Peacebuilding Initiatives and Lessons from the Drivers of Conflict for Niger Delta Youth

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Abstract

Youth are victims of structural problems which often generate conflict. This is why society needs peacebuilding to ensure progress in all areas. Using secondary sources, this study examines the context and nature of peacebuilding for the Niger Delta youths and the extent to which such initiatives have affected the stability of the region beyond the amnesty programme. The study also discusses the lessons from the drivers of conflict and instability across the region. The study adopts the Active Peace Theory, which examines how peace is mainstreamed as part of a triad, that includes justice and well-being (wholeness). It is difficult for youths who understand the significance of well-being to engage in acts that deny people's rights to sustainable living. This becoming part of their lifestyle would prevent violence in society. The youth have a lot to benefit from being on the side of government, either playing supportive roles directly as partners in development or filling the unemployment gaps through job creation in their legitimate businesses. The existence of partnership and peace committees in various multinational companies is an opportunity for the youth to be given recognition in the area of having their grievances attended to. Youth well-being and safety priorities must be considered by the state and policymakers at all levels if sustainable and positive peace are to be enjoyed.

Keywords: Active Peace Theory, justice and well-being, peacebuilding, Niger Delta youths, sustainable living

Introduction

Generally, youth are victims of the structural problems created by colonial powers who helped to sustain authoritarian rule in many parts of Africa, where armed conflicts and violence remain the daily experience of young people (Fawole, 2001). According to Fawole (2001:5):

> *With the rise of warlordism and the intensity of conflicts in Africa, local warlords also have a large pool of disgruntled and jobless youths, hapless victims of state retrenchment from its responsibilities, to recruit willing soldiers from. The combination of local warlords with unrestricted access to vital resources, youth soldiers who depend on drug use and abuse of alcohol, having the capacity to utilise small arms and light weapons, and increased the savagery with which internal conflicts are expressed.*

The 2018 United Nations report revealed that there are 1.2 billion youths in the world (Kallon, 2021). The number of youths across the world has continued to increase. Such intimidating number indicates the need for policymakers to consider the interests of the youth and their strengths and weaknesses to avoid a situation where they become available tools for instability. In other words, the age group requires attention if the world desires positive peace.

Why the youth are mainly the dominant actors in conflict scenarios and are trapped in conflict has always been a surprise and source of worry to many people in government and society. It has been argued that, owing to various factors, youths are destructive and are used as tools of insecurity. The

age advantage and sometimes idleness that characterise the lives of young people, who would have been better positioned if their potential were harnessed by policymakers at all levels, contribute to this. They neither make themselves available for peaceful activities nor get guided to know the dangers and threats of a non-peaceful approach to life and the benefits of peacebuilding. This development makes it difficult for them to appreciate the manifestation and functionality of peacebuilding in society. There are times when politicians and businessmen utilize their influence in society to mobilize the youth in favour of their interests (Obaje, and Okeke-Uzodike, 2013). There are arguments that youths have remained alienated from the political systems (Kallon, 2021). They are excluded from programmes that are directly beneficial to individuals, especially in areas of empowerment and development.

The strength of young people is not only in the significant use of social media and formation of youth-focused groups to discourage injustice in institutions at all levels and neighbourhoods and across the country. They can also become relevant as society witnesses increasing accessibility to programmes to design projects aimed at reaching numerous observers and targets (Denner and Martinez, 2016). Their agency can be a useful tool of peacebuilding, development and societal transformation in ending vices and unproductive activities of all age categories.

Freddy (2015, p. 271) notes that the experience of youths in times of reconstructing damaged infrastructure hinders their comprehension of conflicts and peace processes, that is the capacity to determine the outcome of reconciliation initiatives to prevent resurgence of confrontations. The level of information and exposure determines understanding of any situation. This is why training should be a component of peacebuilding, which is expected to discourage youths, especially those that engaged in violence through the use of arms but later disarmed from returning to armed struggle (Asiedu and Berghs, 2012). For behavioural changes, the youth need to understand the consequences of using force, and the benefits of nonviolent means of conflict management (Nwobueze, 2018). Such changes can come through what scholars call multi-track diplomacy track 5, that involves training, research and peace education which are life-changing and capacity-building to provide requisite knowledge and skills. With this, they can also train others on sustainable ways of responding to conflicts by embracing peaceful management approaches.

