

YOUTH ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT AND POVERTY REDUCTION IN WEST AFRICA (REFERENCE TO THE AMNESTY PROGRAMME IN THE NIGER DELTA)

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Abstract

The growth of an economy needs to have a great impact on the citizens of that economy and thus help reduce poverty which is one of the main purposes of the millennium development goals. Nigeria has one of the largest populations in Africa and regarded as wealthy in terms of natural resources but with high levels of poverty. The government in their effort applied many policies in eradicating poverty through many empowerment programmes. This study attempts to examine if the empowerment programmes implemented by the government really helped in reducing poverty with focus on the youth who are the future of the economy. Focus was laid on the Amnesty Programme implemented to empower the youth in the Niger-Delta, highlighting the financial commitment of the programme and challenges encountered. The study uses the qualitative research approach which was exploratory and

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descriptive in nature with information leading to deduction of conclusions derived from journals, books and previous papers. It was realized that the Amnesty programme has helped to prevent the militant youths from their bad deeds and succeeded in equipping them with technical training in various fields of endeavour. It was also concluded that there has been a lavish expenditure on the programme but still encounter many challenges such as unpaid or irregular payment of allowances to beneficiaries, inappropriate training provision, and limited employment prospects and so on. The challenges hinder the achievement of the expected goals and thus do not yield any effective result in reducing poverty. The study recommends that The Federal government should provide funds to the beneficiaries of the programme to establish their own businesses or provide them with job opportunities since unemployment of the graduates can push them back to the creek.

Keywords: youth economic empowerment; poverty reduction; West Africa; Niger Delta.

JEL Classification: I25, I32

Introduction

Economic growth needs to have a greater impact on poverty reduction if the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are to be met and the effects of the multiple global crises overcome. Poverty connotes a condition of human deprivation or denial with respect to the basic necessities of life: food, shelter, and clothing. It is a symptom of embedded structural imbalance, which manifests in all domains of human existence (Hamdok, 1999). The author also believes that poverty is highly correlated with social exclusion, marginalization, vulnerability, powerlessness, isolation, and deprivation. In Nigeria, the pandemic of poverty is under-grinded by multifarious manifestations and dimensions. A major trajectory of some of these manifestations according to Afigbo (1989) and Mashi (2009) are economic dependence, individual or family inability to provide for the basic needs of life, occasional or permanent joblessness, lack of individual or collective freedom, over-indebtedness, inability to own assets or save, access to land and credit facilities and vulnerability to food insecurity etc. From UNDP (2004), causes of poverty in Nigeria is associated with poor governance, corruption, lack of accountability in management of public affairs, gross violation of human rights,

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nepotism and skewed income distribution, poor infrastructure and impaired access to productive and financial assets especially by women and the vulnerable groups.

In response to the pervasiveness of poverty in the country, the Nigerian government over the last four decades have introduced several programmes, some of which were sector specific and others non-sector specific, with poverty reduction as its centre-piece. Additionally, several poverty reduction approaches have also been utilized in attempt to grapple with the beleaguered poverty situation of the country's citizens. Some of these bothers on economic growth approach, the basic needs approach, the rural development approach and the target group approach and a whole lot of others (Ogwumike, 2005). The problem of poverty is seemed to be often linked strongly with the issues of unemployment.

Unemployment is one of the major challenges faced by young Nigerians. In 2006, the National

Census reported the country's total population to be constituted by about 60% young people and children under the age of 25. According to the 2007 General Household Survey Report, the unemployment rate for youth aged between 15 and 24 was 30.7%. Further, 23 million out of 40 million unemployed youth are considered to be unemployable. This staggering statistic is often attributed to a weakening educational system including out-dated curricula, insufficient resources in schools and training institutions, and a lack of focus on training the youth in certain skills that are required by employers such as communication, leadership, and problem solving, as well as the ability to take initiative and professionalism. In 2008, the inactivity rate for youth aged 15 to 24 was 69.8% and 32.6% for youth aged 25 to 34.

The more disturbing fact is that rather than decrease, these problems have become increasingly complex and intractable in the last decade. The general out look of the country is reflected in the situation of the youth. According to the National Policy, Nigeria, youth comprises the age group between 15 and 35 inclusive and in the last population census constitute the largest proportion of the country's population; some of which are not educated while others are jobless. One might imagine what would happen to the future of the country if the main constituents of its population are facing economic hardship. These have also led many of the youths of the country to stand out in a struggle to benefit from the oil wealth of the economy which is largely situated at the Niger Delta state of Nigeria. The youth thus formed militant groups that often-orchestrated violence in the industry and the country as a whole which effects oil production and other trade activities of individuals.

