Presidential Amnesty Programme and Peacebuilding Outcomes in the Niger Delta: Evidence from Rivers State

Henry Chinedu Ifeze

Department of Defence and Security Studies,
Nigerian Defence Academy, Kaduna
Corresponding author: ifeze.henry2015@gmail.com

Abstract

This article examines the contribution of the Presidential Amnesty Programme (PAP) to peacebuilding in the Niger Delta, with specific focus on Rivers State, drawing exclusively on secondary data from existing literature and documented evidence. Anchored in conflict transformation theory, the study situates peacebuilding as a process that extends beyond the cessation of violence to address structural and socio-economic drivers of conflict. Evidence indicates that the PAP played a decisive role in de-escalating militancy, reducing attacks on oil infrastructure, and restoring relative stability in the immediate post-amnesty period. Disarmament and reintegration initiatives, including training and financial incentives, contributed to short-term security gains and economic recovery. However, the analysis reveals that these outcomes were not matched by corresponding structural transformation. Persistent challenges, such as selective beneficiary inclusion, weak institutional coordination, politicisation of programme benefits, and inadequate attention to environmental degradation and local development, have constrained long-term peacebuilding outcomes. The article argues that the PAP functioned largely as a stabilisation mechanism rather than a transformative framework. It concludes that sustainable peace in the Niger Delta requires a shift from ex-combatant-focused interventions to inclusive, community-driven strategies that integrate governance reform, environmental remediation, and equitable development.

Keywords: Amnesty, Conflict, Conflict Management, Militancy and Peacebuilding

Introduction

Peacebuilding and amnesty initiatives have effectively contributed to the disarmament and reintegration of combatants across the globe. For example, Colombia's 2016 peace agreement with FARC and Northern Ireland's 1998 Good Friday Agreement both included amnesty provisions to support reconciliation, though each faced post-conflict reintegration challenges (Moloney & Pettersen, 2017; McGarry & O'Leary, 2016). The peace deal with FARC in Colombia was aimed at ending the long conflict, and while it has led to significant reductions in violence, there are ongoing challenges in fully reintegrating ex-combatants and achieving long-term stability (Arnson & Tickner, 2019). Similarly, in Northern Ireland, the Good Friday Agreement of 1998, which included an amnesty component, was a pivotal step in ending decades of sectarian violence known as 'The Troubles' (McGarry & O'Leary, 2016). The amnesty provisions allowed for the release of political prisoners, which was controversial but essential in facilitating peace and reconciliation between conflicting parties.

Amnesty programmes have played a significant role in addressing conflicts in Africa, particularly in nations grappling with prolonged civil wars and insurgencies. For instance, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was established by the post-apartheid South African government in 1995 as a component of the transition to democracy. Individuals who

admitted to political offences during the apartheid era received pardons from the TRC (Krog, 2015).

The persistence of violent conflict in resource-rich regions continues to challenge conventional approaches to peacebuilding, particularly where economic wealth coexists with social deprivation and environmental decline. The Niger Delta region of Nigeria exemplifies this paradox. Despite accounting for the bulk of the country's oil revenue, the region has experienced decades of environmental degradation, economic marginalisation, and political exclusion. These conditions have undermined traditional livelihoods and generated deep-seated grievances that culminated in the emergence of militancy and organised violence in the late 1990s and early 2000s (Omeje, 2016; Watts, 2008). Armed militant groups, motivated by demands for resource control, environmental justice, and socio-economic inclusion, engaged in pipeline vandalism, oil theft, and kidnapping, thereby posing significant threats to national security and economic stability (Courson, 2009).

In response to escalating violence and its adverse impact on oil production, the Federal Government of Nigeria introduced the Presidential Amnesty Programme (PAP) in 2009. Conceived as a strategic departure from coercive military operations, the programme sought to restore stability through disarmament, demobilisation, and reintegration (DDR) of ex-militants. By offering unconditional pardon, vocational training, educational opportunities, and financial incentives, the PAP aimed to reduce hostilities while addressing some of the socio-economic drivers of conflict (Obi, 2017; Adedeji, 2023). Empirical evidence indicates that the initiative contributed to a notable decline in armed attacks and facilitated a temporary restoration of oil production and relative calm in the region (Eregha & Omotosho, 2016).

However, the programme's apparent success in de-escalating violence has not translated into sustainable peace. Existing scholarship highlights its limited scope, particularly its narrow focus on ex-combatants at the expense of broader community needs. Structural challenges such as environmental degradation, youth unemployment, weak governance, and inequitable resource distribution persist, undermining long-term stability (Akinwale, 2010; Ebiede, 2017). Furthermore, issues of uneven implementation, politicisation of benefits, and inadequate reintegration support have constrained the programme's transformative capacity (Aghedo & Osumah, 2015). The re-emergence of militant activities in subsequent years shows the fragility of gains achieved through the amnesty framework.

Against this backdrop, this article re-examines amnesty-driven interventions within broader peacebuilding paradigms. The article draws exclusively on secondary data to interrogate the extent to which the Presidential Amnesty Programme has contributed to peacebuilding in the Niger Delta, with particular emphasis on Rivers State. By situating the programme within the wider discourse on conflict transformation, the analysis moves beyond surface-level assessments of stability to a deeper evaluation of structural change. It argues that while the PAP achieved measurable short-term outcomes, its long-term effectiveness depends on its integration with inclusive development strategies, institutional reforms, and community-centred approaches to peacebuilding.

