Reflections from the Field

Leadership Initiative for Transformation and Empowerment (LITE-Africa)

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This reflective paper expresses the opinions of a former expatriate LITE-Africa staff member. The paper depicts her experiences and perceptions working in the Niger Delta and the lessons generated from it. This is the first in a series of reflective papers that will be developed by various LITE-Africa staff members. The papers will convey individual views on the Niger Delta region including beliefs, and observations that will contribute to a larger body of knowledge on the region. For further information on this and other LITE-Africa publications please visit: http://nidprodev.org/ or contact office@nidprodev.org.

Prior to arriving to the Niger Delta, my familiarity with the region was limited. My decision to take a position in the region was met with staunch opposition and unpleasant imagery of what was to be expected -- violence and instability. However, these inaccurate perceptions of the region are borne from misconceptions and the failure to understand the underlying issues prevalent. Rather than experience the terror that many professed was commonplace, I experienced a life altering year of discovery. I gained firsthand knowledge of case studies along the spectrum of international development issues from peacebuilding, community governance, to corporate social responsibility. I also discovered and developed myself as an individual, as the experience allowed for significant introspection and personal development. The pages that follow, narrate these experiences in detail and provide a series of observations and lessons learned that can be instructive for individuals and organizations wishing to engage in the Niger Delta. While I do not profess to be an expert in the field, this paper reflects a lived experience.

1.0   Community Development

1.1   CBO's and the GMoU

What is remarkable about Niger Delta communities is the initiative and drive of Community Based Organizations (CBOs) and the inventive approaches taken by community residents to drive their own development. While working on projects in Isoko South and Yenegoa LGAs, it was striking to see the efforts taken by community residents to hold the government accountable for its failure to deliver services to its communities, for example a women's group[1] that was established by and receives mentoring support from LITE-Africa advocated for, and achieved, the renovation of a primary school in Oleh community. CBOs are instrumental in the development process as they are located in the communities they serve and are directly impacted by the poor conditions they work to combat. The lack of engagement by government and development partners requires that CBOs are fully empowered to fill the tremendous gaps present.

CBOs in the Niger Delta, and globally, are unable to provide a greater range of diverse services because of several shortcomings including: "Poor leadership, limited networking with local and external organizations, and lack of registration with an official public agency."[2] Based on what I observed, CBOs in Niger Delta communities can benefit from capacity building efforts, not limited to training in project management, gender-sensitive planning, leadership development, and conflict resolution. In addition to providing these groups with capacity building skills and funding it is important they have a thorough understanding of the Nigerian policy environment. There are many underutilized policy instruments that can guide the advocacy and development efforts of these groups. For example, there exists a misconception

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[1] This refers to the Women Support Network, established as part of LITE-Africa's Oxfam Novib Livelihood and Governance Program.
[2] Opare, Service. Strengthening Community-Based Organizations for the Challenges of Rural Development. *Community Development Journal* 42.2 (2007): 251-264.

that the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) only applies at the Federal level. However, where States do not have laws regarding public records, the FOIA applies to states.[3] A law such as the FOIA is instrumental in promoting transparency and accountability by giving citizens access to public records however it can only be propelled into action through civil society engagement.

Finally, CBOs in the region, too often, operate in isolation, not engaging in networking or experience sharing with CBOs in other communities of the Delta and beyond; or forging links with external development partners. For example, a project titled Add Their Voices to the Budget, introduced in 2011 - funded by Pact Nigeria and implemented by the Nembe City Development Foundation (NCDF) [4] -- created the first opportunity for Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC) and Chevron Nigeria Limited (CNL) sponsored Regional Development Councils (RDCs) and Cluster Development Boards (CDBs) to work together – this is seven years after the initial implementation of the model. While the ability of CBOs to reach beyond the Delta is constrained by funding and accessibility, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and development partners in their project design can integrate experience sharing as a key component. Beyond this the use of Information Communication Technologies (ICTs) can facilitate greater cross border communication.

