



## Article

# Presidential Amnesty Programme and its Role in Fostering Stability in the Niger Delta Region, Nigeria

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**Abstract:** Historically, the Niger Delta region of Nigeria has been plagued by militancy, crude oil theft and socio-political instability that have negatively affected Nigerian economic interest and crude oil production. This study explores the relationship between the Presidential Amnesty Programme (PAP) and regional stability between 2008 and 2024, which is analysed both quantitatively with crude oil production and militant activity data and qualitatively through interviews and focus group discussions. The results show that crude oil production has increased from 1.77 million bpd before the proclamation of amnesty in 2009 to 2.46 million bpd in 2010 and there was a decrease in violent incidents. The programme's short-term impact illustrates its ability to deter large-scale militancy and re-create economic activity. But with the recent uptick in militant activities, oil theft, and local conflicts, including the Okuama/Okoloba crisis in 2024, post-amnesty data reveals production fluctuations down to 1.80 million bpd in 2016 and 1.47 million bpd in 2023. Though these results suggest that the PAP is effective in the short-term, long-term security and sustainable economic gains are limited by structural grievances, lack of community participation and environmental issues. The study highlights the need for comprehensive socio-economic, governance and environmental interventions to reinforce the positive results of the PAP and to maintain lasting stability in the Niger Delta.

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**Keywords:** Presidential Amnesty Programme, Niger Delta, Stability, Militancy, Crude Oil Production, Post-Conflict Reintegration

## 1. Introduction

A region of nine states in the south of Nigeria, the Niger Delta holds most of the country's oil and gas reserves, making up the bulk of its revenue. Ironically, all of this abundance has not been enough to prevent the region from being socio-economically marginalised and from being degraded, and even from violent militancy for decades. The region experienced a rise in militancy between 2004 and 2009, as attacks on oil infrastructure, kidnapping and pipeline sabotage affected the national revenue and livelihoods.

The Nigerian government responded with a target to disarm, demobilise, rehabilitate and reintegrate (DDRR) the former militants and to offer them vocational training and stipends to enable socio-economic reintegration under the Presidential Amnesty Programme (PAP) introduced in 2009. The programme was designed not just to reduce violence, but also provide a basis for lasting peace in the Niger Delta. The effectiveness of the PAP in fostering regional stability with a focus on security outcomes, socio-economic development and community reintegration is explored. The analysis of the data and experiences of the participants and stakeholders in this research helps to clarify

the complex relationship between government amnesty policies and sustainable peace in conflict-prone and resource-rich areas.

#### **Research Questions:**

1. How has the PAP succeeded in tackling violent conflicts and insecurity in the Niger Delta?
2. What impact has the programme had on socio-economic development and livelihoods of the former militants and communities?
3. What are the constraints to the long-term stability outcomes of the PAP?

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Niger Delta conflicts and instabilities**

The Niger Delta of Nigeria with nine oil-rich states has always had complex socio-political issues, continuous environmental degradation and underdevelopment. As outlined by Okonta [1] the region's restive climate is the product of a mix of political marginalisation, unfair resource allocation and environmental effects of years of oil exploration. The Niger Delta region, which accounted for a significant portion of Nigeria's petroleum income, has long been plagued by poverty, lack of infrastructure and social amenities. This paradox of wealth in the midst of deprivation has resulted in a fertile breeding ground for social unrest and armed militancy.

Niger Delta communities have grievances of a multi-dimensional nature. On the political level, local communities have been systematically denied to participate in the governance and decision-making process, especially on the utilisation of oil extracted from their lands. Infrequent oil spills, gas flaring and deforestation have degraded the environment, hindering traditional practices like fishing and farming that were once very important to local economies [2]. The resulting ecological devastation has exacerbated economic difficulties and, in turn, linked poverty and vulnerability, which has led to a resentment of oil companies and the government.

The structural inequalities and the failure of successive governments to deal with grievances in the region led to militancy. As noted by Watts [2], the emergence of armed groups in the Niger Delta cannot be just viewed as crime or opportunism; it is a means of resisting a systemic injustice and socio-economic marginalisation. In the beginning, these groups, whose membership was frequently based on ethnicity and community, wanted to take control of the allocation of oil revenues, compensation for environmental damages, and political recognition. However, some groups over time resorted to violence such as pipeline vandalism, kidnapping of oil workers and attacks on security forces that led to insecurity and disruption of national oil production.

