NIGER-DELTA CRISIS AND PARTICIPATORY CONFLICT MANAGEMENT APPROACH

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Abstract

Various countries in the world has resolve conflicts of resources, political or cultural values through using participatory conflict management approach that gives rooms for addressing the emerging needs that led to the conflict. Niger Delta Conflicts has its own history and causes since before Nigeria independence in 1960's but the argument cannot be separated from failure of government to fulfil on its mandate that what has brought to the escalation of the conflict for a very long time. The paper has reviewed various relevant works on the subject matter to give the work a focus line for investigation and solving a problem. The paper has a major findings that peoples in the Niger Delta Region was lacking some basic necessities for good living, while elite groups both from traditional institutions and political office holders are highly engage in massive corruption where money means for development of the Region are diverted to personal accounts for only individuals needs not public interest in the area. The paper has a suggestion that to addressed the issue of conflict in Niger Delta,   Institutions both at Federal, State and Local Government, communities leaders and members of Civil Society Groups must keep awake for their responsibility of providing for basic needs for their peoples through using scientific administrative approach indices of identifying the needs and finding an appropriates means of addressing those demands and lastly government at all level must operates open, transparent and accountable to people needs in the Niger Delta Region through purely engaging them on

participatory method of identifying and resolving problems with all-inclusiveness and responsibilities.

Keywords: Conflict, Niger Delta, Good Governance, Elitism and Corruption.

INTRODUCTION

Niger Deltaconflicts had been on existence for over four decades. Beginning from the pre-colonial period, the region has witnessed a series of conflicts, which had their roots, initially in the protest against injustice, and in recent years in the quest for resource control. All efforts to resolve conflict in the region failed until 2009 when amnesty was declared by the Yar'adua/Jonathan administration and some form of uneasy peace prevailed. However, seven years down the line, there is renewed militancy in the region and effort is once again geared towards finding lasting peace. This article assesses the efforts made by the Federal Government of Nigeria to address conflicts in the region from the early 1960s to date. It is based on a literature study and on the author's knowledge of the issues in the Niger Delta. Findings from the work show that the Federal Government's approach to resolving conflict in the region has not been successful because it has not adequately addressed the issues that gave rise to the conflict, and because of its emphasis on the use of force.

Crisis and conflicts are a part of the genetic makeup of societies, as long as there are interactions between social entities, there is bound to be friction. 'Conflict refers to contradictions arising from differences in the interests, ideas, ideologies, orientations and precipitous tendencies of the people concerned. These contradictions are inherent at all levels of social and economic interactions of the human race. It may therefore exist at the individual, group, institutional, regional, national and international levels' (Okoh, R. 2005:92), while Drennan sees crisis as 'extraordinary in kind and/or scope, testing the resilience of a society and exposing the

shortcomings of its leaders and public institutions (Drenan, et al, 2008:3). The mosaic of the crisis is painted with blame; stakeholders dodge responsibilities by blaming theother, the landscape is littered with obvious neglect in most instances and who would bell the cat? The Multinational corporations that operate in the region flaunt records of their involvements in the community through infrastructures, while they heap the bulk of the job on the Nigerian government because they pay their taxes. The government consistently post images of policy portfolio's and mixed details which seemingly have no bearing with the latitude of the common man in the Niger Delta. Of course, we reckon with the complex makeup of the community, the disillusionment, the historical legacy of ethnic rivalry and mistrust, the present day hijack of channels of distribution by few members of the community for personal consumption, the problems with immediate gratification which is common with some sects in the Niger delta and the troubling introduction of criminality as a façade for organized resistance against perceived injustice.

The Niger Delta situation has become the cynosure of grave developmental defects and gross human neglect which reflects in the lack of basic infrastructure like hospitals, roads, schools, electricity, potable water and security. This dearth of amenities is heightened by the activities ofoil prospecting multinational corporations in the region whose operations continue to damage both the ecosystem and climate due to oil spills, dredging, flaring and the laying of pipelines which require the removal of large swaths of forest resources with no alternative plans for renewal and sustainability.

OVERVIEW & CAUSES OF THE CONFLICTS

The Niger Delta region of Nigeria, located in the south-south zone of the country, is the region that produces oil – the lifeline of the Nigerian economy. Since 1956, when oil was discovered in commercial quantity in Oloibiri in present day Bayesa state, Hydrocarbon resources have been the engines for Nigeria's economy, as oil provides 95% of Nigeria's foreign exchange earnings and 80% of the government's budgetary revenues (Davis, 2010:1–2). According to the Nigerian National Petroleum Company, Nigeria's oil production accounts for 8% of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Corporation's (OPEC) total daily production and 3% of the world's volume. However, the discovery of oil, which was expected to improve the lot of the

communities where it is sourced, has become a curse rather than a blessing because of oil exploration activities and its attendant hazards, such as air and water pollution. This has led to the indigenous people demanding compensation as well as control of the oil wealth. This demand has led to a confrontation between activists and Multinational Oil Companies operating in the region as well as the Federal Government. The struggle which started as a peaceful protest metamorphosed into armed conflict after the killing of a renowned activist and playwright in the region, Ken Sara-Wiwa and eight other Ogoni men. The new wave of protests after this has included the abduction of foreign oil workers, bombing of oil installations and destruction of lives and property.

