

NSRP MAPPING CONFLICT PREVENTION ACTORS AND INITIATIVES IN SELECTED STATES

REPORT FOR DELTA STATES

**UKOHA UKIWO AND PATRICK NAAGBANTON
MARCH 7 2012**

Summary of conclusions

Delta State has experienced the most longstanding and intense violent conflict in the region and its coastal areas have served as strongholds of major Niger Delta militant groups. Several sustained efforts by the government and oil companies to address violent conflicts through empowerment of key actors in the conflict as well as opportunities for both legal and illegal resource accumulation have contributed to reduction of incidents of inter-communal violent conflicts and violent confrontations between militants and community activists and security operatives.

However, ethnic suspicions and rivalries have not abated and continue to weaken existing conflict mechanisms. NSRP can help by supporting initiatives aimed at promoting reconciliation at state, district and community levels. The study confirmed the relevance of proposed NSRP outputs in the state and identified prospective partners for implementing the outputs among both state and non-state actors.

1. Study purpose

The Terms of Reference outlined the objectives of the mapping as follows:

- a) To better understand the local drivers of violence in Delta State and the relevant actors
- b) To identify potential programme partners in the states
- c) To collect data on promising conflict prevention and peacebuilding initiatives
- d) To capture findings in a short analytical report.

2. Methodology and approach

The main methods adopted for the mapping are key informant interviews (KIIs) with leaders and staff members of civil society organizations, especially NGOs and government agencies and desk research. The interviews were conducted in Warri and Asaba by Patrick Naagbantton while Ukoha Ukiwo anchored the desk research and preparation of the analytical report.

The selection of organizations was based on reputation. A snowballing technique was used to get contact information of other organizations from those already known to the researcher. However, this was not very fruitful as it seemed that organizations contacted were reluctant to introduce the researcher to other organizations to enhance the chances of their organizations being selected as NSRP partners. This is not surprising given the competition for funding among NGOs generally.

Another challenge encounter during the research was the ethnic rivalry in the state which has bred suspicions among NGO leaders and staff members. In one particular case, an NGO staff from an organization declined an invitation to a meeting with the

researcher in another organization in a central location because the host organization was headed by an Ijaw while she was Itsekiri.

The field research also encountered difficulty of getting some organizations to provide information on their activities. While this largely stemmed from poor institutional capacity which affected documentation, there was some indication of fatigue with donor sponsored organization assessment. Some organizations are reluctant to participate in organization assessments based on the perceptions that such exercises are mere formalities as the donor organizations purportedly had favoured organizations to award grants to.

However, the researcher used personal contacts to mitigate some of the challenges especially in Warri which has more NGOs that have had access to international donor funding. There are fewer established organizations in Asaba.

The mapping exercise was also limited by the design which focused on organizations based in the state. This state centric focus meant that organizations based outside the state that are implementing programmes in state were not visited. Given the historical position of Benin as the capital of the Midwestern Region (later Bendel State), which included present day Delta, some notable NGOs running programmes in the state are based in Benin City. Examples of such organizations are African Network for Empowerment and Environmental Justice (ANEEJ), Environmental Rights Action (ERA), Centre for Population, Environment and Development (CPED) and Girls Power Initiative (GPI). The activities of some of the major organizations that fall in this category were however captured by desk research. Finally, the mapping also encountered the challenge of the closure, dormancy or relocation of some organizations that were very active in peace building activities in the past. Notable among these are Academic Associates Peace Works (AAPW) and Pro Natura International (PNI).

3. Grievances that drive violent conflict

Since it was carved out of old Bendel State in August 1991, Delta State has witnessed several protracted incidents of violent conflicts. These violent conflicts arise from grievances among different communities and ethno-communal groups in the state over perceived marginalization and injustices. Inter-communal violent conflicts have been rife in the state due to grievance expressed by the different ethnic groups.

It is apposite to note that the composition of the state did not reflect the agitations for states in the area. The military government of Gen. Ibrahim Babangida obviously merged demands for two different states -Anioma and Delta states- to create a single state. Proponents of 'Delta State' from the coastal area of the state, especially the demographically dominant Urhobo ethnic group had desired the capital of the state to be located in Warri but the Babangida administration instead approved Asaba, which was proposed as capital of 'Anioma State' as the capital of Delta State. The ethnic groups in the central and southern senatorial districts of the state were peeved that Babangida took the decision to satisfy his wife who was a native of Asaba.

