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BEYOND AMNESTY AND ADVERSARIAL CONFLICT MANAGEMENT STRATEGY FOR SUSTAINABLE PEACE AND DEVELOPMENT IN THE NIGER DELTA REGION

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ABSTRACT

The Nigerian state is yet to come up with a viable management strategy to address the Niger Delta conflict with a view to achieving durable peace in the region. Unfortunately, adoption of adversarial conflict management strategy by the Nigerian state in order to stem the tide of insurgency and militancy in the region increased the intensity of the protracted social conflict. Besides, despite its initial and immediate positive effects, the on-going Amnesty initiative of the federal government lacks the capacity to tackle the underlying factors of the conflict and the policy has gone under heavy criticisms, owing to its implementation shortcomings. This article not only explored the dynamics of the violent conflict but also evaluated the effectiveness of the two major conflict management approaches of the federal government and the activities of ethnic militias together with criminality in the region. It further revealed the motive behind the persistence of violence, prevalence of economic and security threats in the region. This article, which adopted an analytical-critical method, also contended that there is a possibility of a recurrent violence in the region in the near future, should the prolonged negotiations between the government and the Niger-Delta people eventually fail to metamorphose into the long-awaited visible developmental transformation of the area. The paper therefore concluded that there is an urgent need for the Nigerian state to be genuinely committed to social justice in order to record an enduring peace, socio-economic stability and sustainable development in the Niger Delta region.

Keywords: Amnesty, Adversarial, Conflict Management, Sustainable Peace, Development

DOI

INTRODUCTION

The protracted and destructive social conflict in the Niger Delta region witnessed a vicious cycle of violence in recent years. However, it is a denial of truth to avow that there has been a permanent solution to the skirmish in the region. This is because the idea or structure of vesting ownership and control of all natural resources in the nation-state without considering a fair system of

compensating the political entities within which the resources are being extracted will engender and prolong violence (Faleti, 2005). The Niger Delta realities continue to produce apprehension and deep humanitarian concerns because for over five decades, the Nigeria state has not been able to proffer a lasting management strategy to the lingering resource-based conflict in the region with a view to achieving a sustainable peace. The

optimism from some intellectual quarters that the return to democratic rule in 1999 would engineer the process of a genuine resolution of the social conflict was just a mere wishful thinking. Although several attempts had been made to manage this enduring conflict at different times in the annals of Nigerian political history, the interventions were moribund and thus not efficacious. This is partly because of the poor implementation of governmental initiatives arising from institutionalized corruption and other administrative failures, but mainly because of the glossing over of the root causes of the problems by the successive governments instead of addressing them. The repressive approach of the Nigeria state, which is an expression of a bad and authoritarian governance, really triggered the full-blown aggression of the frustrated people of Niger Delta and deepened the crisis in the region.

The lucrative natural economic resource called crude oil is generating more than ninety percent of the Nigeria foreign exchange earnings, which has made it the mainstay of the Nigerian economy (Ogbogbo, 2009). However, despite its huge economic contributions to the Nigerian state, the region is in a pathetic state in terms of development. The empirical evidence confirms that the Niger Delta conflict attracts a multidimensional explanation, as it emanated from interconnected underlying factors. Over the years, the agitations of the inhabitants of Niger Delta region focus on the issues of marginalization, poor infrastructural facilities, inequitable revenue allocation and environmental degradation, which is an overt and a direct negative effect of the explorative activities of Oil Multinational Companies (MNCs). One of the realities of the pollution and destruction of

environment is unemployment being experienced by the youth of the region whose major occupations were farming and fishing. The non-responsiveness to the plights of these indigent people by the government aggravated the resentment of the Niger Deltans, which eventually snowballed into violence and criminal activities against the Nigerian state and the Oil Multinational Companies (Gbadegesin, 2009).

The Niger Delta imbroglio is a typical example of deprivation that arose as a result of absence of true federalism. The nature and structure of Nigerian federalism are not only unfavourable but also a threat to minor ethnic groups within the nation as it differs from the ideal nature of a federal system. Unlike every successful federation like USA where the functioning political entities willingly consented to come together and determined the conditions for their political union by deciding the rights, privileges and authority to be surrendered to the central government, the federal system being practiced in Nigeria constitutionally grants the central government ownership and control over all natural resources. The minority ethnic groups only get an insignificant percentage of the national wealth realized through the resources obtainable from their region (Ikejiani, 2009). Apart from the wider and pervading socio-political encumbrances, the economic and environmental problems experienced by the indigenous people of the Niger Delta region metamorphosed to civil revolt, which unfortunately earned the nation the status of a failing state.

