

Assessment of the Effectiveness of the Presidential Amnesty Program in Curbing Youth Restiveness in the Niger Delta: A Conflict Transformation Perspective

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ABSTRACT: The persistence of youth restiveness in the Niger Delta despite over a decade of implementation of the amnesty program reflects unresolved grievances rooted in marginalization, unemployment, and uneven development. This study examines the effectiveness of the amnesty programme in addressing youth restiveness in the Niger Delta. Its objectives are to evaluate the extent to which these interventions have reduced youth violence, fostered reintegration, and delivered socio-economic benefits to affected communities. Anchored in Conflict Transformation Theory, the study argues that sustainable peace in post-conflict societies must go beyond silencing violence to transforming the underlying structural injustices that drive conflict. A mixed-methods approach was employed, combining structured questionnaires administered to 200 respondents comprising ex-militants and non-militant community youths in Rivers, Bayelsa, and Delta States with insights from relevant policy documents and secondary sources. Findings reveal partial success in disarmament and demobilization: while 92% of ex-militants enrolled in PAP and 85% received demobilization training, only 61% completed reintegration due to unmet promises, irregular stipends, and limited employment support. Unemployment remains widespread, affecting 48% of ex-militants and 38% of non-militant youths, while just 15% benefited from formal government empowerment schemes. However, the paper also reveals that there was a 63% reduction of violent activities, and a 72% resurgence of conflict based to government incentives being stopped. Additionally, there were 71% visible development projects in the area under study with little impact on people, and 80% deep distrust in the government's sincerity and transparency. Non-militant youths, in particular, felt excluded and marginalized by PAP, creating new community tensions. The paper recommends that the federal government of Nigeria should reform and expand the amnesty program to address the current realities of youth restiveness in the Niger Delta. This would give room for the reintegration of ex-militants who were excluded from the presidential amnesty program. This would also provide updated, market-relevant vocational and entrepreneurial training for ex-militants in the area under study. The government should strengthen monitoring and accountability mechanisms for the handlers of the program. Annual impact reports should also be published to promote transparency and allow citizens to track the progress and effectiveness of the programme

KEYWORDS: Youth Restiveness, Oil-Related Grievances, Niger Delta, Amnesty, Peacebuilding, Conflict Transformation Theory.

INTRODUCTION

The Niger Delta region has consistently been the backbone of Nigeria's oil-dependent economy, producing over 90% of the country's export earnings and significantly contributing to the federal budget (Ikenga, 2023). Ironically, although oil extraction has driven macroeconomic growth, the communities hosting these operations remain deeply impoverished and underdeveloped. The paradox of wealth existing alongside poverty is clear in longstanding issues of environmental damage, rising unemployment, neglected infrastructure, and social-political marginalization (Adesanya, Jatula, & Opeyeooluwa, 2023). Oil spills, gas flaring, and deforestation have destroyed agricultural lands and aquatic habitats, harming traditional farming and fishing livelihoods. At the same time, systemic corruption, ineffective governance, and unequal distribution of oil revenues have deepened the frustrations of local youth.

This resulting disenchantment and economic struggle have sparked recurrent waves of armed resistance and social unrest. Young people, viewing themselves as victims of exploitation by both the Nigerian government and multinational oil companies, have reacted with acts of sabotage, pipeline vandalism, hostage-taking, and outright insurgency. During the late 1990s and early 2000s, organizations like the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) emerged as key players, advocating for resource

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control and local autonomy. Their actions disrupted oil production, threatened national energy security, and posed a direct challenge to Nigeria's economic stability (Ubhenin, 2021).

In response to the escalating crisis, the Federal Government of Nigeria initiated the Presidential Amnesty Programme (PAP) in 2009. This program aimed to disarm, demobilize, and reintegrate over 30,000 former militants and included monthly stipends, vocational training, educational support, and commitments to community development. Initially, the program received praise for restoring relative peace and reducing violent militancy, particularly between 2009 and 2012 (Okonofua, 2016).