Mobilizations by the aggrieved groups, especially the Urhobo, for the creation of the 'real Delta State' has generated tensions between the largely Igbo speaking peoples of the Northern Senatorial District and the ethnic groups in the Central and Southern Districts. Governments dominated by the Urhobo (especially Chief James Ibori administration, 1999-2007) are accused of creating a new state capital by establishing a Government House Annex in Warri, and thereby allegedly neglecting development of the state capital.

Ethnic grievance has also been the underlying cause of the protracted violent conflicts between the Ijaw and Itsekiri, and Itsekiri and Urhobo especially over ownership and control of local governments and competition over access to rents from oil companies in the Warri area. Both Ijaw and Urhobo have historically challenged alleged Itsekiri domination and these grievances have led to several incidents of violent conflicts between the Ijaw and Itsekiri on the one hand and the Itsekiri and Urhobo on the other hand (see, Otite and Albert 1999; Imobighe, Bassey and Asuni 2002).

Grievance against the perceived exploitative operations of multinational corporations exploring and exploiting oil and gas has also led to violent conflicts. Many oil producing communities in the state decried neglect by oil companies and the destruction of their natural environments. On many occasions, mobilizations against perceived exploitative relations with oil multinationals have resulted in violent confrontations with security agencies. The increasing militarization of conflicts between oil producing communities and multinational corporations was evidenced by the proliferation of militant armed groups in the state and the deployment of the Joint Military Task Force. A case in point is the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) which has its operational headquarters (Camp 5) in Oporoza Island, Gbaramatu clan in Warri South West LGA. Until the commencement of the amnesty programme in 2009, MEND has been in armed confrontation with security agencies and launched crippling attacks on critical oil infrastructure in the area, including the highly prized Bonga Oil Field, off the coast of Warri.

Although most communities in the area are peeved with oil company operations and with the Federal Government for pocketing most of the oil revenues, inter-communal relations are often strained by competition for access to employment, contracts and compensation from oil companies. Violence has often occurred over perceived favouritism displayed by the companies for some as against other communal groups.

Allegations of inequalities in access to oil revenues have also led to rising tensions in generational conflicts. In Delta State many youth associations have increasingly challenged monopoly of privileges by the elders and forced themselves into community governance institutions. For instance, youths from Ewvreni in Ughelli North LGA committed regicide over suspicions that their paramount ruler had allegedly diverted compensation to the community from an oil producing company for personal use.

However, there is no evidence that the youths, who easily appropriate chieftaincy titles have fared better in administrating oil-derived commonwealth. Quite often, the emergence of youth leaders have resulted in proliferation of groups as splinter factions seek direct access to state or oil company largesse. A case in point was the

fractionalization of the Federated Ijaw Niger Delta Communities (FNDIC)- which spearheaded the campaign against the Itsekiri and Chevron- after Chief Oboko Bello, its leader was appointed into the Presidential Committee on the Development of Coastal Oil Producing Communities in early 2005.

In the 1990s, high handed responses of security agencies to community protests and rising casualty figures especially among youths influenced womens' associations to become involved in anti-corporate oil industry mobilizations. The women have used such platforms to express their grievance about the double jeopardy they face with the loss of their husbands and sons to the perennial violence as well as loss of sources of livelihoods due to environmental pollutions. The most reported case of women's activism in the Niger Delta was recorded in Ugborodo where Itsekiri women occupied the Escravo Oil Export Terminal (see Ukeje 2004).

4. Events that trigger violent conflict (or could do)

Against the background of the climate of suspicion and hostility among different ethno-communal and generational groupings events that pertain to the distribution or reallocation of resources have been major triggers of violent conflicts in Delta State. These include the creation of state and local governments, elections and political appointments, payment of compensation by oil companies, delimitation of constituencies, employment and contract opportunities in oil companies, award of scholarships and bursary to students, recognition and classification of chieftaincy by state and local governments, land ownership titles etc.

