



August 15, 2009

ENDING THE NIGER DELTA CRISES: EXPLORING WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN PEACE PROCESSES

Author(s): Chukwuemeka Eze, Bridget Osakwe, Bukola Akosile, Evelyn Mere
Editor/quality assurance: Takwa Zebulon Suifon and Ifeanyi Okechukwu

Address enquiries to: National Network Coordinator, WANEP-Nigeria, 3, Soji Adepegba Close, off Allen Avenue Ikeja, Lagos, Nigeria. Tel/Fax: 234-1-5556805, 8198282 (website: www.wanepnigeria.org)

.....WANEP © 2009.....

1. INTRODUCTION

The Niger Delta question predates the independence of Nigeria and has continued to stick out like a sore thumb in the nation. The present administration's renewed search for an effective solution to this protracted problem is based on the fact that it is part of President Yar'Adua's Seven Point Agenda, and thus a critical index in measuring the success of the administration as well as the country's march towards Vision 2020. The strategic importance of the Niger delta to the socio-economic well being of Nigeria can never be over emphasized; the creeks and swamps in the region sit on

WEST AFRICA EARLY WARNING NETWORK (WARN)

The West Africa Early Warning Network (WARN) is an integral part of the West Africa Preventive Peacebuilding Program co-ordinated by the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP). Through its WARN Program, WANEP is setting the stage for a civil society-based early warning and response network in Africa with emphasis on human security.

WARN covers the entire Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) sub-region including Cameroon and Chad. Our focus was initially the Mano River Basin countries of Sierra Leone, Guinea, Liberia, and Côte d'Ivoire. We have since expanded to cover the entire West Africa sub-region.

Since 2002, WANEP entered into an agreement with ECOWAS through the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) in the framework of capacity building in Conflict Prevention. One of the goals of this agreement is to interface WARN with the ECOWAS Early Warning Systems to optimize early warning conflict prevention in West Africa. In view of this development, WANEP has been operating a liaison office located at the ECOWAS Secretariat in Abuja, Nigeria since April 2003.

one of the world's biggest oil reserves with about 54 billion barrels of oil. The oil explored in the region accounts for over 85% of government revenue and 95% of the nation's foreign exchange¹. In addition, the World Bank has reported that the region has the tenth largest proven gas reserve in the world.² However, the country's continued dependence on oil and gas revenues generated from this region strikes at the core of stability for the nation. Moreso when the full implementation of the 2009 budget is already affected by

¹ UNDP Human Development Report, 2000-2001 Millennium edition.

² Tunde Obadina, "Nigeria Alone Could Provide the Power Needs of All West Africa", from Africa Recovery, Vol.13 #1 (June 1999), page 16 (part of article, "Nigeria in Focus")

shortfall in revenue from oil production as result of militancy in the region.

A common root cause to the instability revolves round the issue of resource control and socio economic development of the region. However the plight of indigenous women in the face of intractable violence has largely been ignored. The just suspended armed engagement between the Joint military Task Force and various militant groups in the region has created several negative consequences for women and children which is subsumed under the bigger issues of violence. This policy Brief explores recent dynamics in the Niger Delta conflict in the context of the amnesty granted to militants, release of Henry Okah and the plight of the vulnerable groups in all the efforts geared towards resolving the conflicts. This paper attempts to bring the 'women perspectives' into the fore of events in the region. This brief specifically:

- Analyzes the recent violence and its impact on women and children;
- Critically examine the roles of different social groups in the life of the conflict;
- Highlights women not just as victims but as a group with the capacity to make both positive and negative contributions to the dynamics of the conflict;
- Explores the accelerators as well as resources for peace; and finally
- Proffers options for response.

BACKGROUND TO THE CONFLICT:

The upscaled military action of the Joint Task Force in Gbaramatu Kingdom of Delta State on May 13, 2009 in response to the alleged killing of an army officer (a Lt.Colonel) and the attack on eleven others by Militants in the region highlights part of the tragic history that has befallen the Niger Delta since the discovery of oil in the region in 1956.

