

# Conflict Management: The Nigerian Government's Strategies and the Question of Enduring Peace

Abosede Abimbola Usoro<sup>1</sup>, Okon Effiong Ekpenyong<sup>1</sup> & Charles Effiong<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Dept. of Bus. Management, University of Calabar, Nigeria

<sup>2</sup> Dept. of Accounting, University of Calabar, Nigeria

Correspondence: Charles Effiong, Dept. of Accounting, University of Calabar, Nigeria. E-mail: charly4free@yahoo.com

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## Abstract

The article x-rayed the conflict management strategies that Nigerian government adopted in Odi and the larger Niger Delta crises. We undertook extensive review of literature related to these two conflict situations to determine which of these strategies - the use of force or the granting of amnesty worked better for the benefit of Nigeria. It was observed that the use of force to manage the Niger Delta imbroglios has always escalated the conflict. On the other hand, the granting of amnesty presented a better platform for managing the conflict and has the potential of resolving the Niger Delta crises if vigorously and holistically pursued. Key recommendations were that: the root cause(s) of conflict should be well established to know the strategy(ies) to use in managing it; the managers of conflict should not rush and employ force to manage any conflict; there should always be active channels for effective communication between the conflicting parties and equitable, just socio-political environment should always be created to forestall the emergence of conflict, leaders should always be proactive on conflict issues through effective communication and dialogue not until when there is a breakdown of law and order.

**Keywords:** Conflict management, Strategies, Odi, Niger Delta, Amnesty programme.

## 1. Introduction

Conflict is as old as the family institution and it exists in many spheres of life. It is a process that begins when one party or group perceives that another party or group has negatively affected, or is about to negatively affect something that the first party cares about (Thomas, 1992 in Robbins & Judge, 2010). Conflict can arise in virtually any social setting, be it between or within individuals, groups, communities, tribes, states or nations. Conflict brings about change and change also brings conflict and both are inevitable part of life (Tjosvold, 1993 in Kreitner & Kinicki, 2010). Conflict can be a serious problem if it is allowed to escalate as it could create chaotic conditions that make it nearly impossible for people to relate or live together peacefully. Thus, one school of management thought views it as a dysfunctional outcome that threatens social harmony, peaceful co-existence, and economic growth and development and as such it is harmful and should be avoided as it has a negative connotation synonymous with such terms as violence, destruction and irrationality. Authors with this perception treat conflict as a negative pathological condition characterized by hostility, struggle, breakdown of law, order, rules and regulations, lack of cooperation etc. Another school of management thought posits that it is a functional outcome and argues that it is natural and inevitable in all social settings, endeavours and organizations, and has the potential to be a positive force in determining and fostering community harmony, peaceful co-existence, and national development (Kreitner & Kinicki, 2010). This perception sees conflict as not only inevitable but necessary in our social life and treats it as a means that addresses issues like marginalization, exploitation, injustice, abuse of power and resources, etc. The belief is that it strengthens equity and fairness, social interaction, economic growth and development. Conflict management therefore connotes actions taken to keep a conflict from escalating beyond control. It implies the ability to control the intensity of a conflict and its negative effects, through negotiation, intervention, and other institutional mechanisms including traditional diplomatic methods (Ajala, 2005; Search for Common Ground, 2014).

Nigeria is the most populous country in Africa, with her population of about 140 million people accounting for 47% of West Africa's population and a nearly a fifth of sub-Saharan Africa's population. Nigeria's population is diverse,

made up of around 200 ethnic groups speaking about 500 indigenous languages, practicing two major religions - Islam and Christianity (World Bank, 2007). Nigeria, has had her fair share of conflicts right from the Aba riots of 1929, the independence struggle of the 1950s, the election riots of the 1960s, the Kafanchan riots of the 1970s, the Matasine massacres of the 1980s, the Oodua People Congress (OPC) militancy and the Odi invasion of the 1990s, the Niger Delta militancy of 2000s to the present day Boko Haram attacks of the 2010s. Hitherto, for Nigeria to remain one sovereign nation, she must articulate and adopt effective strategies to manage her conflicts.

Contemporary, Nigeria's democratic regimes have witnessed more conflicts than the military era (Onimajesin, 2005 in Yakubu, Adebayo, Ubah, & Dogo, 2005). The causes of these are not far from political intolerance, use of thugs during elections, misinformation of youths by politicians, religious leaders and community elders, the feeling of marginalization and the quest for resource control, etc. Onimajesin (2005 in Yakubu et al, 2005) connected this increase in ethnic militancy to the relative liberal environment created by democracy which, without proper orientation, encourages banditry and has ironically made violence popular as a way of seeking redress and settling old scores. He further painted the picture of the mayhem engendered under the various militia groups such as OPC, Amalgamated Market Traders' Association (OMATA), Bakassi Boys, Zaki-Zaki and Egbusu, which left hundreds dead and millions of naira of properties lost. Sequel to the differences in the root cause(s) of these conflicts as well as the leadership style(s) of the ruling government at the time of these conflicts, different strategies were adopted to quell these conflicts. The thrust of this paper therefore is to do a post mortem on the effectiveness of the strategies adopted for the two most currently curbed conflicts which are the Odi invasion and the Niger Delta militancy, with a view of proffering propositions for the ongoing Boko Haram conflicts and possible future imbroglios.

