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Ethnicity, Identity and the Amnesty Programme in Nigeria's Niger Delta Region

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Abstract

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) has since 1945 been making efforts to improve global well-being through cultural communication and integration. Nigeria, as a member of the establishment, is blessed with very rich and diverse cultural practices which are capable of enhancing the economy and thereby promoting the desired wellness of the populace. This desire however, is challenged by incessant crises in various regions of the country hampering the expected development. The Niger Delta Dunkirk, as a case, has been significant in crippling cultural activities and the economy of Nigeria. This paper evaluates the questions of ethnicity and identity in the region, and the introduction of the amnesty programme by the Nigerian government from 2009-2015 in an attempt to placate the restiveness within the oil-rich region. The study discusses the crisis within the context of the UNESCO definitions and policies in relation to

culture. Adopting Gurr's Relative Deprivation theory, the study provides relevant data to examine the causes, and measure the impact of the cataclysm on Nigeria's culture and economy. The paper concludes that perceived injustice occasioned by the lack of political will by the political class and the failure to clearly integrate the place of ethnicity in national policies account for the persistent crisis in the Niger Delta.

Keywords: Development, Ethnicity, Amnesty, UNESCO, Niger Delta, Culture

Introduction

The multiplicity of the world with respect to language, culture, ethnicity, community, state, country, religion, gender, race etc. creates the beauty and dynamism enjoyed and celebrated today. Thus, the existence of these diversities account for the joy of existence. This beauty in diversity also comes with its challenges which vary from the concept of racism, bigotry, tribalism, to extreme exhibitions of crises and wars in various parts of the world. The 2009 UNESCO framework for cultural statistics records that one hundred and ninety three (193) countries and seven (7) associate members are in this partnership. According to the framework, the main

objective of UNESCO is to promote peace and security through education, science, culture and communication for the purpose of justice, rule of law, human rights and fundamental freedom without racial, sexual, language or religious discrimination (UNESCO, 2009:ii). Nigeria seem to be lacking in not only peace and security, but also in justice, rule of law, human rights and fundamental freedom.

The country projected to become the 3rd most populous country in the world by 2030 is estimated to have over two hundred and fifty (250) ethnic groups and more than two hundred (200) languages and various religions, and described as the most populous African country (Pontianus and Oruonye 136, Ingiabuna and Uzobo 89). Faced with intertribal, religious and political upheavals, the country keeps nose-diving into political anarchy, economic recession, abject poverty, and is currently faced with secessionist cries. These account for the earlier projection by analysts that Nigeria as a country may not last beyond 2015. While Nigeria has lived beyond 2015, scepticism over the survival of Nigeria for longer years keeps increasing due to the religious and political tensions in which the country is sub-merged. The Boko Haram insurgency, the rampaging Fulani herdsmen, the demands of the Movement for the Actualisation of the Sovereign State of Biafra

(MASSOB), the activities of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), the Niger Delta militancy, the inter-tribal and communal crises within various states of the country account for the fears. There is therefore the need to understand the ideology behind the struggle, which militates against the success of the UNESCO programmes in the Niger Delta region.

The intention of UNESCO to establish a regional 'multisectoral' office in Abuja, the capital of Nigeria was suspended due to the bomb blast of 26th August, 2011 at the UN office in Abuja (UNESCO, 2014: ii). Nigeria has witnessed several other violent protests and agitations beyond the Abuja blast. The state of insecurity is detrimental to cultural preservation and the attainment of UNESCO's development goals in the country. This study thus becomes imperative to mediate the place of amnesty in the attempt to palliate the restive environment. It analyses the implication and functionality of the 2009 UNESCO framework for cultural statistics in Nigeria and examines the challenges that insecurity in Nigeria poses to the attainment of sustainable development goals. The paper emphasises the correlation between Drama/Theatre Arts and policy-making/implementation towards achieving development objectives, and suggests way forward in an attempt to checkmate

unresolved setbacks within the Niger Delta (and other related crises) as enumerated in the study.

Methodology

This study adopts purposive sampling as the method of data collection and the qualitative research method as the method of data analysis. It focuses on the crises within the Niger Delta region of Nigeria which is in tune with the 2009 UNESCO framework, and the UNESCO and Nigeria cultural policies. While there is a plethora of crises of various degrees and nature, the dispute over oil deposits and distribution of oil products will be the concern of the paper. Qualitatively, the study is based on participant observation, interviews, data acquired from reliable organisations, libraries, archives, and other printed materials relevant to the research argument. These materials are used to substantiate the evaluation. Quantitative data extracted from relevant materials are also considered.

