

*Full Length Research*

# The Niger Delta Question And The Amnesty Deal: A Retrospective Analysis, 2009-2019

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Although the history of the Niger delta conflicts dates back to 19th century when the Akassa raids, and other events created violent tensions across the creeks, the people of the Niger Delta since the first oil exploration in Oloibiri (1956), had struggled to assert their rights with regards to the massive exploitation and exploration of the natural resources in the region by various successive governments. The violent reactions or series of social movements between the year 2003 and 2009, forced the Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN) to initiate an amnesty deal to help assuage the socio-economic plights of the people who had continually agitated against the exploitation of their people by both the FGN and various multinational corporations responsible for the recurring environmental degradation the region had been subjected to. Therefore, a point of departure for this study is to conduct a critical-retrospective examination of the Niger Delta Amnesty Deal of 2009 granted by the then President Umaru Musa Yar' Adua to various militant groups in the Niger Delta region as a way to quell recurring explosion of pipelines and oil facilities, as well as banditry and sporadic kidnappings. Using secondary-sourced evidence, the study argues that the Niger Delta question defied Amnesty Deal as between 2009 and 2019, many of the social and environmental issues persisted. More so, the amnesty Deal failed as conflict erupted after a brief hiatus, and violence has remained a *conditio-sin-qua-non* in attracting both government and the international community attention to the plight of the people of the Niger Delta region.

**Keywords:** Amnesty Deal, Conflict, Niger Delta, and Nigeria.

## INTRODUCTION

After years of unrests, protests, and insurgency in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria, the President Umaru Musa Yar' Adua led-administration initiated what is today referred to as the Niger Delta Amnesty Deal (NDAD) targeted as a strategy to calm the region that was tensed for many decades (Oluwaniyi, nd; Igwe, 2010; Austine and Sunday, 2013; Ako , 2013). Between 2009 – when the Amnesty Deal was initiated to 2015 – when the President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan's administration

lasted (before handing over power to President Muhammadu Buhari on May 29, 2015), - the Niger Delta region had experienced a level of quietness, as most of the social movements that had earlier characterized the region's structures for better infrastructural development and well-being relaxed their agitation. The relaxation – coupled with arms surrendering – marked a new phase for the region and its peoples – who had been denied basic indices of what life ought to be for a people whose

region contributes a noticeable chunk of what constitutes national revenue for Nigeria.

The fact that the Niger Delta region have suffered deprivations despite its contributions to the national economic profile is not in doubt. As a matter of fact, several scholars have spilt so much ink in their various studies to underscore this anomaly (Tamuno, 2011; Azaiki, 2009; Ogbogbo, 2005). In other sphere, researches have shown that since oil was first explored in Oloibiri around 1956, the Niger Delta region has remained fraught with diverse social, economic and political imbroglio. The rippling implications of these has created a situation where the people continue to see agitations through violent social movements as the most effective means of attracting government's attention to their plight. One of the plights of the Niger Delta peoples remain the recurring oil spillages that have invariably caused so much destruction of the lands and waterways of the region. It is general knowledge that both land and water are two key elements when the issue of economic development is to be examined. It has been argued by scholars that the exploration of crude oil has left many oil communities in abject poverty since oil spillage renders the two major sources – water and land – useless for the people (Tamuno, 2011; Etekpe, 2007, Azaiki, 2009; Akpan, 2012).

Frustrated by these sad realities, the people are forced to seek redress. However, their methods of seeking redress appeared not just enough to handle the issues at hand. Hence, the likes of Isaac Adaka Boro proves quite significant in the understanding of how the Niger Delta people attempted to resolve the issues that confronted their aspirations during the dawn of post-colonial Nigeria through the application of arm insurrection (Boro, 1982; Courson, 2009; Ajibola, 2015). Outside the scope of insurgency, there have been cases of agitations through non-violent means. One famous personality that comes to mind is Ken Saro Wiwa (Azaiki, 2009; Tamuno, 2011). It is difficult to discuss the Niger Delta question without mentioning the personality of Saro Wiwa given his contributions in drawing both local and international attention to the plight of the people of Ogoniland in particular, and the entire Niger Delta region in general (Uraizee, 2011; Farbstein, 2015). With Saro Wiwa's death in 1995 and the end of military rule, the Niger Delta agitation took another dimension, especially during the administration of President Olusegun Obasanjo (1999-2007). President Obasanjo's administration recorded massive unrest across the Niger Delta region.

