Non-Terrorist Conflicts, Credible Commitment and Peace Building in the Developing Societies: Evidence from Post Amnesty Violence in the Niger Delta, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT   Modern terrorism studies have understudied non-terrorist conflicts in relation to credible commitment to peace building in the developing countries. Contemporary theories of peace building bring this to scholarly glare. From this perspective, the contradictions of mediation and negotiation, without credible commitment among key stakeholder groups, leads to complex and multidimensional resurgence of post recovery conflict. This study draws from the Niger Delta experience. It conceptualizes militancy as a non- terrorist violence to differentiate it from terrorism and further builds on credibility and reputation theory and posits that non commitment to peace process may not only trigger new conflict rather mars the reputation of parties to the conflict. In this context, the paper demonstrates that State lethargy has been a major trigger of post amnesty violence in the Niger Delta. Based on in-depth interviews with ex-combatants, presidential amnesty programme(PAP) representatives, and civil society organizations(CSOs) working on peace building, it argues that credible commitment is a marginalized concept that has a high mediation and reconciliation impact. To make an original contribution in this complexity, dimensions of non - credible commitment was discussed to identify key social processes or drivers, which helped explain how and why credible commitment is essential for post amnesty sustainable peace. These drivers also increased understanding of the wider diversity of resurgent post amnesty violence and implications for peace building. The study provides guidance for developing a commitment to peace, which offers some policy insights to non- terrorist conflict and in particular, post amnesty armed violence in the Niger Delta.

Non-Terrorist Conflicts, Credible Commitment and Peace Building in the Developing Societies:
Evidence from Post Amnesty Violence in the Niger Delta, Nigeria

125

INTRODUCTION

Little is known about non- terrorist conflicts in most crises ridden developing societies. Non terrorist conflicts are those conflicts that are not linked to terrorism. These conflicts have been in the margins in terrorist studies. The study of non-terrorist conflicts have become important in the post- Cold War era following the resurgence of new wars and local conflicts within borders. Whilst non-terrorist conflicts are not targeted at destruction of humans such as violation of human rights, killings or direct attacks on the state, it entails indirect opposition to state policies or attacks on state agencies or violation of state rules largely by an aggrieved or marginalized section of the society. This includes civil disobedience, mass action, riots, separatist agitation such as the Indigenous People of Biafra(IPOB) in south eastern Nigeria, communal conflicts and similar forms of internal insurrection that trigger conflict such as militancy by aggrieved Niger Delta youths in the South-South Nigeria.

On its part, terrorist violence takes various forms including mindless and senseless killings, violent attacks on the state, its agencies and the citizenry, violation of human rights, rape, banditry, criminality, abduction of citizens for ransom, suicide bombing and all other forms of violence by 'faceless' groups. This has been the case with Nigeria's Boko Haram. The 2021 Global Terrorism Index (GTI) ranked Nigeria third terrorist nation in the world.

The UN General Assembly Resolution 60/288 (1994) posits that the aim of terrorism is to invoke political attention for whatever objectives or gains by the terrorists. Schmid (2011) identified three main elements in defining terrorism; **(1)** the use (or threat) of violence, **(2)** political objectives and **(3)** the intention of sowing fear in a target population as a means of achieving these political objectives.

A common feature of both terrorism and non- terrorist conflict is the disruption of the polity, through tension and panic. The study of non-terrorist conflict has been a useful research agenda for scholars seeking to understand dynamics of contemporary terrorism especially in contexts linked to credible commitment and post conflict peace building.

126

Non-Terrorist Conflicts, Credible Commitment and Peace Building in the Developing Societies : Evidence from Post Amnesty Violence in the Niger Delta, Nigeria

In non-terrorist conflicts, issues of non-credible commitment have been identified as responsible for perverse post conflict violence. For instance, there is looming credibility crisis in resolving the Niger Delta armed conflict. With the recent incendiary and ongoing post amnesty violence in the region alongside the broader rise of resource justice movements, it appears that some of the core ideals of the federal government's amnesty programme as a peace building mechanism are not working. Such trends have led to increasing scholarly debates on post amnesty violence in the Niger Delta (Ukiwo, 2016; Ebiede, 2018; Vurasi & Nna, 2020). Ojione (2010) captured the intensity of the violence when he identified a twist in the current wave of militancy as the battle extends from the creeks, to upland areas and at times to the seats of government. Many of these studies, however, have tended to ignore the longer-term relevance of credible commitment in the process of post conflict peace building – a gap which extends to the dominant theorizations in contemporary peace and conflict debates. Thus, emphasis on 'credible commitment' as a strand of post conflict peace building that is based on the implementation and strict adherence to issues of conflict resolution by conflicting parties have been in the margins in conflict resolution discourse in the developing countries.

In the late 2000s, at various parts of the Niger Delta, armed militia groups most notably Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force (NDPVF), and Niger Delta Vigilante (NDV) inhabited much of the creeks and erected what became popularly known as 'camps'. The activities of the leadership of these camps gave rise to an entirely new and unanticipated crisis: oil resource sabotage, abduction of expatriate oil workers for ransom, vandalization of oil pipelines resulting in sharp decrease in production and export of oil from the Niger Delta. Virtually all the major oil multinational companies experienced one form of attack or the other (Ikelegbe, 2010; McNamee, 2012). These militia groups became the symbol of insurrection and armed violence against the Nigerian state, in which agitation that took various violent forms including criminality emerged as real 'strategic' threat, to Nigeria's oil resource – the mainstay of the country's economy. This representation of the Niger Delta in a vortex of volatility gained popular currency both in debates and social circles as the various militia groups take up arms against the Nigerian state (Osaghae, Ikelegbe, Olarinmoye & Okhonmina, 2011).

