

The Niger Delta Challenges: Re-thinking the Strategy for Combating Militancy in the Region

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Abstract: In spite of the cessation of activities by militant groups in the Niger Delta (ND), which follows the grant of amnesty and its appurtenances by the administration of President Umaru Musa Yar'adua in 2009, Nigeria's mono-cultural economy, was once again, besieged by rising cases of militancy with the advent of President Muhammad Buhari's administration in 2015. While these growing activities of militants have ensured the destruction of the country's vital oil infrastructure, it also ensured a drop in the country's oil productions to an all-time low of 800,000 bpd, from a daily production of 2.2 mbpd. This dealt a heavy blow to the country's economic life line and thus, set in the country's current economic malaise in the form of recession (for instance, President Muhammad Buhari and Vice President Osibanjo have at various times described the current economic recession as militancy-induced), which further threatened the country's economic interest and by extension, national security. This paper, using library research and content analysis was posed, amongst others; further interrogate the dynamics which give rise to militancy in the Niger Delta. Related to this was also on the need to, particularly, interrogate whether such activities serve the interest of the common man in the region and the country in general. It is the implications arising from the general discussions of the paper which formed the likely conclusion of this study.

Keywords: Challenges, Amnesty, Strategy.

1. INTRODUCTION

Nigeria's mono-cultural economy has, once again, been hit by rising cases of militancy in the Niger Delta, which had seen the country's oil production plummet to an all-time low of 800,000 bpd, from a daily production of 2.2 mbpd. While the activities of the militant partly explain the country's current economic malaise, for instance, several analyses, including statements of the country's President and Vice President, have at various times described the country's current recession as militancy-induced (Channels TV online Updates, September 19, 2016); further fuelling threat to the country's economy and national security. This assertion needs to be contextualized especially in the spate of challenges to the country's security, as seen in the activities of Boko Haram (BH) in the North East and the pro-Biafran agitation in the South East. This is in addition to the spike in cases of armed robbery and kidnap for ransom across the country and lately, the rising threat posed by the rampaging activities of alleged herdsmen across the country.

Important to note however, other than the latter and except for BH, which reared its ugly head in late 2009; the challenges in the Niger Delta are not new. Fast rewind to 2008, the period was characterized by heightened activities of militant groups in the region leading to destruction of the country's oil infrastructures. While these activities have created and nurtured the emergence of strong militant groups and warlords, it also ensured, as Ukiho, (2015:5) contends, the distortion in the socialization processes and rising inequalities in the Niger Delta, with ex-militants leaders assuming position of *nouveaux-riches*. Contextualized in the foregoing therefore, was the emergence of personalities like, Tompolo, Tom Ateke

and Asari Dokubo, amongst others. Until in 2009, when the administration of Umar Musa Yar'adua, invoked Section 175 of the 1999 Nigerian Constitution and thus, proclaimed an amnesty programme which provided unconditional pardon to the armed militants in the Niger Delta region. While the official proclamation of the amnesty has ensured a cessation of militant activities, it further redefined, as alluded earlier, the socialization processes and indeed, the character of the region. This is especially in the manner it sought to accommodate and rehabilitate militant groups in the oil producing areas.

Since the advent of the Buhari's administration however, the foundation of the Amnesty Programme can be safely be said to have shattered, as witnessed in the upsurge in the activities of militants, which climaxed especially in 2016. This scenario thus, has rekindled the need to further interrogate the challenges in the Niger Delta region with specific reference to the activities of the militants.

The paper, using secondary source was, amongst others, posed to further interrogate the dynamics which give rise to militancy in the region and by so doing, proffer alternative strategies towards addressing the needs of the region. The presentation was in 8 major sections, with this section as introduction. The second section conceptualized keywords of the paper; the third part provided brief insight into the Niger Delta region and its terrain. The fourth part, explored the theoretical basis adopted for the analysis; the fifth part overviewed the insurgency in Niger Delta up to the administration of President Yar'adua, which effectively granted the presidential amnesty to the militant in 2009. The sixth part of the paper explored the return of militancy in the region with the advent of Buhari administration and in the seventh part, the paper undertook a re-think in the strateg(ies) at combating militancy in the Niger Delta region, with the eighth part as conclusion.

2. DISCOURSES ON KEY TERMS OF THE STUDY

2.1 Challenges:

The word challenge is a term that has become a vogue in the lexicon of motivational literature and speakers. It is especially used both as a consolation and a spur that, "life without them (challenge) would be stagnant and uninteresting" (Sekibo, 2012:11). To the extent of its usage in motivational literature, it is used in reference to whatever confrontation man faces for his advancement or growth; or in reference to the difficulties he encountered in any chosen programme for his advancement (Sekibo, 2012:12).

