

**EDUCATION AND PEACEBUILDING IN AFRICA: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS ON
POST CONFLICT NIGER DELTA, NIGERIA****Tobor, J. O. & Odubo, E. F.****ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this paper is to examine the peacebuilding initiatives in Africa with particular emphasis on the Amnesty program in Niger Delta, Nigeria and to find out whether it has achieved its goal of restoring peace and stability in the region. The introduction of the Amnesty program in 2009 resulted in suspending the violence but has so far not resolved the region's problems. Thus, a resurgence of violence may occur in the region except the undesirable socio-economic situations that fuelled militancy in the first place are addressed. This paper examines the Amnesty program, using content analysis of relevant secondary data that highlights the experiences and perceptions of the ex-militants who participated in studies of Tobor (2014) and Odubo (2014). Findings from both studies demonstrated that the Amnesty program is a good step towards peace building in the region. However, a holistic approach to development of the region must be taken to compliment the progress made so far. The significance of the study is that the results may help African nations particularly the Nigerian government enhance its youth education and training programs. Recommendations include consultations with key stakeholders and inclusion of all youths in the educational and vocational training programs that will cater to essential needs of the majority of the inhabitants of the Niger Delta region. The social significance of these recommendations may help prevent a return to militancy and violence and thus promote greater social, economic, and political stability in the region.

Keywords: Africa, Amnesty program, conflicts, crisis, education, Niger Delta, Nigeria, peacebuilding, post conflict.

INTRODUCTION

This paper critically analyzes Nigeria's Amnesty program and raises questions about its prospects of achieving sustainable peace in the Niger Delta. Since the 1990s, disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) programs have been a core component of the peacebuilding model used by the United Nations and other institutions (Ibaba, 2011). A DDR program is characteristically adopted as a means of transition from conflict to peace since its function is to remove one or more of the disputing parties from the scene. Ibaba (2011) posited that peace negotiations generally include DDR clauses, yet in peace-building theory, a DDR program is expected to comprise only the preliminary phases of a much broader process of addressing root causes that initially motivated the combatants.

In 2009, the United Nations (UN) Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon gave a report on peacebuilding in the immediate aftermath of conflicts. He emphasized that education is one of the recurrent priorities in the peacebuilding process, especially as it relates to the transitioning process for post conflict communities. According to Smith (2011), advocates of averred that education helps to preserve peace in post conflict environments. Smith (2011) is of the view that education which is a long-term process and one that is focused on the development of children and youth can restore peace in a conflict environment. However, Davis (2013) posited that education that is not properly planned may result in further conflict if there are frustrations and tensions due to unmet expectations. Several other researchers

have also stressed the importance and the key role played by educational interventions in the peacebuilding process in post conflict environments. For instance, Hayes and McAllister (2009) indicated that education has been used to resolve conflicts in nations worldwide. Studies conducted by Hayes and McAllister (2009) on education and peacebuilding revealed that education helped resolved warring communities in Northern Ireland by helping to improve community relations.

METHODOLOGY

The ethnographical study of Tobor (2014) and the phenomenological study of Odubo (2014) inform this paper. A combination of purposeful and maximum variation sampling models provided the diversity and information from persons of experience illuminated the research problem. The decision of who participated and how many people participated is derived from the nature of the study set-up. Tobor (2014) interviewed 20 ex-militants while Odubo (2014) interviewed 10 ex-militants, 3 program administrators, and a government official associated with the program, putting his total study participants at 14. The qualitative research method was utilized to explore the benefits and significance of education, skill acquisition, and vocational training component of the Amnesty program on the Niger Delta ex-militants that have graduated from the amnesty program. The phenomenological approach is justified because the study has to do with gaining an in-depth understanding of a social phenomenon that is carried out within the natural setting of the participants of the study (Guest et al., 2013). The case study approach was adopted because it was logical to construe this approach as an action plan intended to navigate from question to conclusions. For instance, this method provided the study an opportunity to collect and examine data from the real-life context of the study participants.

Data collection method involved extensive interviews and open-ended questions on the study participants (ex-militants) with focus on their personal experiences. The questions were designed to be open-ended so as to encourage respondents to volunteer their views on questions willingly. The choice of safe and quiet venue for interview encouraged conversation in a relaxed and secure atmosphere. During the interview process, field notes were also taken on a note pad with the transcripts typed into a word document. After the interviews, data were transcribed and analyzed, and member checked for results, summaries, and recommendations made. The whole processes of data collection and analysis lasted for one month. Recording equipment was used for the interview. Olympus VN-702PC digital voice recording device was utilized to conduct the interviews, and for back-up, a" Sony ICD-PX333" digital voice recorder for recording audio data.

