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**PEACE EDUCATION IN MARGINALISED COMMUNITIES IN
NIGERIA: THE 'PROTECT OUR FUTURE' PROJECT**

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“The Niger Delta holds some of the world's richest oil deposits, yet Nigerians living there are poorer than ever, violence is rampant, and the land and water are fouled. What went wrong? ----

Oil fouls everything ... It spills from the pipelines, poisoning soil and water. It stains the hands of politicians and generals, who siphon off its profits. It taints the ambitions of the young, who will try anything to scoop up a share of the liquid riches—fire a gun, sabotage a pipeline, kidnap a foreigner.

Nigeria had all the makings of an uplifting tale: poor African nation blessed with enormous sudden wealth. From a potential model nation, Nigeria has become a dangerous countryEverything looked possible—but everything went wrong.

The cruelest twist is that half a century of oil extraction in the delta has failed to make the lives of the people better. Instead, they are poorer still, and hopeless.” Tom O'Neill *National Geographic*, February 2007

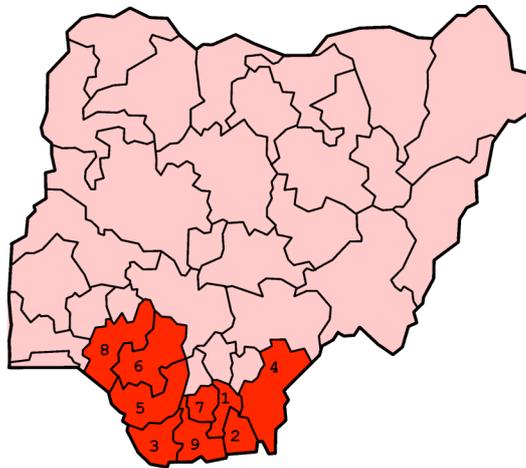


Figure 1: Map of Nigeria numerically showing states typically considered part of the Niger Delta region: 1. Abia, 2. Akwa Ibom, 3. Bayelsa, 4. Cross River, 5. Delta, 6. Edo, 7. Imo, 8. Ondo, 9. Rivers

This paper explores the conflict in the Niger Delta area of Nigeria and the effect of the ‘Protect our Future’ Project. The conflict in the area has taken various dimensions. There have been various schools of thought on the reason for the continued spate of conflict, violence and recently now kidnapping in the Niger Delta¹. The most

¹ O'Neill T, *Nigerian Oil, Curse of the Black Gold*. National Geographic Magazine (FEBRUARY 2007 edition). Onuoha

commonly held view is to attribute it to a potent cocktail of violence, underdevelopment, abject poverty in the area, lure for quick money, environmental damage and failure of government leading to a growing frustration and circle of violence among the people. However, in spite of the effort of the government and various stakeholders, the situation does not seem to be abating. This paper analyses the situation and proffers likely solutions to this age-long problem in the region that have taken a new dimension. These include the contribution of funds by persons who benefit from the community to a central fund to be used for education of members of the community. It finally reflects on the role the 'Protect our Future' Peace project is contributing and likely to contribute to the process of achieving peace in the Niger Delta.

Introduction

Nigeria is located in sub Sahara Africa. Figure 2 shows the location Nigeria within West Africa and Africa. Nigeria got independence from Britain on 1st October 1960. The various ethnic nationalities in the country have been existing independently with their different cultures and styles of leadership before the intervention of the colonial masters. The first group of foreign influence were the Portuguese navigators in 1472. There was also the slave trade in the 16th to 18th Century. The British set up presence in the country and between 1861 and 1914 it established what it called the colony and protectorate of Nigeria. It therefore governs the people through the indirect role. In this model the local leaders still have some influence on their people. However, the final authority rest with the colonial masters.

The merger of the colony of Lagos and the various protectorates in 1914 gave birth to Nigeria. This merger was without the consent or consultations with the people. It was based on the convenience of the British. Nigeria has witnessed various forms of Government from the Parliamentary system of Government in 1960 to the present Presidential system of Government; in between the country has witnessed various

Austin, *From Conflict to Collaboration: Building Peace in Nigeria's Oil-Producing Communities*. London, Adonis and Abbey, and 2005. Okonta, I., & Oronto, D., *Where Vultures Feast: Shell, Human Rights and Oil in the Niger Delta*. San Francisco, Sierra Club Books and 2001. Human Rights Watch, *The Price of Oil: Corporate Responsibility and Human Rights Violations in Nigeria's Oil Producing Communities* (Human Rights Watch, 1999)

forms of military dictatorship.

Nigeria is the most populous nation in Africa, with a population of about 130 million people. The mainstream of the economy at independence was cocoa, palm products, groundnuts and other agricultural products. However, the discovery of oil in 1958 has changed the economic fortune of country and the people. The bulk of the country revenue as of today comes from oil, which accounts for about 80%. The revenue from oil since the 1970s has glossed more than \$400 Billion dollars, yet there is nothing to show for it. The majority of the people live in desolation and abject poverty. Nigeria is Africa's leading oil producer and the world's seventh largest exporter. Nearly all its 2.5 million barrels a day production comes from the Niger Delta².

The Niger Delta is within the south - south geo political zone in Nigeria. It is an area of approximately 70,000 square kilometres comprising of swamps, rain forests, rivers and creeks. It accounts for almost ninety five percent of the country oil export³. Figure 1 shows the states considered as part of the Niger Delta States. Figure 2 shows a close up map of the Niger Delta showing streams, creeks, etc.