The three major ethnic groups in Nigeria (which are Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba) have mostly been in control of the political sphere of the Nigerian state since the attainment of independence in 1960. The privileged of

these leading groups and their allies in the forces have unvaryingly dominated politics, governance and other resources of power at the expense of the minority groups (Gbadegesin, Ibid). The neglect and brutality of the government led to the feeling of alienation, hopelessness, frustration and the recourse to violence of the poverty-ridden minorities whose land produces oil and gas that generate the largest part of revenue to the Nigerian government. Thus, leadership issues and insensitivity of the government to the predicament of the Niger Delta people gave birth to militancy and insurgency in the region, which drastically disrupted explorative activities and resultantly affected the economy of the Nigerian state. In an attempt to achieve durable peace and sustainable development in the Niger Delta, the federal government introduced Amnesty Programme in June, 2009 by the late president Umaru Yar'Adua led administration. However, despite the fact that the laudable presidential amnesty initiative has stretched from the initial 60 days to over 12 years owing to its sustainability by successive governments, it is doleful that the Niger Delta region is far from witnessing an enduring peace and considerable development. The recurring nature of the conflict as well as the failure of the earlier governmental interventions therefore calls for a strategic, systematic and genuine response to the conflict by the Nigerian state.

Based on the foregoing, it is fundamental to succinctly analyze the conflict, with reference to the operation of the political institutions, implications on the socio-economic structures, adverse effects on the environment, the impacts on customary ways of life in the region and the conflict management approaches being adopted by the Nigerian government.

CONTEXT ANALYSIS OF THE NIGER DELTA CONFLICT

The indispensability of context analysis in order to understand any conflict situation cannot be over emphasized. This is because it is a means of having an in-depth knowledge and proper understanding of the circumstances surrounding each of the factors or issues of a conflict and the situation that makes the issues problematic in nature. Thus, understanding the context is crucial in any conflict situation (Best, 2006) as it helps to locate the emergence, history and background of both the parties as well as the issues in any conflict under consideration. A good context analysis requires the establishment of the geographical, historical, timeline, economic, political and demographic background of a conflict (Olaniyi and Nnabuihe, 2010).

Geographical perspective

The Niger Delta is nearly 242 kilometres from the North to South, spreads along the coast for about 320km (200m) and occupies an expanse of land totaling 70,000 square kilometres. The region is regarded as one of the world's largest wetlands and the largest in Africa (Nnoli, 2006), is geographically blessed and extremely rich in aquatic and wildlife resources. This Niger Delta region, which comprises nine out of the 36 states of Nigeria namely; Abia, Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross-River, Delta, Edo, Imo, Ondo and Rivers, possesses a very rich deposit of hydrocarbon and gas, which made the region the treasure base and resource backbone of the Nigerian economy (Akpuru-Aja, 2007). The endowment of the region with crude oil and gas deposits attracted Oil Multinational Companies such as SPDC, Chevron, ELF, Texaco, Agip, Exxon-Mobil and Total to the region for massive exploration activities. The

region has a good number of Oil Fields as well as Export and Flow Stations, ample onshore and off shore Oil Wells and a substantial gas deposit (Paki and Ebienfa, 2011 as cited by Oluyemi, 2020). The stages of the oil production activities in the Nigeria oil industry and the operations involved take place exclusively in the Niger Delta region (Gbadegesin, 2009). The region has four distinct ecological zones namely; coastal island zone, mangrove swamp zone, fresh water zone and rainforest zone. The region has up to 30 million inhabitants, which constitutes about 23% of the total Nigerian population (Omotola, 2006; Chinwese et al, 2012).

