

Investigating and Addressing Oil Related Conflicts in Niger Delta: A Case Study of Warri

Falode I.A¹ and Egunjobi, L²

¹Department of English, University of Ibadan, Nigeria

²Department of Urban and Regional Planning, University of Ibadan, Nigeria

*Corresponding Author

Abstract: The Niger Delta area of Nigeria has the largest reserves of oil and gas in West Africa yet is the most polluted in the world. Sequel to oil exploration and development, the land, water and air environment used to be green. However, the increasing petroleum pollution of the Niger Delta environment since oil exploitation began in Oloibiri in 1956 has resulted into alarming rise in poverty levels birthing violent conflicts and fatalities among the major stakeholders including oil companies, government and the people of Niger Delta. The ongoing conflict in the Niger Delta started in the early 1990s with Warri becoming the epicenter of regional violence. Recent efforts towards ending conflict and insecurity such as declaration of amnesty and 13% derivation principle has not yielded much success. The objective of this study is to investigate the root cause of oil related conflicts and examine different traditional approaches such as elder's intervention, inter-marriage, oath-taking in view of adopting the best method in proffering lasting solutions to the lingering crisis in Warri. The study area is Warri Township in Delta State, Nigeria. It is located on latitudes 50 27' N and 50 36' N and longitudes 50 40'E and 50 48' E. It is one of the largest and oldest towns in Delta State and located on the banks of the lower Niger Delta. The study employed the tool of survey questionnaire to acquire data relating to conflict and conflict resolution methods in Warri Township. Two hundred (200) copies of questionnaire were administered to the residents of Warri community using random sampling technique in 5 selected communities among the Ijaw, Urhobo and Itsekiri tribes of Warri where conflict is preponderant which gives room for equal chance of any resident to be chosen in the study area. Descriptive statistics was used to explain the frequencies of the variables in terms of their percentage. Results of the analysis show that the management of conflict in this town must embrace the use of negotiation, mediation, public participation as well as the traditional methods of peaceful coexistence such as, intervention of elders, oath-taking and inter-tribal marriage. It is recommended that Stakeholders must ensure that conflicting parties understand each other's culture, weaken stereotype they have of each other, ultimately to enhance effective intercultural communication.

Keywords: Petroleum pollution, conflict, traditional methods, environmental impact

I. INTRODUCTION

Crude oil exploration, exploitation, transportation and refining activities in the Niger Delta have resulted in pollution hazards from accidental oil spill or pipeline vandalization. Quite often, these hazards reach disaster proportions as witnessed in the 1999 Jesse (Delta State) oil

pipe-burst-related fire disaster that consumed about 1000 people, in addition to large-scale environmental destruction. Similar disaster occurred in 2003 in Isukwuato (Abia State). It has been shown in several studies that the amount of oil spilled in 50 years was a least 9-13 million barrels, which is equivalent to 50 Exxon Valdez spills (Adeniyi, 1998, FME, et. al. 2006, Omole and Falode, 1998). Environmental and Social Economic Impact of Oil Spillages in the Petroleum Producing Riverine Area of Nigeria. In Proceeding of 1997 NNPC International Seminar on the Petroleum Industry and Nigeria Environment. Conflicts that have arisen from the environmental impact of oil production activities in the Niger Delta have made development of the region difficult. These crises which resulted from the cumulative effects of the different phases of the oil business on the inhabitants of the oil producing area have culminated into serious communal conflicts pitting the state/government and the oil companies against the indigenes of the oil producing areas. It has also degenerated into inter-communal clashes between communities most especially over the issue of land ownership and compensation. All these have led to loss of lives and properties, disruption in oil production activities and the attendant reduction in investments, production and revenue accruable from oil and gas sales.

