“Post-Amnesty Niger Delta and the Promise of Development: Issues, Prospects and Problems

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Abstract

The offer of amnesty to militants in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria was premised on the assumption that it would engender an enabling environment for meaningful development of the area. This paper seeks to project into the problems that may likely jeopardize this assumption. It identifies the windows of opportunity for a lasting peace in the region but expresses doubts about positive change in the character of the Nigerian State. As privatized state, political actors exploit the state to pursue personal and parochial interests rather than implementation of policies aimed at improving the development of the Niger Delta area.

Keywords: Militants, corruption, governance, derivation, poverty, deprivation.

Introduction

The origin of militant activities in Niger Delta could be attributed to failure of the Nigerian State. Because of its inability to pursue the delivery of public goods in a transparent environment, the state could not contain the agitation of the people over the neglect of meaningful development (Ibaba, 2008:12). Instead, the state promotes policies that appropriate development to advance the interests of Nigerian political gladiators. This, as Ibaba has noted, was possible because “the Nigeria State is privatized and is therefore used to pursue personal, sectional and ethnic interests, as against the common interests” (Ibaba, 2008:12).

Cases of past governors of the region who plundered the money with reckless abandonment abound. For instance, the former Governor of Edo state, Lucky Igbinedion was alleged to have stolen “about N2.9 billion from the state coffers while in government” (Adewole, 2008). He was accused of illegal withdrawal of the state fund for private use; state allocations that could have been used for development purposes to relieve the people of Niger Delta from their impoverishment. Assessment development in Nigeria has been negative. For instance, the 2009 failed state index ranking places Nigeria in the 15th position with 99.8 (Foreign Policy, 2009). The 2009 World Report of the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHCR) on Nigeria notes that “government corruption and mismanagement robbed Nigerians of their rights to health and education” (UNHCR, 2009). The indicators for these rankings include group grievance, human flight, uneven development, economic decline, factionalised elites, human rights, delegitimation of state, among others. In all these, Nigeria ranks among the countries with
in a precarious situation like Afghanistan, Somali, Sudan, and Pakistan, to mention a few. In fact, restiveness in the Niger Delta manifests the failure of government and its attendant impact on the political system.

The Niger Delta is an area that stretches over 20,000 km2 of swamp land in the littoral fringes of Nigeria (Afinotan and Ojakorotu, 2009:191). It is one of the world’s largest wetlands, and covers over 60 per cent of Africa’s largest mangrove forests (Eyinla and Ukpo, 2006). With a distinct aquatic environment including marine, brackish and fresh water ecosystems, Niger Delta encompasses the most extensive fresh water swamp forest in West and Central Africa, and manifests an intricate network of creeks, rivers, streams, swamps, braided streams and Oxbow lakes, besides a stretch of flat and fertile land mass.

The Paradox of Oil and Development in Nigeria: A Theoretical Exposition

Scholars have sought to inquire about the negative “relationship between the presence of oil and development” (Alexander and Gilbert, 2007) in developing countries. Where there is the absence of political will to harness the resources to improve on developmental projects, there is bound to be crisis of development, especially in the oil producing communities. In explaining this paradox, two different perspectives have emerged (Duruigbo, 2005; Karl, 2007; Ross, 2001). The first is the “paradox of plenty” or “resource curse” which argues that the discovery of oil leads to a deterioration of governance and human development indicators in resource-rich states. This school posits that, “there exists a negative relationship between endowment with natural resource and social and economic development” (Duruigbo, 2005: 5). The consequence of this is the prevalence of poverty, poor health care, child mortality, and poor educational performance (Karl, 2007: 7).

Ordinarily, discovery and exploration of oil which engender increased revenue should be a catalyst for development in the Third World. However, because of weak democratic governance structures and institutional capacity, particularly in the area of revenue management, government fails to use this wealth as a means to uplift the living standard of the people or reduce poverty. Thus, the benefits accrued from oil are mainly restricted to the elite, especially those with political power. It has been noted that in political system with inclement democratic environments, “the presence of oil leads to the marginalisation, disenfranchisement and disempowerment of the people” (Alexander and Gilbert, 2007; Karl, 2007:5). This is true of Nigeria.