Peacebuilding is needed by young people to enable stakeholders to effectively address employment challenges and education needs of the excluded groups, especially by creating equal opportunities in education and employment, and increasing their participation in dialogue and processes that enhance peace (Freddy, 2015). When these young people are given the opportunity to take part in dialogue, it would be difficult for them to have any reason to protest or make allegation of exclusion. This will give them a sense of belonging.

Although it has been established that many of the youth do not have access to civic engagement, they have the capacity to contribute to community transformation (Collins, Augsberger and Sirois, 2021). Examining the lessons from the drivers of conflict in the Niger Delta region is critical for peacebuilding since the utilisation of youth energy for peaceful purposes could translate to peacefulness through peacebuilding engagement within the context of African Union's Agenda 2063, which advocates more youth engagement.

The nature of peacebuilding

Preserving relationships despite differences is one of the benefits of peacebuilding. Peacefulness is an ingredient of sustainable development (Okolie-Osemene, 2012). In other words, it is difficult to think about any meaningful development that could be sustained without peacefulness and

understanding. This can occur through the learning and teaching of peaceful living, which is a dynamic instrument of social change with positive impact on resource governance and actualisation of national interest (Olarinde and Onifade, 2010).

Peacebuilding refers to the transformation from a condition of violence to more political and socio-economic equality, justice, fairness and security for all. The two aspects of peacebuilding are reduction of or transforming violence and improvement on existing peaceful activities or the encouragement of new ones (Adegbami, 2020). Peace could be positive or negative. Negative peace is not people-oriented, while positive peace is people-centred. Peacebuilding is a practice that concerns people in every society. This concern brings hope because of the positive outcomes often associated with peacebuilding. Any society that desires peace for stable environment, where people are not threatened by anything, requires peacebuilding. Adequate utilization of human and material resources is needed to pursue peaceful atmosphere and sustainable development. This means that peacebuilding concerns all groups across the world.

Conflict-affected regions of the world are usually in dire need of peacebuilding programmes to prevent the escalation and resurgence of violence during or after the agreement between actors involved in dispute. Recognizing the relevance and functionality of peace initiatives paves the way for all stakeholders to appreciate the opportunities offered by their hostile and friendly relations.

Theoretical framework

This study adopts the Active Peace Theory, which examines how peace is mainstreamed as part of a triad, which includes justice and well-being. This is in consonance with the Hebrew word *shalom*, which some people call Bible's word for salvation, justice and peace (Adebayo and Jegede, 2014). Justice and well-being cannot be achieved without adequate provision of human needs, which are crucial in making people comfortable to discourage them from becoming agents of conflict or violence. When people are taught to be peaceful with others, acting based on justice and promoting the well-being of all, it would be difficult for them to engage in violent conflicts.

Participation and empowerment aid the perception of youth-centred agency. Focus will then be on the capacity to determine their lives and adding value to other people's lives. Ultimately, this situation recognises the effectiveness of youth involvement in peacebuilding (Berents and McEvoy-Levy, 2015; Freddy, 2015). The youth are dominant actors in conflict scenarios across the world. Unfortunately, this has not translated into their active involvement in peace processes, especially activities that could lead to peaceful resolution of conflicts and sustenance of peacebuilding initiatives. Many young people across the oil-rich region of Niger Delta also escalate tension through their acts of lawlessness.

Youth and Peace in the Niger Delta

Obstacles to peacebuilding include injustice, corruption, activities of spoilers, youth restiveness, failure of negotiation, communication breakdown, and lack of readiness of actors to dialogue and identify possible ways forward. When people are educated to value peace, they are given the opportunity to learn the benefits of being truthful, ensuring that they are not used to perpetrate acts of injustice, and being obedient and respectful to elders (Abdile, 2012). This is a significant and indispensable principle of peacebuilding, which youths cannot do without if they are determined to engage people with mutual trust and understanding, promote human relations and tackle practices that corrupt interaction or complicate issues.

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Peacebuilding means restoration of normal conditions and permitting development during a conflict. The condition that prevailed before a particular conflict and how to identify the timeline of the peacebuilding effort and development are crucial (Agary, 2006). The essence of peacebuilding is to address the abnormal behaviours and conditions that characterize a period of conflict. Agary (2006:3) captures the areas of focus thus: "There are many dimensions to peacebuilding. However, in recent times, the global focus seems to have moved more towards the combating of terror and less towards overcoming deep-rooted conflicts or those associated with war-torn societies."

The view of women is not different from that of young people, who see crude oil as being associated with sorrow, tears and blood (Babawale and Odukoya, 2007). Their restiveness is instigated by seeing other regions without oil being transformed with the oil resources from the Niger Delta. No social group has been more vocal than the youths, who have consistently demonstrated their frustration arising from continuous abandonment of Niger Delta, which is usually traceable to the central government. This made them to adopt different means to drive home their points.