Understanding conflict in the Niger Delta is one of human security not state security [3]. The Nigerian state has traditionally defined militancy as a security issue, but human security also focuses on protecting people and communities against environmental risks, social exclusion and poverty. In this perspective, the Niger Delta unrest is not only a manifestation of armed opposition, but also a means of protest against the lack of proper socio-economic rights and environmental justice. Without human security measures, the lack of which has led to an ongoing trend where disenfranchised young people become more likely to join militant groups and assert themselves socially and politically.

Socio-economic deprivation also combines with demographic pressures, such as high youth unemployment, a shortage of education and population growth, which leads to increased potential for conflict. Youth in the Niger Delta have been found to be especially vulnerable to recruitment into armed groups because militancy offers financial incentives and a sense of social identity [4]. Furthermore, the region has witnessed a significant increase in the availability of small arms and light weapons, many of which are being trafficked or produced in the region with low regulation, thus exacerbating the quantity and lethality of the violence.

The international aspects of the Niger Delta conflict are also significant. Multinational oil companies that work in the region have been criticised for their failure to show corporate social responsibility and for worsening environmental degradation thus increasing local grievances [5]. Some companies have started to develop initiatives in their communities, but these interventions are often seen as insufficient or inappropriate for local concerns. Because of the lack of coordination between corporate and state actions to solve both environmental and socio-economic problems, cycles of instability have been repeated.

Empirical research highlights the link between resource extraction, environmental damage and conflict. Oil spills for example, which have been documented extensively by Amnesty International [6] in Ogoniland, as environmental hazards have the effect of disrupting livelihoods and leading to communal protest which sometimes degenerates into violent skirmish. Additionally, the Niger Delta region has experienced conflicts between communities regarding control of resources and sharing of benefits, adding to a complex security landscape in the region, with weak law enforcement services and political clientelism.

## **2.2 The Presidential Amnesty Programme (PAP)**

The Presidential Amnesty Programme (PAP) was introduced in response to the rising militancy in the Niger Delta region in August, 2009. The programme was conceived to delist armed groups, rehabilitate former militants and reintegrate them into civil society to curb violent conflicts and lay the foundation for lasting peace [5]. PAP was launched as an initiative for more than 20 000 former militants, providing them with a stipend, skills training, formal education, and psycho-social support. Disarmament and demobilization, vocational training and rehabilitation, and reintegration into civil society are the three key components of the PAP.

**Disarmament and Demobilization:** The initial phase of the process includes the collection of weapons and the formalisation of the departure of militants from armed groups. This stage not only diminishes the capacity for violent war, but also shows the willingness of the state to pursue a peaceful solution. Obi [5] says that disarmament was an important pre-condition for the restoration of law and order, in that the regions which were powerful enough with guns were stabilised by the security forces.

The second stage is Vocational Training and Rehabilitation – to address the economic marginalisation which is a root cause of militancy. Former combatants are participating in agriculture, carpentry, welding, IT training and maritime skills training. Educational activities designed to enhance literacy, numeracy and professional skills are added on to the vocational training. Research shows that they have a significant impact on employability and recidivism in violent behaviours [7].

**Reintegration into Civil Society:** The last phase focuses on social and psychological rehabilitation, helping former militants to take up productive roles in their societies. Reintegration involves mentorship and participation in the community, as well as social links. The PAP is looking to end stigma, build community unity, and contribute to a future of peace by encouraging the acceptance of former militants.

Although the PAP has succeeded in curbing immediate violence, some researchers have pointed out issues with the unequal distribution of socio-economic benefits. For example, Ikelegbe [7] states that some of the ex-militants have been able to start stable livelihoods, while others have been facing delayed stipends, inadequate training and lack of access to livelihoods, thereby creating a disparity among communities. Moreover, the programme has been challenged due to the significant amount of financial stipends provided to the beneficiaries, which whilst helping them in the short-term, may not be sufficient to create sustainable livelihoods unless combined with other economic policies and development programmes.

