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POST-CONFLICT PEACE BUILDING AND DEMOCRACY IN AN OIL REGION

The Role of Women's Groups in the Niger Delta Region, Nigeria

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Post-Conflict Peace Building and Democracy in an Oil Region: The Role of Women's Groups in the Niger Delta Region, Nigeria

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1.0 Introduction

Conflict is an inherent dimension of human relations and an undercurrent of social relations (CASS, 2005). It is made all the more pervasive to social relations by the problem of scarcity (in the midst of plenty) that requires cooperation for its resolution. Properly managed conflict can lead to the resolution of fundamental disputes and where not well managed, it tends to aggravate divisions in the state and ultimately find expression in violent and destabilizing social actions. Conflicts in Nigeria are usually due to boundary issues and land resources. With the rise of ethnicism and ethnic nationalities as political identities and increasing youth militancy, various riots and violent confrontations deriving from ethnic, religious, economic and political motivations have become common in the nation. These conflicts and violence are presently fuelled by the following perceived inadequacies:

- Lack of equity in the distribution of national resources
- Blatant show of gross misappropriation of resources by the political leaders, with a new trend that portrays them as seeing national resources as personal and to be disbursed at their whims and caprices with no monitoring and evaluation processes put in place. Even when they are caught embezzling huge public funds nothing happens
- Perceived injustice by the generality of the people
- Too many sophisticated and expensive guns are in the hands of unscrupulous and mostly highly qualified and unemployed youths, and no-one is answering the following questions – Who gave the guns to the youths? And for what purposes?

In the NDR specifically, the failure of existing structures and processes to resolve fundamental issues of allocative and distributive inequities (cultural, economic, social, political, justice and good governance) account for its salience as a political force in destabilizing social relations and political processes. From this perspective, CASS (2005) argued that the extent to which protagonists of conflicts in NDR are determined and prepared to resort to physical violence and other extra-legal means to advance their

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positions and secure their collective interests, is indeed an indication of the extent to which established structures and processes for conflict prevention, management and resolution have proven ineffective and insensitive to deep divisions in the area, over the formal and informal rules, processes and laws designed to regulate social relations in state and society. That is why conflicts in the NDR have found expression in the ready resort to physical violence as a solution to the fundamental questions and issues of: fairness, equity, justice and participation in respect to resource allocation and distribution.

Many theaters of violence have existed for a long time in the NDR. However, from mid ninety-nineties, there has been an alarming increase in social and ethnic tension and conflict. Marked by rising militancy especially as armed youth groups emerged, traditional structures of authority were eroded. The fragile economy continues to decline and traditional sources of livelihood are neglected (Oruwari et al, 2003). These are usually interlinked and include: socio-economic burdens, environmental conflicts over competitions for land and water, pressures of democratization coupled with contradictions of forces of marginalization and demand for empowerment.

As the Niger Delta is Nigeria's main oil mineral producing region (the oil mineral being the mainstay of Nigeria's foreign exchange earnings – about 90%), the activities of oil and gas exploration and production companies and the forces that have aligned themselves within the Nigerian state with the multinational oil companies are at the center of much of the conflict and violence. Alagoa (2000) describes clearly the key issues in the following summary:

'The situation is clearly the result of the large years of internal colonialism brought to a head by oil exploitation, which degrades the environment and demoralizes the people. Local political institutions and culture have come under siege and the unemployed youths push aside the control of elders and traditional authorities that they see as ineffective against the external and internal agents that exploit the people. The disillusioned youths serve as community vanguards, which fight for control against neighboring communities over land in which new oil wells have been discovered, beginning the process of self-destruction.'
[Alagoa, 2000:10]

Thus, the communities in the region are angry with the major bone of contention being the slashing of the derivation component of revenue accruing to the states in the region from the federal government. Over the years however, one response strategy after another have been employed by the federal government to settle the problems. These range from upward review of revenue to organized repression in the region. The communities have on the other hand protested, lobbied legislatures and tried to make the environment inhospitable for continuing oil exploration activities by attacking oil companies operating in the area (that they perceived as agents of the federal government). A typical retort by youths at a focus group discussion is: "We do not see the federal government. They are in Abuja (the federal capital) and we cannot reach them. All we know is that when we need something, we march to the flow station shut it and both government and oil companies will meet our demands." Presently, the

youths have included taking of expatriate oil company workers as hostages and their negotiations with the government are becoming more: bold, prolonged and extensive in their demands.

With a Gross National Product per capital below the national average of 280 United States dollars (USD), the region remains poor despite its enormous resources. Several threats to livelihoods ranging from physical to political threats exist in the NDR. Thus, poverty and social dislocations including cultural animosities fuel the conflicts within the region. More recently, violence fuelled by differences in political alliances has aggravated the conflict situation. The results of these violent engagements are wanton destruction of lives and properties. Thus, the impact is felt at community and personal levels with extreme forms of human rights abuses (Human Rights Watch, 1999). It is in this area that official responses to conflict and violence in Nigeria are totally inadequate. Often governments at all levels and in all dispensations (both military and political), have responded very late in conflict situations even with advance warnings. When the responses were finally made, the state security outfits or military have used excessive force to the extent of compounding the situation and increasing damage. Beyond the repressive and excessive use of force, the state has never been able to prevent or resolve conflict. Studies have shown that more has been achieved by the warring communities taking responsibility to resolve the fundamental differences using traditional leaders (chiefs and elders), women and even elite and youth groups (Oruwari et al; 2003). This is not surprising. Before the advent of state institutions under colonialism and their use in conflict resolution, and up to the present, local communities across the nation have a long history of conflict management and peace making from the inter-personal to the family, community and inter – community levels.