It is important to note here that while institutional structures are relevant to effective democratic governance, a combination of factors that are distinctly human in nature would transform the major choices into useful instruments of
development. For instance, revenue generated from oil cannot be appropriated without the individuals in their respective institutions charged with policy issues and process. Hence, Duruigbo (2005:3) argues that oil rich developing countries experiencing negative development were not necessarily cursed by their resources but beset with a curse of leadership.

The second school of thought argues that there are two economic paradigms that define many of the situations and consequences encountered by oil rich countries. These address the impact that the influx of vast quantities of foreign capital can have on national economies, and the negative long-term habits and trends that this can engender within States (Karl, 2007). Preventative steps can be taken to ensure that an economic equilibrium is maintained, but these require concerted action on the part of the government concerned. For instance, special saving funds could be put in place to ensure that market volatility such as the rise and fall of the price of oil at the international market, can be accommodated in the national budget formulation process. The first of these is the phenomenon known as the Dutch disease or what is called the rentier state syndrome. It was named after the negative effects of the North Sea oil boom on industrial production in the Netherlands. Karl insists that

This phenomenon occurs when resource booms cause real exchange rates to rise and labour and capital to migrate to the booming sector. This results in higher costs and reduced competitiveness for domestically produced goods and services, effectively “crowding out” previously productive sectors” (Karl, 2007).

In short, once the petrol runs out, if there are no efforts to diversify the economy away from petrol revenue reliance, the local population can no longer afford to purchase imported manufactured goods, and the local market is incapable of providing affordable alternatives. As such, oil dependent countries like Nigeria, can become what is termed a “rentier state”, where rents are being paid by foreign actors and accrue directly to the State, and where only a few are engaged in the generation of this rent (wealth), the majority being only involved in the distribution or utilization of it (Ross, 2001: 329). In other words, a rentier State is a

State that lives from externally generated rents rather than the surplus production of the population. In oil-exporting states, this is measured by the percentage of natural resource rents in total government revenues (Karl, 2007: 2). Financially, the rentier State thus relies primarily on externally generated income, and becomes less dependent upon internal tax revenue, and may therefore be less inclined to ensure that
adequate macro- and micro-economic provisions are implemented in service of development. Thus, “[p]etrodollars simply permits more scope for cumulative policy errors” (Karl, 2007:2).

These two schools are appropriate for the analysis of the crisis in the Niger Delta as well as the issue of amnesty. It is instructive to note that the justification for a prolonged crisis in the Delta area is the visible state of underdevelopment as manifested in the absence of basic social amenities and facilities. To the people, the exploration of oil in their land is a curse rather than blessing. The more oil resources exploited, the more poverty it engender. The essence of the amnesty is to rid the region of armed conflict in order to allow smooth operations for the multinational oil companies and sustainability of peace in Niger Delta. Rents paid by these companies generate revenue for the national economy. Unfortunately, these companies remotely, encourage crisis situation in the Niger Delta to pave the way for illegal oil bunkering that are sold at cheaper price at the international market (Abdusalami, 2009). For instance, Delta State Governor, Uduaghan, accused foreign oil companies operating in the Niger Delta of conniving with their home governments to promote oil bunkering (Abdusalami, 2009:51). According to him, the companies and their collaborators in the international community possess the technology for such activities.

The Niger Delta

The Niger Delta region is an irony and as a microcosm of the larger Nigerian commonwealth, it is

a contiguous region of contradiction and painful contrasts, where daily the issue of poverty and development, oil and power politics, inter-ethnic harmony and communal eruptions, wealth and its lack, and an awe-inspiring ring of nature’s flora and fauna coexist with the excesses of ecological waste and environmental degradation, all playing out on a daily basis a drama of life and certain painful death (Buhari, 2009).

Apart from this, it is a land of grim realities. Farming, the traditional source of livelihood of the people has become useless as a result of pollution by oil companies operating in the region. Frequent oil spills have destroyed the aquatic resources and the people were not adequately compensated for the acquired land (Odidi, 2009). In short, the land is bereft of development.