Conceptual Discourse

Amnesty

Amnesty is widely conceptualised as a state-sanctioned act of pardon that exempts individuals or groups from prosecution for offences committed during periods of political conflict. It is often deployed as a pragmatic instrument within transitional contexts where the immediate cessation of violence is prioritised over strict legal accountability (Mallinder,

2024; Sriram, 2012). Beyond its legal connotation, amnesty functions as a strategic peacebuilding tool embedded within broader Disarmament, Demobilisation, and Reintegration (DDR) frameworks. Its primary objective is to incentivise combatants to renounce violence and facilitate their transition into civilian life, thereby reducing the immediate capacity for conflict.

Scholarly debates on amnesty revolve around its normative and practical implications. On one hand, proponents argue that amnesty creates conditions conducive for dialogue, reconciliation, and the restoration of order in fragile societies (Iroanya et al., 2020). By lowering the cost of surrender for combatants, it accelerates conflict termination and stabilisation. On the other hand, critics contend that amnesty undermines justice by absolving perpetrators of serious human rights violations, thereby eroding the rule of law and marginalising victims' demands for accountability (Lenta, 2023). This tension between peace and justice situates amnesty within the broader discourse of transitional justice, where trade-offs are often inevitable. In the African context, amnesty has been employed in diverse settings, including post-apartheid South Africa and post-conflict Uganda, where it facilitated reintegration but yielded mixed outcomes in addressing structural inequalities (Krog, 2015; Branch, 2017).

In Nigeria, the Presidential Amnesty Programme (PAP) exemplifies the application of amnesty as a conflict management strategy in the Niger Delta. Introduced in 2009, it provided unconditional pardon, financial incentives, and reintegration opportunities to militants who surrendered arms (Obi, 2014). While the programme achieved a measurable reduction in violence, it has been criticised for privileging ex-combatants over affected communities and for failing to address underlying grievances such as environmental degradation and economic marginalisation.

Peacebuilding

Peacebuilding refers to a comprehensive and long-term process aimed at addressing the root causes of conflict and establishing sustainable conditions for peace. It extends beyond the mere cessation of hostilities (negative peace) to include the promotion of justice, equity, and institutional stability (positive peace) (Galtung, 1996). As a multidimensional concept, peacebuilding encompasses political, economic, and social interventions designed to transform conflictual relationships and prevent relapse into violence (Lederach, 1997). The United Nations conceptualises peacebuilding as an integrated approach involving the reconstruction of governance institutions, revitalisation of economic systems, and strengthening of security structures (United Nations, 2010). Central to this process are mechanisms such as DDR, institutional reform, economic recovery, and reconciliation initiatives. These components collectively aim to dismantle the structures that sustain conflict while fostering inclusive governance and social cohesion.

In resource-rich but conflict-prone regions like the Niger Delta, peacebuilding assumes a particularly complex character. The region's conflict is deeply rooted in environmental degradation, inequitable resource distribution, and political exclusion, necessitating a holistic approach that goes beyond security interventions (Idemudia & Ite, 2021). While the Presidential Amnesty Programme contributed to the reduction of armed violence, its focus on disarmament and reintegration reflects only one dimension of peacebuilding (Oluwaniyi, 2011). Sustainable peace requires addressing broader structural issues, including environmental justice, youth unemployment, and governance deficits. Critiques of peacebuilding interventions often highlight their tendency to prioritise short-term stability over long-term transformation. In the Niger Delta, the persistence of socio-economic

inequalities and the resurgence of militancy show the limitations of narrowly conceived peace initiatives (Ebiede, 2017). Consequently, peacebuilding must be understood as a continuous and adaptive process that integrates security, development, and justice.

Nexus Between Amnesty and Peacebuilding

The relationship between amnesty and peacebuilding is both complementary and contested, reflecting the broader tension between short-term conflict management and long-term structural transformation. Amnesty operates as an entry point into peacebuilding by facilitating the immediate cessation of violence through the disarmament and reintegration of combatants. Reducing the incentives for continued conflict, it creates a conducive environment for subsequent peacebuilding interventions (Sriram, 2012; Obi, 2014). In this sense, amnesty contributes to the achievement of negative peace, which is a necessary precondition for deeper societal transformation. However, the contribution of amnesty to sustainable peacebuilding is inherently limited if it is not embedded within a broader framework that addresses the structural drivers of conflict. The Niger Delta experience illustrates this limitation. While the Presidential Amnesty Programme succeeded in reducing militancy and stabilising oil production, its narrow focus on ex-combatants excluded wider community concerns, thereby undermining its transformative potential. Issues such as environmental degradation, governance failures, and economic marginalisation remained largely unaddressed, creating conditions for the re-emergence of violence (Ebiede, 2017; Idemudia & Ite, 2021).

