



Gender, Ethnicity and Violence and Their Effects on Livelihoods in the Niger Delta Region, Nigeria: The Case of Keegbara-Dere (Ogoni) and Bolo (Okrika) in Rivers State

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Abstract

The Niger Delta Region in Nigeria considered the oil mineral producing area in the country has become a breeding ground for various forms of violence. The inability of residents in these areas to directly gain appreciably from the resources generated by the exploration and exploitation of this natural resource has contributed to this problem. Although it is now recognized that violence severely undermines broader development goals of growth and sustainability, a lot of policy research is dominated by quantitative methodologies. While obviously important, such highly quantitative methodologies fail to capture how people actually experience violence and also how it had impeded their livelihoods. This study, while placing a lot of emphasis on qualitative methodology looks at the interrelationship between ethnicity and violence and their effect on livelihood (on gender basis) in oil mineral producing areas in Nigeria.

Résumé

La région du Delta du Niger, au Nigeria, considérée comme la zone de production du pétrole, à l'échelle nationale, est devenue un cadre propice à différentes formes de violence. L'incapacité des résidents de cette zone à profiter des

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ressources générées par l'exploration et l'exploitation de cette ressource naturelle est en partie responsable de cette situation. Même s'il est reconnu que la violence remet sévèrement en cause les objectifs de développement en termes de croissance et de durabilité, une grande partie de la recherche menée en matière de politique publique est dominée par les méthodologies quantitatives. Bien qu'étant d'une évidente importance, ces méthodologies quantitatives ne reflètent pas la façon dont les personnes vivent réellement le problème de la violence, ni la manière dont ce phénomène a affecté leurs moyens de subsistance. Tout en accordant une grande part à la méthodologie qualitative, cette étude examine l'interaction entre les notions d'ethnicité et de violence, ainsi que leurs effets sur les moyens de subsistance (selon les relations de genre), dans les régions productrices de pétrole au Nigeria.

Introduction

What is being gradually accepted in the literature is that many of the factors and forces responsible for the raging conflicts in Africa lie in the impoverishing socio-economic burden of debt and adjustment, the stresses of environmental and human insecurity and especially ethnic enmity. In the past three decades, Nigeria has demonstrated a very high propensity for ethnic and religious violence. However, in more recent times according to Egwu (2001), there has been a dramatic surge in xenophobic expressions, the hardening of ethno-regional positions and the proliferation of ethnic militias that have unleashed varying degrees of violence. The outcome is an extreme sense of intolerance, which manifested into numerous cases of religious, intra and inter ethnic violence. Consequently, there have emerged several flash points of ethnic and religious violence across the country in the sense of occurrence of direct violence in addition to a number of potential situations of violent outburst.

Presently, an area that has become notorious globally for violent ethnic-based clashes is the Niger Delta Region (NDR) of Nigeria. While some of the incidents of violent clashes are of recent occurrence, others have the history of conflagrations over a relatively long period. The ethnic-based violence between Keegbara-Dere (Ogoni) or K-Dere and Bolo (Okrika) in the Niger Delta is one whose antecedents date back to the early twentieth century in the 1910s. Oral history recalls that the conflict can be traced to claims over ownership of a particular strip of land, along a river channel running between them. Oral history also has it that there was a Supreme Court judgment on the disputed land in 1911. K-Dere people claim ownership of the land, as the area is part of their bush used for rotational farming. The counter claim by Bolo is that the land was the original site of the settlement before their forebears moved across the

creek to the present location on the island. The absence of accurate maps and land records has made the issue a matter of claims and counter claims over the years. Today, several violent incidents have resulted in: loss of lives and property, interventions by successive governors of the Rivers State, and several civil cases in the law courts. Despite these interventions, the problem is nowhere near solution.

Sadly however, the emergence of violent conflict between the two communities has further complicated historical accounts. Whereas history remains unclear, the reality on the ground is the impact of violence on development of the two communities, particularly the threats to livelihoods. In a region that is already facing other threats to their livelihoods from pollution and resource depletion, to neglect by government, violent conflict poses serious problems for sustainable development.

