

Pandef and Peace Building in the Oil Rich Niger Delta

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Abstract

This paper X-rays the role of Pan Niger Delta Elders Forum (PANDEF) in peace building in the oil rich Niger Delta (ND). It employed the sustainable peace building theory, and relied essentially on secondary data. Data gathered were analyzed using content analysis. The study divulged a significant role played by PANDEF in regard to peace building in both pre and post amnesty era in the oil rich ND. It reveals that PANDEF has played diverse roles including ensuring coexistence and harmony as well as reducing use of arms, pipeline vandalism, kidnapping and other violent activities in the oil rich ND. The paper therefore recommended amongst others that PANDEF should be given all requisites; funding, Independence and training to perform such vital duties as peace building, and maintenance of law and order within their jurisdictions in the oil rich ND, and Nigeria at large.

Keywords: *Amnesty, conflict, PANDEF, Peace building, Niger Delta*

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Background to the Study

Nigeria is a blessed nation with abundant natural resources. In spite of these resources the Niger Delta region is the economic hub of Nigeria and has remained a focal area of concern in history, both in the contexts of development, trade and history of resistance against injustice and depression (Nweke, 2012). Oil and gas deposits from the region contributes over 80% of government revenue, 95% of foreign exchange earnings and 96% of export revenue (Odalonu, 2018; Ojakorotu, & Gilbert, 2010). Despite these contributions from the region to the national coffers, the region suffers from abject poverty, neglect and total underdevelopment (Okolo, & Rufus, 2017; Okolo & Kasikoro, 2021; Crisis group Africa, 2015).

This is aptly captured by Nweke (2012) that the citizens of the region have continued to groan in abject poverty, worsening and depleting infrastructure as well as environmental degradation as a result of oil exploration and exploitation activities in the region for decades. This state of affairs is being promoted by the Nigeria state and her collaborator the oil multinationals operating in the ND environment. Although, conflict and grievances in the Niger Delta region pre-dated to the colonial and post-colonial governments even in the midst of persistence agitation and or confrontation by the indigenes of the region and that has led to one form of conflict or the other (Okolo, 2018; Okolo, 2016; Christmas, 2018; Okolo, 2014a). No doubt, successive administration has one way or the other made attempts to address the development challenges of the region, these responses yielded little or no success hence militancy, kidnapping of expatriates, public officials and their relative for ransom, oil theft, pipelines vandalism/ Illegal bunkering continued unabated in the region. However, in 2009 formal President Yar' Adua proclaimed unconditional amnesty to the Niger-Delta Militants (Aghedo, 2013; Ezeibe & Nnamani, 2013; Kasikoro, Sokore & Oputa, 2014). Though, with the acceptance of the amnesty programme by the ND militant's peace became prevalent in the region and oil production boom.

Over time, the relative peace enjoyed by all became threatened and this gave raised to different forms of criminalities as it ranged from armed robbery, kidnapping for ransom, oil thief, illegal refining of crude oil, pipeline vandalism e.t.c. In fact, these criminal activities significantly affect our national revenue accruing from crude oil (Onuoha, 2016; Owonikoko, 2018). However, these could be deduced to several reasons for instance; years after the implementation of the amnesty programme, it shows the programme was not sustainable to address the development needs of the people of the region.

More so, coupled with the response from President Buhari to Dr. Pauline Baker's interviewed that is administration will prioritised the developmental needs of the area he got more votes than the area with lesser votes; the deliberate shut down of the Nigeria Maritime University at Okerenkoko; perceived victimisation of ND son's and daughter's particularly of Ijaw ethnic extraction by the Buhari led administration (such persons as High Chief, Government Ekpemukpolo, a.k.a. Tompolo; Chief, D.S.P. Alamiyeseigha, Patrick Akpobolokemi etc.), withdrawer of all surveillance contract awarded to ex-

militants and awarding same to non- Niger Deltas, downsizing the budgetary allocation of the Amnesty programme and the rumour that the programme will be cancelled shortly after, among others (Ownikoko, 2018).

In other to address these above conundrums, at 2016 so many militant groups resurfaced from the Niger Delta again in furtherance of the struggle towards promoting the development needs of the people. Among these militants groups, two militant's groups seems to be more pronounced and dreadful, they causes serious havoc to the nation's economy. They are the Greenland Justice Mandate (NDGJM) and the Niger Delta Avengers (NDA). Following their activities, it shows that the NDA seems to be more dangerous and deadlier in its operations than the NDGJM. For instance, during January to July 2016, the NDA has recorded proximately 34 high profile attacks on oil installations in the region (Owonikoko, 2018).