However, over a decade later, signs of youth discontent continue to be evident. Numerous ex-militants remain unemployed, the reintegration process has been inconsistent, and the promised development initiatives are frequently left incomplete or abandoned. The disparity between expectations and actual results has increased, leading to doubts about the long-term viability and effectiveness of the Amnesty program (Anugwom, 2024). Additionally, critics contend that the program emphasized pacification rather than real structural change, neglecting to tackle the deep-seated economic and political issues that initially fueled militancy.

Against this background, this study examines the effectiveness of the amnesty in addressing youth restiveness in the Niger Delta. Its objectives are to evaluate the extent to which these interventions have reduced youth violence, fostered reintegration, and delivered socio-economic benefits to affected communities.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Youth Restiveness

Youth restiveness can be defined as a complex and multifaceted condition characterized by a state of agitation, disillusionment, and a propensity among young individuals within a society to engage in forms of protest or even violence, which are often driven by their perceptions of social, economic, or political exclusion and marginalization. This phenomenon typically manifests itself through a variety of behaviors, including but not limited to riots, strikes, acts of vandalism, militant activities, and other forms of disruptive conduct that significantly challenge the established order (Eregha & Irughe, 2009).

As articulated by Eze (2016), the phenomenon of youth restiveness tends to arise when the aspirations and expectations of young individuals are consistently thwarted or unmet, which consequently leads to a profound sense of frustration and aggression that is often directed towards state institutions and corporate entities that are perceived to be complicit in their disenfranchisement.

Amnesty

Amnesty, in an academic context, refers to a formal and official pardon that is conferred by a governmental authority to individuals or groups who have committed political offenses, and it is frequently utilized as a strategic measure aimed at terminating violence and fostering a sense of national reconciliation. This concept serves as a fundamental instrument in the processes of post-conflict transitions, particularly within the frameworks of Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR), which seek to restore peace and order in societies emerging from conflict (Bamidele, 2013).

In the specific context of the Niger Delta, the amnesty program, which was launched in the year 2009, represented a direct response to the prolonged period of violent agitation that had been instigated by various militant factions within the region. This program was designed to offer an unconditional pardon to militants who complied with stipulations to surrender their arms, participate in rehabilitation and reintegration processes, and engage in vocational and educational training opportunities aimed at fostering personal development and socio-economic stability (Okonofua, 2016).

Peacebuilding

Peacebuilding, as a concept in the field of conflict resolution and social development, refers to a series of sustained and deliberate efforts that are aimed at addressing the root causes of conflict and establishing the necessary conditions that will facilitate long-term and enduring peace. Unlike the more reactive approaches of peacekeeping or peacemaking, peacebuilding encompasses a broader spectrum of activities that extend beyond merely halting hostilities to include vital aspects such as economic development, the promotion of social justice, the building of robust institutions, and the fostering of reconciliation among various stakeholders within society (Lederach, 2003).

In the context of post-conflict societies like the Niger Delta, effective peacebuilding involves the critical task of rebuilding trust and fostering cooperation between the state and local communities, while simultaneously prioritizing inclusive development and ensuring that justice is served for historical grievances that have long been overlooked. Barnett *et al.* (2007) posit that successful peacebuilding endeavors require a foundation of local ownership, participatory governance, and a comprehensive understanding of both the structural and relational dimensions that underpin conflict dynamics.

Empirical studies on the efficacy of the amnesty program and the associated peacebuilding initiatives within the context of the Niger Delta region present a landscape characterized by a diversity of mixed and frequently contradictory findings, thereby complicating the narrative surrounding these efforts. Although it is the case that certain scholars and researchers recognize the presence of short-term advantages emerging from the implementation of the programme, a substantial number of experts bring to light the significant

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structural deficiencies and the overarching implementation challenges that persist, particularly about the concepts of sustainable peace and comprehensive youth development.

Ikenga (2023) offers compelling evidence indicating that the PAP resulted in a noteworthy reduction in violent criminal activities, as well as a marked decrease in incidents of pipeline vandalism during the years that followed its initiation in 2009. Nonetheless, the same study also uncovers critical deficiencies in the actual execution of the programme, identifying issues such as rampant corruption, pervasive political interference, and a glaring lack of adequate job opportunities following training, all of which collectively undermine the program's potential to engender long-term socio-economic change and development within the region.