I found that the International Oil Companies (IOC) operating in the region were more responsive to community needs than government. For example, in reference to partnership initiatives for development in the Niger Delta, Idemudia argues that "initiatives that focus on microcredit schemes, skill acquisition centres and investment in small and medium enterprises also have enormous potential to ameliorate poverty in host communities."[5] These initiatives promote self-sufficiency and enable beneficiaries to independently generate income and potentially employ others. Both Shell and Chevron sponsored GMoUs incorporate these elements for example, the Egbema Gbaramatu Central Development Council (EGCDC), a Chevron sponsored CBO, works to provide vocational skills training to residents in the communities it serves including skills in, networking and web design, crane operation, electrical wiring, fashion, marine technology, and mechanical technology, and is preparing to graduate 192 trainees this year. Chevron also launched a 40 million Naira microcredit scheme through EGCDC in 2008, 70% of which was allocated to women.[6] Beyond this, the GMoU introduces tangible benefits to communities, including basic infrastructure such as walkways, health centers, and civic centers among others. The GMoU employs a participatory community driven

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[3]Odinkalu, Anselm Chidi. "10 Myths About the FOI Act." Right to Know 2011. 5 Jun 2012. Accessed at: http://www.r2knigeria.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=200&Itemid=313
[4] The Nembe City Development Foundation is a SPDC sponsored Cluster Development Board that receives mentoring support from LITE-Africa; the proposal submitted for the ATVB project was developed with support from LITE-Africa.
[5] Idemudia, Uwafiokun. "Oil Extraction and Poverty Reduction in the Niger Delta: A Critical Examination of Partnership Initiatives." *Journal of Business Ethics* 90 (2009): 101.
[6] Nwachukwu, Clara. Chevron Inaugurates N40 Million Micro-Credit Scheme for Ijaws. The Punch 6 Nov 2008. Accessed at: http://archive.punchontheweb.com/Articl.aspx?theartic=Art200811061333912

model for development, evidenced by the establishment of CBOs and consultative processes, and the design and use of community development plans to guide interventions. It is important to note the government's amnesty initiative also introduces skills training, financial empowerment and microcredit; however these benefits are restricted to ex-militant youth, largely excluding non-militants and women. This inadvertently glorifies militancy and perpetuates the image that violence is the sole avenue for government recognition.

It would be useful for NGOs working in the region to measure IOC performance against government performance to make a case for the GMoU model to be adopted as an intervention strategy at the local government level. This can also direct donors to make investments in the CBOs established through the GMoU process, this would diversify their funding sources and increase their revenue for greater impact. Moreover, it is useful to analyze the actual impact of IOC interventions on community development; the current debate on the issue is fragmented with some arguing that efforts have been insignificant and others purporting that substantial and positive changes have occurred.[7] Despite this there is need for clear and consistent assessment criteria to be developed and used to make this analysis. It is through this that the residents of the Niger Delta and their individual and collective rights are incorporated and centralized in the development process

1.2   Culture and Community Development

Another interesting observation about Niger Delta residents is that they have preserved their culture. The presence of chiefdoms, the integration of traditional rites in project activities and the presence of shrines among other symbols throughout the Delta were striking.   When I traveled to Isoko South Local Government Area for a policy dialogue, as part of LITE-Africa's Oxfam Novib funded Livelihood and Governance Program, traditional rulers outnumbered government officials, and the same was true when I traveled to Yenegoa for a similar event. This demonstrates that traditional rulers have some level of commitment to their communities because they are members and residents of these communities. In the design and implementation of projects it is important that these rulers are engaged; they have an important role to play in community mobilization. Beyond this there is a direct link between cultural preservation and sustainable development. According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO):

"To preserve the heritage is for a community to work towards the recovery of a collective memory and identity, and through this collective effort, create social cohesion. To valorise the heritage means to contribute to a better mutual knowledge and understanding among the communities present within a territory, each one with its own particular cultural identity. This results finally in the maintenance of social harmony, which implies

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[7] Idemudia, Uwafiokun. "Oil Extraction and Poverty Reduction in the Niger Delta: A Critical Examination of Partnership Initiatives." *Journal of Business Ethics* 90 (2009): 93.

the recognition and respect for the differences in the cultural identity of each community, a determining factor in the implementation of a sustainable development policy."[8]

In addition to promoting social capital and cohesion, cultural preservation can be a selling point for tourism that can promote economic growth, both nationally and for small scale entrepreneurs, whose locally made and grown products would be profitable with increased tourism. This can also help to introduce their goods to larger markets across borders. In the long term, using culture to promote tourism would debunk the stigma and misunderstandings about the region.