As conflicts occur, women are usually caught at the receiving end of losses incurred. Displacement and death place untold heavy burdens on their traditional roles as providers of livelihoods. When access to traditional sources of livelihoods becomes increasingly precarious due to conflicts, women are forced to engage in alternatives usually at the risks of their lives to provide for their families (Oruwari et al, 2003). It is therefore not surprising that women have traditionally been significant participants in post conflict peace making in the NDR (Oruwari, 2002).

This study is an attempt at exploring effective post conflict peace building processes in the NDR and their prospects for democracy while using case studies of women's groups involved in peace building in the region. This study will also consider areas to be highlighted for immediate action in respect to peace building e.g. attention will be placed on the contents and phases of the key tasks of the post conflict stage and to accompany properly the civil society partners and political actors in implementing them.

The discussion in this paper is divided into six parts after the introduction. First, is the statement of aim and objectives. Second, is a short literature review. This is followed by: the methodology adopted; a report of the case studies and discussion of findings. The paper is rounded up with concluding remarks and references.

2.0 Aim and objectives

The basic aim of the study is to identify the potential of women groups within the NDR to engage in post conflict peace-building processes and their prospect for democracy. Specific objectives for the study are as follows:

- i) Identify the specific forms of intervention by Women's groups in post conflict peace-building processes.
- ii) Examine the capacities of the strategies used by the groups to achieve their objectives
- iii) Examine the prospect of their strategies for democracy
- iv). Based on the above, make recommendations on how these can be made part of current efforts to improve post conflict peace building and democratic practices in Nigeria

3.0 Literature Review

The central issues to be considered in this study revolve around the following key concepts. These are: conflict; peace; conflict prevention, management and resolution; and democracy. A section that attempts to discuss these key concepts from the perspective of the prospect for democracy in the context of Nigerian follows.

Conflict

Simply defined, conflict is a relationship perceived by one or more concerned parties as unfair, unworkable or both (Rabie, 1994). The feeling it engenders reflects both a state of mind and a state of economic and political affairs characterized by disagreement, intense competition and mutual hostility. Therefore, conflict occurs in a society when power, interests and values are distributed in a manner that makes certain groups feel constrained and discriminated against. From this definition, we can say that conflict is one thing that no human being or functioning organization can escape since in any society, there are: diverse human interests and needs; competing individual and group goals; and, different religious and social beliefs that are most times largely incompatible.

Other major causes of conflict include: different loyalties, cultural values, ideologies, geo-political considerations etc. that provide a fertile ground for the planting and nurturing of conflict between and within states. Disparities in wealth, natural resources, technology and power among social groups within and between states have also been causes of increased grievances and conflict.

Generally socio-economic groups within states are formed around issues that reflect people's ability to gain socio-political status and economic wealth. The groups that demonstrate ability to succeed are characterized as rich and influential while those that do not are poor and powerless. Left unattended, the relationship between the two groups would become conflictual and structural violence that implies that force is used continuously in society to defend perceived interests becomes an integral part of every

day life in the society. As conflict is about values, beliefs interests and perceptions, it occurs at every level of human and state interactions. And, it is affected by: total environment, future planning, levels of education, and human needs and satisfaction. Thus, the way a particular conflict is perceived and resolved must take into consideration the past and future relationships between the conflicting parties.

Conflicts and its many manifestations disrupt established systems, orders and inter-group relationships, causing them to lose balance and become unstable. Thus, conflict is either good or bad and always leads to questionable consequences. Conflict has two major categories viz. interest-related and value-related. Interest-related conflicts are those that are concerned with trade issues, state security, regional influence, dispute between labor and government etc. While those of value-related are concerned with matters related to political ideologies, religious beliefs, cultural rights, national sovereignty, socio-political status of minorities etc.

Peace

The other side of conflict i.e. the side that represents harmony and reflects a mutually satisfying relationship is peace. It is a product of individual, group and state interaction at the many levels of social, political and economic life. Peace is a situation generally characterized by the absence of war and violence in which human interactions are conducted in an orderly manner and disputes arising from such interactions are settled peacefully. Narrowly defined, peace is the absence of war.

Laue (1991) defined peace as a process of continuous and constructive management of differences toward: the goal of more mutually satisfying relations, the prevention of escalation of violence, and the achievement of those conditions that exemplify the universal well-being of human beings and their groups from the family to culture and the state. Efemini (2005) posited that peace is a dialectical concept that has character and therefore to understand the character of peace in the NDR, there is the need to appreciate the political economy of oil production within the context of the Nigerian State. However, positive definitions of peace transform conflict resolution into a continuous peace building, peacemaking and peacekeeping processes to deal with social conflict and create the socio-economic and political conditions that guarantee social justice.