The people in the oil communities live in abject poverty with no electricity, potable water, and health amenities. However, the oil facilities in the area are guarded by government troops. The workers are provided with comfortable air conditioned apartment with all amenities. The author recalls his trip to one of the oil platform of Shell. 'As we sailed on the river we touched the water and felt the oil film. This is the water the people drink. As we passed thatch houses in various stages of disrepair, children came out of the houses to wave at us. At other times we passed by parents in canoes carrying firewood. They must have gone a long distance to collect those woods for cooking. Yet, when we got to the Shell platform it is like a different country. Here we are offered bottled water; air conditioned facilities, electricity,

² International Crisis Group, Various Africa Report in 2006

³ Dulue Mbachu, *The poverty of oil wealth in Nigeria's Delta*. In for ISN Security Watch (03/02/06).

television and every modern amenity to make life comfortable”.⁴

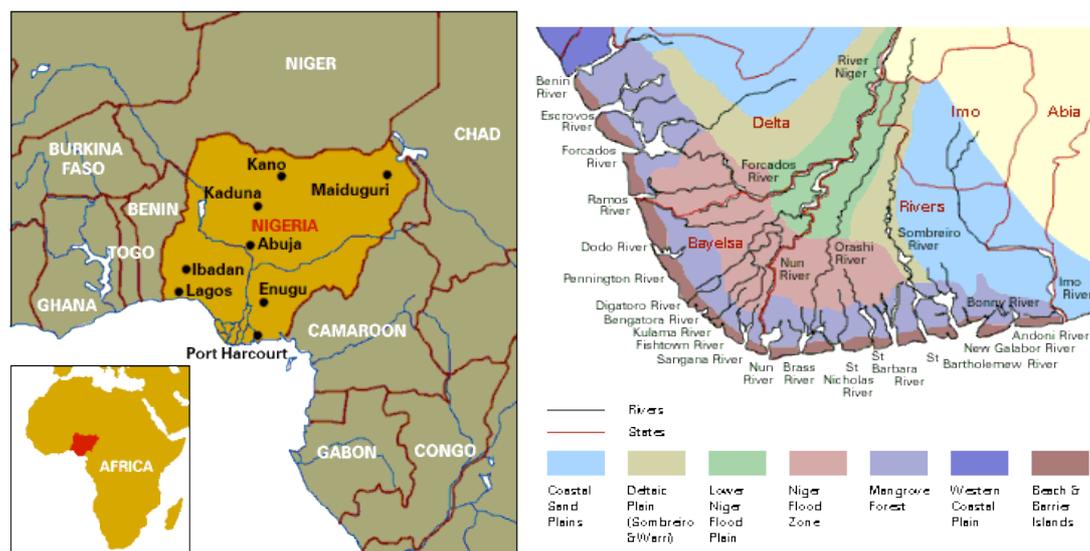


Figure 2: Map Showing Nigeria within Africa & Niger Delta Terrain

The election of President Umaru Yar’Adua and his Deputy Goodluck Jonathan, an ethnic Ijaw and former governor of Bayelsa State, in April 2007 raised the hope of an early resolution of the crisis in the Niger Delta region. However, a year after their inauguration, the situation is still as pathetic as before. Violence and criminality is intertwined in an unholy alliance. The kidnapping of expatriate workers as a tool for agitation, which is also a lucrative ransom yielding business, has taken a turn for the worse with local politicians families now victims. How did we get to this point? To understand the conflict in the Niger Delta region, it is critical for us to appreciate the history of the country and the Niger Delta region in particular.

History of Protects in the Niger Delta

The political history of Nigeria since independence has been dominated by military dictatorships⁵ this has suppressed opposition especially in the Niger Delta area which has been plagued by years of environmental degradation and abject poverty. The

⁴ Personal experience of Author working in the area in October 1999.

⁵ Ben Nwabueze, *Military Rule and Social Justice in Nigeria*. Saros International Publishers and 1993. Bayo Oloyede *The Press Under Military Rule in Nigeria (1966-1993): An Historical and Legal Narrative* (African Studies) .Edwin Mellen Press and 2004

resulting hardship and the inability of the government to provide services to the people resulted in a series of protests. The history of the struggle for the emancipation of the area has not always been violent. There are various documented cases of non violent protest that various government crushed with ample violence. The case of the Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP) in 1990 and Ken Saro Wiwa is a case study.

The demands of MOSOP articulated in the bill of rights asked for compensation for the degradation of Ogoni land. It is claimed⁶ that the establishment of MOSOP can be linked to other ethnic groupings at that time like: Odua Peoples's Congress (OPC), Arewa Peoples Congress (APC) and Movement for the Actualisation of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB). The difference however, lies in that MOSOP was seen as a threat to the oil industry, which lays the golden egg that sustains the economy. The government of General Sani Abacha could not tolerate their agitation and Ken Saro-Wiwa and the others were framed for murder and hanged. The suppression of that protest violently by the government and the hanging of Saro-Wiwa and eight other Ogoni minority rights activists set a terrible precedent in the Niger Delta. The Odi and Choba Massacres are also cases where protests were crushed with heavy military might with huge casualties and cases of rape. An interesting but sad aspect of the Odi and Choba Massacres was that it was ordered by a civilian president. It can be argued that the violent suppression of dissent led to the present situation in the area.

The demise of General Abacha ushered in a new political dispensation. In 1998 the Ijaw Youth Council (IYC) was formed as an amalgamation of various youth groups in the Ijaw speaking areas of the Niger Delta. One of the highpoints of the IYC was the Kaiama Declaration:

"All lands and natural resources (including mineral resources) within the Ijaw territory belong to the Ijaw communities and are the basis of our survival...We cease

⁶ Ike Okonta, *MEND: Anatomy Of A Peoples' Militia*. (2006-11-02). <http://www.pambazuka.org>

to recognise all undemocratic decrees that rob our peoples/communities of the right to ownership and control of our lives and resources, which were enacted without our participation and consent. These include the Land Use Decree and the Petroleum Decree..." - (Excerpt from Kaiama Declaration, 11 December 1998)

This declaration articulated the injustice done to the Ijaw nation and the methods to alleviate the problem. However, the leadership crisis in the IYC led to the formation of the Asari Dokubo led Niger Delta Peoples Volunteer Force (NDPVF). This can be claimed to be the beginning of change in tactics and mobilization for the groups.