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The federal government in its efforts tries to calm the situation by instituting the Amnesty Programme aimed at empowering the youth to give end to their actions and thus establish peace. It is therefore the desire of the study to examine how far the government has come with this empowerment programme and how best the programme has helped in economic improvement and hence reducing poverty in the country.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

1. To examine the impact of economic youth empowerment (Amnesty Programme) on poverty reduction.
2. To determine the extent to which the Amnesty Programme has addressed the Niger-Delta conflict and highlight the financial commitment of the federal government to the programme.
3. Identify the challenges and critique of the Amnesty youth economic empowerment programme and come up with some possible solutions
- 4.

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Economic Empowerment

Economic empowerment is the capacity of individuals to exercise control over their livelihoods through their ability to make choices on what productive activities to engage and invest in, to decide how and when to engage in markets and to influence the terms on which they do so. Governments and development partners can play an important role in helping strengthen economic empowerment. They can do this through economic and social infrastructure investments and regulatory measures for decent work (paid and unpaid) through cash transfers and other social protection measures; through policies and programmes for people in poverty to gain access to and control assets, both individual and collective; and through making markets work for people in poverty. Economic youth empowerment can therefore be referred to as a way of equipping the youth through many economic policies and programmes to provide for themselves and thus reducing youth unemployment and social vices inducing a reduction in poverty.

2.2 Conceptual Issues of Poverty

There is no externally fixed poverty standard applicable to all social circumstances. This means that one can hardly find an unambiguous and a universally acceptable definition of poverty.

Because the phenomenon is situational, one can only meaningfully explain it in the context of the historical setting and prevailing circumstances of a particular society. And because poverty is multidimensional in meaning, magnitude and scale, we can also understand it from economic and sociopsychological dimensions. From the economic perspective, poverty can be viewed as a situation of low income and/or low consumption. This approach has often been used for constructing poverty – line; line which represents the values of income or consumption necessary to purchase the minimum standard of nutrition and other necessities of life (Obadan, 1997). Going by this definition, people are said to be poor when their measured standard of living, calculated in terms of their incomes or their consumption patterns, fall below the poverty - line. The poverty - line, according to Adams (2004) is an imaginary index that is used to separate the poor - those who cannot afford the basic necessities of life from the non-poor - those who can afford the basic needs of life such adequate healthcare, good nutrition, education, etc. From a socio-psychological perspective, poverty is seen in terms of deprivation, lack of access to property such as land, inadequate medical facilities, poor living conditions, lack of access to educational facilities, and the inability to realize one’s potentials and aspirations. Thus, people here are classified as poor if they cannot afford the basic needs of life; are not employed, dwell in poor living conditions, are illiterate, are lacking in adequate healthcare and social amenities that can give them decent living.

2.4 The Concept of the Amnesty Programme in Nigeria

Armed groups, many affiliated to the Niger Delta-wide political organization MEND, the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta, proliferated throughout the oil producing states, particularly from early 2006 onwards. In January 2006, MEND declared war on the oil industry pending the resolution of long term political grievances relating to poverty and underdevelopment, the poor regulation of an environmentally polluting oil industry, and the alienation of local people from rights to land and resources in the Niger Delta. Attacks on oil industry infrastructure, the kidnapping of expatriate oil company personnel and the illicit tapping and sale of crude oil became stocks in trade of armed militia, many with political as well as pecuniary objectives. Their actions significantly dented the Nigerian government revenue base, which relies on oil and gas sales for some 90 percent of its foreign exchange earnings. Some estimates point to losses of 100 billion dollars to the Nigerian treasury between 2003 and 2008 as a result of

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conflicts. By April 2009, crude oil exports had fallen to 1.6 million barrels per day (bpd) in March 2009, down from 2.6 million in 2006, in April 2009 the idea of an amnesty for armed ‘militants’ was first mooted by the late Nigerian President Umaru Musa Yar’Adua in power since May 2007, but met with a less than positive response from most militant quarters. It was followed up in May 2009 by a full scale aerial military bombardment of Gbaramatu and Escravos in Delta state, a key militant stronghold and close to offloading platforms of Shell and Chevron. The attack left up to 1,000 people dead, most of them ordinary civilians and many more injured or rendered refugees.