Yet, it is a region that harbours Nigeria’s 40 billion oil reserves (Watts, 2004; Eyinla and Ukpo, 2006). Oil and gas resources from the region provide 80 per cent of government revenue, 95 per cent of foreign exchange earnings and 96 per cent of export revenues (Ibori, 2009; Watts, 2004:5). It is home to 300 oilfields, 5,284 oil wells, ten oil and gas export terminals, 275 flow
stations, ten gas plants, and massive liquefied natural gas. In one word, the Niger Delta is the economic heartbeat of Nigeria. Niger Delta is one of the 20 major deltas in the world, and, perhaps, the richest in the world in terms of oil and gas reserves. In addition, the Niger Delta is the most populated of all the deltas; as a result, impacts on its delicate ecosystems affect millions of people. This peculiarity explains why environmental problems generate communal conflicts.

Geographically, the Niger Delta basin hosts the largest number of rivers and waterways. This feature makes the development of physical infrastructure challenging and capital intensive. An allied environmental fact is that a substantial part of the region is permanently waterlogged all year round. This geographic nature makes communication difficult, hazardous and expensive. The challenges of the area include oil conflict, minority rights and geo-strategic relations (Akinola. 2009). Unfortunately, government failure in addressing the problems has eroded public trust in policy thrusts aimed at ensuring a enduring legacy of peace.

Within the precinct of this natural obstacle is the endowment of rich opportunities. Prior to the discovery of oil, Niger Delta was an environment which supported substantial subsistence resources the population. There were medicinal herbs and barks, fish and shrimp, crabs and clams, wood for energy and shelter, as well as a stable soil for farming (Afinotan and Ojokoratu, 2009:194). It was the habitat for exotic wildlife such as the Delta elephant, the white crested monkey, the river hippopotamus, as well as a colorful array of exotic birds, crocodiles, turtles and alligators. The region also accounted for a large percentage of Nigeria’s commercial fisheries industry.

Oil prospecting activities in commercial quantities which started in Oloibiri in 1956 (Watts, 2004:6), has left a scare of problems in the area. Oil exploration is associated with environmental degradation such as destruction of vegetation, farmlands and human settlements to allow for seismic cutting lines (Afinotan and Ojokoratu, 2009:194). The aftermath of this is the proliferation of environmental hazards destruction of fish and some other aquatic life, both marine and freshwater around the prospecting sites. Noise pollution and vibration from seismographic blasting also affects buildings, fence walls, wooden bridges and access roads. There were no plans to rectify the impacts or to improve on the healthcare delivery system in the zone (Eyinla and Ukpo, 2006).

Further more, oil drilling operations pollute the underground water. While farming and fishing grounds were polluted by toxic waste materials. The discharged waste water from major
production terminals together as well as other contaminants often pollutes the environment during the process of oil refining. This is the tale of destruction and underdevelopment that characterize the Niger Delta region.

**Agitations for the Development of Niger Delta**

This grim reality of the problems in the region has attracted a long history of demands for redress. Prominent people in Niger Delta had mounted all kinds of resistance against what they perceived as oppression and injustice, which was the lot of Niger Delta population. In 1854, King William Dappa Pepple of Bonny confronted the government with the plight of the people in terms of their pitiable living conditions (Fagbadebo, 2009). At a time when Sir George Goldies made efforts to have a greater control of the palm oil resources, the people led by King Koko of Nembe declared the Akasa war as an expression of their determination to protect the rights of the people (Nnenyelike, 2009). In a similar vein, King Jaja of Opobo, Nana of Itsekiri, Oba of Benin, and many other monarchs in the Niger Delta have had cause to challenge the British Colonial government against the plight of the people of the area.

In 1946, Mukoro Mowoe, a member of the then Western Regional Assembly fought to draw the attention of government to the health hazards confronting the people of the then Warri Province (Darah, 1995:B2). Isaac Adaka Boro, in the early 1966, led a small group of Ijaw Nationals to declare the “Niger Delta Peoples Republic”. The underline factor that prompted the 12-day revolution was, according to Boro, oppression of the people of the Niger Delta (Darah, 1995:B2; Fawehinmi, 2004). To this end, in the *The Niger Delta Peoples Republic Declaration of Independence*, Boro stated among other things, that the action was essential “to give adequate protection to the Niger Delta people against aggressors” (Fawehinmi, 2004).

