DOES VIOLENCE PAY?

REVIEW OF NIGER DELTA COMMUNITY PERCEPTIONS ON CONFLICT, MILITANCY AND CHANGE:
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DOES VIOLENCE PAY?
INTRODUCTION

DOES VIOLENCE PAY?

The Niger Delta was violently thrust on the attention of the world during its 2005 -2009 militancy crisis. This conflict reduced oil production by two thirds costing Nigeria over $15 billion a year in lost revenue. Weekly kidnappings, pipeline attacks and militarisation of the region made for newsworthy stories, whilst the population continued to face the challenges of poor governance, limited service delivery and environmental devastation. This newsworthy violence and militancy turned attention away from an on-going low intensity local conflict fuelled by inter and intra community conflicts over oil related contracts, political contracts and political control. The Niger Delta Amnesty process ended the militant attacks and ensured that oil production has returned to pre-crisis levels.

However, the underlying issues driving conflict and tensions in the region remain and there are regular examples of intra community violence as community representatives fight over the spoils of contracts from oil majors and the government. These local conflict dynamics are reinforced by the absence of the state and functional service delivery, which escalate the short term focus of those fighting for survival. These local tensions are further compounded by the challenges placed on traditional livelihoods via the widespread environmental devastation caused by oil spills as a result of oil major equipment failure and third party sabotage for oil theft.

There are thus four main pillars of tensions and potential violence in the Niger Delta:

1. MILITANCY/END OF AMNESTY
2. CONTRACT TENSIONS
3. POLLUTION
4. SERVICE DELIVERY

These interrelated challenges reinforce and drive each other to provide a potentially catastrophic mix in the run up to the 2015 election cycle. Any intervention to reduce the threat of violence in the Niger Delta region will need to recognise this interrelated nature of these national regional and local tensions and ensure it reduces pressure and creates opportunities for transformation across and within each pillar.
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CURRENT POLITICAL AND KEY CONTEXTUAL TRENDS

ELECTION FEVER STARTS AGAIN

The elections have been a flash point and point of concern in past years. Sometimes these fears have been exaggerated, but the outbursts of violence after the 2011 election and the higher than usual tension around the 2015 election cycle are obvious reason for concern. In the Niger Delta the 2002-2003 period is an important reference point because it offers clear warnings of the fractures that could develop in parts of the Niger Delta. Similar conditions prevail now in Rivers and Delta states while by some measures volatility is worse than in previous years. The limitation of violence in Delta State in 2011 is an indicator that conflict can be prevented but it also underscores the need for action and vigilance by government, civil groups and security agencies.

FLASH-POINT STATES HAVE HISTORY OF CONFLICT

Rivers State is an obvious flash point for 2015 where it seems possible that current tensions driven by the Presidential and Governor Split may continue right through to the election. Rivers has a history of political violence which in many ways bred the militancy phenomenon which followed from 2004 onwards. Delta State has had a decade of more closely contended elections and a disastrous breakdown in 2003 which escalated into ethnic conflict across the state. The tensions in both states will rise more swiftly than many outside observers anticipate because such a strong weighting is placed upon the party primaries – especially those of the PDP. Both states will benefit from voices for calm and demonstrations of the benefits of non-violence throughout the last quarter of 2013 and all of 2014. As the worst violence in both Delta and Rivers came months after elections, after the boys had been dumped by their political sponsors, there will be a need for vigilance that goes well past election day itself.
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EARLY TESTING GROUNDS - RIVERS & DELTA

There are important tests of capacity and strength for all actors before the end of 2013. The political struggle will continue in Rivers state through the remainder of the year unless there is an unexpected reconciliation or victory for either side. In Delta State there will be a strongly contested bye-election for the Senate which must take place before the end of the year. This emphasizes the importance of some engagement and messaging as early as possible to help set boundaries for political contests and bring as much leverage as possible for restraint before tensions escalate further. The early period will also be an opportunity for INEC and other agencies to demonstrate their capacity to provide a relatively level playing ground – something which was distinctly lacking in earlier years.

The credibility and respect for results of elections in the Niger Delta is a key issue in preventing both short and medium term violence. Past elections have resolved little because abuse has been well documented and much of the population has persistently felt disenfranchised or worse. The 2011 elections brought significant national improvements but the gains in the Niger Delta were patchy with rural areas often experiencing a continuation of routine rigging of results. INEC has already expressed its interest in improving its performance and strategic reach in 2015 with obvious concerns in the Niger Delta. There are opportunities to boost public engagement with elections which in itself has protective benefits because most abuse is perpetrated by a relatively small but well resourced minority of actors who use the pool of unemployed youth to further their short term interest. This reliance on violence to gain power further removes the need for those in power to use the resources at their disposal for service delivery, after all if it is not votes that count, why bother?

ILLEGAL OIL REFINING

In the period since the last election this has evolved from an obscure opportunity to make limited money in some rural areas to a phenomenon across the region with its own economic momentum. It is having a direct impact on the oil industry and a number of knock on effects including damaging power generation because of the corresponding damage to gas supplies. Presently illegal oil theft is
suppressing around 25% of Nigeria’s oil production and has forced the closure of at least Afam and neighbouring power stations. There is a high probability of action against oil theft in the next year with a number of conflict risks that could develop as this rare local economic opportunity is challenged. Amid many complications illegal oil refining is also providing significant indirect economic short term gains for rural communities who will feel significant impacts if artisanal refining is curtailed.

