.1	31.1	12.1	9.2	1.5	4.4
3	The politicians handling Amnesty programmes are not reliable	31.9	16.8	21.2	15.0	9.9	5.1	4.3
4	Amnesty will not improve their overall well being	5.8	9.2	16.8	35.2	20.9	12.1	3.1
5	Many militants did not surrender all their weapons	16.8	27.1	42.1	5.9	8.1	-	4.4

Source: Field survey

Hypothesis 5a and 5b predicted that the retention of arms by ex-militants is associated with the commodification of violence, and that this factor combined with the social/blood bonding with leaders to influence the rejection of amnesty. As predicted, these relationships were obtained (Table 4). The socio-political economy of violence in the NDR has raised possession of "violence attribute" to a commodity status, such that it could be bought and sold in a bargain which politicians and unscrupulous businessmen. Those who have experience in violence therefore offer it as services for a fee in furtherance of many criminal related activities. We consider these "commodification of violence" and gun ownership as push factor to crime, which can make the rejection of amnesty possible. Equally amnesty demanded ex-militants to denounce violence, but alleged esoteric considerations as demonstrated in blood oath and allegiance to militant leaders by the militants could constitute push factors for the formation of joint-criminal enterprise (organized crime). In order to investigate the impact of these factors in the rejection of amnesty, we began by exploring the bivariate relationships between nine key variables of interest responded to in the instrument: political thuggery, assassination, oil bunkering, kidnapping, gun ownership, gang membership, forming own gang, blood oath and allegiance to militant leader. While participation in paid political thuggery, assassination, oil bunkering, kidnapping, gun ownership were regarded as PFC, ability to team up with others ex-militants to form gang or belong to a gang, blood oath as well as allegiance to militant leaders were seen as PFOC.

Table 4 presents the means, standard deviations and correlation for all the independent variables. Respondents believed that the commodification of violence was enhanced greatly by gun ownership ($X = 4.55$, $SD = 0.91$). While gun ownership could be employed by ex-militants in political thuggery for pecuniary benefit ($X = 3.86$, $SD = 1.00$), engagement in other activities like assassination ($X = 2.97$, $SD = 0.83$), oil bunkering ($X = 2.13$, $SD = 1.10$) and kidnapping ($X = 2.30$, $SD = 0.89$) were lowly rated.

When the push factors to organized crime (PFOC) were examined, allegiance to militant leaders was given a high mean rating value ($X = 4.44$) with little variation ($SD = 1.04$). The existence of blood oath ($X = 2.58$) had substantial variation ($SD = 1.40$) compared to the ability to form own gang ($X = 2.33$, $SD = 1.30$). Joining existing criminal gang was lowly rated ($X = 1.82$, $SD = 1.07$). Both the PFC and PFOC demonstrated significant positive relationship with each other ($P < .05$), thus suggesting the existence of the culture of violence in the NDR, and the pecuniary consideration that must be curbed for the amnesty program to work.

Table 4: Descriptive statistics and inter-correlations of pull and push factors to rejection of Amnesty (N = 273)

Variables		Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1	Political thuggery	3.86	1.42	1.00								
2	Assassination	2.97	0.82	.39	1.00							
3	Oil bunkering	2.13	1.10	.35	.32	1.00						
4	Kidnapping	2.30	0.89	.33	.35	.41	1.00					
5	Gun ownership	4.55	0.91	.31	.33	.32	.30	1.00				
6	Gang membership	1.82	1.07	.29	.26	.39	.33	.37	1.00			
7	Form own gang	2.33	1.30	.35	.30	.44	.36	.37	.42	1.00		
8	Blood oath	2.58	1.40	.35	.27	.45	.36	.39	.43	.44	1.00	
9	Allegiance to Militant leader	4.44	1.04	.42	.57	.31	.31	.45	.34	.35	.37	1.00

Source: Field survey

In order to evaluate the independent effect of both the PFC and PFOC on the rejection of amnesty, multiple regression analyses were conducted. The result is reported in Table 5. Model 1 revealed that the commodification of violence factors explained 29.5 per cent of the total variance in the rejection of amnesty. The consideration of pecuniary benefits that could be earned by militants from political thuggery, hired assassination, oil bunkering and kidnapping were positive push factors to rejecting amnesty, but oil bunkering was not statistically significant. When the interaction effect between the commodification of violence factors and ownership of gun/ammunitions was added in model 2, an additional 8.7 per cent of variation was explained. The result of the model revealed that ownership of gun was likely to significantly enhance political thuggery ($\beta = .453$, $P < .05$), hire assassination ($\beta = .267$, $P < .05$) and kidnapping ($\beta = .140$, $P < .05$). The beta weight for oil bunkering remained largely unchanged despite the addition of gun ownership in model 2. Such finding suggests that oil bunkering may be a positive pull factor in rejecting the amnesty package, but bunkering require more than owning guns and ammunitions to tap a pipeline.

