

The Amnesty Programme and Sustainable Peacebuilding in the Niger Delta: Achievements, Contradictions, and Future Prospects

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Article History	Abstract
Original Research Article	<i>This study examines the Presidential Amnesty Programme (PAP) as an instrument of sustainable peacebuilding in Nigeria's Niger Delta. The main aim is to evaluate the programme's achievements, contradictions, and long-term prospects. The specific objectives are to examine PAP's contributions to peace, rehabilitation, and socio-economic reintegration; to identify governance challenges and structural limitations; and to explore policy options for transforming the programme into a more inclusive, development-oriented framework. The study is anchored on Human Needs Theory as articulated by John Burton (1979, 1990), which holds that unmet basic needs such as security, recognition, and participation drive recurrent conflict and that sustainable peace requires addressing those needs. Using a descriptive research design, the study draws on secondary data from government reports, academic literature, policy papers, international organization publications, and credible media sources. Thematic content analysis was employed to identify patterns related to disarmament outcomes, reintegration, governance, and structural constraints. Findings show that PAP succeeded in reducing large-scale militancy and restoring stability, but its long-term impact is weakened by weak governance, elite capture, reliance on stipends, and persistent environmental and economic deficits. The study concludes that PAP must evolve from short-term pacification to development-led peacebuilding. Recommended actions are integration of PAP into a unified regional development framework, prioritizing entrepreneurship and access to microcredit for reintegrated youths, and instituting transparent beneficiary management with independent audits and participatory monitoring.</i> Keywords: Amnesty Programme, Niger Delta, peacebuilding, Human Needs Theory, reintegration
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I. Background to the Study

The Niger Delta region, rich in oil and gas resources, remains one of Nigeria's most paradoxical spaces of wealth and deprivation. Despite accounting for more than 80% of Nigeria's foreign exchange earnings and nearly 95% of export revenues (Central Bank of Nigeria [CBN], 2023), the region continues to suffer from endemic poverty, underdevelopment, and environmental degradation. From the late 1990s through the 2000s, militant groups emerged to challenge the Nigerian state and multinational oil corporations, protesting environmental neglect, inequitable resource distribution, and political marginalization (Ikelegbe, 2013; Obi, 2020). This culminated in a cycle of

violence that disrupted oil production, reduced government revenue, and threatened Nigeria's national security.

In response, the Federal Government of Nigeria introduced the Presidential Amnesty Programme (PAP) in June 2009 under President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua. The initiative sought to disarm, demobilize, and reintegrate (DDR) thousands of ex-agitators into civilian life, offering training, education, and financial support in exchange for the surrender of arms (Aghedo & Osumah, 2016). The programme, initially conceived as a short-term peace intervention, has since evolved into a protracted mechanism of conflict management and economic reintegration, with

successive administrations sustaining its funding through the Ministry of Niger Delta Affairs and the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC).

More than 30,000 ex-militants have officially benefitted from the Amnesty Programme, while hundreds have undergone vocational and university training both within and outside Nigeria (PAP Annual Report, 2022). The initiative has contributed to relative peace in the region, leading to a dramatic rise in oil production from less than 700,000 barrels per day in mid-2009 to over 2.4 million barrels per day by early 2011 (Nigerian National Petroleum Company [NNPC], 2021). Yet, beneath these gains lie persistent contradictions. Allegations of corruption, patronage, and politicization have plagued the programme, raising questions about its long-term sustainability and transformative impact on local communities (Ibaba & Ikelegbe, 2022).

Moreover, the structural conditions that originally triggered the militancy — such as unemployment, environmental degradation, and exclusionary governance — remain largely unaddressed. Several scholars argue that the Amnesty Programme represents a “palliative peace” rather than a sustainable peacebuilding framework (Ukeje, 2020; Ogege, 2021). The heavy emphasis on cash payments and stipends, rather than on institutional reform and inclusive development, has entrenched dependency and eroded local agency. As Nigeria faces new fiscal and political pressures in a post-oil global economy, the future of the Amnesty Programme, and indeed the broader peacebuilding architecture in the Niger Delta, remains uncertain. Thus, this study revisits the Amnesty Programme as both a policy experiment and a peacebuilding model, interrogating its achievements, contradictions, and prospects within the context of Nigeria’s evolving political economy and global energy transitions.