For the Nigerian economy to remain buoyant, it is necessary to evolve a new and appropriate conflict resolution and crisis management method to douse the raging flames of the Niger Delta in order to improve the quality of life of the inhabitants, bring about lasting peace and stability in the region and to improve the operations of the industry with less disruptions for increased production capacity in order to to achieve a resultant increase in revenue from oil and gas sales. While there is a legislative requirement in EIA decree 86 of 1992 for environmental related problems and in the SIA by oil industry project proponents, the DPR has EIA legislation for the petroleum industry even before the 1992 decree. While EIA studies have been more or less mandatory in Nigeria's petroleum industry since the 1980's, most of such studies lacked formal Public Involvement (PI) and Environmental Mediation (EM). Consequently, the concerns and opinions of the local communities are poorly addressed in the EIA/SIA process. This usually elicits social dispute and rather than negotiation most of the time, litigation has been the dominant dispute resolution technique in the petroleum industry which

has not abated the rising tide of conflicts. There is therefore an obvious need for the application of Alternative Dispute Resolution techniques.

1.1 Objectives of Study

- (a) Identify the nature of conflict in terms of ownership, tribes involved, geographical scale and environmental pollution
- (b) Identify the different methods of conflict resolution
- (c) Proffer possible and lasting solutions by employing African traditional methods of conflict resolution

1.2 Scope of Work

The study addresses conflicts involving three major ethnic groups namely Ijaw, Itsekiri and Urhobo, the oil community and Government representatives in Warri, a town in Delta State of Nigeria. Primary emphasis is on conflicts connected to the exploitation of Petroleum in this area. The study will analyse each of the factors that come into consideration in the design of a traditional dispute resolution system for this town.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Africa is known to harbor some of the best-known resource-related conflicts in the world today. Most of these conflicts occur due to the disagreements on how these resources are extracted, processed and marketed. The main issue is that local populations are not fully involved in the development decisions. The staggering contrast between the enormous wealth of the Niger Delta and its enduring human poverty, decaying infrastructure and distressed environment has been variously described as the “paradox of plenty” (Karl, 1997; Udosen, 2009), “where vultures feast” (Okonta and Douglas, 2001) and the “antinomies of wealth”, (Ibeanu and Ifeluni, 2006) among others. The Niger Delta is a region suffering from administrative neglect, crumbling social infrastructure and services, high unemployment, social deprivation, abject poverty, filth and squalor, and endemic conflict. Social and economic deterioration, ignored by policy makers, undercuts enormous possibilities for development (UNDP, 2006).

Falode et al. (2006) investigated the cause of conflicts and how they are managed in the Oil Producing Areas of Nigeria. It was deduced that inadequate community level involvement is the major cause of the conflicts and crisis in the area. The absence of a well-structured and participatory impact assessment process in the industry is a major source of conflicts. Consequently, more attention needs to be paid to greater public involvement and alternative dispute resolution techniques. These hold greater promise for development planning than violence and litigation.

Owolabi and Okwechime (2007) examined oil and security in Nigeria, with special reference to the crisis-ravaged Niger Delta. Their findings revealed that the Niger Delta provides over 80 percent of government revenues, 95 percent of export receipts, and 90 percent of foreign exchange earnings of the nation. Oyefusi (2007) analysed the determinants of the

propensity to armed struggle and the probability of participation by individuals in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. He found out that about 36 percent of the sampled population revealed a willingness to take up arms, which translates to a potential rebel army size of about 24 percent of the male population in the states sampled. In the analysis, the author noted that while grievance appears pervasive and is systematically explained by the data, neither the grievance level nor its commonly-cited causal factors, appear to be strong enough to create a disposition towards armed rebellion. Instead, factors that reduce the opportunity cost and risk of participation or increase the perceived benefits appear to be more important. Fjelde (2009) argues that oil-rich governments can use political corruption to buy support from key segments of society, effectively outspending other entrepreneurs of violence. The study found a negative but statistically significant interaction between oil production and political corruption. Afinotan and Ojakorotu (2009) identified and analysed the major challenges posed by the Niger Delta crisis to the Nigerian state. Obi (2009) study argued that the evidence emanating from the Niger Delta revealed that the conflicts have complex causes: roots and branches that transform over time in response to various factors, and forces: local, national and global, and defy simplistic explanations or *quick fixes*.