Conceptualized within this study, the term was used in reference to the confrontation which impedes the development process of man or society as imposed, for instance, especially by environmental factors and the rising militancy in the Niger Delta. In the context of its usage, the term challenge was used in specific reference to the military confrontations in the region and the arising problem therein. In the proceeding analysis, the term was interchangeably used either as crisis, issues, problem and sometimes, debacle.

2.2 Amnesty:

Amnesty is defined either as a decision by government, which allows political prisoners to go free, within this context, political prisoners are pronounced as free under the amnesty terms or as a particular period in which people are not punished for committing a particular crime. In this case people who had illegal weapons are spared from prosecution under the amnesty term (dictionary.cambridge.org). In the same vein, Otite and Umukoro (2011) cited in Ohagwu (2014), have conceptualized amnesty in "reference to a general pardon of offence by government or deliberate over look of offences against the state. It means to cancel or not to exact punishment due for an offence".

In the context of the foregoing and with particular reference to the former, the use of the word 'political prisoners', as if the word applies only to this cadre of persons, may sound reductionist. But it goes to be argued that, the term has wider application and, was used here in reference to the pardon and exemption from punishment granted by government to the militants of the Niger Delta region over illegal bearing of arms against the state; threat to peace and the vandalization of the country's economic infrastructure. The amnesty programme of the Niger Delta therefore, entails for the militants a state pardon for their various offences and consequently, freedom from punishment. The policy, as implemented by the Yar'adua administration had three major layers which includes disarmament, demobilization and re-integration of the militants.

2.3 Strategy:

The word strategy is fluid and is often subjected to different usage and interpretations. It is no wonder, Fage (2007:127) citing Broadie (1968:281), had cause to observe that, the word is:

Dynamic and frequently used, it is applied to numerous other kinds of competitive situations, including commerce and games, and today, one speaks of testing various 'strategies of plays' over a broad range of situations.

Typical of the above could be seen in the use of the term, for instance, by Mbachu (2007) and Akpuru-Aja (2007), amongst others. While Mbachu (2007:3), sees it as "denoting a general programme of action and a deployment of resources towards the attainment of comprehensive objectives", Akpuru-Aja (2007:48), defines the term to mean the "instrument for problem identification and problem solving, as well as organizing and coordinating finite resources to achieve clearly identified objectives".

To the extent of its usage here, the term was used in reference to any generally conceived and carefully laid out plan which allows the deployment of resources for the attainment of clear set out objectives. It was therefore, used to denote a process which encompasses the variegated issues pertaining to the Niger Delta region through careful planning and effective resource deployment for the attainment of peace, security and development of the region.

3. EXPLORING THE REGION OF NIGER DELTA AND ITS TERRAIN

One or two issues are at the centre of any discussions of the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. First, in terms of size, it is one of the largest deltas and, is often viewed as the third largest on earth. It is adjudged as one of the most difficult and, can be compared to other Delta in the Amazon, such as the Mekong and the Ganges. It stretches a distance covering 70,000 square kilometres, making up about 75 of Nigerian land mass, half of which is wet land of 36, 000 square kilometres, with vast flood plains and mangrove swamps (Omotola, 2006:3; Ohagwu, et-al 2014:79). Two, the Niger Delta is made up of states like, Akwa Ibom, Cross Rivers, Rivers, Delta, Imo, Edo and Bayelsa states. But politically speaking and by implication of oil exploration, the Niger Delta in Nigeria was redefined by the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) Act of 2007, to comprise new entrants, such as Ondo and Abia states.

Lastly, apart from the fact that the region is the source of 80 per cent of Nigeria's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and represents the economic backbone of Nigeria (Afonitan and Ojakorotu, 2009: 191), transportation through the region is usually by rivers and creeks.

4. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF ANALYSIS

The importance attached to matters of security has made it imperative to align this study to a theoretical framework of analysis/perspective for proper grasp. To this extent, this study is rooted on two fundamental theoretical perspectives, viz: the theory of political ecology and, the frustration and aggression theory.

Simply put; the theory of political ecology centers on issues and the relationship that either exist or occur between social, economic and political factors. The core emphasis in the analysis therefore, is on the need to further interrogate the relationship between politics and ecology with a view to understanding human behavior. The primary concern of the framework is the use or control of resources as a basis towards understanding the political dynamics surrounding material and the discursive struggle over the environment in the Third World (Bryant, 1998:89). The framework has the followings as core assumptions:

- Cost and benefits associated with environmental changes are distributed unequally;
- Changes in the environment do not affect society in a homogenous way, political, social and economic differences account for uneven distribution of its costs and benefits;
- The unequal distribution of costs and benefits inevitably reinforces or reduces existing social and economic inequalities;
- Any change in environment must affect the political and economic status-quo;

- The unequal distribution of lost and benefits and the reinforcing and reducing pre-existing inequalities hold political implication in terms of the power relationship that exists (Bryant and Barley, 1997:28 cited in Okoli, 2013:2).

