

SDN



Nigeria's Presidential Amnesty Programme: Untangling the dependencies that prevent it ending



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SDN supports those affected by the extractives industry and weak governance. We work with communities and engage with governments, companies and other stakeholders to ensure the promotion and protection of human rights, including the right to a healthy environment. Our work currently focuses on the Niger Delta.

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Executive summary

Introduction

Initiated in June 2009, the Presidential Amnesty Programme (PAP) has become an enduring institution. Initially it was conceived as a short-term mechanism for de-escalating and defusing the militant insurgency that destabilised the oil-rich Niger Delta over the preceding decade, and was also designed to achieve broader socioeconomic and stabilisation objectives. Its approach is to reintegrate agitators via trainings, further education, job placements, and business start-up support, and pay a monthly social support stipend until they graduate the PAP. However, mismanagement enables elites to divert annual budget allocations into private pockets, compromising the quality of delivery so much that participants fail to graduate, and it must continue running. Lucrative and durable, the PAP has created complex and stubborn financial dependencies—both for elites and its lowliest beneficiaries. This report explores the inner workings and patronage functions of the PAP in the context of its beneficiaries, to highlight an important consideration in the design of a realistic and effective exit strategy.

Methodology

The research is based on semi-structured interviews conducted in Bayelsa, Delta and Rivers states between July and August 2019. Researchers met with PAP beneficiaries that have undertaken training or received stipends. Researchers struggled to find out basic information about the programme from officials in the PAP's Abuja headquarters and the liaison office in Port Harcourt. As a result, official information relating to the administration of the PAP—and its scope, scale, contracts, and activities—remains scarce.

Findings

The PAP is spectacularly opaque compared to other government entities. For the past five years (2017-2021), the annual budget was NGN65 billion (GBP£146 million), but no breakdown of how those funds are spent is published, nor any evaluation of completion or effectiveness. Independent observers repeatedly find that the PAP has failed to achieve its core mandate of skills development and employment, largely due to mismanagement of resources.¹ Three main areas where actors vie to control resources allocated to the PAP are outlined below. These flow via '*constellations of patronage*' embedded in the political economy of the Niger Delta.

Stipends

Ex-agitators—the intended beneficiaries—receive a monthly stipend worth more than double the national minimum wage. But without effective training, post-training support, or employment opportunities, they have not been reintegrated into society or weaned off payments—and many are now dependent on the PAP. Senior ex-agitators are generally allocated the same stipend, but in many cases continue to receive a cut of the stipends paid

to their subordinates, despite efforts to stop this. Furthermore, it is commonly alleged that thousands of non-agitators or non-existent 'ghost agitators' were fraudulently inserted so senior ex-agitators or political elites can receive their pay. Without robust record-keeping this is easy to institute, and is difficult to prove, but interviews confirmed a common perception that these practices are widespread.

Contracts

Our research suggests contract award processes are primarily driven by political considerations, rather than technical competence or value for money. Individuals seeking contracts must forge relationships with ruling party figures and demonstrate their loyalty ahead of, during, and after elections. This appears to be the main route to gain privileged access to high-value contracts directly from the PAP, or indirectly through the influence of the PAP over other government ministries, departments and agencies (MDAs), and private sector actors such as international oil and gas companies. Other routes reported include extortion through acts or threats of violence. Contracts typically include:

- Fulfilment of trainings, conferences, events, and other activities for the PAP.
- Procurement of materials meant to support livelihood start-up following PAP training.
- Construction of buildings, facilities, roads, and other infrastructure for government MDAs.
- Security, surveillance, and other services in the formal oil and gas industry.

Grand corruption

Political elites reportedly propose, and lobby for, a coordinator that can tilt the PAP patronage system in their favour. Successive coordinators have huge corruption allegations levelled against them in Nigerian courts, but with top-cover from the highest levels of power, none have been prosecuted. Research respondents indicated that the administrators and political elites conspire to trade contracts for political capital and favours. In this system, the coordinator is embroiled in negotiations, recedes from engaging stakeholders and in duties, and prioritises profit and reducing political embarrassment for patrons, over PAP objectives. This negatively affects the functioning of the PAP, as coordinators resort to buying off key conflict actors, and embezzle what is left, at the expense of legitimate beneficiaries.

Prospects for a return to conflict

The prospects for a return to conflict remain significant. The failure of the skills development, training, and employment dimension of the PAP means that, if it is discontinued today, it will have done little to improve the livelihood, business, and educational skills of Niger Delta youth. The PAP has reduced instability, but via an approach that relies on key conflict actors to suppress tensions in return for a share of budgeted resources. The relative stability is also unsustainable and fragile as this approach does not solve the underlying causes of instability, is at the discretion of political elites, vulnerable to manipulation, and hotly contested among ex-agitators.

A decade after the start of the PAP, local grievances surrounding resource control and development—key demands of the agitators—have not been meaningfully addressed. The failure of successive governments (both federal and state) has further hardened attitudes among ex-agitators and the region's long-suffering residents. This has left its beneficiaries disillusioned with government-led peace or development processes, and more susceptible to re-engaging in violent or criminal acts. [Public perception surveys](#) carried out by SDN across violence-prone communities in the region reinforce this point; citizens identify the failure of the PAP, and the need for reform and exit—but are broadly opposed to ending PAP benefits without a sustainable alternative.

Considering the reach of patronage networks, the ability and willingness of technocrats within the political system to design alternatives needs to be improved. The political class use ex-agitators as muscle in illicit errands to further their power, and they often use the benefits of the PAP, or threats to investigate past benefits, as leverage to entice support. Utilised in this way by the political class, the system provides incentives for participants to push against its end, often through mass protests, or firmly worded threats to return to conflict or to attack the oil and gas industry.

Conclusion

Designed to be a stop-gap solution to transition the region out of a resource-driven conflict, the PAP has instead become a dependency-inducing palliative—a substitute for the delivery of public goods and widespread socioeconomic gains. Vast corruption syphons away resources that may otherwise enable the programme to achieve its objectives and come to a managed end. Due to mismanagement, the PAP has not achieved in 11 years, what it set out to do in five. Thus, elites and beneficiaries can justify demands for extensions and further budget allocations.

