

# Governance and Society Review (GSR)

Volume 4 Issue 1, Spring 2025

ISSN(P): 2959-1619, ISSN(E): 2959-1627

Homepage: <https://journals.umt.edu.pk/index.php/gsr>



Article QR



**Title:** Mopping the Floor and Neglecting the Leaking Roof: Lessons from the Niger Delta Amnesty Programme in Nigeria

**Author (s):** Jude Chikadibia Onwunyirimadu


**Affiliation (s):** Federal University Otuoke (FUO), Otuoke, Nigeria

**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.32350/gsr.41.01>

**History:** Received: February 17, 2025, Revised: April 15, 2025, Accepted: May 14, 2025, Published: June 25, 2025

**Citation:** Onwunyirimadu, C. J. (2025). Mopping the floor and neglecting the leaking roof: Lessons from the Niger Delta Amnesty Programme in Nigeria. *Governance and Society Review*, 4(1), 01–12. <https://doi.org/10.32350/gsr.41.01>

**Copyright:** © The Authors

**Licensing:**  This article is open access and is distributed under the terms of [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

**Conflict of Interest:** Author(s) declared no conflict of interest



A publication of The School of Governance and Society  
University of Management and Technology, Lahore, Pakistan

# Mopping the Floor and Neglecting the Leaking Roof: Lessons from the Niger Delta Amnesty Programme in Nigeria

Jude Chikadibia Onwunyirimadu\*

Department of Political Science, Federal University Otuoke (FUO), Otuoke  
Nigeria

## Abstract

The Niger Delta region is the primary producer of crude oil in Nigeria. The region's socio-economic, political, and environmental issues escalated into youth restiveness and violence, which caused a significant reduction in oil production and economic losses. The paper critically assesses the essence of the Presidential Amnesty Program (PAP), introduced in 2009 as a response to the militancy, focusing on disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration policies. While acknowledging the PAP's success in de-escalating immediate security threats and increasing oil drilling and production in the region, the study highlights its pitfalls in addressing pressing issues in the region such as environmental degradation, resource control, and socio-economic disparities. The study likens the PAP to "mopping the floor and neglecting the leaking roof," emphasizing the neglect of foundational issues. It criticizes the program's focus on militants, insufficient coherence in collaboration with other intervention agencies, and the unsustainable approach of monthly stipends. The research raises critical questions about the program's long-term sustainability and advocates for a comprehensive approach to tackle root causes. Theoretically, the research utilizes the Sustainable Development Theory, which emphasizes the need for policies fostering long-term peace and development. The study recommends a reassessment of PAP objectives, the establishment of a clear timeline, and the implementation of self-reliance and sustainable programs for the repented militants to address the identified flaws and challenges in the region.

**Keywords:** Niger Delta, President Amnesty Programme, youth restiveness, environmental degradation, sustainable development, Post-Niger Delta Militancy

## Introduction

Nigeria's Niger Delta region is a significant oil-producing area, accounting for approximately two million barrels per day in 2019. This region generates about 95% of Nigeria's total export earnings and 80% of the federal

---

\*Corresponding Author: [onwunyirimadujc@fuotuokey.edu.ng](mailto:onwunyirimadujc@fuotuokey.edu.ng)

government's revenue. However, the area faces numerous challenges, including environmental degradation, youth unemployment, and socioeconomic and political marginalization. These issues have led to youth restiveness, violence, and security threats to people's lives, livelihoods, and critical oil infrastructure (Nextier SPD, [2020](#)). During the 2007-2009 crises, Nigeria's oil production reduced from 2.2 million barrels per day to 700,000 barrels per day, which caused substantial economic losses of around 58 million dollars daily. In response, President Umaru Musa Ya'Adua introduced a peace initiative programme for the militant groups in 2009 (Nextier SPD, [2020](#)). Historically, the Niger Delta region thrived in agriculture and trade before oil exploration began. However, Unabia ([2011](#)) opines that the region's inhabitants felt disenfranchised by the disruption of their way of life and expressed their discontent through non-violent social movements, demanding improved socioeconomic conditions and resource control. Unfortunately, the Nigerian government's response was often indifference and violent repression, leading to continued environmental degradation and human rights violations (Unabia, [2011](#)).