The formation of militant groups in the Niger Delta is therefore constantly linked to the inability of government and the various stakeholders to resolve the issues of the degradation of the environment that had led to destruction of various sources of livelihood for the people leading to frustration and abject poverty. The response has been various forms of protest, sabotage of facilities for oil production and of recent kidnapping of oil workers for ransom.

The various groups are relatively obscure and their tactics are unconventional. The impact of their activities has generated attention to them. There is a high level of coordination and organisation, the era of non violent protest seem gone. The militants seem well trained in sophisticated guerrilla war fare which is supposedly funded by proceeds from illegal oil bunkering as well as the ransom paid for the kidnapped. The sophistication of their firepower makes them no match for the conventional police force. The state has therefore deployed the military to the area. The method can be likened to the guerrilla tactics in Iraqi where various groups carry out activities to create fear and cripple activities of the intended victims⁷. The present situation has gone through various circles and levels of conflict. The question that the people constantly ask is when will the situation will come to an end? This question is quite ambiguous, because there are two situations here: the situation of lack of development

⁷Global Guerrillas, *Nigerian Evolution*. 16 January 2006
globalguerrillas.typepad.com/globalguerrillas/2006/01/nigerian_evolut.html

in the Niger Delta and the resultant militancy and kidnapping. Which should end first? It can be likened to the chicken and the egg scenario. However, while it can be argued that the reason and how the situation got to this level are well known. The question for consideration should then be why is the situation still not under control?

This paper attempts to answer the question why the militant situation is now part of the story of the Niger Delta. It will remain part of the history and folk fore of the people. The paper is divided into three parts. The first part looks at the general situation of the country with reference to the Niger Delta area. It explores the militants' situation and the factors that led to the present impasse. It examines the issues of resources control, land use act, ransom payment, etc. The paper will focus on the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) as an umbrella group for the various militant groups in the Niger Delta. The second part of the paper analysis and reflects on the effect of the 'Protect our Future' project. The conclusion explores various initiatives to solve the problems.

This paper is based on a number of qualitative interviews conducted between August 2007 and March 2008 in Port Harcourt Rivers State and Warri Delta State. The author interviewed and held formal and informal discussions with various stakeholders such as the media community leaders, community persons, local persons, youth leaders, militants, lawyers and government officials. However, because of the highly sensitive nature of the situation, they have asked not to be named. The author has referred to them as 'schools of thought' without having to give a direct quote. This conforms to the 'emic' perspective in conflict analysis. In the words of Jayne Docherty: "...the perception of the parties and this implies that we must understand how the parties think about their relationship/ conflict, in order to grapple with what is going on."⁸

History of Militancy in the Niger Delta

The term militants is used in its most general sense to refer to either individuals or a group that champion a cause selflessly. The purpose of the struggle is to achieve a goal. The supposedly militants use all means to achieve their vision which include

⁸ Jayne Seminare Docherty, PAX 533. *Introduction to Conflict Transformation. Basic Research Methods for Conflict Transformation Practice*, Harrisonburg, Eastern Mennonite University and 2006

been aggressive or perceived to be aggressive. An aspect of militancy is the presumption that the militant is rigid and does not tolerate difference in opinion. This implies that the militants do not normally follow conventions or established laws. They are can be prone to violence either directly or indirectly and do justify this based on their ideology.⁹

In the Niger Delta, there are various groups that can be called Militants in a most general sense. These groups are but not limited to:

- The Coalition for Militant Action in the Niger Delta (COMA),
- Martyr's Brigade.
- Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force (NDPVF),
- South-South Liberation Movement (SSLM),
- Movement for the Sovereign State of the Niger Delta (MSSND),
- DE Gbam,
- Niger Delta Vigilante,
- Meninbutus,
- The Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), etc

This paper as stated earlier will focus on MEND as a reflection and an umbrella group for the various militant groups in the Niger Delta. MEND announced their resolve to be a major player in the unfolding drama that is the crisis in the Niger Delta by organising high profile attacks on oil installation in Nigeria in January 2006. They issued a tense statement:

"It must be clear that the Nigerian government cannot protect your workers or assets. Leave our land while you can or die in it.... Our aim is to totally destroy the capacity

⁹ Webster Online Dictionary <http://www.websters-online-dictionary.org/definition/militant>

of the Nigerian government to export oil."¹⁰

MEND can be described as a major group in the region; however, there are various armed groups loosely linked and associated with them. They share a common anger at the level of under development and abject poverty in the area as well as the lure for quick money through ransoms paid for the kidnapped victims. The groups get their weapons from sales of illegal oil in the high seas as well as proceeds from ransoms. The various groups have carried out series of high profile kidnapping of oil workers from Bulgaria, Britain, USA, Honduras, Pakistan, India, Korea, Malaysia, Indonesia, Romania and the Philippines. Even Nigerians are not spared.

Politically, it is difficult to ascertain the political inclinations of the groups; the situation is based on the loose nature of the organisations that are afflicted to MEND. This creates a situation where various persons speak at different times. There is apparent disagreement on even participation in government processes. MEND can be described¹¹ as “an idea, a general principle underlying the slew of communal, civic and youth movements that began to proliferate in the Niger Delta, and particularly in the Ijaw-speaking areas”. MEND will want to describe themselves as revolutionaries striving to free their people from the shackles of oppression and the exploitation and degradation of their environment by the multinational oil companies with active connivance of the government. They therefore advocate compensation for the degradation and pollution of their natural environment. However, will it be fair to assume that this is the only purpose for their actions? There is some opinion that the actions much as it serves the general interest of the people of the region, there are a lot of self preservation and interest in the actions of the various groups. These groups argue that the concept of putting the Niger Delta in the front page of the agenda has been done and the subsequent actions border on criminality. This paper will strive to highlight and create a balance opinion.