A timeline analysis shows that as early as as 1966, Isaac Adaka Boro embarked on a twelve day revolt in 1966 to protest inequality and injustice experienced by the minorities in the Eastern region of Nigeria. His revolt kickstarted the chain of various degrees of violent protest which over the years was suppressed by the military government.

A significant turning point to the struggle was the formation of the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP) inspired by Ken Saro Wiwa in 1990 to protest the environmental degradation. In response the military government of General Sani

Abacha set up the Rivers State Internal Security Force to 'deal with' them as he considered their actions as an uprising. The subsequent violent abuses and political intrigues led to the death of Ken Saro Wiwa and indigenes of Ogoni land. Another significant threshold in the historical timeline was in 1999 when the Federal Government under the leadership of Chief Olusgegun Obasanjo ordered a military engagement to the village of Odi in response to perceived acts of violence by restive youths in the community. During the onslaught, women and girls were brutally raped and killed by the military officers and subsequently displaced without provision for trauma healing, reintegration and reconciliation.

With the turn of the new millennium the agitation took a worse destabilising dimension as clusters of youth groups organised themselves into militant groups to violently agitate and seek for various group interests often coated with a facade of regional or communal positions. Groups such as the Niger Delta Volunteer Force and the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) embarked on campaigns of sabotage, destruction of oil installations, kidnapping/hostage taking for ransom and oil bunkering. These acts have had devastating effects on the country's economic performance, causing huge loss of petroleum output and revenue. At present, more than 1 million barrels per day are lost to shut in and force majeure by oil multinational companies while not less than USD \$500 billion have been lost in the five years. Kidnappers and hostage takers have also reportedly pocketed over \$100 million between 2006 and 2008 alone from the over 128 persons kidnapped during the period³. The victims of these kidnap incidents moved from men to include women as mothers, wives and very young daughters made victims due to their relationship with targeted men. At one stage, the kidnappers diverted their attention to kidnap of little girls; for whatever motive but the effects were traumatizing for their families especially mothers of the kidnapped children and other mothers who are gripped with fear of safety of their own safety and that of their children.

The JTF otherwise referred to as Operation Restore Hope has been the most recent military response by the Federal government to the militia activities and criminality in the Niger Delta. Composed of the Nigerian Army, Air Force, the Police (MOPOL) and State Security Service and deployed in the Niger Delta Region in August 2003, it was tasked

³ 'Kidnappers pocket N15bn', Thisday Newspaper, Wednesday April 1, 2009 pg 8:

primarily with securing the region from total descent into anarchy.

The 13th May 2009 military bombardment of 'Camp 5' regarded as MEND stronghold at Oporoza in Gbaramatu Kingdom of Delta State has also sparked off incursions into other communities in the Kingdom with suspected militant operations such as Kurutie, Kokodiagbene, Kunukunuma, and Okerenkoko communities.

With the upsurge of violence in the region, national and international attention has been focused on the level of human rights abuses as result of militant and military activities in the region. However, little attention has been placed on a group considered as the most vulnerable in the crises which is women and children. Though women in the Niger Delta constitute the economic bedrock of their communities through traditional sources of livelihood such as fishing, farming and trading, they are most affected and abused in the litany of violence that has pervaded these communities.

KEY ISSUES AND QUESTIONS IN THE CONFLICT:

A critical analysis of the present situation in the Niger Delta highlights the following questions:

- With the level of peacebuilding resources inherent in them, could it really be said that the women groups in the Niger Delta communities are powerless to agitate for what is right by campaigning for the use of right approaches and strategies or are they also complacent?
- What sort of protection exists for women, girls and children in the midst of conflict and barrage of attacks and counter-attacks?
- What are the coping mechanisms and or strategies that these women are currently engaging to survive?
- Women's capacity to continue their role as provider of the everyday needs of their families in times of displacement;
- Are women included in formal discussions or are their views and concerns assumed to be taken care of by the 'all knowing men'?
- What is the role and position of women in the recent amnesty package granted by the Federal Government