This marginalization and deprivation led to the emergence of violent social movements and unrest in the region (The News Humanitarian, [2010](#)). In 2009, the Nigerian federal government launched the Presidential Amnesty Programme (PAP) to address militancy. The program consisted of disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration policies. Over 20,000 ex-militants surrendered their weapons under the disarmament policy, while the demobilization policy involved documenting and counseling former militants. The reintegration policy aimed to empower beneficiaries as entrepreneurs or employable citizens (Presidential Amnesty Programme, [n.d.](#)). The Presidential Amnesty Programme (PAP) for the former militants has significantly reduced pipeline vandalism, kidnapping of oil workers and other oil related restiveness. The ex- militants and some of their leaders were trained in various skill by the Nigerian Government and about 30,000 of them were placed on N65,000 monthly stipend, while this approach has relatively brought peace in the Niger Delta region and increased crude oil extraction per day. Nevertheless, largely the programme has failed to address the core issues facing the region, ranging from environmental degradation, resource control, and socioeconomic and political issues that led to the violence conflict/militancy before the presidential pardon/amnesty in 2009.

The Niger Delta Presidential Amnesty Programmes (PAP) can be described as mopping the floor and neglecting the leaking roof because little or no significant progress has been made to address the issues of environmental degradation confronting the Niger Delta region. The disarmament phase of the Presidential Amnesty Programme for the Niger Delta Militants has failed to clearly establish the number of militants who surrendered their weapons. The phase also failed to clearly define the disarmament criteria (Nextier SPD, [2020](#)). The PAP's demobilization phase has raised questions over its transparency and sustainability of the monthly stipend of 65,000 naira paid to the ex-militants (Nextier SPD, [2020](#)). The programme has failed to effectively collaborate with other sister agencies, such as the ministry of the Niger Delta Affairs and International Oil Companies (IOCs), in the region to resolve some of the issues bedeviling the region (Unabia, [2011](#)). The PAP's sustainability has been questioned, with concerns that it may not address the underlying causes of the conflict (Aminu, [2021](#); Ijediogor & Okafor, [2022](#)). Habitat disruption in the Niger Delta oil-rich region persists, including oil spillages, natural gas flaring, etc. The human contribution to environmental challenges in the region cannot be overstated (Aminu, [2021](#)). Corruption and maladministration have also plagued the PAP, hindering its ability to empower the youths of the region (Ijediogor & Okafor, [2022](#)).

This research aims to investigate and unravel the flaws of the PAP and prescribe sustainable solutions to environmental threats and ecosystem disruptions facing the Niger Delta region. It emphasizes the urgent need to address the main causes of the agitation, such as environmental degradation, deprivation, unemployment, poverty, and poor infrastructural development. To achieve these objectives, this study raised critical questions like; has the issue of youth unemployed in the region been effectively addressed? What has happened to infrastructure in the region since the establishment of the Presidential Amnesty Programme (PAP)? Has the programme adequately tackled environmental pollution in the region?

### **Rationale of the Study**

This research holds significant importance as it seeks to enlighten the Nigerian government and relevant stakeholders in the Niger Delta region on the need to reassess the objectives of the Niger Delta Presidential Amnesty Programme (PAP). It aims to pinpoint the program's deficiencies and prescribe viable solutions. Furthermore, the study will provide actionable

recommendations for addressing the region's pressing environmental and human development challenges/issues. Ultimately, this work will contribute to the academic discourse in fields such as environmental sciences, sustainability studies, development studies, political science, peace and conflict resolution, and other social sciences. It will also serve as a valuable resource material for future study on the Niger Delta Presidential Amnesty Programme and related topics.

### **Theoretical Explanation**

According to Obialor ([2006](#)), a theory is a set of interconnected ideas, concepts, definitions, and propositions that provide a scientific understanding of a given phenomenon, and specify relationships between variables. A theory helps to explain, predict, and guide action. For the purpose of this study, the Sustainable Development Theory, was used in examining the PAP in the Niger Delta. The Sustainable Development Theory emphasizes meeting human development goals while preserving natural systems' ability to provide resources and ecosystem services essential for economic and social well-being (Cerin, 2006, as cited in Mensah, [2019](#)).