In the context of this study, political ecology is seen important in the manner environmental issues in the Niger Delta have assumed and, in fact, are shaping national political discourses and processes often leading to militancy. Further cascading from this, for instance, were institutional activities which had seen the setting up of the OMPADEC; now to the NDDC; lately, to the Presidential Amnesty Programme granted to the militant groups; and the constitutional provision of 13% as derivation for all revenues from oil approved for oil producing areas (note, demand for a review of this formula remains unabated). In other words, these were issues that have formed part of the struggle which continuously redefine and reconfigure Nigeria's federal structure either in the name of resource control, fiscal federalism or as the case may be, political restructuring.

Two or more issues are thus, thrown up and are germane here. One, the militancy in the Niger Delta region needs to be seen as related and form part of the continuing expressions of the demands for restructuring and therefore, fit into the larger strategies by ethnic minorities in the region (mindful, of course, that the region is inhabited majorly by ethnic minorities), to gain further concession in the larger context of Nigerian politics. To this extent, Tantua and Kamruzzaman's (2016), view is apt, as they see the issue as part of the ensuing contestation for power and authority amongst the contending elements. This is a view also fits into an earlier insinuation by Ukeje (2004), who sees it as epitomizing the shifting emphasis from mere bread-and-butter to serious issues by the people of the region, on their statuses, role and place within the larger Nigerian polity. Three, discourses on the relationship between ecology and politics, no doubt, further reinforce and rekindle the widely-held notion on the nexus between politics and other processes of human endeavor.

Frustration and Aggression theory had its root in past works by a psychologist, John Dollard and his pioneering work (Dollard, et-al. 1939); this is in addition to other subsequent research work by Leonard Berkowitz (1980-89). But as times went by, the approach has been employed to explain political violence by scholars like, Ted Gurr, James C. Davios, Ivo and Rosalind Feierabend and Douglas BWY (Midlarsky, 1975). Simply put, the theory seeks to see every aggression as always the result of frustration and certain sense of perceived loss. Contextualized within this, an individual with certain sense of dissatisfaction and anger is most likely to react by directing his annoyance and aggression against that which he perceives or sees as responsible and possible source of his predicament.

The second variant type of frustration-aggression theory however, seeks to locate and interpret relative deprivation as a state of mind in which exist a discrepancy between what an individual seek and what is attainable. The argument thus is, the greater the discrepancy, there is greater anger and propensity towards violence. This position was further concurred with by Gurr (1970:24), as he argued, inter-alia, that when we feel thwarted in our attempt to get something we want, we are likely to become angry; and when we become angry, the most satisfying inherent response is to strike at the source of our frustration. Further to this, Lichbach, (1989:431) citing Muller, appears to have provided a seemingly succinct view of this position as he opined thus,

If the mobilization of discontent is correlated with the extensiveness of inequality, such that when inequality is pervasive, some mobilization is almost bound to occur, and then the relationship between inequality and political violence should be positive and curvilinear, i.e., positively accelerated.

In other words, the plank of the argument within this perspective further underlined, for instance, the view that an individual whose basic desires are thwarted and who, as a consequence, experiences profound sense of disappointment and anger is prone to react to his condition by directing aggressive behaviour at what he/she perceives as being responsible to, or for his situation. The above position is in tandem with Hann and Feagen's (1973:133) view that, the greater the perceived importance of the desire and the more comprehensive the checking, the more vigorous and aggressive the response of the deprived might be.

Contextualized within this study therefore, to the extent that frustration was held as a causal factor in understanding the aggression in the "Middle East by Palestinians against the State of Israel; in apartheid South Africa by the ANC and other liberation movements; and in Northern Ireland by the IRA, among others" (Afinotan and Ojakorotu, 2009:194); to the same extent, the militancy in the Niger Delta can be located in the aggression wrought by the frustration arising from oil exploration activities by government and its agents operating in the Niger Delta.

However, this is not to say that these two perspectives are not without their limitations. For instance, while the political ecology perspective could hardly establish a linear causal relationship between politics and environmental issues, the frustration–aggression theory is limited to the extent that, not all frustrations have birthed aggression and aggressive responses. Secondly, aggression might not always be negative; in fact, they sometimes could turn out to be the source for and a harbinger for productive purposes.