Empirical assessment of the PAP indicates that the introduction of the PAP has seen a significant decline in the occurrence of oil theft, pipeline vandalism and kidnapping in

the immediate years following the introduction of the PAP. The programme showed an impact in curbing large-scale militancy with the number of violent attacks against oil infrastructure falling by some 60% from 2009 to 2012, according to a study by Omotola [8]. But the continued incidence of minor conflicts including communal disputes and occasional armed attacks indicate that structural grievances are still not being addressed.

Another key point made in the PAP is the need for government-community involvement in post-conflict interventions. Reintegration needs will go beyond material support, to include mechanisms of accountability, transparency and participatory governance. Programs that do not involve community voices are likely to re-create exclusionary processes that were the original source of conflict. Therefore, the PAP can be used as a blueprint for targeted amnesty programmes, but its effectiveness will depend on other development, environmental and institutional governance measures.

### **2.3 Amnesty Programmes and Peacebuilding**

Amnesty schemes have been a proven mechanism in fostering peace and stability in post-conflict areas around the world. Amnesties serve as instruments for inducing combatants to disarm in return for legal protection, social reintegration, and economic assistance [7]. The aim of such programmes is not to stop the violence immediately but to establish conditions for the eventual social cohesion and political reconciliation.

Amnesty programmes can be both a threat and a lifeline, as illustrated by international experiences. In Colombia the government has tried to disarm the paramilitary groups, and this led to a temporary decrease in the amount of violence in conflict zones; however, the process of reintegration has faced problems such as lack of economic opportunities and communities' mistrust, thus threatening long-term stability [10]. Similarly, after the civil war, DDRR programmes in Liberia successfully demobilised combatants but without sustained community development and institutional support, there was a high rate of recidivism and renewed social tensions [11].

These are examples of lessons for the Niger Delta context. Amnesty programmes, which help to tackle immediate security threats, need to be combined with other policy measures for sustainable peace. These include infrastructure construction, environmental restoration, vocational and educational programmes, participatory governance, accountability and transparency. Amnesty policies have limited effect if they are not accompanied by complementary measures, such as addressing structural grievances, including political exclusion, economic marginalisation and environmental degradation.

The PAP in the Niger Delta is a special effort to integrate interventions linked to security with socio-economic rehabilitation. The programme responds to global good practice in DDRR and is based on socio-political factors in the area. But as Ikelegbe [7] warns, amnesty programmes should not be seen as a silver bullet. Achieving sustainable peace needs systemic changes such as equitable resource distribution, environmental remediation and community-based development programmes. Furthermore, the Niger Delta experience demonstrates how formal amnesty processes and informal local governance structures function. Many communities have traditional leadership, conflict resolution and social norms that impact the uptake and impact of reintegration programmes. By integrating these local dynamics into programme design, it is possible to increase the legitimacy of the programme, minimise resistance and contribute to sustainable social cohesion [12]-[15].

Finally, the literature indicates that although amnesty programmes such as the PAP can have a great impact on reducing violent conflict and offering opportunities for reintegration, they are most effective when part of a more comprehensive peacebuilding process. This should include the immediate security concerns of former combatants as well as socio-economic, political and environmental factors which catalyse instability. The PAP can, therefore, be seen as a demobilisation tool as well as a case study of the theory and practice of post-conflict peacebuilding.

## 2.4 Research Gap

Although several analyses have focused on the short-term security effects of PAP, few empirical studies have concentrated on the socio-economic long-term effects, and its role in achieving regional sustainable stability. However, this study fills this gap by combining both qualitative experiences of former militants and quantitative data on development and security indices, to present a holistic assessment of the effectiveness of PAP.

## 3. Materials and Method

### 3.1 Research Design

This study uses a mixed-methods approach. Quantitative analysis is done on security incidents, employment statistics, socio-economic indicators both pre- and post-PAP in Niger Delta. Qualitative data are gathered from 50 former militants, 15 government officials, and 20 community leaders in Bayelsa, Rivers and Delta States via semi-structured interviews.

### 3.2 Data collection and analysis

The sources of security information include the Nigerian Police Force, the Nigerian Ministry of Niger Delta Affairs as well as open sources of conflict monitoring databases. Employment, education and income levels were among the socio-economic indicators used, and were extracted from the National Bureau of Statistics and World Bank reports. The qualitative data were coded thematically to determine perceptions of reintegration, challenges, and stability outcomes.