Two recurring decimals across the Niger Delta region were frequent kidnapping of oil workers (especially expatriates), and the blowing up of oil pipelines (Ibaba, 2008). Other issues were the sporadic activities of oil vandalism and illegal refinery and transactions. Hence, the period saw the emergence of

various groups (militant), which became forces to reckon with in the region. Perturbed by the incessant happenings in the region, certain measures became a necessity if the region must experience peace again. President Olusegun Obasanjo consulted with some leaders of the militant groups, such as Asari Dokubo. Irrespective of the intervention, the issue lingered. Two years into his administration, President Yar'Adua initiated the Amnesty Deal that wooed the militants.

Taking the foregoing background into consideration, this article makes a modest contribution to existing literature on the Niger Delta and the oil question through the amnesty programme initiated to help forestall further attacks across oil facilities by the various Niger Delta militant groups – fighting for the 'rights' of the people in a manner – violence – that they thought would attract not only the federal government of Nigeria's attention, but also those of the international communities and oil multinationals concerned.

A critical index that distinguishes the Niger Delta region from other regions across Nigeria, is the large deposit of crude oil. Since the very first exploration of crude oil – in Oloibiri (present-day Bayelsa) around 1956 by Shell BP (Steyn, 2009) – the region has continued to serve as the biggest contributor to the national purse, as oil has remained the main driver of the Nigeria economy. The region consists of nine states from the federation. These include: Abia, Delta, Imo, Rivers, Akwa Ibom, Ondo, Edo, Cross River and Bayelsa States. The region is a tapestry of diversely homogenous ethnic groups consisting of Ijaw, Igbo, Ibibio, Yoruba, Bini, among others. The region's demography reveals that irrespective of the mass deposit of crude oil, the peoples within the oil-rich zone are yet to properly taste the benefit of their natural resources. The region has a high statistical rate of violent crime, due to the paucity of jobs. More so, given the fact that oil spillages have dealt a huge blow on the ecology of the region, agriculture activities considered as the largest employer of labour has dwindled over the years. Based on the National Population Commission census report of 2006, the Niger Delta has about 31.2 million (Omuta, 2011).

With a huge index poverty ratio, and a bursting youthful population, the region has seen many violent social movements because the younger generations prefer violent approach to get the attention of the various governments towards their demands.

**Table 1:** Population of the Niger Delta region by States

State	Land Area (Square Kilometres)	Population (NPC, 2006)	Capital City
Abia	4, 877	2, 833, 999	Umuahia
Akwa Ibom	6, 806	3, 920, 208	Uyo
Bayelsa	11, 007	1, 703, 358	Yenagoa
Cross River	21, 930	2, 888, 966	Calabar
Delta	17, 163	4, 098, 391	Asaba
Edo	19, 698	3, 218, 332	Benin City
Imo	5, 165	3, 934, 899	Owerri
Ondo	15, 086	3, 441, 014	Akure
Rivers	10, 378	5, 185, 420	Port Harcourt
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>112, 110</b>	<b>31, 224, 587</b>	<b>N/A</b>

**Sources::** National Population Commission (NPC), 2006; Omuta, Gideon E. D. "Poverty and Environment Quality in the Niger Delta Region: Dependence on Biomass Fuels as the Source of Household Energy," *Centre for Population and Environmental Development (CPED)*, Monograph Series, 2011.