5. THE NIGER DELTA INSURGENCY: AN OVERVIEW

The conversation around the crisis in the Niger Delta centres on certain key fundamentals. First, is the issue of environmental concern and secondly, as an issue arising from resource exploitation and control. Notwithstanding, these two, as Obi (2006:3-6) alludes, need to be situated in the “microcosm of the larger Nigerian state within the context of equity, access to oil resources and power by oil-rich communities, self-determination, ethnic autonomy, lack of political participation and democratic accountability, underdevelopment and widespread poverty”. It needs therefore, be argued that these issues not only threaten the security of lives, but the economic viability of the Nigerian state. This is more so as, the region is home to 50% of the country’s revenue and 90% of its foreign exchange earnings. Narratives from Epelle (2011:55) and El-Rufai (2016:6), further lent credence to the latter. For instance, while the former sees the region as the source of 80% of government’s gross domestic product and 90% of our foreign exchange earnings, the latter effectively sees same figures as coming from oil revenues.

While the foregoing serves as a foretaste of the Niger Delta Challenge, for the purpose of this analysis and succinct understanding of the issue, this study is broken into three historical stages. The first stage dates back to as early as the colonial era. It was a period championed by prominent traditional rulers of the region such as, King Jaja of Opobo, King Koko of Nembe and King Nana of Itsekiri. The struggle of this period was essentially a struggle on the sale and regulation of the prices of palm oil with British traders and Niger Delta indigenous traders on the other hand. To this extent, the struggle was part of the resistance against exploitation and the subjugation by the British colonialists in the course of which many of the natives were killed; with several other communities either displaced or completely wiped out. The 1895 Akasa Raid in Brass remains an important reference point in the history of the struggle of this period (Ilagha, 2007; Tamuno, 2011).

Sequel to the discovery of oil in commercial quantities at Oloibiri, Bayelsa State, in 1956 and subsequent other discoveries extending into other parts of Niger Delta, three fundamental changes were introduced into the region. One, as Oluwaniyi, (nd) alludes, was the transformation of the region from palm oil production to fossil oil, which put the region in a strategic position both nationally and internationally. Two, the transition from palm oil production to fossil oil had seen the conflict in the region transformed from conflict in palm oil trade to fossil oil, especially as the region was turned into home and site for global oil production and international relations (Oluwaniyi, nd). Three, the introduction of fossil production in the region effectively ushered the second important segment of the struggle in the Niger Delta, a struggle informed by the perceived marginalization and deprivations suffered by peoples of the region in the wake of oil exploration and exploitation (we shall return to the details of the oil exploration in the region shortly). The culmination of this was thus, the declaration of the Niger Delta Republic in the mid 1960’s by Isaac Adake Boro (Sagay, 2001; Asuni, 2009; Nwagbara, 2007; Boro, 1982; 2007; International Crisis Group, 2009; Tamuno, 2011 and Okoli, 2013).

Interestingly, while the discovery of fossil oil in the region has (as earlier alluded), assured crucial place for the region in the country’s political economy, the oil rich region was left in environmental despoliation resulting from oil spills and gas flared, both incidentals from the activities of oil companies; this is including cases of rising poverty in the region. But this situation could not have been any different and was, owed much to the former. For instance, agriculture which forms the dominant economic activity in the region suffered a setback, as extraction and exploitation of oil has caused adverse impact on the soil, forest and waterways of the communities. These, added to the rising poverty in the region, were further compounded by progressive downward revision of the derivation principle of revenue allocation with each of the country’s succeeding regime. This trend had seen a gradual reduction in the share of federal allocations to oil-producing states from 50% in 1966 to 3% which was again only to be reviewed upward to 13% in mid-1990s (Obi and Rustard, 2011:7).

The late 1990’s was critical and thus, marked the third segment in the analysis of the struggle in the Niger Delta. It was a period characterized by agitations and counter agitations by ethnic and environmental rights, including heightened threats

and disruption in the operations of oil companies for failure to come to terms with demands from oil producing communities, as championed especially by the then Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP), led by Ken Saro-Wiwa.

However, the response of the state to some of these activities and indeed, other Ogoni activism was a stiff repression which, importantly, introduced another dimension to the struggle- armed violence and militarization of the Niger Delta crisis (Okpe, 2004). This situation thus, allowed for the emergence of other very volatile scenarios, precipitating to armed conflict as was witnessed with the 1998-9, Ijaw unrest. This is in addition to the rising activities of militia groups that became a recurring theme in the Niger Delta since 2000.