The late 1970s and early 1980s, witnessed the beginning of popular resistance and the call for “resource control” equitable distribution of oil resources (Watts, 2004:6). However, the charismatic leadership of Ken Saro-Wiwa and the 1990 Ogoni Bill of Rights, promoted by the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP), marked a watershed in the popular agitation against the consequences of oil development in the Niger Delta. In 1995, Saro-Wiwa, the founder of MOSOP as the organized body to champion the course of redressing the “political and socio-economic wrongs imposed on the Niger Delta people” (Fawehinmi, 2004), was killed along eight other Ogoni people by the military government (Watts, 2004:6). As Watts has rightly
noted, this action ignited a prairie fire of struggles by other oil-producing communities and a growing clamour for compensation across the nine oil-producing Niger Delta states. Apart from this, a wide-ranging pan-ethnic political movements and civil societies sprang up. The agitation by members of MOSO came up as an outrage of Ogoni people over the issues of marginalization and neglect by Shell Development Company with the Federal Government.

The Kaiama Declaration of 1998 was an uprising of the Ijaw Youths who resolved that all oil producing companies in the Niger Delta should vacate the region by December 1998. But in 2003, the resistance was infiltrated by youth-gangs who lost out in the political process. Thus, a rivalry clash among the gangs led to factionalisation and proliferation of armed groups who exploited the pent up anger in the region to advance the cause of Niger Delta (International Crisis Group, 2006:2-13). A new dimension was introduced in 2006 when the Movement for Emancipation of Niger Delta (MEND) emerged. Members of these groups deviated from the strategies of the previous leaders as they introduced cases of illegal bunkering, cultism, militancy, sea piracy, hijacking of vessels, hostage taking and kidnapping (International Crisis Group, 2006).

Failed Promises and the Scourge of Violence

In all these, successive governments have initiated seemingly laudable projects and measures to address the demands of the people. In 1957, the colonial administration set up Sir Henry Willinks Commission in response to the concern of ethnic minorities over their perceived slim chances of survival in the independent Nigeria. The Niger Delta Development Board Authority (NDDB) was constituted in 1959, through the supplementary Federal Government Gazette no 56 Vol.46. In 1979, the Niger Delta Basin Authority (NDBDA) was set up. The revenue Act of 1981 created a special fund for the oil producing areas. In 1989 Presidential Task Force for the Development of oil producing areas was put in place, while in 1992, Oil Mineral Producing Areas Development Committee (OMPADEC) emerged as another intervention agency to redress the problems in the Niger Delta. The failures of the previous bodies led to the establishment of the Niger Delta Commission came on stream (NDDC) in 2000.

Even at that, the problem of development in the Niger Delta persists. By 2006, the militant groups took up arms to forcefully drive home their demands for a constructive engagement rather than palliative measures in the area.
The Niger Delta Peace and Conflict Resolution Committee was instituted in 2007, while Technical Committee on Niger Delta was carved in 2008. The same 2008, Ministry of Niger Delta was created. As all these are done, huge amount of money are spent, yet no fruitful result is achieved. It is important to note that it is the resources from oil that Abuja the capital of Nigeria and other major cities in Nigeria were built and developed. Yet Niger Delta is left undeveloped. It is also from the resources from oil that the salaries of soldiers and traditional rulers are paid. It is from the money from the oil that the corrupt leaders use to pay their mistresses and foreign prostitutes. The truth is that successive administrations have paid lip service or done nothing to the situation. It is this prevalent state of affairs that stimulated the genuine demands for a redress, which later developed from peaceful to violent agitation, and most regrettably, its contamination with criminality which appears to have overwhelmed an unarguably justified agitation (Nnenyelike, 2009).

Generally, people of a particular state would have a measure of expectation and obligation from the government. The citizens’ view of the government determines the nature of support it would garner in prosecuting various policies. Where the people have the feelings of national pride, it will bolster the legitimacy of the government (Almond, et al, 2004: 46-47). A common sense of identity and national history binds the people and the government together in times of political upheavals. As such, the crises level in such state would be minimal and easy to manage because there is a common platform of orientation and expectation. However, in countries where development is in abeyance in the midst of plenty, sense of deprivation would engender instability and the inability of the government to muster national support.