The rise of militia agitation was largely an attribute of growing poverty, neglect and increasing youth unemployment, which contrasts the oil wealth of the region (Ebiede, 2018). Recent accounts demonstrate that most of the militants were university graduates who could not be gainfully employed in Nigeria's public sector (Ebiede, 2018). Some studies highlight that the core trigger of the violent agitation was increasing marginalization of the oil bearing Niger Delta as Nigeria's government has a history of unequal revenue allocation formula (Obi, 2010; Ukiwo, 2011).

Non-Terrorist Conflicts, Credible Commitment and Peace Building in the Developing Societies:
Evidence from Post Amnesty Violence in the Niger Delta, Nigeria

127

In 2009, the federal government granted unconditional amnesty to the militants. What has been less explored is the cause of the recent post amnesty violence, in relation to credible commitment on the part of the federal government and its implication to peace building policy in the developing societies. Thus, issues of local conflicts in the developing societies have taken complex dimensions. In particular, discourses promoting peace building and credible commitment among the developing societies have become more important as the development contradictions of most resource rich countries have not been adequately resolved in contemporary peace and conflict studies.

This study seeks to broaden the scope of terrorism studies with emphasis on transformation of non-violent conflicts conceptualized in the context of post amnesty Niger Delta. It focuses on non-terrorist conflict and the need for credible commitment as essential to mitigate post conflict violence. It draws on evidence from the Niger Delta post amnesty violence. The post amnesty era is important as the Niger Delta has experienced complex post recovery conflicts, and particularly as oil rich Nigeria, Africa's largest economy was recently declared the "World poverty capital", by the Brookings Institute (Kharas, Hamel & Hofer, 2018). This draws local and international attention to post transition peace building.

Again, the magnitude of the on-going crisis in spite of democratic rule suggests the need for effective resolution of the conflict, which remains central to the processes and practices of inclusive and participatory democracy. This makes credible commitment inevitable. Whilst there are important empirical and theoretical debates on armed struggle and violent conflicts in post amnesty Niger Delta, these accounts, say little or nothing about the place of credible commitment in their respective accounts and, more importantly, omit any conceptualization of credible commitment in their empirical or theoretical schemas. This not only weakens their respective analyses but also serves to misconstrue the relevance of credible commitment to peace building and more particularly, post amnesty transformation of the Niger Delta.

The central research question is; what factors account for non-credible commitment to post transition recovery in the Niger Delta? To find answer to this question, this paper seeks to explore the conceptual and theoretical relevance of the term "credible commitment" in relation to non-terrorist – conflict transformation by highlighting the importance of credible commitment in postrecovery era. In particular, it draws attention to the role of commitment and compliance to peace deals by stakeholder groups in the building and maintenance of a peaceful social order. This emphasis on credible commitment not only underscores some neglected aspects of post-Cold War local conflict resolution but also accounts for persistence of new wars and local conflicts in post 1990 global South (Kaldor, 1999).

Essentially, the notion of credible commitment in post amnesty Niger Delta, puts peace building in proper perspective in conflict transformation contexts and accounts for the specific ways prevailing peace building processes have failed. Succinctly, the assumption that credible commitment has been a marginalized concept in post conflict peace building within the developing societies will be elucidated.

The paper demonstrates the critical relevance of credible commitment in post conflict transformation. Our debate follows on the heels of recent and ongoing arguments, which emphasize the persistence of post amnesty violence. Some of the leading contributions to the debate highlight state repression and militarization as well as fallacy and contradictions regarding the core ideals of amnesty (Joab-Peterside, 2011; Ukiwo, 2016), as some of the key drivers of post-amnesty violence. Others identify corruption and non-transparency in governance process (Joab-Peterside, 2011). This reflects a contradiction of state commitment and its alleged coercive approaches by which both the ex-combatants and other stakeholders tend to resort to violence as alternative and inevitable means to demonstrate grouse and disavowed commitment of the state to amnesty. Further, many peace and conflict accounts of the post amnesty Niger Delta have been criticized not only for their shortcomings in their analysis of how the state has failed, which has undermined the peace process, in some ways resulted in new violence, rather their inability to provide alternative strategies. This is also a gap the present study addresses.

Specifically, the paper goes beyond superficial framings of post amnesty peace building that dominate several non-critical accounts such as arguments that amnesty has doused marginalization and volatility of the region (Kuku, 2011; PAP,2015). These accounts are superficial insofar as they conceptualize amnesty as more or less viable instrument of peace building without deepened interrogation of its core ideals and prospects. They are uncritical in terms of context-sensitive exploration of development failures in the Niger Delta including poverty, low human development, and ecological breakdown. This contributes to non-fulfilment of the development needs or existential requirements of the local oil bearing communities. As such, existing approaches to the study of amnesty in the Niger Delta tend to understate the need for state accountability and transparency as integral to the understanding of the level of transformation in ways that are inclusive and participatory in line with the ideals of liberal democracy.