## **2. The concept of conflict management**

There is no universally accepted definition of conflict (Rahim, 2011). Conflict connotes a wide range of understanding of a situation or a behaviour in which the interests, needs, goals or values of involved parties interfere with one another or is perceived to interfere with one another. It is serious disagreement, an escalation of disagreement between parties that triggers strong emotions. Rahim (2011) postulated five elements which cuts across definitions of conflict: it includes opposing interests between individuals or groups in a zero sum situation; such opposed interest must be recognised for conflict to exit; it involves beliefs, by each side that the other will thwart (or has already thwarted) its interests; it is a process that develops out of existing relationships between individual or groups and reflects their past interactions and the context in which this took place; an implied action by one or both sides that do, in fact, produce thwarting of other's goals. Conflict often results because of miscommunication between people with regard to their needs, ideas, beliefs, goals, or values. An understanding of what conflict is and why it occurs is central to being able to manage it (Ellis & Abbott, 2011). Conflict if properly managed is a potentially positive and productive force for change that brings growth and development (Olufemi & Adawale, 2012).

Conflict management is the process of limiting the negative aspects of conflict while increasing its positive aspects (Rahim, 2011). It is the principle that all conflicts cannot necessarily be resolved, but learning how to manage conflicts can decrease the odds of nonproductive escalation. Dalung (2013) asserts that conflict management entails the long term management of intractable conflicts. He further explained that it is the variety of ways by which people handle grievances standing up for what they consider to be right and against what they consider to be wrong. Conflict management therefore involves acquiring skills related to conflict resolution, self-awareness about conflict modes, conflict communication skills, and establishing a structure for resolving conflict in the environment. It is a process that embraces all articulated strategies, interventions and institutional mechanisms in controlling the escalation of conflict.

## **3. Theories of conflict**

### *3.1 The traditional view theory*

The early approach to conflict assumed that all conflicts were bad. Conflict was viewed negatively, and it was used synonymously with such terms as violence, destruction and irrationality to reinforce its negative connotation. This theory holds that conflict is harmful and should be avoided. The traditional view was consistent with the attitudes that prevailed about group social behaviour in the 1930s and 1940s. Conflict was seen as a dysfunctional outcome resulting from poor communication, lack of openness and trust between people, and the failure of government to be responsive to the needs and aspiration of his people (Robbins & Judge, 2010).

### *3.2 The human relations view theory*

The human relations view theory argues that conflict was a natural occurrence in all groups and social settings and as such it is inevitable. Proponents advocated the acceptance of conflict. This theorists' view dominated conflict theory

from the late 1940s through the mid 1970s. Proponents rationalized its existence; it cannot be eliminated, and that there are occasions when conflict can create group growth and development.

### 3.3 *The Interactionist view theory*

While the human relations view theory accepted conflict, the interactionist view theory encourages conflict on the grounds that a harmonious, peaceful, tranquil, and cooperative group or social entity is prone to become static, apathetic, and nonresponsive to needs for change and innovation, (Dreu & Vliert, 1997 in Robbins & Judge, 2010). The major contribution of the interactionist therefore is encouraging leaders to maintain an ongoing minimum level of conflict – enough to keep the group, leaders or government self-critical and creative.

### 3.4 *Perspective view theory*

The different stakeholders of leadership view the relationship between the leaders and the people from a range of different perspectives:

a). *Unitary perspective theory* – under this theory, leaders and the people work together as a team to achieve common goals. The unitary approach to leadership relations assumes stakeholders such as the people and their leaders work *hand in hand* to achieve shared goals. It sees the economic entity as unified entity in which everyone shares the same purpose and is part of the same team. If conflict arises, it is seen as the fault of leadership of the people or communication problems.

b). *Pluralist perspective theory* - the pluralist believes that conflict between leaders and the people given their different interests is expected at times. It also recognizes that some interests are shared and that administrative policy decision making should be shared between the competing parties. Both parties need to accept that the differing views can be considered for successful growth and developmental relations to occur. So leaders and the citizenry must develop an effective system of communication that allows the citizens to express their views and to resolve any conflict.

c). *Radical perspective theory* - this approach believes that there are such fundamental differences between leaders and the people and that it is almost certain that conflict would always occur. It believes that leaders and the people are too opposed to one another to work together.