STATE GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY AND ESSENTIAL SERVICES

Although there have been improvements in some areas the lack of basic quality provision of functioning services in health, education, power and water in many communities remains a well justified source of grievances with government. The need for improved responsiveness and performance from government both at state and local level remains obvious and while elections have an important role to play it is vital that more sustained engagement is maintained. A more active local media scene – particularly in radio – is helpful in this regard but more can be done especially if a broader range of social networks can find their voice.

ELECTION CYCLE STARTS NOW. The 2015 election cycle is assumed by many actors and the public to lead by default to elections in April of that year. In fact, INEC has a mandate from the Electoral Act to hold elections between 150 days and 30 days to the end of a four year tenure. This actually means elections could fall anywhere between December 2014 and April 2015 at INEC’s discretion. It is unlikely they will announce election dates extraordinarily early so a degree of uncertainty will likely remain through early to mid 2014 as to when the election will take place. Under most scenarios political parties will conduct a good deal of their essential business around candidate selection within 2014 and possibly earlier than many might expect. These time frames underline the urgency of peace-building work with the violence that took place in Rivers State in 2002 as a critical cautionary note.

AMNETHY COMING TO AN END The winding down of the Amnesty for militants in the Niger Delta is an unpredictable factor in an already difficult election cycle. While officials repeatedly announce that
the Amnesty will end in 2015 there is no sign of a viable transition that explains what will happen after it concludes. Two things are clear, its mission to retrain and reorient demobilized militants will be only partially complete at best. Secondly the success rate of turning allowances and short term training into jobs is either low or lacking in data and communication. There is an obvious risk that curtailing the amnesty will lead to another cycle of violence, especially as political actors may be tempted to exploit the latent capacity of militants in the region. The recent political positioning of Presidents Goodluck Jonathans re-election as central to a non-escalation of militancy in the Niger Delta, is a worrying dynamic that places renewed emphasis on short term crisis management rather than medium to long term core issue response.

WHERE ARE ALL THE JOBS? Whatever level of progress will have been made by the present administration by 2015 this will only punt a dent in mass unemployment in the Niger Delta region. There are examples of extraordinary employers in the region—whether it is woodworking specialists in Delta State or the largest pilot organic farm in West Africa in Rivers State. Yet these are not enough to deal with a destabilising legacy of unemployment and underemployment within a rapidly growing young population. The lack of adequate statistics does not hide the very high unemployment rate, especially in rural areas where violence prospered and its contribution to economically desperate options such as illegal oil refining. Without economic alternatives for those most likely to prosper in the short term but a new uptake in violence well-meaning words and knowledge/capacity building interventions will face the real risk of falling short in reducing the threat of violence in the Niger Delta. There needs to be clear demonstrable proof that non-violence pays. The last ten years of events in the Niger Delta has proven the benefits of violence.

URBANIZATION The extent of urbanization in Nigeria is difficult to quantify but the 2011 electoral roll probably gives the best indicator. For example, of 2.4 million total voters in Rivers state, the two largest urban local governments make up almost 40% of the population with ‘suburban’ areas sure to carry this towards 50% of the adult population. This has created obvious tensions in areas such as the Port Harcourt waterfronts and rapid urbanization has also created pools of youth who could be easily exploited for political violence. The effect is most noticeable in major centres, but is also an issue in smaller towns with populations of 20,000 upwards, especially those with tertiary centres providing training and an education, but no jobs.
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ENVIRONMENT  Environmental devastation was an important issue at the time of the 2011 election with oil spill impacts on the Niger Delta continuing to mount despite a decade of concern. The combination of the UNEP Ogoniland report and impacts of spills over the past two years have only served to intensify frustration over the lack of progress and demonstrable environmental leadership by the federal government. Oil spills from illegal refining and theft have further damaged the region and complicated previous and ongoing impact from operational failures. International visitors have noted that local political actors have been ‘desensitized’ to a level of devastation that anywhere else would be regarded as catastrophic. The massive flooding in the region in 2012 added to rural economic losses that have yet to be fully appreciated. As bad as the situation is in the region there are opportunities for quick wins – including the massive labour force that would be required for meaningful clean up activities if the present inertia could be reversed and the right effective but labour intensive solutions could be identified.

RIVERS

The politics of Rivers State is now possibly the most complicated in all of Nigeria. It contains elements of factional splits that date back to at least 2002, but there are also growing national dimensions that escalate the stakes for all sides. The potential for conflict is obvious and early warning signs have included both sides recruiting youths to bolster their position. Among the most obvious risks are repetition of the politically sponsored conflict that started ahead of the 2003 elections and led directly to the first cycles of militant conflict from 2004 onwards. There is however a greater understanding among stakeholders of the downsides of conflict based on the economic decimation of the state between 2005 and 2007 from which the state is only now beginning to recover. With control of such a high profile and population rich state in question the stability of Rivers state will at best be finely balanced throughout the next 18 months.

