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International Digital Organization for Scientific Research

IDOSR JOURNAL OF ARTS AND MANAGEMENT 2(2): 117-134, 2017.

ISSN:2550-7974

## **Amnesty Programme and Youths' Empowerment in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria: A Critical Appraisal**

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### ABSTRACT

This study is on amnesty programme and youths' empowerment in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. The federal Government of Nigeria had introduced this amnesty programme to curb youths' restiveness which had prevailed in the Niger Delta region before the late President Yar'Adua's administration. An important part of this Amnesty programme is youth empowerment. The extent to which this amnesty programme has empowered the youths of this region constitutes the broad objective of this study. Specifically, the research sets out to determine whether the amnesty programme has been effective in training and creating jobs for the youths of the Niger Delta region. The study relied on Marxian political economy approach as a theoretical framework. Using qualitative method anchored on secondary means of data collection. The study reveals that though a lot of youths from the Niger Delta region has benefited from the training programmes packaged by the amnesty office, the modality of selection and placement is still marred with controversy. Furthermore, some of the youths of the region especially the non-militants are completely left out of the scheme. This sends a wrong signal to the up-coming youths across the country. It is therefore recommended that government needs to deepen the programme to accommodate the non-militant youths of the region, ensure transparency and fairness in the process of enlistment and placement and systematically address the salient issues that necessitated the breach of peace that was witnessed in the region.

**Keywords:** Amnesty programme, Youths empowerment, Niger Delta and Nigeria.

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### INTRODUCTION

Amnesty Programme is an initiative of Nigeria's Federal Government aimed at curbing youths' restiveness in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria and revamp revenue accruing to the Federation Account via oil exploitation in the region. This became necessary following sustained attacks on oil installations in the Niger Delta region by militant groups operating in the region. Before the introduction of the Amnesty programme, the Niger Delta region had become very volatile with rising insecurity. This manifested in forms of bunkering, hostage takings, bombardment of oil installations etc.

Essentially, the activities of violent groups in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria had led to the initiation of the Amnesty Programme for the militants in the Niger Delta region of

Nigeria. The Amnesty Programme entails 'Disarmament', 'Demobilization', and 'Reintegration'. Recall that the militancy was ostensibly a war against the Nigerian state and the multinational corporations, whose oil exploration had orchestrated severe environmental degradation, stifled the industries in the region which were agro-based and necessitated terrible poverty amongst the people of that region.

A lot of the youths resolved to get back from the multinationals and the Nigerian government what had been stolen from them. This resolve of these youths was fuelled by the fact that the activities of the multinational corporations have not only affected negatively, their means of livelihood but the government's apparent nonchalance to the plight of people of that region. According to Niger Delta Human Development Report "*Long years of neglect and conflict have promoted especially among youths a feeling of a bleak future, and thus see conflict as a stratagem to escape deprivation.*" This led to the growth of criminal activities in the region which ranged from armed robbery, bunkering, kidnapping and full blown militancy.

More so, the successive Nigerian administrations and the multinational companies who are the beneficiaries of the oil exploration in the Niger-Delta region had not shown sincere purposeful efforts in tackling the socio-economic, health and infrastructural problems prevalent in the region. Rather, the Nigerian government employed repressive measures with the tacit influence and support from the multinational corporations to contain the emerging agitations in the Niger-Delta region of Nigeria. This manifested in the following actions of successive Nigerian governments: The Umuechem Massacre of 1990 [1],[2], the Ogoni genocide [1],[2], the execution of Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight other Ogoni leaders in 1995 by the Military government of late Gen. Sani Abacha [3], the Odi Massacre of 1999 [4], the Odioma killings in 2005 [4] and Gbaramatu Massacre of 2009 [5], to mention but a few incidents in the Niger-Delta region. Any of these Niger Delta communities visited with the state wrath usually come out with sore tales of woes. Lives were wasted, properties destroyed, women raped, and a lot more of the people displaced or forced into exile [6], [7]. These greatly shaped the mentality of the youths in the Niger-Delta region who began to perceive their environment as war zone. This much was inferred by Oshionebo (2009) [6], in the following words:

*... the government cracking down with the strong support, active influence and connivance of the oil multinational corporations (MNCs), which reached a crescendo with extra-judicial hanging of the Prize nominee Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight other kinsmen in November 1995, by the infamous government of the maximum ruler - General Sani Abacha...*

The scholar observed that the resultant effect was the outbreak of armed conflicts in the area, abduction and kidnapping of oil workers, especially the expatriates. This was gravitating into a very alarming proportion when late President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua's administration initiated the Amnesty Programme for the militants in the Niger-Delta region of Nigeria. It had become very clear to the Nigerian government and even the multinational corporations that the use of brute force was not achieving the much desired result given the fact that increasing number of the youths of that region were buying into the militant life-style as the only means of survival. This is anchored on the belief that despite the fact that they (the Niger-Delta people) are the goose that lay the golden eggs, their farmlands and seas can no longer offer them any meaningful means of livelihood, while foreigners cart away the proceeds of their land unabashed. Watts (2008) [8] noted, "*Almost 90 percent of the local inhabitants of the Niger Delta fall below the poverty line of \$1 dollar per day as they depend on the aquatic resources for their livelihoods*". Apart from this, a very large percentage of the youths are not educated and therefore cannot compete with the more educated youths from other parts of the country for very limited vacancies elsewhere. So, the risks of militancy and the threats posed by the Joint Task Force (JTF) then made no difference from that posed by poverty, hunger, deprivations and frustrations.

Prior to the proclamation of this Amnesty Programme in 2009, the Nigerian government had in the past attempted to introduce some palliative measures intended to douse tension in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. According to Ukiwo (2010) [9], "*several developmental initiatives have been taken by the Nigerian government to enhance the socio-economic development of the region, such as the establishment of development boards, provision of basic infrastructural facilities etc*". It is however pertinent to note that much as those initiatives were laudable, they failed to achieve the desired result because of endemic corruption and poor approach to the root causes of the militancy in the Niger Delta region. The Amnesty Programme therefore was intended by the Yar'Adua's administration to heal wounds, suit fraying nerves, and reconcile the militants, and indeed the people of Niger Delta with the State for a sustained and hitch-free exploitation of the resource endowment of the region. The Yar'Adua administration, in line with this therefore proclaimed Amnesty in June 2009 for the militants in the Niger Delta region, who had been at war with the state, in exchange for disarmament, rehabilitation and reintegration into the society. One incontrovertible fact is that this Amnesty programme was intended to curb criminal activities prevalent in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. These ranged from all forms of armed violence, kidnapping, robbery, bunkering and militancy. In this work, we shall be

looking at the Amnesty Programme and Youths' Empowerment in the Niger Delta region, to determine whether the Amnesty programme has empowered the youths of Niger Delta region of Nigeria.

### STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

Since the introduction of Amnesty programme by Nigeria's Federal Government as a means of resolving the militancy in the Niger Delta region, scholars have done quite a lot in studying the Amnesty programme and its tendency to resolve the militancy in the Niger Delta Region. Most of the studies had focused on the devastating effects of the militancy in the Niger Delta region on Nigeria's economy, [10],[11],[12], Nigeria's corporate existence [13],[14], and on Nigeria's foreign relations (Nwajiaku 2010; Ukiwo, 2011)[9],[15]. Emphasis had been on the impact of oil prospecting in the region on the prevalent industries within the region (farming, fishing, etc), on the environment, [16][17],[18], the restiveness of the people, the attitudes of the multinational towards the people, the apparent neglect of the region by successive administration and the need to find ways of ameliorating the problems emanating from crude oil exploration and exploitation on the people of Niger Delta region, vis a vis the corporate existences of Nigeria[19],[20],[21].

High rate of unemployment among the youths of the Niger Delta is a major reason for the growth and spread of militancy in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. The Amnesty programme is time bound and is approaching its time limit. One aspect of the programme deals with Youths' Empowerment. This is necessary because when the youths are gainfully employed, the lure to violence/militancy will be minimized. Whether the government is actually doing enough in this critical aspect of the Amnesty programme constitute the problem of this study.