2.0   Human Security

2.1   Youth and Human Security

In my discussions on the Niger Delta, it seemed that youth programs in the region were synonymous with the Amnesty Program. The amnesty is at the center of heated discussions and debates on the region. In my assessment, I believe that we can credit the program with creating a period of stability, not peace. Peace goes beyond the absence of conflict to encompass the promotion of sustainable economic and social development, respect for human rights, equality between women and men, democratic participation, tolerance, and the free flow of information[9], none of which exist in the Niger Delta and all of which are underlying causes of conflict. In a study -- entitled Oil and Youth Militancy in Nigeria's Niger Delta Region -- carried out on 200 youth in four communities of Delta and Bayelsa States, participating youth cited the following factors as drivers of youth violence in the region: Non-fulfillment of GMoUs, lack of social services and infrastructure and lack of employment opportunities[10]; each of these issues was strikingly apparent during my stay.

Non-fulfillment of MOU by Oil Companies: This was evident during my stay, when youth of the Uzere Community in Isoko South LGA staged protests at SPDC facilities over its failure to enter into a GMoU with the community, despite benefitting from the oil it produces. They also expressed dissatisfaction over the scanty development projects SPDC introduced to the community such as one hospital that is not functional because SPDC failed to fund an accompanying health insurance scheme.[11] In response to these peaceful protests, soldiers and mobile policemen fired tear gas on protesters resulting in a chain reaction of events

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[8] United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. *A Guide for African Local Governments: Cultural Heritage & Local Government*. Grenoble, France 2006. 28 Accessed at: http://whc.unesco.org/uploads/activities/documents/activity-25-2.pdf

[9] U.N. General Assembly. "Declaration and Progrramme of Action on a Culture of Peace" (A/Res/53/243). 6 October 1999. Accessed at: http://cpnn-world.org/resolutions/resA-53-243B.html

[10] Oluwaniyi, Oluwatoyin. Oil and Youth Militancy in Nigeria's Niger Delta Region Journal of Asian and African Studies 45 (2010): 314-319.

[11] Amaize, Emma. "3 dead, 100 injured as Delta community, Shell clash over GMoU." *Vanguard* 29 November 2011. Accessed at: http://www.vanguardngr.com/2011/11/3-dead-100-injured-as-delta-community-shell-clash-over-gmou/

that led to three deaths and 100 injuries. This experience demonstrates the importance of the GMoU model and the value placed on it by community residents, but it also speaks to a wider issue of poor governance, giving the appearance that government security forces are in place to protect foreign entities over its own citizens, further perpetuating feelings of alienation and marginalization by residents of the Niger Delta.

Lack of social services and infrastructure: LITE Africa's Citizen Report Card assessment carried out in 2010 and funded by the European Union, uncovered 287 abandoned, substandard or incomplete projects in 120 communities; another Citizen Report Cared carried out in 2012 uncovered 78 similar projects in 20 communities. Projects were sponsored by government (at all levels), oil companies and international actors. The 2012 survey revealed that 10 of the 20 communities do not have functional health centers, further, 44% of all primary schools in the 20 communities and 56% of secondary schools do not have desks and chairs for students. In traveling to communities in Isoko South, Yenegoa and Southern Ijaw LGAs, the neglect was visible. These findings speak to severe administrative neglect and the failure of government to meet the most basic needs of its citizenry.