The people identified the problems affecting the region and see themselves as collective victims. They complain about non-convincing attempts of the Nigerian government to painstaking development of a rewarding model that will reduce spillages of the Niger Delta, not adequately carrying the people along as development partners, and leaving the people perpetually in "losses and psyche effects arising from the activities of multinational companies whose exploration creates risks in affected villages" (Nwaozuzu, Abada and Aniago, 2020, p.28). The region suffered downward review of the revenue allocation formula at different times, especially 1970-1999, when it dropped from 45 per cent to 3 per cent. This was a significant decrease from what it was in 1960 (50 per cent) based on the principle of derivation (Ukiwo, 2009, p.2, cited in Nwaozuzu, Abada and Aniago, 2020).

After the publication of Ogoni Bill of Rights, when the first group demanded resource control after forming Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP) in 1990, other Niger Delta groups started demanding their shares of the oil wealth. They adopted tactics that created panic in the oil industry, on the one hand, and strong solidarity amongst groups in the region, on the other hand, based on their common cause of ending marginalisation of minorities (Ogbogbo, 2008). Thereafter, Ijaw Youth Council proclaimed Kaiama Declaration; the Oron produced Oron Bill of Rights; Urhobo Economic Charter was declared; and the Ikwerre formed Ikwerre Charter of Demands and Akalaka Declaration (Duruji, Olanrewaju and Duruji-Moses, 2019).

Alade (2012) examined youths' militancy as a bargaining tool for challenging structural violence in the Niger Delta region. This was done in order to determine how decades of environmental degradation, poverty and unemployment and dissatisfaction aided agitations and restiveness of young people in the Niger Delta for decades. From the study, it is obvious that poor social responsibility initiatives made people to engage in protests and confrontations that turned violent after some time, while demanding the clean-up of the environment, livelihood improvement, health provision, and economic justice through sharing of revenues and compensation of those affected by the environmental degradation. The failure of the state to critically and peacefully engage the oppressed and protesting youths triggered youth militancy that defied all resolution methods.

Onuoha (2006, p.111) avers that proliferation of arms is responsible for the complexity of managing youth restiveness. With the heavy deployment of security forces in the region, competition for control by the military and militants became an issue that has undermined the peace of the area.

In the view of Mitee (2012), the region that has become crude oil enclave is known for exploration and export of this natural resource in commercial quantities to the extent that geographical

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description is no longer obtainable. Economic management shows how the Niger Delta is significant to the country and global energy mix (Aghalino, 2009; Agahlino, 2012).

As a result of shocks and several complexities that are linked to the security threats against Nigeria's oil sector in the Niger Delta, stakeholders aim at addressing such safety problems that spread across the region (Aghalino and Okolie-Osemene, 2014). The government and its oil company partners seek to contain the youth-led protests that motivate aggressive behaviours against the state and oil majors. For the youth, ending their agitations without their need being met is like losing their means of livelihood, while the government and oil companies see calls for resource control as an invitation for violence or threat to government's main source of revenues. However, it is difficult to end agitations without any attempt to pay attention to the youth. Ensuring that the origins of the problem are addressed without any delay and that efforts are made to curb misappropriation of public funds meant for human and societal development are crucial.

Addressing this concern would lead to an end to linking many negatives to the youth. One of these is the claim that youth restiveness shows how the youth who are critical conflict actors easily become violent without being disturbed by the military operations deployed by government to contain criminal acts in the region (Nwobueze, Okolie-Osemene and Okoh, 2016). Prolonged social exclusion and economic exploitation of numerous youths force them to indulge in criminality and violence (Aria, 1997). Some scholars maintain that violence among young people motivated government to deploy security agencies with the mission of law enforcement using the military and this intervention created panic and uncertainties in the region (Okolie-Osemene and Aghalino, 2011). However, such a situation did not escalate until the state and multinational corporations could not show the people that they are stakeholders and not spoilers in the petrochemical industry. Government development projects were delayed due to the presence of security forces, that have made peace elude the youth; they make it look as if the youth are troublemakers. People describe youth restiveness as an immature way of expressing oneself when aggrieved. It is seen as irrationality, irresponsibility, indiscipline, youthful exuberance and a reaction to childhood protectionism. This description is controversial because empirical evidence showed that youth violence/militancy is sometimes in sympathy with the agitations of the working class and the yearnings and aspirations of other oppressed people and, sometimes, even the ruling class (Oromareghake, Arisi and Igho, 2013:49).