Analysts have alluded to the fact that women are not just victims, but also beneficiaries as mothers, sisters, lovers, wives etc. They have felt that women, in these capacities, could have made a difference had they wanted to, referring to the decisive action taken by Odi women when suspected militants entered their community as a fall out to the recent attack by the military on Escravos region. Others on the other hand pointed to cultural constraints. Perhaps until honest answers to these questions begin to emerge, only then could the riddle and mystery called the Niger Delta conflict begin the journey towards a solution.

4. KEY ACCELERATING FACTORS OF THE SITUATION.

4.1 The non inclusion of voices of moderation

There has been a remarkable absence of the voices of moderation such as those of women in the decision making on strategies to be adopted in the course of managing the Niger Delta conflict. Within the ambit of rhetorics attributed to MEND, the JTF, the Federal and state Governments and other members of the public, no strong platform or opportunity is provided for women in the Niger Delta to utilise their natural mediative capacities to mitigate verbal abuses that influence tensions and exacerbate conflicts. The paliative capacities of women draw from their connections as mothers, sisters and wives to cushion trends or patterns of violence in communities. Because this 'voice' has remained suppressed in the ongoing conflict dynamics in the region, belligerents and other interested parties to the conflict who benefit from economies of conflict have yielded to various levels and dimensions of violence to attain their goals.

For instance a Federal Representative from Kebbi State Mr. Ibim N'Allah's commented during the discussion on the floor of the house concerning the Niger Delta that "...it was better to do away with 20 million people (the Niger Deltans) to sustain the remaining 100 million."⁴ This threatened to change the dynamics of the conflict to violence between the North and the South-South, with dire consequences for the nation.

This violence laden rhetoric would have drowned out if moderating voice of women was utilised to remind the nation that more than half this population is comprised of women and children and are most affected by the conflict.

⁴Thisday Newspaper: Thursday, 28 May 2009: ACF backs military operations in N'Delta

4.2 Preference of military option over dialogue.

The perception of the relationship between the Niger Delta and the Federal government by the majority of the people of the Niger Delta is of 'us' against 'them' and thus will continue to make Deltans view JTF and government's activities as hostile and targeted at wiping out the Ijaw minority ethnic group under the guise of fishing out militants.⁵ This resonates in the fact that the Nigerian government, aware of the potential consequences of the military offensive made no comprehensive provisions to curtail the effect of the violence on civilians especially women and children.

4.3. Proliferation and uncontrolled access to arms and ammunition

Discovery and recovery of huge arm cachet was reported by the JTF during the different 'cordon and search' missions and the 'rescue operations' especially in places like the Okerenkoko and Oporoza in Gbaramotu kingdom.⁶ This is a long way from *uhuru* for JTF's battle of reducing proliferation of arms in the region. JTF raised a fresh alarm that the militants were re-grouping and stockpiling arms in furtherance of their criminal activities in the region. JTF also in the week discovered an arms dump with rocket-propelled grenades, and seven primed bombs as well as other assorted arms and ammunition in Okerenkoko, in the restive Gbaramatu kingdom.⁷ This was confirmed by the fugitive Tompolo who claimed that the arms JTF took away from the 'Camp 5' are just like taking a cup of water from the ocean. He boasted that JTF had not seen anything yet and that MEND is far better equipped than the Nigerian military.⁸ The presence and movement of large cache of arms in the region will continue to fuel militancy and spark off other offensives. Availability of arms ultimately increase the levels of violence faced and experienced by women in rape incidents by armed men, injuries, robberies, kidnap cases amongst others.