The PAP itself depends on key conflict actors to suppress agitations on an ad-hoc basis. Yet this requires deception, false promises, and contributes to an accumulation of disillusionment with government, as well as with the key conflict actors they co-opt. This system is not sustainable, it regularly fails, erupts into violence, and risks a future regional collapse into conflict.

Viewed politically and pragmatically, the PAP has become an entrenched part of Nigeria's political economy, and the fragile political settlement in the Niger Delta region. Because successive federal governments have viewed the PAP as a conduit for patronage and a mechanism for co-opting individuals and groups with deep-seated grievances, the PAP remains primarily a political—rather than developmental—programme. Ending the PAP will therefore require a well-informed political strategy based on an understanding of the interests and incentives that maintain the PAP. That strategy would need to be supported by an unprecedented level of coordination, cooperation, and commitment, among federal and state officials, to developing the Niger Delta.

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Abbreviations

GBP£ – Great British Pound

ICPC – Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission

IOC – International oil company

MDA – Ministry, department or agency

MEND – Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta

NDDC – Niger Delta Development Commission

NGN – Nigerian Naira

NSA – (Office of the) National Security Advisor

PAP – Presidential Amnesty Programme

SDN – Stakeholder Democracy Network

USD\$ - United States Dollar

NB: Monetary values herein based on currency conversions accurate at the time of writing

Introduction

Initiated in June 2009, the Presidential Amnesty Programme (PAP) has become an enduring institution. The PAP was intended to serve two purposes. Firstly, the PAP was intended to serve as a short-term mechanism for de-escalating and defusing the militant insurgency that destabilised the oil-rich Niger Delta region over the preceding decade. Second, the PAP was intended to create broader socioeconomic integration of ex-militants and regional development. However, observers are in consensus that it has failed to achieve these objectives, despite many extensions beyond the planned 2015 end-date, and hundreds of billions of naira in allocations.

Instead, it has helped barely sustain thousands of impoverished ex-agitators, while steering significant sums to their leaders, as well as other powerbrokers. These elite-run '*constellations of patronage*' cut across countless political, ex-agitator, commercial, and communal networks, unifying them in some respects, while also fuelling violent competition among them. Lucrative and durable, the PAP has since created complex and stubborn financial dependencies—both for elites and its lowliest beneficiaries. Both groups have grown heavily dependent on the programme and, to some extent, on each other to perpetuate it.

As a result, the PAP has significantly impacted the political economy of the Niger Delta. As outlined in this report, there is a need to expand the focus beyond the enrolled ex-agitators, to include these other stakeholders who benefit from the PAP. The report highlights the importance of untangling and detaching these additional stakeholder dependencies as part of exit strategy proposals.

Based on extensive field interviews and research conducted by SDN researchers throughout the Niger Delta in mid-2019, this report looks at how ex-agitators and political elites receive benefits under the PAP, and the degree to which they have become financially dependent. It also assesses the extent to which the security and stability of the region is affected by these dependencies. Finally, it provides policy recommendations, and identifies agents of change capable of addressing the more problematic consequences of the PAP.

Methodology

Unless otherwise cited, all material in this report was derived from field interviews and research conducted by SDN researchers through field work in Delta, Bayelsa and Rivers states between July and August 2019. Researchers met with both male and female PAP beneficiaries—many of whom previously engaged in militancy—that have since undertaken training or received stipends through the PAP. In addition to conducting semi-structured interviews with these individuals, researchers took time to look at various forms of documentation they possessed relating to the PAP and the benefits they received.

Researchers struggled to elicit even basic information about the PAP from officials at the PAP’s administrative headquarters in Abuja, and liaison office in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, which was set up in 2019. Even the PAP’s media assistant was unwilling to answer substantive questions. As a result, official information relating to the administration of the PAP, its scope and scale, and its contracts and activities remains scarce. Even many of the leaders of the ex-agitators were unable—or unwilling—to properly account for the number of beneficiaries they oversaw. Researchers assessed that this reluctance on the part of ex-agitator leaders stemmed from the fact that they were claiming for many more beneficiaries than they actually commanded.



An example of SDN interview participants in the field

Analysis of findings

An overview of how the PAP works

The PAP was created following an offer of amnesty to armed militants (or agitators) in the Niger Delta from President Umaru Yar'Adua on 25th June 2009. It was designed to last five years, and follow the UN disarmament, demobilisation, and reintegration (DDR) model. But unlike most DDR programmes worldwide that are run by the UN, it was designed and implemented by the Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN). The PAP continues to be run by the FGN, and is situated under the Office of the National Security Advisor (NSA), an unelected office at the core of the presidency.

The PAP claims that it has 30,000 ex-militants enrolled. However, SDN's interview respondents indicated the true number may be thousands higher. Armed groups were accepted into the PAP in three different phases. The first phase engaged in direct negotiations with the FGN following the amnesty announcement, while second and third phase groups did not demobilise until later, mainly due to fear and distrust of the process.² The first phase is seen by some ex-agitators as encompassing more “real” militants as opposed to those who allegedly enrolled in the programme for “business reasons” (personal profit), or were “inserted by politicians” (patronage).

The coordinator

Strategic and operational decision-making within the PAP is concentrated in the hands of the coordinator, the most senior official. Since the PAP's inception, the role of coordinator has been a highly politicised and potentially lucrative one. Milland Dixon Dikio—a retired army colonel—is the current coordinator of the PAP, following various accusations of corruption, and the eventual removal of Professor Charles Quaker Dokubo—an academic and security policy expert trained in the United Kingdom—in August 2020.³ Successive former coordinators have engaged in financial impropriety while in office resulting in NGN712 billion (USD\$2 billion) in wasted or missing funds between 2010 and 2020, according to the National Security Advisor (NSA).⁴ By virtue of their position, the PAP coordinator is also made aware of all projects and spending made by federal MDAs in the Niger Delta region, thereby providing the coordinator with opportunities to influence sizeable contracts from other government entities.