Thus, nearly half a decade into the implementation of the Amnesty programme, its impacts on youths' empowerment in the Niger Delta region has not received significant attention. Given the fact that this programme is billed to end by 2015, it becomes necessary to assess how the programme has fared in terms of empowering the youths of the Niger Delta region. Upon this backdrop, this study is intended to critically evaluate the Amnesty Programme of the Federal Government of Nigeria as introduced by the previous administration (Late President Yar Adua) and continued by the present administration (President Goodluck Jonathan), as it affects youths' empowerment in the Niger Delta region of the country. To achieve this, the following *Research Question* was posed:

- 1) Has the Amnesty Programme of Nigeria's Federal Government been able to empower the youths of the Niger Delta region?

### OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The broad objective of this study is to determine whether the Amnesty Programme of the Federal Government of Nigeria has been able to address the problem of unemployment among the youths in the Niger Delta region.

The specific objectives of this study include the following:

- To determine whether the Amnesty programme has been effective in facilitating training programmes for the youths of the Niger Delta region.
- To ascertain if the Amnesty programme has addressed the problem of youths' unemployment in the Niger Delta region.

### SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study has both theoretical and practical significance. Theoretically, this study will surely enrich scholarship as it is going to fill a yearning gap in literature regarding the Amnesty programme and Youths' Empowerment both in the Niger Delta region and Nigeria in general. The study will definitely contribute to knowledge as it concerns the Amnesty programme and Youths Empowerment in Nigeria. The study will provide research material for studies in Amnesty, Youths' Empowerment and related areas.

Practically, this study will be very useful to the Federal Government of Nigeria as it would provide an insight into the performance and challenges of the Amnesty programme especially as it affects Youths' Empowerment and the best way of tackling same. The study will x-ray the implications of Amnesty programme on the Niger Delta region, thus, serving as a guide to policy makers in the country. It will also be very useful to the multinational corporations operating in the Niger Delta region especially in determining their Corporate Social Responsibilities [CSR] and the environmental impact control measures.

### LITERATURE REVIEW

This study examines the impact of the Amnesty programme of Nigeria's Federal Government on youths' empowerment in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. It is pertinent to note that the Amnesty programme was an initiative of Nigeria's Federal government aimed at solving daunting security challenges in the Niger Delta region which was threatening

national income. Accordingly, the aim of this review is to examine pertinent literature with respect to the following research question in order to locate a gap in the literature:

### **HAS THE AMNESTY PROGRAMME SUCCESSFULLY EMPOWERED THE YOUTHS OF THE NIGER DELTA REGION?**

Owing to paucity of literature assessing the impact of the Amnesty programme on youths' empowerment programmes in the Niger Delta region, this review will encompass the pre-amnesty efforts of Nigeria's government to assuage the feelings and empower the people of Niger Delta region, the imperative of this Amnesty programme and the modalities adopted to demobilize the youths and facilitate skill acquisition/training programmes for the youths of that region. Obviously, scores of writers had written on the Amnesty programme, especially as it concerns its efforts and strategy for the demobilization and reintegration of the ex-militants in the Niger Delta region. According to Interagency Coordination report (2009), in an attempt to stem the tide of debilitating security challenges in the Niger Delta region, the Nigeria's Federal Government on September 8, 2008 inaugurated 'The Technical Committee on Niger Delta region.' The then President, late President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua adopted the Amnesty programme for the Niger Delta militants as recommended by the 'Technical Committee' as a way of arresting the security challenges in the region. The Amnesty programme recommended by the committee entails 'Disarmament', 'Demobilization' and 'Reintegration' into the Nigerian society (DDR). It is comprised of two phases. The first phase would include the 'Disarmament' and 'Demobilization' while the second phase entails the 'Reintegration' which is often times referred to as the post amnesty phase.

The Interagency report cited above maintained that the 'Disarmament' is the process through which the arms, ammunitions and all the war devices used by the militant groups are recovered or mopped up as a way of disarming the youths of those dangerous weapons used to met-out terror and take oil workers hostage. The report maintained that a time frame to surrender their weapons and enlist in the Amnesty programme was given to the militants. It was recorded that at the end of the disarmament period of 60 days, 2760 guns of different caliber, 287, 445 round of ammunition, 18 gun boats, 763 explosives and 1090 dynamites caps were recovered[22].