¹⁰ Excerpt from an e-mail MEND claiming responsibility for some attacks. <http://www.corpwatch.org/article.php?id=13121>

¹¹ Ike Okonta, *MEND: Anatomy Of A Peoples' Militia*. (2006-11-02). <http://www.pambazuka.org>

How did the situation reach this level?

There are schools of thoughts reflected in the various interviews conducted on how and why the situation has reached this alarming stage. It is commonly stated that the Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force (NDPVF) led by Mujahid Dokubo-Asari was in the forefront of the struggle until he was arrested and in prison while standing trial for treason. He was the symbol of the struggle, however, with his incarceration various groups sprang up to fill the gap. In this category is MEND, which learnt apparently from the experience of NDPVF. This experience is illustrated later in the various tactics employed by MEND.

The tactics of MEND was remarkably different from groups that preceded them. The group seems to be led by university educated youths. They were prepared and seem to know what they want to do. Nnamdi K. Obasi, West Africa senior analyst at the International Crisis Group stated: "MEND seems to be led by more enlightened and sophisticated men than most of the groups in the past"¹². The success of MEND can be attributed to various factors: the sympathy they enjoy in the communities enabling them to maintain secrecy of its operation and movement of its operatives as well as their knowledge of the terrain. Government crackdowns have only bolstered that sympathy and driven more recruits. Another aspect that has bolstered recruits is the supposedly financial benefit from kidnapping and illegal oil bunkering. The organisation is loosely coordinated, and each unit plans its operation independently, the effective use of the media to fight their cause has served as a source of protection for MEND. The groups routinely advocate for resource control.

Resource Control and Land Use Act

The federal government has direct control of oil resources which is operated through

¹² Quoted in: Stephanie Hanson, *MEND: The Niger Delta's Umbrella Militant Group* March 22, 2007. Council on Foreign Relations <http://www.cfr.org/publication/12920/>

the various joint venture agreements with the foreign multinationals mainly Chevron Texaco, Shell, ExxonMobil, ELF, etc. The group's articulation of resource control has various interpretations. However, it has not been adequately defined, clarified nor is there a common vision on what resource control means and the various steps to actualize it. In a simplistic use of the term, it connotes the resolve of a people to have power to make decisions over their lives which includes over resources in their area. This involves the access, ownership, control and management of resources in an area for the collective good of the people in the particular area.

The other notable demands of the groups can be adduced to be political such as the freedom of two Ijaw leaders Mujahid Dokubo-Asari who is standing trial for treason and Chief Diepreye Alamiyeseigha the former governor of oil rich Bayelsa State charged with corruption. Both of these men have been released from custody, but yet the situation has not abated.

The issue of resource control can be appreciated by understanding its relationship to the Land Use Act and the issue of land ownership in Nigeria. The Land Use Act of 1978 addresses the issue of ownership of lands in the country. The Act vested the ownership of all land to the state to be used for the benefit of the people. The act excluded family, groups from trusteeship of lands but only as occupants. The implications are that people who occupy land are issued with certificate of occupancy, showing occupation not ownership of the land. The Act¹³ states:

Subject to the provisions of this Act, all land comprised in the territory of each State in the Federation are hereby vested in the Governor of that State and such land shall be held in trust and administered for the use and common benefit of all Nigerians in accordance with the provisions of this Act.

The land use decree vested land to the Federal Government for the good of the whole

¹³ Laws of Nigeria, Land Use Act, 1978 Excerpts from the Land use act 29th March 1978

citizens of the country irrespective of where the land is located. The implication is that whatever resources available in any part of the country belong to the whole country. The people of the area might bear the brunt of the exploitation of the resources in the area, yet the revenue does not accrue to them. It is in this respect that the agitations for resource control do not find a lot of favourable audience among people outside the region. It is argued that the derivation allocation¹⁴ is enough to cater for the mineral producing areas. There have been various arguments for and against the 13% allocated for mineral producing area¹⁵. The positions of different persons depend on the various factors, however, that is outside the scope of this paper.

Resource Curse

Oloibiri is a village in present day Bayelsa State in the Niger Delta. It is here in 1956 that the first oil drilling started. The discovery of oil ideally could be a source of blessing and wealth for the people. However, the situation in Nigeria is different, in the words of O'Neill¹⁶:

“The cruelest twist is that half a century of oil extraction in the delta has failed to make the lives of the people better. Instead, they are poorer still and hopeless”

Resource curse refers also to the paradox of plenty. It is a situation where places rich in natural resources have less growth and development than places without such resources. There are various factors for this development such as volatility of revenues from the natural resource, government mismanagement, corruption, etc. Looking at the present situation in the Niger Delta, it can safely be said that oil has not brought development or prosperity to the people, rather, it has increased their

¹⁴ Derivation principle in revenue allocation means 13% of all revenue from an area will be given to the area that produces it.