Moreover, the use of amnesty raises critical questions about justice and legitimacy within peacebuilding processes. The absence of accountability mechanisms may generate resentment among victims and weaken public trust in state institutions (Lenta, 2023). This highlights the need to balance amnesty with complementary measures such as truth commissions, reparations, and institutional reforms. Peacebuilding, therefore, must transcend the logic of pacification and engage with the deeper socio-political realities that sustain conflict. In essence, amnesty and peacebuilding are interdependent but not interchangeable. Amnesty provides the immediate conditions for peace by halting violence, while peacebuilding ensures the sustainability of that peace through structural transformation. The effectiveness of amnesty as a peacebuilding tool ultimately depends on its integration into a holistic strategy that prioritises inclusivity, justice, and development. Without such integration, amnesty risks becoming a temporary palliative rather than a foundation for enduring peace.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework is anchored on Conflict Transformation Theory (CTT), which provides a comprehensive lens for analysing the dynamics of peacebuilding beyond the mere cessation of violence. Rooted in the works of scholars such as Lederach, the theory conceives conflict not as an aberration to be suppressed, but as a social phenomenon that can be constructively transformed through deliberate structural and relational changes. It shifts attention from short-term conflict management to long-term transformation of the underlying conditions that generate and sustain violence. Conflict Transformation Theory posits that durable peace emerges when interventions address the structural, relational, and institutional drivers of conflict simultaneously. Structurally, it emphasises the need to confront socio-economic inequalities, marginalisation, and environmental injustices that often underpin violent agitations. Relationally, it focuses on rebuilding trust between conflicting parties, particularly between the state and local communities. Institutionally, it advocates reforms that enhance governance, accountability, and inclusive participation. This multidimensional

approach aligns with the complex realities of the Niger Delta, where grievances are deeply embedded in historical neglect, resource inequities, and ecological degradation.

Applied to the Presidential Amnesty Programme (PAP), the theory provides a critical framework for assessing both its achievements and limitations. While the PAP contributed to the de-escalation of violence through disarmament, demobilisation, and reintegration initiatives, Conflict Transformation Theory interrogates whether such outcomes translate into sustainable peace. It questions the extent to which the programme has transformed the structural conditions that fuelled militancy, including unemployment, environmental damage, and political exclusion. The framework therefore, enables a nuanced evaluation of the PAP as more than a pacification strategy. It highlights the gap between negative peace, defined by reduced hostilities, and positive peace, characterised by justice, equity, and inclusive development.

Conflict and Militancy in the Niger Delta

Conflict and militancy in the Niger Delta represent a protracted struggle shaped by decades of environmental degradation, political exclusion and unequal access to economic resources. Conflict in the region encompasses recurring disputes over resource control, governance structures and cultural recognition, involving complex interactions among local communities, multinational oil corporations and the Nigerian state. These tensions have deepened as communities confront the ecological destruction of their livelihoods and the perceived failure of government institutions to address long-standing grievances. Militancy, in this context, refers to the organised deployment of violence by non-state groups seeking to influence political and economic decisions. Such groups often employ tactics including attacks on oil facilities, kidnapping of personnel, pipeline sabotage and large-scale oil bunkering to exert pressure and draw attention to their demands (*Human Rights Watch*, 1995). Over time, militancy has evolved from spontaneous acts of resistance into structured movements that articulate broader claims about justice, autonomy and equitable development.

Historically, the crisis evolved from colonial and postcolonial extractive structures that dispossessed communities of land and livelihood, compounded by decades of oil spills, gas flaring and underdevelopment that generated deep grievances and fed waves of resistance such as the Ogoni struggle and the rise of armed groups in the 2000s (Osaghae, 1995). Key drivers of militancy include environmental depletion, unemployment, youth frustration, inequitable resource distribution, corruption, weak governance and the growth of lucrative criminal economies built around illegal oil markets, which blur the boundaries between political agitation and organised crime. These factors interact with state weakness: heavy-handed security responses often escalate tensions and undermine trust, while political interference, exclusion and selective development reinforce perceptions of injustice (Oluwaniyi, 2011).

The tactics of militant groups have ranged from pipeline vandalism and illegal refining to hostage-taking and armed confrontations, producing severe economic losses, security instability and ecological damage. Scholarly analyses commonly interpret the conflict through grievance–greed theories, relative deprivation, frustration–aggression and political opportunity models, all of which highlight how structural violence and limited peaceful channels for redress enable violent mobilisation. State responses have included the 2009 Presidential Amnesty Programme, which temporarily reduced violence through disarmament and reintegration incentives but failed to address the deeper drivers of conflict, particularly inadequate remediation, poor governance and lack of sustainable livelihoods (Ajodo-Adebanjoko, 2017).

The Niger Delta region consists of nine oil-producing states mainly from the South-South, South-East and South-West geopolitical regions of Nigeria namely Akwa-Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo, Rivers, Abia, Imo and Ondo states (Ebegbulem, Ekpe & Adejumo, 2013). Bayelsa, Delta and Rivers states were the core Niger Delta states, but President Obasanjo included the rest in the year 2000 because they belong to the oil-producing states (Asuni, 2009; Abegunde, 2013). The region covers about 7.5% of the Nigerian land mass and 75,000 km² (Abegunde, 2013). It is blessed with natural and mineral resources such as forests, freshwater swamps, mangrove swamps, agricultural products, oil, gas etc. (UNDP, 2006). It has over 31million of the over 140million total Nigerian population based on the 2006 national census (National Population Commission, NPC, 2006); with about 140 ethnic groups (Asuni, 2009), including the Ijaw, Ogoni, Kalabari, Efik, Esan, Ibibio, Igbo, Oron, Bini, Edo, Ikwere, Ukwuani, Isoko, Annang, Yoruba, Itsekiri and Urhobo etc. (Afinotan & Ojakorotu, 2009; Asuni, 2009).