In 2009, the Federal Government interceded with an amnesty programme under former President Musa Yar'adua and his deputy, Goodluck Jonathan. The amnesty, which was proposed to last for five years, required that repentant militants surrendered their arms in return for unconditional national pardon. This exercise witnessed a total of 26 808 militants surrendering their arms and ammunition and being granted amnesty, which involved co-opting or integrating them into the society as well as training them (Ajodo-Adebanjoko, 2016:1). While amnesty lasted, there was some reprieve as militants sheathed their swords. However, there has been recourse to arms in the region in recent times as new militant groups emerged in 2016 with various demands. While the new names that emerged, this time differ from the past ones, there is no doubt that this was old wine in new bottles. The new militants are still insisting on resource control and bombing of oil installations, which is re-immersing the country in conflict once again. The Federal Government in its bid to check this has been returning fire for fire by constituting a military operation code-named operation 'Crocodile Smiles', which the militants and many analysts feel is not the answer to the problem of conflict in the region. This article is an attempt to assess the Federal Government's approach to tackling the new wave of militancy in the region. The study proposes a Collective Non-violent Conflict Management approach involving local and foreign negotiators, an international mediator and the parties to the conflict working together to find a lasting solution to the conflict. The choice of this approach is based on the fact that many of the strategies (violent and non-violent) adopted in the past to resolve conflict in the region have not achieved the purpose.

Conflicts and insecurity in the Niger Delta The Niger Delta region of Nigeria comprises the nine states Abia, Akwa-Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo, Imo, Ondo and Rivers. About 31 million people live in the region which is renowned as one of the World's ten most important wetland and coastal marine ecosystems. The Niger Delta is rich with a diverse mosaic of ecological zones, five of which are the Mangrove Forest and Coastal Vegetation Zone, the Fresh Water Swamp Forest Zone, the Lowland Rain Forest Zone, the Derived Savannah Zone and the Montane Zone. The Niger Delta is also the location of massive oil deposits, which have been extracted for decades by the government of Nigeria and by Multinational Oil Companies (MNOCs) (Ajodo-Adebanjoko and Ojua 2013:2). Since 1970, the country has earned at least $300 billion from energy development and in 2005 it made $450 billion. With about 40 million barrels of proven oil reserves, it currently produces 2.4 million barrels of oil per day, which constitutes about 90% of the government's revenue and 95% of the country's foreign exchange earnings (Ajodo, 2002:6). Nigeria is West Africa's biggest producer of petroleum and the sixth largest supplier of oil in the world, thanks to oil from the Niger Delta. Oil wealth has been instrumental to Nigeria's emergence as a leading player in world and regional politics. Specifically, Nigeria has been playing a leading and dynamic role in African politics as a member of several regional organisations, such as the Africa Union (AU) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), and an active role in global politics under the United Nations. With the oil boom in the early 1970s, Nigeria began to assert her influence around the globe and to date whatever influence Nigeria has, is credited to the discovery and exploration of oil.

However, the region which bears this economically important oil has been enmeshed in conflicts for more than four decades – owing to the negative impact of oil exploration. The region is a tale of poverty, squalor and gross underdevelopment in the midst of plenty, due to environmental degradation which has affected the people's agricultural means of livelihood. The effect of oil spills and gas flares has been death to aquatic lives and waste to farm lands. It is on record that more gas is flared in Nigeria than anywhere else in the World (Nore and Turner 1980). It is on record that the oil industry in the Niger Delta is one of the worst cases in the world of gas flaring. Nigeria is the second largest offending country, after Russia, in terms of the total volume of gas flared and the resulting emission of about 70 million tons of CO_2 a year, higher than the

emissions in Norway (Worgu, 2000). In the case of oil spills, Nigeria has the highest number of oil spills in the world; between 9 million and 13 million barrels of oil have been spilled in the Niger Delta (although the Department of Petroleum Resources (DPR) puts the amount of petroleum spilled in the area between 1976 and 1996 at 1.8 million out of a total of 2.4 million) (Ajodo, 2012). A UNDP report states that more than 6 800 spills were recorded in the area between 1976 and 2001 while the Nigeria National Petroleum Company (NNPC) places the quantity of petroleum spilled into the environment yearly at 2 300 cubic meters, with an average 300 industrial spills annually. The World Bank however believes that the amount of oil spills could be ten times higher than the officially released figures. Erosion, canalization, intra- and inter-communal conflicts between host communities are also some effects of oil explorations in the region. This has led to protests by the indigenous people, leading in turn to full blown conflicts.

Conflicts in the Niger Delta have been occurring as far back as the pre-colonial period and the early 1960s when there were protests against the marginalization of the region. In the early 1990s, there were also non-violent protests in Ogoniland to protest against the degradation of the environment by Oil companies. After these series of uprisings, a new wave of protests characterized by militancy began in 2003. Violence during this period grew out of the political campaigns in 2003. As they competed for office, politicians in Rivers State manipulated the Niger Delta Vigilantes (NDV), led by Ateke Tom, and the Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force (NDPVF), led by Alhaji AsariDokubo, and used these groups to advance their aspirations, often rewarding gang members for acts of political violence and intimidation against their opponents (Bekoe, 2005). This eventually witnessed the emergence of other militant groups, such as the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), and the Niger Delta Liberation Front (NDLF) which unleashed mayhem on the region. This introduced militancy into the region which was characterized by armed attacks, bombing of oil installations and hostage taking, particularly of foreign oil workers – thereby ushering in a Hobbesian Niger Delta (Ibeanu, 2006:9). For several years, the region was characterized by insecurity; and at the height of the crisis, the situation was dreaded by Nigerian citizens and foreigners alike. As a result, many people fled their communities and many foreign businesses were relocated to their home countries.