The literature reviewed provided an in-depth background on the disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration programs (DDR) in Africa. For instance, documents related to the DDR programs in Africa were reviewed and analyzed. Themes were identified, transcribed, and then typed into computer files. Content and thematic analyses were used for the data analysis. Ethical and confidentiality issues were addressed in these studies. For instance, prior permission was obtained from participants before the interviews. In addition to verbal explanation, the informed consent had provisions that explained to the study participants that their participation in the study was voluntary and that they were required to understand the benefits and risks before consenting, signing and dating the informed consent forms. Study participants were also told that there were no compensations for participating in the study. The voluntary nature and freedom to withdraw from the study at any time was explained in great detail to the participants.

Post conflict Niger Delta, Nigeria

Odubo and Tobor (2016) posited that education also plays a vital role in preventing and transforming violent conflicts as well as helping to form and shape behaviors and identities. More importantly, education through the DDR program can help conflict communities' transition more smoothly to non-conflict status (Smith, 2011). For the Niger Delta conflict, the DDR Strategy, otherwise known as the Amnesty program is one of such educational programs introduced to resolve the crisis in the region. Etemike (2012) argued that youth restiveness in the region is a direct consequence resulting from historical deprivation, marginalization, oppression, and dispossession. These odds threaten the existence and survival of the inhabitants of the Niger Delta region, and in response, the youths of the region resort to violent agitations that include kidnappings, hostage taking, oil bunkering, and attacks on oil installations (Ogege, 2011).

It is against this background that the late Nigerian President Musa Yar'Adua introduced the Amnesty program in 2009 as a means to create an enabling and peaceful environment designed to address the developmental issues and problems of the Niger Delta region (Akanji & Oyitso, 2012; Idowu, 2012; Ogege, 2011; Oluwaniyi, 2011). In other words, the Amnesty program is a peacebuilding initiative that was created and aimed at ameliorating the root causes of the Niger Delta crisis. The strategy for conflict resolution in the region centers on amnesty from prosecution by the Nigerian government. While researchers agreed that the Amnesty program/initiative has been partially successful, they maintained that the main reason for its inability to achieve an overwhelming success was because the program failed to address the root causes of militancy in the region (Amaraegebu, 2011; Oluduro & Oluduro, 2012; Oluwaniyi, 2011).

Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) interventions in Africa

DDR interventions have been used across the world and in Africa over the past four decades. Between 1992 and 2007, a total of 24 DDR interventions were introduced globally by the United Nations (UN) with only six of those outside Africa (Hanson, 2007). According to Zena (2013), between 2008 and 2013 four DDR programs were introduced in Africa including Darfur, Sudan – 2008, South Sudan – Phases I & II, 2009, Nigeria – 2009, and Libya – 2011). Hanson (2007) posited that some of these DDR programs have been successful, while others have failed because the focus of the programs was not clearly identified from start. However, in 2005, the UN introduced a more focused DDR program through a new set of policy guidelines. With this, newer DDR interventions in Sierra Leone, Ivory Coast, and the Democratic Republic of Congo proved to be more successful than earlier interventions in Somalia and Liberia (The UN Office of the Special Advisor on Africa, 2007). According to Hanson (2007), 75% of ex-combatants surveyed in Sierra Leone attested to the fact that the training component of the DDR prepared them well for employment. Nonetheless, the same cannot be said of the outcome in other regions of the continent. For example, some of the ex-combatants in Congo did not think the training was useful to them and so would rather the government return their weapons due to inability to fend for themselves after going through the program (Hanson, 2007).

Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) as a Post conflict Peacebuilding Process in Africa

The establishment of the DDR process is connected to peace processes. In other words, the entire arrangement of the DDR process is often determined by the peace process that entail peace negotiations and settlements both within and outside the countries involved (The UN Office of the Special Advisor on Africa, 2007). DDRs introduced in countries like Ethiopia, Eritrea, Angola and Uganda has been deemed successful. In addition to the UN, other bodies have also joined ranks to make these programs successful including the African Union (AU), European Union (EU), the regional economic and security groups in the West, Southern and the Horn of Africa and some Scandinavian states through the Multi-Country Demobilization and Reintegration Program (MDRP) established in 2002 (The UN Office of the Special Advisor on Africa, 2007). In other to reduce the length of this essay, only a few of the successful and the not-so-successful DDR interventions in Africa are highlighted below:

Angola. The peace process in Angola was established after the death of the founder and leader of the Movement for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) in 2002. This was followed by a DDR intervention which led to the demobilization of 97,392 ex-combatants out of 138,000 participants. Leaders of UNITA and Forces Armades de Angola (FAA), the other rebel group in Angola also embraced peace and are contributing to a growing Ugandan economy (The UN Office of the Special Advisor on Africa, 2007).

Burundi. The DDR program for Burundi included individuals from both the country's armed forces and the opposition (The UN Office of the Special Advisor on Africa, 2005). Zena (2013) averred that Burundi's DDR program lasted from 2004 to 2008 with a total of 26,283 demobilized and 21,012 reintegrated from an estimated 35,000 combatants (Zena, 2013). The program also helped placed 543 demobilized participants with employers (The UN Office of the Special Advisor on Africa, 2007).

The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). The DRC's DDR program is one of the complex and multi-faceted yet successful DDR programs in Africa. The DRC's DDR program was administered in two-folds. The first part involved the disarmament and repatriation of foreign combatants and their dependents while the second was a DDR program for the warring groups. DRC's DDR process was facilitated mainly by the UN and the World Bank in conjunction with the DRC government (The UN Office of the Special Advisor on Africa, 2007). According to Zena (2013), DRC's DDR program lasted from 2004 to 2010 with the demobilization of 159,000 ex-combatants and the reintegration of 77,780 (Zena, 2013).

Sierra Leone. Sierra Leone's DDR program consisted of stakeholders including the UN, World Bank, UNICEF, and local participants. The framework of the peace process is centered on peace agreements in 1996, 1997, and 1999 (The UN Office of the Special Advisor on Africa, 2007). According to Zena (2013), 71,043 participants were demobilized, and 54,000 were reintegrated from an estimated 84,200 participants (Zena, 2013). Trainings, formal education, and agricultural and job placements were also offered to the participants in the reintegration phase (The UN Office of the Special Advisor on Africa, 2007).

Uganda. Sustained armed conflicts in Uganda began in the mid-1980s. Several DDR initiatives have been implemented in the country over the years. For example, in 2000, an Amnesty Act was established. The Act grants amnesty to those that have taken up arms

against the government and who wanted to go back to civilian life without repercussion or prosecution. Those who sought amnesty were called “reporters.” According to OSAA’s report in 2007, at the end of 2006, an estimated 21,000 reporters were granted amnesty, and 19,000 of those received basic reinsertion/resettlement support (The UN Office of the Special Advisor on Africa, 2007).

STUDY FINDINGS

Odubo and Tobor (2016) maintain that education can be used as a reconciliatory tool that may help resolve conflicts. Conflict-sensitive education can be viewed as a powerful tool for developing ideas and can help in economic growth and development. While education in itself does not bring about conflict transformation, it does have the potential to do so (Smith, 2011). Smith and Ellison (2012) maintained that post conflict education should focus on providing education which includes technical and vocational training to school drop-outs to enhance their employment opportunities. However, these trainings have been criticized as insufficient in providing the needed skills for employment. In other words, post conflict education and training should be targeted towards addressing the employment and economic needs of the participants, as well as improving their marketability. Sometimes, the education and trainings end up exacerbating the conflict if the graduates of such trainings feel the acquired skills has not lived up to its promise. Nevertheless, the researchers concluded that post conflict educational trainings and assistance for combatants not only helps to resolve conflicts but also provides opportunities for them to better themselves (Smith & Ellison, 2012).

Education was a common notable theme identified in both the study of Tobor (2014) and Odubo (2014). For instance, the findings of Tobor (2014) demonstrated that the Amnesty program need to be complemented with the involvement and participation of other key stakeholders and inclusion of all youths in the educational and training programs that will cater for essential needs of the majority in the region. A majority of the study participants maintained that the federal government can empower the indigenous people through education, training, skill acquisition, and by providing good paying jobs for graduates of the Amnesty program (Tobor, 2014). Similarly, Odubo (2014) explained that when asked what the federal government can do to prevent militancy in the region, the ex-militants identified education, scholarships for youths in the region and the country as a whole, infrastructural development, provision of basic amenities, employment opportunities for the youths in the region, and resource control/revenue sharing as some of the factors that can help prevent militancy. This is in line with the literature reviewed. For instance, Kuku (2012) averred that youth development and empowerment programs should complement the Amnesty program in order to sustain the relative peace and stability currently enjoyed in the region.