### Theoretical Underpinnings

The Conflict Theory is adopted for this study. The theory was enunciated by Karl Marx in which he posited that society is in a state of continual conflict due to the constant competition for very limited resource in the society. Moreover, the conflict theory stipulates that social order is often more than not maintained by domination and power, rather than by outright consensus and conformity (Hayes, 2020). A major implication from the conflict theory is that those who are in possession of 'wealth' and resources (access to crude oil in the case of the Niger Delta region) will do everything possible to protect as well as hoard those resources – thus depriving the majority of the population from having any benefit. Invariably, those that do not have access to the wealth and resources in their society will do everything possible to also have their own share of the society's resources. Of course, this contrasting situation is enough reason to ensure that the society is left in a constant state of struggle between the 'haves and the have nots.'

Deducing from the forgoing analysis, it becomes pertinent to state that the Niger Delta region have been caught up in a web Of constant struggle due in part to the nature of lop-sidedness between the leaders and the people. Since the first oil exploration of crude in 1956, many of those communities have been left deprived in terms of human and infrastructure. This deprivation is even more glaring as many of those who had depended on their land for agricultural activities have been displaced both from the place of abode and their source of livelihood (Idemudia, 2011). In the face of these trying moments, many were compelled to resort to violent approaches as a sure way of attracting both states' and

federal governments' attention to their plight.

Another theory that fits into the context of this study is that of relative deprivation. It is almost a generally accepted fact that the Niger Delta people have been so deprived, just as the study has stressed in the preceding paragraphs. Indeed, the theory of relative deprivation is discovered on the ideas of the French sociology, Emile Durkheim, who emphasizes "the substance of people's expectations and reality" (Walker and Pettigrew, 1984). Cited in (Walker and Pettigrew, 1984), Durkheim argues that "a breakdown in social cohesion or unity leads to social change or conflict. This social bond is built upon a shared consciousness and a common history and experience." Thus, the Niger Delta people (especially its youthful population) feels deprived and as any normal human society would have done, decided to pick up arms and react in the most violent manners that would not only get government's attention, but that of the international community (Aghalino, 2012).

### From Palm Oil to Crude Oil: Changing Variables with Fixed Outcomes

It would be misleading to assume that the Niger Delta region and its inhabitants started to experience violent movements only in recent times. While it could be argued that the discovery of crude oil set the stage for another form of confrontations and disturbances across the region, it is not outrightly wrong to note that the region has recorded quite a number of violence based on economic struggles during the mid and twilight of the 19th century when palm oil held sway. Usoro (1974)

argued that palm oil trade – a major substitute for the trade in humans (Trans-Atlantic Slave trade) – assumed a non-negotiable role in the patterns of economic relationship between the British colonial government and the Nigerian peoples South-of-the-Niger.

During the 19th century – after the introduction of ‘commodity trade’ by the British colonial government – the idea of trading outside the parameters of human cargo gained prominence among indigenous communities across the southern region of colonial Nigeria. Most of the societies in southeastern Nigeria traded mostly palm produce. The case of Jaja of Opobo, among several others remain ever green in the annals of the Niger Delta history (Davey, 2015; Adagogo-Brown and Eze, 2020; Uzoigwe, 1978; Jaja, 1977). Others were the case of King Koko of Nembe’s famous Akassa Raid on the depot of the Royal Niger Company in 1895, and the crisis between Nana Olumo, the then Itsekiri Governor of Bini River (Balouga, 2009). Beyond the struggle between the European traders and prominent personalities across the Niger Delta region, there were a plentitude of complaints and agitations recorded in many parts. In most cases, the British often persuaded the indigenous people to continue in trade with their foreign counterparts (Korieh, 2010; Frankema and Waijenburg, 2014; Meredith, 1984).