Theoretical Framework

Ted Robert Gurr's Relative Deprivation (RD) theory serves as the theoretical base for analysis. Gurr's RD theory expatiates the implications of globalisation and the

quest for a unified system in the world economy and politics as championed by Western political and economic ideologies. These have led to the truncation and subversion of some cultures, systems, and religions. The prevalent forceful destabilisation of communal wills, aspirations and other idiosyncrasies of tribes, ethnic groups, and religions by successive Nigerian governments gave birth to oppositions, protests and revolutions, hence armed struggles in the Niger Delta. Gurr (1970: 23, 125) describes Relative Deprivation (RD) as 'the tension that develops from a discrepancy between the "ought" and the "is" of collective value satisfaction, and this disposes men to violence' and concludes that 'the benefit of one group is an automatic loss for all the others'. His assertion aptly explains the reasons behind so me of the agitations, protests and crises witnessed in Nigeria, and precisely, the Niger Delta region. Richard Schaefer in a similar view avers that Relative Deprivation is 'The conscious experience of a negative discrepancy between legitimate expectations and present realities' (Schaefer 2007: 69). This paper focuses on the 'negative discrepancy' and 'present realities' in the Niger Delta region with regards to the 2009 UNESCO framework, but may use other regions and situations,

in and outside Nigeria to buttress points where necessary.

Ethnicity, Identity, and Cultural Heritage: The UNESCO Perspective

Ethnicity and identity remain key factors in the sociological understanding of a people, their behaviour and their environment. Defining these attributes is so complex that it encompasses all aspects of the being and the culture of a people. According to Isajiw (1993:14), ethnicity 'is a social-psychological process which gives an individual a sense of belonging and identity'. This brings us to the issue of identity. In Isajiw's position, 'identity can be defined as a manner in which persons, on account of their ethnic origin, locate themselves psychologically in relation to one or more social system, and in which they perceive others as locating them in relation to those system...Behaviour according to cultural patterns is thus an expression of identity and can be studied as an indication of its character' (Isajiw 1993:14). Identity is therefore an aspect of ethnicity while ethnicity is an attribute of culture.

As affirmed by the then Director General of UNESCO, Koichiro Matsuura, the 2001 UNESCO Declaration on Cultural Diversity which is a response to the 9/11 terrorist attack in the United States 'raises cultural diversity to the level of "the common heritage of humanity", "as necessary for humankind as biodiversity is for

nature" and makes its defence an ethical imperative indissociable from respect for the dignity of the individual' (UNESCO 2002:3). The declaration as observed in the 2009 UNESCO Framework for Cultural Statistics (UNESCO 2009:18) states that cultural diversity should be considered as the peculiar "spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional" attributes of a people or group. It is the totality of their arts, ways of life and communality, values and belief system. Culture, in this view, is therefore the totality of a collective relatedness of a people which translates into actions and reactions in response to nature, daily existence and their survival. An attempt on their culture could thus be interpreted as a threat to the people's wellbeing and survival.

Culture, in UNESCO's perspective, also comprises ethnicity and identity. Cultural heritage 'includes artefacts, monuments, and groups of buildings and sites that have a diversity of values including symbolic, historic, artistic, aesthetic, ethnological or anthropological, scientific and social significance' (UNESCO 2009: 26). It is also categorised under UNESCO as (a) the tangible cultural heritage and (b) the

intangible cultural heritage. According to the UNESCO report, the term 'cultural heritage' has greatly changed in recent times due to the instruments developed by the organization. The tangible cultural heritage (TCH) includes buildings and historic places, artefacts, archaeology, architecture, monuments, science and technology and the related physical aspect of definite culture.

Cultural heritage transcends the physical to accommodate the intangible cultural heritage (ICH). This refers to all 'that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognise as part of their cultural heritage' (UNESCO 2009:28). It is 'traditional and living at the same time...constantly recreated by communities and groups in response to their environment, their interaction with nature and their history, and provides them with a sense of identity and continuity' and all the 'traditions or living expressions inherited from our ancestors and passed on to our descendants' (UNESCO 2009:28). These are the social practices, festive events, rituals, oral traditions, performing arts etc. The tangible and intangible cultural heritage account for cultural groupings. But within the cultural groupings, we find smaller units with little or greater variations most often found in the intangible cultural heritage such as languages and rituals. These variations account for their ethnicity and identity which is further slightly differentiated by distinctions like pronunciations, articulations and their general parlance.

The People of Niger Delta and Contemporary Realities

The Niger Delta region is occupied by various ethnic groups in Nigeria. Francis, Lapin, and Rossiasco (2011:12) note that the 'population is also extremely heterogeneous, with approximately forty different ethnic groups speaking 120 mutually unintelligible languages and dialects' with various cultures of similar attributes. The Efik/Ibibios, the Ijaws, the Urobos, the Igbos, and others are all entangled in this economic grouping. The tangible heritage that connects the people of the Niger Delta region of Nigeria often referred to as the South-South (Imo, Abia Ondo states excluded), is mostly if not entirely the economy. This includes boat and hat making, raffia works, fishing and other agricultural engagements. But in contemporary times, the oil and gas deposits within the region have been added to their heritage which is now a key contributor to the restiveness within the Niger Delta.