The paper demonstrates that while there is a need for a debate on the possibility of popular solution and consensus on mediation regarding armed conflicts in the Niger Delta, such debates cannot be separated from the theoretical and normative debates on the issues of equality and distributive justice. Discussions on amnesty issues, cannot set distributive justice issues aside, even when issues of consensus on the nature and scope of amnesty is raised, there is need to make a distinction

Non-Terrorist Conflicts, Credible Commitment and Peace Building in the Developing Societies:
Evidence from Post Amnesty Violence in the Niger Delta, Nigeria

129

between possible means of equitably resolving the causes of the crisis. Credible commitment as an expanding post conflict phenomenon should be adhered to and adopted by conflicting parties. Essentially, as an attempt to universalize a particular set of post conflict resolution principle and values, credible commitment should be adopted and adhered to, in local and international peace building.

Drawing on secondary data and interviews with ex-combatants, some PAP representatives, and CSOs working on peace building, the central objective of this paper is to explore the ramifications of credible commitment and its implications for sustainable peace building in post amnesty Niger Delta. This is important as dominant theorizations of contemporary armed struggles in the Niger Delta is increasingly hinged on a shared assumption of its inherent violent character based on the dominant notion of "volatility" of the Niger Delta. In the alternative, this paper reexamines this existing perspective through a critical theoretical and historical exploration of the relevance of credible commitment in institutionalizing peace building. Building on the concepts of "credibility" and "reputation in peacemaking" alternative theoretical positions are taken with distinct attention to the relevance of commitment of all stakeholders to the peace process in the workings and institutional fabric of the amnesty programme.

The paper draws on some of these arguments in the literature and, in more specific ways, shares their perspectives in advancing alternative arguments on credible commitment. Thus, by focusing on the critical perspectives of post amnesty violence, the paper aims to make a new contribution to the wider literature and theoretical debates on non-terrorist conflict and peace building one that is linked to the understanding of the relevance of credible commitment and the specific contexts of non-state commitment, resurgent post amnesty violence and the persistence of armed conflicts in the region – one that also speaks to the contemporary context of a rent seeking state. The paper discusses how and why credible commitment plays a key role in sustainable peace building, thereby addressing a relevant theoretical gap in the literature. It examines some of the limitations of the amnesty programme, which are further developed in conceptualizing credible commitment; the structured relations between the elites and the ex-combatants and ideologies in the construction and relevance of post amnesty peace building in particular.

Table 1. Differences between Terrorist and non-Terrorist Conflicts

Terrorism	Non -Terrorist Conflicts
Violent attacks always targeted at the government, its agencies or citizens.	Could be violent or non volent and may not always be targeted at the state. It could be inter or intra communal conflicts or peaceful demonstration or violent agitation against the state ie the #End SARS# protest in Nigeria in 2020.
Faceless,senseless violence, shootings, bombings and mindless killings.	Has a face and could be triggered by political or economic marginalisation of a group. Takes the form of separatist agitation ie IPOB, or militancy in the Niger Delta, demonstations, urban riots, mass action etc.
Always with violent threats to intimidate the government, trigger tension and panic in the society.	May not always have violent threats rather agitation for a-cause such as ethnic minority agitation, strikes or demonstrations in which dialogue could be solicited or adopted. Youth militancy ie the Niger Delta expériences armed insurrection against the state over resource marginalisation, environnemental degradation and alienation.
Seisure of a state,or part of a territory within a state. Example the Talaban and the seizure of Afghanistan, Boko Haram and the seizure of Gwoza and other communities in the Lake Chad Basin.	No form of seizure or occupation of a territory, rather vandalization of government facilites such as militancy and vandalization of oil facilites in the Niger Delta.
Imposition and collection of taxes from seized or occupied territory eg. ISIS, Hezebolah, Boko Haram.	No imposition of taxes rather incompartibility of goals such as demonstrations by federal workers over non payment of minimum wage by the federal goverment, resource conflicts such as oil rent related conflicts among Niger Delta communities, communal conflicts ie border and land disputes.
Violation of human rights including gender rights such as abduction of school girls and the use of female teens as suicide bombers, threat to human security.	Non violation of human rights, rather agitation or demonstration to guarantee human rights, equality and freedom ie gender equality agitation, ecological lights, separatist agitation,harmoniztion of salary structure ie minimum wage, the #End SARS# demonstration in Nigeria, restructuring of Nigeria's federal system etc.
Outright killing.	Ethno-religeous crises, vandalization of state facilities such as militancy and oïl facility vandaliztion in the Niger Delta.
Criminality and banditry. Example, Herdsmen killings,rape and abduction including school girls by Boko Haram.	Grevance, militants abduct expartriate oil workers in the region to draw state attention to their demands.
A terrorist group affiliated to ISIS.	A non terrorist group agitating for equality, resource right and distributive justice.