### 3.5 *The function (outcome) theory*

The function (outcome) theory assesses the outcome impact of the conflict on the social entity (Kreitner & Kinicki, 2010).

a). *Functional conflict theory* - This is also commonly referred to in management circles as constructive or cooperative theory of conflict. This theory suggests that the leaders and the people can have shared goals. Conflict arises chiefly because the parties argue about the best way of achieving their common interests.

b). *Dysfunctional conflict theory* - This is also commonly referred to as competitive theory of conflict. It indicates that the citizens and their leaders have opposing goals and interests. This theory holds that conflict hinders social relationship, peaceful co-existence, communal growth and national development. Conflicts are undesirable and leaders should ensure their eradication. There is high degree of mistrust and a propensity for communication channels to break down, leading to overt conflict. (Ribbons, 1978 in Kreitner and Kinicki, 2010).

## 4. Causes of conflicts in Nigeria

The causes of conflict between individuals, groups, organisations, communities and nations stems from a common thread which runs through them - notably differences. It might be difference in opinions, beliefs, perceptions, views, interests, needs or goals. Given the Nigerian scenario, the very characteristics of her populace, geological landscape and type of leadership (colonial, military or democratic) abound with diversities which provide grounds for differences and hence conflicts. Hitherto, some identified causes of conflict in Nigeria are here highlighted.

Prominent among the root causes of Nigeria's conflicts is the fact that Nigerian States are endowed with varying natural resources which are exploited for the Nigerian Federation at different times, with varying adverse consequences for the environment in which these resources were and are exploited. The lack of commensurate control of the revenue yields from these resources by the producing communities has resulted in many conflicts. The Odi massacre, the Choba village incidence, etc. all have their roots in petroleum exploitation related grievances. As at today, some youths from the Niger Delta States like Bayelsa, Akwa Ibom, Rivers, Ondo and Delta are languishing and wasting away in detention cells (Onimajesin, 2005 in Yakubu et al, 2005). Poverty is one cause of conflict. The oil boom in Nigeria has been driven by oil extracted from the Niger Delta region. Oil wealth, from the Niger Delta

region, is largely responsible for sustaining the Nigerian Federation (UNDP, 2006). Despite fuelling much of Nigeria's economic growth and development, the Niger Delta is somewhat marginalised from Nigeria's national development (Osuoka, 2007). Essentially, there is a significant disconnect between the wealth the region generates for the Nigerian Federation and the transnational oil companies extracting oil from the region, and the region's human development progress. Visibly there is poor corporate social responsibility by exploring oil firms. Analysis of poverty and human development indicators paints a dismal picture for the Niger Delta. Poverty incidence increased in the Niger Delta between 1980 and 2004 as table 1 shows.

Table 1.

Incidence of Poverty in the Niger Delta, 1980-2004						
	1980	1985	1992	1996		2004
Nigeria	28.1	46.3	42.7	65.6		54.4
Edo/Delta	19.8	52.4	33.9	56.1	Delta	45.35
					Edo	33.09
Cross River	10.2	41.9	45.5	66.9		41.61
Imo/Abia	14.4	33.1	49.9	56.2	Imo	27.39
					Abia	22.27
Ondo	24.9	47.3	46.6	71.6		42.15
Rivers/Bayelsa	7.2	44.4	43.4	44.3	Rivers	29.09
					Bayelsa	19.98

Source: National Bureau of Statistics (2005).

The region is characterised by the slow pace of systemic reforms, lack of: jobs, clean drinking water, schools, electricity and clinics etc. This has boosted support for insurgents such as Movement of the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP), MEND etc. (International Crisis Group, 2006). Consequently, many youths resort to militancy as a result of frustration from poverty. Most poverty alleviation programmes do not have direct bearing on the people's life in terms of health, job creation, education and provision of social infrastructures, amenities and facilities particularly in the rural areas. Changes in societal values as witnessed in religious intolerance; religious leaders' quest for material gains at the expense of giving their flock virtuous spiritual guidance; not to mention, the use of bouncers by the clergy seems to send out a message that violence is acceptable. It is imperative to assert that another conflict aider is the ease and frequency with which weapons and militias of terrorist groups from neighboring countries find their way into Nigeria through the country's borders. Report from the media also states that there is ample evidence to show that some weapons used in recent communal clashes, and even for armed robberies were from government armory (Tell Magazine, 2000 in Onimajesin, 2011).

The feeling of alienation experienced by members of ethnic groups when they believe they have been sidelined from the main stream of Nigerian politics, given the Nigerian polity practices of *ethnic cum winner takes it all politics* is another cause of conflict (Alabi, 2010; Osuntokun, 2001.). This reason in particular gave birth to OPC militancy in the 1990s. Mazuiri (2001) also argue that the *sharia law* advocacy in some northern states was triggered by the resentment to the shifting of political power from the north to the south without any remarkable transformation in the economy of the north. Again, the Nigerian political elites with their penchant for cross carpeting, creating divisions and making provocative statements that cannot be substantiated have also contributed to conflict generation in the country.