THEORETICAL PERSPECFTIVES OF ECO-VIOLENCE AND PSYCHOLOGICAL PRIMORDIAL THEORIES

This work has adopted a combination of eco-violence and psychological primordial theories to discuss the nature of Niger Delta and Conflict and the way to address the menace.

Eco-violence, also known as environmental conflict, theory was developed by Homer-Dixon (1999:30) in his attempt to explain the causal relationship between natural resource endowment and the outbreak of violent conflict.According to him,decrease in the quality and quantity of renewable resources act singly or in various combinations to increase the scarcity, for certain population groups, of vegetation, farmland, water, forests etc. This scarcity of ecological resources can reduce economic productivity, both for the local groups experiencing the scarcity and for the larger regional and national economies. Consequently, the affected people may migrate or be expelled to new lands … while decreases in wealth can cause deprivation conflicts (Homer-Dixon 1999:30).

The central argument of the theory is that declining availability of renewable natural resources, which results in competition over scarce resources, engender violent conflict (Ajaero et al. 2015:471). This view was expressed by Annan (2006) when he stated that 'environmental degradation in forms such as desertification, resource depletion and demographic pressure exacerbates tensions and instability …'. Michael (2001) also noted that:

Competition over the control of valuable oil supplies and pipeline routes has emerged as a particularly acute source of conflict in the 21st century. With the demand for oil growing and many older sources of supply (such as those in the United States, Mexico, and China) in decline, the pressure on remaining supplies, notably those in the Persian Gulf area, the Caspian Sea basin, South America, and Africa, is growing ever more intense.

This is seen from competition in Africa over the revenue generated from scarce natural resources which has led to violent conflict in Angola, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda, Sudan and Nigeria (Bhattacharyya, 2015). The foregoing aptly describes the situation in the Niger Delta where oil exploration activities leading to environmental degradation such as shortage of farmlands, death of aquatic life, air and water pollution, oil poisoning causing

respiratory ailments and destruction of mangrove forests, often without adequate compensation, have resulted in conflict. This was why the late environmentalist, Ken Saro-Wiwa, lamented that the people of the region faced extinction in what he described as an ecological war (Saro-Wiwa, cited in Na'Allah 1998).

Increasing frustration emanating from oil exploration has led to violent resistance which has culminated in conflict in the region between locals represented by militants and oil corporations operating in the region.

Psychological/primordial theorists, on the other hand, are of the view that humans have a deep-rooted psychological need to dichotomies and to establish enemies and allies, which leads to the formation of ethnic and national group identities and behaviors. How a group perceives itself and its relationship with those outside the group determines whether their relationship will be based on cooperation, competition or conflict. Usually those within the group are regarded as better than those outside, and this leads to 'me-you', 'we-they' 'insiders-outsiders' and 'minority-majority' sentiments. In the Niger Delta, conflicts are generated by grievances about natural resources (which border on demands for ownership of the resource concerned), the distribution of resource revenues and about environmental and social damage caused by extracting the resource. In Nigeria, the Federal Government is the one responsible for resource allocation and control, but conflict has arisen over the most appropriate revenue sharing formula with the Niger Delta people who demand that a special proportion be given to them due to their oil richness – just as it was done for the north when agricultural produce was the mainstay of the economy (Sheriff et al. 2014:75). This demand has however been refused by Nigerians in the rest of the country and by some of the leaders. The result was the above-mentioned primordial sentiments of group versus group, which led to the creation of ethno-nationalism-identities (Kasomo 2012:1; Alao 2007:159). We see this in the confrontation between foreign oil companies and local communities in the Niger Delta and between the Niger Delta people who view themselves as minorities being marginalized and oppressed and the 'majorities' in the other parts of the country that do not produce oil but reap the benefits of revenue allocation. Consequently, there have been violent agitations in the form of militancy and a call for secession by the Niger Delta buttressing the argument of Bannon and Collier (2003:5) that violent secessionist movements are statistically much more likely if a country has valuable natural resources, especially oil.

The Nature of Conflicts and the Burning Issues in Niger Delta Region

The high industrial activity in the Niger Delta Region has exposed the area to the dangers of pollution of water, land and air as well as oil spills which have endangered aquatic life as well as the entire ecosystem, topography and surface vegetation. The problem of deforestation has led to loss of bio-diversity in the mangrove swamps, and to the destruction of nurseries and feeding grounds for many commercially important species of fish and crustaceans. The contamination of water bodies by oil has also led to the contamination of fisheries, freshwater and brackish water swamps, and to the killing of fishes, crabs, oysters and periwinkles. This has therefore destroyed artisan fishing which is of great importance to Niger Delta economy. The 45 years of oil production in the area has brought about defoliation of mangroves and the acceleration of erosion and flooding in the coastal areas. There is also the case of contamination of rivers and inland waters, which are important sources of drinking water and food, thereby rendering such water and food unfit for human consumption. Ground water pollution is another serious impact of oil production. As it was expected, the activities of the oil industry did not spare the health of the human components of the Niger Delta environment. For instance, Ndifon (1998:804-813) identified oil acne (a special skin eruption due to exposure to oil) among respondents. He also reports the incidence of cancer, decreased fertility, fever, cough, abdominal pain and diarrhea, while as much as 85 percent of respondents suffered a combination of these symptoms.

