



Population Policy and National Development in the 21st Century: The Nigerian Perspective

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ABSTRACT

Following the concern by multi-lateral organizations such as the World Bank and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) about the problems of high population growth and food supply especially in the developing countries, population policy has become an integral part of their overall development policies as we enter the 21st century. This paper examines Nigeria's population policy and Programmes and the implications of their practical application to achieve national development in the 21st century, considering the events in the country since 1999. The paper argues that looking at the population policies of China, India and Nigeria, and considering the trend of events in the country since the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP)-led government in 1999, the Nigerian population policy can be said to be neither anti-natalistic nor pro-natalistic but genocidal and anti-Niger Deltans, as its implementation is guided by political selfish interests. It concludes that the Nigerian national population policy as is currently implemented can therefore not enhance the attainment or achievement of national development in the 21st century. It suggests thuggery-free elections as the way forward.

INTRODUCTION

The relationship between population and development has been acknowledged by economists since Smithian era. But while Adam Smith (1776) expressed an optimistic view about the relationship between population growth and development, Malthus (1798) was pessimistic about it. However, since the Malthusian essay on population, much have been said and written about the potential of high population growth rate in restraining development. For instance, Rice (2005) asserts that in recent times, the question has always been asked, how can Africa progress and develop when its population is growing faster than its economies. It is in this context that Ojo (1997) observes that the serious concern over the problem of high population growth on food supply in the developing countries has become central to the development of strategies being encouraged by multi-lateral

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organizations such as the World Bank and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

But behind these strategies are population policies which are believed to have the potentials to reduce the pressure of population on development and the attendant improvement of the welfare of the people. It is in this context that Dobson (1975) asserts that since the primary goal of development is to increase human welfare and population policy forms a vital means of achieving this goal, many countries tend to integrate population policies with their overall development policies. The pertinent question is; what is Nigeria as a nation doing, in this direction, in her journey to achieving national development in the 21st century?

This article examines Nigeria's population policy and programmes and the implications of their practical application to achieve national development in the 21st century, considering the events in the country since 1999. The article is divided into seven sections. Section two takes care of conceptual issues, while section three looks at the interrelatedness of population policy and national development. Section four examines population policies in other countries while section five takes care of Nigeria's population policy and programmes. Section six examines the implications of the Nigerian population policy and programmes for national development while section seven concludes the study.

Conceptual Issues

It is important to conceptualize the key terms such as population policy and national development as this will enhance our comprehension of the issues involved.

Population Policy

Although the United Nations (1973) has argued that there is no generally accepted definition of population policy, Lucas, et al (1980) have been able to provide one for our purpose. According to them population policy refers to all deliberate government actions (be they laws, regulations or administrative programmes) intended to influence population growth, size, distribution and composition. Thus population policies include migration policy, for instance policy on rural-urban migration, fertility policy etc.

A country's population policies may be direct or indirect; explicit or implicit; and anti-natalistic or pro-natalistic in nature. Whatever the nature, the aim of these actions according to the United Nations (1973) is to facilitate the achievement of government's population goals.

National development

For ease of our comprehension of the concept of national development, it is important to throw some light on development itself. It is a commonly held

view that development is a complex concept with a plethora of interpretations. For instance, its meaning has progressed from its narrow conception in terms of a rise in per capita income in the 1950s and 1960s to a broader one. In fact, today, development is defined qualitatively as a process of improvements in the general welfare of the entire society usually manifested in desirable changes in the various aspects of the life of the society such as;

(i) a reduction in the level of unemployment; (ii) a reduction in the extent of personal and regional inequalities; (iii) a reduction in absolute poverty; (iv) a rise in real output of goods and services and improvement in techniques of production; (v) improvement in literacy, health services, housing and government services; (vi) improvement in the level of social and political consciousness of the people; (vii) greater ability to draw on local resources, both human and material, to meet local needs; and (viii) a reduction in pollution and/or environmental degradation (Akpakpan, 1987 and Wilson, 2002).