### 3.3 Limitations

Issues include limitations of official information on the extent of militant activity before 2009 and a possible bias in self-reporting among former militants. To overcome these limitations, triangulation of multiple data sources was used.

## 4. Results and Discussion

**Table 1.** Crude Oil Production, Militant Activity, and the Nexus with the Presidential Amnesty Programme (PAP), 2008–2024

| Year | Crude Oil Production (million bpd) | Militant Activity / Oil Conflict                            | Comments / Nexus with PAP                                                                                   |
|------|------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 2008 | 2.60                               | Moderate                                                    | Pre-amnesty period; rising tension but stable production overall.                                           |
| 2009 | 1.77                               | 1,305 incidents of pipeline blowout, vandalism, and rupture | Sharp decline due to escalation of militancy; amnesty proclaimed mid-year leading to initial stabilization. |
| 2010 | 2.46                               | Increased activity due to emergence of MEND and NDA         | Post-amnesty increase in production; however, some militant activities persisted.                           |
| 2011 | 2.37                               | Low to moderate                                             | Continued post-amnesty stability with slight decline in production.                                         |
| 2012 | 2.60                               | Minimal                                                     | Relative stability maintained; PAP contributing to reduced large-scale militancy.                           |
| 2013 | 2.19                               | Low-level incidents                                         | Slight production drop; minor resurgence of conflict in creeks.                                             |
| 2014 | 2.19                               | Low-level incidents                                         | Stability maintained but occasional attacks observed.                                                       |
| 2015 | 2.13                               | Low-level incidents                                         | Gradual decline in production; continued minor unrest.                                                      |

|      |      |                                     |                                                                                                                         |
|------|------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 2016 | 1.80 | Resurgence by Niger Delta Avengers  | Post-amnesty decline; militancy resurged affecting production.                                                          |
| 2019 | 2.01 | Low to moderate                     | Crude oil production recovery; PAP's effects partially evident.                                                         |
| 2020 | 1.77 | Oil theft and sabotage              | Decline attributed to illegal oil activities; PAP unable to fully prevent conflict.                                     |
| 2023 | 1.47 | Persistent oil theft and conflict   | Data from interviews and FGDs indicate ongoing militancy and oil-related violence (Okuama/Okoloba crisis, Delta State). |
| 2024 | 1.54 | Persistent conflict and retaliation | PAP DDR efforts insufficient to fully stabilize region; economic interest still constrained.                            |

The data in Table 1 clearly indicate that the implementation of the Presidential Amnesty Programme (PAP) immediately had a positive effect on the stability and crude oil production in the Niger Delta. After a sharp decline from 2.60 million bpd in 2008 to 1.77 million bpd in 2009 because of the surge of militancy, crude oil production experienced a sharp increase in 2010 to 2.46 million bpd, following the proclamation of the amnesty. The pattern shows that the initial success of the PAP in curbing violent incidents, pipeline vandalism and kidnappings was supported by the arguments of Obi [5] and Ikelegbe [7] that disarmament and rehabilitation of ex-militants had positive impact on the immediate security situation in the region.

The PAP has the capability to reduce the intensity of militant activities in the short-term as evidenced in its performance in 2009, when it reported 1,305 cases of blowout, vandalism and rupture of oil pipeline. This aligns with Watts [2], who stated that grievances of youth militancy can be addressed through targeted interventions, such as employment, stipend payments and reintegration programmes, which can help to decrease the pull towards violent involvement. This is supported by the fact that soon after the amnesty, the production of oil increased, indicating that economic stability is interconnected with the improvement in security.

Data after the amnesty also indicate, however, that the impact of the programme on long-term stability was limited. Crude oil production reached 2.6 million bpd in 2012, but has since been on a downward trend, falling to 1.80 million bpd in 2016 before dropping to 1.47 million bpd in 2023, as the Niger Delta Avengers and other militant groups resumed their attacks. This resurgence further reinforces Humphreys and Weinstein's [9] finding that, although DDRR programmes can be effective in inducing short-term violence reduction, maintaining social cohesion and long-term development can prove to be difficult. The data indicate that even regions that have settled into a relative calm state without constant monitoring, community engagement, and system-level economic opportunities, are prone to conflict recurrence.

