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YOUTH EMPLOYMENT AND THE PRIVATE SECTOR IN AFRICA

Editors **Seife Ayele,**
Dominic Glover and
Marjoke Oosterom



Notes on Contributors	iii
Clementina Oluwafunke Ajayi In Memoriam	vii
Introduction: Youth Employment and the Private Sector in Africa Seife Ayele, Marjoke Oosterom and Dominic Glover	1
Ethiopia's Agricultural Transformation: Agribusiness' Contribution to Reducing Youth Unemployment Tesfamicheal Wossen and Seife Ayele	15
Labour Casualisation and Youth Employment in Ghana's Formal Private Sector Gertrude Dzifa Torvikey	31
Uganda's National Youth Policy and Job Creation for Youth Rita Makumbi	45
Skills Gaps and Mismatches: Private Sector Expectations of Engineering Graduates in Ethiopia Jerusalem Yibeltal Yizengaw	55
Fostering Agribusiness Entrepreneurship for Kenyan Youth through Practice-Based Education John Muchira	71
Navigating Precarious Livelihoods: Youth in the SME Sector in Zimbabwe Simbarashe Gukurume	89
Assessing the Effectiveness of Employment Programmes for Ex-Combatants: A Case Study of Nigeria's Post Amnesty Programme (PAP) Tarila Marclint Ebiede	105
Glossary	119

Assessing the Effectiveness of Employment Programmes for Ex-Combatants: A Case Study of Nigeria's Post Amnesty Programme (PAP)*

Tarila Marclint Ebiede¹

Abstract Employment of ex-militants is an important part of disarmament, demobilisation, and reintegration (DDR) programmes in societies emerging from armed conflicts. In this article, I examine the potential of Nigeria's Post Amnesty Programme (PAP), a locally designed DDR programme, to contribute to the employment of ex-militants in the oil-rich Niger Delta region. I show that although the programme has focused on training, its design and implementation has not been informed by a clear understanding of the private sector environment where ex-militants are expected to find work in the Niger Delta. I demonstrate empirically how programmes that are designed to address employment of ex-militants can easily fall short of expectations. I suggest that a baseline understanding of the needs of private sector employers is an essential part of youth employment programmes in fragile and conflict-affected societies.

Keywords: youths, ex-militants, jobs, private sector, peace-building.

1 Introduction

Youth employment is one of the most urgent development challenges facing policymakers in sub-Saharan Africa. Youth unemployment in this region is about 11 per cent (ILO 2017), a proportion that seems relatively small when compared to other regions of the world but which, in the context of sub-Saharan Africa's large population, clearly designates a very large number of unemployed youth. Approximately 12 million young people enter into the workforce each year, but only about 3 million jobs are created annually (AfDB 2017). The challenge of youth employment is particularly urgent in societies that have been affected by violent conflicts, where economic development is low, infrastructure is absent, and the private sector, in which youths are expected to seek employment, is weak.

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In societies recovering from violent conflicts, the unemployment problem is particularly prevalent among youths who have been involved in fighting and have become ex-combatants in the post-conflict phase. This is one of the specific problems that reintegration programmes are designed to address (Munive 2014). Reintegration is a process whereby ex-combatants acquire civilian status through sustainable employment and incomes (United Nations 2010). The reintegration process is supposed to be facilitated by vocational skills training, job creation, entrepreneurship support, psychological reorientation, and family support (Berdal 1996). However, the available evidence suggests that reintegration programmes often fail to create sustainable employment for ex-combatants (Blattman and Ralston 2015).

Policymakers in Nigeria face the challenge of generating employment for ex-militants in the country's oil-rich Niger Delta region. In 2009, the Nigerian government implemented a disarmament, demobilisation, and reintegration (DDR) programme for armed groups in the Niger Delta, which is known locally as the Post Amnesty Programme (PAP). The PAP includes programmes designed to support knowledge and skills acquisition, financial empowerment, internships, microcredit, and education to facilitate long-term employment for ex-militants.²

The Nigerian government claims that the PAP has successfully addressed the challenge of youth unemployment among ex-militants in the Niger Delta. However, in this article, I argue that the PAP has largely failed to facilitate the rehabilitation through employment of large numbers of ex-militants in the region. There is a gap between the government's claims and verifiable figures on the employment rates of former militants. For example, the government has claimed that it registered 30,000 ex-militants in the PAP (*Gist Magazine* 2013), yet it has only provided training for 15,459 individuals (PAP 2015). Data on actual levels of employment resulting from the programme are scarce, but the last official figures show that only 2,072 participants in the PAP have found jobs (Omonobi 2014).