As human experience seems to indicate that the absence of war and violence cannot be maintained without social justice, and social justice cannot be achieved under conditions of war and violence, what is needed is realistic peace. This is described as the absence of violence under conditions and relationships that provide for the non-violent resolution of political conflict and the freedom to pursue legitimate individual and group goals without threat or coercion. Peace must therefore be understood and employed as a continuous process to lessen social tension, resolve political conflict and create conditions to pursue freedom and justice through a gradual evolution of human perceptions and socio-political institutions. Since human and organizational interaction is a continuous process of gradual change and transformation, neither conflict nor peace exists without the other, making them two societal and mental states in flux. Thus,

conflict and peace are two interchangeable but always co-existing processes that can be enhanced or weakened, accelerated or de-escalated, maintained or abandoned, but never eliminated. And, examined from a wider perspective, either peace or conflict is all good or bad. In fact, peace without conflict is stagnation, and conflict without peace is chaos, making peace and conflict two pre-conditions for continued human progress and organizational regeneration.

Conflict Prevention, Management and Resolution

Conflict prevention occurs when efforts are made to avoid differences developing into crisis. A true strategy of conflict prevention is to eliminate the most serious causes and changing the conditions that promote or facilitate conflict in the first place. This can be done when positive rather than negative peace is pursued and when the strategy of resolution addresses the real causes of conflict. Positive peace is achieved when the process moves from the elimination of violence to dealing with the causes of conflict and proceeds to achieving universal happiness (Rabie, 1994). To prevent conflict rather than reacting to crisis requires: fora for dialogue and joint problem solving; acknowledgement of the legitimacy of interests of all parties concerned; and understanding of the historical and psychological dynamics at work.

Conflict management is a process to bring it under control. During the cold war, the super powers of the world recognized the need to manage international conflict in order to avoid escalation of disputes and possible direct confrontation between themselves. Conflict management techniques were developed to undermine the influence of each other and to enhance their own interests, particularly in regions considered of vital importance. Thus, conflict management techniques that were developed and successfully used to manage international disputes during the period were largely the product of a particular mentality and limited experience.

The conflict management techniques developed were largely legal and based on a perception that conflict is primarily the result of competing interests, rather than clashing values. As a result of that, it was thought that both individual and state behavior could be altered using the right material incentives. Moreover, the developed world legal system was and still is a tool to address individual grievances and protect individual rights rather than group rights, but as argued by Azar (1990), the principal unit in a conflict analysis ought to be the group and not the individual or state. The common unit of analysis in the developed regions therefore has focus on the individual state or system and their implications. It has ignored the group totally. This system is what has been adopted by the developing countries. Thus, since the groups were not the unit of analysis, the management of conflicts in the developing countries was expected to fail, and it did.

Conflict resolution is a process to end and not to eliminate conflict. The process is put in place to vastly moderate its intensity and impact, eliminating the negative and reducing conflict to a subconscious force that continues to motivate people but does not dominate their outward attitudes and inter-group relationships. It is an intervention by a

third party to reform existing relationships by effecting institutional and attitudinal change. Fostering peace and peaceful co-existence in communities largely means dealing with issues and initiating social processes to strengthen cooperative relationships and promote new ones to expand and deepen cooperation. Conflicts seen as serious, intolerable and unwinnable are usually ripe for resolution. For such conflicts to be resolved, adversaries must engage in serious peace processes with the declared objective of resolving the conflict.

Deutsch (1973) described two approaches of conflict resolution as competitive and cooperative. The competitive approach is adversarial, rely on the use of force, usually perceived by antagonists as zero-sum in nature, and can readily but not necessarily lead to destructive results. The cooperative approach is non-adversarial, usually perceived as non-zero sum in orientation, and often lead to constructive outcomes. The cooperative approach encourages the building of long-term collaborative relationships that requires addressing mutual grievances and aspirations of conflicting parties and creating new frameworks that encourage them to cooperate and view their problems, interests and futures as interlinked.

On Democracy in Nigeria

The problem of democracy in Africa in general and Nigeria in particular stems from the fact that the leaders and the masses did not share the same vision of the post colonial society (Nzongola-Ntalaja, 2000). Ajayi (1982) wrote that in addition to seeking freedom from the arbitrary rule of the Whiteman, ordinary Africans wanted better paid jobs, education and health care, other amenities of modern living such as pipe borne water, electricity and durable houses, and above all a better future for their children. And as collaborated by Nzongola-Ntalaja (2000), although democracy has to do with the right of individuals to choose who will rule them, ordinary people have never fought ideas or things in some-one's head. They have always fought and made sacrifices in order to: win material benefits; live better and in peace; see their lives go forward; and guarantee the future of their children.

Thus, as far as the Africans are concerned, it is the wider view of democracy that is relevant. This goes beyond individuals acquiring the power to decide by means of a competition for the people's vote. It includes democratic autonomy that calls for a high degree of accountability of the state and substantial direct participation of the people in their community's institutions. It requires the creation of equal opportunity for participation including social and economic rights.

From the abundant literature on democracy, what came out clearly is that there is no fixed model of democracy as the meaning is contextual. What is clear is that democracy is brought about by individuals and groups and by social actors who fight for it. And, as argued by Adebo (2005), it is not possible for the poor section of the population to fully enjoy their political rights without a welfare state that prevents perceived extreme material poverty and steep socio-economic inequalities that are the ingredients for conflict situations in the communities.

Conflict Management and Democracy in Nigeria

An examination of the way traditional societies deal with conflict reveals that they are generally better equipped than the Western countries to deal with social and value-related conflicts but less able to resolve interest-related and power struggle conflicts. But because societies have different cultures and historical experiences, conflict resolution techniques that many nations have developed over time are not the same and may not work outside their own cultural contexts.