Historical perspective

Historically, upstream activities began in Nigeria in the first decade of the last century but oil as a natural resource was discovered in commercial quantities by Shell-BP in Oloibiri now located in today's Bayelsa State in 1956. The oil exploration began in 1958 with a production of 5,100 barrels per day, which rose to 17,000 barrels per day in 1960. Nigeria surpassed other countries in crude oil export on African continent with 2 million barrels and 1.989 million barrels of oil sold in the international market per day in 2019 and 2020, respectively (Igwe, 2020). As at 2021, Nigeria was the principal producer of oil in Africa with verified reserves of 36.91 billion barrels (Addeh, 2021) and the oil sector alone accounts for almost 6 percent of the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

The level of exploration and exploitation of crude oil and gas in the Niger Delta region culminated in the massive environmental degradation affecting the survival of its inhabitants. However, the failure of the Nigerian government to pay proper attention to

their grievances by addressing their socio-economic needs and environmental challenges militating against the well-being, means of livelihood and survival of these people led to their feeling of absolute neglect and marginalization (Ogbogbo, 2005). The Niger Delta people were therefore embittered, as they believed that it was because of their minority status that they were politically and economically relegated in the larger Nigerian federalism.

The consciousness of the fact that the crude oil being extracted from their region is a significant source of foreign exchange earnings for the country and the reality of the government's non-responsiveness to their yearnings for infrastructural development aggravated the feeling of political alienation (Ogbogbo, *ibid.*). The Petroleum Decree of 1969, which vested in the federal government the ownership and control of all crude oil and gas resources, and the Land Use Act of 1978 totally stripped the Niger Delta people of the ownership right and deprived them huge compensation expected from oil multinational companies regarding the acquisition of their lands for explorative activities. The reality of the detrimental effects of the oil companies' activities, coupled with the non-provision of infrastructural facilities by either the oil companies or the federal government led to the dramatic upsurge of complaints arising from the display of displeasure by the host communities (Ogbogbo, *ibid.*).

The experience of the Niger Delta people gave birth to protests and uprisings that eventually culminated in violent agitations in the region when all the attempted peaceful approaches proved abortive. Apart from the earliest revolt championed by Isaac Adako Boro in 1966, there were some other notable uprisings in the 1980s and the 1990s. How-

ever, all these insurrections were successfully suppressed by the repressive measures of the Nigerian military governments (Ogbogbo, *ibid*). The suppression and ruthlessness of the then military governments got to the peak and the case of the Niger Delta attracted an international sympathy when the environmental activist, Ken Saro Wiwa and the eight other Ogoni leaders were executed by the Nigerian state in 1995 during the dictatorship of late General Sanni Abacha.

The agitations of the Niger Delta people repressed by the military administrations were resuscitated with the commencement of democratic government in 1999. It later escalated into violence and assumed armed dimensions (Ishola, 2010). As at 2005, the unarmed peaceful protesters and demonstrators had metamorphosed into armed militant groups, which were vehemently attacking the Oil Transnational Companies (MNCs) and their explorative activities in the region (Oluduro and Oluduro, 2012). The insurgency movements eventually took criminal dimensions as the youth of the oil-rich but environmentally-impoverished region began to engage in the abduction of both the expatriates and indigenous personnels of oil companies. The insurgency got to the peak between 2006 and 2009 and drastically affected the Nigeria's daily oil production which fell from 2.2 million barrels per day to less than 800 thousand barrels such that a military Joint Task Force (JTF) was urgently constituted by the government to tackle the security and economic threats to the nation. However, the insurgents were in possession of numerous weapons to the extent that what the government initially thought was going to be a transient military exercise became prolonged and it was obvious that the insur-

gents were determined to paralyze all explorative activities in the region. The insurgents not only embarked on regular destruction of pipelines, illicit bunkering and vandalism of oil installations, but also acquired sophisticated weapons to confront the Joint Task Force through the proceeds of the uncontrolled bunkering activities and financial support from some shadow parties (Isola, 2010).

Socio-economic perspective

The inhabitants of the oil-rich region equally frowned at the inequitable distribution of oil wealth by the Nigerian state and demanded for fair share of the proceeds of oil resources of the Niger Delta to the indigenous people as they bear the brunt of the ecological effects of oil and gas exploration all alone. Thus, the grievances of the Niger Delta people are also against the revenue sharing formula of the Nigerian state. The unfair revenue allocation formula that had resulted in gross neglect of the region in comparison with other areas that contribute much less revenue to the federation's account led to the violent agitation of the minority ethnic groups who inhabit the Niger Delta region.