According to Shaxson (2008:201), the youth are described as violent the moment various policy programmes of government are no longer acceptable to them since their impact cannot be felt as desired. A restive situation is an efficacious approach of responding aggressively to activities of government actors. It portrays forceful grassroots activities aimed at development of violence. It paves the way for militia acts of organised resistance by indigenes of the Niger Delta against exploitative behaviours of their political elite. Ikpa (2013) asserts that youth restiveness involves the combination of actions, behaviours and attitudes which are socially unacceptable exhibited by youths. The youth take advantage of their restiveness to obtain what they want from relevant authorities (Mba et al., 2021). This approach of getting what they want is not legally acceptable.

The negative relationship in host communities does not promote cordial relationship. Since the economic issues evolved in the region, numerous disruptive actors have emerged with different interventions aimed at managing the situation. The resolution and management of conflicts can be implemented at the same period. However, it is argued that peaceful societies that prioritise the resolution and transformation of conflict situations have higher probability for peace-oriented initiatives (Ginty, 2021).

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The economic and security situation in the Niger Delta for more than three decades, characterised by deprivation and environmental concerns, requires urgent response from governments at all levels. This should be devoid of politicization of the development needs of the people (Obi, 2009; Nwafor, 2011; Mitee, 2012; Okocha, 2012). Over the years, several economic activities have been taking place across the area where these activities aided instability. The dominant activities have been within the oil sector owing to the presence of the multinational oil companies that engage in exploitation and exploration of oil. These adversely affect businesses, farming and fishing.

Peacebuilding for Niger Delta youths

Youths are to be given serious attention to discourage them from seeing violence as a major way of life. Peacebuilding is relevant because of the threats of conflicts and violence. Scholars have identified many risk factors which make peace to elude society. Some of them are greed, availability of illegal arms, youth bulge and high percentage of youth unemployment. No peacebuilding initiative can claim to succeed without recognizing the risks associated with these factors of societal instability. Peacebuilding is a multi-stakeholder endeavour which requires endurance and coordination. It should not be focused only on violent conflicts, like armed conflict. This is because even those militants or insurgents engaging in armed conflict are members of the community and interact with the people. Therefore, analyses of events need to be extended to justice and tolerance.

Youth involvement in peacebuilding will do society a lot of good. However, more achievements will be recorded when people are empowered to overcome poverty and underemployment, which usually motivate the youth to easily engage in anti-social behaviours that are detrimental to the peace and security efforts of the government. The more youth are involved in peacebuilding, the higher the peace initiatives gain society's attention, with adequate impact on the stability of society. Peacebuilding projects drastically reduce the temptation of youths enrolling in violent groups. Such youth-oriented efforts can be sustained by ensuring that more youths are empowered with life skills.

To discourage youths from using frustration as an excuse, equitable distribution of resources cannot be disregarded (Ibrahim, 2015). A man whose basic needs are met can hardly engage in aggression. This is because deprivation of human needs motivates frustration and use of violence or arms to force policy makers to consider community development (Thom-Otuya, 2016).

On the challenges in sustaining agreements between the oil companies and host communities, Babatunde (2020, p.934) claims that, "Multinational corporations are responsible for the spillages and collapse of agreements with the people." Both the use of obsolete equipment and the alleged instigation of youths to execute the act of vandalism portray the companies as corrupt and weak in social responsibility. This is because these pipelines pass through various communities in Rivers State and beyond.

Some of the oil companies have been reactive, rather than being proactive, to the coomunities' requests to be compensated as a result of huge losses arising from oil spillages (Idemudia, 2014, cited in Babatunde, 2020b). Indigenes residing in crude oil-bearing areas are at risk due to food crisis arising from oil spillages and environmental instability that undermines the traditions of villages and creates scarcity of resources (Babatunde, 2020b). From the project Nigeria-Watch, various Ogoni communities have witnessed resistance from the non-state group called MOSOP.

Asari Dokubo and other individuals also became popular beginning from year 2005 through their resistance targeting oil production. Gbomo Jomo became a known "spoiler" (Okolie-Osemene, 2015:12). Only MEND (Movement for the Emancipation of Niger Delta), out of the militants remains

more fierce and hostile to the multinationals, causing more threats after the amnesty that de-radicalised youths. In 2008-2009, MEND destroyed facilities of Shell, including pipelines, which are several miles away from the towns in Rivers, Bayelsa and Delta States. It also successfully attacked the oil-receptor of government around Atlas Cove Jetty Lagos on 12th July 2009 (Okolie-Osemene, 2015:14).