The most protracted violent conflict in the state - between Ijaw and Itsekiri - was triggered by the creation of Warri South West LGA. The Local Council, which was created on October 1, 1996 was originally (according to the military administrator) supposed to be headquartered in Ogbe-Ijoh, an Ijaw community. However, after few months of operating from Ogbe-Ijoh, the Federal Government Gazette on Local Government creation listed Ogidigben, an Itsekiri community, as the LGA headquarters. The Ijaw were aggrieved by the relocation of the headquarters from Ogbe-Ijoh to Ogidigben and decided to launch attacks on Itsekiri communities. The violent conflicts between Itsekiri and Ijaw continued until 2003 when the LGA headquarters was relocated to Ogbe-Ijoh.

The announcement of the results of the election for the position of Chairman of Warri South local government area conducted in March 1997 triggered violence. The Urhobo claimed the elections were rigged in favour of the Itsekiri candidate to perpetuate alleged Itsekiri domination of the LGA. Similarly, there were violent conflicts between the Itsekiri and the Urhobo over the election into the State House of Assembly. The Itsekiri claimed Chief James Ibori rigged the PDP primaries in favour of the Urhobo candidate. The Itsekiri have historically dominated political positions in Warri on the claims of indigeneity. The Itsekiri consider Warri Division as their homeland and reject the alleged expansionist ambitions on their more populous Ijaw and Urhobo neighbours.

Recognition of host communities by oil producing companies have also triggered conflicts in Delta State as in order parts of the Niger Delta. In 1977, there was a bloody clash between Ubeji (Itsekiri) and Ekpan (Urhobo) over ownership of the land

to be used by the newly established Warri Refinery of the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC). In 2002, violent conflicts erupted in Uzere, Isoko LGA of the state after Shell distributed disused pipelines to one of its host communities without extending the same gesture to a neighbouring community.

Violent conflicts have also been triggered by disputes over spheres of influence of traditional rulers. The rejection of the purported overlord status of the Olu of Warri (Itsekiri monarch) by the Ijaw and Urhobo has made events or activities surrounding chieftaincy to trigger violent conflicts. For instance, the palace of a newly recognized Ovie of Okere Urhobo in Warri was burnt down in 1999 shortly after the courts upheld the decision of the state government to recognise him against the opposition of the Itsekiri traditional authorities. The annual coronation anniversary of the Olu of Warri have on several occasions triggered violent clashes as Ijaw and Urhobo communities mobilized to stop the carnival celebrating the Itsekiri monarch to pass through what they consider Ijaw and Urhobo parts of Warri. In other parts of the state, selection of chiefs and paramount rulers has occasionally triggered violence within affected communities.

Another major trigger of violent conflicts in the state is the high-handed and repressive measures taken by security agencies deployed to keep peace during conflict situations. For instance, in 2009 the invasion of Oporoza by members of the JTF in search of alleged MEND fighters escalated the violence in the state. Moreover, in 2010 the JTF invaded Ayakoromo, an Ijaw community in Gbaramatu clan of Warri South West in search of a renegade militant John Togo. This reignited violence between security forces and militants that had abated after the commencement of the amnesty programme.

Finally, it is apposite to note that events happening outside the boundaries of the state have often triggered violence within the state because of the peculiar ethnic configuration of Delta State where some ethnic groups indigenous to the state are also found in neighbouring states. A notable example is the armed struggle launched by MEND after the arrest and detention of some Ijaw personages from Bayelsa and Rivers State in late 2004.

5. Who is keeping the peace now – and how?

The federal, state and local council governments are the major actors in conflict management in Delta State. This is not surprising as it has been shown above that governments at all levels have been implicated in the instigation and escalation of conflicts in the state.

The first approach adopted by government to keep peace is the deployment of troops to separate combatants and conflicting parties. However, in contexts where the state is considered partial and or the state is seen as aggressor troop deployments have actually contributed to the escalation of conflicts. Troop deployments have clearly contributed to further militarization especially the proliferation of sophisticated weaponry in the coastal areas of the state. The excesses of security agencies notwithstanding the deployment of troops have contributed to the cessation of hostilities. For instance, the reinforcements by the

JTF in Delta State early 2009 contributed to debilitating the militant groups based in the area and *ipso facto* influencing their decision to accept presidential amnesty. The main militant group based in the area, which was led by Government Ememupolo (Tompolo), had earlier resisted government's overture for disarmament.