Placing the blame squarely on leadership failure, Duru and Ogbonnaya, (2012)[23] posit that:

*The collapse of social values, failure of leadership, and neglect of the youth is now a current problem in Nigeria. This vice now increases the spate of unemployment, abject poverty, illiteracy, frustrations and the resurgence of many militant and terrorist groups in different parts of the country.*

For Saro-Wiwa (1995)[25], First of all, oil exploration and exploitation orchestrated unemployment and abject poverty in the region. This was done through various means among which are: the environmental degradation and pollution which rendered farmlands useless and destroyed aquatic life via oil spillages. The prevalent industries (fishing and farming) which had provided gainful employment for the youths of that region was badly affected. In his words:

*We in Dere, a community in Ogoni today are facing a situation which can only be compared to that of a civil war...the ocean of crude oil had emerged, moving swiftly like a great flood, successfully swallowing up anything that comes its way; crops, animals, etc....There is no pipe borne water and yet the streams, the only source of drinking water is coated with oil. The air is filled with crude and smells only of crude oil. We are thus faced with a situation where we have no food to eat, no water to drink and no air to breathe.*

The aforementioned scholar led a non-violent agitation for redress and empowerment in the Niger Delta region prior to his demise which saw the eruption of militancy in the region.

Etekepe (2012)[25] noted that the activities of these groups continued to gather momentum as more youths of the region continued to identify/enroll in the militant activities owing to its '*gains*'. Militancy became a lucrative business. The militant activities, even though very risky, provided quick cash to the members thereby providing income comparable to those of the oil workers who were intimidating (*oppressing*) them with ostentatious lifestyle. According to him, the militant activities reached a crescendo in the year 2008 when it grossly affected the national revenue, leading to a drop from 1.2 million barrels per day in 2004 to about 0.80 million barrels per day in by the first quarter of 2009 (Etekepe; 2012)[25]. This compelled the Federal Government to take a more serious step to curb militancy in the region. Etekepe (2012)[25] observed that before the Amnesty programme, the Federal Government in the year 2004, made attempts to buy over the prominent leaders of these militant groups like Ateke Tom and Asari Dokubo by paying to them, the sum of \$2,000 for each of the 360 AK-47 they surrendered to the government. But this failed to stop militancy and other earlier measures of government to checkmate the rise of militancy in the Niger Delta region date back to the Willinks Commission of 1958 set up by the

colonial administration to proffer solution to the issues arising from the agitations of the minorities over economic and political structural imbalance in Nigeria.

Okonta and Douglas, (2003)[26]. Also pointed out that as early as 1962, the Niger Delta Development Board (NDDDB) was set up to serve in advisory capacity and provide government with information that would lead to the alleviation of the plight of the area in conjunction with the Development Act of 1961. According to him, the reports of the NDDDB died with the first republic following the military intervention of 1966. He argued that from then till 1989 when the military government of General Ibrahim Babangida set up the Oil Minerals Producing Areas Development Commission (OMPADEC), nothing meaningful was done with respect to the agitations of the Niger Delta region. All the same, this commission (OMPADEC) failed to actualize its objectives owing to allegations of corruption. Okonta and Douglas, (2003)[26] further opined that the military administration of late Gen. Sani Abacha worsened the injury of the Niger Delta region by executing Ken Saro Wiwa (MOSOP leader) and other Ogoni elders for championing the course of the Ogonis of the Niger Delta region. For them, even the establishment in the year 2000, by President Olusegun Obasanjo, of the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) in an attempt to ameliorate the perceived injustice perpetrated on the people of Niger Delta region could not abate the spread and allure of militancy. The scholars contend that seeing that the commission was not delivering the goods as desired, a whole ministry was created in 2008 to address developmental issues in the Niger Delta region. According to them, these steps failed to assuage the feelings of the Niger Delta people as these were easily hijacked by the politicians who constitute an infinitesimal percentage of the population thus living the greater percentage of the people in the cold, especially the youths who are at the centre of the militancy. The Nigeria's government therefore came up with the Amnesty programme for the militants of the Niger delta region.