Table 5: Multiple regression estimates of respondents' perception of pull and push factors to rejecting Amnesty by colleagues (N = 273)

Independent variables		Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
A	Pull factors				
	Commodification of violence:				
	Political thuggery	.425*	.453*	.462*	.483*
	Hired for assassination	.225*	.267*	.268*	.272*
	Oil bunkering	.048	.048	.048	.152*
B	Ownership of gun/ammunition:				
	Gun		.307*	.317*	.328*
A	Push factors				
	Criminal vocation:				
	Gang membership			-.025	.197
B	Social/blood bonding:				
	Ability to form own gang			.028	.050
	Existence of blood oath				.206
	Allegiance to Militant Leaders				.389*
Adjusted R ²		.295	.382	.474	.671
Δ adjusted R ²			.087	.092	.197

*P < 0.05

In model 3, the first set of the push factors to criminality (criminal vocation) were introduced to test for further interactive effect. It resulted in additional 9.2 per cent of the total variance in the rejection of amnesty. Although the result showed only slight changes from the previous model, criminal vocation significantly predicted engagement in political thuggery as do hire assassination, kidnapping and gun ownership. But it was not a significant push factor in the rejection of amnesty. The additional of the second set of push factors (social and blood bonding) to the regression equation (model 4) raised the explained total variance in the rejection of amnesty to 67.1 per cent, an increase of 19.7 per cent over the previous model. Whereas the social/blood bonding factors had a strong positive and significant influence on all the PFC and allegiance to militant leaders, the effect on the existence of blood oath was not significant, but it influenced a positive tilt in gang membership. As the final model could show, allegiance to militant leaders, more than any other push factor, significantly influenced the rejection of amnesty by the militants, and also elevated the significant influence of the PFOC. Thus hypotheses 5a and 5b were supported.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine the reason(s) behind the rejection of amnesty and hence the renewed militancy in the NDR, and by extension explore ways that could lead to a change of heart for a lasting peace in the NDR. We tested five hypotheses that sought explanations on the continuous violence in the NDR despite the amnesty package. Our discussion highlights the supporting evidence obtained for these hypotheses and suggests factors that can be controlled in order to checkmate violence in the NDR and hence the acceptance of amnesty.

Abandonment of amnesty was explained by respondents' experience of failure in government's empowerment programme in the past. Despite wide belief among the ex-militants that the amnesty package when implemented will improve their socio-economic status, the fear of failure like past government programmes was still a hindrance to open embrace. Such fear provoked alternative thinking that amnesty may be a ploy to abandon the struggle for the emancipation of the NDR and or a delaying tactics to enable government military task force to gain access into their abandoned camps in the creeks and destroy them. As Heimer argued, under conditions of uncertainty, benefactors of a programme may prefer to align with the option that they are used to⁴². In this case many militants returned to the creeks.

Factors that influence the renewed violence: Leadership of the different militant group significantly predicts the rejection of amnesty by members. This is not surprising because as Curran and Renzetti observe, gang members often resist any kind of restraint on their behaviour except that imposed informally by fellow gang members or the leadership⁴³. They defy or ignore the authority by parents, teachers and other agents of social control. This realization must have influenced the invitation extended to the militant leaders at the onset of the amnesty by the Federal government. Some militant leaders were escorted to Aso Rock (the presidential palace) by their different state governors to the warm embrace of the President. Beyond such ceremonial reception, literature evidence reveals that their input in the amnesty package was not solicited. Rather there was pressure on the militant leaders to conform to the amnesty deal by the traditional and political leaders in the NDR. The militant leaders in turn exerted pressure on their members to conform. Such pressure generated what Janis called *groupthink* – the tendency for members of a cohesive group to maintain consensus to the extent of ignoring the truth⁴⁴. Loyalty to the militant leaders requires that members do not raise embarrassing questions, attack weak arguments or counter soft-headed thinking with hard facts. In such a case members who had serious doubt about the decision to accept amnesty did not speak out. Unfortunately the delay in the implementation of the amnesty and the violent protests that erupted provided avenue for alternative thinking and expression of suspicion. It created disincentive for the militant disbandment and challenges for finding adequate and appealing alternative livelihood options. Since many militants did not surrender all their weapons, it was easier to return to the creeks and continue the campaign of violence. Those who did not accept amnesty at all heralded their return to militancy.

Socio-political economy of violence: Government's failure to genuinely tackle the root cause of political and economic exclusion has not only provide objective condition for the emergence of militancy, it also provided conditions for the rise of normlessness – a situation which fosters the emergence of other groups with subculture of violence tendencies for the pursuit of pecuniary gains. Members' willingness to participate in violent activity, to expect violence, and to be ready to retaliate against the military task force created heroes in the different communities especially among the youths. More than this, militancy became an innovative behaviour to a desired end or goal that is utilitarian.