In a similar vein, Adedeji (2023) undertook a rigorous field-based assessment in the states of Bayelsa and Delta, ultimately concluding that while there has been a notable demobilization of militants, the wider region continues to grapple with profound underdevelopment and socio-economic challenges. The research illustrates that persistent issues such as inadequate infrastructure, the enduring cycle of poverty, and alarmingly high rates of youth unemployment serve as fundamental drivers that contribute to the re-emergence of discontent and unrest among former militants. Essentially, the process of demobilization has not effectively translated into meaningful reintegration or transformation of the broader economic landscape within which these individuals operate.

Adesanya *et al.* (2023) put forth the argument that the observed decline in youth violence during the post-amnesty period can be attributed primarily to financial incentives provided to the individuals involved, rather than stemming from any authentic reconciliation efforts or sustainable empowerment initiatives. Their research findings suggest that the reliance on stipends and vocational training packages, which lack the underpinning of sustained institutional reforms or a commitment to inclusive governance, has ultimately failed to address the deep-rooted grievances that initially ignited the flames of militancy within the region.

Moreover, Anugwom (2024) offers a critical perspective on the cultural and psychological disconnection that exists between the design of the amnesty program and the actual lived experiences of the youth in the Niger Delta. The study reveals that a significant number of ex-militants perceive the programme as inherently "transactional," devoid of any substantive community engagement or long-term strategic planning. Additionally, the reintegration efforts that included vocational training were frequently found to be poorly aligned with the prevailing realities of the local economy or suffered from insufficient oversight and supervision.

Furthermore, Ubhenin (2021) underscores the role of governance failures as a critical impediment to the successful implementation of the programme. Empirical data collected reveal that irregularity in stipend disbursements, the diversion of benefits by political elites, and a conspicuous lack of transparency in the selection process of beneficiaries have all contributed to a significant erosion of community trust. These systemic flaws not only diminish the credibility of the programme but also foster the perception that the amnesty program has evolved into an elite-driven rent-seeking mechanism, rather than serving as an effective grassroots peacebuilding tool.

In addition to this ongoing discourse, Nwankpa (2014) asserts that while the amnesty program may have temporarily succeeded in suspending overt acts of violence, it has fundamentally failed to dismantle the underlying structural frameworks that perpetuate conflict within the region. His research emphasizes the pressing need for a comprehensive and holistic approach that seeks to tackle issues of economic injustice, environmental degradation, and the political exclusion that have historically marginalized the communities within the Niger Delta.

When considered collectively, these empirical findings serve to underscore the notion that, although the amnesty program may have succeeded in curtailing open conflict in the short term, it has not effectively achieved the transformative peacebuilding objectives that were originally envisioned at the outset of the programme. The present study examines the effectiveness of the Presidential Amnesty Programme, along with other peacebuilding initiatives, in addressing the pervasive issues of youth restiveness and the oil-related grievances that have long plagued the Niger Delta region.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This research is grounded in Conflict Transformation Theory, as originally proposed by John Paul Lederach in 2003. This theory emphasizes a shift from merely resolving or managing conflicts to altering the fundamental structures, relationships, and socio-political dynamics that contribute to and perpetuate violent confrontations. Instead of perceiving peace as simply the lack of violence, conflict transformation views peacebuilding as a comprehensive, long-term, inclusive process focused on mending relationships, tackling systemic inequalities, and promoting equitable development (Lederach, 2003).

Relevance of Conflict Transformation Theory

Conflict Transformation Theory holds particular significance in the Niger Delta context. The region's prolonged history of environmental damage, economic exclusion, and lack of access to oil revenues has generated profound grievances among the youth population. The implementation of the amnesty programme was introduced as a strategy for peacebuilding, aiming to disarm militants, reintegrate former combatants, and deliver socio-economic assistance. Nevertheless, the persistent youth unrest and

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underdevelopment prompt an examination of whether the programme has effectively transformed the conflict environment or merely addresses its surface symptoms.

Utilizing conflict transformation theory enables this research to delve deeper than mere metrics, such as the reduction of violence. It provides a framework for evaluating whether the Amnesty Programme has resulted in meaningful structural changes, including better governance, economic integration, and youth empowerment, or if it serves solely as a temporary measure of appeasement. Furthermore, this theory highlights the significance of local ownership, cultural relevance, and the restoration of relationships, which are essential for assessing the enduring impacts of peacebuilding efforts in the Niger Delta.