⁵ PRESS STATEMENT May19, 2009: STOP THE GENOCIDE IN DELTA STATE: THE CRY OF NIGER DELTA WOMEN by the NIGER DELTA WOMEN FOR DEVELOPMENT ENERGY AND SECURITY

⁶ Thisday newspaper Thursday may 21, 2009 pg 1&8: N'delta crisis: Nigeria losing N8.7b daily

⁷ Thisday, Thursday, 28 May 2009: N'Delta: JTF raises the alarm on fresh arms acquisition

⁸ [HTTP://ALLAFRICA.COM/STORIES/200906030228.HTML](http://allafrica.com/stories/200906030228.html), DAILY TRUST INTERVIEW WITH PREYE (CHIEF GOVERNMENT EKPEMUPOLO ALIAS TOMPOLO) ON NIGERIA: THE MISSING SOLDIERS ARE DEAD - MILITANT LEADER ON JUNE 2, 2009

4.4 Negative activities of the Media

Competition and commercialisation of news reports or media biases are accelerators to the current conflict. The media is inundated by various reports of the dimensions of conflicts in the region. Sensationalism has been reported as a contributor to the sustained operations of the JTF and Niger Delta Militants. Women who in the process are traumatized, killed, bereaved or displaced ultimately bear the negative consequences of these violent consequences between the JTF and militants.

4.5 Possible existence of complex networks of patronage and support to militants.

Media reports indicated the discovery of lists of prominent Nigerians who are alleged to be supporters of the activities of militants in the militant camps invaded by the JTF. In addition, reports by ThisDay Newspaper on the 28th of May reflect the complex connections of militants to those holding political office. The report noted that both the sister to Henry Okah, recently released under the federal government amnesty scheme, and the brother of the militant, Niweigha, killed in Odi are both assistants to the Bayelsa State Governor. As long as these complex networks of patronage spanning across the nation exist, political will can never be mustered to check the activities of militants, leaving room for incidents such as those that resulted in the latest violence.

5. WAGING PEACE IN THE NIGER DELTA: ROLE OF WOMEN

5.1. Role of women and traditional leaders in Odi

The women of Odi, in collaboration with the traditional rulers acted proactively to prevent the violence in Gbaramatu kingdom from spreading to their community in Bayelsa State. On noticing the influx of strange people into the community from Delta State where the JTF began the operations against the militants, they organized protests to alert the police of the fact that a son of the community, Ken Niweigha who played a central role in the death of 12 policemen in the 1999 killings that led to the invasion of Odi by the Nigerian military, was harbouring people suspected to be militants fleeing from the war zone. Over 5000 women protested and called for the JTF to help rid the town of the militants to avoid a repeat of the 1999 military invasion. The militant was promptly arrested and a major calamity was averted. This pointed to the fact that women are not

just victims but could act as agents of a non-violence resolution of conflict.

5.2. The All Niger Delta People's Assembly.

The availability of such Assembly that cuts across the Niger Delta with the ability for an in-depth objective analysis of the causes of crises in the region and steps to ensure an enduring peace and order as evidenced by the communiqué issued by 150 delegates at the end of their second annual meeting held recently at the Presidential Hotel, Port Harcourt, Rivers State. This shows that there are credible groups the Federal government could partner with to work on finding lasting solutions to the issues in the region. Starting from the implementation of the Report of the Niger Delta Technical Committee, the issue of continuing illegal flaring of associated gas by oil multinational companies beyond the December 31, adequate funding of the Ministry of the Niger delta, the communiqué also looked inwards to point accusing fingers at the State and Local governments in the Niger delta that brazenly steal the commonwealth belonging to the people of the region with impunity. These issues raised, if addressed, would lead to a context that protects all Niger Deltans, especially women and children.

5.3 Role of the Media:

The media focused unrelenting attention on the conflict. This created various fora for robust debates on issues in the conflict both in the print and electronic media. The media has continued to play a very important role in terms of sensitizing the citizenry on the ills associated with the conflict, the steps towards addressing the issues as well as the plight of these vulnerable groups. In the recent amnesty package given by the federal government, the media has been vocal in its reportage of the advantages and gaps identified in the amnesty.