I identify three factors that account for this failure: (1) the lack of an assessment of the needs of private sector employers, (2) a flawed incentive structure for PAP participants, and (3) the lack of a politically feasible strategy for winding up the programme. As a result, the PAP has become a disguised subsidy programme for unemployed and underemployed youth in the Niger Delta, representing an open-ended burden on public finances. To improve this outcome, I argue that the PAP requires reform to achieve a better targeting of the skills and capabilities needed by employers, more effective implementation, and a clearly identified route to transition from the PAP into sustainable employment.

The article proceeds as follows. Section 2 provides an overview of the PAP. Section 3 discusses the focus on the private sector as a potential employer of youth in the Niger Delta. Section 4 analyses the implementation of the PAP and explores the available evidence on

Table 1 The disarmament, demobilisation, and reintegration components of the Post Amnesty Programme

Disarmament	Demobilisation	Reintegration
Duration: 6 August–4 October 2009	Duration: 6–12 months	Duration: Up to 5 years
Collection of arms, ammunition and explosives, etc.	Ex-militants report to camp	Knowledge and skills acquisition
Documentation and biometrics	Verification and documentation	Financial empowerment
	Transformational training	Placement programmes
	Peace-building and conflict resolution	Microcredit
	Counselling	Education
	Career guidance	Reconciliation with local community
	Wellness assessment	Conflict resolution framework/ mechanism
	Reintegration classification	Monitoring and evaluation
	Education and vocational placement	Exit of programme
	Graduation and demobilisation	
Disarmament camps	Transformational training centres	Partnering government agencies, NGOs, and private organisations
Media campaign	Rehabilitation camps	Tracking and support framework

Source PAP (2009). First Plan of the Presidential Committee for Amnesty, Abuja.

the employment of ex-militants in the Niger Delta. It explains how a realistic assessment of the needs of the private sector is a missing ingredient within the PAP. This has undermined the programme's principal objective to facilitate youth employment in the Niger Delta. Section 5 summarises the argument and concludes.

2 An overview of the Post Amnesty Programme (PAP)

Protests, agitations, and civil disobedience by youths in oil-producing communities have characterised Nigeria's Niger Delta in the last three decades (Omotola 2009). The underlying driver of these agitations is that communities are not benefiting from the oil extraction that takes place on their land. Beginning in the late 1990s, youths demanding increased development and an end to environmental degradation in the Niger Delta organised mass protests against international oil companies (IOCs) and the Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN). These protests evolved into an armed militant struggle in 2005. Youths belonging to different militant groups focused on sabotaging oil industry infrastructure and critical assets, and kidnapping expatriates working in the oil industry (Ibaba 2011). These attacks led to a significant reduction of crude oil production in Nigeria, from 2.5 million barrels per day in 2005 to about 2 million barrels per day in the first quarter of 2006. Nigeria's oil production did not rise above 2.2 million barrels per day throughout the period of the insurgency.

Another steep decline in production occurred in 2008, and in the third quarter of 2009, production stood at only 1.75 million barrels per day. Industry and government revenues from crude oil sales fell during this period. The government came under pressure to find solutions and bring the armed insurgency to an end (Ukiwo 2016). In May 2007, a new government, led by President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua, opened negotiations with armed groups in the Niger Delta. In May 2009, the President proclaimed an amnesty for all armed groups in the Delta. As part of the peace process, the PAP was designed as a DDR programme for militants who agreed to renounce violence and accept an amnesty (see Table 1).

Disarmament exercises were carried out by the Nigerian military in the major cities of Warri, Yenagoa, and Port Harcourt from the beginning of August to the end of October 2009. At the end of the disarmament exercise, the FGN claimed that it had identified and registered 30,000 participants in the PAP. Many ex-militants signed up for the programme when leaders of militant groups endorsed it. The former militants were accommodated in camps, in a bid to separate them from their former armed groups. Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) were contracted by the FGN to carry out reorientation programmes, which taught ex-militants peaceful methods of conflict resolution, human rights, and the rule of law. Career counselling was provided, in preparation for the reintegration phase. The first phase came to an end in 2010, having prepared the stage for former militants to reintegrate into their communities.