The Background of Amnesty

Neutralizing the nuisance capacity of MEND and its many affiliates, by paying them off, was the principal target of the amnesty deal. The dramatic emergence of MEND in 2005 had changed the character, cohesion and effectiveness of what had been a fragmented set of armed attacks on the oil industry. MEND-an organization with its main support drawn from the Ijaw ethnic group provided the possibility for greater horizontal cohesion. This was done across the variety of affiliated youth militia groups and secret cults / gangs, operating throughout towns and villages in the oil producing states of the Niger Delta, with a multitude of aims and ambitions, since the late

1990s. Whilst initially explicitly political in orientation (MEND’s first statements called for the release of two high profile Ijaw political figures, imprisoned towards the end of 2005, the former governor of Bayelsa State, Diepreye Alamiyeseigha and Alhaji Asari Dokubo, the former militant leader of the Niger Delta People’s Volunteer Force/Service), many of its affiliates and what became known as simply ‘militants’ or ‘warlords’ were less so. The scaling up in the efficacy of Delta wide militancy since 2006 was also facilitated by the dramatic expansion and accessibility of mobile telephony over inhospitable terrain, facilitated greater coordination amongst increasingly better funded and highly mobilized groups. The federated nature of MEND, whilst a source of strength, also meant the absence of a high command structure leaving it open to fragmentation and making negotiations difficult with the potential of exclusion of some and inclusion others.

2.4.2 What the Amnesty Programme Entails

In July 2009, a budget of N50-52 billion (\$145 million), later N68 billion was controversially announced for the Amnesty program intended for 20,192 registered

militants. The actual size of the budget was a constantly shifting target, with different amounts being quoted in the national and international press at different times and the subject of continuous upward revision. Exactly how the budget was to be spent, and the proportion which was to be allocated to monthly allowances versus the proportion allocated to a broader reintegration and rehabilitation package, was also unclear.

Over a 42 month period of training, reintegration and rehabilitation in government designated residential training centers, ex-repentant militants who registered were to receive monthly allowances of N65, 000 over the same period. This was three times the average salary for a young public sector worker in Nigeria but just a little higher than the foot soldier salary, which stood at 50,000 naira (US\$400) in 2006, and substantiates the claim that the amnesty was an attempt to replace an economy of violence with an economy of peace. This could only hold true if militant numbers were accurate. Yet the criteria used to establish eligibility for inclusion were also unclear, with the numbers of intended 'beneficiaries' widely believed to have been inflated.

Methodology

The approaches used in this study are qualitative research design. According to Creswell (2003), "qualitative procedures" stand in stark contrast to the methods of quantitative research. Qualitative inquiry uses different knowledge claims, strategies of inquiry, and methods of data collection and analysis. Although the process is similar, qualitative procedures rely on the text and image data, have unique steps in data analysis, and draw on diverse strategies of inquiry. The study in a bid to achieve its objectives adopted both exploratory and descriptive methods of design. The study also uses exploratory approach of design since it uses *literature search and case analysis* which are forms of exploratory design techniques.

Data collected for the study was from both primary and secondary sources. Primary source of data was collected through telephone interview conducted for the management of the programme in order to have an insight on the progress and challenges encountering the programme. Secondary source of data (information) was also obtained from internet, journals and other forms in completing the study.

Financial Commitment of the Federal Government to the Programme

Every empowerment programme aiming to the achievement of a complete success rightfully depends on the amount of money pumped into it. This subsection

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of the study therefore provides insight in to the financial commitment of the government to the Amnesty programme.

The proclamation of amnesty in the Niger-Delta by former President Yar’Adua, on 25 June 2009 received commendation from the National Council of States, which is the highest nation’s advisory body. The Nigerian government has demonstrated commitment to the programme through financial allocation to the programme, which amounts to N127 billion between 2009 and 2011. See table 1 below. The Ministry of Niger-Delta Affairs also got the sum of N181 billion during the same period (see Table 2).

Table 1: Budget Receipt by the Niger-Delta Amnesty Programme, 2009-2011

Year	Budget receipt (N)	Purpose
2009	30bn	Program take-off grant
2010	30bn	Feeding stipends and reintegration for ex-militants
2011	90bn	Feeding stipends and reintegration for ex-militants
Total	N127bn	

Source: Author’s compilation from media source

Table 2: Budget receipt by Ministry of Niger-Delta Affairs, 2009-2011

Year	Budget (N)
2009	97bn
2010	46bn
2011	39bn
Total	N181bn

Source: Author’s compilation from media source

Following the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration processes, including arms collection, oath of renunciation, presidential pardon, and registration for reintegration, the 60-day amnesty lapsed on 4 October 2009. A total of 26,358 ex-militants registered for the amnesty programme. As at 28 November 2012, 12,000 had been trained in different fields like pipeline welding and crane operations.