However, societies that have developed flexible and extensive rules to deal with conflicts are more likely to maintain political stability and social peace, while undergoing social change and responding to national and global challenges. In this context, conflicts become a reflection of diversity, not enmity, and conflict resolution techniques become tools and rules to regulate diversity while preserving unity. These techniques are tools to reduce tension, moderate conflicting views, and seek new ways and frameworks for forming new consensuses and promoting cooperation among the many diverse views and groups. On the other hand, societies that have failed to develop viable conflict resolution techniques, and those that have maintained that the traditional political and belief systems remain valid regardless of time are more likely to experience open conflict.

In respect to conflict situations in Nigeria, the government and its agencies have always employed the top-down approaches along with forceful intervention that in the short run curtails the problem which erupts again in the long run. This is because the fundamental issues involved are matters for negotiation and not the use of force or litigation. The procedures for handling conflict in Western democracies are enshrined in their legal system and these are backed by good data. However, in the Nigerian context, our legal system is basically an imposition of colonialism on existing customary laws and decision-making processes. We also lack the database to quickly dispose of conflicts using the courts and other institutions of the state.

Peace building is the beginning of sustainable peace in the communities in conflict prone regions and the NDR is not an exception. For successful peace building, it is necessary to establish institutions and mechanisms for: sustaining and expanding peace; revitalizing cultural norms and reconstructing governance systems; and for strengthening communities and all stake holders to have capacity and skills to contain conflicts and be able to reach out for reconciliation with one another. It is democratic autonomy that makes this possible. Thus, democracy and peace building have a symbiotic relationship.

These issues highlight the need for promoting traditional methods and documenting the role of women's groups in peace building and conflict mediation. Our study is expected to be a contribution in this direction.

4.0 Methodology

The study employed the key informant and focus group discussion approaches to the collection of data. Through personal contact in known conflict areas, it was possible to

interview some groups who had participated in peace building. An interview schedule was prepared to guide the discussion. Individuals, groups and government organizations were contacted. Within the limits of time, data for the study was drawn from five basic studies listed below. Only three interviews were successfully carried out (i-iii). To increase the scope covered, the study also utilized data from previous studies (iv and v).

- (i) Ekunuga Women's Association
- (ii) Ogbakiri Women's Peace Forum/ Prayer Group.
- (iii) Academics Associates Peaceworks (NGO).
- (iv) Women in Umuechem Community.
- (v) Women in Ugborode Community.

5.0 Case Studies

The case studies reported here consist of interviews with (while using the interview guide): two women leaders of associations that had been involved with peace building and peacemaking in some communities in the NDR; and an associate of a peace building NGO. Included is secondary information from the cases of Umuechem in Etche, Rivers State and Ugborode in Delta State.

i) Ekunuga Women's Association - Abua/Odual

When the people of Okolomade demolished the village of Ekunuga in 1996, the women of Ekunuga intervened. They formed the Ekunuga Women's Association that comprised of women (all women including those not from Ekunuga but are married there). At the heat of the conflict about three (3) women initiated the formation of the organization and they called on the women who responded. The primary aim of the organization was for peace making and development of the community.

The women intervened in the conflict by writing the Area Commander and the District Police Officer (DPO) to assist in restoring law and order in the area. The area DPO called everyone in the two villages especially the chiefs separately to communal meetings. The outcome of the meeting was that the problem was handed over to the traditional rulers in the two communities. However, up till today, the problem had not been solved successfully.

The main cause of the problem was land issues. After flooding in the 1980s, Ekunuga's land became waterlogged. They applied to the neighboring village of Okolomade (of the same ethnic background) and they were given the present location for resettlement. Ten (10) years after the resettlement, they (Okolomade) took the case to high court for them to leave. They lost the case and also lost at the Court of Appeal. The need to evict Ekunuga's people from the land came as a result of pipelines passing through the land and the payment of compensation by the oil company prospecting for oil in the area. The major problem is that of who should claim the compensation.

The association is not registered with the government and there is no constitution, but officers were elected at the general meeting. They comprised of: the president, secretary, treasurer etc. The secretary took minutes at every meeting and normal meeting procedures are followed at every meeting.

Major achievement of the organization

The councils of chiefs of the two communities have been meeting since 1996. Presently, the arbitration report has been prepared and a resolution is expected to be passed soon.

The association does not have any link with the government agencies like Women's Commission (Ministry of Women's Affairs) and it was not introduced to the Rivers State Branch of The National Council of Women's Societies (NCWS) since it was formed to solely solve a local problem.

The leaders were not involved with capacity building in any way. Their efforts were based on the general traditional rule in the country that when women as a group express opinions in respect to issues that affect the communities, the men listen. It is also believed that when women as a group in a community intervene in conflict situations, it is time for peace.

The association was funded by freewill donations by members and of course the meager monthly contributions. The men in the community supported them in an advisory role and they also encouraged their wives and daughters to be part of the organization. Although, the respondent believes that women are generally not physically violent but they have the power of the tongue i.e. they use their mouth to fight.

ii) Ogbakiri Women's Peace Forum/Prayer Group

Ogbakiri is a community comprising of six (6) villages. It is part of the Ikwerre clan. Thus, the community comprised of people from the same tribe, culture and creed. The people are both Christians and atheists. The respondent was the founder and president of the association.