This study focuses on these dimensions of conflict using the K-Dere and Bolo situation as a case study. It is therefore concerned with the differential developmental impact on men, women and youths in K-Dere and Bolo and responses (both coping and adaptive strategies) that they have adopted to ensure livelihoods, the difficulties experienced in daily needs, the uncertainties and fears, suspicions and distrust that are now becoming entrenched in life in these communities. Parts of the responses to be highlighted include the threat of more violence and the people's perception of the role of the state in this conflict over the years. Specific objectives of the study are as follows:

- i. To understand and examine historically the social relations between K-Dere and Bolo.
- ii. To assess the effect on food production and livelihood systems under changing and volatile situations.
- iii. To identify within the household and the community, the emergence of specific strategies for coping with violence and conflict and how this impacts on traditional roles between men and women.
- iv. To examine the roles and responses towards peaceful resolution of the conflict from within the communities and by external agents.

The framework used in this study applies the concept of livelihood and how this is impacted upon by ethnic violence. There is a linkage between the struggle for livelihood and ethnic violence. It is this circularly causal nature of the linkage that constitutes the core of our conceptual framework.

Ethnicity and violence in Nigeria

Ethnicity is a multi-faceted concept and one that has been given to diverse interpretations. According to Egwu (2001), it is necessary to clarify the meaning of the concept for two key reasons. First, is the tendency to simply understand ethnicity merely as a derivative from ethnic groups. The problem with this interpretation is that although ethnic pluralism and ethnicity are etymologically linked, ethnicity is a product of interactions between and among people of different ethnic groups. Thus, ethnic pluralism is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for the emergence of ethnicity. Second, is the tendency to enmesh ethnicity with other social phenomena with which it shares similar features especially those that come within the categories of communal identities. Mafeje (1997), while recognizing the ideological nature of the concept, added that the real significance in the African context is that ethnicity becomes a principle for organizing power in the arena of intra-class struggles.

Of significance to researchers is the role ethnicity plays in the social process. To this end, there are the perspectives that present African ethnicity as a historical and political construction and a direct product of colonial invention. Others include the elite perspective that argues that elites who compete for power and privileges are the primary users of ethnic weapon. In the past ten years in Nigeria, there had been an increase in the cases of conflict in the country. The reasons for these conflicts vary from ethnic and political interests, religious biases, environmental degradation and territorial and border clashes. These conflicts at the national level have generated the most concern as they pose a threat to survival of the fragile democracy in the country after several years of military rule. Also, they have resulted in widespread killings and maiming, destruction of life and property and indeed sometimes whole villages, displacement of people, suspension of economic activities and loss of means of livelihood in the affected areas.

In this study, it is recognized that NDR, which is the oil mineral producing area in the country has become a breeding ground for various forms of violence. This is as a result of the frustrations experienced by the residents in this area in respect of their inability to directly gain appreciably from the resources generated by the exploration and exploitation of this valuable natural resource. Most of the protests are centered on environmental degradation and absence of facilities or community development projects. The NDR youths especially are always protesting that 98 per cent of the resources for the development of the country is from the region while the people live in abject poverty. Thus, the most widespread incidents have

occurred in the guise of youth militancy in conflict with oil and gas exploration companies and in the use of force by state security outfits against such militancy. The Human Rights Watch (HRW) in January 1999 published a documentation of some of the worst examples of state use of force including the tragic Umuechem and Ogoni experiences in Rivers State. More recently in 1999 was another major conflict between the Odi community in Bayelsa State and the Nigerian military that left only two buildings standing at the end.

IDEAS (2001) attributed conflicts among the “component ethnic groups, clans, classes and personalities” in the Niger Delta to the many social contradictions within the region. IDEAS (2001) further noted, “The common historical experience of the Niger Delta should not suggest that the region is homogenous. Its peoples do not even share a single consciousness of the commonality of their experiences. Divisions within the Niger Delta are as serious as divisions between the Niger Delta and outsiders. Causes of intra and inter ethnic conflicts in the Niger Delta varied. While in some cases the conflict can be traced to the divide and rule techniques of the oil and gas companies that are condoned by the state, others can be traced to the long-standing historical differences that external forces play upon. For example IDEAS (2001) argued that the crisis in the Niger Delta especially in the 1990s was propelled principally by a regime of state violence mounted against the people of the region by oil companies and the Nigerian military governments. In this regard, the military encouraged conflicts between communities and ethnic groups and then used the violence as a pretext for repression. Always dangled before communities is the allocation of resources and projects unjustifiable and inequitably distributed in the form of social infrastructure, compensation, and other development projects. Within specific communities the divisive carrot is that of inept and corrupt leadership leading to agitations for change.