Following these hostilities, PANDEF was formed as a grassroot movement in October 7,2016 to represent the interest of the region to dialogue with the government. It is headed by Chief. E.K Clark. PANDEF was formed to represent the image of the region. The preceding occasioned kin discourse on the role of PANDEF members in promoting and building peace in the Niger Delta and Nigeria at large. As earlier pointed out, these traditional institutions such as Chiefs, age-grades and elder's council of the community who are supposed to mitigate in the conflicts in their respective domain to bring about lasting peace have eventually engrossed in the conflicts (Nweke, 2012). For instance, a faction known as the Pan Niger Delta People's Congress (PANDPC) emerged. Does that mean that recently traditional institutions have fail to promote peace building in Nigeria? If so, does it mean that PANDEF which is a conglomeration of traditional institutions that encompasses traditional rulers, Chiefs, Elders council and Opinion Leaders, has failed in promoting peace building in Nigeria? What role has PANDEF' played in peace building in Nigeria? Giving answer to these questions is the purpose of this study.

Conceptual Framework

Concepts by nature and interpretation are polemic in nature. Thus, there is a need to clearly define and operationalise the concepts used in this study.

Peace Building

The concept of peacebuilding came into used first in the 70s by John Galtung, in one of his presented works when he recommended for the establishment of peace building structures to promote a sustainable peace to tackle the root causes of violent conflict and more so, promoting indigenous institutions for peace management and conflict resolution (Galtung, 1996). Following this, it implies that peacebuilding is targeted at constructing a better society. The report from the former Secretary General of the United Nations Boutros Brotros- Ghali in 1992 titled 'An Agenda for Peace' popularized the concept of peacebuilding in the international scene. For him, he sees peacebuilding as an action put to solidify peace and avoid relapse into conflict.

The concept of peace building is used in this paper to mean ensuring coexistence and harmony as well as reducing violence which include reducing use of arms, pipeline vandalism and kidnapping, particularly in the ND.

Pan Niger Delta Elders' Forum (PANDEF)

The PANDEF is a conglomeration of traditional institutions such as Traditional Rulers, Chiefs, Elders council and Opinion Leaders. The membership is drawn from the nine state of the ND and its represents the image of the region. Its National Secretariat is Niger Delta Wetland Centre, No. 29 Osiri Road, Ekeki, Yenagoa, Bayelsa State.



Figure 1: Logo of PANDEF

Source: Adapted from PANDEF National Leadership Retreat, 2017.

Niger Delta

The ND as a region is one of the regions in the federal republic of Nigeria. It occupies about 70,000 Km² (27,000 sq. mi.) located in the Southern part of the country and it therefore earn 7.5% of Nigeria's land mass (Obi, 2010). As a region, ND is administratively composed of nine entities: Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross-River, Delta, Edo, Port Harcourt (River) are allocated in the South-South geopolitical zone; Ondo is located in the South-West geopolitical zone, meanwhile, Abia and Imo belong to the south eastern geopolitical region. The ND is a multi-ethnic federal state with a population of approximately 31 million people from over 40 nationalities speaking approximately 250 different dialects (Obi, 2010). See figure 2 below:



Figure 2: Map of the Niger Delta

Source: Courtesy of NDDC Master Plan.

The NDR covers a very dense rainforest, and most people in the area have traditionally worked in fishing and farming. The region also produces and supplies an abundance of food products that are available for trade and consumption throughout the year. Previously, it was described as a river of oil due to its palm production potential. The tropical rainforest in the region opens up to the Atlantic Ocean, making ND one of the most important wetlands, with a rich, complex but fragile ecosystem (Kuku, 2012). With the emergence of crude oil in Nigeria's economy, ND has become synonymous with Nigeria's oil-producing areas, known internationally as the region with the most oil reserves. ND is also a terrain conducive to conflict, notably the 1966 uprising, the 1990 peaceful protests, and more recently widespread armed attacks (Okolo, 2014b).