II. Statement of the Problem

While the Presidential Amnesty Programme (PAP) has contributed to a noticeable reduction in large-scale violence and oil-related disruptions in the Niger Delta, it remains uncertain whether the initiative has achieved its broader goal of sustainable peace and development. More than a decade since its inception, many ex-agitators and community youths still face unemployment, environmental degradation persists, and developmental inequities remain stark (Ibaba, 2021; Nwozor, 2022).

The programme’s heavy reliance on financial incentives rather than structural transformation has produced a rentier peace — one that stabilizes the region temporarily but perpetuates clientelism and dependency on federal patronage (Aghedo, 2020). Furthermore, the reintegration component of the Amnesty Programme has been

inconsistently implemented, with limited monitoring and evaluation frameworks to track beneficiaries’ long-term socio-economic progress (Okonta, 2023).

Compounding these challenges are governance deficits within key institutions such as the NDDC and Ministry of Niger Delta Affairs, which have faced recurrent allegations of corruption, duplication of functions, and political interference. The concentration of benefits among former militant elites, to the exclusion of non-militant youth and women, has also created new forms of inequality and resentment within communities (Omotola, 2020).

As Nigeria transitions toward economic diversification and faces global energy shifts away from hydrocarbons, the sustainability of the PAP is increasingly in question. Whether the Amnesty Programme can evolve from a short-term pacification policy into a comprehensive peacebuilding strategy that promotes inclusive development, institutional reform, and regional stability remains a pressing concern. This study therefore seeks to critically evaluate the achievements, internal contradictions, and future prospects of the Amnesty Programme as a mechanism for sustainable peacebuilding in the Niger Delta.

III. Aim and Objectives of the Study

The main aim of this study is to evaluate the Amnesty Programme as an instrument of sustainable peacebuilding in the Niger Delta, with particular focus on its achievements, contradictions, and long-term prospects.

The specific objectives are to:

1. To examine the major achievements of the Amnesty Programme in promoting peace, rehabilitation, and socio-economic reintegration in the region.
2. To identify and assess the contradictions, governance challenges, and structural limitations of the programme.
3. To explore viable policy options for transforming the Amnesty Programme into a more inclusive and development-oriented peacebuilding framework.

IV. Research Questions

1. What are the major achievements of the Amnesty Programme in promoting peace, rehabilitation, and socio-economic reintegration in the Niger Delta region?
2. What contradictions, governance challenges, and structural limitations have affected the implementation and effectiveness of the Amnesty Programme?

3. What policy options can be adopted to transform the Amnesty Programme into a more inclusive and development-oriented peacebuilding framework?

V. Theoretical Framework

This study was anchored on the Human Needs Theory, which provides a fundamental explanation of the persistence of violent conflicts and the requirements for achieving sustainable peace. The theory was initially articulated by John Burton (1979, 1990), a conflict theorist who sought to understand why conventional approaches to conflict management, such as negotiation, deterrence, or coercion, often failed to produce lasting peace. Burton argued that the roots of social and political conflict lie in the denial or frustration of basic human needs that are non-negotiable and universal to all people. These needs include security, identity, recognition, participation, and development. The Human Needs Theory therefore departs from rational choice or interest-based perspectives by emphasizing that peace cannot be sustained unless these fundamental human requirements are acknowledged and fulfilled.

According to Burton (1990), conflicts are not merely contests over material interests or political power but are deeply embedded in the human quest for dignity, belonging, and self-actualization. When individuals or groups perceive that their essential needs are ignored or suppressed by existing institutions or state structures, they may resort to violent resistance as a means of asserting those needs. The theory thus shifts attention from surface-level disputes to the underlying psychological and structural factors that drive conflict. Burton's argument aligns with the views of Abraham Maslow (1943), whose hierarchy of needs posits that unmet physiological, safety, and esteem needs often provoke frustration and aggression. In this sense, the Human Needs Theory provides a more comprehensive lens for analyzing conflicts that persist despite peace agreements or power-sharing arrangements.