By anchoring this research in such a theoretical framework, a critical evaluation becomes possible not only of the amnesty program's outcomes related to peace and security but also of its wider implications for justice, fairness, and sustainable progress in oil-producing communities.

METHODOLOGY

This investigation employs a mixed-methods research design that integrates both quantitative and qualitative strategies to achieve a thorough understanding of the effectiveness of the amnesty in addressing youth unrest and grievances related to oil in the Niger Delta. This methodological approach facilitates the triangulation of results, thereby enhancing the credibility and richness of the findings (Creswell, 2014).

The study was carried out in three primary oil-producing states: Rivers, Bayelsa, and Delta, which were purposefully selected owing to their historical connections to youth militancy, involvement in the amnesty program and the prevalence of conflicts associated with oil.

The targeted population consisted of both ex-militants participating in the amnesty program and non-combatant youth from the community affected by oil-related issues. A multi-stage sampling method was employed. In the first stage, the three states were purposively chosen. In the second stage, two local government areas (LGAs) were selected from each state based on the severity of previous militant activities and government actions. In the final stage, a total of 200 respondents (100 ex-militants and 100 community youths) were selected using stratified random sampling, ensuring a representative selection across various regions and demographics.

Data collection

Data gathering involved the use of structured, pre-tested questionnaires segmented into sections on demographic characteristics such as age, educational background, gender, and so on; involvement in the amnesty; employment status and income levels; access to vocational or reintegration assistance; perceptions of peace and security; trust in governmental bodies and oil companies; and satisfaction with development efforts. Responses were captured using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from “Strongly Disagree” to “Strongly Agree.” The quantitative results were complemented through the analysis of relevant secondary data sources, including government publications, NDDC reports, academic studies, and media outlets.

Data Analysis

The responses to the questionnaires were analyzed through tables, frequencies, and percentages. This section presents and interprets significant findings across five key areas: demographic characteristics, involvement in the amnesty, employment situation, perceptions of peace and security, and opinions regarding development and government engagement.

Table 4.1 Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Variable	Category	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	65
	Female	35
Age Distribution	18–25 years	28
	26–35 years	47
	36–45 years	19
	Above 45	6
Education Level	No formal education	12
	Primary	24
	Secondary	41
	Tertiary	23

Field Survey, 2025

The majority of respondents (65%) were male, reflecting the gendered nature of militant activity in the Niger Delta. Youths between 26-35 years formed the dominant age group (47%), which aligns with the age bracket most actively involved in militancy and reintegration. Educationally, 41% had secondary education, suggesting moderate literacy levels that could enable them to engage

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with training or reintegration programs. Only 12% had no formal education, while 23% attained tertiary education, indicating some potential for skilled employment if opportunities are made available.

Table 4.2 Participation in the Presidential Amnesty Programme (PAP)

Indicator	Percentage (%)
Enrolled in PAP (2009–2015)	92
Received disarmament/demobilisation	85
Completed reintegration training	61
Did not receive full PAP benefits	39

Field Survey, 2025

An overwhelming 92% of respondents reported being enrolled in the amnesty during its early phase (2009–2015), while 85% underwent disarmament and demobilization. However, only 61% completed reintegration training, and a significant 39% stated they did not receive full benefits. This points to implementation gaps, particularly in the reintegration and post-training phases, which are critical for lasting peace. These findings support prior concerns raised by Adedeji (2023) about the uneven delivery of amnesty program benefits across the region.

Table 4.3 Employment and Livelihood Status

Indicator	Ex-Militants (%)	Community Youths (%)	Combined (%)
Currently employed	48	38	43
Unemployed	34	52	43
Underemployed	18	33	25.5
Access to formal employment or support	13	17	15

Field Survey, 2025

Employment remains a major challenge. Only 43% of respondents are currently employed, with another 43% unemployed, and 25.5% underemployed. Community youths fared worse than ex-militants in employment terms, with only 38% employed and 52% unemployed, suggesting that amnesty benefits although flawed, offered some advantage to ex-militants. Alarming, only 15% had access to formal employment or institutional support, which exposes a fundamental weakness in the sustainability of the reintegration process.