Yet others cite ignorance and poverty as contributory factors arguing that the fact that people are poor and lack political consciousness makes it easy for them to be manipulated and goaded to fight themselves. This argument further points to the significance of the many conflicts in the region as deriving from the many social contradictions within NDR. One of these conflicts was in Umuechem in Rivers state. On 30 and 31 October 1990, the women of Umuechem held a protest at Shell Petroleum Development Company’s facility in their community. Mobile policemen were drafted to the scene. They reportedly killed some 80 women demonstrators who were unarmed and also destroyed 495 houses. Village women who were demanding provision of electricity, water, roads and

compensation for oil pollution of crops and water supplies triggered off the demonstrations. A judicial commission of inquiry set up by the Rivers State Government concluded that there was no evidence of a threat by the villagers and that the mobile police had displayed a reckless disregard for lives and property. The Kaiama Declaration by the Ijaw youths in December 1998 on the issue of resource ownership and control saw the drafting of troops and navy personnel into the region.

Sources of threats to livelihoods in NDR

According to Moffat and Linden (1995) threats to livelihoods and poverty in the Niger Delta derive from several sources which include physical threats, economic and political threats. The physical threats include erosion and flooding and degradation of agricultural land due to oil and gas production activities and increasing population pressure on available land. Economic threats include fisheries depletion, deforestation and biodiversity loss due to overexploitation and pollution. Political threats include the appropriation of local resource rights and especially crude oil and gas resource use by the federal government and multinational oil companies, the operation of laws that effectuate the appropriation process and the marginalization of local communities.

The gender dimension of securing livelihoods comes in the differences in economic activities and the traditional roles within the homes. Within NDR, as is common with rural parts in Nigeria women are largely responsible for feeding the family. When conflicts and pollution occur women are unable to feed their families. In the area of fishing, women engage in harvesting (by picking shell fish) and also in dragnet fishing usually in swamps. The proceeds are normally sold for cash but always only after what is necessary for feeding the family is removed. Any threat to livelihood thus limits the ability of women to feed their families. It is not surprising therefore that women are often dragged into conflict situations usually as victims. Women have also been dragged into conflict situations in order to broker peace as exemplified by the Umuechem's case in 1990 and the Ugborode case where women actually occupied the Escravos Tank farm belonging to Chevron for ten days in July 2002 until a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was signed by the company and the community.

Historical perspective of the Nigerian political economy and oil activities

In the 1990s oil production accounted for over 90 per cent of Nigeria's foreign exchange earnings, 97 per cent of Nigeria's total income, 25 per cent of the Gross Domestic Product and 70 per cent of its budget revenue (Frynas 1998). The oil industry is therefore indispensable to the state. As in most other Organizations of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), foreign companies in Nigeria have always dominated the oil industry. Indigenous oil and gas companies have only just become important with Moni Pulo being the only significant one from the Rivers State. In terms of quality, Nigeria produces light, sweet oil of high API gravity the standard of the American Petroleum Institute. Location is another major advantage. Not just is Nigeria closer to the United Kingdom and the United States of America, which means lower cost of transporting oil from Nigeria than the Middle East, politically the West African region is more stable than the Middle East.

Within the country, the leadership of the Nigerian state has all along been under the control of a minority elite made up of top government officials, highly placed military officers, influential businessmen and their allies. The revenue accruing to the state from the oil industry sustains this group. These elites are the power brokers in the society and they play a major part in controlling the cause of events. Their interests in many ways determine the way and manner oil multinationals operate in the country.

Research method

The research method applied in this study involved a combination of systematic observations, questionnaire administration and comprehensive interview schedules. The questionnaires and interview schedules carried out during the months of November 2002 and February 2003 were administered at K-Dere, Bolo and at Port Harcourt where most of the public officers reside.