Governments at all levels have also empanelled commissions of enquiry and peace committees to manage conflicts. For instance, several commissions of enquiry have investigated and made recommendations for the resolution of the Warri crisis. The Special Presidential Security Committee on the Niger Delta (known as the Ogomudia Committee) set up by the Obasanjo government in 2000 was largely in response to several violent conflicts in Delta State. In many instances, non-implementation of committee recommendations has contributed to the resumption of violent conflicts. For instance, the Itsekiri claim that a central factor in the Warri crisis is the failure of government to implement findings of peace committees and disregard to court rulings over communal disputes.

Given the high intensity of violent conflicts in the state in the early 2000s, the state government created a unit called the Department of Conflict Resolution which was headed by a Special Adviser in the Governor's Office. The Unit headed then by Comrade Owvomorie. Macauley, the current Secretary to the State Government, was responsible for troubleshooting in conflict areas and took over the functions of ad hoc peace committees. The fact that this institution had a guaranteed existence throughout the Ibori administration contributed to resolution of thorny issues in the protracted tripartite Warri conflicts between the Itsekiri, Ijaw and Urhobo.

By appointing a veteran labour unionist to the position, the government was able to use bargaining and negotiation skills to advantage. The violent conflict was resolved by strategic resource allocation and reallocation through a number of measures including transfer of LGA headquarter to Ogbe-Ijoh, appointment of key leaders among aggrieved groups to key positions, devolution of local council administration to ward levels, zoning of political positions, etc. It is instructive that most of the ring leaders in the conflicts have since been incorporated through sundry political appointments. The devolution of LGA administration to ward level reduced conflicts over tussles for the control of the Warri LGAs as each ward had a guaranteed allocation from the monies accruing to the LGA.

Although the Conflict Resolution Unit has been dismantled its functions are being performed under the current administration of Dr. Emmanuel Uduaghan by a number of agencies and individuals, including the Ministries of Poverty Alleviation and Youth Affairs and several political and security advisers to the Governor.

A similar scheme, which devolves the management of resources to local communities, has been adopted by major oil producing communities in the state. Through the framework of the Global Memorandum of Understanding (GMOU), oil companies have created trust funds for clusters of communities with common or similar identities. The communities now manage funds paid annually to them by the companies. In the Warri area, the emergence of GMOUs have reduced rivalries among the Itsekiri, Urhobo and Ijaw over access to oil rents as each of the communities have separate GMOU agreements and autonomous regional development councils. In addition, oil companies continue to buy peace by granting

sundry contracts, notably security contracts and oil spill clean-up contracts to militants, youth leaders and community chiefs with significant followership.

An interesting aspect of the GMOU process is the interest shown by the companies in improving the capacity of development councils to implement projects with community trust funds. Some companies have entered into partnerships with non-governmental organizations to facilitate capacity building in community development among their cluster communities. An example of such collaboration is that between Chevron and the Partnership Initiatives for Development in the Niger Delta (PIND) a consortium made up of the New Nigeria Foundation, Niger Delta Professionals, ACCORD for Development and Morgan Smart Foundation. The companies recognise the dangers of being seen as an alternative government and have increasingly supported initiatives that strengthen the capacity of communities in demanding good governance from state governments and local government councils.

Apart from facilitating community development, non-governmental associations have also been involved in direct conflict resolution initiatives. The most notable example is the mediatory efforts of the Academic Associates Peace Works (AAPW) in the resolution of the Warri conflicts. AAPW with support from United States Institute for Peace (USIP) deployed strategic tools such as action research and broad based training on mediation among community groups with great success (see Albert 1999, Asuni 2002 for details). The African Centre for Corporate Responsibility (APCR) has also been involved in community mediation. The USAID funded Conflict Abatement through Local Mitigation (CALM) supported initiatives for peace among youths through sports. Moreover, the Department of International Development (DFID) and the European Union through the Micro Projects have extended support to community empowerment.