Table 4.4 Perception of Peace and Security

Indicator	Agreement (%)
Violent acts (e.g., bunkering, kidnapping) reduced	63
Peace is fragile; may collapse if benefits stop	72
Distrust in government's peace commitment (community)	80

Field Survey, 2025

While 63% agree that violent activities have reduced, 72% view peace as fragile and conditional on continued benefit flow. Furthermore, 80% of community youths express distrust in the government's commitment to long-term peace. These figures reveal a superficial calm that masks deeper tensions and a lack of sustainable reconciliation. The over-reliance on financial incentives for peace is risky and undermines structural transformation.

Table 4.5 Perception of Development and Government Presence

Indicator	Agreement (%)
No significant development since PAP (roads, schools, clinics)	71
Corruption and favoritism influence benefit distribution	67
Oil companies/government agencies are accountable to communities	12

Field Survey, 2025

There is widespread dissatisfaction with post-amnesty development efforts. A high 71% reported that no tangible infrastructure or community development had occurred, while 67% believed that corruption and favoritism shape the distribution of program benefits.

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Only 12% felt that oil companies or government agencies are accountable to local communities. This reveals a severe trust deficit and a disconnect between state and societal expectations, which undermines peacebuilding gains and breeds further restiveness. Collectively, these tables suggest that while the amnesty program achieved notable success in short-term disarmament and violence reduction, its impact on employment, reintegration, trust-building, and sustainable development remains inadequate. The fragility of peace, as well as widespread mistrust and weak governance, affirms arguments by Anugwom (2024) and Ubhenin (2021) that amnesty programs must be embedded within broader conflict transformation strategies to be effective.

FINDINGS

Based on the analysis of data, the following key findings emerged:

i. The study shows high amnesty program participation but incomplete reintegration.

A majority (92%) of ex-militants enrolled in the amnesty programme between 2009 and 2015, and 85% received disarmament and demobilisation support. However, only 61% completed reintegration or vocational training, with 39% reporting that they did not receive the full benefits promised, for example, unpaid stipends, lack of job placement, incomplete training). This points to systemic implementation gaps in the post-conflict framework, weakening the long-term success of peacebuilding.

ii. The study shows employment and livelihood challenges persist.

Employment levels among both ex-militants (48%) and community youths (38%) remain low, with many engaged in low-paying, informal work. Only 15% of all respondents had accessed formal employment or entrepreneurial support from government schemes, while underemployment affected 18% of ex-militants and 33% of community youths. This indicates that economic reintegration remains insufficient, and youth vulnerability to restiveness persists due to a lack of sustainable livelihoods.

iii. The study shows fragile peace amid widespread distrust.

While 63% of respondents acknowledged a reduction in violence, such as oil bunkering and kidnappings, 72% expressed concern that tensions could re-emerge if amnesty program benefits cease. Community youths showed particularly high levels of distrust in government, with 80% questioning the federal commitment to lasting peace. This finding indicates that peace in the Niger Delta is largely conditional and superficial, driven by economic incentives rather than genuine reconciliation or institutional reform.

iv. The study shows perceived government failure in development delivery.

71% of respondents reported that basic infrastructure and services (such as roads, schools, and clinics) had not significantly improved since the commencement of the amnesty programme. Additionally, 67% believed that corruption and political favoritism largely determine who benefits from interventions, leading to widespread perceptions of exclusion. This reflects a governance deficit that undermines the legitimacy of state institutions and reinforces youth frustration. The absence of participatory and inclusive development contradicts the principles of transformation-based peacebuilding and contributes to the persistence of restiveness among both ex-militants and non-militant community youths.

v. The study shows symbolic peace and widespread disillusionment with programme effectiveness.