It is also home to several popular social movements and groups, including the Ijaw National Congress (INC), Ijaw Youth Congress (IYC), Movement for the Liberation of the Niger Delta (MEND) and Movement for Chicolo (FNDIC), all Indigenous peoples fought for rights in the natural resources of the region. Likewise, it has been an area of international controversy over pollution, corruption and human rights abuses due to ongoing oil and gas operations last fifty years (Ako, 2011). Due to the nervous negligence of successive Nigerian governments and the oil companies operating in the region, North Germany has become an impoverished region of widespread poverty, under - development and environmental degradation (Obi, 2010).

Theoretical Underpin and Methodology

The underlying theory for the study is the sustainable peace building theory. The theory was propounded by John Paul Lederach in 1997. Lederach (1997) developed a peacebuilding framework based on an understanding of peacebuilding for sustainable reconciliation within societies. Thus, according to Lederach, peacebuilding can be achieved by creating structures, processes, and personnel training within a generational time frame. Paul van Tongeren advocates complexity theory for conflict prevention and peacebuilding. According to Tongeren, to contribute to peace, various institutions need to work together in various ways at many different levels. Therefore, the impact can never be attributed to a single player. In other words, no one can claim that the X factor has led to sustainable peace in the country. For example, in the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC), different groups of individuals, organizations and actors interact to support the transition from response to prevention. Therefore, "impact" is often the product of a combination of factors, and no single institution or project can really claim all the credit. In conclusion, the evolution of the peacebuilding discourse is related to the fundamental understanding of peace (Lederach, 1997). Thus, different understandings of peacebuilding have emerged, all reflecting the tension between negative and positive peace, that is, a narrow or broad understanding of peacebuilding. We found two main paradigms: sustainable peacebuilding with broad understanding, and liberal peacebuilding with short- to medium-term understanding, almost equivalent to nation-building. The former has received the most attention since the mid-to-late 1990s, and the latter is the most discussed and controversial today.

Notably, these concepts also have overlapping elements. While the explicit goal of liberal peacebuilding is to build liberal peace, sustainable approaches to peacebuilding also reflect many of the liberal elements of the "good society" based on Kant's work. So, acknowledging the differences, we decided to use a working definition of peacebuilding that strikes a balance between the two extremes, while also allowing for flexibility: "Peace building is targeted at managing and preventing armed conflict and also to sustaining peace when an organised violence has actually ended (Lederach, 1997, p. 135).

In this regard, peacebuilding is a multifaceted endeavour that encompasses all activities directly related to this goal within 5 to 10 years. Peacebuilding should create favorable conditions for economic reconstruction, development and democratization as a prerequisite for a legitimate democratic order, and a core objective of PANDEF as traditional institution is to ensure sustainable peace and development. This theory is relevant to this study because it best explains the puzzles earlier raised. The qualitative research method was adopted, with extensive utilization of archives, texts, journal articles, monographs, magazines, and relevant web pages. The analysis was purely descriptive and content based (i.e content analysis), wherein inferences were drawn (Eneanya, 2012; Okolo & Boubai, 2021).

Literature Review and Analysis

Since the intrusion of modern democracy in Nigeria from 1999, the role of traditional informal institutions like chieftaincy such as PANDEF and the extended family system among others via mediation, reconciliation, pacification, culture, story- telling, joint problem solving, truth-telling and so on in peace building cannot be undermined. Hence, Pkalya, Adan and Masinde (2004) contends that traditional institution like chiefs, elders' council of the community, extended families, lineages, clans, tribes, religious goodwill, local institutions, and ethno- linguistic groups plays major role in peace building process in African, Nigeria and the Niger Delta (ND) in particular. However, conflict and grievances in the Niger Delta region can be traced back to the colonial era or beyond. Moreso, the region has been unduly neglected and underdeveloped by the colonial and post-colonial governments even in the midst persistence agitation and or confrontation by the indigenes of the region which has led to one form of conflict or the other (Okolo, 2014c; Christmas, 2018). It should be noted that various attempts have been made to address the development challenges of the region, these responses yielded little or no success hence militancy continued unabated in the region.

Meanwhile, in 2009, former President Yar' Adua proclaimed an unconditional amnesty to the ND Militants (Aghedo, 2013; Ezeibe & Nnamani, 2013; Kasikoro, 2014). With the embracement of the Amnesty programme by the ND militant groups, peace became prevalent in the region and oil production which was from 700,000 barrels per day between 2007 to mid- 2009 increase to the range of 2.4 million and 2.6 million in late 2009 (Onuoha, 2016). Over time, relative peace enjoyed by all became threatened and this gave raised to different forms of criminalities as it ranged from armed robbery, kidnapping for ransom, oil thief, illegal refining of crude oil, pipeline vandalism e.t.c. In fact, these

criminal activities significantly affect our national revenue accruing from crude oil (Onuoha, 2016; Owonikoko, 2018).