The respondent formed the group with the primary aim of maintaining peace in Ogbakiri land while using religion as the focal point. At the heat of the Ogbakiri crisis, and with the assistance of Saint Thomas Anglican Church, Port Harcourt, she went to the air and called all Ogbakiri women to a meeting at the church premises that is a neutral ground on 11th May 2001. This became imperative as the crisis and destruction became increasingly regular and other tribes in Port Harcourt started passing insulting remarks about their inability to live peacefully in their community. In Nigeria, the home villages are expected to be peaceful haven where people run to when there are problems in the cities. A young man from Ogbakiri, the respondent's husband and a chief, who is an elder in one of the villages in the Ogbakiri community assisted financially.

It took about two weeks to convince the women of her sincerity. This was achieved by appealing to women at the market places in the area, sending circulars to women organizations from the area and government offices in Port Harcourt etc. Thus, when the association was finally formed, it cuts across the social and economic strata of the

society. The association has been in existence for two (2) years, and it is still in operation, as they have not stopped praying for sustainable peace in Ogbakiri land.

Officers to run the organization were chosen by election, however all the villages are represented. Communication at the meetings is in Ikwerre language. It is compulsory for the president, secretary, financial secretary and treasurer to be educated in the English sense. The chosen officers are: the president, the secretary, the financial secretary, the treasurer, two PROs and two Provosts. The constitution is still being prepared meanwhile normal meeting procedure is followed and minutes are reported and read at subsequent meetings.

Major Achievement of the Organization

The association has been able to achieve lasting peace and unity, and spreading of the word of God in the community. The women used their churches and their Christian faith to achieve this success.

The Process used to achieve Peace

The representatives of the association met a respected Ikwerre elder who piloted them to the council of Ikwerre traditional rulers. After stating their mission and begging the chiefs to intervene on their behalf in the crisis, the traditional rulers agreed with the women and pledged their support and made a resolution at Isiokpo (that is the traditional capital of Ikwerre land).

First, the traditional rulers advised the then Rivers State Attorney General (who happened to be an Ikwerre daughter but married to a man from another tribe in the state) to hasten the release of the Government White Paper emanating from the Judicial Commission of Enquiry set up by the State Government to investigate the Ogbakiri crisis. This was done.

Second, during the crisis, they held prayer meetings at the end of every month at the Community Health Center Hall at Ogbakiri. Initially, the youths in the area did not allow the women to enter the hall but when they appealed to the youths and gave them tokens, they acquiescent. One of the young men appreciated their efforts and joined them from the beginning.

Third, the ancestral monument of one of the villages along with especially the head of the monument that was destroyed by another village was recasted and replaced. The traditional chiefs intervened for its retrieval. This helped dialogue between the warring parties to continue. In fact, a new head was molded and the chiefs made the culprits to pay for its replacement, but the association took the initiative to contact the sculptor and start the remolding. Having restored peace, a thanksgiving service was organized and attended by the State Governor at Isiokpo. Those who did not contribute to the peace efforts collected money from the government for the occasion and were parading themselves on the day since they wanted the governor to notice them. The members of

the association were pushed to the background. They were not offended but were satisfied that their main objective of restoring peace had been achieved. Since then, there had been relative peace in Ogbakiri land.

There were so many facets of the causes and at the same time the ripples effect was present. In the case of intra village conflict; these were sometimes caused by chieftaincy titles struggles. The escalation of the conflict was engineered by educated elders and jobless youths who were continually having access to guns. The association has no link with government agencies and the leaders have not been involved with capacity building.

Major funding from the organization is from their monthly contributions that are meager, although when they called on some Ogbakiri sons for assistance, they responded. The men in the community are their advisers and sometimes they pray with them at their prayer meetings.

iii) Academic Associates Peaceworks (NGO)

The organization founded in 2000 by a sociologist who operates all over Nigeria. Its main area of involvement is conflict resolution. The respondent is an associate of the NGO and was specifically involved with some conflict mediation in the NDR. The focus of Academic Associates Peaceworks is on education. This is to empower the affected communities to resolve the conflict on their own.

Procedure for Conflict Mediation

- i. When the organization learns of any crisis - area of clashes between communities
- sometimes intra or inter - it wades in. The information is generally through the mass media, most times the radio and newspaper.
- ii. The follow-up team from the organization goes to the area to discuss with the various groups involved. - Members of the team seek audience with traditional rulers in the area by appointment. If consent is given, a quick research is carried out about why and who started the conflict. After fieldwork, a proposal is written to the government. The director sees the governor with the proposal for intervention, along with the costing. If the governor likes the proposal, he agrees to fund it and mobilizes the organization to proceed with the intervention. If he does not like it, the proposal is put on the shelf.

Assuming that funds are made available:

The chiefs and some members of both sides of the conflict are written to inviting them to a neutral hotel. Since they are natural rulers, they are kept in expensive hotels and at the end of the exercise they are given honorarium. Equal numbers of participants are drawn from the two sides. The persons invited include provocative persons, prominent chiefs and all major actors involved in the crisis. If objections are made about inclusion

of some persons in the other group, the composition is dissolved and a new one is set up until members are acceptable all round. The number of participants chosen depends on the budget approved. However, all elements in the crisis are represented. These representatives must be ready to give peace a chance.