The difficult terrain makes road construction and maintenance an uphill task. The Niger Delta inhabitants thus suffer from poor road conditions, leading to high cost of transportation. The area has been denied the much-needed development of social and economic infrastructure such as electricity, roads and pipe borne water. The Niger Delta states suffer from relatively high rates of both rural and urban unemployment. The neglect of the region for so long against the backdrop of so many unresolved issues seem to have resulted in the breeding of an army of miscreants.

The externalities associated with the exploration, production and transportation of crude oil are of the negative type. They may be classified into quantifiable and non-quantifiable externalities. The quantifiable negative externalities include such effects as numbers of fish killed as a result of oil spillage in fishing waters, numbers of hectares of crops destroyed or replaced with giant pipelines and rigs. These are easy to identify and value in monetary terms. The payment of

adequate compensation to displaced communities or individuals may suffice. The non-quantifiable negative externalities on the other hand include the loss of potential output which would have been derived from unpolluted land and water, the increased health hazards resulting from increase in hydrocarbons in the water and air, the increase in the mortality and morbidity rates associated with environmental pollution, as well as the loss of income by farmers as result of polluted farmlands. Also, the loss of vital sources of drinking water, the effect of moral decadence and the loss of societal values are all examples of non-quantifiable externalities which are of grave consequence to the people. These are not easy to identify, value or state in monetary terms. Most of the externalities associated with crude oil exploitation in the Niger Delta are of this sort. These externalities precipitate the contradictions in the Niger Delta.

All of these have culminated in socio-economic problems such as high levels of poverty and unemployment, community and oil company conflicts, intercommunity conflict over land and compensation, decay in societal values, poor roads and transportation network, high cost of fuel, paucity of housing and infrastructure facilities, moral decadence and high crime rates. These problems have been said to be located within the revenue-sharing principles, formulae and practices of the federal government which have starved the Niger Delta of much needed funds (Okoh&Egbon 1999:407, Egbon&Okoh 2000:11-12, Okoh 2001:391, Okoh 2002:81-83). Since 2000 the federal government has increased the proportion of revenue shared to the Niger Delta states, and infrastructure development has improved through the activities of the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC), but the levels of poverty, unemployment and violent conflicts are still quite high.

Classification of Conflict in Niger Delta Region

Inter-community conflict, which may be as a result of long-standing disputes between two or more communities, unsettled boundary problems, disputes over oil-bearing land, or incursions into community land.

Intra-community conflict, which may be due to long standing disputes between individuals within a community, political marginalization by a ruling ethnic group or class, an unacceptable traditional ruler, or embezzlement (real or imagined) of compensation by community leaders.

Community versus oil companies' conflict, which may be caused by several factors. There are factors related to the presence of oil installations in a community. For instance, an incursion into community land, a threat or perceived threat to the continual existence of a community, ineffective communication between communities and oil companies, unrealistic formalities of claim tenders, non-payment of compensation for occupied land. Some factors are specifically related to environmental pollution: non-payment or inadequate payment or unduly delayed payment of compensation for polluted land and water resources, abject poverty due to displacement and loss of livelihood arising from pollution of farm land or fishing waters. The devastating effects of the oil industry do not only affect the economy and the ecosystem, but also the cultural and social systems of the Niger Delta. Disputes between communities and oil companies are therefore often of long-standing nature and difficult to resolve.

Community versus (federal, state or local) government conflict. For this variant many of the problems are linked to the federal government. The causes of the community versus government conflict may be some or a combination of the following:

- The parlous state of existence and material conditions prevailing in the Niger Delta;
- Low level and quality of development in the region and the near absence of a common development framework and focus;
- Perceived low level of government presence in the Niger Delta;
- Paradox of grim poverty amidst tremendous oil wealth and flagrant display of wealth by the beneficiaries of the oil wealth both within and outside the Niger Delta;
- Nonchalant attitude of government towards the plight of the people of the Niger Delta;
- Marginalization by government;
- Creation of local government by the federal or state government;
- Boundary adjustments by federal government;
- Acquisition of land by government for public or military force; and
- Use of force in conflict management by the police and military force.

Interventions in Niger Delta Conflicts

The Nigerian government has over the years employed a three-pronged strategy to tackle the incessant oil-related conflicts in the Niger Delta. The strategies include; the derivation principle,

the establishment of developmental bodies and the militarization of the region. The derivation principle grew from 1.5 % to 3% and currently is at 13%. Whereas, when agriculture was the mainstay of the Nigerian economy, the derivation principle was 50% of a state's income but with the of advent oil-boom this was changed. The change was based on the government's argument that oil is an accident of geographical location. The second strategy employed is the establishment of developmental commissions. From the Niger Delta Development Board (NNDB) in 1960, the Oil Mineral Producing Areas Development Commission (OMPADEC) in 1992, the Petroleum (Special) Trust Fund (PTF) in 1995, the Niger Delta DevelopmentCommission (NDDC) in 2000, to the establishment of the Ministry of Niger Delta Affairs in 2008 (Okolie-Osemene, 2015, pJ2), the government tried to address the basic needs of the people. Thirdly, the Federal Government introduced the military option, by establishing the Joint Task Force which violated human rights in the Ogoni, Odi and other dissatisfied communities that culminated in militancy (Odoemene, 2012). Most of the military expeditions in the affected communities ended with sexual violence against women and young girls, raising the mind-boggling question on 'why do soldiers rape?' (Odoemene, 2012, p. 229). The implication of the military option is that it further radicalized the already restive Niger Delta youths. The military approach seems to be the last resort which also remains a pointer to the fact that most of the committees set up to address the oil-related conflict have not achieved their goals.