THEORETICAL CONVERGENCE BETWEEN CREDIBLE COMMITMENT AND PEACE BUILDING

Credible commitment theory was popularized by neo-liberal institutionalists (Keohane, 1989; Moravcsik, 1991; Rodrik, 1991; North, 1993; Sen, 2015). The term credible commitment within peace and conflict studies has a substantial body of theoretical literature (Hovi, 1998; Addison & Murshed, 2002; Mattes & Savun, 2009; Stankovic, 2009; Flores & Nooruddin, 2011). An influential treatise on non-credible commitment applicable to the Nigerian scenario is the credibility and reputation theory of peacemaking (Addison & Murshed, 2002), which argues that the regularity with which peace agreements break up in civil wars is an attribute of non-credibility and reputation. This captures the majority/minority strand of non-credible commitment thesis popularized by Fearon (1998), who argued that since majority groups cannot credibly commit to fair treatment of minority, the minority agitation turns violent. Fearon (1998) posits that five issues that can vitiate the intensity of the credible commitment problem. **Firstly** where, minority group demonstrate military weakness or exhibit weak cultural preferences for secession, invariably the expected benefits from fighting will tend not to linger even among worst compromise.[1] **Second**, physical separation of the two groups vitiates the credible commitment problem, as the minority can secede with less violence. **Third**, external power might enforce the division of benefits. **Fourth**, the less stark the anticipated drop in power between first and second rounds, the less difficult the problem. **Finally**, when a large percentage of the members of the minority group has the option of "exiting" the game by emigrating, the minority group's will to fight decreases. Based on this logic, Fearon (1998) suggests that, since rural dwellers have comparably less of an exit option, they tend to bear a larger percentage of the costs of fighting in "sons of the soil" wars.[2] Thus, the particular Niger Delta scenario is aptly buttressed as the ex-militants return to creeks fighting to secure oil on their soil.

The theoretical arguments of the paper draw on this framework. The theory will help explain whether the federal government has demonstrated credible commitment to the amnesty granted the ex-combatants or otherwise. Given the unique situation of the Niger Delta-an oil rich minority region since the discovery of crude oil in the region in 1956, and the increasing poverty and environmental degradation (UNEP, 2011), credible commitment has become critical to both the understanding of the transformation of the Niger Delta within the context of balance of power and in terms of genuine commitment of the federal government. While policies can be

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1- This was the particular case of the Niger Delta in 1966 when Isaac Adaka Boro declared the republic of Niger Delta. Due to weak military power he was crushed by the federal military government.

2- The notion of "sons of the soil" gave rise to increasing militancy and resource conflict in the Niger Delta as the militants took to the creeks fighting to protect oil in their soil despite amnesty.MEND provides a clear example.

132

Non-Terrorist Conflicts, Credible Commitment and Peace Building in the Developing Societies : Evidence from Post Amnesty Violence in the Niger Delta, Nigeria

credible whether or not trust exists, policies and statements are more likely to be credible when there is prior trust (Rodrik, 1997; Miller, 2011).

Yet, the concept of credible commitment remains one of the least explored or interrogated in the study of contemporary arms struggle and peace building in the Niger Delta, as none of what has recently emerged as the major works on armed struggle especially since post amnesty era considers the concept important enough to be a tool for analysis. The theoretical significance of this concept drives from the insights it offers in understanding the fundamental cause of persistence of armed conflict in the Niger Delta and more so the evidence it provides regarding underdevelopment of the region.

Theorizing the linkages between credible commitment to amnesty as a modality for peace building by the Nigerian state infers from a historically specific intuition of passive response to socioeconomic transformation of the Niger Delta, which invites an analysis of the various ways by which the government – in certain instances – failed to provide the much needed peace in the volatile region. While recognizing a broader process of Demobilization, Disarmament and Reintegration (DDR) "from below", the outcome is neither transformative nor uniform.[3] Instead, the increasingly aggrieved fragments and social movements within the futile structures of the broader programme ultimately re-consolidated and re-emerged as crucial threat to the State in the form of post amnesty combatants. Conditioned by both the exploitative and asymmetrical "relations of forces" between cross-cutting, contending and complex classes and their differential access, control and positions within the broader context of oil resource rent appropriation. Non credible commitment is thus, evident and indicative of the processes and dynamics of minimal state response to the demands of the agitating youths and the Niger Delta in general. The typical outcome of noncredible commitment is the "very contradictions" of amnesty in institutionalizing sustainable peace.[4] The scholarly literature and theoretical debates on credible commitment reinforce such theoretical and policy relevant discourse (Miller, 2011; Sen, 2015) akin to post amnesty transformation failure.

In relation to the various theoretical underpinnings of the concept of credible commitment, the paper considers the prospects and problems associated in the practice of credible commitment by the government in relation to peace building as a tool for policy response. Further, the paper discusses the need for "credible commitment" as an important area of study that expands the field of both traditional peace building and research on armed conflict in the developing societies in relation to global attention. In particular, the paper seeks to examine further where the

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3- Interview with ex-combatants, 15/3/2021,Port Harcourt.

4- Personal Interview with a CSO leader 16/3/2021in Port Harcourt, Rivers State.

discussion on "credible commitment" stands theoretically in the peace and conflict debate, and how this affects the complex and cross cutting power structure among the elites, other key stakeholder groups and the oil bearing local communities.