¹⁵ Edevbie, David. *The Politics Of 13 Per Cent Derivation Principle*. (2000). http://www.waado.org/environment/FedGovt_NigerDelta/RevenueAllocation/13PercentAllocation.htm . Chibuikwe U. Uche & Ogbonnaya C. Uche, *Oil and the Politics. of Revenue Allocation in Nigeria*. ASC Working Paper 54/2004. African Studies Centre, Leiden. John Boye Ejobowah. *Who Owns the Oil? The Politics of Ethnicity in the Niger Delta of Nigeria*. Africa Today - Volume 47, Number 1, Winter 2000, pp. 29-47. Ike Oguine, (2000). *Nigeria's Oil Revenues and the Oil Producing Area*. The Centre for Energy, Petroleum and Mineral Law and Policy. <http://www.dundee.ac.uk/cepmlp/journal/html/vol4/article4-10.html>

¹⁶ O'Neill T, *Nigerian Oil, Curse of the Black Gold*. National Geographic Magazine (FEBRUARY 2007 edition).

hardship and destroyed their fragile ecosystem that supports their livelihood. It is a classic example of the people suffering in the mist of plenty.

The situation of resource curse leads to conflict within societies as different groups agitate for a share and control of the resources. These conflict takes various factors either openly such as in the agitation in the Niger Delta or though passive resistance. The purpose of the agitation serves various purposes for example: It can bring the attention of the wider community including the international community to the plight of the people. It can also be a forum to agitate in order to right the wrong from the past. The case of the Niger Delta can be attributed to the destruction of the livelihoods of the people through pollution and degradation of their environment. This has led to farm land and fishing resources destroyed leaving the people in a terrible state of poverty.

Ransom Payment

The issue of ransom payment is quite disputed. MEND claim that it collects no ransom for releasing the kidnapped expatriates' workers. This assertion is supposedly confirmed by the negotiators and various government officials. However, the claim that ransom is not paid does not seem to be supported by the facts on the ground which tells a different story. The present all comers affairs in the hostage saga proves that there is profit in the business. Okonta¹⁷ stated that MEND hostage taking strategy is "to exploit the blaze of publicity thus generated to announce their grievances and demands of the Nigerian government" might not be the whole truth. The assertion¹⁸ "though kidnapping of oil workers for ransom is a favoured tactic of the militants, abuse and killing are rare" ; seem to be more reflective of the situation in the Niger Delta.

The strategy certainly is to put pressure on the government, but most especially to protect themselves from attacks and military intervention. The scars of Odi are still

¹⁷ Ike Okonta, *MEND: Anatomy Of A Peoples' Militia*. (2006-11-02). <http://www.pambazuka.org>

fresh in the minds of the people. Therefore, the publicity puts international pressure on the government to intervene, as the announcement that ransom was not paid builds on their credibility. However, the question bothering most objective minds is what are the details of the negotiations? What is the trade off? The more intriguing question is how is the group financed? How are the sophisticated weapons acquired? If not ransom from kidnapping then it will be from oil bunkering. These activities borders on criminality, therefore it will be safe to assume that the source of the wealth used in acquiring the weapons is not from legitimate source and even acquiring such weapons is illegal.

Actors in the Niger Delta Crisis

The actors in this conflict play vital roles, their actions explicate why the conflict, violence and kidnapping issue has lasted this long and why it might likely continue into the near future. We will be exploring their interests, relations, capacities and the incentives. This explores the attitudes, behaviours and context, the analysis also looks at the needs, interests and position of the various actors.

The significant actors are as follows:

- Federal Government
- State Government
- Various Government Agencies
- Various Government Security Agencies
- Government Negotiators
- Community Negotiators
- Community Leaders
- Community People
- Militants leaders
- Militants followers
- Media
- Oil Companies
- Businesses

¹⁸ Ike Okonta, *MEND: Anatomy Of A Peoples' Militia*. (2006-11-02). <http://www.pambazuka.org>

- Citizens of the country
- Non Governmental Organisations
- International Community

Federal Government

The Federal Government is responsible for maintaining security in the country. It must guarantee and protect life and property. However, the issue of kidnapping has exposed and brought the government to ridicule. The attitude of the federal government was to deploy the military to the area to engage the militants. The behaviour stems from the concept that the action of the militants is illegal. Therefore, government will not engage an illegal group in negotiation. The vice president comes from the Niger Delta; it will not be good publicity that he supports the use of excessive force against his people.

The government position of not negotiating with Militants seems hypocritical and is not helping the situation. While the government negotiates to release hostages, it will not negotiate the demands of the militants. The situation might not be won militarily because of the peculiar nature of the Niger delta and the huge casualty if it is attempted. However, the military has showed disrespect and disregard for civilian casualty like in the cases of Odi and Choba. Therefore it can safely be argued that what's preventing the military from a full assault is their lack of complete knowledge of the terrain. The unpredictable and difficult terrain is an advantage to the militants who knows the terrain better. In the unlikely event of a military invasion, the defeat of the militants will not solve the problem, but will rather create more bad blood in the region. There is also the fear that a military option might led to a greater disruption in oil production with its serious consequence for the world.

The position of the government is that kidnapping must stop before any talk can happen. The interest of the government is to guarantee the safety of the citizens and be seen to be in control of the situation. It also need a peaceful coexistence and non disruptions of oil production.

State Government and Various Government Agencies

The various state governments of Rivers and Delta States are directly responsible for security in their various states. Kidnapping affects the socio economic activities in the states. Night life in Port Harcourt was creped for a long time. Presently most of the expatriates have relocated outside the Niger Delta states. The effect is telling on government revenue. The attitudes of the state governments are that the kidnapping must stop, but they do not want to be seen to be against the legitimate agitation of the people of the area. The kidnapping also provides illegal funds for government officials. It is alleged that government provides the ransom money. However, much as governments will denial this, it is a common fact in the streets that government officials inflate the demands of the militants into line their pocket. The story is like this: If the militants demand 20 million Naira, the government officials collect 50 million naira and the difference goes into their pocket. This explains again the reluctance to engage with the militants.