President Muhammadu Buhari (2015–present) has taken a hands-off approach toward addressing Niger Delta-related issues, relying on his inner circle and ruling party powerbrokers to shape policy decisions and recommend who to appoint as PAP coordinator. This reportedly involves extensive negotiations behind the scenes between serving federal ministers, senators, ex-agitators, and other powerful actors, seeking to influence the decision, which ultimately rests with the NSA and President. As the findings show, the stakes are high, so political ‘godfathers’ compete to ensure a favourable coordinator. The research suggests these ‘godfathers’ conspire to trade contracts for political capital and favours. In this system, the coordinator is perpetually engaged in negotiations, recedes from engaging stakeholders and in duties, and prioritises contracting and reducing political embarrassment for patrons, over PAP objectives. This negatively effects the functioning of the PAP, as coordinators resort to buying off key conflict actors, and enable the embezzlement of what is left, at the expense of legitimate beneficiaries.

Big budgets, small footprints

The PAP is incredibly opaque, even by Nigerian government standards. In terms of corruption risks, it has many glaring red flags. Until 2016, the PAP's annual budget was NGN20 billion, but in the last five years it has been allocated NGN65 billion (GBP£146 million or USD\$180.5 million), making it one of the Nigerian government's largest line-item expenditures.⁵ By comparison, the PAP budget amounts to three times the capital expenditure of the Rural Electrification Agency, slightly more than the Ministry of Education's capital expenditures, or roughly equal to 25% of the Nigeria Police Force's total salary costs.⁶ Exactly how these funds are budgeted and spent remains a mystery, as neither the budget ministry nor PAP publishes even a basic breakdown. But recent statements from the current coordinator, Dikio, indicate that 85% of the PAP's total budget is spent on contractors, with the remaining 15% available for ex-agitators.⁷ This lack of transparency reinforces the perception among PAP beneficiaries that government officials embezzle funds.

The PAP is also unable to reliably document how many beneficiaries are enrolled in its programme, how many individuals have received training over its 10-year history, specific details about that training, or its long-term impact. Similar to information on budgets, the number of beneficiaries remaining to be trained is not published regularly, must be deduced from statements or interviews, and is often contradictory. For example, the latest statement from Dikio claims that 8,000 individuals—or 26% of enrolled beneficiaries—are yet to receive training as of 2021.⁸ Yet, this is roughly the same number claimed three years earlier by one of his predecessors.⁹ It is also commonly held that thousands of non-agitators or 'ghosts' were fraudulently inserted so senior ex-agitators or political elites can receive their payments. Without robust record keeping, this was easy to institute—and difficult to prove—but interviews confirmed these practices are widespread.

In the PAP liaison office in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, opened in February 2019, there is no record of the number of beneficiaries in the state. PAP beneficiaries come to the office on a daily basis, seeking information about the empowerment initiatives and training opportunities. Staff do not have any information to provide to these ex-agitators, leaving them even more frustrated and disillusioned than before. As a result, ex-agitators are left puzzled about the purpose of Port Harcourt PAP office; *"if you go to Abuja you will still see everybody there and you'll be wondering who is in Port Harcourt"* observed one. Neither Delta nor Bayelsa states have a liaison office, though the PAP uses training facilities in Bayelsa, Lagos, and Imo states. It is not clear whether the PAP maintains these locations directly or leases them. In 2019, the unutilised Bayelsa training centre was looted and vandalised by disgruntled locals resulting in millions of naira in losses.

An overview of PAP benefits

The PAP has created dependencies among ex-agitators, their leaders, state and local politicians, and their networks, via the financial and material benefits it has steadily disbursed over the past decade. These include a monthly stipend, skills training, government contracts, and private security contracts, among other inducements. Although initially hoped to jumpstart broader socioeconomic development across the region, these benefits have instead become a costly, corruption-prone endowment programme, rather than a key component in a more coherent, sustained regional development strategy.

Monthly stipend

NGN65,000 (USD\$140) is paid to every ex-agitator enrolled into the PAP as a monthly stipend. Though a significant sum to many living in the Niger Delta, one of Nigeria's least developed regions, it is not enough for a family to live on. Furthermore, since the start of the PAP, the absolute value of this stipend has decreased as the Nigerian naira has steadily lost value against the US dollar. In October 2009, USD\$1 bought roughly NGN153; in January 2021, USD\$1 bought NGN465; while the price of food, fuel and other domestic staples increased dramatically over the same period. Beneficiaries were also promised other allowances to supplement the stipend, such as housing support, but these have never materialised.

Most PAP stipend payments are now paid directly to the beneficiaries via their bank accounts, as opposed to the previous practice of paying lump-sums to ex-agitator leaders for onward distribution. This is to avoid the common practice of ex-agitator leaders taking a cut on the stipends of subordinates. To make this change, the FGN conducted a lengthy biometric registration process in 2016. This direct payment method has, to some extent, reduced leaders' hold over their subordinates, but also partly weakened group solidarity and unity. To counteract this effect, some leaders have worked to ensure they are still able to deduct a share from these payments by making "*kangaroo arrangements with the banks*", as one ex-agitator described them. Likewise, some leaders have 'bargained' with the PAP officials to remove beneficiaries from PAP records who refuse to 'settle' them, and replace them with more 'loyal' followers. Although this can help maintain leaders' 'hold', these deductions over many years have also generated resentment among ex-agitators toward their leaders. Some have refused to remit the funds to their leaders. Others have taken more drastic steps. In June 2011, ex-agitators disgruntled about these deductions killed their commander in Yenagoa, Bayelsa State. This reportedly gave other leaders pause and led some to begin paying their followers' stipends in full.

At various points in the PAP's history, these payments have been delayed for many months, antagonising those who rely on them. According to one leader, "*when payments are delayed, we have very little options of what can be done to help the situation maintain or improve, because most of us still rely completely on that NGN65,000. Also consider that some camps deduct monies from their boys so there isn't much left to survive on after these deductions*". These delays, according to this leader, forces his boys to turn to destabilising activities such as political thuggery, artisanal oil refining, and sea piracy to make ends meet.

Some ex-leaders, in contrast, receive large special stipends from government under the terms of the amnesty. Tompolo, for example, allegedly receives a NGN12 million personal stipend each month, according to respondents in this research. Two of his designated sub-commanders—Dennis Otuario and Kestin Pondi, neither of whom actually served as field commanders during the insurgency—allegedly receive over NGN6 million monthly. Others claimed that John Togo's 'estate' receives NGN4 million a month, despite the fact he died in 2011, while Ateke Tom receives NGN1 million monthly.