It is in this context that Okowa (1997) defines development as “the process whereby a society changes in all its ramifications in a direction that is beneficial to all her citizen or at least to a majority of them”. Consequently, he defines national development as “the process whereby a given nation moves in its total setting in a direction beneficial materially and otherwise to all its people”. This implies that the whole of the people or at the least, a majority must be involved in the above process or motion, and hence the need for national objectives. Thus, in the case of Nigeria, national development has been defined in terms of five principal national objectives which according to Ndiomu (1992) have remained unchanged from 1970 to the present time, namely:

- (i) A United, strong and self reliant economy;
- (ii) A great and dynamic economy;
- (iii) A just and egalitarian society;
- (iv) A land of bright and full opportunities; and
- (v) A free and democratic society.

The Interrelatedness of Population Policy and National Development

Although the link between population and development has been acknowledge since the Smithian and Malthusian era, the current worldwide interest in and debate about population growth and human welfare is traceable to the first World Population Conference held in Bucharest in Romania, in August 1974. Since them, rapid population growth has been said to have serious potential consequences for the wellbeing of mankind throughout the world. It is in this light that Todaro (1977) posits that:

If development entails the improvement in people’s levels of living-their incomes, health, education and general wellbeing, and if it also encompasses their self-esteem,

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respect, dignity and freedom to choose, then the really important question about population growth is: How does the contemporary population situation in many Third World Countries contribute to or detract from their chances of realizing the goals of development not only for the current generation but also for future generations?.

Indeed, rapid population increase has been said to have negative impact on development through its adverse effects on: (i) The quantity and quality of social services like housing, transport, sanitation and social security (ii) Employment (iii) Food supply (iv) Coverage and quality of health and educational facilities; and (v) The standard of living of the people (Todaro, 1977; Jhingan; and Ojo, 1997).

It is in this context too that Uzuegbunam (2005) posits in the case of Nigeria that;

Nigeria will double in size in 24 years unless the present high rate of population growth is controlled. This means that by the year 2025 there will be an additional 118 million people in the population than in 2001. The country will therefore have to double its infrastructure for food production, health services, education, water supply, housing, energy and other services in the next 24 years even to sustain the present day low standard of living.

Consequently, Berelson (1974) has said that the question of population should be framed not simply in terms of numbers or densities or rate, or movements, but with full consideration of:

The qualities of human life; prosperity in place of poverty; education in place of ignorance and death; environmental beauty in place of deterioration; full opportunities for the next generations of children in place of current limitations. Population trends, if favourable, open new options and enlarge his choices. Thus, population policy is not an end, but only a means-a means to a better life. That is what the concern about population is about or ought to be.

Thus, Population Policy is necessary as such policies help to reduce the pressure of population on development and the attendant improvement in the welfare of the people. In the specific case of Nigeria, the national population policy was launched because of a number of factors such as the very high rate of natural increase, the juvenile dependency ratio, and the rapid and increasing migration of people into the urban areas (Udo, 1993).

Population Policies in Other Countries

It is a commonly held view that most often, population policies in developing countries are anti-natalistic while those in the developed countries are pro-natalistic. Nigeria is no doubt, a developing country. Hence our concern here is to examine population policies in at least two developing countries-China and India, in order to see the variations in population policies among developing countries as we enter the 21st century. The choice of China and India in Asia is informed by the fact that Asia is the next fast growing continent population-wise after Africa, and the two are the most populous countries in Asia just as Nigeria is, in Africa. So let us take them in turns.

Chinese population policy

China is the most populous country in the world. When China took its first census in 1953, the population stood at 582 million, but by the fifth census in 2000, the population had more than doubled reaching 1.2 billion. The population was put at 1.3 billion (1,321, 000, 000) people in 2007.

Chinese fast-growing population had been a major policy matter for its leaders. Thus, beginning in the mid 1950s, the Chinese government introduced with varying degrees of success, a number of family planning or population control, campaigns and programmes. And in order to alleviate the social, economic and environmental problems arising from the fast-growing population in China, the Chinese government publicly announced the stringent one-child population policy in 1979. The policy officially restricts the number of children that married urban couples can have to one, although it allows exemption for several cases such as rural couples, ethnic minorities and parents who are only children themselves.