Ayofe (2009) investigated conflict resolution mechanisms in the resource-endowed Niger Delta communities of Nigeria. The findings revealed that there are differing opinions about conflict resolution mechanisms in the Niger Delta among the different groups. While government officials and multinational oil companies were optimistic about mechanisms for conflict control, youth activists and labour leaders were pessimistic about the possibility of lasting peace in the study area. The study established that community and religious leaders have identified structural barriers such as intervention efforts that failed to facilitate peace, rising spate of hostage taking by militant youth and inadequate infrastructure. Ugbomeh and Atubi (2010) examined the tripartite relationships that existed between the oil industry, Nigerian state, and the Niger Delta region with a view to defining its future road map to sustainable development. The study argued that oil has not brought prosperity and better living conditions to the people. Rather, it has been accompanied by instability, insecurity, conflict, violence, crime, and social tensions.

Idowu (2012) traced the causes and also reviewed the attempts made by the government to resolve the crises in the Nigeria's Niger Delta, while examining the institutional framework used by the Federal government in responding to the long term neglect to invest in the social well-being of the Niger Delta people. The study found out that the enormous wealth of Nigeria's Niger Delta does not match the abject poverty being witnessed by its people. Thus, neglect, deprivation, environmental degradation, lack of social infrastructure of the Niger Delta has been met by violent resistance. Okumagba

(2012) analysed the failure on the part of the multinational corporations and the Nigerian state that lead to conflict in the Niger Delta. The study revealed how the development of the region through projects and programmes will help to reduce conflict in the region. The findings showed that the lack of strategic planning for exploration and production of oil, shrinking of the environmental space for farming and fishing activities, regional imbalance and skewed resource allocation, lack of proper funding, poor implementation of projects and programmes have been responsible for the rising conflict in the region.

Ihayere, Ogeleka and Ataine (2014) investigated the effects of the Niger Delta oil crisis on the women folks. They argued that oil crisis could result in adverse effects on humans and animals which include social, ecological, health and economical. Their findings revealed that hydrocarbon and petrogenic pollution affects aquatic lives and agricultural practices in the Niger Delta. These resulted in decrease in fishing resources, damage to marine flora and fauna, loss of biodiversity, deforestation, coastal and marine erosion and flooding. They opined that the inability of the people to fix these problems and government insensitivity is the cause of persistent conflicts and confrontation of dwellers of these communities with government and oil companies. They concluded that women suffer all kinds of hardships such as rape, physical violence (beatings, maiming murder, and properties destruction) in times of conflict in the Niger Delta.

Nwankwo (2015) in another study argued that the region has been underdeveloped despite its contributions to the national economy. The study showed that the corporate social responsibility projects of the oil companies are inadequate and therefore, require a change of strategy. The study also noted that the resistant movements were formed in the region to address environmental rights violations and enhance economic development. The study concluded that the oil companies should differentiate between what the people want and their actual needs. This is expected to end the attacks on the oil workers by the restive youths.

III. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Study Area

The study area is located around latitude $50^{\circ}31'N$ and $60^{\circ}11'N$ and between longitude $50^{\circ}44'E$ and $50^{\circ}47'E$. The area is approximately 100 square kilometers and it is bounded by other communities. Socioeconomic activities within this area are majorly fishing, crop farming, vegetable farming and a little of petty trading. Figure 1 shows the study area.