According to Okonofua (2011), over 75% of the youths in the Niger Delta region are unemployed and a majority of these youths cannot gain employment because they lack the required education and skills that are applicable to modern industry. Van der Berg (2008) equates lack of education as a direct contributing factor to poverty. The Nigerian government’s adoption of amnesty without ensuring accelerated empowerment within the oil-endowed communities negates popular demands in the region. According to Tobor (2014), this makes it all the more important for the Nigerian government to enhance human development in the region by providing education and vocational training for the youths as well as employment opportunities for them to be productive, marketable, employable, and relevant with applicable knowledge and skills to modern industry. Tobor (2014) posited that

all the ex-militants interviewed suggested that the federal government can contribute towards peacebuilding and stability in the region by bringing development to the area. All the study participants maintained that this can be achieved if the federal government decides to build schools, hospitals, good roads, and providing drinking water and electricity (Tobor, 2014). Similarly, the findings of Odubo (2014) identified lack of infrastructural development, lack of human development and unemployment as a constant mention during the study. According to Odubo (2014), almost all the ex-militants interviewed attributed the lack of human development and unemployment as part of the reason there is violence in the region and one of the core reason they decided to join the armed groups. Participants indicated that the lack of education of the youths in the region contributed to increased unemployment in the region (Odubo, 2014). This, in turn, resulted in abject poverty in the region. The literature reviewed is consistent with these findings. For instance, studies (Asuni, 2009; Kuku, 2012; Oluduro & Oluduro, 2012; Ibaba, 2011; Joab-Peterside, Porter & Watts, 2012) averred that the lack of development, marginalization, unemployment, environmental degradation, abject poverty, lack of basic and social amenities (hospitals, good roads, clean water), and the continued use of repressive force by the federal government in responding to peaceful protests of the people of the region in their quest for resource control contributes to building structural imbalances that fuel militancy in the Niger Delta.

CONCLUSION

Several conclusions can be drawn from the discourse on education and peacebuilding initiatives in Africa, particularly on the Amnesty program in Niger Delta, Nigeria. It has been demonstrated that the Amnesty program positively contributes towards peacebuilding in the Niger Delta, although it has some negative connotations for ex-militants. There are barely proven records of improvement in the socio-economic situation of the Niger Delta, Nigeria. However, unsatisfactorily, the support for the Amnesty program can be described as a sacrifice for peace in the region. Essentially, the need for sustainable peace in the Niger Delta would be achieved if the living standards of the majority of people in the region significantly improve. The study demonstrated that swift infrastructural development is a critical factor and a driving force for peacebuilding efforts in the region. Findings indicate that rapid transformation of the region will likely motivate the ex-militants to maintain peace and contribute towards the development of the region. Therefore, the study recommends that the Amnesty program should be complemented with other innovative measures such as wide consultation with various key stakeholders and inclusion of all youths in the educational and vocational training programs that will cater to essential needs of the majority in the region. Tobor (2016) maintain that the meaningful participation of the youths and elders of a community results in a more effective management of the participation-representation polarity. In other words, such engagement provides a greater legitimacy to the authority of the peacebuilding initiative (Tobor, 2016). Failure to include the youths in educational and training programs thereby successfully reintegrating the ex-militants into society may have both short and long term impacts. Short-term impacts could be that ex-militants may return immediately to violence or conflict thereby threatening the peace and security of their various communities, while long-term impacts could be the potential of ex-militants preventing the social and economic development of the country through their disruptive activities.

The success of peace making initiatives in the Niger Delta communities will be guaranteed if the unequal exchange relationships that place the region in a disadvantaged position are addressed. In this regard, the Nigerian government and multinational oil companies are encouraged to put the Niger Delta at the center of their priorities. Emphasis should be placed

on the provision of modern schools, readily available employment opportunities, modern technological facilities, pipe borne water, tarred road, hospitals, consistent power supply and attractive developmental projects that can transform the region from its present situation to an industrial area.

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