The conversations on the struggle and the rising violence in the Niger Delta, as earlier alluded, a fact further reinforced by Okoli, (2013:40-41), owed to environmental degradation and other abuses especially from the activities of TOCs. However, the conversations on the specificities of the crisis need to be further interrogated against the backdrop of,

- a. State Predation and Terrorism;
- b. Corporate *Buccaneerism* and Irresponsibility;
- c. Socio-Economic Deprivation and Mass Impoverishment; and
- d. Political Marginalization Okoli (2013:40-41).

Although the observation of the 2006 Nobel Laureates Report appears in tandem with the foregoing, a new dimension added by the report was the introduction of corruption (Akoh, 2011; Bakare, 2015; Sayne and Gillies (2011), as a factor that was seen to have helped in fueling despondency and further resistance in the Niger Delta.

This view is not out of place, as corruption has become imbedded and has continues to undermine the activities of most government agencies saddled with the development of the region. This, for instance, can be captured in an analysis by Ibaba (2008), in his article on the operations of the then Oil Mineral Producing Areas Commission (OMPADEC); and the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC). Further illustration of these sordid affairs was captured in another analysis by Eni, (2010). But even more to this (this in no way implies that corruption is peculiar to this region), were other brazen theft of Niger Delta resources at state levels. Gleaned from this were the case of Governor Alamesiagha of Bayelsa State; Lucky Igbinedion of Edo State and James Ibori of Delta State (the last two were convicted by competent court of law, one in Nigeria and the last, in the UK).

As valid as Okoli's and the Nobel Laureate's position were, conspicuously absent in both position is the failure, even if flippantly, to acknowledge the role of criminals and criminality, which have assumed centre-stage in driving the trajectories of the crisis. For instance, lending credence to this view, while Tantua and Kamruzzaman's (2016), are of the view that militancy in the Niger Delta "...appear as rebellious action of protesting groups engaged in criminal activities for private gains...", in the same vein, Ako's (2011:45), view seemed anchored on same pedestal, as he argued thus, gangs and other criminal elements have opportunistically used the issue of resource control in the Niger Delta region to engage in criminal activities under the cloak of regional insecurity. The crisis has thus, morphed from legitimate activism to a full blown insurrection, with the region turned into a hot bed of arms-bearing youth (actions reserved only for the legitimate agent of the state), unleashing all forms of sabotage, including *vandalization* of oil pipeline/infrastructure and other acts of brigandage.

This situation was not helped as many of these militant groups were effectively transformed as tools in the hands of politicians, deployed every now and then for political objectives. This, apart from further emboldening the militants, it also went along way in establishing them as a force to reckon with in the vortex of communal conflicts, local resistance and politics of resource control associated with the region.

In retrospect, it is worth highlighting that, the surreal nature of the militant's activities needs to be located not only in the threat it poses to the country's economic wellbeing, but more so in its national security. The latter can be gleaned, for instance, oil production which reached a high peak of 2.4 mbpd, plummeted to as low as 700,000 bpd. This, no doubt, tasked the ingenuity of the bureaucrats in Abuja, into producing what officially became the amnesty programme with all its appurtenances to the militant groups. The amnesty programme was therefore, a precursor to the unfolding trajectories in the oil industry, the politics of the Niger Delta region and, Nigeria in the post Jonathan's era.

6. BUHARI ADMINISTRATION AND THE RETURN OF MILITANCY IN THE NIGER DELTA

Barely two years into the assumption of office by the Buhari administration, there appeared a return to militancy in the Niger Delta, this is especially following stepped up attack on Nigeria's oil infrastructure by a purportedly newly formed militant group, the Niger Delta Avengers. While the renewed attack had seen oil production plummet, as earlier alluded, to as low as 800,000 bpd, and setting the trajectories for the country's current economic recessions; it fundamentally raises the need to further interrogate, what went wrong with the Presidential Amnesty and who does the return to militancy in the region serve?

Answers to this question could, perhaps, be located in the very nature of the amnesty programme, in this case, is the manner the programme was built around certain individual militants, who wielded so much influence, which effectively gave way to the emergence of warlords in the region. This view, no doubt, lent credence to the assertion by Jegede and Olu-Olu (2015:276-7) that, the amnesty process has "...introduced a form of alienation...or an entire hijack by some opportunistic people". Further deduced from this was especially the manner in which the amnesty programme provided for the emerging warlords, an unfettered access to those in position of authority (such as, state governors and the presidency). This is in addition to other privileges, including payment of amnesty stipends to individual militants effectively channeled through them (warlords).