The intangible heritage of the different states that make up the Niger Delta cannot be generalized. Each of the states have varied ancestral history, rituals and

arts performances. This is where the issue of ethnicity comes up, and within the ethnic groups one can still find the language identity. Each of the Niger Delta states (especially South-South of Nigeria) have more than five different languages. Though some of these states share common festivals which account for their closer rapport, they are intrinsically far from being similar in the discourse of identity and self-assertion.

Some of the rituals and festivals celebrated in this region as published by Nigerian Bulletin online include the Ekpe Masquerade festival found among the Efiks/Ibibios of Cross River and Akwa Ibom States, and some parts of Abia state of the South-Eastern region. The festival, which is exclusively for men, links the people to/with their ancestral heritage. Members of the Ekpe Masquerade cult are seen as the messengers of the ancestors (ikaan) and bear the onus of paying tribute to these ancestors on behalf of the entire village or community. Another festival in the region is Ukwatta festival. This festival is associated with the people of Abbi in Delta State of the South-South Nigeria. It is an annual festival that marks the end of the farming activities and it also ushers in another farming year. The festival showcases masquerade performances, local dance, reunions between the travelled and those at home. It is a festival of thanksgiving to ancestors and prayer for their blessings in the forthcoming farming season.

There is also the Adane-Okpe festival which is a commemoration of the four founders of Okpe kingdom; Esezi, Eubreke, Orhoro, and Orhue who migrated from

ancient Benin kingdom. It is a yearly event which holds in Orerokpe regarded as the ancestral abode of the Okpe people. The Ine/Ekansu festival is a celebration of war and peace among the people of Asaba in Delta state. It is a five-day festival that features war dances, and re-enactment of old battles fought and won by the people. In Rivers State, the Ikwere, kalabari, Okrika communities celebrate a certain festival to honour water spirits in their region. It is an annual festival that features masquerades with headdresses like those of fishes and birds. The priest of the deity opens the occasion with divination, then ritual sacrifices are made before the songs and dances to make the event colourful. But a shared culture in this region is the agricultural practices such as fishing and farming in all the states.

These festivals and the accompanying activities are reflections of their cultural heritage and serve as means of social coercion and oneness. The fanfare creates opportunity for cultural exchange and marketing of their heritage to the world. It is noteworthy to point out that despite the fact that this different people are grouped under same ethnicity, geographical zone, political unit, when it comes to rituals and festivals, distinctive variances still exist among them. This is because genealogically, the different villages are believed to be birthed by two or more siblings of the same parents. This accounts for the preferences or more emphases laid on particular ancestors or deities by these communities. All these festivals while reflecting communal heritage and intercultural relatedness also express the diversities and identities that separate and classify them into smaller albeit closely knitted entities. These little but very strong identities account for most of the internecine wars and communal clashes often experienced within the region. It is also a major cause of disagreements and feelings of exclusion when individuals from the different states of Niger Delta are not represented in political and economic decisions in Nigeria.

Also, the creation of states and local government areas and other forms of balkanizing societies into fragments for political convenience have also been a great catalyst in the dissensions and suspicions developed within the region and among other once united groups of people in the country. In the quest for people in the boundary communities to acquire more land for agricultural purposes, often trespass government established borderlines because they perceive that such borderlines were established unjustly. The Premium Times newspaper of June 25, 2016 published the communal clash between Cross River State and Ebonyi State. In the article titled Eight Feared Dead as Neighbouring Communities Clash in Cross River, Ebonyi, it was observed that 'some women from Ochienyim went to

harvest cassava in their farms when unknown persons suspected to be from Adadama attacked them'. The possible cause of such attack could be hinged on a belief that the said piece of land is a part of their ancestral heritage which the contemporary government deprived them of, and as such, they attack to deter future trespassers.

Another major factor contributing to violence in the Niger Delta region is elections. The huge gap between the rich and the poor, the rulers and the ruled, hunger, hopelessness and desperation that characterise almost all the communities in the region is habitually exploited by the political elites. This has made elections a do-or-die affair in the region with the aim of installing corrupt politicians likely to share their loots with some selected few from the masses. The Human Rights Watch observes that in early April 2003, there was a crisis in Bassambiri between Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) and United Nigeria Peoples Party (UNPP) members. This was caused by some PDP members who fled the community earlier but tried to force themselves back into the community a few days before elections. Nigerian politicians often incite the youths and provide them with arms in their desperation to win political seats and have access to plunder the national wealth.