PAP stipend examples - personal testimonies from PAP beneficiaries in Rivers State

“Sincerely, the monthly NGN65,000 helps me in a way. When it was me, my wife, and four children it was better but my younger brother [a gang member] was killed in 2011... by soldiers...After the biometric, they stopped paying my brother’s wife. I do some other things to support myself [such as crime and election thuggery]”.

– Ex-agitator from Degema LGA who accepted amnesty under Farah’s camp.

“I am fine, I am a trained driver, but I want more training in driving. With my skills I do jobs as a driver for a lot of companies. If they give the remaining training [to] us [as a driver, they should [be able to] stop paying me the NGN65,000.”

– Ex-agitator, father of four from Akuku-Toru LGA who accepted amnesty under the Solomon Ndigbara camp.

“Please let them not stop the amnesty payment. That money plus the money I make from my work as an electrician I am happy.”

– Ex-agitator, father of two from Gokana LGA who accepted amnesty under the Ndigbara camp.

“Yes, the money is helping us, but not all the time we make money, but I am doing other business. Okay, you want to hear; I am selling my oil (on the black market). Was it not our father Ken Saro-Wiwa that said we should sell our Niger Delta oil?”

– Ex-agitator, father of three from Ogu/Bolo LGA who accepted amnesty under Ateke Tom camp. Member of the Icelanders cult gang.

“I am a welder. I was the best during our training at Bramada camp in Ondo State. I was training others. So you should understand if things were good I shouldn’t be complaining of money. But in [Gokana LGA] we don’t get jobs like that. That is why the NGN 65,000 is helping me every month”.

– Ex-agitator, Ndigbara camp.

“Beside my amnesty money (NGN65,000) I do farm business, I do Okada (commercial motorcycle) just to take care of my wife and one child”.

– Ex-agitator, Ndigbara camp

Skills Training

From the outset, skills training and loosely-defined ‘empowerment’ programmes have been a core element of the PAP, provided to beneficiaries as part of the reintegration process. Yet many ex-agitators argue that this has been deeply flawed, implemented poorly, with substandard training and start-up support, or no delivery at all.¹⁰

This stems from the PAP’s use of inexperienced sub-contracting firms, often awarded to political elites or ex-agitators themselves. One Ijaw activist described how training contracts involving members of a particular ex-agitator camp were typically awarded to companies linked to the leaders of those camps. The leader would then presumably receive a cut or a kickback from the company that he would nominate to receive the contract from the PAP.

Compounding this challenge is the tendency of ex-agitators and PAP administrators to substitute beneficiaries nominated for training with others. Initially, the PAP directly sent individuals to training opportunities, but in recent years the system of nominating trainees has changed; now the PAP tends to approach leaders and allocate them a specific number of beneficiaries, which they select.

Moreover, in the absence of a guiding strategy from the PAP office, contractors rarely undertake a proper needs assessment of the beneficiaries they train, and replicate approaches from past proposals instead. Many trainees did not receive proper certification when they completed their training, leaving them unable to prove their qualifications needed to apply for jobs. Others received inappropriate materials to establish a business, or enter employment following the training.

That said, some PAP beneficiaries have leveraged the programme to undertake longer term studies, including Bachelors and Masters degrees at international universities, in the place of one-off training. One source noted, for example, that many ethnic Itsekiri PAP beneficiaries in particular opted to “go to school”, and as a result many have become literate. But these are exceptions to the rule. As a result of poor training outcomes, some ex-agitators engage in subsistence or marginal livelihoods—petty trading, farming, and other semi-skilled jobs—by necessity. A small fraction of them, meanwhile, engage in criminal activities such as oil bunkering, artisanal refining, or have been hired by pipeline/oil facility surveillance firms.



Young participant in one of SDN’s agricultural livelihood pilots, planting rice in the Niger Delta

PAP Contract Examples

The following are a few selected examples of companies that have received training (or other) contracts from the PAP:

Glassfa Continental Ltd and Innotek Royal Ltd.

Controlled by Samson Fetimi, an Ijaw youth leader, evangelist and businessman from the Egbema clan in Warri North Local Government Area (LGA). In 2016, Glassfa carried out small business trainings for 91 PAP beneficiaries.¹¹ In 2017, Glassfa carried out poultry farming training in Warri.¹² In 2019, Innotek received a contract to provide ‘starter packs’ and other fishing and maritime supplies to up to 400 women.¹³ In January 2019, Fetimi complained to the press that the PAP had been delaying payments to his companies and other vendors.¹⁴

Bradama International Skill Works Ltd. Owned by ‘General Shoot-at-Sight’ (Bibopre Ajube) and headquartered in Ese-Odo LGA, Ondo State—his home area.¹⁵ In 2014, Bradama organised a six-month welding and fabrication training for PAP beneficiaries. Trainees interviewed said the training and living conditions were better than other courses they attended. Bradama has also received contracts to conduct pipeline welding which were sub-contracted to JIMCO Global Concept Ltd, owned by Jim Okolo—a businessman and aspiring politician from Anambra State.

GO Get It Investment Ltd. Owned by Kenneth Hembe Orkuma, a former national president of the National Association of Nigeria Students (NANS) and brother to Herman Hembe, a long-time member of the House of Representatives from Benue State.¹⁶ In 2005, Orkuma announced that NANS would endorse a third term bid by President Obasanjo.¹⁷ The following year, however, the NANS senate impeached Orkuma, citing his alleged involvement in cultism and cult-related violence.¹⁸ Orkuma’s firm received a PAP contract in 2011 to organise a six-month training programme in pipeline welding in the Philippines.

Jamub Global Services Ltd (Jamub Group) and Menzon Nigeria Ltd. Based in Abuja and owned by Prince Jacob Aminu Momoh, a politically-connected businessman from Edo State. In 2011, the firm sub-contracted another firm—Innoson Kiara Academy—to undertake a “chaotic and disorganised” welding training at the Meridian Hotel in Port Harcourt. In 2016, Jamub similarly partnered Innoson Kiara Academy to train 80 ex-agitators in vehicle manufacturing.¹⁹ In 2016, Momoh served on the screening committee for the All Progressives Congress (APC) Ondo State governorship primary.²⁰

Brain Box Matrix Services Ltd. Headquartered in Port Harcourt and owned by Sylvanus Ibietela Eferebo, a younger politician from Tombia town in Degema LGA. In 2015, Eferebo ran for State House of Assembly on the All Progressives Grand Alliance (APGA) ticket. Brain Box received a contract when Boroh was PAP coordinator to undertake a 9-month training programme in power transformer repairs and maintenance. Ex-militant leader, Asari Dokubo reportedly facilitated the contract.