The committee constituted by the to oversee the PAP proposed a reintegration plan that focused on offering bespoke courses of vocational skills acquisition (PAP 2009). It was estimated initially that this plan would cost the Nigerian government US\$360 million. Over time, the cost of the training component of the PAP has increased to more than US\$1 billion. According to a PAP official, this increase resulted from changes in the design of the programme. The initial plan envisaged the provision of bespoke training exercises by the PAP itself, whereas the revised programme provided access to training opportunities, extending beyond nine months' duration, which would lead to international certifications.³

PAP participants were placed in educational institutions and training centres in Europe, North America, Asia, South Africa, and West Africa, as well as private institutions in Nigeria. Vocational training was arranged in areas such as marine technology, heavy duty equipment operations, welding, diving, agriculture, boat building, aviation, fashion design, hotel and catering, cosmetology, and hair dressing (*Gist Magazine* 2013). Academic training focused on undergraduate degrees such as law, political science, business management, mass communication, international relations, public administration, medicine, engineering, applied sciences, building and construction, and information and communications technology (ICT) (*ibid.*).

Youth unemployment in the Niger Delta has often been blamed on a lack of education and skills. Indeed, many youths who took part in armed militancy blamed the lack of employment opportunities as a reason for joining armed groups (Oyefusi 2008). The enhanced provision of educational and vocational training in the PAP was intended to address this problem (Ajibola 2015). In particular, it was expected that these training programmes would enable ex-militants to find work in the private sector (Kuku 2012).

Although the PAP was designed to enable youths participating in the programme to find work in the private sector as a whole, the programme focused heavily on the oil and gas sectors, in particular. According to PAP officials, this emphasis was designed in response to the interest expressed by local youths to engage in the oil and gas industry in the Niger Delta.⁴ As will be shown in the analysis, the majority of ex-militants selected training opportunities that could enable them to seek employment in the oil industry. However, while private companies within the oil industry are the dominant private sector interests in the Niger Delta, the extent to which they are able to provide employment for youths remains contested.

3 The private sector and youth employment in the Niger Delta

Youth unemployment is a general challenge across Nigeria (Ismail 2016). Recent data indicate that about one third of Nigerian youths have been unable to find gainful employment (NBS 2018). The issue cuts across the country's 36 states, including the oil-rich Niger Delta. Youth unemployment rates in Rivers State (41.82 per cent) and Akwa Ibom State (36.58 per cent) are significantly above the national average, while the state of Bayelsa is slightly below the national average at 30.36 per cent. The data on youth unemployment in the Niger Delta are not a surprise as youth employment is generally a challenge in fragile and conflict-affected states (FCAS). There is a general concern that high levels of youth unemployment contribute to criminality or mobilisation for armed violence (Izzi 2013); however, there is no confirmed relationship between unemployment and crime in the long term (Janko and Popli 2015). Nonetheless, tackling youth unemployment and underemployment are seen as important objectives for building peace and stability in FCAS (Enria 2014).

The Niger Delta is a fragile and conflict-affected region. Fragility and violence in the Delta have been driven largely by the exploration and extraction of crude oil resources, which are carried out as a joint venture between the Nigerian government and private sector operators. The Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) represents government interests in the oil sector, alongside a number of international and national oil companies which play a significant role, especially in the exploration and extraction of crude oil, as well as the construction and operation of oil production facilities. However, while the private sector is a major player in the oil sector in the Delta, the region's dependence on oil and gas has not helped private sector growth in other areas of the economy. The Niger Delta is an example

of the resource curse thesis, which argues that an abundance of natural resources stifles economic growth and development, and can lead to violent conflict. Scholars that have theorised on the resource curse thesis have drawn empirical evidence from sub-Saharan African countries such as Nigeria, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Zimbabwe, and Angola (Badeeb, Lean and Clark 2017).