Irrespective of the different identities and ethnicities, the people nevertheless, unite in a common front under the auspices of the Niger Delta to fight against their perceived collective 'enemies'. This is exemplified in their struggle against successive Nigerian government's denial of their economic rights, perpetuated in connivance with few treacherous indigenes. These are the major factors responsible for the slow and poor development in the Niger Delta despite the huge human and material resources latent in the region.

Niger Delta and the Amnesty Programme

Nigeria from inception (independence) appears to be engulfed in ethnic struggles and subjugations, inter-tribal conflicts, socio-economic and political 'muscle flexing', and other forms of agitations and protests. These account for the several coups and the Nigeria-Biafra war. Some analysts believe that Nigeria never learned from the war and is yet to enthrone justice in the system. As such, the country continues to face avoidable agitations from different groups. Fund For Peace (FFP), a Non-Governmental Organisation in pursuit of world peace and security ranks Nigeria 12th amongst 178 countries in the global Fragile States Index (FSI) of 2021. The Niger Delta is deemed to be responsible for more than 70% of the national

wealth accounts for about 30% of this state of fragility. For more than a decade, the region has been plagued with chaos, armed struggles, violence and anarchy in the quest to regain their 'deprived' natural inheritance and also to get a balanced compensation for the damages caused by oil exploration in their land.

According to the UNESCO Declaration on Cultural Diversity (UNESCO 2002:10), 'Development without participation is doomed to failure'. Expatiating further, the declaration points out that 'without enlisting the enthusiasm of the world's poorer and weaker groups in the task of their own empowerment, and without making space for their own ideas about freedom, dignity and power, the work of development becomes another exercise in the imposition of power upon the weak'. This pretext seems to be the justification for the extent of vandalism of pipelines and disruption of oil exploration by indigent youths in the Niger Delta area of Nigeria. As generated from figures provided in the Nigeria National Petroleum Corporation's (NNPC) yearly publications (2009-2015), the table below explains the impact of militancy in the nation's economy:

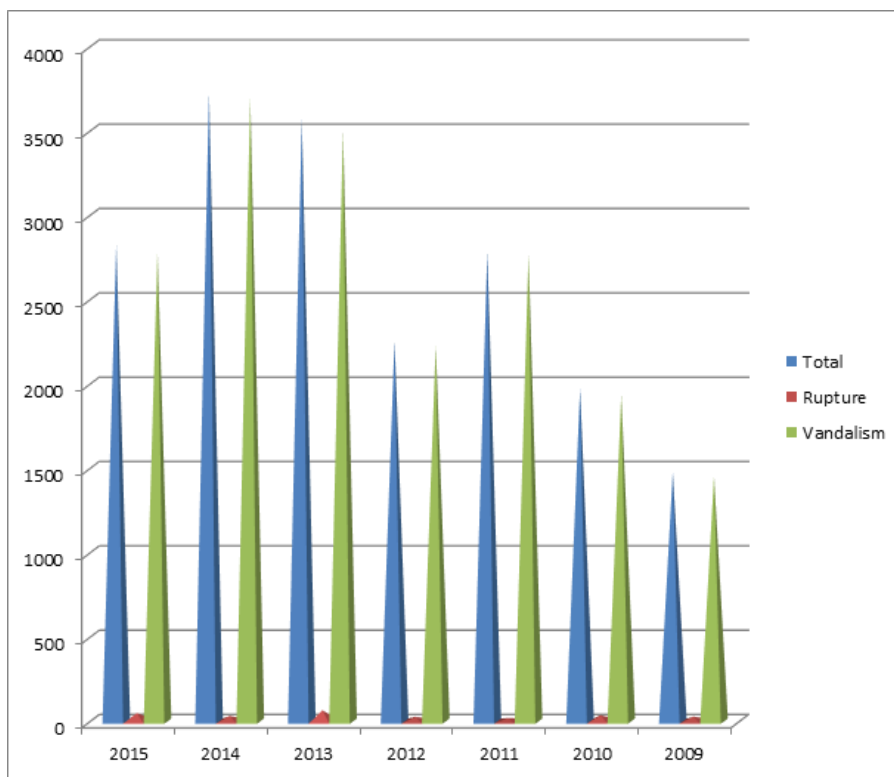


Figure 1. Graphic Representation of Incidences

The chart enumerates the totality of incidences affecting oil exploration in the region from 2009-2015. As observed, vandalism (green bar) by restive youths account for almost all the casualties recorded, which has cost the country a huge financial loss as indicated in Figure 2;