Further, it demonstrates that re-conceptualizing the amnesty programme within the context of credible commitment, not only deepens theoretical relevance of the credible commitment thesis, but also provides a re-evaluation of post-conflict peace building to forestall future reoccurrence. Thus, credible commitment is an alternative theoretical framework for understanding resurgence of post amnesty violence, building upon the interconnected ideas of non-commitment of the federal government to the amnesty deal, "resource alienation", "marginalization", and "nontransformation" within an increasingly asymmetrical majority/minority relationship. It focuses particular attention on how the recurrent armed violence aided in the understanding of noncommitment of the federal government to amnesty and alternative conceptions of credible commitment to peace building, thus, calling into question the supposedly "transformative" and "inclusive" elements of the amnesty programme. It does so, first, by highlighting the social foundations of armed conflict, persistence of post amnesty violence – within and among the localities, dimensions of non-credible commitment by the federal government, and conclusion. This is important to provide further guidance for policymakers and stakeholder groups. And essential to understand the bounds of the prevailing programme and therefore, the idea of a supposedly "new post amnesty transformation" and mechanisms to further gauge, the *extent* amnesty has been either a failure or a success.

THE SOCIAL FOUNDATIONS OF ARMED CONFLICT AND AMNESTY IN THE NIGER DELTA

There are distinct explanations of armed conflict in the Niger Delta, and its relation to peace building (Ushie, 2013; Vurasi &Nna, 2020) as well as causes and origins of such intractable violent armed conflicts in the region (Isumonah, 2012). With particular reference to the post-Cold War politics and, in particular, the distinct character of armed conflict across the third world, a number of theoretical perspectives have sought to explore the linkages between armed conflict and peace building.

To this end, it is worth exploring the nexus between armed conflict and amnesty and its linkages with credible commitment in peace building theory. Some scholars have provided empirical and theoretical perspectives to the Niger Delta armed violence by explicating the complex and intractable contour of the conflict including "the underlying" causes that inform and shape the dynamics of the armed conflict (Duquet, 2009).

Arms struggle has been well documented in the debates on oil resource politics and conflict in the Niger Delta since the discovery of crude oil in Oloibiri a community in the Niger Delta in 1956 by Shell.[5] Ojakorotu & Okeke-Uzodike (2006) have provided one the most sustained theoretical accounts of armed conflict in the Niger Delta. The complex development crises that have confronted the oil rich Niger Delta has drawn out the structural contradictions between the government, oil resource rents and other stakeholder groups as well as the making and evolution of armed conflict.

In February, 1966 a Niger Delta activist Isaac Jasper Adaka Boro declared the Republic of Niger Delta leading to a-12 day revolution in former Eastern region of Nigeria, which was crushed by the federal military government. This incipient agitation, formed the background to subsequent resource struggles and agitations in the Niger Delta as oil resource struggle has not ebbed (Amadi et al, 2016). The quest for oil resource justice necessitated by the contradictions of alienation and systemic dispossession of the oil bearing communities on whose land oil is exploited triggers repeated violent agitation and resource conflict.

In the early 1990s, non-violent agitation was rekindled following the formation of the Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP) led by Ken Saro Wiwa in August 1990. The execution by hanging of Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight Ogoni compatriots in November, 1995 by the federal military government headed by General Sani Abacha intensified the Niger Delta struggle. On December 11, 1998 there was the Kaima Declaration in which the people of Ijaw extraction laid further claims to the ownership of oil in their soil.

Similar groups that emerged during this period included the Movement for the Survival of Ijaw Ethnic Nationality (MOSIEN), Niger-Delta Women for Justice (NDWJ), Chiiccoco Movement, Community Rights Initiative (CORI), Ijaw National Congress (INC) and Egbema National Congress (ENC).These groups have been agitating against the federal government and the Multinational Oil Companies (MNOCs) regarding issues of environmental degradation arising from oil exploration activities of the MNOCs.

5- Personal interview with Ex-Combatant 15/2/2021 in Igbogene Bayelsa State.

Table 2: Structure of the Niger Delta Amnesty Programme

1	**Disarmament**	**Demobilization/Rehabilitation**	**Reintegration**
2	Duration: 6 August to 4 October 2009	Duration: 6 to 12 months	Duration: Up to 5 years
3	Collection of arms, ammunition, explosives	Ex-militants report to camp	Knowledge and skills acquisition
4	Biometrics	Verification and documentation	Financial empowerment
			Placement programmes
			Microcredit
5		Transformational training	Education
6		Peace building and conflict resolution	Reconciliation with local community
7		Counseling	Conflict resolution Framework/ mechanism
8		Career guidance	Monitoring and evaluation
9		Wellness assessment	Exit from amnesty
10		Reintegration classification	
11		Education and vocational placement	
12		Graduation and demobilization	
13	**Key enablers**		
14	Disarmament camps	Transformational training centres	Partnering government agencies, NGOs and private organizations
15		Rehabilitation camps	Oil and gas institutions (OGIs)
			Tracking and support system

Source: Federal Government of Nigeria-PAO, Niger Delta Amnesty Programme:
http://www. nigerdeltaamnesty.org/index.php?option¼com_content&view¼article&id¼54&Itemid¼55

Following the return to Democracy in 1999, punitive act in the Niger Delta was exemplified in February, 2002 by the Nigerian military following the military invasion and killings in Odi village, an oil bearing community in Bayelsa state. This had implications for peace building in the region as several youth movements and activist groups condemned the activities of the Nigerian military. Armed conflict in the 2000s took a different dimension and became more violent, there were severe disruption of oil activities, which adversely affected the Nigerian state as volume of oil resource export dropped (Moody, 2016). It was on the basis of the increasing

disruptions that the federal government considered amnesty as a better option. The main objective of the amnesty was to disarm, demobilize and reintegrate repentant militants back into the society. The programme was envisioned to offer benefits to the militants who gave up their arms with skills acquisition, education and stipends (Ebiede, 2018). Following the terms of the amnesty, militants who surrendered their arms and demobilized were not prosecuted rather were rewarded. The rewards included; vocational training, formal education in Nigeria or abroad, loan to set up businesses as well as a monthly stipend of about US$400 which as at that time was higher than Nigeria's minimum wage of about US$60 per month (Ebiede, 2018).