The negative impact of natural resource conflicts on private sector growth in FCAS has significant implications for job creation and youth employment. The private sector faces particular challenges in FCAS, which are typically characterised by a weak regulatory and judicial environment, hard-to-enforce property rights, a lack of policy and fiscal frameworks, criminality and corruption, a lack of basic infrastructure and services such as electricity, high business risks, and security threats, which make it challenging for private enterprises to thrive (Eriksson Baaz, Olsson and Verweijen 2018; Mac Sweeney 2009; Peschka, Emery and Martin 2011). According to Peschka *et al.*:

The impact of conflict, violence, and prolonged fragility is particularly pervasive on the legitimate formal private sector. Foreign and local investors alike flee the country, taking with them longer-term capital, skills, jobs, and technology and further undermining local private sector support institutions (such as chambers of commerce)... The businesspeople who do stay face difficulty in accessing finance, are often harassed or co-opted by increasingly corrupt government and military and/or by militias, and may find it harder to import necessary goods or export their products (2011: 15).

Unsurprisingly, FCAS occupy the bottom rungs of the World Bank's Ease of Doing Business Index (World Bank 2018: 4). In FCAS, political logics often overtake the production logics that shape private sector activity in more stable societies (Castel-Branco, Cramer and Hailu 2001). Private actors may even be involved in political and economic relationships and practices that help to sustain conflict, violence, and instability (Oetzel, Getz and Ladek 2007). They may profit directly from involvement in war as providers of services and equipment to warring parties, or they may be involved in the extraction of natural resources, which is often at the heart of such conflicts.

Some analysts have identified these negative dynamics in relation to the involvement of businesses in the Niger Delta (Frynas 2001). The armed militancy that characterised the Niger Delta region was directly linked to contestation over the oil industry's activities. Key actors in this conflict were armed militants, local politicians, the FGN, and IOCs operating in the Delta. The corporate social responsibility (CSR) practices of IOCs fuelled conflicts and empowered armed militants in some communities (Ebiede 2017). IOCs reformed their CSR practices to address some of these shortcomings (Ite 2007). However, recent analysis suggests that contestation over oil resources and the activities of the oil industry continue to fuel conflict in the Niger Delta (Bendana *et al.* 2018).

Revenues of regional government in the Niger Delta are derived almost exclusively from the oil sector. The government's focus on oil revenues has also limited the development of appropriate policies that can facilitate private sector growth. Oil revenues have been lost to corruption within government. Even where government funds infrastructure development, there is no evidence to suggest that such investment leads to private sector growth in the region. There is also no evidence that such investments form part of an overarching strategy to foster the emergence of private sector-led economic development in the region.

IOCs dominate the oil and gas industry in the Niger Delta. Although the industry is profitable, hydrocarbon extraction and the associated value chains do not generate many jobs for young people. In 2005, it was estimated that the oil and gas industry accounts for only about 65,000 direct and 250,000 indirect jobs in Nigeria as a whole (Fajana 2005). In 2017, the National Bureau of Statistics, Nigeria (NBS) estimated that the oil industry and extractive sector in the country employ only about 1 per cent of the entire labour force of Nigeria. This illustrates that the oil industry is not the type of private sector activity that can generate wide-scale employment in the Niger Delta.

According to the NBS, the key employers of labour in Nigeria and the Niger Delta are mainly small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in the agricultural, hotel, tourism and entertainment, food and catering, education, and transport sectors. While these sectors are flourishing, they are not fully developed. Formal private sector service delivery in the Niger Delta remains weak and is largely confined to the urban areas. The lack of infrastructure in rural areas of the Niger Delta makes it difficult for private sector actors to thrive. Even in urban areas, companies involved in manufacturing, hospitality and tourism, food, and catering lack basic and fundamental infrastructures, such as electricity supply.

The exploration and production of crude oil has polluted the environment, reducing the productivity of agricultural activities in the region (Opukri and Ihaba 2008). Yet, agriculture is the single largest employer of labour in the Delta (Nextier Advisory and SDN 2016). The absence of a thriving non-oil private sector is said to limit the 'creation of markets, and access to other factors of economic progress', which are essential to the provision of jobs for youths in the Niger Delta (*ibid.*: 4).