6. THE IMPACT OF THE VIOLENCE ON WOMEN AND CHILDREN.

The report from the interviews conducted by the Women in Peacebuilding Network (WIPNET) members and other media reports put the number of the internally displaced persons at about 20,000. Majority of this people are women and children who are trapped in the hot spots of violence as escape routes through the waterways were

blocked by the military and militants ⁹.

Reports from Ogbe-Ijoh on the 24th of May stated that most of the IDPs at Ogbe-Ijoh temporary camp at Warri South Local Government Council were young and old women. Most of them are separated from their families as they fled from Okerenkoko and Oporoza communities in the bid not to be caught in the crossfire between the JTF and the suspected militants.

Many of the displaced women shared their experiences with our Women in Peacebuilding Monitors that visited them

Comfort Tony, 20 spoke of how her studies were interrupted on the day the attack started and how together with her three sisters and her mother, she swam for nearly an entire day just to get away from the cascading bullets from helicopters. The whereabouts of their father and brothers were unknown. She said they were in the bush for three days where they were kept company by the regular sounds of gunshots. Another woman identified as Victoria said she escaped from Chanomi Creek and was yet to see her four children, husband, her aged mother and her pregnant sister.¹⁰

There had also been stories of women who gave birth in the bush while fleeing. A media report narrated of an elderly woman who had to use her teeth to cut the umbilical cord of a 23 year old woman who went through emergency child birth while in the bush.

A woman's thigh was nearly cut in half when, on hearing the gunshots, she jumped from her boat into the ocean and hit a very sharp object with her leg. She swam with deep cut for hours until she was rescued. Another elderly woman who was unable to flee at the sound of the gunshots and bombing was left cowering in fear in her fishing boat for hours. The trauma was still evident when she was rescued.

There were also reports that the members of the Joint Task Force invaded the IDP camps where the women were taking refuge in search of militants. This led to further flight, displacement and traumatising of the women.

⁹ Report by the Punch of Monday, May 18, 2009

¹⁰ http://www.234next.com/csp/cms/sites/Next/News/National/5419557-146/Trauma_in_the_Niger_Delta_.csp

An impact assessment at Ogbe Ijoh highlights that the most important need of women were food, clothing, sanitary wears and shelter. They also asked for government's help in reconstruction of their homes and rehabilitation and reintegration into their communities. They couldn't distinguish between the parties in conflict but were aware that "army people" were not their own people based on the scale of attack and destruction they had experienced¹¹.

6.1 Capabilities and Resources of the Niger Delta Women:

Traditionally, women have remained a harmonizing, uniting and sustaining factor within their communities. The Niger Delta women whose occupation is primarily fishing, farming and petty trading, have created economic and social networks amidst poverty, degradation and violence in the region. They have also adopted indigenous non violent strategies to address issues of conflict within their communities. This could be seen in the non violence approach adopted by the women of Ugborodo to draw the attention of Chevron Nigeria Limited to the degradation of the environment which had destroyed their sources of livelihood and impoverished their families and communities. This strategic action brought more meaningful results than the violence adopted by men and youth which most times result in military invasion as in the cases of Odi and Umuechem. These peacebuilding capabilities had been further enhanced through formalised capacity building trainings for grass roots women living in these areas by civil society networks/groups. A critical mass of women able to work side by side with men on issues of peace and security therefore exists at the grassroots but remains untapped in the quest to positively transform the Niger Delta conflict. This is because the patriarchal culture of Niger Delta communities places women in subordinate positions to men. In some communities, women are not allowed to sit side by side with men in community town halls where decisions are made. Tragically, when decisions to adopt violent strategies are agreed by the men, these women are not allowed to participate and present an alternative, peaceful perspective. Yet they are the ones most negatively affected by the consequences of such violent approaches to issues affecting the region as has again been made evident by the experiences of the women in communities targeted by the JTF in the recent bombardment.

¹¹ These reports were provided by members of the Women in Peacebuilding Network (WIPNET) who visited the displacement camp at Ogbeijoh, Warri, Delta State during the crisis.