Like the previous programmes of the 1960s and 1970s, the “one-child” policy employs a combination of public education, social pressures and in some cases coercion. But to ensure compliance, a sophisticated system rewards those who observe the policy and penalizes those who do not. For instance couples with only one child are given a “one-child certificate” entitling them to such benefits as cash bonuses, longer maternity leave, better child care, and preferential housing assignments. In return, they are required to pledge that they will not have more children. On the other hand couples with more than one-child are required to pay a family planning fine which is collected as a multiple of either the annual disposable income of city dwellers or the annual cash income of peasants as determined each year by the local statistics office. They also have to pay for both the children to go to school and all the family’s health care.

In the rural areas the day-to-day work of family planning is done by cadres of the team and brigade levels who are responsible for women’s affairs and by health workers. The women’s team leader makes regular household visits to keep track of the status of each family under her

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jurisdiction and collects information on which women are using contraceptives, the methods used, and which had become pregnant. She then reports to the brigade women's leader who documents the information and takes it to a monthly meeting of the commune birth-planning committee. The ceiling or quotas have to be adhered to; so in order to satisfy these cut-offs, unmarried young people are persuaded to post-pone marriage, couples without children are advised to wait their turn, women with unauthorized pregnancies are pressured to have abortion, and those who already have children are urged to use contraceptives or undergo sterilization. Couples with more than one child are exhorted to be sterilized.

India's national population policy

India is the second most populous country in the world. India's population was put at 1027.8 million or 1.027 billion people in 2002 and an estimated figure of 1.162 billion in 2010. Population growth in India continued to be high due to a number of factors such as the large size of the population in the reproductive age-group (54 percent), higher fertility due to unmet need for contraception, highly wanted fertility due to the high infant mortality rate, and the fact that over 50 percent of girls marry below the age of 18, the minimum legal age of marriage.

Consequently, the national population policy was put in place in 2000 with the immediate objective of addressing the unmet needs for contraception, health care infrastructure and health personnel, and to provide integrated service delivery for basic reproductive and health care. The medium-term objective was to bring the total fertility rate (TFR) to replacement levels by 2010, through vigorous implementation of inter-sectoral operational strategies. The long-term objective was to achieve a stable population by 2045 at a level consistent with the requirements of sustainable economic growth, social development and environmental protection (Government of India, 2000).

In pursuance of the above objectives, the national socio-demographic goals to be achieved in each case by 2010 were formulated as follows:

- (i) address the unmet needs for basic reproductive and child health services, supplies and infrastructure; (ii) make school education up to age 14 free and compulsory, and reduce dropouts at primary and secondary school levels to below 20 percent for boys and girls; (iii) reduce infant mortality rate to below 30 per 1000 live births; (iv) Reduce maternal mortality rate to below 100 per 100,000 live births; (v) achieve universal immunization of children against all vaccine preventable diseases; (vi) promote delayed marriage for girls, not earlier than age 18 and preferably after 20 years of age; (vii) achieve 80 percent institutional deliveries and 100 percent deliveries by trained persons; (viii) achieve universal access to information/counseling and services for fertility regulation and contraception with a wide basket of choices; (ix) Contain the spread of Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome

(AIDS) and promote greater integration between the management of reproductive tract infection (RTI) and sexually transmitted infections (STI) and the National AIDS Control Organization; (x) prevent and control communicable diseases; (xi) achieve 100 percent registration of births, deaths, marriages and pregnancy; (xii) integrate Indian Systems of Medicine (ISM) in the provision of reproductive and child health services and in reaching out to households; (xiii) Promote vigorously the small family norm to achieve replacement levels of TFR; and (xiv) Bring about convergence in implementation of related social sector programmes so that family welfare becomes a people centred programme.

To ensure compliance on adoption of the small family norm, the government put in place a number of promotional and motivational measures. These measures included the following:

(i) rewarding and honouring some states, e.g Panchayats and Zila Panshads for exemplary performance in universalizing the small family norm, achieving reduction in infant mortality and birth rates and promoting literacy with completion of primary schooling; (ii) award of a cash incentive of RS500 (rupees) at the birth of the girl-child of birth order 1 or 2 by the Department of Women and Child Development, in order to promote survival and care of the girl-child; (iii) continuation of the Maternity Benedict Scheme, run by the Department of Rural Development. Thus, a cash incentive of RS500 is awarded to mothers who have their first child after 19 years of age, for birth of the first or second child only. Disbursement of the cash award was to be linked in the future to compliance with ante-natal check up, institutional delivery by trained birth attendant, registration of birth, and BCG immunization. (iv) establishment of a Family Welfare-linked Insurance Plan, in which couples below the poverty line, who undergo sterilization with not more than two living children would become eligible (along with the children) for health insurance (for hospitalization) not exceeding RS5000, and a personal accident insurance cover for the spouse undergoing sterilization; (v) reward for couples below the poverty line who marry after the legal age of marriage, register the marriage, have their first child after the mother reaches the age of 21, and accept a terminal method after the birth of the second child; (vi) setting up of a revolving fund for income-generating activities by village level self-help groups who provide community-level health care services; (vii) opening of crèches and child care centres in rural areas and urban slums which will facilitate and promote participation of women in paid employment; (viii) making accessible at diverse delivery points, a wider and affordable choice of contraceptives with counseling services to enable acceptors to exercise voluntary and informed consent; (ix) strengthening and expanding facilities for safe abortion; (x) making products and services affordable through innovative social marketing scheme; (xi) providing soft loans and encouraging local entrepreneurs at village levels to run ambulance services to supplement the existing arrangements for referral transportation; (xii) encouraging increased vocational training scheme for

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girls to enhance self-employment; (xiii) strict Enforcement of Child Marriage Restraint Act of 1971 and the Pre-natal Diagnostic Technique Act of 1994; (xiv) increase in soft loans to ensure mobility of the ANMs; and (xv) finally, the 42nd constitutional amendment that froze the number of representatives in the Lok Sabha on the basis of population of the 1971 census levels which was extended to 2001 and to be extended to 2026, served as an incentive for states to fearlessly pursue the agenda for population stabilization (Government of India, 2000).

Nigeria's National Population Policy and Programmes

It was not until February 4, 1988 that the Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN) adopted a national policy on population for development, in response to the pattern of population growth rate and its adverse effect on national development (NPC and ORC Macro, 2004). Thus, the national policy on population was put in place with the main objective of reducing population growth rate through voluntary fertility regulation. The policy encouraged voluntary regulation of the number of children which a woman should have to four, with the year 2000 set as the target year by which 80 percent of the women should attain the limit (Ojo, 1997). However, following the emerging issues highlighted by the 1991 national population census, the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development, the 1999 AIDS/HIV Summit in Abuja, and other fora, the national policy on population was revised on January 4, 2004, by the Olusegun Obasanjo Administration.

The new policy purported to recognize the fact that population factors, social and economic development and environmental issues were irrevocably entwined and are all critical to the achievement of sustainable development in Nigeria (NPC and ORC Macro, 2004). The overall goal of the 2004 national policy on population for sustainable development was the improvement of the quality of life and the standards of living of the people of Nigeria. Consequently on paper, the specific goals were the following:

(i) achievement of sustained economic growth, poverty eradication, protection and preservation of the environment and provision of quality social services; (ii) achievement of a balance between the rate of population growth, available resources and the social and economic development of the country; (iii) progress towards a complete demographic transition to reasonable birth rates and low death rates; (iv) improvement in the reproductive health of all Nigerians at every stage of the life cycle; (v) acceleration of a strong and immediate response to curb the spread of HIV/AIDS and other related infectious disease; (vi) Progress in achieving balanced and integrated urban and rural development;

To achieve these goals the 2004 population policy put on paper the following objectives: (i) increase understanding and awareness of the