Lack of employment opportunities

Many Niger Delta youth lack the skills to become gainfully employed. When they do obtain skills for employment in the oil sector, they still face difficulty becoming employed because their level of skill may not be commensurate with the work they seek. Employment opportunities with the oil companies benefit youth outside oil-producing rural communities. Where residents of oil producing communities are employed, they assume lower level positions such as "cleaners of oil installation facilities, pipeline security personnel and temporary contractors whose appointments terminate following the completion of those contracts."[12] This calls for greater emphasis to be placed beyond the oil sector in terms of preparing youth for employment.

2.2   Women and Human Security

In my experience and in the international discourse it is assumed that the factors that impede women's development, both economic and political, are caused by external factors – outside of women's control. However in the Niger Delta the reality was that women themselves fail to support one another, they have become inundated with misconceptions of women's inability to challenge men, to make decisions and impact their communities. This was particularly evident in women's participation in decision-making. This situation, coupled with the history of violence in the Niger Delta, presents a compelling case for the implementation and utilization of United Nations Security Council 1325 on Women, Peace and Security

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[12] Oluwaniyi, Oluwatoyin. Oil and Youth Militancy in Nigeria's Niger Delta Region Journal of Asian and African Studies 45 (2010): 317.

(UNSCR 1325). Little work is being done in terms of implementing UNSCR 1325 in Nigeria and the country has not yet adopted a National Action Plan on the resolution; this is ironic considering the leading role the nation plays in regional peacekeeping efforts.

UNSCR 1325 is the first resolution on women, peace and security and was adopted by the United Nations Security Council in 2000. Key provisions of the resolution include:

- o Increased participation and representation of women at all levels of decision-making.
- o Attention to specific protection needs of women and girls in conflict.
- o Support for local women's peace initiatives.
- o Gender perspective in post-conflict processes.[13]

This is useful in the Niger Delta context because the current peace that exists is temporary, created by an unsustainable program, that does not address the underlying causes of violence, the government sponsored amnesty. Using tools such as UNSCR 1325 can catalyze the impact of the Amnesty Program, while introducing significant funding and intervention from external actors. The Niger Delta is a key area to introduce such a resolution because while women have been greatly affected by conflict -- for example, women constituted the majority of internally displaced persons following violence between the Nigerian military and militant groups in Gbaramatu in May 2009[14] -- they have not benefitted in great numbers from the government amnesty. Between August and October of 2009, 20,192 militants were disarmed through the amnesty program including 20,049 men and only 133 women,[15] totaling less than 1%.

Implementation of UNSCR 1325 would be instrumental in addressing some of the dynamics that challenge peace and security for women in the Niger Delta including:
- o Structural violence, such as institutional gender discrimination
- o Lack of basic social services
- o Exclusion of women in decision making
- o Lack of unity among Nigerian women, "an insufficient level of conscientisation/ mobilization"[16]
- o Gender insensitivity by the State causing neglect of women's interests. [17]

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[13] U.N. Security Council, "Resolution 1325 (2000) [Women, Peace and Security]" (S/RES/1325). 31 October 2000
[14] Barnes, Karen, Eka Ikpe and Funmi Olonisakin eds. Women, Peace and Security: Translating Policy Into Practice. (New York, NY: Routledge, 2011) 90.
[15] Omadjohwoefe , Ogege Samuel. Amnesty Initiative and the Dilemma of Sustainable Development in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria *Journal of Sustainable Development* 4.4 (2011): 254
[16] Report of the National Consultative Meeting on Women, Peace and Security Resolution 1325, Issues and Instruments The Nigerian Context. International Alert September 2002, p.8 accessed at: http://www.badgerdesigns.com/alert/v1/pdfs/niger_cns.pdf

UNSCR 1325 would also serve to fill the gap created by the government's failure to develop a comprehensive conflict management and peacebuilding policy. This became particularly evident in August 2011, following a suicide car bombing at UN headquarters in Abuja. Following this attack the North has experienced a series of bombings and attacks by terrorist groups and the State has been unable to suppress this violence. When I traveled to the North, to Kaduna, listening to community residents it became evident that the causes of violence in the North were not unlike those in the Niger Delta: lack of government engagement, lack of employment opportunities, poor service deliver, lack of tools and resources to enhance livelihoods and feelings of neglect and marginalization.