The latter is prevalent in most developing countries, especially those with oil resources. Michael Ross has argued that “governments that fund themselves through oil revenues and have larger budgets are more likely to be authoritarian; governments that fund themselves through taxes and are relatively small are likely to become more democratic” (Ross, 2001: 335). In other words, “petrodollars actually sever the very link between people and their government” (Gary & Karl, 2003: 23). This assertion explains the situation in the Niger Delta. Unfortunately, the absence of truly democratic mechanisms to engage the government in a meaningful dialogue compounds the problem as both the government and the people do not share any common ground whereby mutual obligations could be realised. Thus, the lack of fully functional democratic system has stiffles demand for accountability or representation in governance. When democratic strategies failed, the only option left foe the people was violence. It is axiomatic for the people to expect the state to perform certain functions or deliver certain services. Evidently,
this is the yearnings of the people of the Niger Delta, who live in areas where oil is being extracted. They feel they deserve a share in the profits, even if this only takes the form of compensation for lost land or environmental damages.

In fact, this paper holds that granting pardon to the “repentant militants” is an admission of government failure and guilt. The Speaker of the House of Representatives, Dimeji Bankole alludes to this when he said:

If we are to be honest with ourselves, we have not been fair to the Niger Delta… The Niger Delta has been producing the funds with which we have been running this country for so many years. The funds we used to build Abuja … those lovely roads and bridges and offices came from the funds from the Niger Delta. I have not seen such bridges and roads in the Niger Delta…Until those roads and infrastructure comes to the Niger Delta,…we will continue to put the request on the front burner of the Nigerian politics (Buhari, 2009).

Despite huge revenues from oil in recent years, corruption and mismanagement remain a major cause of Nigeria's failure to make meaningful progress in improving the lot of ordinary Nigerians. These financial factors are closely entwined with the rampant political violence in Nigeria. Public revenues are not only stolen and misused, but often pay for the services and weapons behind the political violence. Because violence and corruption make political competition a very expensive endeavor in Nigeria, many politicians are far more accountable to powerful and violent political godfathers who sponsor them than they are to their constituents (Human Rights Watch, 2007a).

Apart from engendering crisis situation in the Niger Delta, corruption has drained the national economy. For instance, some western diplomats estimated that Nigeria lost a minimum average of $4 billion to $8 billion per year to corruption over the eight years of the Obasanjo administration (Human Rights Watch, 2007a). The figure equal between 4.25% and 9.5% of Nigeria's total GDP in 2006. Thus, systemic corruption has denied the people of the Niger Delta the benefit of resources in their domain. In Rivers State, the largest oil producer and the wealthiest state in the nation, both the state and local governments have failed to make meaningful improvements in the state's badly dilapidated primary health and education sectors in recent years despite per capita spending far in excess of many West African countries at the state level alone (Human Rights Watch, 2007b). Instead, an unprecedented influx of revenue into state and local government coffers has been squandered or stolen. The situation in Rivers is the general pattern of governance in Nigeria. The federal government earned an estimated $223
billion during the eight years of Obasanjo administration alone. Yet, between 50 and 90 million Nigerians out of the estimated 130 million live on less than one US dollar a day and per capita income stands at one-third the level it had reached in 1980 (Human Rights Watch, 2007a). Nigeria has the world's second-highest number of maternal deaths each year after India; one in five Nigerian children die before the age of five, many from easily preventable diseases.

In the 2008 ranking of the the Human Poverty Index for developing countries (HPI-1), Nigeria ranks 80th among 108 developing countries for which the index was conducted with the HPI-1 value of 37.3 (UNDP Report, 2008). The HPI-1 focuses on the proportion of people below a threshold level in the same dimensions of human development as the human development index - living a long and healthy life, having access to education, and a decent standard of living. Nigeria also has some of the worst socio-economic indicators in the world, and the link between violence and corruption reflects vividly across all facets of Nigerian society (Human Rights Watch, 2007a).

Amnesty and the Promise of Development in Niger Delta

The scourge of restiveness in the Niger Delta coupled with military option of the Federal Government had its effects on the socio-economic and political environment. Domestically, the impact of the insurgency and the resultant reactions of the federal government endangered peace and retarded economic growth. In actual fact, since the resurgence of the crisis in 2006, attacks on oil installations alone had shut in one million barrels of crude oil per day (Businessday, 2009).