Rivers State hosts Shell Petroleum Development Company and other oil companies which engage in the production and export of crude oil, with manifestation of resource curse that motivates endemic corruption in the petroleum sector. Many of the stakeholders have been accused of mismanaging public funds (Okolie-Osemene, 2015). Over the years, only a handful of public officials have been held accountable. Such a negative situation has also caused remarkable grievances that encouraged the restiveness of the youth.

The foregoing is also informed by the fact that even ownership of oil wells has become one of the sources of confrontations involving kingdoms in the Ijaw ethnic group, like Nembe and Kalabari in Bayelsa and Rivers States (Igwe, 2012). The ownership issue is in three dimensions: the Niger Delta question concerning the rightfulness or otherwise of the Federal Government and states to control the oil revenues; the struggle by the communities and states to dominate the oil issues; and the restiveness of the youth to stop foreigners and governments from exploiting them. A peacebuilding initiative would require the Federal Government to provide space for Niger Delta stakeholders to present their views and suggest ways on how to move forward in the peace process through meetings that contribute to determining the shape and context of the next phase of the initiatives.

Lessons from the Drivers of Conflict and Instability in Niger Delta

The advent of ethnic militias in Ijaw villages and other communities commanded by Tompolo, Asari Dokubo and Ateke Tom, refocused the pattern of the region's agitations. This made peacebuilding inevitable for the region (Okoi, 2020). International oil companies also involve various actors in order to sustain oil production (Chigbo, 2011). Employing the Niger Delta youths for menial jobs, like protecting oil installations in communities, causes more conflicts; relatives and kinsmen are their enemies, as some educated indigenes are also stranded and excluded (Folarin and Okodua, 2010). Some of the controversies are traceable to the origin of the militancy aimed at mobilising a common opposition against the oil companies and government through resistance, protests, vandalism, and hostage taking. These are products of the 1998 Kaiama Declaration issued by the Ijaw people demanding the closure of oil production and withdrawal of soldiers from Ijaw land (Adesina, 2000). Since this Ijaw declaration and formation of various restive groups, the aggression against government has escalated, with the youth exhibiting frustration arising from their perceived exclusion, unemployable status and neglect in many sectors of the oil economy, including conflict management (Kinanee, 2018). The frustration and aggression were occasioned by the poor welfare packages for the increasing unemployed youth, that engendered volatility and criminality (Nwobueze, 2015).

Many individuals in some quarters still find it difficult to understand why communities should continue engaging with the state to achieve peace. Revisiting various recommendations by several government-initiated committees and panels of enquiry is crucial. Peacebuilding requires active involvement and contributions of various actors and stakeholders. This approach demands the understanding of both the aggrieved and concerned members of society to ensure that everybody benefits from the peace that is generated from peacebuilding.

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There are many works that portray the era from 1990 as that of instability in the Niger Delta region, where various communities have been embroiled in confrontations with the government and multinational oil companies. In the 1990s youths began organizing protest movements for agitations. The Niger Delta problems have been approached from development perspectives (Udeke, 1995; Nwobueze, 2015; 2021).

As the Youth Development Collective Theory of Change emphasizes the need for welfare of persons, community and youth leadership for transforming community-school situations, engaging youths in community peacebuilding activities and leadership initiatives could strengthen their capacities to be more productive. The youth build skills through sustained participation in youth development programmes, such as vocational preparations in the following ways: attending school, making satisfactory academic progress, and connecting to the workforce.

Young people's agency reveals the potential of young people in conflict transformation and peacebuilding (Berents and McEvoy-Levy, 2015; Freddy, 2015). This will make it easier for them to know the differences between negative peace (absence of violence) and positive peace, that is peace-oriented channel of achieving peace (Grewal 2003). When the youth are taught to understand the benefits and relevance of promoting justice and well-being, their appreciation of significant drivers of peacefulness will become a daily experience rather than creating opportunities for them to indulge in immoral acts that undermine stability. It is difficult for youths who understand the significance of well-being to engage in acts that deny people's rights to sustainable living. This becoming part of their lifestyle would prevent violence in society.

The issues of oil bunkering and the operation of illegal refineries have dominated reports from the Niger Delta. With high rate of these reports originating from rural communities, the need for increased government presence became more pronounced. As observations showed, young people are well engaged in the business than other age groups.