There is even a bigger problem in the Niger Delta states. Huge revenue accrues to the states in the Niger Delta from oil revenue. However, the reality on the ground does not justify the funds. There are allegations of massive corruption on the parts of the elected representatives. The general feeling is that the officials support the militants to divert attention from their misrule and corruption. It is assumed that when the problems of the militants are finally resolved, the people will hold their leaders accountable.

Various Government Security Agencies

The security agencies are tasked with protecting the life and property of the citizens. The security agencies are handicapped by their lack of knowledge of the terrain. It will be hazardous to attempt to dislodge the militants from the creeks where they hide after each operation. However, the security operatives feel if given a free hand they can carry out a successful operation. The danger is that government does not want to risk another Odi or Choba Massacre. The political terrain is very volatile and government wants to be on the side of the people, therefore it is frustrating for the operatives.

Government Negotiators and Community Negotiators

These are key players in the unfolding drama in the Niger Delta. There are always called upon to negotiate the release of hostages. These negotiators are from different works of life. The perception is that the negotiators have links and are respected by the militants. However, there is a different school of thought to this situation. This school believes that the negotiators are part of the problem. They get assurances from the government that the militants will not be attacked. Government therefore strives to honour the agreement and also to fulfil the demands of the militants. This demands include ransom money, in the channel of communication between the militants and the government / oil companies is through the negotiators. Therefore it is safe to assume that there is a possibility that the negotiators make some profit from the ransom money. The perception in the streets of the Niger Delta is that the negotiators inflate the demand of the militants before telling the government and oil companies. The interest of the negotiators is the freedom of the hostages as well as ensuring that no harm is done to the militants. The negotiators are from the Niger Delta communities.

Community Leaders and Community People

The people of the community live in abject poverty with little or no Government presence. They have lived through series of broken promises. They have witnessed the systematic destruction of their sources of livelihood. They have watched helplessly as peaceful protests are crushed with the full might of the military. They have watched as resources from their area is used to develop other parts of the country. Therefore their attitude to this conflict is that they have nothing to lose since there are already on the lowest ebb, struggling and not able to make ends meet. There will only be casualty if the governments decide to attack the community; however, since there is ample assurance there will not be any attack, the communities support the militants.

The community people actually see the militants as the last hope to bring their plight to the outside world. The community leaders mostly have been compromised through the various inducements from the oil companies. Their moral authority has eroded

considerably. There are therefore not able to execute their leadership role, this created a vacuum that the militants have filled. The issue of leadership in the oil communities is a very thorny issue; there are always changes in leadership. There is hardly continuity; this is based on the compromises they make, which is against the spirit of the wishes of the community, but to better their private interest. In a training workshop for community leaders, the author interacted with community leaders; one informed him that most of the leaders put personal interest at 65% and community interest 35% during the negotiations. With this behaviour the situation never changes in the Niger Delta. Most leaders see leadership as a opportunity to alleviate their poverty. This also confirms the nature of the various tussles for leadership position. It also explains why there is a high turn over of leaders in the area.

Militants' leaders and Militants followers

Most of the militants live among the community. They are not in hiding, most interested parties know them. However, since the cause they are fighting is supposedly for the benefit of the Niger Delta they are supported. However, when the kidnapping switched to non expatriates, the support has considerably declined.

In analyzing the militants' situation, the leadership plays a vital function in controlling and directing its followers. The organisation of the militants is quite secret, each leader has a group of followers. This leader demand absolute loyalty and respect from his followers. He earns the respect by providing for the material benefits of his followers. There is an agreed formula for the sharing of ransom money and proceeds from oil bunkering. The leader takes the bulk of the money and the rest is share among the followers. The leader must be able to keep the 'boys' happy and their needs taken care of. The implication of this is that from time to time, there must be 'action' for the followers. The action provides money. It makes the 'boys' to live above their means and look like heroes in the communities.

Therefore for the kidnapping to stop there must be an alternative source of livelihoods for the 'boys'. The question is: will it be as lucrative as the kidnapping business? It will be recalled that most of the 'boys' do not invest this money but use it to have a 'good life'. Therefore there is constant pressure to have more money. The leadership

of the militant groups are under pressure to stop the kidnapping; however, the problem is not the leadership, but the followers. The general impression from the various interviews is that the leadership is not the problem but the followers. It is speculated that the leaders of the groups are VERY rich and are keen to legitimize their activities, but making the 'boys' happy is a difficult task. For each of the follower dreams of been a leader and getting a bigger share of the loot.

It is argued that the present constant low level kidnapping of Nigerians, including children is a reflection of the above situation. The followers of the various leaders are breaking free and carrying out independent operations. The danger presently is not the leadership of the militant groups but the followers who feel that they can successfully carry out an operation. Eliminating the leadership of the group will worsen the situation, instead of helping it. What then is the need of the militants? They want their community to be developed, but they also want to have a very good life style.

Media

The role of the media in this crisis is different from their role in other crisis. There is the perception among government functionaries that the media seem to be the public relations outfit for the groups. The groups are able to use the mass media effectively. As stated earlier the present crop of militants seem to be highly educated, they have been able to articulate their views and generate sympathy from various stakeholders.

The objectivity of the media might not be questioned; the age long degradation of the environment and the government attitude to the area might have aided the militant cause and made the media to support the groups. The eight years of president Obasanjo administration generated much bad blood with various segment of the media and stakeholders. It is therefore assumed that anything against President Obasanjo or make him look bad should be supported.

It is argued that the effective use of the media is a safety net for the groups. Their demands and messages are passed on to the international community and other groups. These groups put pressure on the government not to attack the militants and to

try to reason with them. The motivation of this group is discussed later. The media can be said to be playing their constitutional role of bring information to the public.

Oil Companies and Businesses

The tactics of the oil companies contributed immensely to the situation today. The apparent lack of transparency in the handling of situations in the Niger Delta through the bribing of traditional rulers, setting up one community against another, refusing to clean up spill site and not carrying out environmental impact assessment for their various projects is bane of the situation today.