However, the trade in palm oil – a major article of the mid and twilight of the nineteenth century would eventually begin to experience some relaxations, as the British colonial government started to explore other economic resources in colonial Nigeria. For instance, during the first decade of the twentieth century, a British Mine Engineer – Albert Kitson – while searching for either gold or silver, stumbled on a large coal mine in the Udi ridges in 1909 (Umejesi, 2011). Subsequent discovery in Enugu ridges around 1914 meant that the focus on palm oil began to reduce as the discovery of coal mines proved more lucrative (Umejesi, 2011). Besides, around 1903, the colonial government had issued exploration rights to oil companies to explore for crude oil across the then old eastern region (to which the Niger Delta was a part of). Between “1908 and 1920, [colonial] Nigeria witnessed the intensification of oil find, but no company had the luck of discovering oil in the country” (Akpan, 2012).

Initially, the Nigerian Bitumen Company had been at the forefront of the search for crude oil. However, by 1937, the Shell D’archy, which later transformed to Shell Petroleum Development Company of Nigeria (SPDCN) received the right to prospect for crude oil in Nigeria (Styen, 2009; Akpan, 2012). It should be noted that in the course of prospecting for crude oil across the southeastern region, a whole lot of issues emanated between the indigenous peoples, politicians (nationalists) and the British colonial government. Styen (2009) gives a historical narration on the many conflicts

that existed between the local peoples and the various oil companies that were handed the prospecting rights. Indeed, it could be argued that even before the Oloibiri oil well was discovered, the people have had to put up resistances against both the British government and various oil companies prospecting for oil on their lands (Styen, 2009). Those resistances during the prospect for oil was only the beginning of the protracted conflict that would later follow.

By 1956 – when the first major oil exploration took place in Oloibiri – the Niger Delta people came to be faced with a new phase of economic quagmire. This quagmire stemmed from the reality that in order to explore oil – which by 1958 became the major source of Nigeria’s foreign earning – the many communities endowed with crude oil have continued to suffer both deprivation, environmental degradation and wide-spread losses (Azaiki, 2009; Moro, 2008). Of course, this ‘new’ situation was not so much different from what had happened in the nineteenth century, where most indigenous population found themselves at the mercy of the British colonial government and tradesmen.

Contributing massively to the federal purse, and getting very little in return, the peoples of the Niger Delta started to question the rationale behind such relative deprivation. Unsatisfied with the responses they received from successive governments of Nigeria, the region adopted more violent means. The first of the series of violent agitations that would follow in post-colonial Nigeria was that of Isaac Jasper Adaka Boro’s Twelve Day Revolution (Boro, 1982). Boro, as fondly called, formed the Niger Delta Volunteer Force (NDVF) – an armed militia with members consisting mostly of people from the Ijaw ethnic group – to demand a better deal from the then federal government. Boro and his comrade refused to accept the fact that very paltry sum of oil proceeds got back to their people, many of whom had lost their sources – land and waterways – of livelihood (Courson, 2009). Thus, the group declared the Niger Delta Republic on the 23rd of February 1966. The next 12 days was intense for the Niger Delta region, as they were confronted by federal troops and the group was brought to their knees, as Boro was charged with treason. In 1967, just a day to the outbreak of the Nigerian Civil War, Boro was granted amnesty by General Yakubu Gowon.

Unlike Boro – who had employed violent means – Kenule Beeson “Ken” Saro-Wiwa was another Niger Delta personality, who pushed through non-violent means, demanded better condition for the Niger Delta region in general, and the Ogoni people in particular. Just as many other previous Niger Delta leadership who had either died or sent to exile for speaking up against the suffering and deprivation of their people, Saro Wiwa met similar fate when he along other Ogoni chiefs were hung by the dictatorial military regime of General Sani

Abacha in 1995 (Saale and David, 2014).