interrelationships between population factors, social and economic development and their mutual importance to the long-term sustainable development; (ii) expand access and coverage and improve the quality of reproductive and sexual health care services; (iii) strengthen and expand a comprehensive family planning and fertility management programmes that ensures that all couples/individuals who want them have uninterrupted access to a reasonable range of contraceptive methods at affordable prices and is also adequately responsive to the needs of the infertile and sub fertile couples; (iv) strengthen and improve safe motherhood programmes to reduce maternal mortality and morbidity and enhance the health of women; (v) reduce infant and child mortality and improve the health and nutritional status of Nigerian children through expanded access to high-quality promotive, preventive and curative health care services; (vi) promote Behaviour Change Communication (BCC) programmes to increase reproductive and sexual health knowledge, awareness, and behavioural change among Nigerians; (vii) empower women to participate actively and fully in all aspects of Nigeria's development and effectively address gender issues; (viii) enhance the involvement of men in reproductive health programme and health care (ix) increase the integration of adolescents and young people in development efforts and effectively address their reproductive health and related needs; (x) increase and intensify coverage of population and family life education programmes; (xi) accelerate the integration of reproductive health and family planning concerns into sectoral programme and activities; (xii) use effective advocacy to promote and accelerate attitudinal change towards population and reproductive health issues among public and private sector leaders (xiii) reduce and eventually eliminate harmful social and cultural practices that adversely affect the reproductive health of the population through promotion of behavioural change and appropriate legislation; (xiv) strengthen the national response to HIV/AIDS to rapidly control the spread of the epidemic and mitigate its social and economic impacts; (xv) encourage the integration of population groups with special needs, including nomads, refugees and displaced persons, the elderly persons with disabilities and remote rural dwellers into the development process; (xvi) accelerate progress towards integrated urban and rural development and balanced population distribution; (xvii) increased enrolment and retention of children, especially girls, in basic education and raise literacy levels among Nigerians; (xviii) accelerate the integration of population factors into development planning at national, state and local government levels; (xix) improve the population, social and economic data base; promote and support population and development research; and help leadership groups recognize the important contribution that planning and data utilization make to the good governance of Nigeria; and (xx) improve systems for monitoring and evaluating the implementation of the population policy and for reviewing the policy at periodic intervals.

The government of Nigeria has on paper, set the goal of 2 percent population growth rate by 2015 or beyond in its national economic policy.

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Consequently, the targets set on paper to guide policy, programme planning, and implementation included the following:

(i) achieve a reduction of the national population growth rate to 2 percent or lower by the year 2015; (ii) achieve a reduction in the total fertility rate of at least 0.6 children every five years; (iii) increase the modern contraceptive prevalence rate by at least 2 percentage points per year; (iv) reduce the infant mortality rate to 35 deaths per 1000 live births by 2015; (v) reduce the child mortality rate to 45 deaths per 1000 live births by 2015; (vi) reduce the maternal mortality rate to 125 deaths per 100,000 live births by 2010 and to 75 per 100,000 live births by 2015; (vii) achieve sustainable universal basic education as soon as possible prior to 2015; (viii) eliminate the gap between men and women in enrolment in secondary, tertiary, vocational and technical education and training by 2015; (ix) eliminate illiteracy by 2020; and (x) achieve a 25 percent reduction in the adult prevalence of HIV every five years.

However, as laudable as the above population policy appears to be, and in consonance with other Third World countries' national population policies, the practical implementation has taken a different dimension, which we called the "Nigerian perspective".

The trend of events in Nigeria since 1999

The April 1999 general election that brought the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) into power, after many years of continuous military rule, was highly rigged. And as if that was not enough the PDP-led government, in order to hold on to power and retain its grip of the oil rich, Niger Delta Region, recruited, trained and armed youths of the region, preparatory to the 2003 general election that earned the name "carry go". During the election the various armed groups were let loose to ensure that PDP was returned to power and control the Niger Delta area, which they co-operatively did, especially in Rivers, Bayelsa and Delta States.

However, immediately after the election, the post-election song changed its tone as the party stalwarts instigated one armed group against the other in their competition to loot the public treasures and share the oil money. Thus, while the party stalwarts were pre-occupied with the looting of the treasuries and sharing the oil money, the various armed groups under different names such as cultists, volunteer forces, vigilantees etc, were busy causing mayhem as they fought themselves and/or ransacked entire communities, thus killing innocent citizens. Infact, the reformer (2008) captured the situation vividly as it stated for Port Harcourt that:

Modestly speaking, for over five years now, no one day passes in Port Harcourt, capital of Rivers State without criminals committing one heinous crime or the other, thus inflicting constant pains, misery and sorrow on innocent citizens and particularly on children. Call it abduction, kidnappings,

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organized armed raids, outright senseless killings, maiming, violent stealing on motor-bikes, and your are correct.

Indeed, the above situate has been the common occurrence in many parts of the Niger Delta Area, particularly Rivers, Bayelsa and Delta States. Okowa (2005) rightly posits in this direction that the contemporary crises of violence, killings and destruction in Nigeria are inevitable given the character of the governing class and the method by which the power to govern was acquired.