The youth have some lessons to learn from engaging in acts not permitted by the government from the deactivation of illegal oil refineries by the security agencies in different parts of the Niger Delta. Since it is an offence, avoiding engaging in such temptation would be more beneficial in the long run than seeking temporary economic benefits. Since unapproved oil production could create panic through humanitarian crisis in the event of any explosion and pollution, discouraging the act is a life-saving effort that the youth must be convinced to embrace it.

There have been allegations of complicity by some government officials and the security agencies in terms of being aware of the operations of these illegal oil refineries and failing to apprehend the perpetrators. This raises fears of these officials also benefiting from the revenues generated.

Illegal exploitation of crude oil is a highly prioritised business in this study area. Militant youths in creeks handle the cutting of pipeline to tap crude oil and load it into tankers with heavy security guard. International businessmen manage the marketing of crude oil and laundering of funds (Bobo, Gimah and Seomoni, 2020). Non-militia youths are also persuaded and recruited into the illicit business. Considering the bold step of Rivers State Governor, Nyesom Wike, in declaring war on individuals operating illegal refineries, it is not acceptable for anybody to still sustain such condemnable act that undermines human security, internally generated revenue and national economy.

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Imposition of stiff legislative measures, strengthening and enforcement of relevant laws as well as other practical ways to make looted resources unprofitable to the spoilers are important. One significant lesson young people must learn from the current government's clampdown on illegal oil refineries is that criminality does not last long in an environment where the state responds to lawlessness. Thus, survival cannot be hinged on nefarious acts which are not tolerated by an organized society where security governance and human development are prioritised by the government.

The youth have a lot to benefit from being on the side of government, either playing supportive roles directly as partners in development or filling the unemployment gaps in society through job creation in their legitimate businesses established after gaining support from government's vocational training projects for the youth. Nobody gains from the losses that are recorded through illegal oil refineries. The youth need to understand the long-term and immediate consequences of corrupt practices and abuse of nature. Instead of making themselves agents of national concern and environmental instability, the youth could function as advocates of environmental protection as well as environmental and economic justice in partnership with governments at all levels.

The existence of partnership and peace committees in various multinational companies is an opportunity for the youth to be given recognition in the area of having their grievances attended to. It will then be easier for the people to sustain channels of communication with the companies and government instead of using force through the formation of restive groups that make the region volatile.

Conclusion

Experiencing conflict affects the level of peace in any affected locations. The Niger Delta states have been the hotbed of insecurity and violence arising from the involvement of youths in social life. This is because many decades have passed with the youth feeling neglected and excluded from the mainstream of development.

The post-amnesty era has shown the time for people to take their destinies in their own hands by adopting peacefulness and seeking ways of living together beyond the state-centric efforts that seem to characterize their agitations. The reality is that government interventions appear inadequate to many of the indigenes of the region who have the perception of government neglect and multinational corporations taking undue advantage of the masses. The responsibility for peacebuilding is a call for action by everybody, including the youth, whose intervention could determine the extent of peacefulness. There is hardly any conflict situation that does not have youths actively involved as actors and victims. They are easily conscripted into violence.

Youth well-being and safety priorities must be considered by the state and policymakers at all levels if sustainable and positive peace is to be enjoyed. This is because, if the concerns of young people are not addressed, they will find it difficult to have confidence in the leaders. Having youths that are out of school, partially schooling, living in unstable families or from separated homes could undermine peacebuilding interventions. It could also affect their peers who may wish to be part of society's efforts to engage more young people.

Most of these problems are linked to the problem of the environment and economic aspects of the issue, which portray the region as a contested enclave. Timely implementation of the reports of various committees on youth and community development would contribute to addressing some of the worries of the youthful population and possibly reduce the high rates of unemployment and

migration of young people from rural areas to urban communities across the Niger Delta and outside the region. The problem of unemployment has contributed to the increase of migration to urban areas, with significant reports of rapid criminality in those areas owing to population explosion and associated poverty and inequalities.

To sustain all the efforts of government and society, the various memorandums of understanding involving oil-producing communities and multinational oil companies need to be reviewed to identify areas of gap, opportunities and concerns among the actors in order to prevent misunderstanding. The government cannot ignore issues concerning gas flaring and social responsibility needs that drive conflicts.

Sustainable mainstreaming of conflict transformation, conflict resolution and conflict management is crucial for the youth to demonstrate their value for peace and understanding of cooperation. Positioning the youth on the path of peacefulness through consolidation of the successes already achieved will build constructive relationships among different levels of society.

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