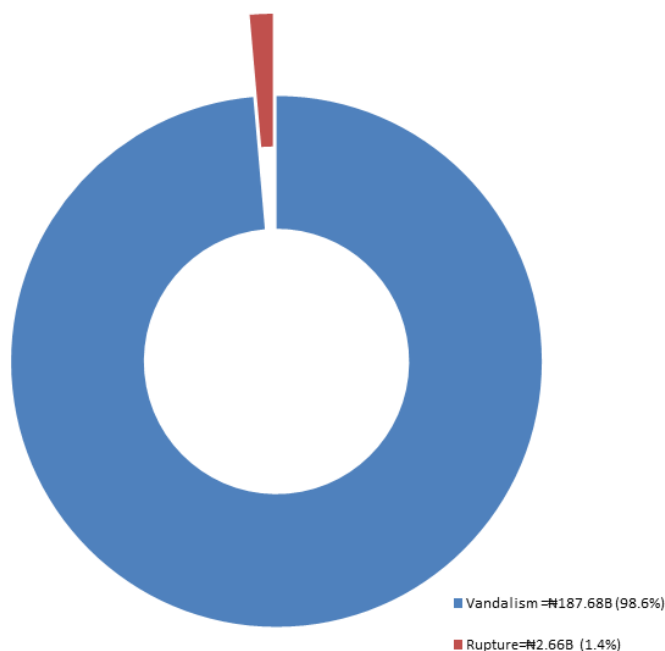


Figure 2. Doughnut Chart Representation of Financial Loss in USD/Naira (2009-2015)

Figure 2 shows that of a hundred and ninety billion, thirty four million naira (₦190.34B) loss from 2009-2015, vandalism accounts for one hundred and eighty seven billion, sixty eight million naira (₦187.68B) while technical faults cost two billion, sixty six million naira (₦2.66B) loss. This is approximately 98.6% of the total loss within the period.

The challenge can be traced back to the discovery of large oil deposits by the Royal Dutch Shell in Oloibiri (present day Bayelsa) in 1956. This discovery attracted several other multi-national companies such as Exxon Mobil, Elf, Chevron, Agip and Texaco amongst others. It increased exploration activities leading to the degradation and environmental hazards in the region. Ering, Bassey and Odike

(2013:422) observe that Mebbine, an indigene of the Niger Delta, in a conference held at River's State University laments that:

Our joys have become sorrows because the oil production activities have completely destroyed the ecological systems of our clan. Aquatic life is almost completely destroyed, the soil completely eroded and flora and fauna badly affected, almost extinct. In addition, oil exploration and production activities have subjected us to devastating erosion and permanent pollution, forcing us against our will to lie permanently to a toxic atmosphere.

This affected the fishing and farming culture of the people which hitherto was the economic and commercial power of the region, and also a source of cultural communion and integration.

The restiveness in the Niger Delta during the colonial era led to the setting up of the Henry Willink Minorities Commission by the colonial administration in 1958 in order to pacify the fears of the minority groups in the colony. Influenced by the leadership of an Ijaw, Isaac Adaka Boro, the region as believed, received 100% compensation for the bane of oil exploration which has deprived the people of their farming and fishing culture. This eventually led to the establishment of the Niger Delta Development Board (NDDDB) to spur quick development in the area. NDDDB was later substituted for the Niger Delta Basin Development Authority (NDBDA). Established by the Alhaji Shehu Shagari regime in 1979 but barely funded. The focus of NDBDA was more on distributing wealth across the entire country including to the non-oil regions. General Ibrahim Babangida's military administration also created its own commission, Oil Mineral Producing Areas Development Commission (OMPADEC) in 1992. This was after calls were made by some politicians from the southern region for more funds to be allocated to the region. The administrative bottlenecks and insincerity on the part of the neo-colonial and independent Government made these boards and commissions mere historical facts devoid of progressive functionality. Therefore the people of the region became more infuriated by their plight.

The highhandedness of the General Sani Abacha's military regime which led to the death of several members of the region including Ken Saro Wiwa, and the massacre of an entire community (Odi) in the region by the Olusegun Obasanjo's democratic administration did not only escalate the crises but also increased the pace and introduced new trends into the agitation. The vandalism of oil pipelines, disruption of the activities of the various oil companies, kidnappings, and full scale

militancy became the identity of the region despite the establishment of Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) in the year 2000. President Umaru Yar' Adua succeeded the government of Olusegun Obasanjo in 2007. With Goodluck Jonathan, an Ijaw man from the region as his vice, he was able to initiate the Niger Delta Amnesty programme a few years into his regime.

Cirrelia Thaxton in her lesson titled What is Amnesty?- Definition and History defines amnesty as a provision of clemency offered to citizens who break the law'. She further explains that granting amnesty exonerates citizens from prosecution and any form of guilt. The implication of amnesty is the declaration of total freedom for perpetrators by the government. Bringing Amnesty into the Nigerian context, Mbalisi, Eheazu, and Kiyenowei (2012: 439) define it as:

A pardon granted to members of all militant groups who have been involved in different nefarious activities that made the nation look insecure and un-conducive for foreign investment, which impinged on the growth and development of the nation's economy and which also dragged the nation's international reputation to the mud.