In others, women are only allowed to express themselves at community fora through their male clan heads. This fundamental disregard for women, has been reported as the links to violence against women such as the rape of women by soldiers and youths during the time of crisis; the denial of economic opportunities for women, the bombing and destruction of lives and livelihood of women in affected communities, invasion of displacement camps where women and children are taking refuge in search of militants. Their continued heightened vulnerability caused by this and other military incursions into Niger Delta communities negates the capabilities and wealth of resource inherent in the region. Indigenous women have often stated they have both the ability to positively transform the Niger Delta conflict and economically sustain their communities if given an opportunity.

The case of Odi in 1999 when Federal troops bombarded the community remains fresh in the memory of the nation. In addition to the destruction of the community, the soldiers raped and killed women as part of their invasion. However, This Day newspapers of 27th May, 2009 reported that when the women of Odi had noticed that fugitive militants from the Gbaramatu had entered the community, with the spectre of attracting military invasion and a repeat of the 1999 saga, they immediately got together and organized peaceful protests rejecting their presence in the community. Supported by the traditional ruler and the council of elders, this singular action adopted by the women of Odi averted a repeat of the carnage of 1999. This protest attracted the attention of the law enforcement agencies and led to the capture and expulsion of the militants who had wanted to operate from their community. Such collaborations between women and men in communities would go a long way towards fostering peace through non violent approaches. The non recognition of this critical peacebuilding resource remains a missed opportunity both for the region and the nation to avert the carnage such as that recently played out in Gbaramatu kingdom.

7. POSSIBLE SCENARIOS .

7.1 Worst case scenario:

The amnesty granted by the Federal government is viewed as a diversionary tactics by both the militant, state governments and other elites and makes violence, pipeline

vandalism, oil bunkering and the likes continue at a very high scale. This forces the JTF to continue the military offensive against militants in the region, expand to Bayelsa and Rivers state. The Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta calls off its sixty (60) day ceasefire and renews its armed attacks on oil facilities. Targeted attacks by militants lead to a total crippling of the oil industry with the nation unable to meet its OPEC allocated quota, revenue projections in the 2009 Budget as well as feed crude to the refineries for local consumption. A strict interpretation of these actions as a threat to national security leads to even more military action in the region. The identities of the officers leading the military action, the President and Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces as well as those of the lawmakers supporting military action lead to perceptions of the North as the enemy. Militants begin targeting the North, attracting reprisals in the process. A financially insolvent country of 140 million people moves progressively from failed state towards collapse. The consequent context of insecurity and violence existing in the Niger Delta and the nation forces Oil majors to sell off their investments and leave. Being the major financier of peacekeeping and enforcement operations, Nigeria's situation leaves a huge gap in ECOWAS, hampering its ability to manage the conflict. A crisis of immense proportion looms. Women bear the brunt of this negative environment created through conflict escalation as they are displaced, raped, killed and left destitute.

7.2 Medium Case Scenario:

The Niger Delta communities and militants continue to perceive the Federal Government's offer of amnesty with suspicion. Few members of militant groups submit to the offer and renounce militancy. However the big militant commanders remain elusive for fear of being killed. The Joint Task Force continues to maintain visible presence in areas considered as militant bases, with sporadic clashes between them. Political considerations and pressures prevent the President from exposing those on the list of patrons of the militants and benefactors / beneficiaries of oil bunkering. The practices continue, along with corruption at the State and Local Governments and the under-funding of the Niger Delta Ministry and Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) due to lack of political will. Sporadic militant attacks continue to affect oil production levels, negatively impacting revenue projections for the 2009 budget and the returns for oil companies. As a result of insecurity and bad governance, Nigeria continues to lose her attraction as an investment destination for international investors.

The situation of women receive half hearted and patronizing attention as they continue to bear the brunt of the impact of the neglect and militarization of the region.