Oil was first discovered in the Niger Delta region at Oloibiri town, now in Bayelsa State by Shell-BP in 1956, while production in commercial quantity commenced in 1958 with 5,100 barrels per day (*Tell,* 2008). Oil boom was experienced in the 1970s, and crude oil gradually overtook agriculture as the major export commodity. The oil sector contributed only 6.0% of GDP in 1970, but grew to 39.3% in 1990, 48.2% in 2004; While agriculture's contribution of about 60-70% to Nigeria's GDP in the 1960s from leading exporter commodities like cotton, groundnuts, rubber, palm oil, Kernel declined to 41.3% in 1970, 29.7% in 1990, 16.6% in 2004 (Daramola, Ehui, Ukeje, & McIntire 2007). Since crude oil became the leading export commodity for Nigeria, the Niger Delta region became very strategic as a major source of revenue the Federal Government of Nigeria (Ebegbulem et al., 2013). Nigeria joined the Organization for Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) in 1971, established the Nigeria National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) in 1977; it has four refineries and several oil companies operating in the Niger Delta, including Shell, Mobil, Chevron, Elf, Agip, Texaco etc.

However, the region has been characterised by severe militancy against the Nigerian government and multinational oil companies. Agitations begun in 1966 with non-violent secessionist movement but turned into deadly militancy as from the 1990s. Since then, the militancy became resurgent, causing massive loss of lives, environmental damages, closure of businesses and loss of revenue which all bear negative implications on Nigeria's prospects for economic development. Most existing studies agree that Niger Delta militancy was caused by popular frustrations and grievances due to marginalisation, environmental degradation, poor infrastructural development, poverty and unemployment despite its huge contribution to revenue generation the socio-economic development of Nigeria (UNDP 2006; Asuni, 2009; Courson, 2009; Akinola and Adesopo 2011; Ibaba, 2011; Benedict, 2011; Abegunde, 2013.). A few studies linked the militancy with greed, implying that the militancy was driven by motivation and the opportunity to loot availability of oil resources (Nwodo, 2009; Tonwe, Ojo and Aghedo, 2011).

Militancy in the Niger Delta remains deeply rooted in structural inequalities, environmental degradation, and economic marginalisation and recent developments show these drivers are as potent as ever. Oil theft (bunkering) has become increasingly systemic, involving not just local youths, but criminal syndicates and even political elites, reflecting an illicit economy worth billion (Iwuchukwu & Ezedinachi, 2024) In parallel, piracy in the Niger Delta has evolved into a "gun business," where maritime criminality is interconnected with arms trafficking and wider criminal networks, rather than being simply sporadic attacks on oil infrastructure (Jacobsen & Rasmussen, 2024).

Environmental damage continues to ravage the region: large-scale oil spills, gas flaring, and polluted water systems have rendered farmlands barren, devastated fisheries, and exposed communities to serious health risks. A recent study estimated that the Niger Delta's polluted waterways, soils, and ecosystems make it one of the most contaminated globally, with aging pipelines, equipment failures, sabotage, and theft driving recurrent spills (Ewin et al., 2023). This ecological decay contributes directly to rising poverty despite the oil wealth flowing out of the region with many Niger Delta communities trapped in a vicious cycle of underdevelopment and despair (Dike, 2025). Compounding this is the failure of remediation efforts: the Nigerian Hydrocarbon Pollution Remediation Project (HYPREP) has been accused of mismanaging funds, using unqualified contractors, and selecting labs unable to properly test contaminated soil, leaving much land unrestored (*Associated Press,* 2024). The divestment of major international oil companies such as Shell's sale of its onshore business has sparked fears among local populations that new owners may abandon environmental obligations, leaving legacy pollution unaddressed. On the human security front, pipeline vandalism and illegal refinery activity remain persistent as security forces reported demobilising over 570 clandestine refining sites and arresting hundreds of suspects (Open Publication Distribution System, 2025).

The social cost of these dynamics is severe: in some communities, recurrent spills have triggered outbreaks of diarrhea, scabies, food insecurity, and other health crises, especially within children and vulnerable populations (*Sahara Reporters*, 2025). These conditions also frustrate efforts to reintegrate ex-militants: the Presidential Amnesty Programme (PAP) continues to struggle with underfunding, limited access to skills training, and inadequate job creation, driving some disenfranchised youth back to criminal or violent activity (Otuaro, 2025). Ultimately, the evolution of militancy in the Niger Delta today reflects a complex hybrid of political grievance, violent crime, environmental injustice, and governance failures that reinforce one another in a downward spiral.

Factors Responsible for Militancy in the Niger Delta Region

Militancy in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria is rooted in a complex interplay of historical, socio-economic, environmental, and political factors that have evolved over decades, producing a volatile environment conducive to violent mobilisation. Central to this crisis is the paradox of resource wealth amid pervasive deprivation. Although the Niger Delta accounts for the overwhelming share of Nigeria's oil revenue, the region has remained characterised by underdevelopment, high unemployment, and poor infrastructure, creating a deep sense of relative deprivation among local populations (Watts, 2008; Omeje et al., 2016). This disparity between resource endowment and lived realities has fostered widespread resentment, particularly among youths who perceive the state and multinational oil corporations as beneficiaries of their marginalisation. The historical roots of this discontent can be traced to the centralisation of resource control following the post-civil war restructuring of Nigeria's federal system, which significantly reduced the derivation principle and concentrated oil revenues in the federal government (Suberu, 2001). Consequently, oil-producing communities have long perceived themselves as victims of internal colonialism, excluded from meaningful participation in decisions affecting their resources and development trajectories (Obi, 2014).