Despite these challenges, scholars and policymakers remain adamant that the private sector has an important role to play in stabilising FCAS, through the creation of jobs and the provision of financial and other resources to support local entrepreneurs (Bray 2009; Peschka *et al.* 2011). It is argued that development actors, including aid donors and the state, can build an effective market system with space for private sector players to operate, as part of their efforts to strengthen the economic systems of FCAS (Batley and Mcloughlin 2010). These strategies are supposed to enhance job creation in the private sector, as a contribution to the stabilisation of FCAS.

Table 2 Reintegration training provided to ex-militants under the Post Amnesty Programme

Area of specialisation	Number trained
Education:	
• Nigerian universities	1,620
• Foreign universities	1,454
Welding and fabrication	5,194
Entrepreneurship	2,798
Maritime	1,086
Crane and heavy duty	1,030
Pipefitting	250
Boat building	299
Agriculture	239
Automobile	207
Electrical installation	89
Aviation:	
Engineers	138
• Pilot (fixed wing)	71
• Helicopter	21
• Instructors	5
Diving	230
Drilling	197
Health, safety and environment	104
Industry automation	86
Entertainment	60
Instrumentation	46
Total	15,224

Source Office of the Special Adviser to the President on the Niger Delta, October 2015 (unpublished).

The private sector remains the largest employer of labour in the Niger Delta. Entrepreneurial individuals still seek to engage in private business activities in various sectors of the economy. The training component of the PAP makes clear that the programme was designed to steer youths towards employment in the private sector, yet this aspiration has not been achieved. It is therefore important to examine why the PAP has not been able to achieve this objective.

4 The Post Amnesty Programme and youth employment in the Niger Delta

Institutions of the Nigerian government in the Niger Delta have implemented various programmes to address the youth employment challenge, including several skills acquisition and training programmes led by the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) and the Ministry of Niger Delta Affairs (MNDA). In addition to these are programmes implemented by IOCs and the Nigerian Local Content Management Board (NLCMB). These programmes are meant for all youths in the Niger Delta. However, the PAP was specifically designed to address the challenge of employment among youths who have been involved in armed militancy in the Niger Delta.

The design of the PAP reflected arguments that unemployment was one of the reasons for the mobilisation of youths into militant groups (Oluwaniyi 2010). Former militants were expected to undertake both vocational and educational training. The vocational training component focused on agriculture, agro-allied processing, transportation, cold-room management, ICT, maritime services, building and construction professionals, oil and gas, and environment and sanitation. By 2015, it was estimated that 15,459 out of 30,000 registered ex-militants had undergone various PAP-sponsored training programmes, both in Nigeria and overseas (see Table 2).

With a few exceptions, such as entrepreneurship and entertainment, most of the types of training offered were aimed at skills needed within the oil industry, including welding and fabrication (5,194), entrepreneurship (2,798), maritime (1,086), and crane and heavy duty machinery operation (1,030). As well as responding to the participants' own demands, the array of training opportunities provided was informed by government officials' assumption that oil companies would provide jobs for ex-militants.⁵ However, the oil industry is not a major employer of labour within the private sector in the Niger Delta. Interviews with PAP officials revealed that the programme's training component was not informed by a baseline study of employment opportunities actually available within the private sector in the Niger Delta. As a result, the focus on the oil industry did not capture the economic realities of the employment situation in the region. A study by the Foundation for Partnership Initiatives in the Niger Delta (PIND), an NGO focused on community development, made the following assertions:

The strong presence of the oil industry in the Delta has resulted in the relative shrinkage of other local industries, such as manufacturing. That is, the lure of high salaries perceived to be associated with oil sector jobs, makes all other forms of employment less desirable. Unstable markets and wide-scale importation have likewise worked to stifle other economic sectors, including agriculture, aquaculture and construction. With poor linkages between the market and vocational training (i.e. matching demand for labor with appropriately trained supply of labor) the result is a large, youthful population that is unable to find decent work (PIND 2011: 16).

The PIND report also noted that 'in terms of skills and competencies, youth tend to fall below the required expectations of employers' (*ibid.*: 19). This situation reflects wider debates in the youth employment literature about balancing demand and supply factors (Darvas and Palmer 2014). Employers seek human capital that is capable of increasing their business output. However, while labour is abundant in societies with high unemployment, the specific skills needed by thriving businesses are often scarce. This mismatch between labour demand and supply is a key factor underlying the youth employment challenge in FCAS. The gap persists in programmes such as the PAP, which are designed to help youths into paid work.