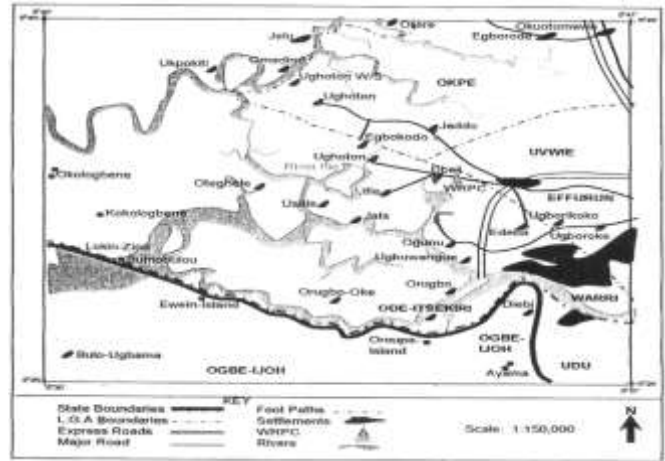


Fig 1: Map of Warri South Showing Study Area

Source: Atubi, A.O

3.2 Questionnaire Administration

Survey questionnaire was administered to a convenient sample of 200 indigenes of Warri in 5 randomly selected communities among the Ijaw, Urhobo and Itsekiri tribes of Warri where conflict is preponderant, officials of government parastatas and employees of selected oil companies including indigenous and international to understand the views of a wide range of people involved in the ongoing conflicts and propose possible ways to manage conflicts. The respondents of the study include community leaders, oil and gas communities, MNOCs, militant groups, Ministry of Niger Delta and NGOs. The questionnaire comprised of 33 questions pertaining to knowledge about various aspects of the conflict including nature of conflict, role of stakeholders, previous methods of resolution and proposed methods of resolution. Fifty (50) questionnaires were administered each to two communities among the Ijaw tribe and one community each among Itsekiri and Urhobo tribes. The sampling was done using random number generator software. The validation of the questionnaire was done using the content validation approach. Data were collected, coded, and then processed with the SPSS software. The variables were expressed as percents and reported.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The results of the analyses are presented in Tables 1 to 3. Based on the questionnaire, data were collected and descriptive statistics were used to obtain frequency of occurrence and percent contributions of the following factors.

- (a) Nature and source of conflict
- (b) Methods of Resolution
- (c) Proposed Methods of Resolution

4.1 Nature and Source of Conflict

From the analysis of the data, it was observed that all the three major ethnic groups (Itsekiri, Ijaw and Urhobo) own Warri with a cumulative of 100%. This clearly shows that Warri is

jointly owned and negates the pre-colonial and colonial assertion of who owns this oil city. These tribes are all involved in the conflict as opined by 56% of respondents. The geographical scale of the conflict is seen as more of local conflict than a national or international conflict with a percent of 86 as against 55 and 25 for national and international respectively.

Table 1 reveals that the conflict is basically centred on conflict of environmental pollution with the percent of 52, most of the creeks are destroyed with its aquatic flora and fauna resulting into socio-economic problems as fishers can no longer fish. This has great impact on the youths who mow through social movements such as MASSOP lend their voice and express their anger. Findings show that the best method of resolving conflict is through negotiation which leads to a win-win.

4.2 Methods of Resolution

It is clearly shown that dialogue is most preferred followed by mediation. Members of the communities want to be directly involved in their own affairs since they suffer from the impacts of oil spill, water flooding, land and soil erosion, etc. Public participation takes about 52% implying that stakeholders want to be carried along in the decision making process. Policy agreement in conflict resolution in Warri seems moderately effective. This shows that policies made by government, oil companies and other stakeholders cannot really bring lasting peace. Policy agreement carries a percentage of 45.5. Financial compensation is seen to be moderately effective in conflict resolution because the money is placed in the hands of a few untrustworthy elders who greedily acquire the money for personal aggrandizement. A combination of approach is quite useful from this analysis. Public participation and financial agreement is quite resourceful with a percentage of 42, followed by negotiation, dialogue, job creation with 29%.

4.3 Proposed Methods of Resolution

Application of traditional methods of conflict resolution is seen as very promising given by the 47% response. Tradition insists on peace among the people of a community and anyone who goes contrary to what is prescribed by the oracle faces the consequences. Applying this method seems to be forceful but every community has a law that instills orderliness. It is this law of orderliness that is needful. The proposed traditional methods of conflict resolution are oath-taking with 16%, elder’s intervention 30%, inter-tribal marriage 28.5%. From this result, it is obvious that elder’s intervention is most preferred because in African traditional belief system, it is acclaimed that the words of our elders are words of wisdom and can settle quarrel amicably because of their years of exposure and experiences of life. With wise sayings, proverbs and classical examples from different regions to drive home their points contending parties will learn to live in peace. It is followed by inter-tribal marriage, it is a taboo to kill an in-law therefore, once a urhobo marries a Ijaw, they become kiths and kins because their blood flows mingling in their children veins. This is a very useful tool in conflict prevention, with 28.5%. Elders intervention, inter-tribal marriage and oath-taking shows a percentage of 25.5 and oath-taking is seen as effective as it reveals 16%. This implies oath-taking alone might not be effective except in combination with other methods.