Efforts by the Nigerian government to address conflicts in the Niger Delta Various efforts, beginning even before independence, have been made by the Federal Government to end the conflicts in the region. In 1957, the government established the Willink Commission to look into the problems of the minorities, and this Commission acknowledged the utter neglect of the region and, among other proposals, recommended the creation of the Niger Delta Development Board (NDDB). This Board could not achieve its aims for many reasons, one of which was the fact that its headquarters were located in Lagos, far from the problem area. With the creation of twelve states in 1967 and the establishment of the Niger Delta River Basin Authority (NDRBA), the NNDB became obsolete. In the second republic, a 1.5% Federation Account for the development of the Niger Delta region was set up for the oil producing areas, but because of the constraint of operating from its secretariat in Lagos it was not able to achieve its purpose.

In spite of recurrent failures, and in order to show its commitment to ending the crisis and ensuring the development of the area, the Federal Government established some other Commissions such as the Oil Mineral Producing Areas Development Commission (OMPADEC) which was in operation from 1992 to 1999. OMPADEC was set up by the Ibrahim Babangida Administration under the chairmanship of Chief Albert Horsefall. Like its predecessors, it failed to achieve its mandate owing to official profligacy, corruption, excessive political interference and lack of transparency. After this, the Niger Delta Environmental Survey was set up in 1995, followed by the Niger Delta Development Commission, established in 2000 by President OlusegunObasanjo with a vision 'to offer a lasting solution to socio-economic difficulties of the Niger Delta Region' and a mission 'to facilitate the rapid, even and sustainable development of the Niger Delta into a region that is economically prosperous, socially stable, ecologically regenerative and politically peaceful' (Niger Delta Development Commission 2000:103). The government also put in place other mechanisms such as the Task Force on Pipeline Vandalization (April 2000) operated by the Nigeria Police Force in collaboration with the NNPC (Niger Delta Development Commission 2001). Similar task forces were also set up by the navy, army and State Security Service (SSS) in various states of the Niger Delta. In Delta state, the government passed a law in August 2001 banning militant groups blamed for the disruption of oil activities in the state. The Special Security Committee on Oil Producing Areas was also set up by the Federal Government in November 2001 to address the prevailing situation in the oil producing areas. Other efforts include the convening of the first Niger Delta peace conference in Abuja in 2007, a Joint Task Force (JTF) in 2008, and a Technical Committee made up of stakeholders and the Niger Delta ministry in 2008.

Amnesty and post-amnesty era Following criticisms of the military option, especially when it became obvious that the use of force by the JTF was aggravating rather than resolving the conflict, an amnesty programme was set up by the Federal Government on 25 May 2009 under the leadership of a former president, Umar Musa Yar'Adua. Amnesty was the Federal Government's effort towards bringing enduring peace, security, stability and development to the region.

It involved granting of national and unconditional pardon to all armed militants in the Niger Delta region who in turn were to surrender their arms and ammunition, sign an undertaking not

to return to the creeks and continue with the struggle and also sign the military re-unification forms. Amnesty followed the recommendations contained in the 2008 report by the Niger Delta Technical Committee (NDTC) initially established by the Federal Government, and chaired by MOSOP president LedumMitee, to assess initiatives taken in the region and provide for a comprehensive report and recommendations. The 45-member committee was inaugurated on 8 September 2008 to collate and review all past reports in the Niger Delta, appraise their recommendations and make other proposals that will help the Federal Government achieve sustainable development, peace, human and environmental security in the Niger Delta Region (Mitee, 2009). The amnesty programme included a disarmament, demobilization and reintegration process.

The first stage of the programme led to 26 808 ex-combatants accepting the offer. Of them, 20 192 accepted the offer on or before 4th October 2009 and 6 616 during November 2009 (Ejovi and Ebie 2013). The second stage involved government setting up demobilization camps for the demilitarization and rehabilitation of the ex-militants; while the third stage involved government's engagement with the leadership of the combatants and ex-combatants, as well as non-combatant youths, for employment and socio-economic empowerment. This therefore brought an end to the spate of bombing and kidnappings in the region, and led to an increase in oil outputs. Despite this seeming success, amnesty was alleged to be riddled with cases of corruption which made it less effective than it should have been. As a result, five years after amnesty new militant groups emerged in the region, namely; the Niger Delta Avengers (NDA), The Joint Niger Delta Liberation Force (JNDLF), the Niger Delta Red Squad (NDRS), the AdakaBoro Avengers (ABA) and the Niger Delta Greenland Justice Mandate (NDGJM). In response, the Federal Government deployed 3 000 military personnel to the region with a plan to deploy 10 000 more by the year 2017 in addition to launching Operation Crocodile Smileaimed at restoring peace to the region (Utebor, 2016). Criticisms have however followed the deployment of troops and particularly the use of force in the region. Critics are of the view that the new security measures will further worsen the security situation in the region and they therefore called for dialogue. In response to this call, the government proposed a $10 billion (N4 trillion) infrastructural rebirth investment programme for the region. Leaders and stakeholders from the region rejected this, however, on the grounds that they were not consulted before it was

proposed (Omotayo, 2016). In addition, the Federal Government in November 2016, convened a peace dialogue in which President Buhari met with leaders from the region in Abuja to discuss the way forward. At the meeting, leaders of the region led by Edwin Clark presented a 16-point agenda to the Federal Government and although the president welcomed the requests in addition to stating that the reports of amnesty would be implemented, peace remains elusive. Some critics have attributed the rise in militancy to the failure of the 13% derivation principle and amnesty to produce development in the region. The result has been pressure and a call for 'resource control' or 'fiscal federalism' (Akintunde and Hile 2016).