Environmental degradation constitutes another critical driver of militancy in the region. Decades of oil exploration activities have resulted in widespread oil spills, gas flaring, and destruction of farmlands and aquatic ecosystems, which traditionally sustained local livelihoods (Nriagu et al., 2016). The failure of both the Nigerian state and oil companies to effectively address these ecological damages has intensified grievances and eroded trust in

formal institutions. Empirical evidence suggests that the Niger Delta is among the most polluted oil-producing regions globally, with severe consequences for public health and economic survival. This environmental injustice has not only impoverished communities but has also provided a moral justification for resistance, as militant groups frame their actions as a struggle for survival and ecological justice. Closely linked to this is the issue of youth unemployment and economic exclusion. The collapse of traditional livelihoods due to environmental damage, combined with limited access to formal employment opportunities, has created a large pool of disaffected youths who are easily mobilised into militant activities (Ibaba, 2011). For many of these youths, militancy offers both an economic alternative and a means of expressing frustration against systemic neglect.

Political marginalisation and governance deficits further exacerbate the conditions for militancy. The Niger Delta has historically experienced weak state presence, corruption, and ineffective governance structures, which have undermined the delivery of public goods and services (Idemudia & Ite, 2021). Development agencies such as the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) and the Ministry of Niger Delta Affairs have been criticised for inefficiency, mismanagement, and elite capture, limiting their capacity to address local needs (Aghedo & Osumah, 2015). This governance failure has reinforced perceptions of injustice and exclusion, creating fertile ground for mobilisation by militant leaders who capitalise on local grievances. Furthermore, the politicisation of ethnicity and identity has played a significant role in shaping the dynamics of militancy. Ethnic groups in the region have often mobilised around shared identities to articulate demands for resource control and political recognition, leading to the emergence of organised movements such as the Ijaw Youth Council and later militant groups like the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) (Courson, 2009). These groups have combined political rhetoric with violent tactics, blurring the line between legitimate agitation and criminality.

The proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SALWs) has also significantly contributed to the escalation and sustenance of militancy in the Niger Delta. The availability of weapons, facilitated by porous borders, weak law enforcement, and regional conflict spillovers, has enhanced the operational capacity of militant groups (Agbiboa, 2013). This militarisation of the region has transformed local grievances into violent confrontations, increasing the scale and intensity of conflict. In addition, the emergence of a lucrative war economy centred on illegal oil bunkering, kidnapping, and piracy has entrenched militancy as both a political and economic enterprise. Militant groups and criminal networks derive substantial financial benefits from these activities, creating incentives for violence even in the absence of ideological motivations (Asuni, 2009; Ikelegbe & Umukoro, 2016). This fusion of grievance and greed complicates efforts to resolve the conflict, as economic interests become intertwined with political demands.

State responses to militancy have also inadvertently contributed to its persistence. Heavy-handed military operations, such as those conducted by the Joint Task Force (JTF), have often resulted in civilian casualties, destruction of communities, and further alienation of local populations (Ikoh & Ukpong, 2013). Rather than addressing the root causes of conflict, such approaches have reinforced cycles of violence and retaliation. Although the introduction of the Presidential Amnesty Programme (PAP) in 2009 marked a shift towards a more conciliatory strategy, its focus on disarmament and reintegration has not sufficiently addressed underlying structural issues. While the programme succeeded in reducing violence in the short term, challenges such as uneven implementation, limited community inclusion, and inadequate post-reintegration support have undermined its long-term effectiveness.

Moreover, the perceived reward for militancy has created perverse incentives, encouraging the emergence of new groups seeking similar benefits.

Impact of Presidential Amnesty Programme on Peacebuilding in Rivers State

The Presidential Amnesty Programme (PAP), introduced in 2009, has had profound yet ambivalent implications for peacebuilding in Rivers State, reflecting both measurable gains in security stabilisation and persistent structural limitations that constrain sustainable peace. At its core, the PAP functioned as a Disarmament, Demobilisation, and Reintegration (DDR) framework designed to neutralise militant violence that had severely disrupted oil production and socio-economic life in core Niger Delta states, including Rivers. One of its most immediate and visible impacts was the significant reduction in armed hostilities. Following the surrender of weapons and the demobilisation of thousands of militants, many of whom were concentrated in Rivers State, the frequency of attacks on oil installations, kidnappings, and piracy declined markedly, creating an atmosphere of relative calm conducive to economic recovery (Ebiede et al., 2020; Ajibola, 2015). This initial success shows the programme's effectiveness as a short-term conflict management strategy, as it curtailed the operational capacity of militant groups and restored a degree of state authority in previously volatile areas.

Beyond the cessation of violence, the PAP contributed to human capital development and socio-economic reintegration, which are central pillars of peacebuilding. Through vocational training, formal education, and overseas scholarship schemes, many ex-militants from Rivers State acquired skills intended to facilitate their transition into civilian livelihoods. These interventions provided alternatives to violence and reduced the economic incentives for returning to militancy (Ajibola, 2015). Additionally, empowerment initiatives, including the distribution of starter packs and business support to beneficiaries in communities such as Buguma in Rivers State, aimed to promote local entrepreneurship and economic self-reliance. Such measures not only enhanced individual livelihoods but also contributed to community-level stability by reducing unemployment-driven grievances. In this regard, the PAP aligns with broader peacebuilding objectives that emphasise economic inclusion as a pathway to durable peace.