Ledef Nigeria Ltd. Owned by Selekeye Victor-Ben, the younger brother of “General Boyloaf” (Ebikabowei Victor-Ben). Selekeye reportedly was head of propaganda for the now-defunct Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), where he and others like Henry Okah used the pseudonym “Jomo Gbomo” to issue threats and announce impending attacks directed towards the FGN and the oil and gas industry. During Kingsley Kuku’s tenure as PAP coordinator, Ledef received at least one contract to organise a six-month underwater welding course in India.

Don Communications Ltd. Owned by Prince Dennis Sami, a former spokesman for then-Governor Goodluck Jonathan and later the owner of *The Nigerian Pilot* newspaper. In 2012 and 2013, he received a contract to send students to the Regional Maritime University in Accra to receive a six-month maritime training course. Sami allegedly threatened attendees who asked critical questions about the programme, according to course participants interviewed for this research. Sami served on the board of the Nigerian Broadcasting Commission from 2013 to 2015.²¹

Government contracts

Government contracts from the PAP and a range of other MDAs are another critical element of PAP-related patronage, and have been widely used since the start to surge state funds into state and local networks. They have also helped to buy the continued loyalty of ex-agitator leaders who were not sufficiently placated by the stipends, training opportunities, or other unfulfilled promises for wider improvements in the Niger Delta.

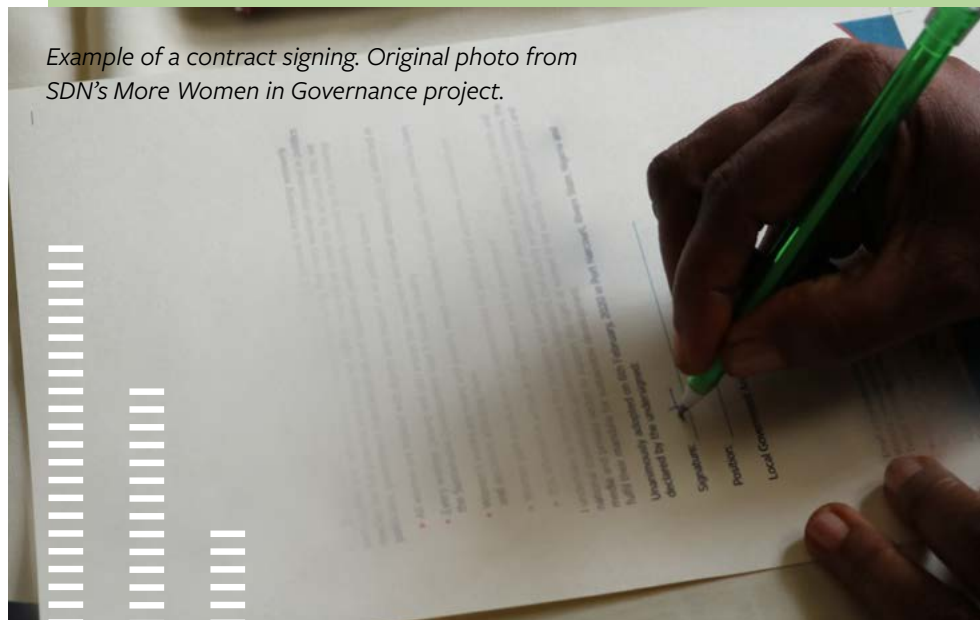
PAP contracts are highly opaque and not published as line-items under the annual allocation in the federal budget. Obtaining specific information about costs and recipients of these lucrative contracts is extraordinarily difficult and risky. Contract award processes are primarily driven by political considerations, rather than technical competence or value for money. Ex-agitator leaders seeking contracts must forge relationships with ruling party figures and demonstrate their loyalty ahead of, and during, elections.

According to one well-placed source, the PAP coordinator is, by virtue of his position, made aware of “*all contracts sent to the Niger Delta region from various MDAs, especially those to placate the boys, and he keeps track.*” Others corroborated this claim, and outlined how the coordinator works to steer projects from other parts of the FGN towards the ex-agitator leaders who could pose a threat to stability and security in the Niger Delta.

One of the most common sources of contracts for PAP beneficiaries is the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC), a separate government agency established in 2000 for socio-economic development projects in

the region. Ex-agitator leader from Rivers State, Solomon Ndigbara, reported that, as one of the pioneers to embrace the PAP, soon after accepting amnesty the NDDC awarded him an inflated contract to construct a one-kilometre road in Khana LGA, Rivers State. Unlike the PAP, NDDC records are public, and show 140 similar projects, with at least 20 of these awarded to companies owned by ex-agitators. Based on the similarity between these projects, and the fact they were awarded around

the same time, it is likely that the PAP leveraged funds from the NDDC to entice ex-agitators into accepting amnesty. As these companies (and others associated with ex-agitators) were awarded NDDC contracts in subsequent years, it reinforces statements from interviewees that the two government agencies continue to operate together.



NDDC contract examples

The following are a few selected examples of companies run by ex-agitators that received contracts from the NDDC. The projects were identified using a combination of information from interviews and public project records.²²

Awarded on the 27th May 2010:

Gbenesolos Nigeria Ltd. Owned by Solomon Ndigbara, this company received a contract for a one kilometre stretch of Bori road in Khana LGA. Two years later in May 2012, it received another contract for one kilometre of the Kono Community road, again in Khana LGA.

Bensam Nigeria Ltd. Controlled by Victor Ben, also known as (AKA) Boyloaf, ex-militant leader from Southern Ijaw, Bayelsa State. This company received a contract to construct G-Tek Road, in Yenagoa the state capital.

Teksharries Global Services Ltd. The company is owned by Hon. Granville Tekenari Wellington, ex-agitator leader from Asari-Toru in Rivers State, and current State House of Assembly Member representing Asari-Toru 1 (PDP). Teksharries was awarded two contracts on this date, both to construct roads in the former militant enclave of Borokiri, Port Harcourt.