The Nigerian press is a source of worry, as they are not left out in conflict generation. Popular perception is that journalists have sometimes been paid to blackmail those in position of power or having political influences. They report misleading information without investigation and sensational stories. They also censor or exaggerate their reportage, thereby triggering reprisal or contributing to the escalation of conflicts. Today, more worrisome in Nigeria is religious extremity which derides from differences in value systems. These extremists are presumed to have ties with world known terrorist organisations like Al Qaeda, Taliban and others. Nigeria has had over fifty religious conflicts from 1977 to date and this is the most recurring form of conflict today (Alabi, 2010). However it is pertinent to state here that conflict might often not be as a result of one factor but rather might be as a consequence of interplay of many factors (root causes).

## 5. Conflict management strategies

Effective conflict management strategies can minimize the negative impacts of conflict on different parties and help create a trusting environment that builds healthy and improved interpersonal relationship, peaceful co-existence, economic growth and national development (Ramin, 2011). Thus, conflict management is interference in an ongoing conflict process with the objectives of: reducing the level of destruction and violence; and preventing its escalation into other areas. Just as causes of conflicts are diverse so also are the strategies to curb or manage it. Thomas and Kilman, (2007) identified five conflict management styles: competitive; collaborative; compromising; avoiding; and accommodating. However, Goldfien & Robbennolt (2007) opined that the dual thrust model of conflict management is based on two underlying themes: pro-self (that is concern for self) or pro-social (that is concern for others) goals and that the interaction between these two themes gives rise to the five conflict management strategies which are:

- a) *Avoidance conflict management strategy*: Conflict manager who adopt this style allow the conflict to phase out on its own through inaction and passivity. This conflict management approach is usually adopted when the manager is not concerned about their own outcomes (pro-self) or that of others (pro-social) (Goldfien & Robbennolt, 2007). Avoiding has the advantage of giving time to better prepare and collect information before acting and is a low stress approach when the conflict duration is short. On the other hand, withdrawing may lead to weakening or losing of position as it may be interpreted as agreement, which may make matters worse. Where there are many stakeholders, withdrawing may negatively affect relationship with another party that expects the action of the conflict manager. Also important decisions may end up being made by default.
- b) *Yielding conflict management strategy*: Also termed accommodating or smoothing approach. It is adopted when conflict managers are determined to meet the needs of others and have a general concern for maintaining stable, positive social relationships and harmony (Forsyth, 2009). It sometimes enhances the protection of more important interests while giving up on less important ones, as well as provides the opportunity of reassessing the situation from other angles. The approach could leave the adopter subject to abuse as opponents may always expect shifting of grounds in their favour. This strategy may turn off some supporters as credibility and influence can be lost.
- b) *Competitive conflict management strategy*: This approach involves the use of force to get the other party to accept the conflict manager's view. This strategy maximizes self assertiveness and minimizes empathy (that is concern for others). The conflict managers see conflict as a challenge of win or lose. The benefits of this approach are that it provides a quick resolution to a conflict and increases self esteem. However, the shortcomings of this style are that it could escalate the conflict and the relationship between the parties would be negatively affected. This approach might require a lot of expenses or resources and does not allow the conflict manager to take advantage of the strong points of the opponent's position. More so, losers might want to retaliate.
- c) *Cooperation conflict management strategy*: Also termed collaborating approach. It is adopted when the conflict managers are highly interested in both their own outcomes and the outcomes of others. This style sees conflict as a creative opportunity of which investment in time and resources could find a win-win solution (Forsyth, 2009). It might require structural changes as other possible alternatives in resolving the conflict are reviewed given available information at hand and unwanted options are discarded. Decisions usually take careful consideration and analysis. The merits of this approach are that it pilots actual problem solving, reinforces mutual trust and respect, and provides a base for effective future collaboration, Notwithstanding, the pickle of all parties must be committed to finding a mutually acceptable solution and this might be more tasking and time consuming compared to other methods. Also this strategy might be impractical when a quick response is needed.
- d) *Conciliation conflict management strategy*: Also termed compromising approach. It is adopted when conflict managers' value fairness and in doing so, anticipate mutual give-and-take interactions. This approach enhances faster issue resolution, reduces tension and friction till a win-win solution could be achieved. However the cons are that it could result in a loss-loss situation if initial demands are too great. It also does not contribute to trust building in the long run as it could spawn cynicism if there is no commitment to honour. Important values and long term objectives could be derailed in the process. This strategy requires close monitoring and control to ensure agreements are met.

It is pertinent to state here that effective conflict management strategies are not completely determined by concerns for self or concern for others but might be sensitive to value judgment of other variables such as culture, value system, religious belief etc., hence the use of traditional rulers and clergies in conflict resolution.