The Participatory Approach to Conflict Management in the Niger Delta Region

This paper has a reason for choosing the participatory approach as best way to go in addressing the issue of conflict in the Niger Delta Region. First, the level of poverty in the area is deepening, as the inhabitants of the area are unable to carry on with their economic activities such as farming, fishing, and other human activities. Agricultural activities usually grind to a halt in communities where violent conflicts take place. Houses, farm lands and fishing ponds are often burned down or destroyed and usually abandoned as villagers escape into safer areas where they do not have access to farm lands or fishing ponds. Violent conflicts also lead to deaths of many male household heads, leaving a large number of widows, orphans and incapacitated people. The increase in morbidity leads to a fall in agricultural productivity, lower income and intensified poverty.

Secondly, the obvious failure of the old perspectives and management strategies of the host communities, Federal Government and the oil companies makes it imperative to search for a better strategy to facilitate negotiations between different stakeholders in projects and policy dialogue.

Thirdly, the zone is the economic nerve Centre of the nation, which cannot afford the perennial disruptions to oil production occasioned by violent conflicts.

Under the current democratic political dispensation in Nigeria, a participatory approach to governance is inevitable for the attainment of good governance, transparency and accountability. This approach is of particular importance in the management of the perennial conflict in the

Niger Delta region. Previous attempts at the application of the approach failed to achieve the desired results, perhaps because of a weak formalization and generalization of the practice. Hence an important objective pursued in this paper is to increase the sensitization of all stakeholders regarding the existence and efficiency of the participatory approach for the resolution of the issue of frequent violent conflicts in the Niger Delta region in particular and Nigeria in general

The participatory approach to conflict management is a collaborative approach to 'problem solving' and decision making. It places an equal priority on the relationship with the other parties and on a mutually satisfying outcome. The strategies of the 'problem-solving' conflict management style include building trust, communicating face-to-face, gathering information, dialoguing, negotiating, valuing diversity, team building, having focus group discussions, searching for alternatives and seeking 'win-win' solutions (Kepner &Likubo 1996:11-28).

Previous methods of conflict management in Nigeria have been adversarial, such that communication between the various stakeholders, that is federal government, oil companies and communities, has been tactical and withholding, argumentative, fault-finding and blame-trading. The attitudes have mainly been suspicious, one-sided, past-oriented, aggressive and defensive. The procedures have involved bargaining from established positions, attacking the other party, using whatever standards are adjudged to be effective in achieving individual goals, and considering options which advance specific parties' positions.

The participatory approach to conflict management can be said to be a collaborative and problem-solving methodology. It is a democratic process, which recognizes the people's right and responsibility to manage their own affairs. The collaborative problem-solving process allows parties or stakeholders with different views to participate. All participants are given equal chance to express their views, generate options and influence the final decision. According to Academic Association Peaceworks (2004:32), 'when people participate in making a decision, they support it'.

Under the collaborative problem-solving methodology, communication is honest and open. It shares information and avoids fault finding and blame trading by the parties. The reciprocally

assertive attitudes are future-oriented and trust-building. The procedures involve negotiation, a focus on the problem and not on parties or persons, a search for common ground, a search for a fair and objective basis on which to take decisions, and a search for options that may lead to mutual gains (Academic Association Peaceworks 2004:32-35).

The participatory approach, which was first known as Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA), is now generally referred to as Participatory Learning and Action (PLA).

Chambers (1994a:954) described the PRA as:

a growing family of approaches and methods to enable local rural or urban people to express, enhance, share and analyze their knowledge of life and conditions to plan and to act.

The PLA approach combines:

- A set of diagramming and visual techniques originally developed for livelihood analysis and now widely used in Natural Resources Departments and in development agencies, and
- Underlying principles of grassroots participation from human rights activism,which involve rethinking power relations and partnerships between development agencies, experts and poor people. These are now being developed further to facilitate negotiation between different stakeholders in projects and policy dialogue (Altinkaya 2002:1-2, Mayoux 2003:3-4).

Participatory approaches enable a wide cross-section of people to share information and opinions about their lives and their environment. It is a bottom-up approach to solving problems and making decisions. Participatory methods use a diverse and flexible set of techniques for visual representation and stake-holder involvement characterized by a set of underlying ethical principles. The participatory approach to development has developed a set of visual tools which can be flexibly applied to assist the synthesis and analysis of information that can be used in group settings and as part of individual interviews. Also, the participatory methods use a set of guidelines for facilitating participation and negotiation in focus group discussions and workshops where different stake-holders are brought together. This may not employ much of the visual

techniques. According to Mayoux, the emphasis is on innovation and creativity in adapting previous practice to new contexts and needs. In our present circumstance, the essence of the participatory approach would be to bring together all the stakeholders in the Niger Delta saga, in order to contribute towards the creation of favorable conditions that may increasingly facilitate sustainable development in the Niger Delta region and the Nigerian economy as a whole.

The underlying principles on which the participatory approach is based are the following:

Embracing Complexity

The participatory approach acknowledges complexities and seeks to understand them rather than over-simplifying reality in accordance with predetermined categories and theories. This is of particular interest to the Niger Delta situation, which is saddled will enormous complexities such as multiplicity of rival tribal and ethnic groups with complex historical relationships.