7.3 Good Case Scenario:

Effective and vigorous implementation of the recommendations of the 45 persons Technical Committee on the Niger Delta is commenced by the Federal Government and other relevant stakeholders as a developmental rather than a military response to agitations in the region. The Niger Delta Ministry and the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) are fully and generously funded to carry out major infrastructural projects to address the infrastructural needs of the region. State and Local Governments through inclusion and participation work with the Niger Delta people for the effective utilization of Federal resources allocated to the states to transform the region and improve the standard of living of the people. The regeneration of the region truly commences and the withdrawal of JTF and demilitarization commences.

In this safe and prosperous context, the rights of the Niger Delta women are respected, enabling them thrive and utilize their capabilities to enhance their families and communities. Women are part of the process of peacebuilding and other initiative geared towards the development of the region as well as eventual stability.

The patrons of the economy of violence in the region are exposed and tried, with militants laying down their arms in response to Federal Government's amnesty offer and ensuring an end to oil bunkering, criminality and violence in the region. Comprehensive disarmament, demobilization and reintegration are effected. Destroyed oil production infrastructures are restored and full production is attained with an enabling, safe violence free environment created for economic activities thrive. Nigeria once again attains full production capacity, meeting her revenue projections for the year.

8. POSSIBLE OPTIONS FOR RESPONSE/ACTION

To the FEDERAL GOVERNMENT:

The following actions could make a difference in the conflict.

- Developing an Action Plan towards the domestication of UNSC Resolution 1325 and 1820 into law in Nigeria to protect women in cases of conflict and enhance their participation in conflict prevention activities. This will also provide a legal

framework for the participation of women in issues of peace and security as core stakeholders. Targeted efforts should be thereafter made to create early warning platforms within which men and women could collaborate as partners on issues of peace and security.

- In seeking ways of resolving the problem of the Niger Delta, the Yar'Adua government needs to employ dialogue. This should entail an exchange of ideas from opposing sides on neutral ground and a level platform and could lead to mutually satisfactory solutions. Opinion leaders have advocated for this dialogue to be held on a frequent basis, consisting of interactive sessions so that the Federal government is always updated on information about the problems and progress of the region. Women platforms need to be strengthened and institutionalized to harness the opportunity for dialogue and decision making on issues that affect them.
- Beyond dialogue, the Yar'Adua administration also needs urgently to show its good faith by embarking on a sound development plan. Infrastructural and human development is essential components of peace-building in a poor region like the Niger Delta where criminal activities have become a lucrative business. Programs targeted at addressing the disempowered positions of women by enhancing their economic networks are key to upholding the economic right of women.
- Ensure adequate funding of Ministry of Niger Delta and by extension the NDDC to make the necessary impact in the region especially through the provision of micro credit scheme to women in general and the displaced ones in particular.
- The Federal Government should without delay put in place machinery to implement the recommendations of the Report of the Technical Committee of the Niger Delta, especially regarding recommendations on programs that benefit youth and women.
- Display transparency by ensuring at least effective naming and shaming and exposure of the perpetrators of the violence in the region in line with the report that the federal government has in its custody. It should be ready to make public, names of top politicians, personalities and organisations including external governments supporting the oil bunkering and militancy in the Niger Delta.
- The federal government in partnership with state government should actively work towards disarmament, decommissioning, demilitarization, rehabilitation and

reintegration in the Niger delta region. The amnesty offer needs to adopt a confidence building strategy by involving neutral parties from the international community.

- The ongoing debate on constitutional review also provides a window of opportunity for the issues of concern to the region such as the Land Use Act and Derivation embedded in the constitution to be reviewed.

Critical Role of the political leaders:

- Political leaders should extol patriotic virtues in governing the affairs of this country;
- Leaders should refrain from bellicose languages that could ignite or trigger more conflicts in the Niger Delta region;
- Politicians must shun ethnic biases and utterances that suggest the annihilation of the Niger Delta people;

Critical role of the State and Local Governments:

- These tiers of government must engender transparent and accountability in governance to effectively utilize resources allocated to the region to provide the dividends of democracy in the state and thereby reducing the necessity of the youth joining militia groups
- They should also collaborate with the Federal government in giving Humanitarian assistance towards speedy rehabilitation of communities devastated by the recent violence, especially the women and children.