Arising from this were thus, cases which allowed for manipulation between officials of the amnesty programme and the warlords. The latter is further corroborated in the alleged theft of #3 billion amnesty stipends belonging to 1,500 militants. For want of emphasis, this was made possible as, Tantua and Kamruzzaman's (2016) alleged, given that, the tripod of the state, the militants and multinational corporations not only exist in tandem. But in between them were also the existence and the functioning of assorted clientele networks among state, multinational companies (MNC), and militia leaders as could be seen in a number of other cases.

For instance, built around the amnesty and by way of further pacifying the militants, was the case of pipeline security surveillance contracts, awarded to certain key militant warlords, such as Tompolo, and Asari Dokubo, amongst others. While the surveillance contract effectively transferred Nigeria's maritime security into the hands of militants (or, at least, former insurgent leaders), it also allows for the release of several billions of Naira, in the name of payment for these contracts without commensurate result, this is even in the midst of rising cases of pipeline vandalism and product theft. Although, this study in no way suggests the culpability of the former militants, it certainly does not remove their culpability given the rising cases of pipeline vandalism and product theft; and the ease with which the acts were perpetrated with semblance of franchise, more so as it was perpetrated, as alleged, in connivance with public officials (Vidal, 2011 cited Okoli and Orinya 2013:70).

With benefit of hindsight, it is pertinent to state that, neither the amnesty nor the surveillance contract had stemmed the tides of vandalism and products theft. This argument seemed reinforced by NEITI's 2013 Annual Report, which argued, inter-alia, that: "Nigeria lost a total of 10.9 billion US Dollars to oil theft between 2009 and 2011" (cited in Okoli and Orinya, 2013:67), from pipeline vandalism and other acts of sabotage. But it is imperative at this juncture to also argue that, the findings in NEITI's could not have been any different or even new. This is because, in the first place, "some of these groups were not only into militancy for change, but for pecuniary gains by vandalizing oil pipelines and stealing the crude oil and selling it into lucrative 'black' market" (Jegede and Olu-Olu, 2015:274). The pipeline security contract therefore, only provided them official cover for impunity and further theft of the country's petroleum resources.

However, conversations on the collapse of the amnesty and, the return to armed insurgency in the Niger Delta, need to be located, firstly, in the struggle especially by some militant warlords, bent at maintaining the *status quo ante bellum* (as captured in the foregoing). Secondly, given the new dynamics in the region, in the determined efforts by new militant elements/groups in the region to redefine and seek for accommodation in the amnesty landscape. It goes then to be argued that, although the build-up to the 2015 election saw several threats by militant leaders of returning to militancy should President Jonathan, the candidate of Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), loses his re-election bid. While many of these threats were, understandably political, the more so as, President Jonathan, belongs to the Ijaw tribe, one of the major tribe in the Niger Delta, such threats need to be interrogated beyond ethnic considerations. It was therefore, part of the larger reaction by the militant warlords of the perceived sense of personal loss(es) the Buhari Presidency could portend to their privileged positions on account of the amnesty programme.

The rest, as they say is history, as President Jonathan not only lost his re-election bid; and all also went with all the acquired privileged statuses of the militant warlords (their unfettered access to seat of power and government officials, including the amnesty scheme which accorded them prominence and other perquisites were suspended). In fact, one of the militant warlords, Tompolo, was declared wanted by the state for alleged cases of corruption. It was within this matrix which saw the new militant group under the umbrella of Niger Delta Avengers (NDA), effectively carrying out its earlier threat, which followed subsequent other attacks on oil installations in the region and thus, a return, as Energy International Risk Assessment (EIRA, 2016) alludes, to a grim feeling of *déjà-vu*.

The discourses around the implication of militancy have partly been captured elsewhere in this study, but for want of emphasis, its implications could be seen especially in the amnesty scheme; the redefinition of the socialization process; and the rise of nouveau riches in the region. However, the repercussion of the latest wave of militancy needs to be further interrogated in other related dynamics. Foremost, in the country's 2015 oil production pegged at of 2.2 mbpd, which however, slumped to barely 800,000 bpd (owing, of course, to the activities of the militants). The ensuing fact is that, with earnings per crude benchmarked at \$38 per barrel and with further turbulence in the international oil market which, by 16th February, 2015 had seen per barrel crude price slumped to \$27 pb. This, while helping to undermine and ensure persistent decline in the country's oil earning and setting the country's slide into economic recession, it also challenged the state's capacity, both federal, the state and local, to deliver. This is in addition to affecting other institutional agencies saddled with the development of the Niger Delta region.