The Sustainable Development Theory helps in understanding that the Niger Delta PAP was primarily established; by the President to maintain peace in the region, and to enable oil companies to extract oil peacefully, which is the major source of revenue for the Nigerian government. However, the programme neglected environmental and developmental challenges, leading to militancy and conflicts.

### **Gap in Literature**

While substantial literature exists on the general impact of militancy in the Niger Delta region, there is a paucity of studies specifically examining the failures and successes of the PAP in the Niger Delta region. The study fills this temporal gap by providing a focused analysis of PAP operations and their socio-economic and environmental impacts since the end of militancy in the region. By doing so, it aims to make a modest yet meaningful contribution to bridging this gap in the existing body of knowledge.

## **Methodology**

The study adopts descriptive research design to analyze secondary data sourced from, relevant textbooks, academic journals, and internet materials. The qualitative approach was employed due to its numerous benefits, such as providing the room for in-depth analysis. In addition to that, the researcher has a comprehensive understanding of the qualitative method and descriptive design was deemed appropriate and thus chosen by the researcher because the results are commonly more descriptive, giving room for the researcher to draw logical inferences and predict possible solutions from the data analysis.

## **Clarification of Concepts**

In the social sciences, there is no universally accepted definition for concepts; however, for the purpose of this study, the following definitions will be adopted.

### ***Presidential Amnesty Programme***

It is a government initiative, often led by a country's president, aimed at granting amnesty, rehabilitation, or reintegration to individuals involved in certain illegal or armed activities. These programs are typically designed to encourage former combatants to disarm and transition to a civilian life, often including vocational training, education, and support for their reintegration into the society.

### ***Development***

It is when the issues of unemployment, underemployment, poverty, diseases, political instability, poor living standard, and environmental pollution have been addressed.

### ***Sustainable Development***

This means any kind of development that is capable of improving the lives of people for a lengthy span.

## **Niger Delta**

The Niger Delta region is located in Nigeria's southern coastal area, encompassing nine states, including six from the South-South geopolitical zone. For this study, we will focus on the six Niger Delta states from the South-South region. The area is densely populated and historically known

as the Oil Rivers due to its palm oil production (Presidential Amnesty Programme, n.d). The region has a rich history, and since 1885/1893 been part of the British Oil Rivers Colony, later expanding to become the Niger Coast Protectorate.

The Niger Delta is a significant oil-producing region, sparking international concern over extensive environmental pollution, often described as ecocide, primarily caused by major oil spills from multinational corporations in the petroleum industry (Presidential Amnesty Programme, n.d).

The region covers approximately 70,000 km<sup>2</sup> (27,000 square miles), accounting for 7.5% of Nigeria's total land mass, and historically included Rivers, Delta, and Bayelsa States, later expanding to include Akwa-Ibom State, Cross River State, Imo State, Abia State, Ondo State, and Edo State in 2000. The Niger Delta boasts Africa's third-largest river drainage area, and is home to various ethnic groups, including Ijo, Isoko, Urhobo, Itsekiri, Efik, Igbo, Ibibio, Edo, Ogoni, and others (Douglas & Okontalke, [2018](#); Okpebenyo et al., [2023](#); Presidential Amnesty Programme, [n.d.](#)). These tribes are further grouped into clans with different dialects.

### **Key Drivers of Militancy in the Niger Delta Region**

The environmental effects of oil exploration in the region have contributed in no-small measures to the destruction of the fragile ecosystem of the region. The region is considered as one of the world's most severely petroleum impacted ecosystems, and among the five most petroleum-polluted environments in the world (Aderogba, [2016](#)). One of the problems in the Niger Delta region is failure of governance, a result of colossal mismanagement of human and material resources and maladministration, by successive governments. The people of the area no doubt have legitimate right to protest for a better life (Aderogba, [2016](#)). The major causes of the Niger Delta conflict lie in the history of the struggles for self-determination, resource control, regional autonomy, and democracy of the ethnic minorities in the region, which started even before Nigeria gained her political independence from Britain. Various Niger Delta ethnic groups led the agitation for resource control. Some environmental and human rights activists led protests against the neglect, exploitation, and pollution of the region by successive governments both civilian and government regimes (Obi, [2009](#)). Osagie et al. ([2010](#)) revealed that the deprivation of the

indigenes of the dividends of proceeds from oil, accounted for the major cause of conflict in the region.