Several scholars have elaborated on and extended Burton's ideas. Edward Azar (1990), for instance, applied the Human Needs Theory in his concept of protracted social conflicts, emphasizing that enduring conflicts such as those in the Niger Delta arise from long-term deprivation of basic human needs, particularly identity, security, and participation. Similarly, Ramsbotham, Woodhouse, and Miall (2016) argue that sustainable peace requires not only the cessation of violence but also the transformation of relationships and institutions that perpetuate need deprivation. In the same vein, Lederach (1997) notes that reconciliation and participatory development are essential for restoring social trust and fulfilling basic human needs after violent conflict. Together, these scholars affirm that peacebuilding must move beyond disarmament and

reconstruction to encompass the satisfaction of psychological and social needs that give meaning to people's lives.

Despite its relevance, the Human Needs Theory has not been without critique. Some scholars such as Parsons (2019) and Schmidt (2017) argue that the theory is overly idealistic, offering limited guidance on how to operationalize human needs within complex political systems. Others contend that the notion of universal human needs risks cultural bias, as societies differ in how they define and prioritize needs (Avruch, 2006). Moreover, critics point out that while the theory effectively diagnoses the sources of conflict, it offers less clarity on institutional mechanisms for addressing those needs in practice. Nonetheless, proponents maintain that its normative and analytical strength lies in redirecting attention to the human dimension of peacebuilding, reminding policymakers that sustainable peace cannot be achieved through coercion or economic incentives alone.

Applied to the present study, the Human Needs Theory provides a useful framework for analyzing the Niger Delta Amnesty Programme as a policy instrument of peacebuilding. The armed militancy that preceded the 2009 Amnesty Declaration was rooted not only in economic marginalization but also in the frustration of deeper needs for identity, recognition, participation, and justice among the Niger Delta people. While the Amnesty Programme succeeded in addressing the immediate need for security by reducing violence and offering financial incentives, it has been less effective in fulfilling the long-term human needs that underpin sustainable peace. The persistence of poverty, environmental degradation, and exclusion from governance processes suggests that structural and psychological needs remain unaddressed. Therefore, the Human Needs Theory enables this study to interrogate the extent to which the Amnesty Programme has gone beyond short-term pacification to meet the genuine developmental and participatory aspirations of the people of the Niger Delta.

VI. Empirical Review of Existing Literature

Empirical scholarship on the Amnesty Programme in the Niger Delta has expanded as scholars have sought to evaluate its role in addressing long-standing grievances, restoring peace, and promoting post-conflict development in the region. The studies largely agree that while the programme has contributed to a reduction in violence, its design and implementation have been undermined by corruption, weak institutions, and limited socio-economic inclusion. The following review synthesizes major empirical contributions, emphasizing their objectives, theoretical orientations, methodologies, findings, and recommendations.

Okonta (2018) examined the post-conflict dynamics of the Niger Delta Amnesty Programme using peacebuilding theory as an analytical framework. Through qualitative interviews with ex-militants and community leaders in Delta and Bayelsa States, the study assessed whether disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) translated into sustainable peace. The findings revealed that although hostilities subsided after the 2009 Amnesty Declaration, the peace achieved was largely superficial, lacking deep social reconciliation and structural transformation. The study concluded that the programme emphasized immediate stability over long-term development and recommended the integration of infrastructure, education, and governance reforms to achieve enduring peace.

Ibaba and Olumati (2020) explored the contradictions and governance challenges of the Amnesty Programme from a political economy perspective. By analyzing policy documents, budgetary data, and stakeholder interviews, they investigated how elite interests shaped the allocation and management of amnesty resources. Their findings showed that political patronage and elite capture distorted the implementation process, with ex-militant leaders and government officials diverting benefits to personal networks. The authors argued that this dynamic undermined the credibility of the programme and perpetuated economic dependency among beneficiaries. They recommended decentralizing programme management, improving fiscal transparency, and empowering community-based organizations to monitor implementation.