BAYELSA

Bayelsa State is not among those that would be expected to cause concern at first glance. It does
not have a governorship election until at 2016 and the sitting governor is extremely close to the Presidency. Yet the reactions within the state if President Jonathan were perceived to lose the election in unfair circumstances would be unpredictable. The state is also beset by some of the largest and most damaging illegal oil refining operations in the region. While the new governor has made the right statements about economic development, reform and education, the impact to date is unclear and it is especially uncertain how much progress he can demonstrate in the next 12 months. There is a need to pay careful attention to the engagement actions that can be taken to prevent the state joining those that are already of serious concern.

**DELTA**

Delta State is on a par with Rivers State for politically fuelled conflict risks. The devastating ethnic conflict after the 2003 elections has been well documented, but swiftly forgotten in political circles. Despite obvious risks the 2011 election cycle was better than expected with very closely monitored elections conducted with minimal violence. This was particularly notable as the results from both a preliminary Governorship election and then the full cycle were highly variable, with blatant rigging taking place on a number of occasions. The state is now notable for being the only coastal state in the Niger Delta with a significant number of opposition representatives. A bye election at the end of 2013 for the a vacant Senatorial Seat will likely be a critical test for all actors, from the electoral commission through to political parties and community organizations. There are also vital lessons to be learnt from Delta state where community led efforts to bring about better elections without sparking violence clearly had significant success.
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SECURITY AGENCIES AND KEY INSTITUTIONS

The progress that has taken place in democratization and peace-building in the Niger Delta has generally occurred within the context of a strengthened and balanced security presence. Delta and Imo states passed through difficult election cycles in 2011 under significantly more intense security supervision than other states. Conversely political violence has generally escalated in weak or even acquiescent security environments. Given that much of the tension in the region will revolve around the 2015 elections the integrity and effectiveness of other key actors will also matter. The ability of INEC to improve its reach and relationships with local organizations will be crucial to confidence in free and fair voting. To be clear – in most of the Niger Delta this is not about protecting a norm but about establishing a new precedent where politicians have really been elected. The majority of the rural areas in Rivers, Bayelsa and Delta states have never been part of credible elections and they will be challenging to convince that they can be part of a ‘one person one vote’ electoral process that will be more likely to deliver services. The work with agencies and institutions thus becomes one of both improving real performance and addressing excessively negative perceptions.

OTHER KEY VOICES

In each of the coastal states there are a number of actors and institutions that carry significant local weight. Although there was no overt intervention, the impact of the former Governor of Imo state falling out badly with the Catholic church was undoubtedly a factor in his loss of office. Churches have not always acted constructively within the political environment in the Niger Delta, but there is no question that they remain the social hub for almost all communities in the region. Other ethnic, social and cultural bodies still carry significant weight although it is equally important to understand that this is variable by region and according to the credibility of their recent conduct. Whatever strategies emerge for public messaging they need to have a clearly thought through approach for engaging institutional and cultural actors.
MEDIA ACCESS IN THE NIGER DELTA

The electronic and to a lesser extent print media have evolved swiftly in the Niger Delta in the past 5 years with particularly strong growth in radio. 84% of people in the Niger Delta are regular Radio listeners. Most of the electronic media will have a hub in each state but broadcasts are not constrained by state boundaries and radio is particularly geared towards multi state coverage. Social media is growing significantly but is limited by two basic factors – cost of access and relatively weak 3G coverage for data in rural areas.

The growth in electronic media has not been uniform - the strongest growth is in Port Harcourt which has the advantage of being a commercial and economic centre, large enough to draw support from advertisers and investors. Port Harcourt also enjoys the advantage of being relatively central with broadcasts from the city capable of reaching several states if adequate investment has been made in transmission capacity. To give an approximate idea there are more than 12 functional radio stations in Port Harcourt, 3 in Yenagoa, and 3 serving Delta state, including government backed broadcasters. There is interest from political actors in all three states in developing media assets with several having controlling interests in some of the newly established stations.

Television coverage is more consistently based around a state level transmission with private television channels now appearing in the Niger Delta but in limited numbers. Thus, of the private channels AIT has stations in Rivers and Bayelsa but Silverbird Television only has a presence in Rivers State, alongside its radio and cinema business. The reach across the states is reasonable but in the rural areas reach is limited by simple factors of whether households have functional TVs and whether there is power at any given time. Satellite television is obviously available across the region but because of cost it accesses a minority, with the exception that viewing houses and bars across the region will invest in this for football coverage.

In the case of both television and radio, some growth is almost certainly being constrained by the approach that the Federal Government has taken to broadcast licenses. Despite pledges to open
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up, there have been no licenses for community radio stations and some frustrations for commercial broadcasters – whether new entrants or established. The Nigeria Broadcasting Commission keeps a tight rein on what it considers ‘proper content’ and most stations are extraordinarily careful not to enter into unduly controversial content.

BAYELSA STATE

Media access in the state is defined by the predominance of riverine communities outside Yenagoa and a few other centres accessible by road. The smaller population puts a temporary cap on media growth beyond the present electronic media but there has been significant growth in locally printed newspapers, even if a number of them have obvious political associations. Although breakdowns of media use are limited it is safe to say that radio probably conveys more news than any other medium with television being a more significant actor for entertainment. A small but significant core of political elites and youth in urban areas will be tuned into social media and multiple electronic sources and this may expand as costs fall.