Stakeholders must be fully involved in the conflict management process. Any peace orientation must be put into cognizance. The result shows a strong agreement with a percentage of 55.5. Subsequent conflict management should be monitored with openness and proper public participation. This reveals 40% and it equally shows that all the stakeholders must as a matter of necessity be ready for dialogue instead of war, but when good intention lacks good communication and understanding, it becomes useless and less effective in peace building but suspicion to both parties.

Table 1: Ascertaining Which Tribe owns Warri

Who Owns Warri?	Tribes Involved In The Conflict	Geographical Scale of Conflict	Sources of conflict	Role in Conflict
Percent of Frequency				
Valid Itsekiri (13.5)	Valid Itsekiri (28.5)	Local (60)	Social Amenities(10.5)	Adviser (20.5)
Ijaw (8)	Ijaw (10.5)	National (27.5)	Money (37.5)	Mediator (9.5)
Urhobo(15.5)	Urhobo(4.5)	International (12.5)	Pollution (52)	Observer (80.5)
All (63)	All (56.5)	Total (100)	Total (100)	Stakeholder (2.5)
				Others (5)
				Total (100)

(Source: Author)

Table 2: Showing Different Conflict Resolution Methods Employed

Conflict Resolution Method	Improvement Strategy	Effectiveness of Public Participation	Effectiveness of Policy	Effectiveness of Financial Compensation
Percent of Frequency				
Negotiation (49.5)	Orientation (32.5)	Very Effective (52)	Very Effective (23)	Very Effective (30)
Mediation (19)	Employment (33)	Quite Effective (27.5)	Quite Effective (45.5)	Quite Effective (35)
Arbitration (5)	Dialogue & Attention to areas of interest (34.5)	It Varies (11)	It Varies (22.5)	It Varies (21)
All of the above (22)	Total (100)	Not Very Effective (9.5)	Not Very Effective (2)	Not Very Effective (7.5)
None of the above (4.5)		Total (100)	Not At All Effective (7)	Not At All Effective (6.5)
Total (100)			Total (100)	Total (100)

(Source: Author)

Table 3: Data on Best Combination of Resolution Approaches

Best Combination of Resolution Approaches	Should Stakeholders Be Involved	Monitoring Conflict Management	Traditional Methods of Resolution	Proposed Traditional Methods of Resolution
Percent of Frequency				
Developmental Programmes, Job Creation & Compensation (29)	Agree Strongly (55.5)	Military (25.5)	Best Method (47)	Oath Taking (16)
Public Agreement, Financing & Public Participation (42)	Agree (35)	Media (41)	No longer Useful (29)	Inter-Tribal Marriage (28.5)
Negotiation & Dialogue (29)	Disagree (1.5)	Civilian Security (18.5)	Generate Conflict (16.5)	Elder's Intervention (30)
Total (100)	Neither (6.5)	Follow-up (15)	Tribalistic Leaders (7.5)	All of the Above (25.5)
None of the above (4.5)	Strongly Disagree (1.5)			
Total (100)	Total (100)	Total (100)	Total (100)	Total (100)

(Source: Author)

V. CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

V.1 Conclusions

The case of Warri as viewed can be seen as a pitiable one. The crisis can only be the outburst to a long hidden cry. From what has been examined, the people of Warri are suffering and the stakeholders who are in the position to alleviate their problems seem not interested in their pains. Results show that Warri is jointly owned and the tribes are involved in the conflict as a result of environmental pollution and underdevelopment.

The government benefits immensely from this region, the oil companies benefit greatly from this region as well. Money from crude oil is used to develop the nation at large therefore, why should members of this region suffer untold poverty and hardship in the midst of plenty. Oil spill which destroys their farm produce, and aquatic habitat as well as acid rain which impacts the land and water negatively, unemployment, poor health, erosion, lack of good infrastructure e.t.c. As long as these issues are unattended to, Warri will constantly produce unstable peace. The issue of who owns Warri is just a tactic to generate conflict as the main problem of the people is embedded but something must propel agitation. The needs of the people must be addressed so as to have positive and stable peace.

The study shows that among the different methods of conflict resolution investigated, participatory mode which involves the people is the most preferred. However, a combination of methods may be effective in bringing lasting peace to the city.