Se-Kuro Nigeria Ltd. Owned by Ateke Tom, Amanyanabo of Okochiri Kingdom in Rivers State, AKA the Sekuro 1 of the Niger Delta. It was awarded a whopping contract for the construction of internal roads in Okochiri, Okrika LGA, Rivers State. Unlike the above contracts, there is no award date noted on the NDDC record. But according to CAC records, the company was established on the 27th May 2010—the same date that the above companies were awarded their contracts—suggesting it was set up to instantly receive the contract. Se-Kuro received a subsequent contract in March 2011 to construct Ilamooku road in Okrika, and another in May 2012 to construct Chief Alex Wele/Isi-Apa Ogologo Road in Obio/Akpor LGA, both in Rivers State.

Awarded between the 25th-31st May 2012

Delhope Construction Services Ltd. Owned by Adiele Ndubuisi, ex-militant leader from Abia State, as well as Hon. Darlington Nwokocha, current Abia State House of Assembly member, representing Isiala Ngwa. It was awarded two road contracts, in Obingwa and Isiala Ngwa South LGAs of Abia State.

S. S. Selky Nigeria Ltd. Run by Selky Torughedi, AKA Young Shall Grow, ex-agitator from Southern Ijaw, Bayelsa State. It was awarded a contract to construct Obeakpu internal road in Ohaji/Egbema LGA, Imo State.

Ebiduminie Global Services Ltd. Run by Franklin Duduku, AKA General Franklin, ex-agitator and leader of Bakassi Boys, from Bakassi in Cross River State. Like the others, it was awarded a road contract, this time to reconstruct the Inyiata-Urashi road, in Ohaji/Egbema LGA, Imo State.

Oris Engineering Company Ltd. Controlled by Henry Binidodogha, aka Egbema 1, ex-agitator from Ovia South West in Edo State. This company was also awarded a contract to construct Akpobor Street in Esan South East LGA, Edo State.

Bibopere International Service Ltd. Controlled by Bibopere Ajube, AKA General Shoot-at-Sight, the ex-agitator commander for MEND on the western fringe. It was awarded a contract to construct Ajube Road, in Ese Odo LGA, Ondo State.

T-Mie Adoki Nigeria Ltd. Run by Tonye Adoki Smart, ex-agitator leader, and current Rivers State House of Assembly Member, representing Port Harcourt 2 constituency. It was awarded a contract for one kilometre of the Mikikwu/Omuaria/Omunwei link road, in Ikwerre LGA, Rivers State.

King Amachree Royal Academy Ltd. Set up by Mujahid Dokubo Asari, ex-agitator leader from Degema, Rivers State. While Asari famously rejected the PAP and did not enrol, the NDDC record shows he was still awarded this contract to construct the Bie-Ama Junction Ring Road, in Borokiri, Port Harcourt, Rivers State.

Private security contracts

Lucrative pipeline security contracts are another important mechanism for placating ex-agitator leaders and their followers. Since inception of the PAP, these have been routinely tendered by the FGN, as well as international and Nigerian oil and gas companies, to ex-agitator leaders. Unlike the other benefits on offer, pipeline surveillance contracts can run for multiple years, and are paid directly from oil companies rather than government, resulting in a far more reliable income stream for ex-agitators. Yet the award is often connected to political allegiance, and used as leverage for support. For example, according to interviewees, following the 2015 election, the FGN dictated the award of pipeline surveillance/security contracts to ex-militant leaders in the Niger Delta. In Rivers State, Egberipapa allegedly received a contract worth NGN90 million, Ateke received NGN250 million, Farah received NGN500 million, and Ndigbara received NGN250 million. According to Ndigbara, his contract was subsequently cancelled under pressure from Magnus Abe and other APC chieftains in Rivers State for his refusal to quit the Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP).

The term 'pipeline surveillance' is, however, a misnomer. Such contracts rarely involve any actual surveillance. Instead, they function as a vehicle for channelling funds to ex-agitator leaders and community youth in order to buy their political loyalty, and discourage them from engaging in pipeline destruction and other criminal activity that disrupts petroleum extraction. The leaders of the ex-agitators are favoured since they yield power and influence in the area, as well as over legions of 'followers', who are often employed by the surveillance company. For more on this, see SDN (2019) *Pipeline Surveillance Contracts in the Niger Delta*.²³