The oil companies have constantly been protected by the federal government because of the strategic nature of the industry to the country. The oil industry has tremendous influence in the country. In the various communities where they operate, they use various methods to tactics to make sure their operation is not disrupted. These methods include setting up one community against another, paying for protection services.

The position of the oil companies is that sabotage of oil facilities is not good for business; therefore everything possible should be done to stop it. They insist that they pay tax and therefore it is the role of the government to provide amenities and development for the people. They argue that their role is to compliment government effort and as part of social responsibility.

The spite of kidnapping has affected business in the region greatly. The hospitality business has almost collapsed. The places that are patronized by the expatriates have virtually closed shop. These have led to unemployment and lose of revenue for the people as well as government. The interest of the business community is that they do not want to interfere in government, however, their business is gradually dieing and something need to be solve the problem and bring things back to normal.

Citizens of the country

The role of the citizens of the country is quite diverse as the country is diverse. The author interaction with some young professionals creates the impression that the

impasse created opportunities for them to show what they can do. With the kidnapping saga most expatriate workers left the area giving room for the Nigerian workers to show their skills. The people of the Niger Delta are in support of the militants, however, the other part of the country do not share the same sentiments. Therefore it is very difficult to determine and accommodate the vast interest. However, there is a general consensus that the problems of development in the area need to be solved and the kidnapping have to stop.

Non Governmental Organisations and International Community

The international communities are interested in what happens in the Niger Delta from both economic and social persuasions. The region produces oil. Nigeria is one of the major producer and exporter of oil. The activities of the militants have led to disruption of supply and increase in oil price. The international community wants the situation to return to normal to enable oil price to fall back. The militant's threats to destroy the oil installations in the area, leads to panic in the oil market and they have showed their capacity to do that. The media have been able to show this to the world. This scenario scares the international community because with the problem in the Middle East, another dangerous situation in Nigeria will not serve their interest. They therefore put pressure on the government to solve the plight of the area.

The various non governmental organisations and the international community are worried and bothered by the neglect of the Niger Delta. The environmental degradation and the continued gas flaring do not conform to their perception of how business should be run. These groups' puts pressure on government and the oil companies to meet the demand of the communities.

Dynamics of the Conflict

As stated above there is a strong possibility that this conflict will continue well into the future. This assessment is based on the lucrative nature of the kidnapping business as the perceived reluctance of the government to arrest and persecute any of the perpetrators of the crime.

The possibility of escalation of kidnapping is limited based on the militarization of the

Niger Delta. This has not prevented the militants from carrying out kidnappings. This supports the analysis above, that there is a possibility that most of the recent kidnappings are carried out by followers of the militants' leaders who see themselves as capable of making some quick money.

The role of the negotiators is shrouded in controversy; this role has increased the possibility of further kidnappings because of the monetary incentive. The perception is that the security vote and other resources of the oil companies are used as ransom money which is spread across the board. For example, if the militants demand 20 million Naira, the negotiators might inform the state government that the demand is 40 million Naira; there is a possibility that what might be accounted for was 80 million Naira from the security vote. However, since security votes are not accounted for, it is not subject to scrutiny, the kidnapping business can be a source of funds for different people in the government.

The militants are most likely not willing to give up arms for amnesty as promised by the government. The various highly publicized returns of arms by confessed militants have been a charade because the arms returned are mainly locally made pistols, not the sophisticated weapons that are used in the operations.

The end point of the game is for the government and Oil Companies to stop paying ransom money. There is the danger that some kidnapped persons might be killed, that might be a big prize, but continuing payment of ransom and denying it only makes kidnapping more lucrative. A second scenario which has played out itself twice within the last one month is the possibility of the kidnappers being traced and a rescue mission carried out. There is the possibility of arrest or killing in the shootout that might follow. The reason for the success of this scenario might be that the various leaders have made considerable money from the kidnapping and the pressure is on them to stop. They have decided then to stop, but their followers have not heeded the advice and have continued without the support of the leadership. Another likely explanation is that the communities are not in support of kidnapping of Nigerians to settle personal issues. Most of the kidnapped Nigerians are family members of politicians. This raises a totally different issue, which the communities are not too

keen to support.

Finally, the international community needs oil from Nigeria. The vice president is from the Niger Delta. The various state governments are gradually being accountable to the people, unlike in previous dispensation where the government do not listen to the people. The fear of Economic, Finance Crime Commission (EFCC)¹⁹ is the beginning of wisdom for most government officials. The EFCC is on the tail of government officials who steal state funds; this has changed the attitude in the various government houses. The federal government is going to budget and pump a lot of funds into the Niger Delta to develop the area and meet the needs of the people. The state government is going to channel and use the funds of the people judiciously for the good of the people, thereby developing the area. The international community will put pressure on Government to achieve the above as well as the oil companies to operate within acceptable international framework. The communities will be happy because their environment will be better and their quality of life improved. The militants will be folk heroes in their communities. They will have achieved tremendous wealth and will have a stake in the affairs of the communities.

The implications of the above is that militancy will gradually fade and become part of history, there will still be pockets of conflicts, militancy, kidnapping here and there, but not as what it was in 2007.

Protect Our Future Peace Project: A New Beginning

It is in the above scenario of uncertainty that the Protect Our Future Project was born in 2005. The programme presently has two broad focuses:

- Peace and Civic Education in Schools
- Traditional Conflict Prevention and Management in Communities

The various undemocratic political practices in Nigeria combined with the deterioration of traditional values and structure have created a situation in which the Nigerian people do not believe that democracy is possible, neither are they able to

¹⁹ EFCC is a government agency that probes and persecutes corruption in various government establishments and businesses.

envison credible alternatives. There is then a growing sense of disillusionment among the populace and a growing cycle of violence. This has led to unprecedented ethnic & religious violence. The country's integration and corporate existence is threatened and raises questions about the ability of the country to survive. Nigerians now see themselves as members of ethnic groups instead of citizens of a country. Consequently, there is a shift from community values and thus the collective aspirations of the people of Nigeria are being abandoned.