Contributing to this, Okonta and Douglas (2003)[26] explained that, oil exploration and exploitation in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria resulted to the destruction of aquatic lives and farmlands of the people of that region. This grossly affected their primary means of sustenance. According to them, the region which was once the agricultural pride of West Africa because of the fertile agricultural land, forest, rivers, creeks, and coastal waters teeming with fish and sundry water creatures is one of the most polluted places in the world today and one of the poorest regions in Nigeria (Okonta and Douglas; 2003)[26]. The scholars are of the opinion that these wanton destruction of means of livelihood created mass unemployment prompted restiveness in the region.

Corroborating the sorry state of live in the region, Akinwale (2010)[10] stated that *“the quality of human capital in Nigeria is presently low. Nigeria’s human capital is underdeveloped as it ranked 151 out of 177 countries listed in the 2004 United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)’s Human Development Index (HDI)”*.

Akinwale, (2010)[10], further stated that as a strategy to tackle militancy in the Niger Delta region, the President (Umaru Musa Yar ‘Adua) who had ‘Human Capital Development’ as one of his seven point’s agenda in 2007 initiated the Amnesty programme. In Akinwale’s words, *“human capital development is one of the seven points’ agenda of the Vision 202020 designed by Yar’ Adua, the president of Nigeria who died in February 2010”*. It was believed that the development of human capital is necessary for the maintenance of peace in the region. Also in agreement with this is the UNDP report on human capital development in Nigeria. According to UNDP (2011), Without doubt, the Amnesty programme is expected to improve the human capital development of the country which is presently low. Nigeria’s Human Development Index (HDI) Value (Comprising Home basic dimensions of human development: a long and healthy life, access to knowledge and a decent standard of living) for 2011 stands at 0.459, positioning the country at 156 out of 187 countries and territories.

Akinwale (2010)[10] maintained that after passing the first phase of the Amnesty programme which is disarmament and demobilization of the militants, the next in line became Rehabilitation and Reintegration of the ex-militants. The scholar noted that this involves identification of skills acquisition / training needs of the ex-militants. Elaborating on the matter, Akinwale cited above observed that a survey of the career aspiration of the ex-militants shows a wide preference for about ten (10) sectors ranging from oil/Gas, Maritime Services, Fabrication and Welding Technology, Exploration and Production and Processing Engineering.

Nonetheless, having run the Amnesty programme for about four years now, it has become necessary to review the successes and hiccups of the programme especially as it affects youths’ empowerment in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. The reports from the panel set up in January 2010 to review the rehabilitation aspect of the ‘DDR’ revealed some inadequacies, leading to calls by elders in the Niger Delta region for the dissolution of the Presidential Amnesty Committee. The report noted inter-alia, that eighty percent of the budget had gone on payments of consultants and contractors with only twenty percent committed on rehabilitation of the ex-militants; the over bloating of the numbers of registered ex-militants; the continued detention of several militants, some of the training

centers falling short with acceptable standards and operating with inadequate facilities (Obi & Rustad, 2011)[27]. According to Nwajiaku-Dahou (2010)[15] *“allowances unpaid or not paid regularly, huge disparities between payments made to foot soldiers and former militant commanders, limited access to rehabilitation training and allowances for those who surrendered weapons after the deadline, inappropriate training provision, limited employment prospects, the absence of a broader political settlement involving the broader Niger Delta population that has burn the costs of conflict, and the politically motivated staffing of bodies responsible for implementing and coordinating the amnesty program, are among the numerous flaws of the Amnesty.”*