The role of oil and gas in export earnings portrays another dimension in the importance of the Niger Delta to the economy of the country and these resources have been the compass of the Nigerian economy shortly after independence. This is because oil proceeds which emanated from petroleum profit tax (PPT), royalties, export sales and domestic petroleum product sales have dominated the structure of government revenue since the early 1970s (Gbadegesin, 2009). Since Oil and gas sector contributed up to 95% of the nation's export proceeds, it follows that the Niger Delta region has a significant contribution to the funding of the Nigerian state. This is because the public overhead profile has been predominantly oil de-

pendent and the budget of the levels of government is structured by the price of oil at the global market (Okowa, 2007).

However, despite its vast oil reserves, the revenue sharing formula adopted by the Nigerian state is not favourable to these minority groups. A major grouse of the Niger Delta people is the fact that the Nigerian government did not consider them for any compensation for the effects of the environmental degradation on their means of livelihood in the revenue allocation structure. Based on equity, the derivation principle supports that the region, where the substantial percentage of the nation's earnings comes from should be entitled to extra share than other states. However, the derivation principle adopted when Cocoa, groundnut and palm oil were the mainstay of the economy was not implemented for the people of Niger Delta in favour of the dominant ethnic groups that are not only wielding the political and economic powers but also controlling the military (Gbadegesin, 2009). It is noteworthy that when the major ethnic groups were in control of sources of revenue, derivation was held as a principle of justice and earned them 100% of revenue. However, when oil revenue made it the turn of the minority ethnic groups, derivation was reduced to 1.5% (Ikoporuko, 1996) which was later increased to 3% and 13% in 1992 and 1999, respectively (Osaghae, 2008).

Thus, the social injustice in the Niger Delta led to the restiveness of the unemployed and hungry youth who were frustrated and full of aggression because their means of livelihood had been destroyed by explorative activities and the proceeds from oil and gas derived from their region are being distributed to other places. In essence, the dis-

tribution of economic resources in form of opportunities, revenue allocation, and the distribution of social amenities have been lopsided, the bulk of which go to the privileged class while the minorities are not well treated. The communities in the oil-producing region have poor social amenities and infrastructural facilities. Thus, the extent of development in the Niger Delta is very negligible and does not commensurate to the level of benefit raised from the region (Ikejiani, 2009). These social injustice and feeling of alienation by the Niger Delta people led to the struggle for resource control. The predicament of the Niger Delta exposes the failure of the Nigerian state to effectively carry out its customary obligation of equitable distribution of wealth and resources (Gbadegesin, 2009).

Environmental perspective

The negative effect of explorative undertakings on the environment and means of livelihood of the people is also directly related to the violent social conflict in the region. The people of the Niger Delta are reacting violently to the degradation of their environment, loss of biodiversity and collective goods as a result of crude oil exploration (Osaghae, 1995). The region is flared with gases resulting in the pollution of the area. Gas flaring is one of the most serious environmental impact of oil and gas exploration in the Niger Delta. Nigeria is ranked as one of the world's leading gas flared countries and the excessive heat from constant flaring adversely affects plants, wildlife and human activities and disrupt the equilibrium in the ecosystem. Oil companies acquired much of the land for burrow pits for industrial wastes disposal. These developments have caused a high level of industrial pollution and adversely affected the social lifestyles of the people in the region (Ikejiani, 2009). Oil spills have

more devastating effects on the environment than all other operations put together. This is because every spillage has an effect on human beings and other means of livelihood particularly farming, fishing, hunting and other forest related economic ventures (Gbadegesin, 2009). Oil producing areas of the Niger Delta experience spills resulting from the leakages caused by the rupture of oil pipelines and blowouts. These spillages as well as toxicity of oil affect soils and waterways, resulting to pollution of crops, destruction of marine life, and contamination of sources of drinking water, all of which constitute health hazards. In addition, oil related fires and explosions have had a devastating effect on the environment and have sent a considerable number of the Nigerian citizens residing in the region to their early grave (Gbadegesin, *ibid*).

ADVERSARIAL APPROACH AND MILITANCY IN THE NIGER DELTA REGION

Adversarial conflict management strategies refer to the use of military or paramilitary force and the law court to address a conflict, which often lead to a negative peace (Albert and Oloyede, 2010). The use of force was the strategy that colonial legacy bequeathed on Nigerian state for the maintenance of law and order and the restoration of socio-political stability (Omotola, 2006). Considering the influence of and addiction to militarism in the Nigerian political space, the use of armed forces continues to be the most preferable approach of safeguarding the national security. The formation and deployment of Joint Task Force (JTF) is a strategy of the government to stem the tide of instability caused by insurgency groups by using force to suppress the rise of militants and crush their various activities that are inimical to Nigerian econo-

my and national security in the region (Utin 2018; Oluyemi, 2020). The rationale behind this adversarial conflict management approach in the Niger Delta by the government is the belief that the use of force through the military intervention is the surest means of dislodging the militants and maintaining a peaceful atmosphere conducive for unhindered oil exploration activities by the oil multinational companies in the region (Ikejiani, 2009; Afeno 2014).