It becomes a means of livelihood and accumulation of wealth through illegal oil bunkering, kidnapping and theft. Such wealth accumulation influenced the rejection of amnesty. The result of this study revealed that many of the ex-militants were not even interested on how much the skill acquisition and rehabilitation package of the amnesty will improve their overall well-being. They deserted the camps because the daily allowance promised them was meager compared to what they can earn elsewhere through the employment of their violent background experience. A multiple regression analysis revealed that the commodification of violence as found in political thuggery, hired assassination, oil bunkering, and kidnapping was becoming very lucrative especially for those who own arms and ammunitions. It constituted a significant push factor for those who abandoned the amnesty camp. The employment of thugs for political ends in the Niger Delta nay the country is not new. Inokoba and Imbua observe that rather than empower the large army of unemployed youth in the region through genuine skills acquisition programme, politicians were arming them for the purpose of political thuggery⁴⁵. They were being engaged as body guards during electioneering campaigns and elections and for the purpose of physical assault and threat of political opponents⁴⁶. The availability of large amount of weapons in the region makes political competition highly debased and combative⁴⁷. In what has come to be known as the “*jobman syndrome*”, criminally minded youths are paid large sum of money to either kill or abduct or kidnap political opponents or their relatives in order to instill fear or quiet them out of the political race.

The “*Jobman Syndrome*” is located in the characteristics of utilitarian violence. Here criminal vocation is not defined as a violation of the law of the land, but an innovative creation to make ends meet. “Any job can be done including the *dirty ones*, so long as it can provide one with money”⁴⁸. Under such consideration the vandalization of oil pipes and or theft and kidnapping of oil workers are not seen as crime. There are activities that should be carried out if need be, to earn a living. As the study revealed in model 3, there was little evidence that gang membership was a push factor in rejecting amnesty. Rather the need to form ones’ own gang appears to be the dream of the militants largely because such gang ownership could enhance pecuniary gains through organized crime. The important finding here is that militant members do not see themselves as belonging to a criminal gang which activities are violating the law; after all, the oil is drilled from the soil of the Niger Delta (*you don’t steal what you have*). In the event that amnesty failed this finding could have two major implications: First, there is likely going to emerge more splinter groups with “jobmen” mentality whose engagement in criminal activities is not regarded as violation of any law by members. Second, such rationalization will increase violent crime in the NDR with attendant effect on the rest of the country.

Taming violence beyond amnesty

There are five key findings from this study. They all attempt to throw light on the amnesty programme, as well as the questions that motivated this study. Unlike previous studies on the Niger Delta militancy, these findings represent bottom-up input from ex-militants themselves:

1. Respondents rating of the amnesty package and the belief that it will improve their socio-economic status were high. Yet fear of implementing the amnesty to the letter which includes giving them the necessary tools and fund to start on their own and or employment was equally high. The reasons were not far-fetched: insincerity on the part of the political class and the failure of past government skills acquisition programme were cited.
2. Many ex-militants did not handover all their arms and ammunitions, and these constitute factors in the commodification of violence with entrenched pecuniary emphasis. The need for immediate gratification was demonstrated when the financial allowance accruable to the ex-militants in the camp became a determining factor of whether to accept or to reject the amnesty deal, notwithstanding the overall benefits of the amnesty package.
3. The social/blood bonding existing between the ex-militant and their leaders were demonstrated with strong allegiance which predicted both PFC and PFOC. This suggests that even though some leaders must have dismantled their camps their group bond still remain intact and the militant leaders are still being respected by their followers. Recent publication by government containing confirmation of short-listed names of ex-militants nominated for skill acquisition training and rehabilitation by their leaders supports this finding.
4. The desire to form own gang by many militants suggests the emergence of many splinter groups which interest is more criminally minded than the overall development of the NDR. Group members rationalized their violence on the marginalization of the NDR and do not see themselves as criminals.

5. The respondents were firm in their opinion that the amnesty package will not result in the overall development of the NDR. This suggests an uneasy calm in the Niger Delta struggle. A sort of “wait-and-see” attitude is adopted by some ex-militants, largely on the pressure of the traditional and political leaders of the region.