As the main focus in this study is the interrelationship between ethnicity and violence and their effect on livelihood (on gender lines), the interviews were concerned with household livelihood strategies during and after conflict. The discussions teased out food production and respective roles of the genders before, during and after conflict and also their involvement in resolutions for peace. The field studies yielded the base data for the empirical analysis of existing situations, perceptions of the conflict; its resolution and citizen responses over time to the conflict. Information

sources consisted of both primary and secondary data. The primary data comprised:

- i. Reconnaissance Survey that involved unscheduled interviews with key informants from each of the communities. This survey was also used for structuring the interview schedules and questionnaires.
- ii. In-depth interviews (through questionnaire administration) in K-Dere and Bolo to chiefs and opinion leaders; women groups; youths (male and female); men groups.
- iii. Interview of government officials in relevant agencies at state and local government levels.
- iv. Questionnaires and interview schedules administered at household levels.

Secondary data sources were obtained from relevant literature in academic journals, government publications and a variety of books well referenced in the text. In all 125 persons in 116 households were interviewed in K-Dere while 117 persons in 92 households were interviewed in Bolo. The study utilized Participatory Appraisal for Rural Areas (PARA) to analyze the data. This was used to identify perceptions of the target groups in K-Dere and Bolo in order to know the causes and consequences of conflict and violence and the coping strategies.

Research results

- i. The data from both communities affirm that violence has occasioned change in livelihood sources. For Bolo, traditional sources of livelihood particularly from fishing have declined, the essential factor being fear of sudden attack by K-Dere people rather than the already accepted environmental pollution. As many respondents from Bolo explained that although the river is polluted by oil activities, they still need it as a main source of food and income and moving up and down the river is possible only if they feel safe to do so. For K-Dere people, the use of the river has also seriously declined. The traditional gathering of shellfishes and firewood by women for domestic use and sale has to be undertaken in groups supported by males serving as security cover. The nature of the violence as expressed by both communities appears unlimited. They include destruction of fishing nets, blocking of creeks, raiding of fishing ports and capsizing of boats and drowning of occupants. However, the impact is the same in the two communities i.e. fear and decline in traditional sources of livelihood.
- ii. The shift to trading is common to the women in both communities. Households in both villages increasingly have to buy food. However

whereas K-Dere women are able to travel to other places to buy and sell by road, Bolo women seem limited to Port Harcourt by water transport that is not only very expensive but unsafe and not regular. This creates a lot of difficulties especially food shortages for the Bolo people. When the transport difficulties are placed against a background of location isolation being the last village in Okrika kingdom along that axis, the impact of the violence on Bolo in this aspect can be better appreciated.

- iii. Of interest also as reported by the women in the two communities, is the impact of the effect of violence on livelihood in the households. This is very prominent in the feeding of the family and education of the children. The use of such words as «hunger», «starvation» connotes how hard it is to feed and educate the children in both communities. Children in both communities were reported to eat after the husbands have eaten and the women eat last. The men were not really aware of this pattern of distribution of food. Noticeable also is the high degree of malnutrition among the children in the communities.
- iv. Economically also, there is a loss of linkages between the two villages and between them and others who use the road and nearby regional market in the disputed territory. Apart from loss of exchange of goods, basically farm produce, forest products like wild vegetables, firewood, snails etc, and fish products, there is also the loss of services which people from K-Dere used to provide in Bolo. These include all the services linked to the car park at the water front end of the disputed land such as security jobs and restaurants that have ceased to exist, and masonry and carpentry works essential for house building.
- v. Social life has also seriously been disrupted. In the two communities, there is a net out-flow of the active population especially male. From K-Dere, out migration of young virile labor is mainly by sea to the Cameroon, whereas from Bolo it is mainly to Port Harcourt. Social interaction has also suffered between the two communities and with other villages around them. Respondents from both communities expressed the fear of interacting with each other even in Port Harcourt that is the state capital. As close as these communities are physically, they are very distant socially. For example, in all their years of co-existence, there is no known case of inter-marriage although clandestine love trysts occur.

Response to violence and conflict

The first response comes in the form of each side accusing the other of having started the conflict. By and large, ethnicity appears to be the principal factor here. Presently, there is a court action initiated by the Bolo people challenging the Rivers State White Paper based on the recommendation of the Justice Ungbuku Commission of Inquiry into the crisis in 1985 on grounds that the commission went beyond its terms of reference to discuss title to land. The case has been on since 1987. In both communities, male and female members of the communities are levied regularly to prosecute it.