Thus, since military action compounded the crisis situation, a conciliatory measure was expedient. Amnesty therefore, is a conciliatory position of the government to “pardon” the militants and reintegrate them back into the larger society. Simply put, amnesty connotes a legislative or executive act that seeks to restore people who might have been found guilty of offences against the state. Section 175(1-3) of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999, empowers the President to “grant any person concerned with or convicted of any offence created by an act of the National Assembly a pardon, either free or subject to lawful conditions”. In exercising such power, the President is expected to consult with the Council of State. Thus, on June 25, 2009, President Umaru Yar’ Adua presented a 60-day amnesty programme for militants in the region to surrender their weapons in exchange for monetary rewards (Sarki, 2009). The programme, essentially, was meant to ensure that the region is free from armed militants.
Will amnesty promote development in the Niger Delta? In other words, is it appropriate to attribute the parlous state of development in the Niger Delta to the insurgent activities of militant groups? What are the factors that were responsible for the failure of past measures? For one, the region is a casualty of the oil economy and an epitaph of resource curse. General Oladayo Popoola Presidential Committee on Development Options for the Niger Delta in March 1999 provided a clue into the recurring crisis in the region. The Committee in its findings discovered that “substantial amounts of resources have been invested in the Niger Delta but without commensurate results” (Report of the Presidential Committee, 1999). The point here is that the crisis in the area has nothing to do with the unavailability of resources to fix the problem but absence of good governance. Thus, it is instructive to state here that the issue of amnesty is not the solution to the problem of the area.

In its report to the then military Head of State, General Abdusalami Abubakar, the Committee did not absolve the Federal Government from complicity in the underdevelopment of the region. Rather, it indicted all levels of government “the communities and other stakeholders in the area…for the unfortunate situation we have in the Niger Delta” (Report of the Presidential Committee, 1999: VII). The Committee therefore recommended both the long-term and short term measures to redress the parlous state of development in the area. The high point of the recommendations is the need for a 20-year regional Master plan for Niger Delta. The essence of this plan is to ensure a comprehensive development plan for the entire region. This is the core requirement for any meaningful resolution of the crisis of development in the region. The Niger Delta Technical Committee (NDTC) also offered some far reaching measures capable ending violent agitation in the area. In fact, the offer of amnesty was one of the recommendations of the NDTC.

These recommendations are not novel. The Popoola Committee noted that successive administrations in Nigeria even prior to the discovery of oil, had taken series of measure to deal with the level of underdevelopment of the area. Nevertheless, each of the interventionist measures had woefully failed to produce the desired results…the non-performance of these government organs were mainly due to administrative failures (Report of the Presidential Committee, 1999:6).

One can discuss the probable problems that are likely to confront this amnesty measure from this point of administrative failure. The Nigerian state possesses a character that induces
systemic failure (Ibaba, 2008). The State as the organizational instrument of society is essentially meant to provide the government with the necessary cohesive factor and maintains its unity of existence (Oyovbaire, 1980:3). Thus, political power is exercised through the State, and it is therefore the object of political competition (Ibaba, 2008:21). The chief role of the State is the maintenance of social and political order in society.

The liberal and the Marxist scholars differ on whose interest the State represents. To the liberal school, the State is neutral in the exercise of power, and therefore, it does not promote one interest against the other (Ibaba, 2008:21). This view refutes the contention of the Marxist school that the State is an instrument that promotes the interest of the ruling class. Thus, the Marxist contends that the State favours the interest of those who govern. To this end, the responsibility of the state is to protect and exhibits what the ruling class want at every particular time irrespective of the policy.

Scholars have dissected the character of the Nigerian state and conclude that it is largely privatized (Ake, 2001; Ekekwe, 1986; Nnoli, 1980; Oyovbaire 1980; Aaron 2006). Here, politics is seen as a means of accumulating wealth; and because the state is the object of political competition and medium for the allocation of resources, it has been effectively used to achieve the goal of primitive accumulation of wealth. The result is the privatization of the state by the ruling class and its consequent utilisation for the pursuit of individual, sectional and ethnic interests; as against the pursuit of the common interests or the public good.