The representatives are kept in the hotel for 3-4 days and trained for crisis and conflict resolution management. They are trained while using an already prepared manual on the theory of conflict, why it occurs and consequences. They are educated on the preferred solutions. Keeping them in the hotel is considered necessary so that Academic Associates Peaceworks can have access to them at all times, day and night. Essentially what Academic Associates Peaceworks does is to train them to manage and resolve conflict by themselves. This is achieved when they are made to realize the consequences of violence and also that it is more profitable to engage in seeking alternative peaceful solutions. After the training, members of the two parties nominate their peace committees (for the two communities) from those present from each community.

Dates are scheduled for further dialogue at meetings in each community. The officials of Academic Associates Peaceworks act as supervisors and they also direct discussions at these meetings. If we label the peace committees **A** and **B**, at the meeting in community **A**, the joint peace committee will meet with other members of that community who were not present at the training. They are informed about the training exercise and the need to allow for peace. This exercise is carried out with the aim of allowing more people to know about the training. Witnesses are called when necessary. Invited to the meetings are all shades of opinion in the community including: prominent persons, lawyers, chiefs etc. Provocative persons are targeted by Academic Associates Peaceworks for private discussions. The proceedings at the meetings are fully documented and videotaped. In very volatile communities armed guards patrol the vicinity of the meeting. The process is repeated for community **B**.

A report is then written by Academic Associates Peaceworks and submitted to government stating the issues and recommendations. The report tries to represent all elements of the case. Sometimes T-shirts and caps with inscriptions on them are given to participants to show solidarity. However, the governor decides the form intervention takes. The NGO had also trained some workers from the oil sector on "early warning system" i.e. how to detect conflict before it erupts and plan for it. The companies provided the funding for the training.

iv) The Cases of Umuechem and Ugborode

Two case studies are presented from The Niger Delta Region (NDR) where women became involved in the crises with the main aim of brokering peace and at the same time getting positive result in the long run.

a) Umuechem Oilfields and the Umuechem Community

Umuechem is a village in Etche in Rivers State. The oilfield location is about two kilometers from the center of the village. Oil was first struck there about the end of 1950s. Before 1990, there was no relationship between the community and the oil prospecting company (Shell Petroleum Development Company - SPDC). There was complete neglect of the village. During this period, the members of the community especially the youths started thinking that the chiefs and elites were side tracking the community to get favors from SPDC. This created conflict in the community with a lot of accusations of betrayal as you could pick out a few contractors favored with lucrative contracts by SPDC. This resulted in the emergence of two warring groups: the youths and elders. There were cases of arson and serious assaults on suspected elders.

The women in the community became worried and wanted SPDC to be aware that they were part of the problem. At their general monthly village meeting sometime in 1990, they decided to have a peaceful demonstration with the sole aim of attracting the attention of SPDC management and discussing with them, as they could not get audience by appointment. The demonstration was not meant to be violent. The women carried leaves (which is the Nigerian traditional peaceful demonstration and solidarity symbol) and marched along the SPDC road leading to the location on the outskirts of the village. The mobile police squad (that is the official force that quells riots and demonstration) was called in by SPDC to safeguard its location (against defenseless women who were unarmed). The squad drove the women back into the village by shooting into the crowd (instead of using teargas etc). A woman was killed and some were seriously injured. When the men and youths saw what happened, they attacked the police squad, that went back to the city for reinforcement and on coming back, razed down the village and killed a lot of people.

Everyone in the country condemned the action. A judicial panel was set up by the Rivers State Government to probe the incident. The government from the report of the enquiry released a white paper. What has happened since then? The incumbent commissioner of police and his most senior officers were either retired or transferred from the state. Because of the widespread condemnation, SPDC has now shown some presence in the village. It has provided: a cottage hospital; pipe borne water; electricity; road into the village and renovated some primary schools. However, there is still protest that more could be done to compensate for years of total neglect. Although SPDC paid compensation to the community in respect of the property destroyed, by the time the money filtered down to the poor residents, some of them did not collect enough to assist them in rebuilding their houses.

b) Escravos Oilfields and the Ugborode Community in Delta State

Women occupied the Escravos tank farm that is the business nerve center of Chevron Nigeria Limited in Delta State for 10 days in July 2002. Operations were suspended as negotiations lasted for the release of workers held hostage as well as the women of Ugborode community to vacate the tank farm that also houses the airstrip, jetty and the company's Escravos Gas Project (EGP).

The crisis forced the company to declare "force majeure", a clause invented to notify its contract crude oil buyers of Chevron's inability to meet crude oil lifting schedule. Part of the resolution of the crisis was a memorandum of understanding (MOU) signed with the protesting women that stressed Chevron's commitment in community development projects and economic empowerment programs in the area.

