

# Jobs for Ex-Militants in the Niger Delta – Why Isn't the Private Sector Involved?

At the end of violent conflict, the most difficult task for most countries is the reintegration of former combatants into civilian life and employment. Failure to do this can leave the door open for further protests and social disorder. In 2009, after a five-year armed rebellion by militants against the government and the oil industry in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria, the presidency implemented the Post-Amnesty Programme (PAP). Unfortunately, the PAP's design failed to take the labour needs of the private sector into account, leaving many ex-combatants without the right skills to find employment and reliant on a monthly stipend from the government. The Nigerian government needs a deeper understanding of the private sector to mitigate the risk of rising unemployment and a breakdown of law and order in the Niger Delta.

## Coming out of conflict to find employment

During the conflict, armed militants claimed to represent the interests of marginalised communities in the Niger Delta region who were not benefitting from revenues generated from oil production in their communities. The militants attacked oil industry infrastructure, significantly cutting Nigeria's oil output and reducing the country's earnings from crude oil export.

In 2009, the Nigerian government initiated a peace process with armed militants in the Niger Delta. Under its terms, militants who freely handed over their weapons and demobilised would not be prosecuted and would receive benefits. These benefits included: a formal education in Nigeria or abroad, small loans to start businesses, as well as a monthly allowance of approximately US\$400 (significantly higher than Nigeria's minimum wage of US\$60 per month).

Leaders of militant groups were also offered large and highly profitable contracts in the oil industry and other sectors of the economy. In the wake of the amnesty programme, ex-militant leaders gained political power and influence in the cities to which they returned.

## Training for the wrong sector

As part of this process the government implemented the PAP to train ex-militants in educational and vocational skills. The objective was

to enable them to find employment in the private sector that would provide a sustainable means of livelihood. Yet, evidence shows that most ex-militants who have participated in the PAP have been unable to find work in the Niger Delta.

A significant number of participants wanted training to find work in the oil sector due to the high wages and the prestige associated with working in the sector. However, the oil sector does not provide a significant number of jobs within the private sector. Despite this, most of the skills taught by the PAP were related to the oil industry. The education and training were largely defined by the aspirations of ex-militants themselves, not by the needs and labour demands of the private sector, who would be providing employment. This reduced the ability of the PAP to facilitate employment, especially in areas other than the oil sector, as ex-militants were not trained for areas that could provide employment.

## A disincentivising stipend

Aside from the programme failing to understand the labour needs of the private sector, the monthly stipend provided to PAP participants has also served as a disincentive to find employment. The stipend paid is significantly higher than the minimum wage in Nigeria, and participants are unlikely to find employment in the private sector that will have similar financial reward. The PAP

failed to take into account the wages and incomes of the private sector in designing its own incentives for the programme.

Ex-combatants have become dependent on the monthly stipend of US\$400 and are not encouraged to seek out opportunities in the private sector, even where they exist. The PAP has therefore largely become a disguised subsidy programme for unemployed ex-militants in the Niger Delta.

### Lack of an exit strategy

Despite the fact that the PAP was originally designed to last for five years (2010–15), the Nigerian government has repeatedly postponed its termination. This postponement has mainly occurred

because of threats from ex-militants who have been unable to find work even after participating in the PAP. The lack of an exit strategy shows that even though the PAP was designed to facilitate employment for ex-militants, the government clearly did not have a considered plan on how this process would work in reality.

As the PAP continues, the Nigerian government has to continue to pay ex-militants their monthly stipends to ensure that they do not create new security threats for the oil industry in the Niger Delta. This has become an unending subsidy programme for unemployed and underemployed youth, and is an open-ended burden on public finances in the Niger Delta.

## Policy recommendations

### 1. Conduct a baseline survey on needs of the private sector

The Nigerian government should conduct a baseline survey of the needs of private sector employers in the non-oil and gas sectors to inform and shape the future of the PAP. Government needs to find out the types of skills required by these sectors and their potential to create job vacancies and absorb workers, as well as the wage rates offered by employers in the region. This baseline survey should also include an understanding of how the government can increase the capacity of the private sector to create jobs.

### 2. Develop a realistic exit plan for the PAP

An exit plan for the PAP should focus on using monthly stipends to place ex-militants in private sector enterprises so that they can acquire work ethics and skills to enable them to find work for themselves. This plan should have a clear timeline, and the stipends should be phased out at the end of the timeline.

### 3. Post-conflict countries should learn lessons from the PAP and other reintegration programmes

The PAP has important lessons for employment programmes for ex-militants in other post-conflict countries. Failure to take the private sector into account, especially sectors within it that have a demand for labour, limits the impact of employment programmes for ex-combatants. It is also important and urgent for international agencies, non-governmental organisations, and governments to share lessons and experiences to shape post-conflict employment programmes, and ensure that ex-militants are supported to find sustainable employment without long-term dependency on the state.

## Further reading

Ebiede, T.M. (2018, forthcoming) 'Assessing the Effectiveness of Employment Programmes for Ex-Combatants: A Case Study of Nigeria's Post-Amnesty Programme (PAP)', *IDS Bulletin* 49.5

Ebiede, T.M. (2017) 'Employing Ex-Combatants in Fragile and Conflict-Affected Countries', *GREAT Insights Magazine* 6.1: 11–13

Enria, L. (2018) *The Politics of Work in a Post-Conflict State: Youth, Labour & Violence in Sierra Leone*, Rochester NY: Boydell and Brewer

Mac Sweeney, N. (2009) *Private Sector Development in Post-Conflict Countries: A Review of Current Literature and Practice*, Cambridge: The Donor Committee for Enterprise Development

Dekker, M. and Hollander, S. (2017) *Boosting Youth Employment in Africa: What Works and Why?* The Hague, the Netherlands: INCLUDE Secretariat

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