Eke (2021) investigated the socio-economic reintegration of ex-agitators through a human capital development lens. Using survey data from participants in vocational and entrepreneurship training schemes, the study evaluated employment outcomes, income levels, and social reintegration. The findings indicated that although training initiatives provided short-term skills, most participants lacked access to start-up capital and market linkages to sustain their livelihoods. The study concluded that reintegration without economic empowerment risks relapse into violence and recommended the establishment of regional enterprise hubs and credit schemes tailored to ex-militants and local youth.

Ogege (2022) analyzed the relationship between the Amnesty Programme, regional security, and oil production stability through a security-development nexus approach. Using time-series data from the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) and security agencies, the study assessed changes in oil production levels before and after the programme's implementation. Results showed that oil output and revenue improved significantly between 2010 and 2013 as militant activities reduced. However,

subsequent funding inconsistencies and political neglect led to renewed criminality and oil theft. The study argued that sustainable peace in the Niger Delta depends on consistent institutional engagement and equitable resource distribution, recommending the strengthening of local governance frameworks for security oversight.

Aghedo and Osumah (2023) conducted a comparative study of the Niger Delta Amnesty Programme alongside disarmament and reintegration initiatives in Sierra Leone and Liberia. Using a comparative qualitative approach, they examined how institutional design affects the durability of post-conflict peace. Their findings revealed that while Nigeria's programme effectively reduced violence, it lacked integration with broader state-building mechanisms such as justice reform and community development. The authors concluded that the isolation of the Amnesty Programme from national development policy weakened its long-term impact and recommended embedding it within a holistic peacebuilding and reconstruction framework that prioritizes inclusivity, accountability, and local participation.

VII. Gaps in the Literature

The first major gap in the existing literature concerns the limited assessment of the Amnesty Programme's long-term achievements in promoting peace, rehabilitation, and socio-economic reintegration in the Niger Delta. Most studies emphasize the programme's early success in reducing militancy and stabilizing oil production but pay little attention to whether these outcomes have translated into sustained peace and inclusive development over time. The second gap relates to the inadequate examination of the contradictions, governance challenges, and structural weaknesses that undermine the programme. Previous research often highlights corruption, elite capture, and uneven distribution of benefits but does not systematically analyze how these governance issues affect the effectiveness and legitimacy of the Amnesty Programme as a peacebuilding tool.

The third gap involves the lack of concrete policy frameworks or reform models for transforming the Amnesty Programme into a more inclusive and development-oriented peacebuilding initiative. Existing studies offer general recommendations for improved management but fail to provide actionable strategies that align peacebuilding efforts with long-term regional development and institutional strengthening. This present study aims to fill these gaps by providing a comprehensive evaluation of the Amnesty Programme as a peacebuilding mechanism in the Niger Delta. It will systematically assess both its achievements and limitations, drawing on empirical evidence and policy analysis to understand its broader impact on regional stability and socio-economic

reintegration. Furthermore, the study seeks to propose practical and context-specific policy options for reforming the programme into a more inclusive, accountable, and development-driven framework that can sustain peace and foster long-term growth in the Niger Delta.

VIII. Methodology

This study utilized a descriptive research design to evaluate the Amnesty Programme as an instrument of sustainable peacebuilding in the Niger Delta region. It relied on secondary data obtained through an extensive documentary review of government reports, academic journal articles, policy papers, publications of international organizations, and credible media sources. These materials provided rich insights into the programme's implementation, achievements, contradictions, and prospects. The data were analyzed using thematic content analysis, which involved the systematic identification, categorization, and interpretation of recurring themes and patterns related to peacebuilding, governance challenges, and policy reforms. This analytical approach enabled a coherent understanding of how the Amnesty Programme has influenced peace, rehabilitation, and socio-economic reintegration in the Niger Delta, as well as the structural and institutional factors shaping its long-term effectiveness.

IX. Discussion of Findings

Answer to Research Question 1: What are the major achievements of the Amnesty Programme in promoting peace, rehabilitation, and socio-economic reintegration in the Niger Delta region?