Peace and Civic Education in Schools

The youth form a significant majority of the population of Nigeria (The United Nations Human Development index estimated the population below 15 years to be about 46% of the total population). Students, being part of the society, are affected by the situation. The average age of students in the secondary schools is 10-17 years. It is obvious that students who are presently in secondary school have no much experience of a democratic culture. They do not know what is expected of them and neither do they know what they can expect. It is necessary to have a program to educate the students on their civic responsibility and how to live peacefully.

The Centre for Human Development and Social Transformation research to determine student behaviours showed that students were prone to act in a violent way at the least provocation instead of respecting and allowing the rule of law to take its place. The Protect our Future Peace and Civic Education Project is based on the premise that if students / youths who form a significant majority of the population know their right and cultivate a culture of democracy and skills of living peacefully, they will be a powerful voice in sustaining democratic values and a culture of peace. It is an invaluable way we can safeguard our future. The strategy is to train teachers in both primary and secondary schools, who in turn will assist in training students on a culture of peace. The desire is that this peace education project given in schools will have an effect in the wider community.

The project begins by examining internal school practices and using these as forums to discuss student rights, responsibilities, and to provide training on basic skills

needed in a functioning democracy (such as statue drawing, election conduction and monitoring). The teachers will be trained to impart the skills of peace education and civic responsibility to the students. Thereby beginning the process of empowering students to elect their own representatives and leaders. This is based on observations that class representatives and prefects (leaders for special functions) are appointed by teachers and by the school principal. This practice is undemocratic as it denies the students the right to choose their leaders.

The students trained form a network of “peace clubs” in the various schools to continue to share ideas and to involve more students in the training. A manual is being developed for that purpose as well as a guide for the teachers to use. The Centre for Human Development and Social Transformation will coordinate the programme of social transformation. And will facilitate constant training at the centre.

Traditional Conflict Prevention and Management in Communities

The Protect our Future Training workshops on Traditional African Conflict Prevention and Management has the vision to empower and strengthen the traditional mechanism for conflict prevention and management in the Niger Delta. The concept of the workshops normally consists of a training of trainers of about forty (40) community leaders (various stakeholders) for a specific local government area. This workshop is held outside the local government area and a workshop for 100 - 150 persons held in the local government area. The trainers normally assist in training the larger group. The aim of the project is to train community leaders on how to prevent and manage conflict in the community. It explores the various potentials to prevent conflict and when there is conflict to ensure that it does not escalate but that it is curtailed and properly managed.

The premise is that if the community leaders cultivate a culture of peace and skills of living peacefully, they will be a powerful voice in sustaining democratic values and a culture of peace. The strategy is to train community leaders who will be able to train others in their community on a culture of peace. The desire is that this peace training on: Culture of peace, conflict prevention, transformation and management will have a multiplier effect in the community.

The training workshop explored the dynamics of community conflict, the various sources of the conflict and how it can be prevented and managed. It used community scan to identify various causes of conflict in the community and how early warning mechanism can be used in conflict prevention and management. The second day of the workshop is designed to be a strategy day, where the participants will develop an action plan on how to transform their communities. The concept is to examine the structure of the community and what causes conflict in the community with community scan. Thereafter, the structure and traditional method of conflict resolution in the communities will be examined, thereby leading to an action plan.

The workshop normally ends with the design of action points which will be a means of taking the lessons learnt to the wider community. The vision of the programme is that community leaders should be able to conduct training for those within their sphere of influence.

Conclusion and Strategies for Conflict Reduction

There is need to implement a master plan for the area. The newly created Ministry of Niger Delta, might be able to facilitate the process. This projects into the future and ensures that the area is sustainable. This will involve different stakeholders. The following options are proposed:

There is need to Increase the derivation funds derivation from 13% to 25% in the first phase and subsequently to increase it to 50%. This has to be negotiated with other stakeholders in the Nigeria project. This is in line with various recommendations of various study groups on the Niger Delta.

Secondly, the land use act and petroleum act that strips the locals control over their lands should be reviewed to right the wrong caused by that act.

Thirdly, the Niger Deltans need to be more proactive in solving problems. The problem of shortage of skilled manpower is quite evident in the area. The oil

companies give employment to some of the indigenes of the area. It is argued that this helps the person involved and his or her immediate family. However, the question to be considered is how this translates to solving the bigger problem of the area. The author feels that each community should set up a trust fund to be managed by credible members of the community. Each person that gets employment through the community help because they are indigenes of the area pays a specific percentage a month for a certain number of years into the fund. The fund will be used specifically for educating more persons in the community. The more people that are educated, the more persons are employable and the more money into the fund and more wealth to the community. Another source of funding for the trust funds should that any indigenous contractor that gets project with the help of the community pays a specific percentage into the trust fund. These two sources of funding will help alleviate the problem of manpower shortage in the oil producing communities.

The complex question of leadership in the Niger Delta needs to be addressed, the people should select leaders they can trust who should put the needs and interests of the communities above their personal needs. In this respect, NGO's operating in the Niger Delta need to begin a process of leadership training and orientation.

Finally, the issue of militancy is a product of the circumstances of the time and if the justification are no longer there, then ideally militancy will soon be a part of the stories of the Niger Delta. The author is of the view that the Niger Delta area with its beautiful natural features will be the tourist hub of Nigeria. However, the Government and the various stakeholders need to be a brace to their responsibility.