The foregoing, for instance, can further be seen in the fact that, "between 2007 and 2014, Nigeria earned an average of over \$3 billion monthly from oil and gas sales taxes. By May 2016, this had collapse to about \$500 million" (El-Rufai, 2006). Added to this, while the sum of N4.97 trillion represents total 12 months disbursement to the three tiers of government (federal, the state and local governments), from December 2015 to November 2016, similar period of the preceding year had total disbursement of N5.5 trillion. This represents a dip of about N523.2 billion (www.nigerianbulletin.com). Arising from this is that, such declining disbursements, apart from being a true reflection of the country's falling earnings, even more so as the economy is mono cultural. This has helped to further render government at various level (including states in the Niger Delta region), incapable of rising to the challenge imposed by the daily and burgeoning expectations of its people.

At this point, it therefore, leaves us with the question, how best can the rising militancy in the Niger Delta be combated?

7. RE-THINKING THE STRATEGY FOR COMBATING MILITANCY IN THE NIGER DELTA REGION

It is platitudinous to proceed by saying that, the militancy in the Niger Delta is a product of environmental issues. This view might sound valid, but it has often than not fail to properly situate these issues in the plethora of other demands which define the character of the Nigerian state. Within this, of course, were issues which border on the politics of marginalization; political restructuring and resource control, amongst others; that remain at the centre of the agitation for Biafra Republic, the Oduduwa republic and other rising irredentist tendencies.

By way of emphasis, while the foregoing issues have, no doubt, reinforced the relevance of political ecology as a framework in understanding the analysis herein; the rising backlash of aggression occasioned by dashed hope from many of these issues also justify the adoption of frustration and aggression theory. It is therefore, in the context of these frameworks that alternative strategies were thought out.

To this end, devising strategies for ending militancy in the Niger Delta must proceed beyond managing militancy. Such strategies therefore, need to be all inclusive and, must navigate between the environment, the political and the social angles. The environmental angle, for instance, needs to proceed with matters of remediation. For instance, as in the case of Ogoni whose long awaited clean-up has just begun, environmental clean-up in the Niger Delta may take time, it is expensive, but not impossible. Towards achieving this objective, such efforts must begin by taking advantage of the global sentiments on the fight against environmental pollution by setting clear target and agenda. This, no doubt, would influence and further galvanize funds for the project not only from consortium of TOC's operating in the region, the indigenous oil companies and government, but also from other stake holders globally.

In this context, it also calls for deliberate involvement, firstly, of the local communities and secondly, the agencies responsible for managing such issues. The involvement of the former must not be made as a one-off-thing. Rather, it should be constant and, made a recurring dialogue between communities of the region over matters of environment and the authorities concerned. Having in mind a good proportion of the communities in the region are farmers, so doing would help in returning back to them their land; and creating additional employment for the growing army of unemployed youth in the region. Side by side this is on the need to move beyond rhetoric and deliberately pursue policies, in line with global commitments and best practices, which would help at ending gas flaring in the region. This is more so as gas flaring, apart from its debilitating effect on the environment, it is also a tremendous economic loss to the country. For instance, gas flaring saw Nigeria losing \$3.363 billion in the first half of 2016, with a potential of further losing \$3.363 billion in the 5 years window, January 2016 – December, 2020, the set out deadline for ending gas flaring in the region (economicconfidential.com, 2016). By way of achieving this objective, a time line must clearly be set, unambiguously adhered to, with violators clearly identified and punished.

Equally important is on the need for the fight against corruption in the region and the country in general to be reinvigorated. With benefit of hindsight into how past efforts both at the federal and state level were sabotaged by brazen cases of theft of funds meant for the development of the region. This, no doubt, has helped to heighten the level of frustration and disenchantment in the region. There is thus, the need to clearly sensitize and recruit the populace in appreciating what corruption portends not only for the development of the region, but the larger Nigerian polity. Contextualized within this is on the need for communities to appreciate the fact that, the fight against corruption, as is with all cases of criminality and wrong doing, is a collective one. Clear examples must be set against perpetrators, even if only for purposes of deterrence.

An important issue in the wider strategies at addressing insecurity in the Niger Delta is on the need for a political blend. In this case, the clamour for resource control, the restructuring of the country's federal structure need not to be ignored. In the context of the former, for instance, is on the need to, even if on incremental basis, increase the derivation formulae beyond the current 13% to 25%, based on past demands and existing recommendations. The latter particularly, calls for a deliberate and robust policy that would ensure the devolution of more powers to states and by implication, the local governments. This is with a view to reducing powers of the central government, seen as too unwieldy. Towards the attainment of this objective, attempts must be made to prevail and sensitize the region, note: not coerce, on the need to remain within the larger Nigerian project, drawing attention especially on the mistakes and experience in Southern Sudan and; to what a stronger Nigeria could portend for states in the region.