The Presidential Amnesty Programme produced immediate and measurable gains in reducing large-scale militancy and restoring oil sector operations. Official figures and independent reports show that crude output recovered rapidly after the 2009 amnesty, rising from roughly 700,000 barrels per day in mid-2009 to more than 2.4 million barrels per day by late 2010 and early 2011, an outcome largely attributed to the cessation of attacks on pipelines and facilities (Nigerian National Petroleum Company, 2011; Central Bank of Nigeria, 2011). The programme enrolled about 30,000 ex-agitators into disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration tracks, delivering monthly stipends and various forms of training and educational sponsorship (Presidential Amnesty Programme, 2022).

Capacity building formed a notable component of reintegration. Data from programme reports and evaluations indicate that thousands of beneficiaries received vocational training in trades such as welding, maritime skills, ICT and entrepreneurship, while over two thousand were sponsored for tertiary education and overseas scholarships between 2009 and 2020 (Presidential

Amnesty Programme, 2022; Partnership Initiatives in the Niger Delta, 2020). Field surveys and programme assessments record cases where trained ex-combatants established small businesses in agriculture, transport and artisanal trades, thereby contributing to local livelihoods in Bayelsa, Rivers and Delta States (PIND, 2020; Ogege, 2021). Social stability improved in several communities as incidences of large-scale attacks, pipeline vandalism and mass kidnappings fell in the immediate post-amnesty years. The United Nations Development Programme observed greater humanitarian access and reduced conflict intensity in many formerly volatile areas between 2010 and 2014, enabling the delivery of services and community projects (UNDP, 2015). These outcomes validate the programme's role in creating a policy space for peacebuilding and reconstruction.

Answer to Research Question 2: What contradictions, governance challenges, and structural limitations have affected the implementation and effectiveness of the Amnesty Programme?

Several interlocking problems have limited the PAP's transformative potential. First, governance and accountability weaknesses have undermined programme credibility. Audits and investigative reports revealed irregularities in payroll management, the presence of ghost beneficiaries, delayed stipend payments and inflated contract awards linked to reintegration projects (Premium Times, 2021; Okonta, 2023). Government expenditure records and sector analyses show that large sums have been allocated to the programme with limited evidence of sustainable, measurable community development outcomes (Ministry of Finance, 2022; Aghedo, 2023). Second, the programme's overreliance on cash transfers and short-term training has not consistently translated into durable livelihoods. Evaluations and surveys indicate that many beneficiaries lack access to start-up capital, market linkages and infrastructural support necessary to convert training into viable businesses. As a result, sizeable proportions of graduates from PAP training schemes remain economically vulnerable and dependent on stipends (Eke, 2021; Ibaba, 2021).

Third, structural drivers of conflict remain largely unaddressed. Environmental degradation caused by oil spills and gas flaring continues to damage fisheries and farmland, undermining traditional livelihoods and fuelling grievances that originally produced militancy (United Nations Environment Programme, 2011; UNEP, 2023). Persistent underdevelopment—poor roads, unreliable electricity and weak market access—limits the Niger Delta's absorptive capacity for reintegrated youth (PIND, 2020; Ogunleye & Ajayi, 2023). Fourth, elite capture and local power dynamics have skewed benefits. Multiple

empirical studies document how former militant leaders and political elites have sometimes acted as gatekeepers of PAP resources, resulting in uneven distribution of benefits and new forms of local inequality (Ibaba & Olumati, 2020; Ogege, 2022). These processes exacerbate social tensions between beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries within communities. Finally, budgetary instability and institutional fragmentation have constrained sustained implementation. Overlapping mandates between the Amnesty Office, the Niger Delta Development Commission and the Ministry of Niger Delta Affairs have produced duplication and weak coordination of development projects (Okonta, 2023; Osaghae, 2024). Funding inconsistencies in recent years have further eroded programme momentum and hampered monitoring and evaluation efforts (Ministry of Finance, 2022).

Answer to Research Question 3: What policy options can be adopted to transform the Amnesty Programme into a more inclusive and development-oriented peacebuilding framework?