However, while these achievements are significant, they are largely confined to the domain of negative peace, the absence of direct violence, rather than the establishment of positive peace characterised by justice, equity, and institutional resilience. A critical limitation of the PAP in Rivers State lies in its narrow focus on ex-combatants, which has inadvertently marginalised non-combatant populations who were equally affected by the conflict. This selective approach has generated new forms of inequality and resentment, as benefits are perceived to be disproportionately allocated to those who participated in violence (Adibe et al., 2024; Obi, 2014). Thus, rather than fostering inclusive peacebuilding, the programme has, in some instances, reinforced divisions within communities, undermining social cohesion.

Still, the sustainability of the PAP's peacebuilding outcomes in Rivers State is undermined by persistent structural challenges that the programme has largely failed to address. Despite the reduction in militancy, issues such as environmental degradation, youth unemployment, poverty, and inadequate infrastructure remain pervasive in the region. Evidence indicates that while youth restiveness declined following the implementation of the PAP, the broader conditions of underdevelopment and economic exclusion continue to define the Niger Delta experience. This disconnect between short-term stabilisation and long-term development highlights a fundamental weakness in the programme's design, as it treats the symptoms of conflict without sufficiently addressing its root causes.

Another critical dimension of the PAP's impact on peacebuilding in Rivers State relates to governance and institutional dynamics. The programme has been widely criticised for issues of corruption, political interference, and weak monitoring mechanisms, which have compromised its effectiveness and credibility. Reports suggest that the diversion of funds, delays in stipend payments, and lack of transparency in beneficiary selection have undermined trust in the programme and the state more broadly. These governance deficits not only limit the transformative potential of the PAP but also perpetuate the very conditions of mistrust and exclusion that fuel conflict. In this sense, the programme reflects a broader pattern of state fragility in the Niger Delta, where institutional weaknesses hinder the consolidation of peace.

Moreover, the PAP has inadvertently contributed to the emergence of a dependency culture and the entrenchment of a rent-seeking political economy in Rivers State. By providing monthly stipends and financial incentives to ex-militants, the programme has created expectations of continuous state patronage, which may discourage genuine economic integration and self-sufficiency. Some scholars argue that this dynamic has transformed the PAP into a mechanism of elite appeasement, where former militant leaders leverage their influence to secure economic and political benefits (Orugbani, 2023). This transactional approach to peacebuilding risks institutionalising a cycle in which the threat of renewed violence becomes a bargaining tool for extracting concessions from the state, thereby undermining long-term stability.

The reintegration component of the PAP also presents mixed outcomes in Rivers State. While many beneficiaries have successfully transitioned into civilian life, others face significant challenges, including limited employment opportunities, social stigma, and inadequate post-training support. Studies indicate that the reintegration process has been uneven and, in some cases, ineffective due to poor programme design and implementation constraints (Ebiede et al., 2020). This uneven reintegration undermines the sustainability of peace, as disenfranchised ex-militants may revert to criminal or militant activities, particularly in the absence of viable economic alternatives. Despite these limitations, the PAP has also facilitated important non-material aspects of peacebuilding in Rivers State, particularly in fostering dialogue and reducing hostilities among formerly antagonistic groups. Initiatives such as peace conferences and stakeholder engagements among ex-agitators have contributed to building trust and promoting reconciliation within the region. These efforts highlight the potential of the programme to serve as a platform for broader peacebuilding initiatives, provided it is restructured to address its inherent shortcomings.

The point here is that the impact of the Presidential Amnesty Programme on peacebuilding in Rivers State is best understood as a combination of short-term success and long-term fragility. The programme has been effective in reducing violence, enhancing human capital, and creating a foundation for stability. However, its limited scope, governance challenges, and failure to address structural drivers of conflict have constrained its capacity to deliver sustainable peace.

Conclusion

The analysis of the Presidential Amnesty Programme (PAP) within the broader context of peacebuilding in Rivers State emphasises a fundamental tension between short-term conflict mitigation and the pursuit of sustainable peace. The programme emerged as a pragmatic response to the escalation of militancy in the Niger Delta, and its immediate impact in reducing violence, restoring oil production, and stabilising the security environment is widely acknowledged (Obi, 2014; Ebiede et al., 2020). By facilitating the disarmament and

demobilisation of thousands of militants and providing avenues for reintegration through training and financial incentives, the PAP effectively curtailed the operational capacity of armed groups and created a window for relative calm. This outcome aligns with the logic of DDR frameworks, which prioritise the cessation of hostilities as a precursor to broader peacebuilding efforts (Oluwaniyi, 2011). However, as the evidence suggests, the transition from negative peace to positive peace has remained incomplete, particularly in Rivers State, where underlying structural conditions continue to reproduce insecurity. A critical limitation of the PAP lies in its narrow focus on ex-combatants, which has inadvertently marginalised the wider population affected by the conflict. This selective distribution of benefits has generated new forms of grievance and inequality, thereby undermining social cohesion and the legitimacy of the peace process (Aghedo & Osumah, 2015). Moreover, the persistence of environmental degradation, youth unemployment, and inadequate infrastructure highlights the programme's inability to address the root causes of militancy. These enduring challenges reinforce the argument that peacebuilding cannot be reduced to disarmament and reintegration alone but must encompass comprehensive socio-economic and environmental reforms.