Apart from the peace mediation efforts facilitated by the AAPW, the success stories of most of the initiatives are not well documented and disseminated. There is in most cases the challenge of attribution due to the multiplicity of interventions. The massive transfer of resources by the oil rich state government and by oil companies has clearly been responsible for the cessation of violent conflicts among the Itsekiri, Urhobo and Ijaw. Some sources also point to the influence of surveillance contracts and opportunities for illegal oil bunkering as having contributed to the reduction of incidents inter-communal violence and mobilizations against oil companies.

6. Gaps in the conflict prevention architecture – and how the NSRP could help

Most of the gaps identified in the Bayelsa and Rivers States mapping report are applicable to Delta State. These include lack of synergy between government and civil society initiatives, non-inclusion of youths and women in community level conflict architecture, lack of transparency in conflict prevention and management initiatives, making militants beneficiaries of empowerment initiatives, lack of sustainability plans for the programmes and lack of support for victims of violent conflicts.

One major gap in the conflict architecture that is pronounced in Delta State is the absence of a well thought out reconciliation programmes. This is imperative given

the longstanding history of rivalries and conflicts among different ethnic groups in the state that has bred mutual suspicion and led to polarisation.

The following table lists prospective organizations that NSRP can partner with to deliver programmes in three outputs areas. Background details of the organizations are contained in annex 1 on organizational profiles compiled by Patrick Naagbantou.

Output	Title	Description	Potential partners
1: More participatory, inclusive, accountable and co-ordinated public safety mechanisms at local, state and federal levels	Strengthening effectiveness of state and LGA security committees	Support a civil society led but inclusive group to promote coordination among to security committees at state and LGA levels	AAPW, African Centre for Corporate Responsibility (ACCR), CEPED, NOA, Office of Special Adviser to Governor on security matters
2: Reduced grievances around unemployment and land and water use in target areas	Support to youth and civil society group advocacy demanding more inclusive and transparent state employment and poverty reduction programmes; and the provision of technical advice to government agencies to support increased inclusivity and transparency in their supply	Support NGO led initiative to demand more inclusive government employment and empowerment programmes	LITE/NIPRODEV, Morgan Smart, ANEEJ, AFRODEP
		Technical support to government agencies to enhance inclusivity and transparency of programmes	Ministry of Poverty Alleviation, DESOPADEC, Ministry of Youth Affairs, CPED

	Support to civil society and community groups to participate in decision-making around resource use and the mitigation of environmental degradation; and the provision of technical advice to government agencies to support more inclusive and transparent resource and environmental management	Support NGO and coalitions with programmes for early reporting and response to oil spills	ERA, HOCON, NAGOND, CEPED
		Technical support to government agency for early response to environmental degradation	Ministry of Environment, CPED,
	Challenge Fund	Interesting initiatives	Based on Applications
3: Increased and more influential participation by women and girls in institutions and initiatives relevant to peacebuilding, with reduced prevalence and impact of violence against women and girls	Supporting the development and implementation of a NAP on Women, Peace and Security which includes the domestication of relevant regional and international norms and standards	Support NGO to support advocacy for domestication at state level	GPI
	Improving the prevention of and response to violence against girls and women by supporting safe spaces for girls and women and building a constituency of	Support NGO to educate public on legislations prohibiting violence against women and promoting litigation	GPI, ICWECD

	support amongst leaders, men and male youth.		
	A challenge fund to support women's organisations to innovate, consolidate and create an evidence base for peacebuilding, protection or empowerment initiatives	Interesting initiatives	Based on applications

References

Charles Ukeje (2004), 'From Aba to Ugborodo: Gender Identity and Alternative Discourse of Social Protests among Women in the Oil Delta of Nigeria', *Oxford Development Studies*, Vol. 34, No. 4, pp. 605-617.

I O. Albert (1999) 'New Directions in the Management of Community Conflicts in Nigeria: Insights from the activities of AAPW' in O. Otite and I O. Albert (eds.) *Community Conflicts in Nigeria: Management, Resolution and Transformation*, Ibadan: Spectrum and AAPW.

T.A. Imobighe, C. Bassey and J.B. Asuni (2002) *Conflict and instability in the Niger Delta: the Warri Case*, Ibadan: Spectrum and AAPW

Appendix 1. List of people met (To be completed by Patrick Naagbantou)

STATE: DELTA		
Name	Description (title, place of meeting or organisation)	Contact details if relevant (phone, email)