Within this wider context, deliberate attempts need to be made in the pursuit and the sustenance of the country's current diversification, in addition to developing other sources of revenue outside the Niger Delta region. To this end, the focus on agriculture; hydrocarbon exploration in the North East and the renewed attention in solid minerals in the North West must be sustained. This is important given; firstly, oil has a life shelf. When it to expires, other alternatives sources of revenue from other region can be relied upon for the sustenance of the polity. Secondly, such effort would help in further creating a sense of responsibility and indeed, a sense of contribution to the larger pool by the other regions, and may hold a ripple political effect on the polity.

In the same vein, deliberate attempts be made at ensuring that the Federal budget (this is including agencies for the region), are in sync with that of states, especially at building infrastructure and deliberate pursuit of a policy of industrialization. Emphasis on the former should be especially, in areas of education, towards promoting human capital development. In this context, Tamuno (2011:27), has rightly observes that, education has "a celebrated multiplier effects, particularly capacity building all possible levels and for all categories of learners". The latter would help in opening up other opportunities; this is in addition to addressing the burgeoning population of unemployed youth that had become susceptible to all forms of nefarious activities in the region. Furthermore, there is the need to promote a youth development scheme at both the primary and secondary schools in the region. Achieving this may require the development of specific curriculum which, while helping to instill a sense of duty and responsibility to the state, would help in neutralizing negative radicalization and radical ideology that may come with perceived sense of frustration.

There is no doubt that, for peace to reign in the Niger Delta and the region open up for development, the amnesty, in the likes of the one granted the then militants by the regime of General Gowon in 1967; and the one recently granted by President Yar'adua in 2009 remains crucial. This is logical as it would help in further opening up the atmosphere of the

region, ensure security and *de-weaponize* the environment. But the amnesty the region requires is the type driven by the communities, rather than individual warlords. To this extent, it goes without saying that, yes; the current amnesty can be allowed to serve out its time. However, it needs to be modified in such a way as to allow for the communities in the region to take centre stage (more-like, a cooperative arrangement and a bottom-up approach, as advocated by Tamuno, (2011:22-25). This would ensure for community ownership and along with the security agents, help in the control of process which oversees the control of weapons surrendered by militants; the disbursement of amnesty stipends; and in the selection of individual militants for any form of skills training. While further details can be worked out towards allowing for effective control of the process, it needs to be emphasized that situation in which individual militants take centre stage in the process is counterproductive.

While youth restiveness in the region, especially as seen in rising cases of kidnap of oil workers for ransom, oil pipeline line vandalism and theft can be situated in the criminal dimension of the Niger Delta struggle, it also needs to be contextualized within the rising frustration amongst youth in the region, arising partly, from absence of gainful employment and engagements. Much as the earlier recommended strategies were geared at addressing some of these issues, it also behooves that more efforts be made to deliberately stem the tides of criminals and criminality in the region. To this end, given that the militants have gained versatility to the conditions, nooks and crannies of the creeks, which have allowed them to easily out maneuver government forces (Ohagwu et-al, 2014:81). This calls for a further fine-tuning of the Strategic Doctrine and Training Manuals of the Navy, the Nigerian Police, the Civil Defence and other paramilitary agents to reflect the terrain of the region. Such efforts would help to avoid the often resort to the catchphrase by the state security personnel each time they were outmaneuvered: 'of not being or lacking knowledge of the terrain'.

Lastly, although not in any way suggesting a militarization of the zone, there is the need for effective policing of the creek and the country's coastal lines, leading up to the Gulf of Guinea. This can be achieved by establishing additional waterways or coastal command. Although this is may be an expensive exercise, it certainly will not be out of place, having in mind the porous nature of the area. This, of course, is considering that the area often serve as a source through which weapons are smuggled into the country and even more so, the threat to the area poses a dire consequence to the country's economic wellbeing and by extension, its national interest.

8. CONCLUSIONS

Thus far, the attempt fairly analyzed the ensuing issues in the Niger Delta, which culminated in the collapse of the amnesty programme with the advent of the President Buhari administration. While the analysis has reinforced the relevance of political ecology, and the frustration and aggression theories in understanding and, in the analysis of issues in the region, by way of conclusion, two points have further been rekindled and reinforced by this analysis. First, is that, a panacea to the crisis in the region needs to proceed with a paradigm shift from the usual approach which tend to isolate and treat militancy and by implication, youth restiveness as one single causal factor. Secondly, as important the first factor might be, the contention is that, the crisis in the Niger Delta need further be interrogated in the context of much broader and indeed, all-encompassing approach, including criminality, if a lasting solution to the problems in the region were to be found.

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