DELTA STATE

The media market is distorted by several factors – a split focus between the major commercial centre of Warri and the political capital Asaba. The state also has just enough terrain to disrupt some line of sight broadcasting and then a very large geographic proportion is ‘riverine’ which limits access to print media, power (other than generator), and 3G coverage. Recovering economic activity and the strongly contested political scene may boost media activity further in the coming 12 months.
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RIVERS STATE

Media growth has been significant and may be even stronger if it were not for the challenges of gaining licenses. The advent of Wazobia FM triggered a small revolution in radio as its broadcasting in pidgen English has set precedents that have led to multiple examples of the format being copied at least in part. Talk radio has also been a major development with phone-in now becoming a major feature of every radio station in the state. This clearly speaks to a strong desire of listeners to interact with the news and developments around them.

Like Bayelsa, there are a significant number of local newspapers which are more likely to carry politicised news and they are also more likely to reach rural areas than the major national dailies. Actual print runs of newspapers are very small compared to the population although a single newspaper will always have multiple readers with a dozen readers per copy being a plausible average. Some of the most successful social media outlets are conventional news houses - with the southern oriented Vanguard Newspaper leading the way with its 775,000 Facebook followers dwarfing its print run.

Media growth in Rivers State is likely to continue over the coming 12 months. Some outlets are known to have plans for expansion while it also seems reasonable to assume that the patchy and sporadic growth in internet access, and reducing cost, will continue to open up the social media space.
The following section gauges community members' perceptions of violence across 7 communities in Delta, Bayelsa and River State. Each case study will depict basic background characteristics of the community, the drivers of conflict and how community members have, and have not, used non-violent activism to catalyze change in the policy and practices of local government institutions and key stakeholders in the community.
“In Ogbia, we believe in non-violent means of dispute resolution. As a community we call upon parties involved and hear from all sides and then find an amicable end.”

STUDENT, OGBIA
A REVIEW OF NIGER DELTA COMMUNITY PERCEPTIONS
DOES VIOLENCE PAY?

COMMUNITY PROFILE

- **POPULATION**
  - Estimated population of 14,000

- **AVERAGE INCOME**
  - A semi-urban settlement, Ogbia residents engage in farming, fishing, local gin distillation, bricklaying, welding, carpentry, hairdressing, and civil service engagement.

- **GEOGRAPHIC AREA**
  - The swampy topography of Ogbia hosts vegetation typical of tropical rain forests.

- **ETHNICITIES**
  - Ijaw ethnic group predominates in Ogbia. The major language is Ogbia dialect of Ijaw, and others such as Hausa, Igbo, Ibibio, Igbo, and Yoruba. Ogbia LG played host to the popular Shell Oloibiri Oil field where Oil was first discovered and commercially produced in Nigeria and West Africa in 1956.

- **EDUCATION**
  - No data available.

- **AVERAGE LIFE EXPECTANCY**
  - No data available.

- **ACCESS TO MEDIA**
  - Radio stations; residents listen to Radio Bayelsa (state owned) Royal FM and Power FM (privately owned).
  - TV: Nigerian Television Authority and Glory land TV are most widely watched.

- **POLITICAL AFFILIATIONS**
  - Honourable Enaye Abbah is the current Ogbia Local Government Chairman, and Mrs. S.A. Festus-Omoni is Vice Chairperson serving for a three years term in office renewable by re-election on expiration of first tenure. They are both members of the Peoples’ Democratic Party (PDP).
COMMUNITY PROFILE

SOCIAL PROFILE

Ogbia is a mixed settlement. The majority of Ogbia’s citizens are Christian although there is also a small Muslim population. The community is traditionally led by the stool of ‘the Ogbanade’ whom is said to be the owner of the land and Paramount Ruler in Council. Other leadership groups working collectively with the paramount ruler are the Ogbia Council of Chiefs, CDC (Community Development Committee), Youth Council, and Women group. These groups have their leadership elected for tenure of two years whereas the Ogbanade and Chieftaincy are perpetual.

Ogbia is host to both government and private owned schools, providing Nursery, Primary and Secondary education to its population. Although the community has no tertiary institution present, its sister community Otuoke hosts a newly formed Federal Institution.

ECONOMIC PROFILE

The estimated projected revenue of the local government in 2010 and 2011 was N 1,348,050,093.0 and N1,949,899,793, while actual revenue was N 1,514,358,327.20 and N 1,765,225,635.88 respectively.

“Funds have been our major challenge as we and Kolokuma/Opokuma LGA are the lowest in terms of allocation. The state government also takes their counterpart funds from source so when it gets to us, sometimes we are left with only ≤ 80 million Naira”

VICE CHAIRPERSON, OGBIA LGA
SUMMARY

The perceived political alienation of citizens from the governance process in Ogbia has resulted in situations of conflict and tensions over the delivery of public services such as water, electricity, health, education, sanitation and road construction among others. Without a platform to raise their concerns and engage with the LGA at the community level, there have been situations where violence has been used in attempt to have their voices heard.