Therefore, conflict can be nipped in the bud and the management will include the use of negotiation, mediation, public participation as well as the traditional methods of peaceful coexistence such as, intervention of elders, oath-taking and inter-tribal marriage. Stakeholders must ensure that conflicting parties understand each other's culture, weaken stereotype they have of each other, ultimately to enhance effective intercultural communication.

REFERENCES

- [1] Adeniyi, O. E. (1998). Environmental and Social Economic Impact of Oil Spillages in the Petroleum Producing Riverine Area of Nigeria. In Proceeding Of 1997 NNPC International Seminar on the Petroleum Industry and Nigeria Environment
- [2] Afinotan, L. A. and Ojakorotu, V. 2009. The Niger Delta crisis: issues, challenges and prospects. African Journal of Political Science and International Relations Vol. 3, No: 5, pp. 191-198.
- [3] Ayofe, A. A. 2009. Curtailing conflicts in the resource-endowed Niger Delta communities of Nigeria. Ibadan Journal of the Social Sciences Vol.7, No: 1, pp. 1-16.
- [4] Falode, O. A., Ogedengbe, K. and Bickersteth, T. (2006). "Managing Environmental Conflicts in the Oil Producing Areas of Nigeria." Trends in Applied Sciences Research, 1(3): 259-272. (USA).
- [5] Federal Ministry of Environment Abuja, Nigerian Conservation Foundation Lagos, WWF UK and CEESP-IUCN Commission on

- Environmental, Economic, and Social Policy, May 31,(2006). Niger Delta Resource Damage Assessment and Restoration Project.
- [6] Fjelde, H. 2009. Buying peace? Oil wealth, corruption and civil war, 1985–99. *Journal of Peace Research* Vol. 46, No: 2, pp. 199–218.
- [7] Halleson, D.N., 2009. An analysis of natural resources related conflicts in Central Africa and the Gulf of Guinea. *Cameroon Journal on Democracy and Human Rights*, 3(1), pp. 47- 70.
- [8] Ibeanu, O. (with Ike Ifelunni), 'Antinomies of wealth: oil revenue allocation
- [9] Idowu, O. F. 2012. Niger Delta crises: implication for society and organizational effectiveness. *British Journal of Arts and Social Sciences* Vol.7 No: II.
- [10] Ihayere, C., Ogeleka, D. F. and Ataine, T. I. 2014. The effects of the Niger Delta oil crisis on women folks. *Journal of African Studies and Development* Vol. 6, No: 1, pp. 14-21.
- [11] Karl, T.L (1997). *The Paradox of Plenty: Oil Booms and Petro-States*, Berkeley: University
- [12] Nwankwo, B. O. 2015. The politics of conflict over oil in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria: A review of the corporate social responsibility strategies of the oil companies. *American Journal of Educational Research* Vol. 3, No: 4, pp. 383-392.
- [13] Okonta, I and Douglas, O. (2001). Where Vultures Feast. 40 Years of Shell in the Niger
- [14] Okumagba, P. O. 2012. Oil exploration and crisis in the Niger Delta: the response of Militia Groups. *Journal of Sustainable Society* Vol. 1, No: 3, 78-83.
- [15] Omole, O. and **Falode, O.A.** (1998). Analysis of petroleum pollution incidents in the Nigerian petroleum Industry. *Journal of Science Research, Faculty of Science, University of Ibadan, vol 4 no 1 pp.1-12. 25-33.*
- [16] Owolabi, O. and Okwechime, I. 2007. Oil and security in Nigeria: the Niger Delta crisis. *Africa Development* Vol. XXXII, No: 1, pp. 1–40.
- [17] Oyefusi, A. (2007) "Oil and the Propensity to Armed Struggle in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria" Post-Conflict Transitions Working Paper No. 8
- [18] Udosen, C., Etok, A.S and George, I.N (2009). Fifty Years of Oil Exploration in Nigeria: The Paradox of Plenty. *Global Journal of Social Sciences* 8(2):37-47 University Press. Columbia.
- [19] Ugbomeh, B. A. and Atubi, A. O. 2010. The role of the oil industry and the Nigerian state in defining the future of the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. *African Research Review* Vol. 4, No: 2, pp. 103-112.
- [20] United Nations Development Programme (2006). Niger Delta Human Development Report. Pp 229.