Also, Obi & Rustad, (2011)[27] noted that the consultations and negotiations were done at a very high level. In their words, *“Rather than engage in open negotiations or a formal peace agreement with the militants, the consultations were at the highest levels of federal government, involving Niger Delta elites/elders and top government officials of Niger Delta origin negotiating with the militant commanders”*. The scholars maintained that it lacked grassroot participation. This approach according to them gave room for a feeling of alienation and cheating by a large portion of the Niger Delta people who believed that the recognized commanders of militant groups are only interested in their self aggrandizement. For Mamah and Amaize, (2012)[28], the recent spate of bombings across the region shows that all is not well with the Amnesty programme. Supporting this, Frynas, (1998)[29] pointed out that ‘MEND’ set off two car bombs on 15 March, 2010 in Warri and the Delta State Capital, where a post amnesty dialogue was being held and these left one person dead and several others injured. Also, the Vanguard news paper of 2<sup>nd</sup> October, 2010 reported that Nigeria’s 50<sup>th</sup> independence anniversary was marred with car bombing that killed about 12 people in the nation’s capital for reasons arising from dissatisfaction over the mode of implementing Amnesty programme. Mamah & Amaize (2012)[28] also observed that Militant group bombed a trunk pipeline at Brass in Bayelsa state belonging to Italy’s Eni SPA, ENI from which it lost around 4,000 barrels per day of ‘equity production’ . To further buttress the displeasure of some of these militant group, The Nation, 30<sup>th</sup> Jan. 2012 reported that the country home of the Minister for Niger Delta, Elder Godsdoy Orubebe was bombed in Burtutu local government area of Delta State on the 28<sup>th</sup> January 2012 as a mark of dissatisfaction of the militants. Also, Daily Independent News Paper of 7<sup>th</sup> April 2013 reported the killing of 12 policemen on April 6, 2013 by some ex-militants along the water ways of Azuzuama community in southern Ijaw local government area of Bayelsa state to demonstrate that the amnesty programme may not have proffered the desired solution for insecurity in the volatile region. *“ the attack on the policemen occurred barely three days after the movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) warned that it would*

*resume destruction of oil platforms in the region*" (Daily Independent News Paper, April 7<sup>th</sup> 2013).

### THE GAP

In as much as a lot have been written about the Amnesty programme of the Federal Government of Nigeria, the impact of Amnesty programme on youths' empowerment in the Niger Delta region is yet a yearning gap to be attended to. Scholars have dwelt more on how the activities of the oil companies have crippled the local economy of the Niger Delta people, created unemployment, poor health conditions and poverty in the region [10][11][12]. Scholars have also dwelt so much on how the activities of the militants had affected the volume of oil production and export in the country, how social mobilization and persuasions failed to yield desired result and the lure to violence for the youths, how the youths resorted to hostage takings, pipeline vandalization, armed robbery and perpetrated terror in the region with the attendant military operations [9],[15],[22]. Many other scholars wrote on how the programme appeared to have reduced the activities of the militants in the region [25][28], but nothing has been done on the impact of the Amnesty programme on youths' empowerment in the Niger Delta region owing to the fact that the programme was still young for its impact on youths' empowerment to be assessed.

The Amnesty programme is expected to wind up by 2015, thus the time is just ripe to examine the progress made so far and the achievements of this programme especially as it affects youths' empowerment absence of which necessitated high security issues in the region. The programme evidently has succeeded in addressing to a large extent the problem of youths' restiveness and appear to have improved security in the region, but sustainability of the relative peace that appear to have been achieved in the region is dependent on the successes of the programme in the area of youths' empowerment which is a critical aspect of the programme. This aspect constitutes the gap that this work seeks to fill. In other words, this work would assess the impact of this Amnesty programme on the youths' empowerment in the Niger Delta region.

### HYPOTHESIS

- 1) Amnesty Programme of Nigeria's Federal Government has been able to address the problem of youths' empowerment in the Niger Delta region.

### RESEARCH DESIGN

This work is expository in nature. The researcher made use of secondary data and interview in sourcing for information required for the study. The researcher attempted to

gather and put together, disparate pieces of information concerning the Federal government Amnesty programme, especially as it affects its youths' empowerment schemes for the youths of the Niger Delta region. In doing this, published reports/periodicals of the Presidential Amnesty office and relevant newspaper articles/reports were used.

### METHOD OF DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

The study shall be adopting qualitative method of data collection. This implies that this study shall generate data based on careful analysis of documents and materials unstructured elite interview. Explaining qualitative method, Federal Republic of Nigeria (2003)[30] observed that it is a detailed and systematic examination of the contents of a particular body of materials for the purpose of identifying patterns, themes or biases. Also, Strauss and Corbin (1990) defined qualitative research as "any kind of research that produces findings not arrived at by means of statistical procedures or other means of quantification". For Idowu (2012)[31] qualitative method is used to obtain in-depth information and concept clarification so as to facilitate instrument design for this study, owing to the fact that qualitative method is well suited for contextual analysis and also very useful when trying to illuminate, interpret and extract valuable information necessary in drawing inferences for logical conclusions. This perhaps informed Obikeze's (cited in Jonathan, 2004)[32], argument - that a strong advantage of qualitative method lies in the fact that it is able to gain access to organization structure, bureaucratic process and so on, and can more readily lead to the discovery of the unexpected phenomenon.