Recognition of multiple realities

These realities should be taken into account in analysis or action. In the case of the Niger Delta there are many such realities, which policy makers would rather wish away than attempt to solve them. Prominent among them are the high poverty levels of the bulk of the Niger Delta inhabitants, the demand for resource control and the unhealthy competition among the communities in crude oil-bearing areas.

Prioritizing the realities of the poor and most disadvantaged

Here the participatory approach takes all stakeholders as equal partners in knowledge creation and problem analysis. In the case of the Niger Delta the main stakeholders are the host communities (youth, men and women), the oil companies and the federal government, state government and local governments. Others may include NGOs, civil society, community-basedorganizations (CBOs), and institutions such as NDDC.

Grassroots empowerment

The participatory approach does not only aim at gathering information about impact, but also aims at making the assessment process a contribution to empowerment through linking grassroots learning and networking into policy making.

The participatory approach has the capability to bring information from a diversity of sources more rapidly and cost-effectively than quantitative or qualitative methods alone (Mayoux 2003:7). The participatory approach is potentially capable of contributing towards increasing the relevance of impact goals and indicators, and of the representations of the stakeholders, the reliability or under-standing of development processes; and the credibility of practical inferences.

The techniques of participatory methodologies include the following:

Visual techniques

These techniques may include diagrams, ranking techniques, time trends analysis, mapping techniques, calendars and ethno-classifications. It is said that the eye receives 83% of information while the other four senses receive the remaining 17%. Hence the key to improve communication is to visualize ideas. The visual techniques could be applied in the communication process of participatory conflict resolution in the Niger Delta by holding discussions with groups or teams, surveying the opinions of participants, evaluating alternative proposals, identifying problems to be tackled, analyzing situations and writing the opinions, ideas, proposals on cards, blackboards, flipcharts, maps, calendars, etc. These visual techniques can be used to list different headings, characterize dependent relationships, interrelated lists and complex interrelationships.

There are a number of advantages for applying visual techniques in conflict management. First, contributions are not lost and forgotten. Writing down a contribution shows the participants that their ideas or messages have been received and duplicated. Secondly, heterogeneous information and contributions become easier to understand with the help of visual aids, which reduce the dangers of misrepresentations and misinterpretations. Thirdly, discussion is limited to arguments relating to the subject matter and is thereby made more objective-oriented. By so doing, emotionally biased contributions can be dealt with separately and more appropriately. Fourthly, the particular stage of discussion is apparent at all times and the direction it is taking is obvious. This is also helpful for those who join the group at a later stage. Participation in discussion is enhanced as emphasis can be placed on hearing the views of every single participant. The implication is that participants' identification with contents and decisions made can be improved.

The usefulness of visual techniques is limited, however, in cases where participants do not want their views publicized or where formal traditions do not allow such a publication.

Group and team dynamics techniques

These may include focus group discussions, role-play and participatory workshops. The basic tool used for the analysis of participatory group and team dynamics is the semi-structured discussions or interviews (SSDs or SSIs). The SSD is a form of guided interviewing where only some of the questions are predetermined. It does not involve the use of questionnaires but at most a checklist of questions as a flexible guide. In contrast to formal survey questionnaires, many questions are formulated during the interview or discussions are generated by the responses of participants. SSDs may be held with:

- Individuals from different categories of the community who have an interest in the same topic;
- Key informants who are interviewed for specific information only they may have (as traditional rulers who may have special knowledge about the history of conflicts with neighboring communities, oil companies or the government);
- Groups of stakeholders who can provide general community level information; and
- Focus groups with whom certain issues may be discussed in detail, e.g. financiers of violent conflicts, the gun barons, the local warlords, government representatives, oil companies and policymakers.The face-to-face interaction enabled by this tool can be valuable for gaining understanding of the issue at stake and establishing rapport between communities and policy makers.

For maximum benefit from an SSD, the facilitator must learn to listen, be ready to learn from the discussion, facilitate and not dominate, lecture or interrupt the discussants, respect other people's opinions, set an agenda and prepare discussion by summarizing findings.

Specialized participatory techniques

These techniques may include the open house, road shows, open space technologies, participatory appraisal, future search, appreciative inquiry and open agenda conferences. The

specialized participatory techniques are very useful for incorporating the views and ideas of the elite class who may not be available for community/public meetings. Reaching this group is of grave importance, however, as the information they provide may tend to stir the warring communities to rise up in arms against the government or the oil companies.

The most prominent of these techniques is 'the open house', which was developed as a constructive alternative to public meetings. It provides a forum where interested people can obtain information and register their views. The venue is usually a well-known place in the community such as the town hall or the palace of the traditional ruler. Display panels are used to present key information about the proposals or issues at stake. These should give visitors a clear understanding of the issues and/or proposals. A short video presentation can be used to enhance written information. A table with hand-out materials is usually provided. Refreshments may also be provided.

To maximize the gains from the open house technique, a systematic feedback is critical. The facilitators may ask the visitors to complete a short survey as they leave the open house. This will help to generate quantitative data and background information for cross tabulation, for example, the geographic location, sex, age and occupation of respondents.

Road shows are variations on the open house. In this case facilitators transport the open house from place to place, setting up and running the open house format in a range of locations suitable to the target audience (Altinkaya 2003:1-2).

The other methods mentioned above are variants of the open house techniques.

Benefits of Community Participation in Conflict Management

Effective community participation has been said to impact positively on social and economic progress. The following are some of the specific benefits of effective community participation in situation analysis and policy making.

In the first place it improves the quality of policies and services. When diverse stakeholders are included in decision making, the policy makers benefit from their first-hand understanding of issues. They provide reality checks, which facilitate the testing of a priori assumptions.