The use of force and repression by the Nigerian state began in late 60s when the military took over power through coup d'état. In the 1990s, the absolute reliance on this approach by the federal government and insensitivity of the oil multinational companies led to the corresponding increase in the vandalisation of oil infrastructures, abduction of expatriates and oil workers. The use of both the military force and adversarial judicial process, which led to the execution of the environmental activist from the Niger Delta Ken Saro Wiwa alongside with eight other Ogoni leaders in 1995, further exasperated the people of the region and provoked a full-blown violent agitation. The Niger Delta conflict has witnessed many military operations in various communities such as Umuechem, Odi and Gbaramatu with the use of substantial military artilleries (Dode, 2012). Instead of these operations to determine the extinction of insurgency activities, restore peace and social order to the region, new insurgency groups such as Movement for the Emancipation of Ogoni People (MASOP), Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) and the Niger Delta Peoples Volunteer Force (NDPVF) arose with ruthless onslaughts across the region (Adeakin, 2013). Owing to the continued experience of economic marginalization and environmental destruction, over 50,000 people

overtly participated in various armed conflicts across the region in 2008. Apparently, the habitual deployment of security forces to the Niger Delta region by the Nigerian state occasioned the mutilation and untimely demise of many people both in the past military regimes and in the current democratic experiments (Gebremichael et. al., 2018).

It has been rightly asserted that the present political realities in Nigeria mirror the several years of militarism and autocratic rule in the country. Like other African countries, the dominance of the military in Nigeria politics has a very strong influence on her civilian rule government (Mohammed, 2014; Oluyemi, 2020). The deployment of the military to the Niger Delta by the Nigerian state to suppress militants without addressing underlying issues increased the tempo of the conflict. The blatant misuse of military personnel in the region provoked the militants to sustain hostilities in the creeks with the Joint Task Force whose impunity and brutality in the region had caused deeper grievances in the Nigerian society (Ezirim, 2010). The region has recorded many military operations in physical combats with the militants that are disrupting explorative activities, but the intervention of the military has never put an end to the attacks of the militants in the region. Rather, the military dimension often aggravates the crisis and threatens the national security.

The early part of 2016 was greeted with the emergence of a new militant separatist group known as the Niger Delta Avengers (NDA) which started its violent operations by destroying many oil facilities of multinational companies in the region. (Onuha, 2016). Considering the various human casu-

alties recorded during military operations, and the violent response of militants, the adoption of military tactics by the Nigeria government towards the Niger Delta crisis are extremely counter-productive and ineffective to facilitate stability in the region. There is currently a global advocacy for the adoption of persuasion, rather than the use of military or legal force, as the prevailing strategy for the realization of peace in the contemporary world (Albert and Oloyede, 2010).

ASSESSMENT OF POST-AMNESTY PROGRAMME FROM 2009 TO 2022

According to Imongan and Ikelegbe (2016), amnesty is the granting of immunity from prosecution and absolution from punishment for certain illicit movements, rebellious and insurgent engagements targeted against the state by shielding the recipients from retributive actions and other penalties. The dramatic upsurge of violence in the Niger Delta region between 2006 and 2009, which designated the region as “the swamps of insurgency” (Africa Report, 2006; Omotola, 2010), and its adverse effects on the monocultural economy of the Nigerian state led to the launch of a comprehensive amnesty initiative by the Nigerian government in 2009. The Nigerian government under the leadership of late president Umar Yar’ Adua granted unconditional amnesty to militants with a view to proffering a lasting solution to restiveness and ranging hostilities in the Niger Delta region (Imongan and Ikelegbe, 2016). Amnesty policy was first introduced to the region in 1967 when the Yakubu Gowon regime absolved the Niger Delta Volunteer Force (NDVF) led by Isaac Adaka Boro for the insurrection he masterminded in 1966 (Oluwaniyi, 2011). However, the dimension of the current Amnesty programme as well as the huge cost implication is distinct

(Aderogba, 2016). The government of Nigeria introduced the Presidential Amnesty policy, which has a tripartite Programme of Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR), and was designed to run for a period of 60 days with effect from August 6 to October 4, 2009. This initiative, which was intended to eradicate militancy in the oil-rich Niger Delta, significantly reduced tensions and crime in the region as about 30,000 militants embraced reconciliation and rehabilitation. Consequently, the oil output appreciated from 800 barrels per day to 2.3 million and some companies leveraged on the opportunity of the abated conflict to repair their damaged facilities (Oluduro and Oluduro, 2012).