Guided by these findings how can we achieve a militant free NDR? Many studies on the Niger Delta have proffered solutions including the amnesty declaration itself. While natural resource abundance is often considered a “curse” for sustainable DDR and peace⁴⁹, there is increasing recognition and understanding of the role of good governance of valuable resources can play in building State legitimacy and in providing peace dividends. In order to achieve a result-oriented amnesty, therefore, the following suggestions are made:

1. *Genuine reintegration/rehabilitation*: Those who have finished the amnesty training on skill acquisition and rehabilitation should be empowered to set up their own small and medium scale businesses or be given employment. It will demonstrate clearly to others the seriousness of the Federal Government on the amnesty deal. Unlike other empowerment programmes there should be follow-up and periodic evaluation of these businesses for the purpose of continuous advice until there are fully developed and sustained.
2. *Mopping up of arms*: The mopping up of arms and ammunition in the NDR is a *sin-qua-non* to peace. The Presidential Monitoring Team set up under the ECOWAS Convention on Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALWs) should be empowered to work along with the amnesty team to mop up these arms and ammunitions. Intelligence gathering through community members can help in the location and destruction of arms. It could also reveal the link between arm traffickers and the militant leaders.
3. *Criminalization of violent politics*: Immediately following arm mop-up is the need to legislate against violent politic. The commodification of violence has a political nexus. Thuggery, hired assassination and abduction or kidnapping are mostly linked to violent politic in the region, and it is gaining currency throughout the country.
4. *Involvement of militant leaders in amnesty implementation*: Another phase of negotiation to convince the remaining militants (some of whom had accepted the amnesty initially only to reject it due to the hiccups that constrained the commencement) should include militant leaders. They still have the ears militants who have returned to the creeks; and they know the terrain of the creeks as well as their capabilities. Using the Joint Task Force (JTF) to drive them across the creeks, the way it is being done now will invariable drive some splinter groups underground, who denied of the benefits of skill acquisition and rehabilitation will remain as criminal gang, to terrorize the region. Such terrorism has consequences on piracy beyond Nigeria as far as crude oil is concerned.
5. *Infrastructural development of the NDR*: The immediate commencement of infrastructural development of the NDR is necessary. Such development should include environmental protection, reduction of pollution and conservation of resources, bearing in mind that these were the initial demands of the Movement of the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP) which failure resulted in full scale militancy. The development of the NDR will create a sense of belonging and remove the tag of marginalization and exclusion which justifies militancy.
6. *Empowering the at-risk youth*: There are other disadvantaged youths (non-militants) in the NDR who despite being similarly disadvantaged refused to take up arms. These youths (who are largely unemployed) should be identified for engagement in effective skill acquisition and empowerment programme with sustainable components. Such initiative will send a clear message that the amnesty package is not a reward for militancy, and can dissuade others from resorting to arms.

Limitation of Study

This study has some limitations that the reader should bear in mind when interpreting the result. The sample is not a representative of the entire population of the ex-militants, but only those who were in the training camp for batches 9th and 10th and who agreed to participate in the study. However there are strengths that counter this shortcoming and support our reliance on the sample for analysis.

Although we were unable to reach the recalcitrant militants, the fact that these ex-militants fought side by side with those who have returned to the creek to continue the fight; and the fact that they were once camped together, suggest knowledge of their grievances with the amnesty package. Other than these, group solidarity and social bond that exist among militants' group members still enables communication among them.

Conclusion

Scholars have produced an impressive body of work on the Niger Delta struggle. However, much of the work focused on the exploitation, marginalization, military destruction, extra-judicial killings and the amnesty declaration. There is little or no empirical work on the on-going violence despite the amnesty declaration and the DDR programmes that followed. Researchers have also failed so far to explore evidence from the ex-militants on the possible roadmap to a violent free Niger Delta Region. Our work examined existing literature and expands on it with evidence from the ex-militants.

The findings revealed that the commodification of violence in the NDR was not without consequences on militancy, and is being exacerbated through the use of arms and ammunitions. Militants who kept away some of their arms were quick to desert the amnesty camp due to the fear that amnesty will fail like other government programmes; and the belief that they can make more money with their arms much more than allowances paid at the camp. The desire of many militants to own their own group is already resulting in the emergence of many splinter groups. The initial objective of the militancy – the comprehensive development of the NDR - therefore, is being replaced with criminal vocation driven purely by pecuniary self-benefits.

Despite the uncertainty in the minds of doubting militants, the level of implementation of the amnesty package is providing assurances in the public that amnesty will proceed as planned. At the time of collecting data for this study the 11th batch of the ex-militants was about arriving at the Obubra training camp. This is beside many others that have been sent abroad for training. But judging by the findings of his study, there is still much work to be done. Commitment by militant leaders is needed especially when there is the risk of opportunism or malfeasance. The recent violent attack initiated by the John Togo militant group (despite the success recorded by amnesty so far) is a pointer to this argument⁵⁰. In order to tame violence in the NDR, we recommend the setting up of small medium scale business or employment for ex-militants who have finished the skill acquisition and rehabilitation training. The mopping up of arms in the Niger Delta Region, legislation against politics of violence, the involvement of militant leaders in negotiation with recalcitrant militants, the immediate commencement of infrastructural development of the NDR and the empowerment of unemployed youths in the region.

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