## 6. The Odi invasion – Conflict management approach

Odi, a small, sleepy Ijaw town, the second largest in Bayelsa State, after the capital Yenagoa, in Kolokuma/Opokuma Local Government Area was not very known to the outside world until November 20, 1999,

when the Nigerian military invaded the town on the orders of the President, Olusegun Obasanjo. Trouble began in mid-November 1999 when a criminal youth gang took twelve policemen hostage and later tortured them to death. The team of policemen had gone to the town to investigate rumours of renewed *Egbesu* mobilisation, this time to storm Lagos. This was thought to be a reprisal for attacks a month earlier on Ijaws in Lagos by the ethnic Yoruba youth group called OPC. It was widely believed that the OPC attacks on Ijaw residents of the Lagos suburb of Ajegunle was a carryover from the conflicts in the State of Ondo between the Ijaw and Ilaje, a Yoruba clan. The government interpreted the killing of the policemen as renewed *Egbesu* challenge to the State and so ordered a military invasion of the town (Ibeanu, 2006). The military invasion of Odi town by the new civilian government seemed to confirm the fears of the human rights community that Nigeria would take some time before the vestiges of the rule of the *militaria* are eliminated. The consequences were chilling – over two thousand deaths, many more missing, thousands forced to flee and virtually no house left standing in Odi (Ibeanu, 2006). These draconian measures drew widespread condemnation both locally and internationally. The excessive display of military force at Odi against a civilian population is unprecedented for a democratic government. The carnage has since come to be termed *Odi Massacre* (Emuedo, 2013). Senator Sulaiman Ajadi (in Emuedo, 2013) vilified that the Federal government had a number of other more civilized and more acceptable conflict management strategies to employ to bring the situation under control, but to resort to the use of maximum and crude force on hapless citizens of Nigeria was *hitting an ant with a sledgehammer*, adding that even a foreign invasion would not have been more devastating. Also, Nigeria's Nobel laureate Professor Wole Soyinka (in Nwaja, 1999) vituperated that nothing justified the killing of the policemen and in the same vein, there was no justification for the revenge mission. He said the the President had no reason for laying a human habitation to waste, no reason for unleashing the animalism of the military on Odi because a crime was committed.

How effective the application of force was as crises management technique for the Odi incidence leaves much to be desired. Although President Obasanjo maintained that the use of force has achieved its objectives, which was to stop and deter attacks and killing of security personnel, subsequent incidents and reaction of people point to the contrary. For example, in line with widespread condemnation of the tragic event in Odi, the incumbent President Dr. Goodluck Ebele Jonathan shares the view that the Odi invasion was counter-productive as it did not stop criminality in the Niger Delta (Ezigbo, 2012).

Also from the legal perspective, delivering judgment on the 19<sup>th</sup> of February, 2013, in the N100 billion Naira suit No.FHC/PH/CP/11/2000 filed by Professor Kobina Keme-Ebi Imananagha, Chief Ndu Gwagha, Chief Shadrack Agadah, Mr. Idoni Ingezi and Mr. Nwaka Echomgbe, on behalf of the Odi community instituted against the federal government in the federal high court holding in Port Harcourt, the presiding judge, Justice Lambo Akanbi, awarded the plaintiffs a total sum of N37.618 billion compensation in their favour for the wanton destruction of their community by Nigerian soldiers and ordered that the payment be made within the next three weeks. Justice Akanbi ruled that the attack on the people of Odi was genocidal, reckless, brutish and a gross violation of the rights of the victims to life and ownership of property (Information Nigeria, 2013; National daily, 2013; Ubimago, 2014; Fabiyi, 2013). Thus in his judgment, Justice Akanbi berated the government for the brazen violation of the fundamental human rights of the victims to movement, life and to own property and live peacefully in their ancestral home. The Court described this as *executive rascality*, a situation where the State turn guns and artillery bought with taxpayers' money against the taxpayers, saying that this is a call for sober reflection and serious concern.

It is against this backdrop that it is definitely certain that the conflict management strategy adopted for the unfortunate Odi community was ineffective and counter-productive in managing the Niger delta crises in Nigeria.

### **7. The Niger delta – Conflict management approach - the amnesty option**

The Niger Delta amnesty programme was adopted because the use of military force failed to deter the militants and bring normalcy to the region and by extension, Nigeria. The use of force has variously been employed by the Nigerian government as a strategy to manage the Niger Delta crises but it has always failed to achieve the desired result: peace. The federal government had employed military force in Ogoniland, Gbaramatu, Odioma, Choba, Ikon, Ikenya, Umuechen and Odi all in the Niger Delta region (Ekumaoko, 2013) to unleash a reign of terror on the people in an effort to maintain peace and order but to no avail. The military operations (in these communities) have been harassment, human rights abuse, brutality, rape, torture, arrest and detentions, extortions, plundering and destruction of lives and properties by government security forces (Ekumaoko, 2013). Hitherto, the people of Niger Delta in an attempt to express their annoyance over government's insensitivity of their plight have all suffered these forms of assault, criminality and violence from government security forces (Ekumaoko, 2013).