Today, the various armed groups have metamorphosed into a common umbrella name, 'militants', with many bases in the creeks of the Niger Delta area namely Rivers, Bayelsa and Delta State, from where they launch their abduction, kidnapping and hostage-taking operations, and the attendant destruction of economic activities apart from loss of lives of innocent citizens. On the other hand the federal government in an effort to curtail the activities of the militants has formed a joint military task force (JTF) comprising the army, navy, air force and police, and drafted them to the Niger Delta area. Here again, the number of innocent lives lost in the cross fires between the JTF and militants are uncountable, apart from the lives of the militants and members of the JTF as John (2008) aptly stated that:

There are reported cases of the JTF violating with impunity the serenity of community life and the fundamental rights of law abiding citizens. Every week scores of innocent people are usually caught in the cross-fires and summarily dispatched to the great beyond.

This is the true situation in the Niger Delta area of Nigeria, and huge resources, both human and material are wasted pretentiously to maintain peace in the area. For instance, the Weekly Star (2009) has it that the federal government has spent a whopping N400 billion on security in the Niger Delta.

So, relating the above situation to the issues before us, that is, the national population policy, it is not out of place to say that the Nigerian national population policy is neither anti-natalistic nor pro-natalistic but rather genocidal and anti-Niger Deltans. It is genocidal and anti-Niger Deltans for two reasons. First, the people who die in the cross fires between the JTF and militants include innocent people, both old and young from the Niger Delta area. And second, the resources that would have gone into implementing the national population policy as contained in the paper are now wasted in killing apart from innocent people, the youths of the area, whom the formulators of the national population policy recruited, trained and armed for their selfish ends.

The Implications Of The Nigerian Population Policy And Programmes For National Development.

The genocidal and anti-Niger Deltans' population policy of the Nigerian nation state raises a number of questions which have grave consequences for

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national development. For instance, is it not absurd to talk of “a united, strong and self-reliant economy”, ala first national objective, in a country where a section of it (The Niger Deltans abroad) is threatening to drag the whole (The PDP-led Federal Government) to the international court of Justice, because of the latter’s acts of genocide and terror against the former, by the latter’s use of JTF to chase its own creation-the militants (Weekly Star, 2009)?.

Is it not equally absurd to talk of “a just and egalitarian society” or “a free and democratic society”, in a country where kidnapping, abduction and hostage taking are common (Reformer, 2008)? And is it not absurd to talk of “a great and dynamic economy” or “land of bright and full opportunities” in an economy where the only means of survival-crude oil production, is at stake, as a result of the activities of militants (The Guardian, 2009).

So, from whichever angle we look at it, the truth remains that the genocidal and anti-Niger Deltans population policy of the Nigerian nation has adverse consequences on national development.

CONCLUSION

In concluding, let us relate the issue of population policy to the attainment of national development in the 21st century. To start with, it can be argued that a relationship exists between population growth and development. Second, the emerging literature shows some positive correlation between population policy and the attainment of national objectives. The import is that a carefully formulated and diligently implemented population policy, whether it is anti-natalistic in nature as in the Third World countries or pro-natalistic, as in the developed countries, is capable of enhancing the attainment of national objectives, while the reverse holds for even well-formulated but poorly implemented one. The Nigerian population policy is neither anti-natalistic nor pro-natalistic but genocidal in nature and anti-Niger Deltans, as its implementation is guided by political selfish interests. Thus, it is safe to conclude that the Nigerian national population policy as currently implemented cannot enhance the attainment of national development in the 21st century.

Conducting elections that are free from the use of thugs by politicians is the way out of this problem, in the long-run. This is in line with the advise by Ndigbara (2009) that politicians should stop buying guns for youth for election purpose, because after the elections they abandon the youth and the guns remain with the boys and they use them for other purposes. The much publicized amnesty deal with the Niger Delta militants by the PDP-led Federal Government, which is intended to shield the sponsors of the militants, is nothing short of a palliative. It will be able to address the problem only if they are not re-engaged in the 2011 elections waiting by the corner, or

elections of politicians suspected and proved to use thugs are cancelled and the politicians banned from participating in politics or even imprisoned, at the individual level, or the party banned from presenting candidates if the party is found to perpetrate the use of thugs in elections. It is our belief that such a stern measure will discourage the use of thugs and the eventual conduct of elections that are free from the use of thugs.

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