Chevron mobilized all stakeholders within the shortest time to resolve the issues raised by the communities. This includes prevention or protection of the communities against operational disasters. All these activities took place peacefully and presently everything is back to normal.

v) Summary of the Case studies

i) What has been noticed generally is that when there is conflict and destruction, every one involved is initially keen on retaliation - "a vendetta of some sort" - but after a lot of destructions of life and properties, most of the people involved become burnt out and most of the elements specially prefer to have peace instead of conflict. At this stage, the warring parties are ready for intervention from any quarter especially women and NGOs.

ii) Culturally in Nigeria, when women come out to take part in conflict, it is time for peace since they are considered as peacemakers (mothers and wives). In some communities for example whenever there are volatile situations:

- All married women will run away to neighboring village chiefs and refuse to come back home until the men solve their problems
- Sometimes daughters of the village will use village criers to make pronouncements and call on the deities. Immediately the men will succumb and settle their differences.

iii) A very important traditional tool that women use to broker peace all over the country is to threaten that they will march naked on the streets. Immediately this threat is announced, even the government listens. This threat was executed in the 1920s during the Poll tax law for education problem in Aba, Eastern Nigeria. The women came out in a peaceful demonstration to appeal to the colonial administration to repeal the law. Their request was ignored. It was then they came out naked. The colonial administration had no option but to repeal the law.

iv) The response of government agencies to conflict has always been to deploy the military forces to keep peace in areas where conflict exists. Often times this has served to worsen the situation as in the case of Umuechem. However, in NDR the oil prospecting multi nationals have learnt that this method does not augur well for solution. They have also learnt that when women come out, they want peaceful solutions. And, the case of Ugborode showed that Chevron learnt from Umuechem's case. The issue arising from this is the ability to maximize the potential of women and maybe practice this method at the national scale.

v) When women get involved in conflict resolution, it is for the good of the community that supercedes household circumstances. What is needed are NGOs that not only provide relief materials and assists in reconstruction and rehabilitation of affected communities in conflict situations, but also stress the need for dialogue which has so far proven to be the best practice in conflict resolution as well as avoidance. Dialogue is the

key to achieving balance in peace negotiations. Thus getting access to dialogue, exercising the ability to listen as well as talk and demonstrating the political will to negotiate are essential.

vi) Culturally, when there is conflict in the household, a third party in form of elderly relation is brought in to make peace. Extended to the community and external relations, the third party is in the form of chiefs and elders. It is that, which women take over. We have to recognize this process of settling conflict (that has always been successful) and not only improve it but focus everyone's attention to it. This is what will improve women's involvement in peace making especially in conflict resolution.

vii) There is the need to build coalitions among various women NGOs so that they can be more effective as researchers, advocates and action-oriented practitioners. It is also necessary for women in the villages to be aware of them so that they know where to call for assistance whenever it is necessary to make peace in any community especially in relation to government agencies and multi nationals.

viii) For there to be peace in the country, it must start from the home. Domestic violence must be recognized and catered for. It should stop being swept under the floor. Thus generally, policies must take care of women - not tokenism - but from the beginning the impact on women must be assessed and made an integral part of legislation and not just as an after thought. Also, there is need to redefine power, not as domination over others in the sense of enforcing one's will on subdued individuals or groups, but rather emphasizing power as the capacity for action to bring about the changes needed - i.e. power: to do; be active; to take on different roles in the society, to create empowering systems, to meaningfully participate in and shape decision making. That is the kind of power that calls for more women in action. Thus women must hold the principle of inclusion in government as a key principle.

xi) Of note is the fact that there is rising militancy in the country of youth gangs with most of them visibly armed. These gangs deal with inter and intra conflict problems (as perceived by them and in most cases are not rational). Thus, this signifies that there is potential for more violence.

x) The challenge is for women to improve their traditional techniques of peace making to meet the challenges of post conflict peace building. We expect that they will be better placed to do this with the assistance of local NGOs and their international counterparts in capacity building for peace making and peace building in their communities.

6.0 Discussions of Findings

Several issues emerge from the interviews. These have implications for the ability of women groups' participation in conflict resolution and peace building.

6.1 Type of Intervention

Women apply different forms of intervention depending on their assessment of how best to proceed. A fairly easy way is the writing of petitions to state security agents, operating within and outside the locality and persons regarded as key players such as traditional rulers, oil companies and relevant government officials. Petition writing has the potential of reaching a wider audience but it suffers from the draw back of being

ignored This is the reason why following up the written petitions with lobbying of relevant persons and agencies is important.

Another form of intervention is confrontation of those regarded as fueling the conflict. Often such confrontations are peaceful protests directed at attracting the attention of government or company officials so that dialogue can be open. If not well handled, it can lead to more conflict and violence.

Some forms of intervention are subtler. Nigerians appear to be very religious and combine praying in Churches for some resolution and offering sacrifices to the gods for others. No one can assess the effectiveness of this form of intervention but it is clear that in the case of the Ogbakiri Women Peace forum, the church became the tool for mobilizing the women. The fact that the forum began as a prayer group enabled women from different sides of the conflict to sink their differences and come together as one Godly organization to intervene in the conflict.

A fact that is highlighted by this study is the limited involvement of non-governmental organizations in peace building in the NDR. Academic Associates Peace Works has a rather elaborate approach to its intervention but only does so where government approves and provides both funds and security. Without these, the NGO does not get involved. However, when it does get the funds, it provides different fora for the warring parties to resolve the crisis by themselves. In this way, Academic Associates Peace works actually trains, sensitizes and empowers the factions in the conflict to manage the situation by themselves. A limitation of this type of NGO is that because of its expensive and elaborate process, it could not be sustained. What we need is effective, less expensive peace building NGOs.

6.2 Government Intervention

Government intervention into conflict situations takes three successive steps. The first act of government is to ignore or play down the violence until it escalates. It then sends in state security agents who cause more damage by using force of arms Secondly, in its extreme form, the Nigerian army has been known to physically occupy entire communities for months, as was the experience of the Ogonis, and the navy in some oil producing Ijaw lands. The third step usually taken by government is the setting up of a judicial commission of inquiry headed by a judge of the high Court. Following the submission of the Commission's Report, the government published the white paper. It is on record that this process has not been effective as the conflicts continue after the investigation.