Qualitative data from the interviews and focus group discussions confirm these patterns. According to key informants, oil theft, pipeline attacks, and violent community conflicts, such as those in Okuama and Okoloba, Delta State (2024), are still happening. This is in line with Omotola [8] who said that the issue of militancy is reduced by amnesty but unaddressed grievances at the local level such as unemployment, environmental degradation and the inequitable distribution of resources sustain conflict. The ongoing state of these conflicts underscores the need for the complementary socio-economic and governance approaches in addition to the DDRR component of PAP, to achieve long-term peace.

By comparison, the trend in the Niger Delta is in line with global experiences with amnesty programmes. The post-conflict DDRR programmes in Liberia and Sierra Leone had an initial positive impact on decreasing violent incidents, but were less effective at reintegration and economic stabilisation over time [9], [11]. Similarly, in Colombia,

although the demobilisation of the paramilitaries had brought a temporary improvement in security, the conditions for economic reintegration and social acceptance based on the structural inequalities, mistrust within the communities and lack of economic opportunities had restricted sustainable peace [10]. Such comparisons indicate that amnesty programmes can have short-term benefits in terms of security, but also have to be backed by adequate socio-economic support structures and participatory governance mechanisms for long-term stability to be realised.

Moreover, the volatility of crude oil production from the initial post-amnesty high shows that the economic aspects of stability and security are also inextricably linked. The sharp drop to 1.80 million bpd in 2016, for instance, came as a result of the rise of the militant group's attacks, which affect the oil operations and hinder the economic goals. This is consistent with Obi [5] who noted that the economic rationale of the PAP – uninterrupted flow of oil revenue on the basis of continuous community cooperation and effective conflict prevention mechanisms – is highly dependent on community cooperation.

It is also emphasized that, the PAP did not adequately address the drivers of conflict, but rather only the symptoms (acts of violence and pipeline attacks). There is a focus on political marginalisation, environmental degradation and unequal resource distribution as the primary drivers of instability in Okonta [1] and Watts [2]. The recurrent oil wars and community dissent in the post-amnesty period point to the need for structural reforms, environmental remediation and inclusive development planning as vital instruments for consolidating the PAP gains.

To conclude, the findings have shown a strong correlation between the PAP and short-term stability in the Niger Delta region, with a corresponding rise in crude oil output and a drop in the number of militant attacks in the region right after the programme was put into practice. But long-term stability is still precarious, as demonstrated by ongoing conflict, plummeting output, and local discontent that shows that the programme, absent wider socio-economic and governance efforts, has its limits. These findings support current literature on amnesty programmes and DDRR initiatives around the world, reinforcing the notion that sustainable peace must be multi-dimensional, and not simply be about disarmament and stipends.

## 5. Conclusion

The study illustrates a clear relationship between the Presidential Amnesty Programme (PAP) and stability in the Niger Delta, at least in the short term after the programme. The programme brought about a short-term stabilisation of the country's crude oil production which rose from 1.77 million bpd in 2009 to 2.46 million bpd in 2010, while also curbing the activities of militants. But during the post-amnesty era, the following issues have been observed: frequent attacks from militants, oil theft, and local conflicts like the Okuama/Okoloba issue in 2024. The fall in crude oil production to 1.47 million bpd in 2023 marks that the PAP's disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) of ex-militants' efforts have not been adequate to ensure long-term stability or maximise economic returns. This highlights the fact that although the PAP has proven to be a good immediate conflict management tool, efforts are needed to tackle the root causes of the Niger Delta's restiveness namely the political marginalization, environmental degradation and socio-economic injustices if we are to achieve a lasting peace in the region.

## Recommendations

Taking into account the findings, the following recommendations are proposed to further link PAP to long-term stability:

1. Improve Socio-Economic Reintegration: Increase the number of vocational training, education and microfinance to allow the ex-militants to obtain sustainable livelihoods other than the receipt of stipends.

2. Enhance Community Engagement: Engage local communities in the planning, monitoring and evaluation of amnesty-related programmes, so as to better enhance legitimacy, trust and social cohesion.
3. Pursue Environmental and Infrastructure Solutions: Conduct full-scale environmental remediation projects and build infrastructure in impacted areas to mitigate grievances that lead to militancy.
4. Implement Effective Monitoring and Evaluation Systems: Develop clear monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to monitor the effectiveness of the DDR process, oil security and community stability, enabling timely measures to prevent a relapse of conflict.

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