The women of K-Dere reported that they have had Christian prayer sessions in respect of peaceful solutions to the crises and at the same time they had on a number of occasions resorted to offering traditional sacrifices to the gods of the land. One of the opinion leaders from K-Dere claimed that he invited elites like himself to meetings at Delta Hotels in Port Harcourt (which is a neutral ground). Elites from both communities attended. A major event that emanated from this meeting was the initiation of a friendly football match. The first leg took place at K-Dere where Bolo people attended but a date for the return match had not been fixed.

The Bolo chiefs and opinion leaders reported specific actions they took to resolve the conflict. They provided a catalogue of peace moves either initiated by them or those in which they participated. Youths from Bolo claimed that they initiated the football match between the two communities. Bolo youths went to K-Dere to play the first leg of the match. Many of them stayed back after the match for some days. However, K-Dere youths have refused to go to Bolo for the return match since then. In the case of the Bolo women, they like their counterparts in K-Dere, believe strongly in religion and they claimed that they are always offering prayers for peaceful resolution of the conflict.

The two communities at some point expressed their lack of confidence in the intervention of government's law enforcement agencies in the crisis. What was apparent to the research team however is that each community accused the law enforcement agencies of being partial any time their interventions did not favor them.

The Rivers State Government on its own part set up the Justice Ungbuku Commission of Inquiry in 1985 to inquire into the dispute between the two communities. It published a White Paper on its findings in 1987. The commission discovered from mostly oral pieces of evidence and past records available to it that there were three main causes of conflict between the two communities. These were land dispute, dispute over fishing rights in the creeks and rivers, and the belligerent nature of the people of both

communities. The major recommendation was that the disputed land should be given to K-Dere. This, the Bolo people vehemently oppose, and since then the litigation instituted by the Bolo people against the government still stands. K-Dere people accuse the government of failing to implement its recommendation and for the past eighteen years everything is at a standstill in the area.

Major findings and discussions

Several findings provide insight into the links between gender and livelihoods in the context of conflicts. One is the shifts in traditional livelihood sources. The people of K-Dere were principally farmers and fishermen. The fear of violence has reduced the significance of fishing and farming. In response, trading is becoming more important including long distance trading. Even though farming is still done, the outer fields are no longer being cultivated. The implications of this trend are many. The men who use the river as a channel into the open sea where larger scale deep-sea fishing occurs have lost this source of livelihood. Some have re-located to Port Harcourt, the state capital, as laborers. There is also a large incidence of migration to Cameroon, Nigeria's eastern neighbor. Others are idle within the villages not having the skills to find jobs. Yet others who were skilled artisans and went to Okrika villages including Bolo to peddle their trades are no longer able to do so. This has increased unemployment among the men. The women are the ones who are now mostly engaged in trading to provide for their families. However, many items of household consumption previously provided through fishing in the creeks (like picking shellfish e.g. periwinkles) and firewood have to be bought. To be able to engage in cutting firewood and creek fishing the women depend on male escorts. For those who do not have access to such escorts they resort to buying. Some women escaped to other villages where they had kith and kin and hired themselves out as farm laborers.

In Bolo, the shift from traditional livelihood sources is also documented. Traditionally, the main source of livelihood is fishing. The conflict has led to engagement in farming within the town on small plots around the home and also to trading between Port Harcourt and Bolo. The end result is the same as for K-Dere. Households have to buy the bulk of their food where previously they produced for consumption and sold the excess for cash. Within the household, this trend places a great burden on the women who now bear the brunt of sustaining household livelihood. In addition the women are educating the children, as the men can no longer manage. When men migrate out of the community, as is now the case in the two

communities, the household effectively suffers from the absence and separation. The social implications of this are also significant.

Youths in both communities are suffering from unemployment. As traditional sources of livelihood decline because of violence, youths who do not have paid employment have no other source to depend on. The general idleness that results has led to widespread dissatisfaction among the youths who choose to remain in the local community or are unable to move out for other reasons. It is these youths that are easily mobilized to promote violence. As remarked by a female respondent from K-Dere, "the crisis has put the people especially the youths in a violence prone situation (wicked life) ever ready for action". Thus the effect of violence is more violence.