The adoption of this method therefore becomes imperative owing to the fact that the study shall rely mainly on qualitative data generated from secondary sources, and the fact that the method facilitates the data analysis.

Remarkably, this study shall rely on secondary sources of data. According to Niger Delta Human Development Report (2006)[33], secondary data refers to a set of data gathered or authored by another person, usually data from the available data, archives, either in the form of document or survey results and code books. The advantage of this as articulated by Report of the Technical Committee on the Niger Delta. (2008)[34] include that of economy. Given that the information of this sort is collected periodically, thereby making the establishment of trends over time possible. Also, this method saves the researcher the trouble of requiring the cooperation of the individuals under study. The researcher will make use of secondary data as that guarantees adequate access to relevant information required for the study. The research will attempt to gather and put together, pieces of

information concerning the Federal Governments Amnesty programme especially as it affects youths' empowerment programmes for the Niger Delta region. In doing this, published reports/periodicals of the Presidential Amnesty Office and newspaper articles/reports become invaluable. These are analyzed qualitatively with a view to x-raying logically the achievements of the Amnesty programme as it concerns youths empowerment.

### **THE AMNESTY PROGRAMME AND YOUTHS EMPOWERMENT IN THE NIGER DELTA REGION**

Years into the implementation of the Presidential Amnesty programme for the Niger Delta ex-militants, the records as contained in the special report of the Presidential Amnesty Office on the Guardian of May 29<sup>th</sup> 2014, highlights the achievements of the Amnesty programme as follows:

The Amnesty Programme of Nigeria's Federal government through the Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) Components, have enlisted about 30, 000 ex-militants of the Niger Delta region. In just about four years of its implementation, Nigeria's home grown Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) component of the Presidential Amnesty programme, under which about 30,000 former agitators in the oil-rich Niger Delta region were enlisted, has attracted global recognition and applause (The Guardian; May 29, 2014). The special report on Presidential Amnesty Programme in the Guardian of 29<sup>th</sup> May, 2014, noted that the programme in Nigeria under the leadership of Hon. Kingsley Kuku is at the critical reintegration phase with 13, 145 youths already graduated in various skills acquisition fields while 4, 698 youths are currently undergoing skills acquisition training or formal education within and outside the country in career choices ranging from marine, heavy duty operation, welding, diving, agriculture and boat building. Others include oil and gas technicians, automobile technology and aviation. According to the report, among the 13, 145 youths who have graduated from vocational training are 169 in Agriculture, Automobile Mechanics (331), Welding & Fabrication (4095), Entrepreneurship (2028), Carpentry, Plumbing & Pipefitting (287), Electrical Installation/Maintenance (442), Information & Communication Technology (249), Crane/Heavy Duty operations (1269), Health safety & Environment (80), Music/ Fashion/ Entertainment/Catering (838), Oil & Gas / Marine (1768), Aviation (177) and others (310) (See Guardian, May 29, 2014). The paper further reported that a total of 2,535 of the 4, 698 currently in training are in formal education, with 1, 440 delegates offshore and 1, 095 onshore, studying courses such as Law, Political Science, Business Management, Mass Communication, International Relations, Public Administration, Accountancy, Information & Communication Technology, Medicine, Engineering, Applied Sciences, Radio Electronics, Building & Construction Technology, among others.

According to the same paper, 477 youths out of 2087 delegates presently deployed for vocational training are offshore, of which 110 are engaged in specialized training. These include 22 at the prestigious Lufthansa flight Training Institute in Frankfurt, Germany, undergoing Instrument Rating, Type Rating and Fixed Wings courses; 9 at the CAE Oxford Aviation Academy, Kinglington, United Kingdom, also participating in aviation Type Rating courses; 30 being trained in Power Generation & Management Process/Machine Management at Schneider Electric in France; 40 studying Geo-Sciences, Reservoir Engineering, Gas Exploration, Production, Refining, Engines and Hydrocarbon utilizations, at the Institute of French Petroleum (IFP), also in France, and 9 undergoing helicopter training at the Airstar Flight school, Italy (Gaurdian, May 29, 2014). The report maintained that 29 of the 139 delegates deployed for specialized training have graduated in Drilling Engineering at Schlumberger Technologies in Melun, France. The delegates in Training are spread across 104 universities, 22 skill acquisition training institutions in 28 countries globally, while onshore those on the special scholarship scheme are in six universities, including the Benson Idahosa University, Igbinedon University, Novena University, Lead City University, Niger Delta University, and Redeemers University. Delegates in vocational training within the country are spread across 19 training institutions in eight states [35].