This privatization project occupies the centre stage of governance and manifest in the prevalence of systemic corruption (Fagbadebo, 2007). The outcome is the series of failures that characterise various policies including those for the resolution of the Niger Delta crisis. As Micheal Watts has noted, staggering corruption and deepening social inequalities aggravate local resentment in the Niger Delta (Watts, 2004:6). If this character continues, will this amnesty work? Is this not another opportunity for the ruling class to consolidate their power especially when 2011 general elections approach? A group of non-violent agitators in the Niger Delta has said that the amnesty was meant for “politicians who are bent on using the former warlords to prosecute their political ambition in the next general elections” (O’Neil, 2009:9). One cannot wish away this position because the latest violent agitations by many of the militants was a direct consequence of politics rather that genuine desire for the emancipation of the people of the Niger
Delta. Chris Albin - Lackey of the Human Rights Watch had in 2007, accused the ruling class in Nigeria of engendering the proliferation of militants. According to him,

Government corruption...actively fuelled conflict in the Niger Delta because federal authorities turned a blind eye to the efforts of the Delta politicians to arm criminal gangs to help them rig the 2003 elections (Albin-Lackey, 2007).

In spite of this pessimistic submission, there exist windows of opportunities to utilise this amnesty as a spring board for the development of the Niger Delta. The implementation of the recommendation of Popoola Committee as well as the position of the Niger Delta Technical Committee would go a long way in ensuring an end to the crisis of development in the region. The amnesty programme is planned to fail. It deals with pardon for the militants who would be willing tools in the hands of politicians in 2011 for the prosecution of their political ambitions. There is the need for capacity building and constructive engagement of the demobilized militants. The failure in this regard has begin to manifest, for instance, in Ondo state, the “repentant” militants who were supposed to be at the rehabilitation camp had deserted the place because, according to the Chairman of the Ijaw - speaking Ese- Odo local Government, no rehabilitation was taking place in Ondo state.

I have said it before that the Federal Government must demonstrate seriousness in handling the repentant militants. I see these boys roaming about. I see them in the market. I see them on the streets but this time, without their guns. The residents of the community in which they live are now living in fear. I am not trying to be an alarmist but the Federal Government should be more proactive in setting in motion activities already earmarked to engage the youths in productive venture. The amnesty programme was hurriedly put together, if not, by now, the boys would have been taken away from the streets. They should have taken them directly from the creeks and integrate them into the society immediately (Bello, Ebiri and Etim, 2009).

**Conclusion**

The parlous state of the living condition of the people in the Niger Delta is obvious. Scholars and researchers, at different times and fora, have described the region as a theatre of irony and paradox. There is extreme poverty in the midst of abundant natural mineral resources. To worsen the matter, political leaders in the region live in affluence, presiding over impoverished people. The riches of the leaders are proceeds from public funds they diverted for the promotion of their private interests. This situation has created credibility problem for the
leaders as the youths no longer trust them. Thus, the people have no other option than to resort to self help through armed struggle. Ibaba says that

The implication of corruption is the exacerbation of the material deprivations that have thrown up the conflicts and violence and the resultant militancy. Because the investment of resources in the people comes into conflict with the selfish interests of the leaders they choose to neglect the people, and thereby sustain militancy (Ibaba, 2008:29).

The leaders have demonstrated what Damieari van Kemedi (2003:138) called “profitability of corruption.” The more the resources were allocated for the development of the area, the more the leaders engaged in monumental lootings thereby engendering, conspicuously, poverty, unemployment and absence of basic social amenities.

It is obvious, therefore, that the crisis in the Niger Delta is beyond the issue of amnesty. Militant activities in the Niger Delta were not responsible for the years of neglect, marginalisation and mismanagement of the resources by all the levels of government. The privatisation of the Nigerian State is the real problem behind the failure of policy that characterizes previous measures to redress the problem in the Niger Delta. This paper therefore subscribes to the position of the Niger Delta Technical Committee (NDTC) that issues of governance and the rule of law, socio-economic and human development are the primary solutions for a sustainable peace in the Niger Delta region.

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