The aim of the Amnesty Programme was therefore to pre-empt further incursion on oil exploration by marginalized communities. The government of Yar' Adua commissioned the amnesty programme on 15 June, 2009 and expected it to span from 6th August, 2009 to 4th October, 2009. The condition for the amnesty was that the militants must be willing and ready to sign an undertaking, surrender their arms and disavow militancy in totality (Ejovi and Sunday 2013:132).

The intentions of the 2009 Amnesty programme of President Yar' Adua were to pardon repentant militants (as they were classified) from the region, train them in various skills within and outside the country, provide monetary compensations and contract awards to selected leaders of the different militia groups. This was done to protect the region from further oil related attacks. The groups included the Niger Delta Peoples Volunteer Force (NDPVF), Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP), Nigeria Niger Delta Vigilante (NNDV), Niger Delta Liberation Front (NDLF), Joint Revolutionary Council (JRC), and the Ijaw Youth Council (IYC). The key figures in these groups as at then were Henry Okah, Asari Dokubo, Ateke Tom, Government Ekpemupelo aka Tompolo, John Togo and others (Ering, Bassey, Odike 2013:424). The administration also created the Ministry of Niger Delta

Affairs to oversee the development in the area and compensations for affected communities. Yar' Adua's efforts yielded better results than those of his predecessors, but it also encountered its own difficulties which left the region still underdeveloped.

Challenges Facing the Amnesty Programme

The unproductive and unworkable system of leadership in the country, greed, insincerity and impunity celebrated by the Nigerian elites and political class truncated justice and development within the region. The high rate of corruption perpetrated by both the Nigerian government, political leaders of the regions and militia groups turned the amnesty programme into a money sharing spree for 'connected' individuals, their followers and cronies. Looking at the antecedents, Ohanwe in an article published on Nigeriaworld website notes that before the proclamation of independence in 1960, 'the Bins Commission in the 1950s allocated 100 per cent (sic) of the oil resources to the region where oil was derived. But from 1960 when Nigeria got her independence, through 1963 when it became a republic, the nation slashed the allocation from 100% to 50%.' This has further been reduced to 13% in recent times, and has therefore given impetus to restiveness within the region.

Ering, Basse and Odike (2013: 422-423) also note that:

The nonchalant attitude of the multinational oil companies to improve on the well being (sic) of host communities through their corporate social responsibilities for the harmful effect of their activities, the uncompromising and irresponsive attitude of the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) which is the Federal Government representative that regulates the oil industry did not go down well with the people. Consequently, it led to the restiveness of the people, culminating in the vandalism, disruption of oil firms' operations, kidnapping and hostage taking of both local and expatriate workers of oil companies, and the seeming endless demand for ransom for their release.

These actions forced the government into establishing a compensating body known as the amnesty programme for the militant youths. Ushie (2013:31) points out that documents made available by the office of the Special Adviser to the President on the Niger Delta reveal that about 26,358 militants embraced the amnesty programme since 2009. The document showed that, 'The militants were demobil-

ised in two batches in designated camps spread across six states in the Niger Delta region. Each militant was to receive ₦65,000 (US\$420) per month, and another ₦3,000 (US\$20) daily during the reintegration phase'.

The programme incorporates 'vocational education, skills acquisition and entrepreneurial development' (Ushie 2013:31-32). Twenty Thousand One Hundred and Ninety-two (20,192) rebels drawn from eight (8) oil producing states of Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Delta, Rivers, Cross River, Edo, Imo and Ondo, were demobilized in Obubra Demobilization Camp as the first set, while the second category of Six Thousand One Hundred and sixty-six (6,166) militants were inducted by 2011. Some of these militants were distributed across thirty three (33) centres in Nigeria while others were sent to South Africa, the US, Russia, Israel, India, Poland, Cyprus, Poland, Ghana, United Arab Emirates, the Philippines, and Trinidad and Tobago. A demographic overview of participants in the first phase is represented as follows:

Table 1: Participants in the Niger Delta Amnesty Programme

States	Male	Female	Registered
Akwa Ibom	155	8	163
Bayelsa	6,900	61	6,961
Cross River	159	1	160
Delta	3,361	–	3,361
Edo	450	–	450

Imo	297	3	300
Ondo	1,198	2	1,200
Rivers	6,958	39	6,997
NDDC	571	19	600
Total	20,049	133	20,192

From the statistics above, Bayelsa, Delta, and Rivers considered as the most volatile areas account for about 85% of participants in this first batch. Abia is the only oil producing state left out. This could imply that the government impassively overlooked affected communities yet to subscribe to violence. Vanessa Ushie (2013:34) in this vein submits that 'the exclusion of certain militant groups, arising from the balkanisation of the militant movement itself and deep-rooted (sic) scepticism and mistrust of the state's motives', coupled with the diversion of about 80% of the amnesty budget to consultancy and contract servicing, leaving just 20% for the actual rehabilitation of repented militants became major setbacks in the programme. The segregation of major actors, such as John Togo and Tamunotonye Kuna of MEND, the trial of Henry Okah in South Africa, and the contracting of militants from other extractions to protect and safeguard pipelines created internal strife within different groups and states along ethnic and identity lines. 'Grassroot community, civil society and vulnerable groups, such as women and children, that shunned violent struggle have also been inadvertently excluded from the state largesse' (Ushie 2013: 36).