The amnesty option was adopted as a result of the recommendation of the 45-member technical committee on the Niger Delta (TCND) set up by late President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua in September 2008 to advise government on how to handle the Niger Delta imbroglio. Headed by a former president of the movement for the survival of Ogoni people (MOSOP), Mr. Ledun Mitee and other 44 men and women who had a fair knowledge of the Niger Delta problems, the committee assembled and reviewed over 400 reports, memoranda and other documents from local, national and international stakeholders (Adeyemo & Adeyemi, 2010). A key element of their report was the recommendation of amnesty for the Niger Delta militants within a comprehensive framework of disarmament, demobilization and rehabilitation/reintegration (DDR) programme (Adeyemo & Adeyemi, 2010).

Seven months later, Mr. Mitee led committee submitted its report to late President Yar'Adua, on June 25, 2009. The President then announced a blanket amnesty that included forgiveness and automatic freedom from any form of prosecution whatsoever to the militants on the condition that they surrendered their arms and ammunitions and embraced peace (Udegbonam, 2013). The amnesty had a 60 days moratorium time frame from August 6 to October 4, 2009, within this period an individual member of any of the armed groups in the region was expected to turn in his or her weapon(s) in exchange for presidential pardon. The amnesty option was employed as a conflict management strategy to aid in the transition of the Niger Delta imbroglios to peace. The stages in this conflict management process are sequentially disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) (Ekumaoko, 2013). Indeed the overall success of any amnesty programme depends to a great extent on the successful management of each of these stages. It is imperative to stress that in a post conflict society, disarmament which is the surrendering of arms by ex-combatants to designated sites or camps to signify the end to fighting often pose a great challenge. It is essentially a military operation designed to manage the instruments of violence (arms and ammunitions) such that a secured and stable environment is made possible for post conflict transition and implementation of peace accords. However, the success of disarmament is determined first by the quantity (and quality) of arms surrendered in relation to the estimated stockpiles and available arms, and secondly by ensuring inaccessibility of arms and arms flow which guarantee no possibility of rearmament (Gurinyayi, 2007 in Ekumaoko, 2013). In the Niger Delta amnesty programme, the disarmament process witnessed the surrendering of about 2,700 sophisticated guns, and about 300,000 rounds of ammunitions by 15,000 militants (Davidheiser & Nyiayaana, 2010). With this, could we possibly admit that the Niger Delta disarmament exercise was a success? Disarmament and demobilization act as violence control processes (or tools) in an amnesty programme, thus while the first controls the physical tools of violence, the later controls the human tools of violence Ekumaoko (2013).

Demobilization is the first step of transition from combat and militarized life to civilian life; and involves dismantling and disbandment of non-state fighting forces and paramilitary forces that are usually assembled in camps for a change of life orientation. The transition process is usually managed through pre-discharging and post-discharging orientations which include counseling on non-violent life and career choice. In the case of Niger Delta amnesty, the orientation camp was at Obubra in Cross River State. Disarmament and demobilization are military processes but reintegration is a civilian process. Reintegration phase involves the absorption of ex-combatants/ex-militants into the civil society through gainful training and empowerment. It is usually geared towards economic independence and self-empowerment as well as peaceful and civil roles of ex-combatants in the society. It addresses specific needs of ex-militants by offering them support in terms of skill development, education, professional training, microcredit and any assistance to peaceful and sustainable livelihoods. It is broader in scope than disarmament and demobilization cutting across economic, psychological and social life of the demobilized persons. Reintegration aims at rehabilitating not only the ex-militants but also the families and communities of ex-combatants and veterans, including disabled combatants (Akinwale, 2010; Egwemi, 2010; Ekumaoko, 2013; Faleti, 2012; Udegbonam, 2012). It therefore follows that it would take years to achieve real integration. Presently, the Niger Delta amnesty programme reintegration is still in progress as the ex-militants are still undergoing various trainings both within and outside Nigeria to acquire skills in order to have a settled, meaningful and worthwhile civilian life.

## **8. Pre and post amnesty security situation in the Niger Delta.**

Prior to the declaration of amnesty to the Niger Delta militants, the security situation in the region was highly risky as life and property were very unsafe. The situation was characterized by gunfire and bomb attacks and counter-attacks between the militants and the government security agents. Government military forces, who in their effort to carry out the orders from authority that be, overstepped their bounds and used maximum force on hapless citizens, killing and maiming people and destroying properties and houses (Emuedo, 2013; Nwagbara, 2010; Udegbonam, 2013; Watts, 2009). This deplorable security situation did not only affect life and property, but also the petro-business, the mainstay of Nigeria's economy. Aghalino (2012: 147) captures this situation thus:

By 1998, there was a worst case scenario as epitomized by 92 attacks on the oil industry which resulted in the fall of crude oil exports down to 1.6 million barrels per day. As noted by international crises group, Shell was most affected by the attack on oil installations and confrontation with the militant. The country lost at least \$23.7 billion to oil theft, sabotage and shut in production in the first nine month of 1998, and about 1,000 people were killed within the same period. By March 2009, production from the offshore business had fallen to 300,000 bpd down from one million bpd before the crises in the region. The attack on Bonga, a 43.6 billion floating, production, storage and offloading deep water subsea facility about 120km off the coast and the attack on Atlas Cove woke government to the frightening dimension the crises has assumed.