While Saro Wiwa's death attracted global attention, condemnations and the eventual expulsion of Nigeria from some international organizations such as the Commonwealth of Nation (Saale and David, 2014), very little gains were recorded in terms of how well the day-to-day experiences of the Niger Delta people became. In fact, between 1995 and 2009, the Niger Delta region remained almost the same. Thus, such stagnation and continuous suffering of the people bred new crops of agitators whose major means to get what they wanted was the use of arms. The arms acquired were employed in blowing up oil pipelines. There were also reported cases of expatriates that were kidnapped in exchange for huge ransoms. Okafor, Ajibo, Chukwu, Egbuche, and Asadu (2018) puts it succinctly when they write "political kidnapping was introduced by the Niger Delta militants, who targeted foreigners, especially

Americans and the British, mainly to draw attention to their plight of environmental degradation, caused by oil and gas exploration and production. The hostages were usually kept for a week[or more] and released after ransom and political demands have been met."

The series of hostage-taking that occurred during the first decade of Nigeria's fourth republic impacted negatively on the Niger Delta environment, as well as Nigeria's earnings since oil was the major source of foreign earnings for the country. Majority of the kidnappings and hostage-takings as related to the struggle for resources have occurred in Rivers, Bayelsa and Delta States. The table below gives a graphic and quantitative description of the nature of hostage-takings that occurred in Bayelsa State between 2004 and 2007 (three years interval).

**Table2:** Kidnapping/hostage-taking in Bayelsa State, 2004-2007

S/N	Date reported	Militants Involved	Hostage/ Victims	Reasons	Date released
1	03/03/04	32	13	Clashes between youth, security operatives and TNC	08/03/04
2	19/12/04	24	42	Impeachment of Speaker/Governor	03/01/06
3	15/01/06	48	14 expatriates and one Nigerian	Arrest of militant leader	23/02/06
4	10/05/07	Faceless	16	Detention of Alamieseigha	23/05/07
5	25/05/07	40	Nine expatriates	Non-development of host communities	08/06/07
6	30/07/07	14	Child of member, State House of Assembly	Welfare of militants	04/08/07
7	08/08/07	11	Mother of Speaker, State House of Assembly	Welfare of militants	23/08/07
8	18/08/07	23	Mother of member, State House of Assembly	Welfare of militants	17/09/07
9	08/10/07	Commander, Pius Group	One Nigerian	Ransom	15/11/07
10	15/10/07	Unknown	One Nigerian	Ransom	15/10/07

**Source:** Ikelegbe, Augustine (2011), "Popular and Criminal Violence as Instruments of Struggle in the Niger Delta region," In: *Oil and Insurgency in the Niger Delta: Managing the Complex Politics of Petro-Violence*, edited by Cyril Obi and Siri AasRustad, (London: Zed Books), p.132.

Beyond the case of Bayelsa, a whole lot of hostage-takings were also recorded in Rivers in particular, given the massive oil and gas exploration that were on-going in many communities across the state, especially in Ogoniland.

Moreso, there were also clashes between the

various militant groups (all under the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta – MEND) and the Nigeria security agencies. A handful of cases exists in that direction where the Nigeria Army and Police forces engaged militants. Most of the time, the outcomes are not good for either side, lives and property have been

lost on both sides, and wanton human rights abuses recorded (Oluyemi, 2020). As per the issue of human rights abuse, the Odi massacre (Bayelsa State), and Choba (Rivers State) mass raping by security agencies are cases-in-point (Nwajah, 1999). In the case of the Odi massacre, the military “engaged in large-scale killing of civilians in the village of Odi, Bayelsa State, as retaliation to the murder of 12 police officers.” (Oluyemi, 2020). After that incident, there have been countless cases of engagements between the security forces and militants in reprisal manner.

In the light of the foregoing narratives so far, one can see that there is no much difference between what transpired during the mid-nineteenth century – when palm oil held sway – to what had played out in post-colonial Nigeria – since crude oil assumed a very vital position in the running of the country. The only difference appears to be that palm oil had been dropped since the discovery of crude oil. However, the nature of (violent) protests, attacks and reprisal attacks remain the same. For instance, there is a clear case of change and continuity between the Akassa Raid of 1895 and the Odi massacre of 1999. Just as that of the Akassa raid where the people attacked the depot of the Royal Niger Company, which attracted the British expeditionary forces, so was the Odi massacre where after killing 12 police officers, the then President, Olusegun Obasanjo, sent in the Nigeria Army to search out those murderers, and in the process lives and property of Odi town were greatly lost.