Government efforts at peace building have not really given opportunities to women to participate. This is evident from the fact that none of the women's groups interviewed had networked with government agencies such as the National Council of Women Societies (NCWS) or the women's commission at state and national levels. Rather, it is the groups that had taken the initiative to involve government agencies by petitioning and lobbying them. Some times the lobbying is informal based on ethnic affiliations.

6.3 Resources for Intervention

All the groups covered in the interviews, with the exception of Academic Associates Peaceworks (an NGO), depended on individual contributions from members. The men sometimes assisted when appealed to. It is clear that funds available to the groups are limited. Oil multi-nationals and government officials are alleged to often “buy” the peace by settling youth gangs set on disrupting oil production activities. Rather than serve as an effective means of peace making, such acts only temporarily hold the youths at bay. As long as the fundamental grounds for grievances are not addressed, it is only a matter of time before rival gangs emerge and the conflict escalates.

The women groups have tended to achieve more lasting solutions with the meager resources accessible to them. It would be reasonable to suggest that better funding will assist women groups involved in conflict resolution to do more. An area that is lacking in attention is the rehabilitation of victims who suffer loss of homes, lives and displaced persons. None of the groups interviewed had done something in this direction. The critical question remains: who should fund groups engaged in conflict resolution? If government funds the groups, by giving cash, the real possibility of group loyalty breaking down as members try to benefit and some individuals within the groups diverting funds exist. However, funds can be provided through indirect means such as providing logistic support, paying for training of group leaders to improve their skills, facilitating creation of networks of groups with other groups also involved in conflict resolution within and outside their immediate environments, and providing avenues where women in areas of conflict can go for assistance in respect to forming associations that will be involved in peace making and peace building. This is where we propose that government should sincerely direct its intervention on both short and long term bases.

International NGOs have built credibility over the years and can use local groups of women in implementing their programs of intervention in conflict situations. They can also organize capacity building workshops to train groups in early warning peace making and peace building, governance practices, human rights and democratic issues.. The questions are: Who should attend? How should the representatives be chosen? Who should fund the workshops? Who should provide for the welfare of participants? What should be provided? How do we guard against high jacking of workshop by government and political party members? These are formidable tasks that must be resolved as at when necessary.

6.4 Sustainability of the Associations

The associations have obviously been established in response to occurring specific conflict situations. For the associations formed to restore peace to be sustainable, they have to incorporate development activities into their programs. Perhaps one could look to the church to serve as a forum for intervention. The question would remain whether the church would succeed in peace building between two very different ethnic groups. An important factor for group sustainability will be how the leadership re-focuses the group and whether the new vision is sufficient to pull the group together in the same way that conflict did. If a group succeeds in making this transition, it could continue to exist.

6.5 Early – Warning Capacity Building

None of the leaders of the groups interviewed had received any training in conflict prevention, management and resolution. What they did was by personal insight of the leadership. The Academic Associates Peace works is the only one that actually trains people to recognize early signs of conflict emerging and when it does, to promote dialogue. This they have done even with employees of oil companies. The other groups simply feel their way through the conflict, doing what seems workable to achieve peace.

There is need to train leaders and members of women groups involved in peace building so that they can become more pro-active. International NGOs, Development Aid Agencies with the support of national governments should fund such training with local NGOs serving as rallying points to effectively train women for conflict resolution.

6.6 The Problem of Youth Militancy

A fear that was expressed by all the women in all the case studies carried out is the militancy of youths in the Niger Delta Region and in all the conflict areas in the country. The youths have access to sophisticated weapons and they are ready to use them with the slightest perceived provocation. The women attribute the cause to that of idleness caused by the youths in the region not being gainfully employed. They claimed that it is not possible to be gainfully employed, as they have not been trained for the changing job opportunities in the oil sector. Meanwhile their expectations have risen tremendously since the world has become a global village and they are continually exposed to mglobal consumer goods. Any training of women to enhance their capacity towards peace building must recognize this development.

7.0 Concluding Remarks

In this paper an attempt has been made to document the activities of some women's groups in peace building in specific areas that had witnessed violent conflicts in the NDR. What came out clearly first, is that the major issue that has implication for the ability of the groups' participation in conflict resolution and peace building is lack of resources. These include capacity building, resources for logistics etc. there is a need therefore to organize capacity-building workshops regularly that will improve their performances. These workshops are expected to discuss and tease out the problems encountered and possible solutions both globally and in the local context. Second, democracy must be considered at the two important levels: partisan and as a way of life for it to be meaningful. Third, sound representative institutions that are based on the principles of democracy and human rights and creatively integrating traditional values and wisdom of each society, have a good chance to usher in a hopeful system where future violent conflicts can be averted and peaceful mechanisms prevail.

Violence is an ethnic-based issue, thus, its solution must have ethnic as well as political, economic etc connotations. It is recognized that conflict is inevitable, but it does not have to lead to violence. By enhancing the capabilities of women to get involved in peace-building, it is expected that in the long run, issues in conflict-prone areas in the region in particular and the country in general will not lead to violence. It is the solving of the issues highlighted that will automatically lead to sincere and effective development of the region and of course provides the environment for democracy to thrive.

Notes

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