The experience of the PAP in Rivers State reveals that while amnesty can serve as an effective entry point for peacebuilding, it is insufficient as a standalone strategy. Sustainable peace requires a holistic approach that integrates security, development, and governance reforms. This entails addressing environmental injustices, promoting inclusive economic opportunities, strengthening institutional capacity, and ensuring equitable resource distribution. Without such an integrated framework, the conditions that gave rise to militancy are likely to persist, undermining the durability of peace. Therefore, the future of peacebuilding in Rivers State depends not on the continuation of amnesty as a reactive measure, but on its transformation into a component of a broader, inclusive, and justice-oriented development strategy capable of delivering long-term stability and resilience.

References

Abegunde, O. (2013). The Niger Delta Amnesty Programme and the Challenge of Sustainable Peace in Nigeria. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science, 3*(18), 248–255.

Adedeji, O. B. (2023). An Assessment of the Niger Delta Amnesty Programme in Southern Ijaw Local Government Area of Bayelsa State, Nigeria. *Nigerian Journal of Peace, Development & Humanitarian Affairs, 3*(1), 129-154.

Afinotan, L. A., & Ojakorotu, V. (2009). The Niger Delta Crisis: Issues, Challenges and Prospects. *African Journal of Political Science and International Relations, 3*(5), 191–198.

Agbiboa, D. E. (2013). Armed Groups, Arms Proliferation and the Amnesty Programme in the Niger Delta. *African Security Review*, *22*(3), 14–30. https://doi.org/10.1080/10246029.2013.825689

Aghedo, I., & Osumah, O. (2015). Insurgency in Nigeria: A comparative study of Niger Delta and Boko Haram uprisings. *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, *50*(2), 208-222.

Ajodo-Adebanjoko, A. (2017). Towards Ending Conflict and Insecurity in the Niger Delta Region: A collective non-violent approach. *African Journal on Conflict Resolution, 17*(1), 9–27.

Akinola, S. R., & Adesopo, A. (2011). Derivation Principle Dilemma and National (Dis)Unity in Nigeria: A Polycentric Planning Perspective on the Niger Delta. *Journal of Sustainable Development, 4*(5), 251–263. https://doi.org/10.5539/jsd.v4n5p251

Akinwale, A. A. (2010). Amnesty and Human Capital Development Agenda for the Niger Delta. *Journal of African Studies and Development, 2*(8), 201–207.

Arnson, C. J., & Tickner, A. B. (2019). *Colombia After the Peace Agreement: The Challenges of Implementation and Reconfiguration of Violence.* Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars.

Associated Press. (2024). Nigerian Agency 'Failed Completely' to Clean Up Oil Damage Despite Funding, Leaked Files Say. https://apnews.com/article/c8bb10645de45a16707a8574bc7791fd

Asuni, J. B. (2009a). *Blood Oil in the Niger Delta.* United States Institute of Peace.

Benedict, A. O. (2011). *Tragedy of Commons: Analysis of Oil Spillage, Gas Flaring and Sustainable Development of the Niger Delta of Nigeria*. *Journal of Sustainable Development, 4*(2), 200–208. https://doi.org/10.5539/jsd.v4n2p200

Branch, A. (2017). *Africa Uprising: Popular Protest and Political Change.* Zed Books.

Courson, E. (2009). *Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND): Political Marginalization, Repression, and Petro-Insurgency in the Niger Delta* (Discussion Paper 47). Uppsala: NordiskaAfrikainstitutet.

Daramola, A., Ehui, S. U., Ukeje, E., & McIntire, J. (2007). *Agricultural Export Potential*. In P. Collier & C. Pattillo (Eds.), Economic Policy Options for a Prosperous Nigeria (pp. 1–38). Palgrave Macmillan.

Dike, J. (2025, February 3). Niger Delta: Poverty Amidst Plenty – A Region in Desperate Need of Transformation. *Vanguard*.https://www.vanguardngr.com/2025/02/niger-delta-poverty-amidst-plenty-a-region-in-desperate-need-of-transformation/

Ebegbulem, J., Ekpe, D., & Adejumo, T. O. (2013). Oil Exploration and Poverty in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria: A Critical Analysis. *International Journal of Business and Social Science, 4*(3), 279–287.

Ebiede, T. M. (2017). Instability in Nigeria's Niger Delta: The Post-Amnesty Programme and Sustainable Peace-building. Friedrich-Ebert Stiftung Peace and Security Centre of Competence Sub-Sahara Africa. https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/fes-pscc/14403.pdf

Ebiede, T., Langer, A., & Tosun, J. (2020). Disarmament, Demobilisation, and Reintegration: Analysing the Outcomes of Nigeria's Post-Amnesty Programme. *Stability: International Journal of Security & Development, 9*(1), 1–17. https://doi.org/10.5334/sta.752

Eregha, P. B., & Omotosho, B. S. (2016). The Amnesty Programme and the Resolution of the Niger Delta Conflict: Progress, Challenges and Prospects. *Journal of Sustainable Development in Africa, 18*(2), 1–14.

Ewim, D. R. E., Orikpete, O. F., Scott, T. O., Onyebuchi, C. N., Onukogu, A. O., Uzougbo, C. G., & Onunka, C. (2023). Survey of wastewater issues due to oil spills and pollution in the Niger Delta area of Nigeria: a secondary data analysis. *Bulletin of the National Research Centre, 47*(1), 116.