Evidence across evaluations and comparative DDR experience supports several policy prescriptions. First, reintegration must be recast from stipend dependence to economic inclusion. That requires linking skills training to market demands, providing seed capital through structured microfinance and fostering private sector partnerships to create employment pipelines. Establishing regional enterprise hubs focused on agro-processing, fisheries, renewable energy and maritime services would generate jobs aligned with local comparative advantages (Eke, 2021; PIND, 2020). Second, the PAP should be integrated into a unified Niger Delta development architecture. Merging programme functions with revitalized, accountable institutions such as a reformed Niger Delta Development Commission would improve planning coherence, reduce duplication, and align reintegration with infrastructure and environmental remediation projects (Osaghae, 2024; UNEP, 2023).

Third, environmental remediation must become central to peacebuilding. Scaling up clean-up operations, enforcing corporate liability, and investing in community health and alternative livelihoods would directly address a core grievance that fuels unrest (UNEP, 2011; UNEP, 2023). Fourth, transparency and independent oversight are essential. Regular public audits, community representation on oversight boards and a digitalized beneficiary registry would reduce ghost entries and corruption risks. Civil society and international partners can play monitoring roles to strengthen accountability (Premium Times, 2021; Okonta, 2023). Fifth, the programme must adopt an inclusive approach that broadens benefits to non-militant youth, women and affected households. Targeted

interventions for women and vulnerable groups would reduce exclusionary tensions and enhance social cohesion (Omotola, 2020; Aghedo & Osumah, 2016). Implementing these options requires political commitment and predictable financing. Comparative lessons from Sierra Leone and Liberia indicate that durable DDR success depends on sustained investment, institutional integration and community ownership rather than episodic cash interventions (World Bank, 2022).

X. Key Findings

1. The study found that the Presidential Amnesty Programme (PAP) effectively reduced militant activities and restored relative peace in the Niger Delta. Through disarmament, rehabilitation, and reintegration processes, thousands of ex-agitators were demobilized, leading to improved oil production, enhanced security, and renewed socio-economic stability across the region. The vocational and educational training initiatives under the programme also improved beneficiaries' employability and livelihood opportunities.
2. Despite its early achievements, the sustainability of the programme's outcomes has been constrained by issues of poor coordination, corruption, and policy inconsistency. Bureaucratic inefficiency, delayed payments, and inadequate monitoring have reduced public trust and weakened reintegration outcomes. Moreover, persistent structural problems such as environmental degradation, unemployment, and infrastructural deficits have continued to frustrate the region's development, limiting the transformative potential of the amnesty initiative.
3. The findings indicate that peace in the Niger Delta requires more than disarmament; it demands inclusive governance, sustainable livelihoods, and social justice. A shift from cash-based incentives to long-term economic empowerment and community development is necessary. Strengthening institutional coordination and ensuring broader participation of women, youth, and local communities will enhance legitimacy and improve the sustainability of peacebuilding efforts.

XI. Conclusion

The study concludes that the Presidential Amnesty Programme has played a pivotal role in restoring peace and stability in the Niger Delta by addressing immediate security concerns. However, its broader goal of achieving sustainable development and long-term reintegration has not been fully realized. The persistence of governance

weaknesses, elite capture, and structural inequalities has limited the programme's transformative capacity. True peace in the Niger Delta requires addressing the root causes of conflict, including environmental injustice, unemployment, and exclusion. The Amnesty Programme must therefore evolve from a temporary peace initiative into a development-oriented and inclusive framework capable of promoting lasting stability, social equity, and regional integration.

XII. Recommendations

1. The programme should be aligned with other regional and national development institutions to ensure coherent planning, efficient resource use, and harmonized implementation of peace and development strategies.
2. Reintegration should focus on entrepreneurship, vocational training, and access to microcredit to enable ex-agitators and community members to participate meaningfully in local economies and reduce dependency.
3. Institutional reforms should emphasize transparent beneficiary management, independent audits, and participatory monitoring. The inclusion of women, non-militant youth, and marginalized groups in peacebuilding processes will foster social cohesion and long-term stability.

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