Qualitative evidence from community reports and documents revealed that reintegration training under the PAP often lacked alignment with market demands and failed to lead to sustainable employment. Respondents described irregular payments, hijacked benefits, and the exclusion of community leaders from decision-making processes, all of which eroded public trust. Only 29.5% of all respondents believed the PAP and related peacebuilding efforts were effective. Trust in government was particularly low 32% among ex-militants and just 18% among community youths, indicating widespread disillusionment with the transparency, inclusivity, and long-term impact of interventions. While visible violence has declined, many community members viewed the peace as superficial, lacking the structural changes and socio-economic reforms necessary to meaningfully reduce youth restiveness.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

This segment analyzes the study's results through the lens of Conflict Transformation Theory, which emphasizes fundamental, systemic, and relational changes as essential for enduring peace (Lederach, 2003). In contrast to short-lived conflict resolution strategies that typically focus on stopping physical violence or compensating victims, conflict transformation aims to tackle the root causes of inequality, exclusion, and structural injustices that ignite and perpetuate conflict. Its goal is to mend fractured relationships, rebuild trust between parties involved, and create a fair and inclusive social framework. Within this theoretical framework, the findings of this study reveal both the partial successes and significant failures of the amnesty program in altering the conflict dynamics in the Niger Delta.

The first major finding illustrates the difficulties surrounding incomplete reintegration and unmet commitments. While it is noteworthy that a large proportion of ex-militants (92%) participated in the PAP and 85% completed demobilization, only 61% finished the reintegration phase. Respondents frequently mentioned irregularities in vocational training, delayed payments, and the lack of promised job opportunities. This disparity between what was expected and what occurred has led many ex-militants to feel disillusioned and economically vulnerable. From a Conflict Transformation standpoint, such incomplete reintegration highlights a failure to tackle the structural aspects of conflict, especially marginalization and economic insecurity. Peace achieved through half-

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hearted measures is likely to be superficial and unenduring, as unresolved issues may resurface and trigger renewed unrest. A genuinely transformative approach would guarantee that commitments made are fully fulfilled and that reintegration efforts are comprehensive, inclusive, and continuous over time.

The second finding brings attention to the widespread unemployment and economic exclusion that impacts not just ex-militants but also the larger population of non-militant youth in the region. The findings indicate that 48% of ex-militants remain jobless, while 38% of community youths who have not engaged in militancy experience similar or worse circumstances. Merely 15% of all respondents stated they had received formal employment support. This extensive economic deprivation undermines the credibility of the amnesty program and fosters increasing frustration among the youth. Conflict Transformation Theory posits that lasting peace must be rooted in economic justice and fair access to resources. When significant segments of the population perceive themselves as economically marginalized, especially in a resource-abundant area like the Niger Delta, the likelihood of renewed violence remains high. The fact that non-militant youths, despite adhering to the law, often receive fewer benefits than former militants underscores systemic policy failures and exacerbates feelings of injustice.

Additionally, the exclusion of non-militant youths has intensified intra-community tensions and resentment. Numerous community youths reported feeling a profound sense of exclusion and marginalization, having been overlooked by the advantages of the PAP despite facing similar structural challenges as ex-militants. This selective focus on interventions—rewarding violent behavior while disregarding peaceful actions creates new divisions within communities and jeopardizes social unity. According to Conflict Transformation Theory, lasting peace cannot be realized without inclusion and community-wide reconciliation. By predominantly concentrating on ex-militants, the amnesty program has unintentionally distanced a vital segment of the population, thereby reinforcing feelings of inequality and injustice. For peacebuilding to be genuinely transformative, it must acknowledge and address the needs of all parties involved, not just those who engaged in armed conflict. Another notable finding indicates the precariousness of the existing peace, suggesting that the seeming tranquility in the area is largely contingent. While 63% of respondents noted a significant decline in violence since the amnesty program was initiated, a larger majority 72% expressed worry that peace would disintegrate if government support were halted. This indicates that the current peace is being maintained through transactional means, stipends and material inducements rather than through genuine structural and relational change. Conflict Transformation Theory warns against the dangers of such shallow peace settlements, which can unravel if the root causes of conflict are left untouched. Without sustained investment in justice, environmental rehabilitation, community development, and equitable governance, the Niger Delta remains a volatile space where discontent can easily resurface.

The study also reveals deep-seated distrust in government institutions and peacebuilding mechanisms. Only 25% of respondents expressed confidence in the government's ability to manage the peace process effectively, while a staggering 80% of community youths believed that the PAP lacked sincerity and transparency. Numerous respondents cited instances of corruption, nepotism, and political manipulation of program resources. Conflict Transformation Theory emphasizes that trust and legitimacy are non-negotiable pillars of peacebuilding. When citizens perceive peace initiatives as self-serving or manipulated by elites, the credibility of such interventions is severely eroded. The resulting cynicism may not only diminish public participation but may also encourage alternative, and possibly violent, avenues for expressing dissatisfaction.