KEY CONFLICT DRIVERS

• POOR SERVICE DELIVERY: Ogbia lacks an adequate infrastructure and basic service delivery to allow the community to grow. The absence of reliable electricity and water source infrastructure to support economic opportunities and basic educations means citizens ‘cope’ to meet basic needs. Through a variety of coping mechanisms, such as children or the elderly forced to work, reducing consumption of food or withdrawing children from school, development is stunted in Ogbia.

  “Shallow boreholes and mono pumps yielded contaminated water. Bore hole and mono pumps failure, especially those provided by the local and state governments. The incidence of diseases related to the consumption of unsafe water increased in Ogbia Town is high. The community flocked to the cottage hospital in Kolo get medical attention for cases of Typhoid and cholera.”

  MEMBER OF OGBIA ADVOCACY COMMITTEE

• POOR GOVERNANCE: Government misallocation of funds means essential services such as primary health care, education and road infrastructure progress slowly.

“Neglect of government in the provision of basic social amenities now before there is water…but now you cannot get water system provided by government unless privately owned. For the water, even 2010 there was water but now no water.”

WOMEN LEADER, OGBIA
“Violence is not an effective way to bring about change in cases where dialogue can easily prevail. Except if several attempts to dialogue fails, and we are not recognised (divide and rule/conscious neglect) then surely we may resort to violence. Going haywire will sometimes lead to dialogue.”
VIOLENCE, MILITANCY AND PEACE

Violence can be romanticised by community members in the Delta. ‘Militants’ or ‘freedom fighters’ caused conflict in the region. However rebel groups further brought the focus of power holders to the impoverished and politically marginalised communities of the South-South. The following section outlines key historical instances of violence in the community and the perception of key actors involved.

KEY HISTORICAL INSTANCES OF VIOLENCE

Neglect by the authorities drives conflict in Ogbia. It is the political realities of the Delta which act as a clear self-justification for violence and illegal trade in the region. The research highlights that the absence of government intervention in Ogbia demotivates community empowerment and justifies community participation in crime. Government failure to provide basic services for people creates the space for disempowerment to thrive. In comparison to other communities in Bayelsa and Delta wide, Ogbia is relatively peaceful.

PERCEPTIONS OF MILITANCY IN THE OGBIA

In spite of the relative peace in the community, residents support the actions of rebel groups during the 2005-2009 period of militancy in the Delta. Ogbia citizens felt that militancy had brought about positive change in the Delta.

Respondents noted that the actions of ‘militant groups’ redirected attention from oil company stakeholders to the ‘exploited’ indigenous communities.

“Militancy has brought about recognition of those who own the resources”

YOUTH, OGBIA

A respondent supported the dictum that the ‘agitation’ empowered the communities that host IOC oil wells.

“Take the United States of America for instance; they practice true federalism unlike Nigeria. The agitation led to recognition of individuals, then groups, and finally the host communities that have become empowered so the process is still on-going”.

For this reason, citizens claimed that ‘the boys’ were right for taking up arms against the government and oil-companies since they continued to neglect communities. A community leader attributes this to;

“their conscious neglect of the communities producing oil and gas who felt they could carry-out their extraction activities without avowal of its hosts and so the militants sent by their actions sent a global message”.

It is argued that the community romanticise the violent actions of militants as the spokes people of the ‘neglected’ community voices.

VIEWS ON USE OF VIOLENCE IN OGBIA

Ogbia community’s reaction to their exclusion from the governing process is a cause of conflict. Citizens broadly felt that when grievances are not recognised or responded to by those in positions of power it is reasonable to use violence. This perception highlights the ease in which unaddressed community grievances could escalates into violent situation. As such, the Youth group are arguably the most active actors in initiating and determining conflict in Ogbia.

The threat of violence was used a resolution strategy between a contractor and group of hired construction workers. The community chairman relays an instance where “a case of restiveness reported to the Youth President and the Councillor representing Ogbia” was eventually resolve through dialogue.

“Youths were agitating for increased pay
on the tedious jobs they performed on the building site. The contractor refused to increase pay so the youths brought the site to a halt. We intervened and after discussing with both parties advised a resolution on a neutral pay (in between both parties demands). The issue was resolved and all parties experienced peace with work in progress again. Currently that job has been completed”.

CHAIRMAN, OGBIA

However, there is further evidence that the community feel that Youth violence has, at times, been positive to the whole community. For example, the community reported an ‘invasion’ or entry of a cult group in the community in 2011. In response, the youth group set-up a voluntary vigilante group to apprehend, by force, those aligned with the cult gangs. The vigilante group then informed the police of suspected citizens. This process, according to some members of the community leadership, “was very successful although we do not always use violence to effect change, but in this case these youths were terrorising our community and citizens. The community is presently rid of those miscreants”.

The role of the Youth as part of a cross community intervention in resolving conflicts was also highlighted when the community were asked who they turn to when conflict arises. A youth leader stated that “apart from the government apparatus already existent at the LG level, the Nigerian Police Force, the Ogbanade and Chiefs in Council, the CDC, Youth Council and Women groups are saddled with the responsibility of resolving crisis from the compound level to the community leadership where applicable”. Other citizens who responded to key informant interview questions concurred.