## CONCLUSION

In a nut-shell, this study has revealed that, though the amnesty programme has remarkably brought the restiveness of the youths of Niger Delta under control, sustainability of the apparent peace enjoyed from the region is not yet guaranteed. The fear of relapse is largely anchored on the fact that the amnesty programme has not affected reasonably the infrastructural development of the region. The programme has not provided educational facilities nor built good schools within the creeks, the programme has not provided good health facilities for the people in the hitherto volatile parts of the region. Poverty and diseases occasioned by environmental degradation are still very pandemic. The programme has not opened up the creeks with good network of roads. Life in the creeks has not really changed on account of the programme. The non-militant youths have not benefited directly from the amnesty programme. Against this backdrop UNDP Human Development Report (2011)[35]. lamented that the empowerment policy of the government through the training programme and job opportunities must not be limited to the militants. It must be extended to all the local inhabitants in the region, otherwise, it could send a wrong signal to others who have been excluded from the exercise that crime pays and may serve as a driving force for others to want to take arms for recognition.

Moreso, allegations of misappropriation have continued to trail the Amnesty programme. The process of placement and disbursement of funds are seriously politicized. Lack of transparency in the process of resource allocation is negatively affecting the credibility of the Amnesty programme. Of the N63, 281, 093, 786 billion allocated to the presidential Amnesty programme in the 2013 National budget, not even a kobo was voted for capital expenditure. While N23,625,000,000 billions were voted for stipends and allowances of 30,000 Niger Delta ex-militants, operational cost received N4,699,933, 814 billion, N35,409, 859, 972 billion was voted for reintegration of transformed ex-militants whereas, N546, 300,000 billion was vote for reinsertion/transition safety allowances for 3,642 Ex-militants (3<sup>rd</sup> phase)[35].

Evidently, larger chunk of the fund appropriated for the amnesty programme in last fiscal year is billed to end up in the hands of the political class with the huge percentage of the youths within the creeks still living in inhuman conditions without good roads, water, electricity, hospitals, school and even telecommunication services.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

The Amnesty Programme was designed to tackle youths' violence in the Niger Delta region which had affected negatively, Nigeria's revenue accruals from crude oil exports. The Programme is one of many strategies employed by the Nigeria's Federal Government to curb militancy, assuage the Niger Delta people, who are at the receiving ends of adverse effects of oil exploitation in Nigeria and ensure a hitch-free oil exploitation and exportation for economic buoyancy of the Nigerian State.

Among the lapses observed is that the programme has nothing for the non-militant youths of the Niger Delta region. This in essence is an endorsement of lawlessness. It sends the negative signal that it pays to engage in violence. The year 2013 Nigeria's Appropriation Act clearly shows that government voted zero naira for capital expenditure for the Amnesty programme. This is improper. The appropriation ought to make some provisions for capital expenditure to enable government provide schools/skill acquisition centers, health facilities, road networks, pipe borne water etc for the people within the creeks.

Moreso, the allegations of misappropriation raises serious questions of credibility on the programme. It is therefore recommended that independent forensic experts be made to review the account books of the Presidential Amnesty office. Any proven case of misappropriation should be prosecuted. This would restore reasonable credibility to the programme. Finally, Amnesty programme arguably, have ignited youths' violence in the Northern part of the country. This has necessitated the call for dialogue and amnesty for

the 'Boko Haram' insurgents in the North. A more lasting solution to this would be devolution of political powers in Nigeria such that each geo-political zone controls the accruals of the natural resources from the zone. This would make for a more responsible government and interest more patriotic feelings in the people.

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