Finally, the perception that peacebuilding efforts are symbolic and lack local ownership emerged strongly. Participants described the amnesty program as being elite-centered, top-down, and externally driven, with little regard for local input or context. Many viewed the focus on disarmament and demobilization as a public relations gesture aimed more at gaining international approval than at addressing the lived realities of Niger Delta communities. Only 29.5% of respondents felt that the PAP had meaningfully contributed to peace or development in their communities. In line with Conflict Transformation Theory, peacebuilding must be participatory, rooted in local knowledge systems, and shaped by the communities it intends to serve. The evident disconnect between program planners and grassroots beneficiaries significantly hampers the potential for long-term transformation and sustainable peace.

CONCLUSION

This study examines the effectiveness of the amnesty program in addressing youth restiveness in the Niger Delta. Utilizing conflict transformation theory and a mixed-methods research design, the study thoroughly explored how these measures have affected employment, perceptions of peace, development outcomes, and trust in government among former militants and youth in the communities of Rivers, Bayelsa, and Delta States. Findings indicate that, although the PAP achieved short-term advancements, particularly in disarmament and demobilization, it has not succeeded in providing sustainable reintegration or lasting peace. A considerable proportion of former militants did not complete the reintegration process, and many who did reported unmet expectations and inadequate support following their training. Furthermore, local youths who were excluded from the program exhibited heightened resentment, which deepened community divisions and feelings of marginalization. The persistent socio-economic deprivation, characterized by high unemployment rates, limited livelihood opportunities, and insufficient development initiatives, continues to breed discontent and insecurity. These circumstances reveal a significant weakness in existing peacebuilding

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strategies, which have concentrated on transactional approaches like stipends and training instead of advocating for structural reforms. From the lens of conflict transformation theory, this indicates an inability to tackle the underlying causes of violence, such as injustice, exclusion, and fractured relationships between the state and society. Although many participants acknowledged a reduction in militant violence, the prevailing peace is perceived as fragile and contingent. The apprehension of renewed conflict, government incentives should be withdrawn, underscores the lack of authentic reconciliation, community involvement, and institutional trust. Additionally, widespread beliefs regarding corruption, political manipulation, and the exclusivity of the amnesty program have further eroded trust in the government's dedication to enduring peace. The study concludes that, while the Presidential Amnesty Programme has been successful in diminishing overt violence, it has not realized its broader objective of transforming conflict. The absence of inclusive governance, necessary economic reforms, environmental justice, and ongoing community participation has left the region susceptible to recurring unrest. To build lasting peace in the Niger Delta, future initiatives must extend beyond disarmament and temporary incentives. They need to be rooted in transformative methods that encourage inclusive development, transparent governance, environmental restoration, and genuine empowerment of youth. Only by addressing the core injustices and structural inequalities can the cycle of unrest and grievances be effectively interrupted in a meaningful and sustainable manner.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- i. In light of the study's findings, the Nigerian government is urged to urgently reform and expand the amnesty program to meet the current realities of youth restiveness in the Niger Delta. This should include reintegrating ex-militants who were excluded or only partially integrated by providing updated, market-relevant vocational and entrepreneurial training.
- ii. The government should strengthen monitoring and accountability mechanisms. Annual impact reports should be published to promote transparency and allow citizens to track the progress and effectiveness of the programme.
- iii. The government institutions must actively involve local leaders, youth representatives, and community-based organizations in the planning and execution of peacebuilding and development projects. Regular townhall meetings and community consultations should be institutionalized to serve as platforms for dialogue, feedback, and joint decision-making.
- iv. The government should implement large-scale infrastructure and ecological restoration projects through transparent, community-driven approaches. Oil companies must be held accountable for environmental damage, and full compliance with corporate social responsibility (CSR) frameworks should be enforced through stronger regulatory mechanisms.
- v. Government agencies should conduct regular needs assessments, community-based surveys, and baseline studies to inform the design and implementation of interventions.

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