However, having run the amnesty programme for over 12 years, it is crystal clear that amnesty policy of the Nigerian government is not capable of addressing the challenges of the Niger Delta. The conflict in the region continues in different shades through the attacks and destructive activities of militant groups such as the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) and Niger Delta Avengers (NDA) operational in the region (Gebremichael et. al., 2018). Although, at a point in time, there was a decline in the intensity of attacks on oil installations by the militants owing to negotiations, the fragile peace was short-lived with the emergence of a splinter-faction called Reformed Niger Delta Avengers (RNDA), which is radically contending for the government's fulfilment of her developmental promises to the region (Gebremichael et. al., *ibid*).

The Amnesty programme itself is flawed in both planning and implementation as the policy has been criticized of unabated corruption as well as alienating civil and orderly

members of the region (Ejezie et. al, 2020). There have been notable inadequacies in the rehabilitation aspect of the DDR such as: deficient training facilities, lack of befitting training centres, irregular payment of allowances and non-inclusion of broader Niger Delta population that had borne the cost of the conflict. Another major challenge is the over-bloated number of registered ex-militants. In 2021, it was discovered that not less than 400 names were replicated in the amnesty payroll (The Guardian, 2021). The disarmament programme cannot be said to be successful in the sense that there is still proliferation of arms in the region as evident in various attacks being carried out by militants even after 12 years of the disarmament exercise. The on-going reintegration programme is also laden with a major shortcoming pinpointed by Imongan and Ikelegbe (2016) regarding the exclusion of some disarmed ex-militants from the rehabilitation and reintegration programmes, which is still generating protests in the region. These obvious flaws are crippling the peace building process in the Niger-Delta (Vurasi et. al., 2020).

AMNESTY AND SUSTAINABLE PEACE

The sustainability of peace in the Niger Delta cannot be guaranteed by the amnesty programme, which is a strategy adopted by the Nigerian state to keep the militants at bay in order to ensure unhindered explorative activities by oil multinational corporations in the region. The post amnesty period in the region is still experiencing insecurity challenges and socio-political syndrome arising from a dramatic upsurge in cult activities, criminalities, assassinations, mutilation and abduction of residents, oil theft etc. (Nwaogu, et. al., 2019; Vurasi, et al., 2020). Supposing it is not fraught with implementation flaws, the

amnesty programme of the Nigerian state can only achieve a temporary peace in the region. This is because amnesty was implemented with the sole aim of putting an end to insurgency, but without corresponding efforts and tenacity by the government to effectively address the major agitations of the people that eventually resulted in insurgency. The broader socio-economic and environmental problems in the region are outside the scope of amnesty programme and the failure of the Nigerian state to effectively surmount the root causes of the violence and insecurity will make a durable peace elusive in the region for a long time (Oluduro and Oluduro, 2012). The justification for this position is the fact that there will be a constant emergence of new insurgency groups should the government fails to address the developmental and ecological yearnings of the region. Thus, administration of amnesty seems not to be an enduring strategy to manage the resource-based conflict in the Niger Delta for the realization of a sustainable peace and development.

The current amnesty deal with the Niger Deltans was intended to be a permanent solution to the conflict in the Niger Delta. Although the amnesty gesture appears to be yielding results, it may eventually fail like earlier interventions because there is no assurance that it can withstand the test of time, but at best douse the tension for a while as we have been witnessing. Technically, there should be peacemaking and negotiations before a post conflict peace building that consolidates any peace process. However, the Nigerian government put the cart before the horse by introducing amnesty, which is a post conflict peace-building strategy, before peacemaking and negotiations with the Niger Delta people.