Another livelihood impact comes in the form of visible absence of employment generating activities such as new housing construction, service sector industries and social activities. In K-Dere for instance, people could not get to the river to cut wood and mud for constructing the traditional wattle and daub housing common in the area. People mainly buy and sell food items. Generally in Nigeria, primary sector production dominates the rural economy and not commerce, and whatever commercial activities and services exist are incidental on primary production. A major observation in this study is that violence has changed the fundamental structure of the rural economy in K-Dere and Bolo.

Fear and insecurity pose two serious threats in terms of the use of the creeks around the two communities. One is the loss of livelihood from the creeks. The other is the loss of easy access to the Bonny River that is a major waterway in the state. Many fishing ports are located along this waterway where artisanal fishermen engage in long-distance deep-sea fishing. Fishmongers (mostly women) from urban markets travel to these fishing ports to buy in relatively large quantities for sale in Port Harcourt and beyond. As they come, they bring food supplies to their customers. Thus, a whole system of livelihood dependent on these fishing ports is no longer available due to the incessant raids on fishing ports and sea piracy on the waterways.

There is clear evidence that K-Dere and Bolo are different ethnic groups and even though they have been neighbors for over two hundred years, by their own account, have maintained their ethnic distinctiveness not even inter-marrying. Certainly, the two communities are either not desirous or are unable to engage in any interaction beyond trade. Within the traditional African setting this is strange and can portray feelings of ethnic superiority on either side. In a conflict situation, such feelings of

distinctiveness and supremacy become tools of manipulation. Ethnicity thus becomes a factor that can be used to whip up sentiments and promote violence against one another.

The general level of awareness of the causes of the conflict and the response including the recourse to the law courts is comparable between men and women in both communities. The youths in K-Dere however showed a poor understanding of the conflict. This could be attributed to the fact that even though there is conflict, it is easier to get in and out of K-Dere as it has a road access to other parts of the state and even beyond. The relative sense of isolation youths in Bolo feel is not here. Also, it could be attributed to local structures of authority and how information is handled within the community. In recent times, K-Dere has had its own internal conflicts involving youths.

There are several disturbing aspects of government agencies and their roles in this conflict. The most glaring is their inability to broker lasting peace. All across NDR, government agencies dabbling into conflict never get sustainable solutions. For instance, since 1987 when the last conflagration of violence occurred between the two communities, there has not been a solution. Another dimension is the lack of confidence by both sides in the government. As each side believes government is biased and partial, showing favoritism to the other, there is mistrust of institutional representation in general and of the police in particular.

Some of the blame for the persistent conflict must be attributed to government and oil companies. There are no accurate ordinance survey maps that can show clear and correct boundaries. Also, the frequent demarcation of new local government areas and the lack of appropriate boundaries is a major source of conflict. Boundary adjustment commissions have never satisfactorily solved boundary problems between communities in conflict. Oil companies in their own case have given names to oilfields that are sometimes not even local.

Recommendations

First, the two communities must be brought to a realization that the continuing conflict between them negatively impacts on their development; sapping away the natural potentials in terms of available resources and the ability to harness them for economic growth. This creation of awareness is a task for non-governmental organizations within and outside the communities. There is need to adopt a long-term strategy for such a task. No short-term quick fix solution would work in this situation as deep-seated animosities and suspicions exist. It will require commitment on the

part of intercessors to bring about lasting peace. The current pretentious attitude of government that the cessation of open hostilities signifies peace is deceptive. Our study has shown that attempts initiated by the communities to promote social interactions have deadlocked. There is need for third party intervention but this must be one that can command the confidence and respect of both communities. When violence occurs, government is especially given to the extreme use of force to bring violence under control. However, there is usually no follow-up action in form of rehabilitation, financial assistance or counseling which are necessary. When livelihoods are disrupted, people suffer. It is through such follow up action that lives can be re-built.