The PAP incentive structure also failed to take into account the realities of the local job market. To support the livelihoods of ex-militants while they underwent training and awaited gainful employment, the PAP paid a monthly stipend worth about US\$400 to participants in the programme, from the moment they enrolled and for an indefinite period. To the young former militants, this financial incentive was one of the key attractions of the PAP.⁶ However, the stipend was set at a level higher than the monthly wages available locally to artisans and skilled workers. Currently, the minimum wage in Nigeria is only US\$60 per month. Although formal employment in private sector jobs is likely to pay more than the minimum wage, the types of jobs for which ex-militants have been trained are unlikely to attract monthly salaries that can compete with the monthly stipends paid by the PAP. As a result, the stipend has tended to act as a disincentive rather than an incentive to seek employment. This was recognised by a PAP official, who told me 'skilled labour can hardly really pay that much... it makes no sense to accept a job that will pay less than the monthly stipend. This is a disincentive for most of them to take up regular employment.'⁷

The PAP was supposed to end after five years, in December 2015, but it has continued to receive government funding and support. In 2016, President Buhari extended the programme to December 2017 (*Daily Post* 2016). The FGN later announced that it would provide up to US\$86 million in additional funds to extend the PAP throughout 2018 (*THISDAY* 2017). These extensions were prompted by protests by ex-militants, who claimed that they had not been successfully reintegrated. Their protests intensified when the government briefly suspended payments of monthly stipends in 2016 (*Daily Post* 2016). Many former militants continue to depend on the PAP for their livelihood, and while this situation continues there is no indication that it will be politically possible for the Nigerian government to terminate the PAP without jeopardising the peace and rehabilitation process.

5 Conclusion

The lack of an exit plan for the PAP and the failure to achieve the objective of facilitating employment for ex-militants has created a conundrum for the FGN. I argue that the lack of an exit strategy has occurred largely because the programme failed to give adequate

attention to the needs of private sector employers in the non-oil and gas sector, both qualitatively (the types of skills required) and quantitatively (the potential to create job vacancies and absorb workers), or to the prevailing wage rates offered by private sector employers in the region. To a large extent, the PAP has become a disguised subsidy programme for unemployed and underemployed youth in the Niger Delta. This flaw in the programme's detailed design and implementation has made it difficult to achieve a sustainable benefit. Instead, both ex-militants and successive governments have used the PAP as leverage in political bargaining in the Niger Delta.

The article has also shown that there is a mismatch between the needs of the private sector and the ambitions of young people in the Niger Delta. Youths in the region aspire to be engaged in the oil industry, but that sector is unable to meet the demand for jobs in the region. This analysis suggests that an overarching strategy is urgently needed to diversify economic development in the Niger Delta, creating a space for other kinds of private enterprise besides the oil and gas industry, and an expansion of job opportunities. In the meantime, there is a need for programmes that seek to facilitate a transition into employment to be informed by robust evidence of the economic and business realities on the ground. It is not enough for the government to set out to train young people, welcome though such opportunities may be. These trainings must be based on a clear needs assessment of private sector employers as well as the aspirations of young people.

Despite the challenges that have been identified with Nigeria's PAP, the need for these types of programmes remain urgent. However, the design and implementation of such programmes needs to be innovative and grounded in empirical understanding of the context of societies that have experienced armed conflicts. Programmes that are not based on this detailed analysis cannot guarantee employment for youths, including those who have experienced armed conflict. While it remains important to mobilise the private sector as a generator of employment for youths in FCAS, it is important to clarify how this mechanism would work in practice. Any programme that seeks to stimulate youth employment, in which the private sector will be a key player, should focus on both the demand and supply sides of the labour relationship between business employers and youths seeking employment.

Notes

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- 1 Centre for Research on Peace and Development, KU Leuven, Belgium.
- 2 www.osapnd.gov.ng/ndap.
- 3 Interview with DDR official, 13 February 2014, Abuja, Nigeria.
- 4 Interview with DDR official. In addition, the PAP established an Oil and Gas Committee to facilitate the employment of ex-militants in the oil industry.

- 5 Interview with DDR official, 13 February 2014.
- 6 Interview with ex-militant, 5 November 2014.
- 7 *ibid.*

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