Crime and lawlessness in the region correlated positively with the crises. Statistics compiled by the International Maritime Bureau for 2008 showed 40 reported cases of piracy in the Delta including 27 vessels boarded, five hijackings and 39 crew members kidnapped. The situation threatened to place Nigerian waters second only to Somalia's as the world's most dangerous (Aghalino 2012). Kidnapping and other social vices became a daily occurrence in all the States of the South-South geo-political zone. In their efforts to bring the situation under control and allow for unhindered petro-business and other economic and social activities, government security agents continually clashed with suspected militants and most times unleashed terror on the communities suspected to be the hide outs of the militants. This conflict management approach led to the escalation of the conflict (Aghalino, 2012; Emuedo, 2013). The Nigerian government on several occasions prefers the *big stick approach* in the Niger Delta imbroglios and as a result many communities were touched. Such communities include among others, Umuechen in 1990, Choba in 1992; Odi in 1999; Uwheru in 2004, Egbema in 2004; Olugbobiri and Ikebiri in 2004; Odioma in 2005; Gbaramatu in 2006 and Afiesere, 2006 (Aghalino,2012; Emuedo, 2013). Table 2 chronicles the instances the Nigerian government adopted the *big stick approach* to resolve the Niger Delta conflict.

Table 2. Use of stick approach in the Niger Delta conflict (1990-2006)

Year	Place	Security agency	Action carried out
August 1990	Umuechen	Security forces	80 unarmed demonstrators killed; 395 houses destroyed
1993	Choba	Mobile police	Houses razed down; properties destroyed
Nov. 1999	Odi	Army	The entire community completely destroyed; 2483 mostly women and children killed
Jan. 2004	Uwheru	Joint task force	20 persons killed; 11 houses burnt down
July, 2004	Egbema	Joint task force	A total of 13 communities destroyed; over 500 houses razed and 200 persons, mostly women and children feared dead
Aug. 2004	Olugbobiri and Ikebiri	State security forces	About 16 peaceful and unarmed persons killed.
Oct. 2005	Odioma	Joint military task force	Over 50 people mostly women and children killed
Feb. 2006	Gbaramatu	Joint task force	15 women and children killed in their homes
Oct. 2006	Afiesere	Police	Over 80 houses burnt and 20 persons killed.

Source: Adapted from Emuedo, C. O. (2013). Challenges to sustainable peace and security beyond the amnesty in the Niger Delta, Nigeria. *Afro Asia Journal of Social Sciences*, 4(4), 1-12.

Deduced from the table, over 2,800 civilians lost their lives and houses and other properties worth millions of Naira were destroyed in an effort to resolve the Niger Delta conflict through the use of force between 1990 and 2006. There was palpable fear of full anarchy and eventual breakup of the country. The situation in the Niger Delta was such that by December 2005, situation has slide into full anarchy (Alabi, 2010; Emuedo, 2013; Nwagbara, 2010). Thus, Professor Wole Soyinka expressed fears over the continue unity of the country. He ranted that Nigeria is on the verge, the blink of a massive implosion that would make what is happening in Sudan a child's play. He said, he knew that everybody was preparing for contingency of breaking up. Ofcourse, this precarious state of affairs was blamed on the frequent use of force to resolve the Niger Delta conflict by government (Aghalino, 2012; Aghalino, 2013; Alabi, 2010; Faleti, 2012; Nwagbara, 2010; Ojo, 2012; Udegbumam, 2013).

Due to the worsening security situation report in the region, late President Yar'Adua adopted one of the key recommendations of Ledun Mitee's led Technical Committee report on Niger Delta conflict, and historically on June



25, 2009, he declared amnesty for the Niger Delta militants in an attempt to assuage them and end the perennial crises in the region. The militants responded by embracing the amnesty and surrendered their weapons; but how and whether the programme was a success one remains a question to answer in further research. Suffice it however to say that Scholars have devoted much attention to efforts at the denouement of the Niger Delta conflict before the Yar'Adua years : Aghalino, (2004); Aghalino, (2009); Ikelegbe, (2001); Ikelegbe, (2005); Ikporukpo, (1981); Naanen, (1995); Oronto, Kemedi, Okonta & Watts, (2004); Osaghae, (1997). It may not be expedient to spill much ink here as the focus of this article is on the lessons from the security situation as a result of the amnesty in Niger Delta conflict compared to the consequences of using crude force to quell insurgency as in the case of Odi massacre. This would no doubt provide a guide and platform to articulate effective approach for future conflict management strategies in Nigeria. Contrary to the former option which escalated or resulted in more violence in the region, the amnesty option seems to offer a better platform for managing the conflict (Faleti, 2012; Nwagbara, 2010; Ojo, 2012; Osaghae, 1997). Existing evidence attest to the fact that since the amnesty was granted, hostilities have reduced in the region with a corresponding reduction in brutality as well as destruction of lives and properties. The volume of the petro-business has since increased resulting in enhanced government revenue for economic growth and development. The Petroleum Resources Minister, Mrs. Deziani Alison-Madueke attested to this fact in a keynote address delivered on February 21, 2012 in the Oil and Gas Conference 2012 held in Abuja when she posited that:

*The nation's actual crude oil ( plus condensate) production rose to an average of 2.39 million bpd, consistently maintained above the budgeted level of 2.30 million bpd... Similarly gas sales rose by more than 70% to an average 4 million standard cubic feet per day in 2011 and for the first time, industry supplied more domestic gas than consumed by the power and industry sector... The Nigerian Liquefied Natural Gas Company (NLNG) had one of its most successful years, with production peaking at 21.2 million metric tons in 2011 alone. Thanks, in no small part, to the amnesty programme which allowed unhindered access to oil and gas operations and activities (Opara, 2012; The News Magazine, 2012).*

In retrospect, the amnesty programme provided a better deal than crude use of force in managing the Niger Delta imbroglios and this should be supported and encouraged by all parties. Rightly observed, late President Yar' Adua's regime met the worst case scenario when he was inaugurated in 2007 but however his commitment and sincerity that culminated into the granting of amnesty was a master stroke as this indeed eventually allowed other developmental initiatives of his administration to fall on a fertile soil (Aghalino, 2012; Nwagbara, 2010; Ojo, 2012; Udegbonam, 2013).

## 9. Conclusion

Conflicts arise from different/comboination of causes and as such there is no one specific effective management strategy. The key to an effective conflict management strategy for an enduring peace is the ability to nip and address the root cause(s) of any conflict. Thus in this articles' opinion the granting of amnesty to ex-militants does not in itself signal the end of the Niger Delta conflict but government being able to grab this opportunity of peace ushered in by the amnesty to resolve the underlying issues that brought about the crises in the first place within the framework of the amnesty programme is what would bring about enduring peace in the region. In this regard, issues like underdevelopment, environmental pollution and degradation, poverty, neglect and youth unemployment, health and social infrastructures and amenities among others should be consciously and holistically tackled under the umbrella of the amnesty. This fundamental and underpinning point, Udegbonam's (2013:53) supported in his argument:

*"Genuine and rapid development should go simultaneously with the declaration of amnesty. While the youths are being disarmed, demobilized, rehabilitated and responsibly reintegrated, the communities are being developed in terms of physical infrastructural and social amenities, and the various obnoxious laws that repressed the people are reviewed (and replace). The narrow focus of the amnesty programme denies Nigeria the much needed opportunity to ensure a lasting post conflict peace in the region."*

## 10. Conflict management in Nigeria: The way forward

- a) Conflict managers should always endeavour to establish the root cause(s) of the conflict if there is to be a true resolution and lasting peace.
- b) The focus of amnesty should not be limited to the ex-militants alone, but should extend to rehabilitating other community members affected in the conflict physically or psychologically.
- c) A rebuilding of the communities that were victims of official brutality occasioned by military and other security agents' operations.

- d) The multinational companies in the region should be encouraged to assist government in the technical training of those granted amnesty and other youths in the region in order to enhance their employability. These in our belief are the panacea in resolving the Niger Delta conflict through the instrumentality of the amnesty programme.
- e) Environmental degradation continues to be a sore spot in the relationship between mineral resource producing communities and explorers of these minerals, the government should put in place comprehensive environmental protection policies and implementation structures to forestall environment pollution and related conflicts.
- f) Resource control in the form of a concerted effort to replace lost means of livelihood with other sources of livelihood such as establishment of industries (cottage, agro allied or manufacturing), encouragement of entrepreneurship development through provision of easy access to loan are better policy option to pursue, rather than the increase in petroleum revenue allocation which ends up in the pockets of politicians.
- g) It is a common belief that there is a yawning communication gap between the government and the people, therefore government needs to bridge this gap and thereby ensure receipt of early warning signals from flashpoints before they degenerate into full blown conflicts. Government should be proactive to conflict issues.
- h) The use of crude force should be discarded in its entirety as it would never resolve conflict.
- i) The dissatisfaction with the structure, operation and power configuration under Nigeria's federalism is also an issue responsible for the unprecedented emergence of many militia groups; the lawmakers should therefore take a critical view of these three issues and make relevant legislative changes.
- j) Leaders should always be proactive on conflict issues through effective communication and dialogue not until when there is a breakdown of law and order.

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