3.0   Conclusions and Lessons

The observations described above share one commonality -- they all stem from poor governance. Government is unwilling and at times unable to anticipate and meet the needs of its citizens and this is particularly true in the Niger Delta. The lack of responsiveness and engagement by the government was rather disappointing, particularly because of the decentralized nature of Nigerian government, which brings government closer to the people thorough the local government and even more directly through the Community Development Committee. Local government officials exhibited disinterest in their communities, at times getting them to attend project activities for just one hour proved difficult. The state is unable to capitalize on this period of stability to implement development projects that curb the underlying causes of restiveness and violence; and it is unwilling to engage with and integrate the marginalized segments of society in decision making.

3.1   Lessons Learned

- **Political will and an enabling policy environment are necessary to scale up effective projects at the community level.** Projects implemented at the community level make a tremendous impact in terms of providing services, training and resources that did not previously exist. However these projects are temporary -- many of their benefits end once donor funding is removed, which on average range from one to five years. While sustainability measures are built into project design, projects cannot be truly sustained unless they are scaled up and linked to wider national, regional and international policy goals.

- **Investing beyond the oil sector.** As described above tremendous investments are made in the oil sector, however this does not always translate into jobs or income generation for rural dwellers particularly among youth. Exploring ways to make agriculture appealing to youth can create

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[17] ibid

substantial jobs while contributing to food security and enhanced nutrition in many communities. Key to this process is the facilitation of market opportunities and promotion of collaboration between youth through group formation; this not only makes economic sense but also integrates elements of peacebuilding and promotes peaceful coexistence. This is particularly true where ex-militant and non-militants work together.

- **Expansion and scaling up the GMoU.** I do not argue that the GMoU is a panacea for development nor do I disregard its weaknesses, however as described above it offers value at the community level. It is an effective tool for participatory planning and produces tangible results. This considered local government can develop partnerships at the community level that can be consulted in the selection and implementation of projects, both local government officials and community residents would benefit from such an arrangement. A portion of development funds at the local level should be channeled to CBOs (established through this arrangement and led by a diverse group of community residents). CBOs will be responsible for designing Community Development Plans that will be used to guide how this funding is spent. These CBOs will receive mentoring support from NGOs working in the region and will also seek external support to carry out projects that are not covered by funding from the local government.

- **Becoming data driven in project implementation.** Many organizations working in the region focus on action oriented interventions as opposed to research oriented projects. It is important that organizations focus some of their efforts on research, particularly because they are among the few groups intervening in the marginalized communities of the Delta. Projects can integrate aspects of both research and action. Beyond collecting and analyzing data from these communities it is key that these findings be made public to the wider regional and international community. This information can drive development efforts and inform development practice.

- **Improving governance and rule of law.** The government in Nigeria suffers from institutional failure and corruption. This is particularly evident at the local level. The relationship between the government and governed in the Niger Delta is contentious, exacerbated by the use excessive force by security forces, specifically in protection of foreign entities. Local government officials can benefit from training in participatory planning and project management; there is also urgent need to develop more effective channels of communication between the governing and the governed. Finally, a greater understanding of human rights is necessary for security forces and community residents.

- **Addressing the North South divide.** As described above the issues in the North and South share similar root causes. It would be instructive to introduce some successful intervention strategies from the Niger Delta to the afflicted Northern States. Beyond this, there is imminent need for a national dialogue on governance that brings together stakeholders from both regions; this will serve to

promote national cohesion, while stimulating innovation on peacebuilding, good governance, human security and community development.

3.2   Conclusion

The Niger Delta is a paradox endowed with tremendous resource wealth yet suffers from endemic poverty. I experienced the true beauty of the Niger Delta on my first trip to a riverine community -- Oporoma community, Southern Ijaw LGA. Traveling by speed boat, I took in the majestic scenery and natural beauty that that the region is endowed with. There is great potential for development efforts to have a transformational impact on communities and on the lives of residents; however there is need to revaluate the current approach and re-strategize.

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