Second, the security agents can do a better job of policing the area. Prior to a conflagration, there are usually tell tale signs that can be tapped into by covert operations and open hostilities forestalled. One of the sad commentaries on the security agents is that even when informed of likely conflict, action is not usually taken to prevent it. It is when all hell has been let loose that they try to intervene. Community watch groups can be set up to participate in this initiative. In addition, reported cases of assault, harassment and killings ought to be carefully investigated and perpetrators punished according to law to serve as deterrent to others.

Third, elite opinion leaders and chiefs in both communities must engage in continuous dialogue until a workable solution is found. The dispute is about land. Claims and counter claims have only led to more violence. The land is presently not being used for any productive purpose. In the context of dialogue, options can emerge for the use of the land and the peace of the communities. This research is not in a position to make specific suggestions on such possible uses but since dialogue is all about generating options and evaluating their feasibility further research is hereby suggested for the resolution of conflict for sustainable development.

Fourth, the loss of livelihoods must be addressed. Coping and adaptive strategies need to be strengthened. The women in Bolo for instance need safe and cheap water transport to Port Harcourt. Privately operated speedboats are too expensive and the use of hand paddled canoes on such a busy waterway like the Bonny River is totally unacceptable. The picture of women competing for rights of waterway with tugboats and oil tankers in the twenty first century is not a good image. This is an area where the state and local government can assist by way of providing specially constructed mass transit speedboats.

Fifth, to help build veritable commercial ventures, soft loans can be given to the women to increase their capital base. The men and youths of

both communities cannot continue to remain idle to the degree that is presently evident. The rural economic base needs expansion to include some degree of rural industrialization such as weaving, production of local crafts, pond fishing, soap making, local crafts and even food processing. For the youths, skills acquisition can be promoted so that they can either establish small-scale enterprises for themselves within the communities or move out to fend for themselves. Once usefully engaged, they will no longer be available to be mobilized for violent acts.

Conclusion

This study attempted to document the differential gender impact of ethnic conflict on livelihoods using the K-Dere/Bolo conflict in the Rivers State of Nigeria as a case study. In this regard, field survey covered households using semi-structured questionnaires. Men, elders, women and youth groups were interviewed separately using interview schedules. The results were presented in a comparative fashion in order to identify commonalities and differences in their experiences. In all instances, the study was careful to keep the gender perspective.

Ethnic conflict has negatively impacted on all sources of livelihood with the attendant fear and insecurity. Coping and adaptive strategies have implied a shift from fishing and farming with trading becoming more important. Even the pre-conflict trading links between Bolo, K-Dere and other communities in the locality have been re-located to that between each of the communities and urban centers farther away. The economy is being gradually transformed from a production-oriented to a consumption-oriented economy. This has serious consequences for the rural economic growth as only a very small percentage of the people are in wage labor.

The women have generally borne the greater burden of the economic changes having to provide household sustenance and now taking on the erstwhile key role of the men—that of paying for the education of the children. The men and youths have also shown a greater tendency to migrate out of the villages in search of paid employment. Both Bolo and K-Dere are essentially inward looking communities, providing for their own development from their own resources. There is hardly any government presence in either community in form of infrastructure and services. The conflict has further served to deter any public sector investment.

The study also highlighted the inadequacy of the government's response to the conflict. Apart from the use of police power to quell the violence when it erupts, the other significant attempt at resolution of the conflict

was the Justice Ungbuku Commission of Inquiry. Following the submission of its report and the publication of the Government White Paper (currently the subject of a court case), the government has kept silent.

This study has made a number of recommendations geared towards first, effecting sustainable peace and secondly, improving livelihoods for the present. They include the use of new initiatives on dialogue using NGOs and other third parties that can gain the confidences of both sides. Also, the need for accurate documentation of land matters by government and oil companies was emphasized especially in cases of boundary adjustments following the creation of new units of political administration. Of great importance are the areas of assistance urgently needed now to cushion the effects of declining livelihood sources and the expansion of the economic base to promote production of goods and services.

The two communities of Bolo and K-Dere are the key players in this conflict. Since they cannot resolve it alone, help is required from government and NGOs. There is no doubt that as long as the conflict remains unresolved new dimensions will emerge and positions held on the issue will harden. There is a need to take concrete steps to tackle the issues. Sustainable livelihoods are the key to sustainable development. For Bolo and K-Dere, ethnic conflict has diminished the possibilities for the realization of livelihood systems that can promote sustainable development.

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