However, these could be deduced to several reasons for instance; years after the implementation of the amnesty programme, it shows the programme was not sustainable to address the development needs of the people of the region, More so, coupled with the response from Former President Buhari to Dr. Pauline Baker's interviewed that is administration will give priority attention on the developmental needs of the area he got more votes than the area with lesser votes; and the closure of the Nigeria Maritime University at Okerenkoko; money laundering charges raised against prominent ND son's and daughter's particularly of Ijaw ethnic extraction by the Buhari led administration (such persons as Government Ekpemukpolo, a.k.a. Tompolo; Chief, D.S.P. Alamiyeseigha and Patrick Akpobolokemi), the cancellation of all oil pipeline and maritime surveillance contract awarded to ex-militants and awarding same to non- Niger Deltas, reduction of the budgetary provision of the Amnesty programme and the rumour that the programme will be terminated shortly after, among others (Owonikoko, 2018).

In other to address these above challenges, in 2016 a lot of militant groups reappeared from the ND again in furtherance of the struggle towards promoting the development needs of the people. Two of these militant's groups seems to be more pronounced and dreadful, causing serious havoc to the nation's economy. They are the Greenland Justice Mandate (NDGJM) and the Niger Delta Avengers (NDA). From their activities, it shows that the NDA seems to be more dangerous and deadlier in its operations than the NDGJM. For instance, between January to July 2016, the NDA has recorded about 34 high profile attacks on oil installations in the region (Owonikoko, 2018). These attacks gradually plummeted the nations oil revenue.

In the light of the above, scholars, such as Nweke (2012) and Oliver and Odendaal (2008) has come out with significant discourse on how successfully Traditional institutions has contributed to promote and build peace in their respective domain. More so, Traditional institutions such as Chiefs, age-grades and elder's council of the community who are supposed to mitigate in the conflicts in their respective domain to bring about lasting peace have eventually engrossed in the conflicts (Nweke, 2012). Pan Niger Delta Elders Forum as a conglomeration of traditional institutions like Chiefs, Elders council, Opinion Leaders that represent the interest of the region meet with the Federal Government and presented a sixteen (16) point agenda for consideration in order to bring peace in the region. Following the 16 - points presentated before the Federal Government, the Government found it necessary to open negociation so as to take the nation out from recession. As a traditional institution, PANDEF role played in peace building in the oil rich ND is quite diverse. It is on record that PANDEF as a major traditional institution in the ND has helped in ensuring coexistence and harmony as well as reducing use of arms, pipeline vandalism, kidnapping and other violent activities in the region (PANDEF, 2017).

The report of PANDEF confirm this fact that the institution has achieved one of its primate objectives of building peace in the ND to reasonable standard, and currently in a different dimension to ensure lasting peace in the region (PANDEF, 2017). In view of this, Otunola (2021) pointed out that traditional institutions if funded adequately will be imperative in conflict resolution and peacebuilding within, and even beyond their jurisdictions.

Concluding Remarks

PANDEF as a conglomeration of traditional institutions that embraces Chiefs, Elders council, Opinion Leaders, it represents the image of the region. It is therefore a traditional grassroot based institution. In view of the conflicts in the ND, particularly in the post amnesty era, PANDEF role played in peace building in the oil rich ND is quite diverse. These include ensuring coexistence and harmony as well as reducing use of arms, pipeline vandalism, kidnapping and other violent activities in the oil rich ND.

Recommendations/Policy Implications

Based on the discussions, it is pivotal to establish the following three recommendations that:

- i. since PANDEF play significant role in peace building, it is imperative that such traditional institutions should be given all requisites to perform such vital duties as peace building and maintenance of law and order within their jurisdictions in the oil rich ND;
- ii. the government should devise legislation/policies to ensure that PANDEF is independent (void of political interface and inducements by political elites for personal interest) to function optimally in peace building in the oil rich ND; and
- iii. government should also engage PANDEF members (and other traditional rulers) on formal peace building training/seminars for better performance.

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