The Presidential Amnesty Office in Abuja also reported that 113 former militants had been offered employment in maritime, welding and fabrication companies at home and abroad. This is a pointer to the level of success recorded in the reintegration component of the amnesty programme. Sadly, however, the lavish expenditures on the amnesty programme have been described in the popular media as a 'political liability' to the Nigerian government. The year 2012 budget proposal allots a whopping \$450 million to the amnesty programme, which is more than what the government spends to deliver basic education to children. Table 3 shows the 2012 budget of N305 billion for projects execution in the Niger-Delta and running of its interventionist agencies.

Table 3: Federal government's budget for Niger-Delta for year 2012

Amount (N)	Purpose
N116.5 billion	South-south region-based federal projects (29.6%) of all regions
N54.89 billion	Statutory transfer to NDDC
N60 billion	Statutory transfer to Ministry of Niger Delta Affairs
N74 billion	Amnesty program for ex-militants

Source: Author's compilation from media source

On their parts, the South-South states also proposed to expend the sum of N1.7 trillion for year 2012. The six South-South states, in addition to the other oil producing states, namely: Abia, Imo and Ondo, make up the Niger-Delta. See table 4 below.

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Table 4: South-South States budget for year 2012

State	Population	Budget (N)
AkwaIbom	3.9m	397.1 bn
Bayelsa	1.7m	222bn
Cross River	2.8m	144.6bn
Delta	4.1m	383.39bn
Edo	3.2m	150.9bn

Source: Author's compilation from media source

Having envisaged the palpable lack of employment for all in the region, the Presidential Amnesty Office has also embarked on entrepreneurship scheme for ex-militants who have completed their training in various vocations in the entrepreneurship pilot scheme. As part of the reintegration component of the amnesty programme, the entrepreneurial scheme is intended to prepare beneficiaries for self-reliance. The scheme comprises a three-week intensive training, preparatory to start their businesses. It enables the beneficiaries create business outlets that are branded, and equipped with seed money. An interesting element of the entrepreneurial scheme is the 12-month monitoring and evaluation period. Within this period also, beneficiaries are expected to maintain log books and monthly reports at least to measure the growth in their choice business. To achieve proper funding and monitoring of the scheme, the Presidential Amnesty Office collaborates with banks. The scheme does not give cash to beneficiaries, it pays for business locations and equips the place with tools or items that would enable them operate their choices business.

Challenges of the Amnesty Programme

The Amnesty programme since its time of commencement was realized to have faced many problems and challenges in accomplishing its objectives successfully

and effectively. These are discussed by the study through observations, personal interviews and internet search.

Economy of peace still far-off

It was realized that there were challenges of allowances unpaid or not regularly paid, huge disparities between payment made to foot soldiers and former militant commanders, limited access to rehabilitation training and allowances for those who surrender weapons after the deadline, inappropriate training provision, limited employment prospects, the absence of a broader political settlement involving the boarder Niger Delta population that has born the cost of conflict, and the politically motivated staffing of bodies responsible for implementing and coordinating the amnesty programme; all these are among the numerous flaws of the Amnesty. These flaws have also been the subject of violence protest throughout the Niger Delta states and beyond, many accompanied by threats of resumption of attacks on the oil industry and on key Federal Institutions by disgruntled ex-militants. The highly politicized nature of the amnesty process, over which political personalities form the Niger Delta fight, has also meant that although the flaws are real enough, protest have also been deliberately orchestrated to political purpose.

Rehabilitation but no reintegration

There are questions that often remain unanswered about the usefulness of the rehabilitation program's skills training and career advice with wide spread complains that training falls short of expectations for high status internationally recognized qualifications that will equip former militants for employment opportunities on the production side of oil and gas industry.

Defective demobilization

It has also come to realization that during the 60 days demobilization and disarmament period, despite the spectacular displays orchestrated by the Rivers state and Bayelsa states governors, no independent verification of arms surrendered actually took place and many arms caches remain intact. Independent verification would have indicated provenance and may have raised more difficult questions about official suppliers. As in the past, arms for cash style pay offs may encourage further arms proliferation in a region of high porous badly policed borders. The possession of small arms continues to be common place throughout the Niger Delta and is linked in part to the poor regulation of oil and gas sector and the manner in

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which oil companies and politicians have for decades, armed youth groups to defend their interests. This has now backfire with devastating consequences on oil companies and the wider population. The decision to retain a sizable quantity of arms, in a context in which militants enjoyed little room for man oeuvre was a means of holding on to the tittle negotiation power they enjoyed, i.e. their ability to inflict damage on the oil industry.