In furtherance, The Nation, an online newspaper of 12 September, 2017 notes that the Ama-Okosuwei of Gelegele Gbene rightly points out that the Ijaw

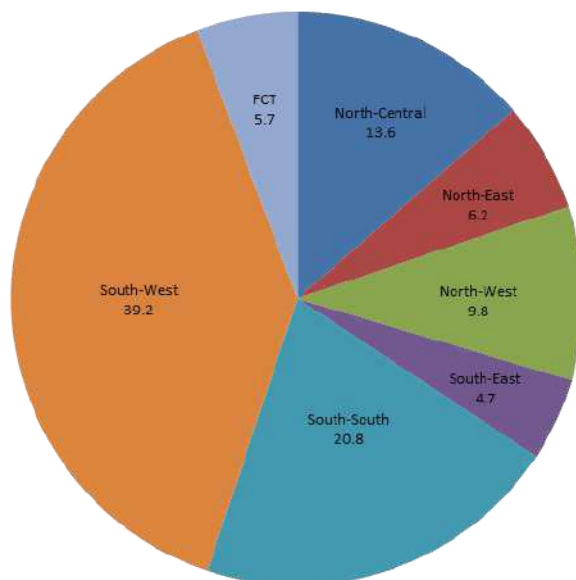
communities have been denied a fair share in the scheme of things. While lamenting the absence of governments' presence in the area despite their natural resources, the traditional ruler also appeals to the Special Adviser to the President on amnesty to expedite action on the inclusion of some ex-agitators from Olodiana not captured in the programme. The traditional ruler also called for the provision of skill acquisition centres in the five Ijaw clans, empowerment of beneficiaries from the communities and provision of slots for INC in the proposed pipeline security and surveillance jobs. The Ama-Okosuwei's statement could mean that despite the hype about the success of the amnesty programme, there is existing deliberate discrimination against some people, communities and ethnic groups. Also, in a discussion with a group of community members within the region, some of the youths' grievance stem from the highhandedness of the government. An indigene, Mr. John explains that the government has forced them into a "point of no return" by killing their members arbitrarily instead of toeing the path of dialogue. Others such as Mr. Onyewuchi acknowledged the unfriendly approach by the government but insists that with resource control allowed down to the community level, the crisis could be resolved. This incongruous management of the amnesty programme forced some militants to rekindle aggression and has also birthed new agitating groups. It is noteworthy to state here that as at the time of the establishment of the amnesty programme, Lagos State, which has replaced Cross River (oil deposit located at Bakassi now ceded to Cameroon) in the list of oil producing states, had not yet been known for oil.

Available data from the NNPC product distribution from 2009-2015 also reveals another angle to the discrepancies, and has also unearthed the echoed deprivation and marginalisation fuelling present revolts in the oil producing region. The table below is a statistical representation of how oil product is distributed across the country:

Table 2. NNPC Product Distribution by Percentage (2009-2015)

YEAR	North-Central %	North-East %	North-West %	South-East %	South-South %	South-West %	FCT %
2009	12.51	4.84	8.77	4.43	22.31	41.20	5.95
2010	16.64	4.35	5.92	2.77	23.87	41.54	4.92
2011	17	5	7	3	24	40	5
2012	24	4	5	3	25	35	4
2013	9.09	8.83	15.04	6.40	15.43	38.83	6.39
2014	7.35	7.45	11.64	6.82	19.86	39.72	7.16
2015	9.09	8.83	15.04	6.40	15.43	38.83	6.39
TOTAL	95.68	43.3	68.41	32.82	145.9	275.12	39.81
VERAGE (100%)	13.6	6.2	9.8	4.7	20.8	39.2	5.7

The pie chart representation of the average in 'Figure 3' gives a clearer analysis of this distribution:



AVERAGE (100%)

Figure 3. Pie Chart Representation of Average

The pie chart shows that South-West (Lagos and Ondo) produces less than 20% compared to the South-South, but receives almost double of what is distributed to the South-South region that produces almost 90% of the total product in the country. While the South-East with two states (Abia and Imo) producing oil, receives less than every other region including the non-oil producing regions and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT). The parameters which determine the ratio for this distribution remain questionable. Besides the deprivation recorded in the product distribution chart, the secrecy in, and the suspected allocation of oil blocs to, and ownership of oil wells by mostly people from the Northern part of the country is also a source of concern for the oil producing states and the people of Niger Delta.