Critical role of the Media:

- They have a critical role to play as partners with the government and civil society as watch dogs of society to foster transparency and accountability in government as a strategy of ensuring resources allocated to the region are deployed effectively towards meeting the needs of the Niger Delta people thereby addressing the root causes of the conflict.
- Explore and highlight the positive roles being played by women in the Niger Delta communities towards peacebuilding as well as highlighting their specific issues in the Niger Delta question.

- There is a critical need for the media to avoid sensational reporting, thereby fueling or escalating the conflict. What is needed is a responsible and responsive media focused on the highlighting of solutions to the conflict.

To Civil society organizations and NGOs:

Civil Society organizations could engage with Niger Delta communities to intervene in the following areas:

- **Continued mobilization and capacity building** for community women and women groups in Gbaramotu Kingdom to be agents of peace and non violent resolution of conflict, rather than be passive or supporters of violence and militancy. The capacity building should include: leadership, peace advocacy, conflict resolution/mediation, conflict monitoring for early warning, early response.
- **Ensure Conflict Sensitivity:** In their programming activities, they must ensure that their development interventions must reflect equity considerations as they relate to women.
- **Psychological intervention:** Organizations focusing on women's rights should work on long term projects with the displaced especially regarding psychological intervention towards reintegration and rehabilitation into their communities.
- **Utilizing the Community Governance Structures for Conflict Prevention:** Traditional and community leaders should be engaged and trained in Early Warning / Early response and non violent conflict transformation for the proactive management of conflicts to avoid a repeat of the recent violence.
- **Advocating for transparency and inclusiveness in governance.** This is to facilitate the participation of Niger Deltans in decisions on how resources allocated to the region are deployed to ensure attainment of common good.

To Oil Companies:

- Exhibit genuine Corporate Responsibility by building relationships for peace with their host communities. Regular consultations and participatory decision making in the delivery of community development will build strong partnerships and sustainable social licences to operate. They must infuse gender considerations into their community development efforts and ensure that their activities do not increase the vulnerability of women.

To The International Community:

- The international community could provide the needed technical support to the Nigerian government in areas it is facing challenges in the bid to ensure sustainable peace and development in the region and the nation as a whole.
- Identify and sanction conflict entrepreneurs who buy stolen oil and supply arms.
- They should also support Civil Society organizations to create mechanisms to ensure effective, transparent and accountable management of federally allocated resources to the Niger Delta States to achieve the necessary impact and address the root causes of violence and militancy.
- Support mechanisms and other monitoring processes that looks at the qualitative and quantitative contribution of women to peace and human security in the Niger delta, as well as protecting their human rights.

Conclusion:

Despite the recent violence in the Niger Delta, windows of opportunity exist to enable all stakeholders work towards a transformation of the conflict and a regeneration of the region. Already some civil society organisations have started a process of skill empowerment that will enable the women develop sources of sustainable livelihood as they begin the process of re-integration to their communities. This action needs to be complemented by peacebuilding skills and platforms that taps into the collective will of affected women to forestall future violence in their communities. The action of the people of Odi community when militants entered the community point to a ripeness and provides a model of how synergy could avert violence as experienced in 1999. Incidentally that action was courageously led by the women fatigued by the unending cycle of violence and destruction in their community and the region and supported by the men and elders in the community. Despite the negative impact of the conflict on the Niger Delta women, they constitute a resilient and resourceful untapped factor in the conflict whose contributions are sorely needed in its transformation if given a chance to work alongside men. The Federal Government and other stakeholders should play genuine roles in addressing the criminality in the region, exposing the conflict entrepreneurs, supported with a genuine commitment to addressing the poverty, degradation and perceptions of injustice expressed by the people as the root causes of the violence and agitation.