Leaders of militant groups were also offered huge and profitable contracts both in the oil industry and other sectors of the economy. At the immediate post amnesty era, ex-militant leaders gained political power and influence in the cities which they returned (Amadi et al. 2016). While it is commonly believed that the amnesty programme has promoted stability in oil production, there are underlying socio-political contradictions that undermine its effectiveness and credibility' (Ushie, 2013: 30).

It was the specific "marginalization" character of the Nigerian State that gave rise to the evolution of armed violence, which largely accounts for the recent "attention" to the region no matter how minimal. Such context-sensitive outcome is historically unprecedented in terms of what followed such as the establishment of interventionist agencies such as the Niger Delta Development Board(NDDB), Oil Minerals Producing Areas and Development Commission (OMPADEC), Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) and the creation the Ministry Niger Delta in September 2008.

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	-	3,361
Edo	450	-	450
Imo	297	3	300
Ondo	1,198	2	1,200
Rivers	6,958	39	6,997
NDDC	571	19	600
Total	20,049	133	20,192

Source: Federal Government of Nigeria-PAO, Niger Delta Amnesty Programme:
http://www.nigerdeltaamnesty.org/index.php?option¼com_content&view¼article&id¼54&Itemid¼55

*Accounts for only the first batch of demobilised ex-militants.

Non-Terrorist Conflicts, Credible Commitment and Peace Building in the Developing Societies: Evidence from Post Amnesty Violence in the Niger Delta, Nigeria

137

POST AMNESTY VIOLENCE AND DIMENSIONS
OF NON-CREDIBLE COMMITMENT

The federal government amnesty programme popularly called Presidential Amnesty Programme(PAP), which was unveiled on 15th June, 2009 was scheduled to run between 6th August to 4th October, 2009 that is, a-60 day period. It was predicated on the willingness and readiness of the militants to give up all illegal arms in their possession and renounce militancy completely.[6] Ukiwo (2016) argued that following high incidence of violence in the Niger Delta, the government came under pressure to find solutions and bring armed insurgency to an end. The amnesty programme was in three phases, namely; the disarmament and demobilization of militants, the rehabilitation and integration of ex-militants and the final stage was the post-Amnesty package of infrastructural development.[7] However, while several militant-groups embraced amnesty, others like the MEND which claimed that it doubted the sincerity of the federal government declined the deal. This was a sign that militant activities has not completely ebbed in the region (Ojione 2010). Undoubtedly, since 2009, the repentant militants had undergone several "transformations" such as training and alternative means of livelihood. While the later suggests a strategy for subsistence, training were aimed to empower the ex-combatants at first instance. Kuku (2011) argued that the presidential amnesty has consolidated peace, safety and security in the Niger Delta and boosted Nigeria's economy. Similarly, Onapajo & Moshood (2016) suggest that the reintegration programme of the PAP has recorded some positive progress.

However, the non-sustainability of the training beyond the amnesty programme span in later years, pointed to a different interpretation, which has dominated much of recent debates on amnesty failure. It has been argued by critics that the amnesty programme was riddled with poor planning, implementation, corruption and non-involvement of key stakeholder groups (Ogege 2011; Ikelegbe 2014; Eke 2014; Amaize 2016; Ebiede 2018; Vurasi & Nna 2020). Ebiede & Langer (2017) posit that one major problem is that the Nigerian government failed to tackle wider socio-economic grievances. This lack of commitment to the wider socio-economic realities of the region triggered dissent. These include the lack of social development in local oil communities, environmental pollution and the exclusion of local communities from the governance of oil production in the Niger Delta region. Non commitment to socio-economic transformation of the ex-combatants gave rise to resurgence of violent conflict. Perhaps, the most revealing aspect of the contradictions of post amnesty "transformation" is how most of the ex-combatants have come to position themselves as "new War Lords"; leading to challenges of reintegration and in contrast to the objectives of the amnesty programme. In practice, while some

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6- Interview with PAP official, 12/2/2021, Abuja, Nigeria.

7- Interview with PAP official 13/1/2021,Abuja,Nigeria.

embraced the amnesty what has emerged in the wider academic debate is a new set of ex-combatants waging crucial war against the Nigerian state. Such groups as the Niger Delta Avengers (NDAs), Red Scorpions and the Niger Delta Greenland Justice Movement (NDGJM) pose potential threat to oil resource extraction. This has been a consequence of superficial commitment to re-integration and rehabilitation of the repentant militants.

Non-commitment to ecological transformation of the Niger Delta is a major factor. In 2011, United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) released its report on environmental degradation in Ogoni, an environmentally degraded community in the Niger Delta, the report stated among other things that it will take 25 to 40 years for an effective clean-up of Ogoni. The clean-up remains an exercise politicized, same ecological degradation is common among several oil bearing local communities in the Niger Delta as most of the communities are poor.