In general, the Ogbia community pride themselves on not being violent, one respondent said:

“Ogbia town is peaceful, we believe in non-violence and dialogue. Internal disputes among us do not linger because we are a common people with common values so we do not hesitate to resolve internal crisis. We have never experienced inter-communal crisis which degenerates to violence, it is not in our nature to compromise to violence”.

This statement suggests that although there has been cases of low level violence within Ogbia, detailed above, compared to communities Delta wide, Ogbia people consider themselves as a peaceful group.

KEY STAKEHOLDERS IN INSTIGATING AND RESOLVING CONFLICT

- All leadership groups in Ogbia play pivotal roles in ensuring peaceful coexistence in the community namely: the Paramount Ruler (the Ogbanade), the Chiefs Council, the Community Development Committee and Youth and Women groups. The Divisional Police Headquarters in Ogbia is also identified as a key stakeholder resolving violence by enforcing peace within its jurisdiction.

- Despite Youth groups playing a role in resolving violence it is often these groups which simultaneously play an active role in perpetrating acts of violence.
COMMUNITY ACTION

OGBIA RESIDENTS MOBILISED TO REBUILD A LOCAL SCHOOL

In response to weak governance in Ogbia, the community advocated for increased inclusion in the monitoring of LGA budgetary allocations on education. The renovations to the Family Support Program School have, as of yet, not been finished by the LGA, and although started, the community is still doubtful of the sincerity or capacity of government to respond.

WHAT HAPPENED IN THE COMMUNITY

- In 2013 a Local Citizens Monitoring Network was created to promote participatory monitoring of NDDC (Niger Delta Development Commission) and local government projects.
- Using budget monitoring and tracking skills, members of the established Local Citizens Monitoring Network (LCMN) presented a fact-based case to their LGA for where investment was needed in the community.
- The community engaged with the government and as a result there are planned improvements and renovations for the Family Support Programme (FSP) school in Ogbia.

CHANGE RESULTING FROM COMMUNITY ACTION

Before the establishment of the Local Citizens Monitoring Network, the community had continued to complain of the poor state of the FSP School facility. Previously the community, particularly the youth, had sought to gain attention from the local government through violence ‘...a language we all understand’, indicating their discontent and highlighting the core needs in the community that needed to be addressed.

Although citizens still see the potential of using violence to be heard, citizens are well aware of the losses incurred by inhabitants and the damage done to other communities which have gone down this path. The LCMN has therefore provided a communications platform for the community to engage with government and other relevant stakeholders in a non-violent way. This is seen as a viable alternative to violence.

“...I hope that our children will learn about advocacy so that they will be able to meet and talk to the government and oil companies and they will not carry guns and die”.

WOMEN LEADER, OGBIA

EFFECT OF COMMUNITY INTERVENTION

Due to the success of the LCMN’s negotiations with local government, the FSP school is receiving various improvements; three classrooms, two toilets and an office for the headmistress are currently being built. Meanwhile renovations of the school buildings - which includes replacement of existing doors, painting of the entire building and fencing of the premises - are planned but yet to commence. Additionally a scholarship award is being developed.

In terms of a reduction in violent behaviour, it is clear that the inclusion of the Youth in the LCMN allowing them the opportunity to be a part of the consultation process, has helped to mitigate some of the youth’s restlessness.

“Violence is not an effective way to bring about change in cases where dialogue can easily prevail. Except if several attempts to dialogue fails, and we are not recognised (divide and rule/conscious neglect) then surely we may resort to violence. Going hay wire sometimes lead to dialogue”

YOUTH, OGBIA
“I am very excited by the recent development at the FSP Nursery and Primary School in Ogbia town. This started when two friends of mine asked for my opinion on what projects I think needs improvement in Ogbia LGA. I recommended FSP School and then it was disclosed that Hon. Mitema Obodor, a known philanthropist wishes to impact the community positively. We presented the FSP case to him (Mitema Obodor) and he concurred to the case. The resultant is the structural project you can see in progress at the school premises. It contains 3 (three) classrooms, Headmistress office, and 2 (two) toilets.”

COORDINATOR, OGBIA STAND CENTRE
PROCESS: INTERVENTION ENGAGEMENT

ENTRY: SUMMARY OF NGO INTERVENTION

In parallel to community self-mobilisation, third party support from SDN strengthened community budget tracking skills. In addition to training a group of 50 community members by SDN through STAND (Strengthening Transparency and Accountability in the Niger Delta) and SLA (Strategic Livelihood Assessment projects), the Bayelsa Non-Governmental Organisations Forum (BANGOF) helped the community establish the Local Citizens Monitoring Network.

The LCMN acts as a ‘community watch group’ encouraging participatory monitoring of service delivery within the LGA. This group were trained in budget monitoring and tracking and basic research and documentation methods. Through creating an institution for community members to take part in the process of allocating budgets to local services and amenities, the community felt that they could effectively engage with the LGA in a non-violent way.

CAPACITY BUILDING

- A group of 50 individuals from the LGA were given training on socio-economic rights, obligations of government and service providers (contractors and frontline professionals, i.e. teachers, doctors) and procurement and Nigeria transparency and accountability laws.