In a nut shell, it can be argued that after 104 years, (1895-1999), the people of the Niger Delta region had to still endure very similar ill-treatments over their struggles for better life and welfare. Worse is that by every indicator, the region is still trapped in underdevelopment crises cutting across their human and infrastructure profiles.

### **The Post-Amnesty Deal: Some Reflections and Present Realities**

“The time has come for us to settle down and find solutions to what led to the crisis in the region. Today marks the beginning of the development of the Niger Delta” (Owen, 2009). Those were the words made by the then Defence Minister of Nigeria (DMoN), Godwin OsagieAbbe while he was accepting the handover of arms and ammunitions from Tompolo’s camp in Oporoza, in the creeks of Delta State. A critical examination on the Amnesty Deal offered in 2009 by President Yar’Adua revealed that the Niger Delta region is still confronted with diverse challenges, yet little or nothing has been done to address almost every issue that had triggered violent agitations across the region in the first instance.

The Amnesty initiated in 2009 – in all fairness – did bring about some calm in the Niger Delta region for a while. The terms of the Amnesty Deal were one that has to do with handing over huge sums of money to militants, as well as sending many others for vocational trainings of all sort both in Nigeria and in the diaspora. The Amnesty Deal was structured into three segments: the disarmament and demobilization of militants, the rehabilitation and integration, and the final stage was the post-Amnesty package of massive infrastructural development. Six states across the Niger Delta had disarmed militants, and the government promised to pay N65, 000 (approximately \$407) monthly (Oluwaniyi, 2011). Austine and Sunday (2013) writes:

Indeed, it was recorded that about 26,358 ex-militants accepted the Amnesty offer (first phase – 20,192 militants representing those that accepted the offer on or before 4th October 2009, while the second phase of the Amnesty Programme that occurred in November 2010 comprises of 6,616 militants representing those that accepted the offer post 4 October 2009).

Rehabilitation sites were set up, among other measures to see that the whole idea of amnesty in the Niger Delta region yielded some gains. It was reported that some weeks after the Amnesty started rolling, the oil output rose to about 2.3 million barrels a day from the initial 800, 000 barrels (during the 2006-2008 period) (Igwe, 2010; Austine and Sunday, 2013).

**Table 3:** Participants in the Niger Delta Amnesty Programme

States	Male	Female	Registered
Akwa Ibom	155	8	163
Bayelsa	6,900	61	6,961
Cross River	159	1	160
Delta	3,361	Nil	3,361
Edo	450	Nil	450
Imo	297	3	300
Ondo	1, 198	2	1200
Rivers	6, 958	39	6, 997
NDDC	571	19	600
Total	20, 049	133	20, 192

**Sources:** Federal Government of Nigeria – PAO, Niger Delta Amnesty Programme: [http://www.nigerdeltaamnesty.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article=54Itemid=55](http://www.nigerdeltaamnesty.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article=54Itemid=55); Ushie, Vanessa, "Nigeria's Amnesty Programme as Peacebuilding Infrastructure: A Silver Bullet?" *Journal of Peacebuilding & Development* 8(1):pp.30-44.

(This is an account of only the first batch of demobilized ex-militant).

While the Amnesty Deal had some early signs of goodwill for the Niger Delta, "a review of the rehabilitation aspect of the Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) revealed some inadequacies thus leading to calls by elders in the Niger Delta region for the dissolution of the Presidential Amnesty Committee" (Austine and Sunday, 2013). Some of the concerns then was that the budget set aside for the rehabilitation of the 'repentant militants' were rather being spent on contractors' fees and other issues. More so, there was the over-bloating of militant's figure, hence making the budget to be slashed into pieces. There was also the case of wide-spread corruption among those entrusted with the duty to see that the Amnesty Deal worked out fine as earlier intended from the outset (Austine and Sunday, 2013). To crown it all, the deal began to show signs of failure even from the beginning due to the insincerity of the people involved in the whole scheme.