Thus, poverty is a key evidence of non-commitment of the federal government's amnesty programme. Following the strategic relevance of the Niger Delta, the federal government should have embarked on massive infrastructural development of the area. On the contrary, UNDP Niger Delta Human Development Report (2006) identified low human development index in the Niger Delta compared to other oil rich countries of the global South.

Monetized incentive against militancy was a major evidence of non-credible commitment. This has been critiqued as "political settlement" accounting for "no pay no peace" (Eke 2014). The federal government's preference to monetary incentives rather than institutionalized mode of livelihood was a disincentive for sustainable reintegration as ex-militants preferred to remain enrolled in the amnesty programme, rather than switch to a less-paid jobs.

There is non-commitment of the Federal Government to harmonized revenue allocation formula as unequal revenue allocation remained a common problem of the Nigerian federal system. It is instructive to note that harmonization of the federal system in terms of equitable revenue allocation was part of the recommendations of the Ledum Mitee (2008) technical committee on Niger Delta (2008).The Committee's recommendations among others included appointing a mediator to facilitate discussions between government and militants, granting of amnesty to some militant leaders, launching a disarmament, demobilization and rehabilitation campaign and increase in the percentage of oil revenue to 25 percent from 13 percent, establishing regulations that compel oil companies to have insurance bonds making the reinforcement of critical environmental laws a nations priority; exposing fraudulent environmental clean-ups of oil spills and prosecuting operators, ending gas flaring by 31st December 2008 as previously ordered by the federal government (Report of

the technical committee on the Niger Delta, 2008). Despite the recommendations, the federal government has not credibly implemented any. Revenue allocation remains unchanged, the Niger Delta has not been cleaned, the amnesty has not been credibly implemented, neither are there evidence of insurance bonds making critical environmental laws a priority, gas flaring is still a daily occurrence.

Another evidence of non-credible commitment is exemplified in the argument put forward by Aziken (2010: 7) that there was delay on the part of the Federal Government to give considerations to the issues that led to the declaration of Amnesty. This delay triggered complex post amnesty violence. On the 4th of October, 2009, following official end of the amnesty, militant activities persisted as exemplified with bombings in some upland areas. As a consequence, on the 15th of March, 2010 in Warri, Delta state, two explosions ensued about 200 meters from the border fence of the Delta State Government House Annex. The next bombing recorded one casualty, MEND claimed responsibility for both (Amaize et al. 2010: 1-5, Ojione, 2010: 9).

During the 2010 independence day celebration on the 1st of October, there was twin bomb blasts, about 20 meters away from Eagle Square, Abuja, venue of the celebration. This claimed 20 lives which, included 8 security agents (Ojione, 2010: 9). MEND also claimed responsibility stressing that they were protesting against federal government's neglect of the Niger Delta.

On the 18th November, 2010, a violent gun battle broke out between soldiers of the Joint Task Force (JTF) and some militants that re-grouped in the a post-amnesty period under the name Niger Delta Liberation Force (NDLF) led by "General" John Togo who resisted the military (Amaize 2010: 5; Ojione 2010: 9). The militants resumed attacks on oil installations and other critical infrastructures. On14th November 2010, the MEND attacked Exxon Mobil facility in Akwa Ibom State and threatened to resume full attack on oil installations in other parts of the region.

Two events, which suggest persistence of militancy appear particularly relevant to the theoretical exploration of non-credible commitment of the Nigerian State to amnesty. First was the federal government's refusal to fully implement the report of the Ledum Mitee Technical Ccommittee on Niger Delta (2008), especially the equitable review of the revenue allocation formula. This argument is consistent with the logic of resource alienation and marginalization in post conflict peace building. Thus, non-commitment could hitherto result in resurgence of post transition violent conflicts.

The next was corruption and weak institutional capacity to effectively implement the amnesty programme. Ushie (2013, p. 33) argued that "the Nigerian state put in significant resources to the amnesty programme. Between 2009 and 2011, the

programme was allocated N127 billion (US$819 million) in the national budget. Of this amount, N3 billion was the "take-off" grant, N30 billion was spent on militants' stipends and N96 billion on feeding the militants. In 2012, N74 billion (US$ 477 million) was allocated to the amnesty programme (Ushie 2013: 33). There are also fiscal transfers to the Niger Delta between 2009 and 2012 – for the Ministry of Niger Delta Affairs, N241 billion (US$1.55 billion), and for the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) N 246.6 billion (US$1.6 billion)". In addition to the budgets of the six core oil-producing states in the Niger Delta, which totaled N1.74 trillion (US$11.2 billion) just for the fiscal year 2012 (Ushie 2013: 33). This scenario snugly justifies our theoretical framework that "credibility and reputation" is essential for post conflict peace building (Addison & Murshed 2002). For instance, while the amnesty programme in some respects is contradictory and, less transformative toward sustainable peace building, it has equally been argued that it is inherently inconsistency in its avowed claim for youth empowerment.