Other perks

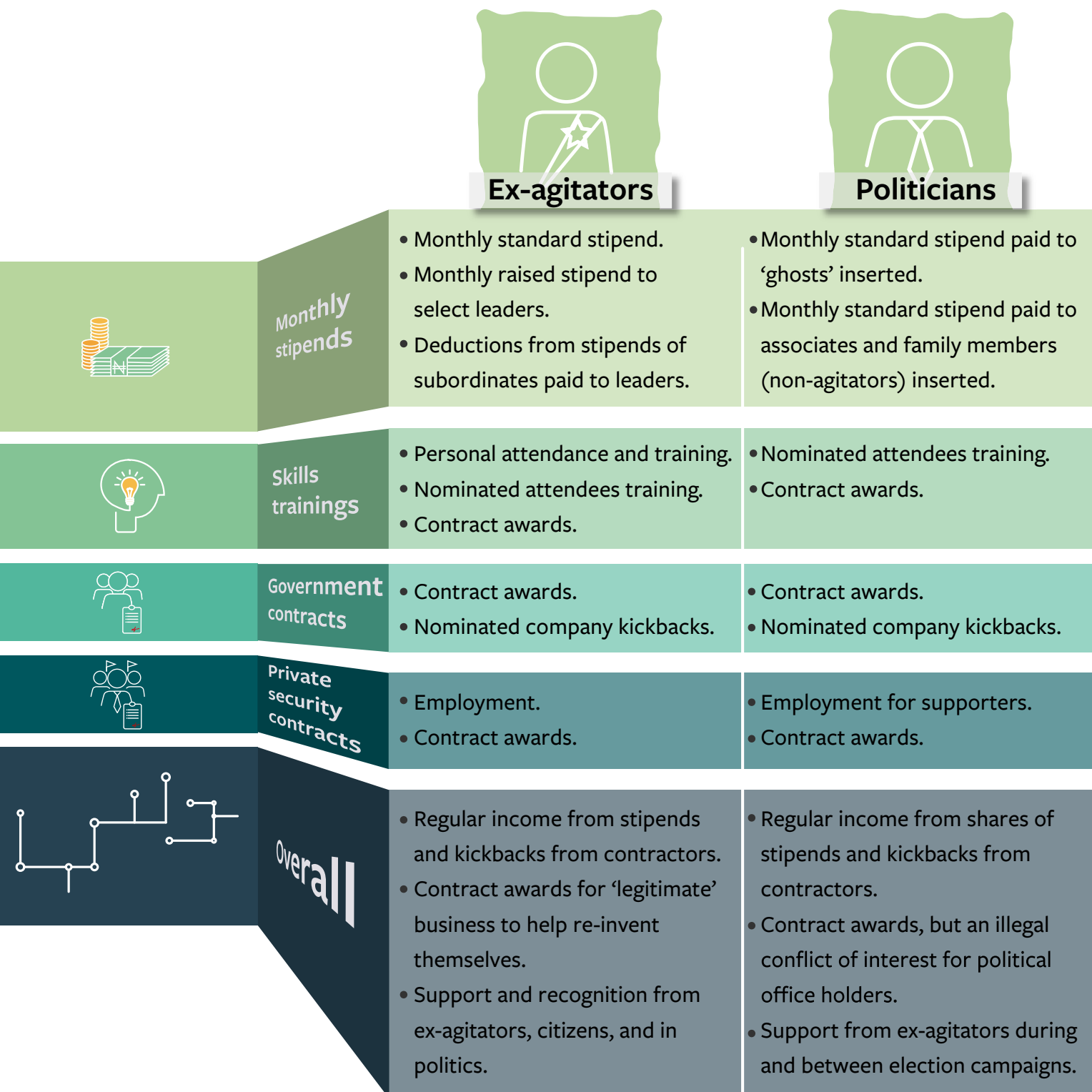
Shortly after its inception, the PAP provided—or promised to provide—other benefits to agitators who surrendered their weapons and accepted amnesty. As an example, the FGN donated houses in Abuja to at least two major ex-militant leaders: Boyloaf (in Maitama) and Solomon Ndigbara (in Asokoro). The government also provided Ndigbara with a house in his hometown of Yeghe, Gokana LGA, Rivers State. These houses were reportedly provided by the Inspector General of Police, although it is unclear whether the Nigeria Police Force already owned the houses, or purchased them using opaquely-managed 'security vote' funds. Ndigbara asserts that his Abuja house was seized in 2016 when he refused to join the APC; he also says soldiers from 2 Brigade (now 6 Division) razed a separate house in Gokana, also in 2016, for the same reason. Boyloaf, in contrast, still occupies his house in Abuja.

First phase leaders also claim that the FGN promised to provide them other benefits such as oil blocks, security details, vehicles, and housing allowances for them and their followers as part of the amnesty agreement. In the words of one leader:

“Today what did we get regarding this promise: NOTHING! It is very sad that ex-agitators would enter an agreement with the government on security and stability concerns and the Federal Government would attempt to cajole us. For this reason too, we are not happy... in addition to the oil and gas sector lifeline, the FG also committed to allocating oil blocks in the Niger Delta to us in paired sets of 4-5 leaders issued an Oil Block. Unfortunately, again, there has been no headway regarding this development till date. All these pending promises of government makes us feel that FG is engaged in 'use and dump' approach in dealing with the Amnesty Leaders, and we are not pleased about our current situation at all, so they should do something about these issues.”

Another first phase leader commented on the discontinued housing allowance for beneficiaries, claiming that *“it was only under Kingsley Kuku [2011-2015] that they paid housing allowance to the leaders who...disbursed the funds to ex-fighters under their various camps. Since that time till date, we have never heard anything about housing allowance again.”*

Summary of the critical dependencies preventing an exit strategy



Prospects for a return conflict

The prospects for a return to conflict if the FGN discontinues PAP benefits remain significant. The incentives for both working-level ex-agitators and their leaders to re-engage in violence or criminality—or to push for the reinstatement of amnesty payments by doing so—would increase. In the words of one local expert, the termination of monthly amnesty payments “*would lead to a multiplier effect increase in crime and criminalities within the Niger Delta*”. For this reason, there is broad-based opposition to the idea of ending PAP benefits across the Niger Delta, as reflected in public perception surveys carried out by SDN across violence prone communities.²⁴

Yet payments are unsustainable, and several observers have advised that the FGN craft an exit strategy and post-PAP policy alternatives. Such alternatives must recognise that local grievances surrounding resource control—a key demand of agitators and other community and civil society declarations—have yet to be meaningfully addressed. The failure of successive governments (both federal and state) to make progress developing the most destitute and conflict-prone parts of the Niger Delta has further hardened attitudes among both ex-agitators and the region’s long-suffering residents.

Another important factor is the failure of the skills development and training dimension of the PAP. If discontinued in the short term, the PAP will have done little to improve the livelihood, business, and educational skills of Niger Delta youth. Many ex-agitators possess few skills beyond serving as foot soldiers to ex-agitator and gang leaders; for them, re-engaging in crime and conflict behaviours is not aberrant, it is in their ‘comfort zone’.

Nigerian security forces’ longstanding take-no-prisoners, shoot-first approach to tackling crime and violence in the Niger Delta has also hardened the attitudes among agitators, who believe that the Nigerian state is not serious about reforming, rehabilitating, and reintegrating them into mainstream society, let alone broader development objectives. This is reinforced by the regular practice of politicians hiring ex-agitators for political purposes, including during elections to intimidate rivals and rig polls.

Experts in close contact with the ex-agitators warn about the destructive effects of terminating the PAP. While recognising the high cost and long-term unsustainability of the PAP, they nevertheless insist that continuing it is the better of two bad options. In the words of one Ijaw activist, “*If the program is stopped today we are certain that it will cause a crisis situation in the Niger Delta, because some of these beneficiaries will form a syndicate in the creeks to start troubling the oil industry and the economy will suffer.*” Another noted a strong, albeit anecdotal, correlation between times when PAP stipends were delayed or went unpaid and the resumption of low-level violence, sea piracy, and pipeline vandalism in the Niger Delta.

The ex-agitators that SDN researchers encountered were broadly unprepared to countenance the termination of the PAP. Several PAP beneficiaries spoken to “*threatened to unleash violence on oil pipelines*” if government ended the PAP. If such foot soldiers become so frustrated with the PAP that they reject it and re-engage in attacks, it is unclear whether the PAP—or FGN—is prepared to adapt and retool to address lingering grievances, and prevent another wave of regional conflict.