**Table 1**

*Presidential Amnesty Participant Demography*

S/NO	State	Registered
1	Abia	123
2	Akwa-Ibom	590
3	Bayelsa	6961
3	Cross-River	160
5	Delta	3,361
6	Edo	450
7	Imo	300
8	Ondo	1,200
9	Rivers	6097
	Total	20,182

*Note.* Source: Presidential Amnesty Programme ([n.d.](#))

### **The Motives behind the Establishment of Niger Delta Presidential Amnesty Programme**

The PAP aimed at reducing the social unrest and militancy in the petroleum-producing region of Nigeria; and to ensure that oil explorations by multinational oil companies are uninterrupted. By the year 2009, the militants' hostile activities had crippled the country's economy. The effects on the nation's economy prompted the government to initiate the Amnesty Programme. Kingsley Kuka, who acted as the President's special adviser on Niger Delta Affairs, headed the PAP. The amnesty programme was contingent upon three key conditions: militants must demonstrate a willingness and readiness to handover their arms on or before October 4, 2009, they must unrelentingly renounce militancy, they must make a pledge to uphold these commitments. (Ubani et al., [2013](#)).

In return for the unconditional surrender, the government mapped out programmes that will ensure that these repented militants become useful to the society. This includes, monthly cash transfer of 65,000 naira to the ex-militants, training and retraining of the former militants to useful skills, education and trade. The PAP has failed woefully in addressing the eco-challenges such as oil spillage, water, land, and air pollution; the



infrastructural decays, high level of unemployment; etc. These are the major reasons the youths of the region took arms. The 65,000 naira monthly stipend appears like a bribe for peace to enable the state and oil companies to explore oil with little or no hindrance from these communities. Ubani et al. (2013) criticized the monthly stipends for lacking timeline on when the programme will wind down, and such it might continue to drain the Nigerian economy.

### **Successes and Failures of Presidential Amnesty Programme**

The PAP has successfully restored calm in the area. This has made it easier for the Nigerian state and oil companies to explore crude oil with little or no hindrance (Ushie, 2013). Initially, the programme proved a monumental success, as peace was restored to the oil-rich region of Niger Delta. Crude oil production reached increased to 2.6 million barrels per day (Aderogba, 2016). The programme has succeeded in recovering over 300,000 rounds of ammunition and 2700 sophisticated guns from the ex-militants (Ushie, 2013). While it will be difficult to achieve a hundred percent success in disarming a region with such a high rate of illegal weapons, the PAP has relatively succeeded in accomplishing one of its core objectives: the disarmament of the militants.

However, the sustainability of the PAP is still a topic of debate, this agrees with Ubani et al. (2013), when they stated that there is no timeline on when the programme will wind down, and as such, it might continue to drain the Nigerian economy. The officials who see it as a conduct pipeline to siphon the economy mismanaged the fund appropriated for the programme. Another failure of the PAP is its inability to address the fundamental environmental issues in the region, such as oil spillage, pollution, and infrastructural deficiencies. The programme focuses more on buying peace rather than tackling the fundamental issues that led to militancy in the region

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

Having explored the objectives, successes, and failures of the Niger Delta Presidential Amnesty Programme of the federal republic of Nigeria, using descriptive analytical design and through the sustainable development theory lens, this study reveals that the root causes of militancy in the region have not been given much attention by the government. The study suggests that the government of Nigeria should reassess and revise the fundamental

goals of the Presidential Amnesty Programme, integrating effective policies to promptly, and sustainably address the environmental challenges in the region.