Secondly, community participation helps solve complex problems. Social, economic and environmental problems are nearly always complex, and the Niger Delta is a case where working together can increase the possibility of finding sustainable solutions.

Thirdly, community participation builds trust and understanding. This is particularly useful in the Niger Delta where these two elements of development are conspicuously missing. People develop confidence in a government/agency that openly invites them to participate in decisions that affect them. A foundation of trust is a priceless element when tough decisions (as is the case in the Niger Delta) need to be made.

Fourthly, community participation helps create an inclusive society. When government acts in co-operation with communities, people feel more powerful, more fairly treated and more valued. This is expected to create a peaceful environment in which the community members can help solve their own problems. This in turn would encourage self-reliance and innovation leading to sustainable development in the Niger Delta region and the Nigerian economy as a whole.

Fifth, community participation helps in measuring progress. Active relationships with the community are valuable for monitoring policy outcomes. The contacts with communities can help policy makers to:

- Identify people to be involved in monitoring and evaluation;
- Develop appropriate indicators to measure progress, and,
- Design appropriate ways of gathering data.

Finally, community participation in policy and decision making will help to ensure that human rights are upheld (Mayoux 2003:2-3) and that the Niger Delta people can get a fair share of the 'national cake'.

Challenges of the Participatory Conflict Management Approach

It is important to state here that participatory methods face a number of inherent challenges. Some are due to the visual tools and others to the participatory process. The extent to which a participatory methodology attains its potential contribution depends essentially on the level of care with which it is used. The participatory tool kits should only be handled by facilitators who have vast experience in handling them, and in the knowledge of the community's traditions, customs and, most importantly, language. The Participatory Conflict Management Approach also faces other challenges, which are listed below:

Time pressure

This is pervasive but must be overcome. Time invested early in inclusive collaboration will save time later.

Fear of conflict

This must be resisted since it can lead to denial or suppression of the open dialogue that is needed to resolve potential conflict.

Temptation to revert to old ways of doing things

Typical examples are: not wanting to listen, being 'right', isolating and excluding, attacking and defending, competing, trading blames, practicing authoritative leadership and decision making. There is a need to persist and persevere through the awkward phase of learning new skills as this would lead to greater benefits in the future.

Conclusion

The conventional methods of dealing with contradictions in the Niger Delta have no doubt failed to broker peace in the region. Rather, these strategies have heightened tension, insecurity and conflicts in the region. The participatory approach to conflict management is no doubt an invaluable tool which would enable a wide cross-section of people to share information and opinions about their lives and environment. People, who under normal circumstances are

voiceless and powerless in the community, are empowered to gain confidence and to speak out. The face-to-face interaction which it provides, creates the opportunity for policy makers to gain an understanding of the issues at stake and to develop community trust and confidence for the government and its intentions. The application of a participatory approach in the Niger Delta is not new but policy makers have over the years paid lip service to the issue, and its principles have not been wholly applied. Hence the desired result of peace in the Niger Delta region has remained an illusion.

Recommendations

There is always the tendency to want to settle with partial measures of success and achievement. Patience is required to allow collaborative processes to work themselves out. For the collaborative problem-solving approach to conflict management to be effective, these challenges must be recognized and adequate adjustments made to overcome them.

Participatory methods have been employed in poverty-alleviation programmes refugee-resettlement projects and micro credit programmes in New Zealand, India and many developing countries with varying degrees of success. In Nigeria the application of the participatory approach has been on ad hoc bases mainly for data gathering. The Niger Delta Environmental Survey (NDES) used it to gather and analyses information (Onosode, 2003:123). The oil companies have now included PRA/PLA procedures as part of environmental impact assessment. Again, however, the consultants involved in such studies use the tool on ad hoc bases to gather information and fulfil their contract obligations. The European Union through its Micro Projects Programme (MPP3) is currently using the participatory approaches in community development in three Niger Delta States, Delta, Bayelsa and River States. The Federal Ministry of Agriculture is also beginning to adopt it for its fadamaprogramme and the National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP). These programmes are yet at their foundation stages.

This paper calls for an integrated conflict management model which sees conflict management as a process embracing three levels of activities, that is, (1) conflict prevention, peace promotion and consolidation; (2) conflict control and abatement; and (3) conflict resolution (Imobighe, 1997:275-280).

1. Conflict prevention, peace promotion and consolidation should involve a behavioural code, confidence building measures and integrative activities, and democratic practices.

2. Conflict control and abatement should involve passing resolutions, making appeals, and using neutral forces to separate hostile parties.

3. Conflict resolution should involve intensive negotiation, the use of mediatory organs, and conciliation activities (Academic Association Peaceworks 2004:22-28).

It is being advocated here that a well thought out community participatory process be built into the policy and decision-making procedure for the Niger Delta region at all times. This would involve the establishment of governance structures, such as the setting up of a community monitoring team by the community members, which has good representation and gender balance at the community level. It will also involve the employment of trained facilitators by the oil companies and government as well as the involvement of pro-active organizations such as the Civil Society Organizations – NGOs, CBOs, and civil rights groups. These would collectively be able to define and advocate a common policy agenda for the Niger Delta region, and to actively contribute to and provide feedback on new policies and their implications (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development 2001:1-6). It would also require parastatals, such as the National Centre for Economic Management and Administration (NCEMA), which have been involved in training and other capacity-building activities, to train a team of facilitators for government agencies, NGOs and CBOs who would effectively institute the participatory process and nurture it to maturity.

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