Galtung, J. (1996). *Peace by Peaceful Means: Peace and Conflict, Development and Civilization.* Sage Publications

Human Rights Watch. (1995). *Nigeria: The Ogoni Crisis – A Case Study of Military Repression.*https://www.hrw.org/reports/pdfs/n/nigeria/nigeria957.pdf

Ibaba, S. I. (2011). *Niger Delta: Constraints and Pathways to Development.* Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

Idemudia, U., & Ite, U. E. (2006). Corporate Community Relations in Nigeria's Oil Industry: Challenges and Imperatives. *Corporate Social Responsibility and Environmental Management, 13*(4), 194–206

Ikelegbe, A., & Umukoro, N. (2016). The Amnesty Programme and the Resolution of the Niger Delta Crisis: Progress, Challenges and Prognosis. *Monograph Series, 14.*

Ikoh, M. U., & Ukpong, E. A. (2013). The Niger Delta Crisis: Taming Violence Beyond Amnesty. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science, 3*(17), 146–159.

Iroanya, R. O., Nguluwe, G., & Ndapulamo, S. (2019). Human Trafficking and Illicit Financial Flows in Africa. *Journal of Namibian Studies: History, Politics, Culture, 25*, 47–70. https://doi.org/10.59670/jns.v25i.178

Iwuchukwu, H. O., & Ezedinachi, I. E. (2024). Oil Theft and the Politics of Resource Control in the Niger Delta, 1956–2022. *Irish International Journal of Law, Political Sciences and Administration*. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17046976

Jacobsen, K. L., & Rasmussen, A. M. (2024). Piracy and the Broader 'Gun Business' in the Niger Delta. *International Affairs, 100*(4), 1693–1713.

Krog, A. (2015). *Country of My Skull: Guilt, Sorrow, and the Limits of Forgiveness in the New South Africa*. Random House.

Lederach, J. P. (1997). *Building Peace: Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies.* United States Institute of Peace Press.

Lenta, P. (2023). Amnesties, Transitional Justice and the Rule of law. *Hague Journal on the Rule of Law, 15*(3), 441–469.

Mallinder, L. (2024). *Amnesties for Political Crimes: From Terrorism to Dissent.*PeaceRep: The Peace and Conflict Resolution Evidence Platform, University of Edinburgh. https://peacerep.org/publication/amnesties-for-political-crimes-from-terrorism-to-dissent/

McGarry, J., & O'Leary, B. (2016). *The Northern Ireland Conflict: Consociational Engagements.* Oxford University Press.

Moloney, M., & Pettersen, J. (2017). *Early Childhood Education Management: Insights From Practice.* Routledge.

Nriagu, J., Udofia, E. A., Ekong, I., &Ebuk, G. (2016). Health Risks Associated With Oil Pollution in the Niger Delta, Nigeria. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, 13*(3), 346. https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph13030346

Nwodo, N. (2009). *From Grievance to Greed: An Analysis of Violent Conflict in Oil Bearing Communities in Nigeria*. Paper Presented at the Conference on Financial and Market Adverse Shocks and Policy Response in Fragile Countries, Accra, Ghana

Obi, C. (2014). Oil and the Post-Amnesty Programme (PAP): what prospects for sustainable development and peace in the Niger Delta?. *Review of African Political Economy*, *41*(140), 249-263.

Oluwaniyi, O. O. (2011). Post-Amnesty Programme in the Niger Delta: Challenges and Prospects. *African Security Review, 20*(1), 44–58.

Omeje, J. C., Egwa, E. I., &Adikwu, V. O. (2016). Impact of Quota System and Catchment Area Policy on the University Admissions in North Central Nigeria. *SAGE Open, 6*(2), Article 2158244016654951.

Open Publication Distribution System. (2025). *OPDS Specification*. Retrieved February 21, 2026,

Osaghae, E. E. (1995). The Ogoni Uprising: Oil Politics, Minority Agitation and the Future of the Nigerian state. *African Affairs, 94*(376), 325–344.

Sahara Reporters. (2025, July 1). Niger Delta Communities Battle Diarrhoea, Scabies, Acute Hunger, Insecurity Caused by oil Spill, Pipeline Vandalism, Neglect. *Sahara Reporters*. https://saharareporters.com/2025/07/01/niger-delta-communities-battle-diarrhoea-scabies-acute-hunger-insecurity-caused-oil

Sriram, C. L., García-Godos, J., Herman, J., & Martin-Ortega, O. (2012). *Transitional Justice and Peacebuilding on the Ground*. Victims and ex-combatants. Routledge, Oxon.

Suberu, R. T. (2001). *Federalism and Ethnic Conflict in Nigeria.* United States Institute of Peace Press.

Otuaro, D. (2025, March 21). *Niger Delta: Route to Peace, Security and Stability*. *ThisDay*. Retrieved from https://www.thisdaylive.com/2025/03/21/niger-delta-route-to-peace-security-and-stability/

Tonwe, D. A., & Aghedo, I. (2011). Amnesty Programme and the Niger Delta: The Road to Post-Conflict Peace and Development. *African Journal of Political Science and International Relations, 5*(2), 58–67.

United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). (2006). *Niger Delta Human development report*. UNDP Nigeria. https://hdr.undp.org

United Nations. (2010). *Peacebuilding: Report of the Secretary-General (A/65/354–S/2010/466).* United Nations.

Watts, M. (2008). *Blood Oil: The Anatomy of a Petro-Insurgency in the Niger Delta.* Friedrich Ebert Foundation Occasional Paper, 1–42.