Additionally, the programme should prioritize resolving the issues of infrastructural decay, unemployment, and poverty in the area. The government of Nigeria should establish a clear timeline for the PAP, particularly regarding the monthly stipend of 65,000 naira. Instead, a more self-reliance-oriented programme should be implemented for the former militants. Implementing self-reliance programme for the former militants will aid in preventing further economic drain caused by ongoing stipends. The monthly stipends of 65,000 naira paid to these ex-militants is an unsustainable dispute resolution method for a dispute of this nature and can best be described as mopping the floor while neglecting the leaking roof. The major reasons for the agitation, such as environmental degradation, socio-economic deprivation, high rate of unemployment, poverty, poor infrastructural development, etc should be addressed.

### **Conflict of Interest**

The authors of the manuscript have no financial or non-financial conflict of interest in the subject matter or materials discussed in this manuscript.

### **Data Availability Statement**

Data availability statement is not applicable as no new data has been created.

### **Funding Details**

No funding has been received for this research.

### **References**

- Aderogba, A. (2016). Government amnesty programme and peace efforts in the Niger Delta Region: An analysis of newspapers' coverage. *European Scientific Journal*, 12(20), 26–27. <http://dx.doi.org/10.19044/esj.2016.v12n20p26>
- Aminu, N. (2021, December 31). *Environmental damage in the Niger Delta is a global challenge*. Sahara Reporters. <https://saharareporters.com/2021/12/31/environmental-damage-niger-delta-global-challenge-nasir-aminu>

- Douglas, O., & Okontalke, I. (2018, March 10). *The Niger delta: A people and their environment: Europe's plunder of the Niger Delta dates back to 1444*. Verso. <https://www.versobooks.com/en-gb/blogs/news/3678-the-niger-delta-a-people-and-their-environment>
- Ijediogor, G., & Okafor, C. (2022, November 15). Niger delta amnesty: Management instability, failed mandate and future of the programme. *The Guardian*. <https://guardian.ng/politics/niger-delta-amnesty-management-instability-failed-mandate-and-future-of-programme/>
- Mensah, J. (2019). Sustainable development: Meaning, history, principles, pillars, and implications for human action: Literature review. *Cogent Social Sciences*, 5(1), Article e1653531. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311886.2019.1653531>
- Nextier SPD. (2020). *Report on the assessment of the Presidential Amnesty Programme (PAP)*. [https://thenextier.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/20200825\\_Nextier-SPD-\\_PAP-Assessment-Report.pdf](https://thenextier.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/20200825_Nextier-SPD-_PAP-Assessment-Report.pdf)
- Obi, C. (2009). Nigeria's Niger Delta: Understanding the complex drivers of violent oil-related conflict. *Africa Development*, 34(2), 103–108.
- Obialor, C. F. (2006). *Logic and method of political inquiry*. Ambix Printers.
- Okpebenyo, W., Onoh, C., Cornell, C., & Igwe, A. (2023). Revisiting the resource curse in Nigeria: The case of Niger Delta. *KIU Interdisciplinary Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 4(1), 259–276.
- Osagie, J., Fred, A., & Samuel, E. (2010). Causes of conflicts in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria as expressed by the youth in Delta State. *Procedia-social and Behavioral Sciences*, 5, 82–89. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2010.07.055>
- Presidential Amnesty Programme. (n. d.). *Presidential amnesty programme*. Retrieved April 9 2024, from <https://osapnd.gov.ng/about/>
- The News Humanitarian. (2010, February 4). *Nigeria: Timeline of recent unrest in Niger Delta region*. <https://reliefweb.int/report/nigeria/nigeria-timeline-recent-unrest-niger-delta-region>

- Ubani, E. O., Ehiodo, C. C., & Nwaorgu, O. C. (2013). *Nigerian government & politics: A study of governance*. Cheedal Global LTD.
- Unabia, O. C. (2011). An analysis of the amnesty policy of Nigeria government on Niger Delta crisis. DIVA Portal. <http://www.diva-portal.org/smash/record.jsf?pid=diva2:1481470>
- Ushie, V. (2013). Nigeria's amnesty programme as a peacebuilding infrastructure: A silver bullet? *Journal of Peacebuilding & Development*, 8(1), 30–44.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/15423166.2013.789255>