Conclusion

Several efforts have been made by various bodies and governments in and outside Nigeria to complement the Niger Delta Amnesty Programme in order to ameliorate, and if possible eradicate violence from the region. Unfortunately, corruption and bureaucracy have restricted access to more comprehensive information on the nature and statistical records of identity, ethnic, communal, affiliation of the beneficiaries of the amnesty programme. These have consequently created suspicions around the intention of the programme. And as long as the region remains wrecked while majority of the people remain in abject poverty, the crises would hardly smoulder. Also, it is obvious that faulty policies and the balkanisation of communities and regions by governments for their selfish political convenience have also made communal boundary crises (most of which are state, ethnicity and identity related) inevitable. It is therefore the hunger and poverty, lack of workable policies guaranteeing cultural rights/freedom, extreme deprivation and destruction of cultural heritage, and lack of conscious cultural inclusiveness in the development process of affected communities that have accounted for several acts of violence in the Niger Delta region.

The Paris declaration on cultural diversity by UNESCO (UNESCO 2002:10) also identifies with such depravity orchestrated by the political and elite class. The declaration further states that the setbacks faced by UNESCO is often caused by 'the mind-set of technocrats, the ideologies of major leaders and the biases of local

elites about losing power when women, children and weaker groups achieve "voice" in their own future'. Matsuura (UNESCO Director-General in 2001) in this vein admonishes that 'culture is not an optional benefit but a central requirement' and calls on partnering member countries to use the declaration 'as a guideline for ground-breaking policies in their specific contexts' (UNESCO 2002: Forward). In line with this, the Director of UNESCO Institute for Statistics, Hendrik van der Pol and Francoise Riviere, UNESCO's Assistant Director-General for Culture state that 'preserving and respecting the specificity of each individual culture as well as the distinctive qualities of each culture is the challenge that must be met globally' (UNESCO 2009: iii). This implies that despite the need to sustain the sovereignty of a country, the cultural differences of each region that constitute a country must be respected and given the space to survive. It is only through this cultural freedom and expression that the true potential of unity in diversity can be harnessed, and sustainable development enhanced.

Recommendation

Leadership and development in Nigeria since the 70s have been a top-down affair despite the flow of resources from the impoverished 'down' communities. This has encouraged laziness on the part of the political leaders who rely on the central government's financial allocations which they use to enrich themselves, leaving little or nothing for the people who are located far from the centre and far the urban centres where the political elites reside. It is therefore imperative for the Nigerian government to enthrone regional autonomy in respect to the economy and security through a bottom-up system, as a means of bridging the gap between the people and their political representatives. This will also reduce ethnic suspicions of injustice, marginalisation and dehumanisation perpetrated by members of alien identity and culture who control the centre at the state and the national levels. As noted in the 2001 UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity, the development of tangible products, for instance the material goals, cannot be sustained by material means alone. It requires the integration of the intangible aspects and the linkage to cultural capacities and ethnic/identity distinctiveness. The Nigerian government should therefore desist from politicising the amnesty programme by making it an avenue to placate selected few and compensate political cohorts without truly reaching out to the affected members of the community. It is advisable that the head and key members of the amnesty committee should be chosen from affected ethnic

communities while government representatives should be more of a supervisory body.

The highhandedness of the Nigerian government to suppress human rights and protesting groups should be jettisoned. Instead of military might which has often escalated violence within communities, the government should embrace dialogue to address the obvious discrepancies, marginalisation, and underdevelopment. The use of brutal force and military actions against protesters is described as a “prescriptive” approach which is mostly domineering, counter-productive and tends to escalate crisis. The “elicitive” approach, which is a participatory crisis prevention and conflict resolution approach, should rather be adopted. This allows members of troubled communities and perpetrators to proffer solutions to the problem, thus addressing and solving the challenges from within (Francis 2011: 24, Best 2011:64, Nnamele 2014: 34-35).

Member countries of the UN and UNESCO should encourage the idea of 'preserving and respecting the specificity of each individual culture' that makes up their enclaves along identity and ethnic lines. Furthermore, there is the imperative need for UN and UNESCO to advance from being 'prescriptive' in formulating cultural policies and measuring cultural products to becoming 'enforcive' in implementing policies that enhance good governance, guarantee human rights and self-development (states/regions) among member nations. This could be achieved by creating and implementing punitive measures for defaulting member countries. It will expedite attainment of the 'main objective' of peace and security which are requisites for preserving cultural heritage, and sustainable development in education, science and culture.

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