Nonetheless, the fact that the main issues – poor healthcare, decayed infrastructures, insecurity, ecological injustices, amongst others – were left, it was only logical that the years to follow would record militant activities once more. As Oluwaniyi (nd) pointed out, the Amnesty Deal was bound to fail because the federal government of Nigeria failed to adhere to the tenets of the technical committee, which stipulated a bottom-up approach to the programme. Instead, the government "collaborated with ex-militants' commanders, who were only interested in their personal aggrandizement and did not consult with the militants on the ground" (Oluwaniyi, nd). The truth is that majority of those considered as ex-militants were more concerned with the monetary benefits and not how the programme (vocational skill

acquisitions) would help develop their human capacity. Collier (2000), as cited in Udoh (2013) theorized that "rebellion in the Niger Delta was driven by greed and the opportunities to benefit from engaging in a war, rather than by the existence of historical and social grievances." In addition, some scholars have claimed that militancy in the first instance was driven by crime opportunism (Cesarz, Morrison and Cooke, 2003). Hence, rather than focus on the key issues that have plagued the Niger Delta region since the colonial times, most of those repentant militants were concerned about their personal welfare.

Hence, just some months after the Amnesty Deal had been signed and concluded, some "ex-militants" began to show signs of going back to the creeks. Their discontentment was that the government had abandoned most of the agreements reached during the process. To say that much positive changes had been recorded in the Niger Delta between 2009 and 2019 would be very misleading. To say the least, the region suffered almost exactly the same problems that had confronted the people since pre-colonial times. Hence, a good look at the Niger Delta region in lieu of the post-amnesty deal reveals quite a lot. First, those cancerous problems still persist. The cry for ecological justice has grown louder, especially from Ogoniland (Chukwu, 2016; Bariko-Wiwa, 1997; Adeola, 2009).

The question of the Ogoniland clean-up have been more of a spectacle in the political corridor, even though, the struggle for Ogoniland clean-up started as far back as the early 1990s, when "Ken Saro-Wiwa, a writer, activist, businessman and environmentalist founded a grass-root movement...called "Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People" [MOSOP]" (Courson,

2009). MOSOP was all out to ensure that Shell – the major oil drilling company in Ogoniland – conducted a proper impact-assessment of Ogoniland, and conducts a clean-up across the land. The massive devastation of Ogoniland by oil spillages and exploration has gained international attention. Saro-Wiwa eventually lost his life and that of other Ogoni chiefs who fought for ecological justice for not just Ogoniland, but the entire Niger Delta region.

However, 26 years after the death of Ken Saro-Wiwa, the cry for Ogoni clean-up is yet to be attended to. Efforts towards ecological justice – as regards the Ogoniland case – only began to get some attentions when in 2011 – under President Goodluck Jonathan – The United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) was invited to conduct an assessment of oil pollution in Ogoniland, with a view to finding a lasting solution to the issue at hand. At the end of the assessment, a report entitled the “UNEP Report” was handed over to the federal government in that same 2011. The reality is that nothing was done. It was only on 2 June 2016 – after the President Muhammadu Buhari’s government “flagged-off the Hydrocarbon Pollution Remediation Project (HYPREP) with the mandate to Remediate the Environment and Restore the Livelihood of the people” (<https://hyprep.gov.ng/ogoni-clean-up-buhari-keeping-his-promise-to-niger-delta/>). Moreso, even though the Ogoni-clean-up project have been said to have received federal government’s approval, it has been reported in many quarters that all what the federal government under President Buhari had said were not carried out (Reed, 2021).