Besides, there is need for a joint problem solving approach in addressing the Niger Delta conflict otherwise it may take a long time before a sustainable peace can be experienced in the region. Despite several negotiations between the Nigerian government and the Pan Niger Delta Forum (PANDEF), which is the mouthpiece of Niger Delta groups and communities, for the return of sustainable peace and social order in the region, the pressing demands regarding the development of the Delta region are yet to receive serious attention by the Nigerian state (Gebremichael et. al., 2018).

Amnesty therefore seems to be a means of eradicating militancy and criminality in the Niger Delta with a sole purpose of achieving a hitch free crude oil explorative activities in the region. A careful consideration of the situation reveals that the major problem of the region is not the militancy but the inability of the federal government to consider the plight of the people of the region. This is because this people had several occasions engaged in dialogue and had exhausted all the non-violence means of airing their grievances but all to no avail before their recourse to violence. Although the introduction of Amnesty in 2009 doused the tension and somehow stabilized the region, the government is not fully committed to addressing the main issues of the conflict since then. If the Nigerian state tactically refuses to address the root causes of the conflict but ensures the sustainability of the amnesty policy because its cost implication is lesser than what the country will lose if it is withdrawn and there is an unrest in the region, then amnesty appears to be an uncharitable strategy. Simply put, the amnesty is a means by which the Nigerian state thwarts the continuance of the conflict and also serves as a soothing elixir intended to give the impression that

the underlying issues of the conflict are receiving adequate attention.

Besides, the fact that what the government offers the Niger Delta people comes in form of a privilege and a mere favour that could be withdrawn if and when the government wishes is worrisome (Ogbogbo, 2005). Indeed, the Nigerian state has often times disappointed the Niger Delta people to the extent that they hardly believe any promise made by the government, because the latter has consistently proved untrustworthy over the years. A cursory look at the agitations by the minorities of the Niger Delta reveals the perceived failing status of the Nigerian state. The rationale behind this assertion is the reality of the power relations problems in the face of abundant resources, the seemingly unending hostilities between the government and the minority groups and the failure of the Nigerian state to work out a viable strategic plan for the attainment of a sustainable development in the region (Gbadegesin, 2009). The continued negotiations and peace dialogues of the Nigerian state with the aggrieved indigenous people in the region to address the grievances may reduce the intensity of attacks on oil facilities but it will not eradicate the developmental challenges in the region. Thus, there could be a recommencement of attacks in the region and possibly the conflict (if not properly and urgently managed) could degenerate into a disastrous eventuality in the long run (Gebremichael et. al., 2018).

CONCLUSION

The above analysis of the Niger Delta scenario lends credence to the position of Alade (2015) that the inability to articulate an adequate conception of social justice to serve as a guiding principle has greatly impeded the progress of sustainable democrat-

ic systems of government in sub-Saharan African states. Besides, it is likely that ethnic diversity of most of these states is responsible for this dilemma. It is a fact that the concept of social justice in any society must consider the prevalent socio-economic realities, the nature of its composition and the location of resources in determining an equitable formula for the distribution of wealth and many other welfare benefits. The inability to reckon with these significant factors is mainly accountable for the failure of the implementation of social justice in modern African states (Alade, 2015). Therefore, it is to be emphasized that the progress of the Nigerian state depends heavily on her ability and readiness to embrace fairness in the management of the available resources with a view to promoting social justice. The social unrest in the Niger Delta can be managed if there is a determination by the government to ensure that both the politics and the economy are handled in such a way that no group feel aggrieved or disenchanted as a result of inequity (Gbadegesin, 2009).

Social peace would remain an illusion in the Niger Delta until adequate attention is given to the question of social justice by the Nigerian state. There is need for the rights and demands of the minorities in the region to be adequately protected and fairly satisfied. Although justice may not be a sufficient condition for social peace, it is indeed an indispensable criterion for a peaceful society as only the pursuit of social justice can provide the necessary frameworks for the prevention of dissatisfaction and unpleasant feeling that often degenerate into conflicts and violence among the people. It has been justifiably argued that the measure of social peace existing in any society partly depends on its aspiration for progress but mainly on its ability to sustain just relationships and institutions

(Ekanola, 2005). The failure of the Nigerian state to embrace social justice has made the violent conflict in the region seem to defy effective management.

The government should therefore implement the major demands of the Niger Delta people, particularly those that border on sustainable development of the region. This would be the best way to express the government's seriousness and commitment towards responding to both environmental and developmental agitations in the Niger Delta Region.

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