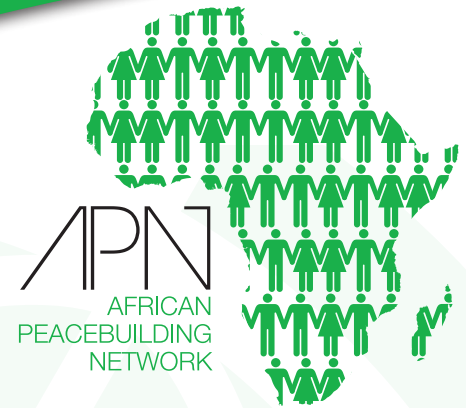




SSRC



**APN Briefing Note
Number 16
December 2017**

The Resurgence of Petro-Conflict in Post-Amnesty Niger Delta, Nigeria: Rethinking Conflict Trajectories and Reforms

By Elias Courson

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Nigerian Federal Government should:

- **Revamp** the amnesty program and provide training to ex-militants so as to improve their job prospects;
- **Undertake** a comprehensive study of the region and its history, in order to rethink development policy and address the roots of structural violence;
- **Depoliticize** government agencies tasked with the development of the Niger Delta region, and implement the recommendations of the Report of the Technical Committee of the Niger Delta;
- **Work** with state and local governments to develop an all-inclusive internal peace and security architecture for the region, in the form of an early warning system.
- **The international community should support** government agencies, non-governmental organizations, and civil society organizations working on peacebuilding in the region.

Since the late 1990s, the oil-endowed Niger Delta region has become an almost ungovernable space. From 1999, there has been a turn to militancy, which escalated with the emergence of the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) in 2005/6.¹ Although the government was initially slow to react to the unfolding trajectory of violent conflict in the region, there was a period of relative peace in the wake of the 2009 amnesty deal, which was somewhat disrupted in February 2016 by the emergence of a new militant group, the Niger Delta Avengers (NDA).²

Apart from the NDA, a plethora of little-known militant groups emerged in the Niger Delta between February and November 2016. Their attacks brought the oil industry and by extension, the nation's economy to a state of near collapse. The government lost about \$7 billion (N2.1 trillion) due to the activities of insurgent groups and oil pipeline vandals in the Niger Delta. Some estimates suggest that these disturbances brought down oil production from 2.3 million barrels per day (bpd), to barely 1 million bpd. The NDA's strategic return to the oil creeks to mount sting operations on Nigeria's petro-economy when global oil prices had fallen drastically (from a peak of \$115 per barrel in mid-2014 to less than \$40 per barrel in early 2016), exacerbated the country's financial woes and contributed towards the national economic recession.

¹ "Timeline: Origins of the Niger Delta crisis," *Financial Times*, February 20, 2006.

² Emma Amaize and George Onah, "Amnesty Deadline: Militants in Last Minute Rush to Surrender," *Vanguard*, October 4, 2009.

Elias Courson is a lecturer in the Department of Philosophy at Niger Delta University, Nigeria. He was a Rotary World Peace Fellow (2008-10), and a 2012 Next Generation Social Sciences in Africa Doctoral Dissertation Fellow. He is currently part of a research team that received an APN Collaborative Working Group (2016-2018). Dr. Courson earned his PhD in Geography from the University of California, Berkeley in 2016.

UNDERSTANDING CONFLICT AND REFORMS IN THE NIGER DELTA

Although there has been a fragile peace in the Niger Delta since the 2009 presidential amnesty program (at least until recently), many of the structural problems which gave rise to the insurgency remain unaddressed. Evidence from the field suggests that the amnesty program has become a platform for political patronage used to pad the pockets of cronies, compromise youth leaders, and buy off aggrieved ex-militants in the Niger Delta.

Conflicts in the region however, have a long and complex history dating back to the nineteenth century.³ There are diverse actors and factors shaping the nature and intensity of violence in the region. The most critical issue is oil-endowment, which has caused disputes about the fairness of the system of fiscal federalism and resource revenue allocation that emerged in the post-1960 period. Conflicts in the Niger Delta are intricately connected to the history of poor governance in the region. They reflect animosities arising from land disputes, territorial claims, chieftaincy tussles, and the demand for resource control by ethnic minorities in the oil-producing Niger Delta, in line with the principles of federalism. The resurgence of insurgency in the region is a reflection of the largely unaddressed grievances of the people, complicated by the debilitating effects of petro-capitalism: land dispossession, pollution, inequitable distribution of oil revenues, highly centralized federalism, and marginalization.

In view of the financial constraints currently facing Nigeria, and the instability in the global oil market, occurring within the larger context of a transition to a low-carbon global economy, there is a particular urgency to rethink the Niger Delta. This should be done both in the context of the relationship between oil and gas and Nigeria's next phase of development; and the prospects for sustainable peacebuilding. It is clear that questions of peace and security in the Delta are inseparable from access to human security, decent jobs, sustainable livelihoods, accountability in governmental and civic institutions, and the deepening of democratic participation. In the longer term, the government needs to plan for a post-oil phase of development. There is no simple approach to the long-term resolution of the Niger Delta crisis.

³ Elias Courson, "Spaces of Insurgency: Petro-Violence and the Geography of Conflict in Nigeria's Niger Delta," PhD Dissertation submitted to the Department of Geography, University of California, Berkeley, March 2016.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The Federal Government should:

- Revamp the amnesty program and provide training to ex-militants so as to improve their job prospects. This should be part of a broader strategy which would involve state and local governments, as well as international oil companies. Given that current ad-hoc responses have failed to tackle widespread poverty and (under) employment, a well-coordinated policy thrust is required to address the pervasive unemployment crisis which causes many youths to feel that criminality presents a viable option.
- Undertake a comprehensive study of the region and its history, in order to rethink development policy and address the roots of structural violence. An accurate analysis of the challenges facing the Niger Delta will allow for new reforms, policy interventions, and governance institutions capable of improving the chances and liberties of residents of local communities and urban centers. Fresh analysis and new policies will require the assembling of Nigerian expertise to address these challenges.
- Depoliticize government agencies tasked with the development of the region, such as the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC), the Niger Delta Amnesty Program and the Ministry of Niger Delta Affairs; and implement the recommendations of the Report of the Technical Committee on the Niger Delta to facilitate infrastructure and human capital development.⁴

All tiers of government should:

- Collectively develop an all-inclusive internal peace and security architecture for the region, in the form of an early warning system. This initiative would require a two-tiered security/intervention strategy: [1] An Internal Advisory Council (at the federal level) and [2] Community Outreach Clusters (at the State and Local Government level). The two groups will interface regularly to maintain security and order in the region with the aim of identifying and addressing conflict before it degenerates into violence.

The international community should:

- Support government agencies, non-governmental organizations, and civil society organizations working in the region on issues related to conflict prevention, peacebuilding, accountability, good governance, development, youth, peace, and security.

⁴ "Report of the Technical Committee on the Niger Delta," vol 1, November 2008.