From 2015 after a peaceful transition of power, Nigeria witnessed a new phase of threats from ex-militants in the Niger Delta region. These threats were coming on the heels of federal government’s announcement that key security contracts held by ex-militant generals had been cancelled, and plans have been announced to phase out the Amnesty Program that provided stipends and other benefits to ex-militants by 2018. Uncomfortable with the announcement made by the federal government, some of the repentant militants showed signs of worries as to the negative impact that the termination of the amnesty would have on the Niger Delta region and its youthful population. Although, it has been argued that what could resurface as another round of insurgency in the Niger Delta region would be more of politics than altruism to save the region.

By 2016, a new militant group – The Niger Delta Avengers (NDAs) – emerged. Beside disrupting economic activities – by blowing up oil pipelines, the group also had intentions to create sovereign state in the Niger Delta (DiChristopher, 2016). The group claimed in a public statement that its members consisted of young, educated and well-travelled youths, and that they are versed in the issues that have since colonial times

troubled the Niger Delta region (Ewokor, 2016; Di Christopher, 2016). One aspect that distinguished the group from the previous militant groups is the manner in which they made use of the social media in disseminating information both to the government and the general public. Between 2016 and 2019, the group engaged in many acts, one of which (in 2016) made Nigeria to fall behind Angola, one of Africa’s biggest oil producer (Africa news, 2017). Take for instance, on 14 January 2016, the NDAs attacked several gas pipelines and oil installations located in Warri South West, as a protest to the order issue by a Nigeria High Court in Lagos, to arrest ex-militant leader, Government Ekpemupolo (Ewokor, 2016). Again, on 14 February 2016, the group was reported to have claimed responsibility for the destruction of Shell’s underwater Forcados 48-inches Export Pipeline at the Forcados Export Terminal. On 25 October, 2016, the NDA *Strike Team 06* was reported to have blown up the Escarvos Export Pipeline, owned by Chevron Corporation, located offshore from the mainland. There were several other attacks that were all credited to the NDAs since the commencement of the President Buhari-led administration. They also engaged the men of the Nigeria Army. For instance, on 10 September, the NDA released an online photo that showed four captured Nigerian soldiers that were rowed in a boat manned by a single militant to an undisclosed location somewhere in the Niger Delta creeks. Suffice it to say that the amnesty deal did not bring the much-desired lasting peace to the Niger Delta region as Nigerian and the Niger Deltans did hope for.

The NDAs is just one among other concerns that have dotted the post-Amnesty Deal era within the Niger Delta region. This and many other issues as have been recorded within the period of the study, have shown clearly that what happened with the Amnesty Deal was simply more or less a political spectacle needed to smoothen certain rough feathers. It had no plan for the commoners who were the most affected group as they have lost their source of livelihood to decades of oil exploration activities. Hence, there is need to revisit the issue at hand in order to avert another round of violent reactions from potential militant groups in the Niger Delta.

## CONCLUSION

This study has reflected on the 2009 Niger Delta Amnesty Deal (NDAD) in a retrospective manner. This is done to see what led to the deal in the first place, how it was initiated and what impact it had on the region since its initiation. Before 2009 – when the late President Umaru Musa Yar’adua brought in the idea of granting the various militants Amnesty, the Niger Delta region

have been so fraught with diverse kinds of unrests. The yearning of the people has since the first social movement was recorded, was for the people to be treated in a manner that reflects the riches endowed in their region. Since 1956 through to 2009, several personalities and groups have used many avenues to draw government attention – all to no avail. The likes of Tom Polo, AsariDokubo, Farah Dagogo, (Tattersall, 2009) and other top-ranking leaders of their various militant groups were engaged in an Amnesty Deal meant to bring “lasting peace” to the people of Niger Delta who have suffered in many ways than one. One question that is often asked is :what happens to the people in the core-rural regions (majority of whom are the worse hit) of the Niger Delta, whose sources (land and waterways) have been taken away by the hazards that come with oil exploration? Of course, the Amnesty Deal, as this article have shown, is just a symptomatic cure, and not the real cure for the deep-rooted crises that have engulfed Nigeria’s Niger Delta region.

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