Oil bunkering

Current estimates suggest the much expanded, but not new industry in stolen oil, is worth some 60 million USD / day. This includes small scale bunkering i.e. the illicit tapping of pipelines and wellheads for local refinement and sale, larger scale bunkering for sale to international partners, and the ‘legally lifted’ under invoiced oil that understates the amounts of oil actually lifted by faking bills of laden. Militant activity had provided an ‘enabling environment’ for this illicit activity, which had long been a feature of Nigeria’s oil economy, to thrive (though the scale of losses to the Nigerian treasury suggested it had got out of control – whose control?). The amnesty package, in targeting one layer of a highly intricate web, the ex-militants, has not even begun to tackle what is effectively a hornet’s nest. Whilst the oil theft trade has been reined in to some extent, it still continues. The chairman of the Amnesty panel, in May 2010, lamented losses of 1 million barrels per day since May 2009, costing the industry sources also note a sharp rise in bunkering the theft of industrial quantities of crude oil and illegal refining. In a speech in September 2012, the former Chairman of the Amnesty program, the Defense Minister, Rtd Major General Abbe, claimed that an amnesty for militants did not mean that the JTF would spare oil bunkers (as if militants could be separated out from oil bunkers as wheat from chaff). The amnesty in paying off militants, essentially took them out of the oil bunkering equation, giving the JTF, freer rein in controlling and policing access to the oil theft economy. Yet relying on the JTF to rein in the oil theft industry appears to overlook the role of the JTF in the oil bunkering business itself, and the centrality of oil bunkering to the conflicts between the JTF and armed groups in the Niger Delta.

Competing Notions of Security in the Niger Delta

The insurgency ‘situation’ sharpened and institutionalized long established heterodox forms of ‘security provision’ (or ‘protection’) by local youth to oil companies. War, insurgency and the militarization of youth groups were indeed an

attempt to use force to secure claims for the awarding of contracts to those designated by the leadership of the armed group in question, and to permit access to the lucrative illicit oil economy that they both afford. As stated in the official amnesty program website, among its desirable benefits was an increase in 'revenues accruing to the

Federation account', 'business activities and foreign direct investment'. Reinforcing the role of the

JTF was seen as the principal vehicle for guaranteeing security for the oil and gas sector. The amnesty was a confirmation of Nigeria's military supremacy over militants (as evidenced by the Gbaramatu adventure a month earlier), and of its desire to carve out its niche in security provision for the oil and gas sector.

Conclusions

It can be concluded from the study that the amnesty programme has succeeded in the prevention of youth militants from attacking the oil industry, kidnaping of expatriate's oil company personnel and tapping and selling crude oil from the stock. The programme has also succeeded in providing technical training to the youth as a form of economic empowerment through different forms to ensure proper means of livelihood for the beneficiaries. This has brought a relative peace to the oil industry of the country leading to the increased generation of revenue. The oil production index which is a good indicator of the Amnesty programme also gains an increment through the declaration of amnesty resulting in development in the region. Several criticisms and challenges of this empowerment, it does not purely eradicate poverty as expected. This means the federal government has a lot at hand to do.

It can further be concluded that the government is financially committed to successful implementation of the integration component of the programme. However there has been too lavish expenditure on the programme which is attributed to the dimension of political liability to the government.

The programme was also coupled with many challenges such as incomplete peace maintenance in the region. This is due to the challenges of allowances unpaid or not regularly paid, limited access to rehabilitation training and allowances, inappropriate training provision, limited employment prospects, the absence of a broader political settlement and politically staffing of the bodies responsible for implementing and coordinating the programme which have been subject of violence protest throughout the region (Niger Delta). Other important challenges

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hindering the programme included the problem of rehabilitation but no integration, defective demonization, oil bunkering and competing notions of security in the Niger Delta.

In general a successive and effective implementation of an economic empowerment programme would yield effective results but should be paid the much attention in its implementation else it might lead to waste of resources.

Recommendations

The Federal government should provide funds to the beneficiaries of the programme to establish their own businesses or provide them with job opportunities since unemployment of the graduates can push them back to the creeks. There should also be a fair selection of personnel constituting the bodies responsible for the programme to ensure non-political issues in the successful implementation of the programme.

A well research should be carried out in to the labour market to identify sectors of the economy especially the manufacturing sectors who needed more labour force so as to design training courses of the programme that suite such sectors for ease in employment.

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