Conclusion

The perpetuation of the PAP is a reflection of the long-running failure—both on the part of the last three presidential administrations and successive state governors—to realise basic development objectives in the Niger Delta region. Designed to be a stop-gap solution to transition the region out of an active resource-driven conflict, the PAP has instead become a dependency-inducing palliative—a substitute for the delivery of public goods and widespread socioeconomic gains.

On the one hand, there remains an inordinately high degree of dependence among ex-agitators on their PAP stipend. Many are jobless and have become demoralised. Very few ex-agitators have actually been able to translate the skills training received under the PAP into new careers. This is often because it has been too limited, or ill-suited, to enable them to climb local employment ladders. Even fewer have access to the type of contracts awarded to the leaders—but these lucrative contracts come with conditions attached for those leaders.

The PAP and political elites, on the other hand, depend on key conflict actors to suppress agitations on an ad-hoc basis, and fight for their re-election. But this requires deception, false promises, and contributes to an accumulation of disillusionment with government, as well as with the key conflict actors sent on errands. This system is simply not a sustainable security mechanism. It regularly fails, erupts into violence, and risks a future collapse into regional conflict.

Meanwhile, the vast corruption from both sides is syphoning resources away that may otherwise enable the programme to achieve its objectives and come to a managed end. Because successive federal governments have viewed the PAP as a conduit for patronage and a mechanism for co-opting individuals and groups with deep-seated grievances, more and more individuals have been rewarded from the bloating budget allocation. As a result, the PAP has not achieved in 11 years, what it set out to do in five. Elites and beneficiaries then justify demands for extensions and further budget allocations, and resort to threats or acts of violence when this is not forthcoming.

As outlined in this report, the critical dependencies preventing an end to the PAP must be viewed more broadly than the ex-agitators and their monthly stipends, and include networks of political elites. Looked at politically and pragmatically, the PAP has become an entrenched part of Nigeria's political economy, and the fragile political settlement in the Niger Delta region. The PAP thus remains primarily a political—rather than a DDR or developmental—programme. Ending the PAP will therefore require a well-informed political strategy based on an understanding of the interests and incentives that maintain the PAP. That strategy would need to be supported by an unprecedented level of coordination, cooperation, and commitment, among federal and state officials, alongside a strategy for developing the Niger Delta.

Recommendations

- **Increase transparency and accountability.** The PAP budget, contracts, internal processes, and beneficiary records fail to meet the most basic transparency standards. The PAP should be subjected to increased financial and administrative scrutiny by the relevant National Assembly committees and the Auditor-General of the Federation. It should also be subjected to a preventative ‘systems study’ by the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC).
- **Strengthen oversight.** Any improvements to the performance and strategic direction of the PAP will be predicated on close and sustained scrutiny by the president. In the midst of grand corruption allegations, there should also be additional levels of oversight, possibly by a relevant committee in the National Assembly. Leadership from above must also engage the parasitic political elites to detach their dependencies on the PAP and ex-agitators.
- **Improve training strategy, coordination and needs assessments.** The PAP should constitute a strategic advisory board composed of knowledgeable technocrats, reputable civil society actors, representatives of the beneficiaries, and other stakeholders in the region. This board could provide valuable advice and strategic direction to the PAP coordinator, as well as independent evaluations of its training programmes.
- **Reduce leaders’ mega-stipends.** The PAP should sunset the multi-million-naira stipends provided to ex-agitator leaders and use the funds to marginally increase the monthly stipends given to low-level beneficiaries. It should also work with banks and leaders to end the ‘kangaroo’ arrangements by which leaders continue to deduct a portion of their followers’ monthly stipends.
- **Discourage the use of ex-agitators as political thugs.** PAP officials, as well as federal, state and local politicians, must work toward a de-escalation of violence and criminal activity in the region by refraining from using ex-agitators as political thugs. Stipend payments or contract awards should not be predicated on ex-agitators’ partisan loyalties.
- **Create exit strategies for beneficiaries.** PAP beneficiaries should be provided with a realistic pathway away from dependence on their monthly stipend. For example, beneficiaries should be able to claim seed money for a start-up business—equivalent, perhaps, to multiple years’ worth of stipends—in exchange for deregistering from the PAP. Awarding such ‘off-ramp grants’ could be based on beneficiaries developing a business plan, or achieving certain qualifications.
- **Seek support from international development partners.** The PAP is one of the only DDR programmes worldwide that was designed and implemented by the national government without external support. But now is the time to seek support from international development partners in Nigeria, who can support the design and delivery of alternative sustainable livelihood programmes for beneficiaries as they transition to a life post-PAP.



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Issue brief



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Nigeria's Presidential Amnesty Programme: In whose interests?

Summary

The mismanagement of government resources allocated to the Presidential Amnesty Programme (PAP) for ex-agitators has created complex and stubborn financial dependencies. This complicates efforts to transition the PAP to an end. These dependencies stretch beyond legitimate participants, to those vying for an illegitimate share of the allocated resources. This includes those administering the PAP and political elites. This briefing summarises a research report, which is based on interviews with those in the system. It explores the importance of untangling and detaching these critical financial and political dependencies as part of exit strategy proposals.

Key messages

- The PAP is not a sustainable solution for stabilisation and development in the Niger Delta, nor do the financial benefits extend to large parts of the population. Instead, it has created complex and stubborn financial and political dependencies, which complicate efforts to end it.
- Since 2009, the PAP has helped sustain thousands of ex-agitators with monthly stipends, but generally failed to ensure reintegration into employment or society. In parallel, some leaders among agitators and political elites have developed ways to steer the PAP in their favour, and embezzled significant funds allocated to activities.
- These actors have grown heavily dependent on the PAP and, to some extent, on each other to extend it. This helps explain why the five-year programme has lasted more than ten years, shows no signs of ending, and is fiercely defended.
- The emergent elite-run 'constellations of patronage' impact wider power dynamics, by making close associates more powerful, but more dependent, on the PAP and the Presidency.
- Any successful exit strategy from the PAP will need a well-informed political approach which understands the interest of all actors, on top of a well-designed plan for winding down activities.