- The BANGOF project team implemented a two day training for the 15 members of the LCMN on Budget Monitoring and Tracking and Basic Research and Documentation Methods.

CONFIDENCE AND ATTITUDE

- After the entry and capacity building process, the community could voice their concerns over poor service delivery in their community from a rights based perspective. The sense of empowerment this created is evident in the LCMN’s quality and substantive comments, contributions and questions during the one-day roundtable discussion—‘the session was very participatory and interactive. Progress was visible’.

COMMUNITY COHESION AND INCLUSIVENESS

The creation of the citizen led, NGO supported, LCMN provided a way for Ogbia citizens to voice their opinions about the development projects in their area. The feeling of inclusion in the governmental process is illustrated in the following quote from the Chairman of the Ogbia LCMN, whom announced to the Local Legislative Assembly Councillors present at the one-day stakeholders meeting “your outreach is limitless— you can get to your federal representatives, representatives at the State House of Assembly, and back home you have this beautiful watch group (LCMN) to consult with and strengthen you in advocacy.”

COMMUNITY ORGANISATION AND COOPERATION

The LCMN members (made up of 10 men and 5 women) were nominated at a public meeting are therefore representative of the community. The round-table meeting indicates that a wide range of stakeholders (the Ogbia Traditional Council of
Chiefs Chairman, various Ogbia Local Government Council Officials and individuals from different CSO groups such as BANGOF) were willing to cooperate and support the community to achieve the town’s priorities. During the roundtable, the FSP school was identified as the facility most in need of investment. This indicates the communities ability to cooperate and successfully negotiate their service needs. Additional possibilities for investment were the Comprehensive Health Centre in Ogbia town (CHC, poor services by Ogbia LG) and a 4-5 kilometre road rehabilitation at Otuasega community (NDDC 2010, abandoned project).

“SDN has equipped us with the needed skills so we will go back to our communities and with this knowledge, document the information we gather as an advocacy report then go further to present it to the officials involved. If nothing is done, then we will advocate non-violently for the change we desire.”

CHAIRMAN, OGBIA LCMN

RESPONSE OR ITS LACK OF

- Ogbia Local Government leadership has only verbally committed to transform the FSP School by upgrading its standard to compete with other government and private schools within Bayelsa State. However, the Local Government has also acknowledged ownership of the facility and given credit to its citizens who voluntarily engaged in the intervention process.

- NDDC failed to respond to invitation for stakeholders meeting between Communities, CSOs (Civil Society Organizations’), NDDC, and LG (Local Government). They neither sent a representative nor communicated after being formally invited via hard and soft copies (invitation letters).

“They (NDDC) always shy away from such interactive forum between progressive minds because of the high level of corruption within the establishment.”

OGBIA LEGISLATIVE COUNCILLOR

- The community have expressed their confidence in being able to solve issues through discussion, one respondent stated “in Ogbia, we believe in non-violent means of dispute resolution. As a community we call upon parties involved and hear from all sides and then find an amicable end”. However, Citizens still have their doubts about government concern for their welfare.

CHALLENGES

For the community, engaging key political stakeholders was a challenge due to their availability.

“It was somewhat difficult to reach out to Hon. Mitema Obodor in order to present the case. This is because he is a very busy
man so meeting with him was quite a challenge. After several appointments the FSP case was successfully presented to him through SDNs advocacy video on the facility.”

PDP CHAIRMAN, OGBIA, NARRATES

The fact that Hon. Mitema Obodor was the only individual identified as a key decision maker in the LGA budget allocation process suggests that there is still a lack of support for community priorities within the LGA. “Secondly, transportation of materials to site is expensive because the access road to the school is not motorable therefore we have to offload materials at one point and singularly transfer to site”. Lack of adequate basic infrastructure in the area highlights the ineffectiveness within the LGA to respond to the needs of the community and suggests that the FSP project may, as a result be, delayed.

HOW DID THIS PROCESS REDUCE THE THREAT OF VIOLENCE?

The engagement process by Non-Governmental Organisations has demonstrated that communities armed with an understanding of facts and their rights enables citizens to have a voice to collectively demand for better services to improve their quality of lives.

“We have long awaited intervention in that school but through this peaceful process the change materialized; a lot of us now know that peaceful mobilization and dialogue can be successful therefore we will not compromise with violence.”

YOUTH PRESIDENT, OGBIA TOWN.

Communities are now aware that intervention can be successful through the process of dialogue processes.

“There is a facility in Ogbia town that had several challenges working against its excellence. SDN trained our people and jointly produced a documentary which reveals these challenges in the facility.”
KEY LESSONS AND NEXT STEPS: RIPE FOR REPLICABILITY

Relevant to Ogbia, however applicable Delta wide, a media intervention in the community would look to address poor service delivery. Interviewees prioritised that, in order for a media campaign to catalyse positive change, the following issue would be central to the intervention:

• **RENOVATION OF THE COMPREHENSIVE HEALTH CENTRE** (CHC, Primary Healthcare Facility) in order to provide the community with improved access to medical advice, free vaccinations in a sanitary environment with adequate staffing.