Ebiede (2018) highlights that amnesty on the contrary, created more violence and exacerbated youth unemployment. As the later remains – a defining element of violence and conflict, it is this "less transformative" strand of the amnesty that makes the question of credible commitment much more inevitable in contemporary peace and conflict debates in the Niger Delta. Ebiede (2018: 106) further argued that the PAP failed to facilitate the rehabilitation of ex-combatants through its inability to create employment for a large number of ex-militants in the region. He demonstrates that there is a gap between the government's claim and verifiable figures on the employment rate of excombatants. Ebiede (2018: 106) provided an example, that the government claimed that it registered 30,000 ex-militants in the PAP, yet it has only provided training for 15,459 individuals (PAP 2015; Ebiede 2018: 106). Data on actual levels of employment resulting from the programme are scarce, but the last official figures show that only 2,072 participants in the PAP have found jobs (Omonobi 2014; Ebiede 2018: 106). These contradictions on the part of the Federal Government triggered the emergence of new post amnesty militant groups in addition to MEND.

The new militant groups claimed to represent the grievances of local oil communities. These groups include the Niger Delta Avengers (NDAs), Red Scorpions and the Niger Delta Greenland Justice Movement (NDGJM). They commenced attacks on the region's oil infrastructure and claimed responsibility, resulting in a reduction of Nigeria's oil production from 2.2 million to about 1.1 million barrels per day in 2016 (Moody 2016; Ebiede 2017) In this vein, Moody (2016) highlighted that the Niger Delta Avengers (NDAs) posed a new threat to oil producers in Nigeria.

The fact that ex-combatants are currently waging "post amnesty wars" is reflective of poor institutionalization of peace by the federal government's amnesty pro-

gramme. The ex-combatants align with various "antagonized stakeholder groups" such as ethnic militias as well as crime syndicates within the wider "democratic" space. This is understandable as funding of the combatants is inevitable, thus they engage in oil bunkering activities, shutting down of oil exploration by MNOCs, artisanal refining, abduction of expatriate oil workers for ransom evidenced as a reaction to the neglect of the region and alleged marginalization of the oil bearing communities in the exploration of oil resources on their land including security threats within the oil-bearing area (Watts 1999). These notions fueled continuous armed struggle and crisis and reflect the basis for continued agitation and the un-resolved minority question in the wider Nigerian politics, which has taken more critical dimension since Nigeria's democracy in 1999.

CONCLUSION

The Niger Delta amnesty programme was built on Disarmament, Demobili-zation and Reintegration (DDR).The pronounced role of the amnesty programme in peace building has been contradictory. The contradictions and complexities reduced amnesty to the level of mere social logic to douse youth agitation and restiveness for smooth flow of oil exploitation rather than any sensible articula-tion of transformation, one that speaks to strategic overhaul of the region beyond amnesty. Such evidence point out the discriminatory inclinations of the Nigerian state against the Niger Delta agitations as an issue of less importance. Rather, what is more important is the daily volume of oil resource that accrues to the state. Thus, to glean the interplay of forces across class and political elite is ap-propriate to understand the basis for the historic armed struggle in the region including post amnesty resurgence of conflict.

A key issue is that the present study has re-established that militancy in the Niger Delta context is a non-terrorist violence. Yet the amnesty programme has been less transformative. The DDR, which dominate socio-political and economic policy strat-egy of the government as argued, are ill-equipped to provide the much needed trans-formation.This has been a dominant scholarly debate in post amnesty studies in the Niger Delta (Ushie 2013), while the demobilization component of the programme is seldom able to counter the dominant strategies of most of the ex-combatants to fully accept the amnesty such as MEND and Mujahid Asari Dokubo's Niger Delta Peoples Volunteer Force (NDPVF) as the later claimed that he is a freedom fighter. There was a limited reform that ought to have accompanied the Disarmament Demobilization and Reintegration components, which proved less transformative.

Where-as militia groups as state adversaries became largely dismantled and discouraged, they were not completely depleted. While there are important empiri-

cal and theoretical debates on armed struggle and violent conflicts in post amnesty Niger Delta, these accounts, say little or nothing about the place of credible commitment in their respective accounts. This historical-cum-theoretical lacuna stems in part from scant investigation of policy relevance of credible commitment to post conflict peace building.

Beyond these, the point this paper has been emphasizing is that, it is not enough to grant amnesty to the combatants, rather there is need to enforce amnesty through commitment to the ideals of the programme by the federal government. Fearon (1995: 401) argued that "mutually acceptable bargains erode, due to the lack of enforcement". This paper theorizes that in contrast, the Niger Delta amnesty as constitutive element of socio-economic transformation, reflected superficial commitment to the normative foundations of socio-economic transformation of the region, this limits the scope and depth of sustainable peace in post amnesty era, thereby providing openings for significant resurgence of post amnesty violence.

It is only proper to understand state interest as a distinct rationality and imaginary that informed the adoption of the amnesty option framed as a legitimate instrument to douse oil resource crisis. What is critical is a reconceptualization of the amnesty phenomenon as reflective of an increasingly lethargic state system that co-exists with indigenous capitalist elites and political class notably owners of the oil bloc concession – a version of exclusionary and exploitative component of oil resource extraction in the ongoing context. This inherent exploitation in contemporary Niger Delta remains glaring as strains of contradictions, which are diversionary, lurks between popular/militia transformation and vested elite capitalist interest, and in particular, radical versus conservative quest for Niger Delta transformation.

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Non-Terrorist Conflicts, Credible Commitment and Peace Building in the Developing Societies:
Evidence from Post Amnesty Violence in the Niger Delta, Nigeria

143

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Non-Terrorist Conflicts, Credible Commitment and Peace Building in the Developing Societies :
Evidence from Post Amnesty Violence in the Niger Delta, Nigeria

145

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