LESSONS DRAWN FROM THE INTERVENTION PROCESS

Third party intervention looks to address the root causes of conflict in Ogbia. Strategic lessons can be drawn from the manner in which the social grievances in Ogbia have been addressed. Key issues noted below could inform subsequent response in the Delta.

• **USE OF MEDIA;** the use of a multi-media approach, through photographs and films, provided a strong case for improvements to the community. The use of media further changed the dynamics between government and citizens, from oppositional dialogue to propositional videos.

• **ENGAGING WITH KEY STAKEHOLDERS;** targeting an individual who the community knew to be supportive of the community led initiatives (Hon. Mitema Obodor) arguably impacted the success of the project.

• **STRONG COMMUNICATION CHANNELS;** maintaining strong and open communication and pressure on government contacts help ensure follow through.

• **LOBBYING FOR SERVICE SPECIFIC DEVELOPMENT AS OPPOSED TO AMBIGUOUS FUNDING;** arguing for specific improvements within the community rather than need for cash or empowerment was also well received by the LGA who expressed frustration with people just asking for hand-outs.
“When oil companies fail to listen to the community's needs we use violence. What this means, in essence, is that when our non-violent action fails, we engage violently.”

MALE CIVIL SERVANT
Otuasega had an estimated population of 8,000 people. Members engage in seasonal fishing and farming work, for subsistence. Other members of the community are civil servants and teachers. For teachers, in Nursery and Primary Schools, the monthly salary of a head teacher is up to N20,000.

Otuasega is in Ogbia Local Government Area, one of eight LGAs in Bayelsa State. The state government delineated the area into four Rural Development Authorities (RDAs) namely: Anyama, Kolo Creek, Ogbia Central and Ogbia Rural Development RDAs. Otuasega falls within the Kolo Creek RDA. The community lies between the tropics on the rain forest belt and shares boundaries with Oruma, Imiringi and Elebele communities. The community has swamps, dense forests and a wide expanse of arable land. Its rivers connect it with the rest of the state.

The people of Otuasega of the Ijaw ethnic nationality - Ogbia. Their language is “Ogbia”.

The former Deputy Chief of the community - Friday Aleke, said that about 30% of the population is literate, 70% are non-literate. A significant number of the youth according to him are uneducated or dropouts and there is a higher number of boys in school than girls.

Chief Friday Aleke said that as a result of health care delivery and child immunization, the mortality rate among the children reduced drastically from what it was previously. In his opinion, average life expectancy is 55, child mortality rate is 75.15 per 1,000 live births while maternity mortality rate is 65 per 1,000 live births.

The most common media outfits the people access are the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA); the state-owned radio and television stations (Radio Bayelsa and Gloryland TV); and a few private media stations (Royal FM and Ray Power FM).
Since 1999, Bayelsa State has been in the control of the Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP). The PDP has strong grassroots support as President Jonathan originate from the LGA. Honourable Enaye Abbah is the current Local Government Chairman.

ECONOMIC PROFILE

The community is host to Shell Petroleum Development Company. Despite its status as an oil producing community, Otuasega is impoverished and the community strongly feel that SPDC has not provided adequate assistance in the form of Corporate Social Responsibility. A recent part of their contemporary history has been punctuated by their struggle to get a fair share of the resources accruing from their land. This has restricted the community’s potential to achieve sustainable development since they continue to struggle with lingering poverty as a result of lack of opportunities and capacities to engage in sustainable livelihoods.

The estimated projected revenue of the local government in 2010 and 2011 was N 1,348,050,093.0 and N1,949,899,793, while actual revenue was N 1,514,358,327.20 and N 1,765,225,635.88 respectively.

SOCIAL PROFILE

Otuasega is made up of ten compounds each with its own chief. Each compound chief, together with the elders, runs the affairs of their compound. All 10 chiefs collectively form part of the community leadership. They assist the community’s paramount ruler who is also assisted by two deputies, the Community Development Committee (CDC), the leadership of the youth group, women group and other community associations. Presently, the community is led by an elders’ council and the CDC.

Communal lifestyle is strong among the people. The majority are Christians of various denominations. Others follow African Traditional Worship. Both Christians and Traditionalists coexist peacefully.
SUMMARY

Contracts from oil exploitation in the Otuasega community drive intra-community conflict. Leadership tussles have emerged resulting in the ineffective delivery of resources from government.

In response to ineffective leadership the community used violent means to overthrow the leader in 2010. Following this, divisions have arisen between those community members who supported the previous leader and those who didn't. This then became an obstacle in itself since the community could not unite on an issue and gain the attention of the government.

Furthermore, Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC)'s refusal to meet community demands has created conflict in the past and there is potential that further engagement could lead to more conflict.

Through the creation of a committee that used advocacy techniques to communicate their priorities to the government, the group successfully appealed to the Bayelsa State to demand improvements to the electricity services. The Otuasega were given a transformer this has greatly improved their electricity needs. In addition the SPDC improved the communities’ access to fresh water.

CONFLICT DRIVERS

- **LEADERSHIP CONFLICT CAUSED INTER-COMMUNAL CONFLICTS**: contracts associated with SPDC activities in the area drive intra-community conflicts.

- **POOR DELIVERY OF RESOURCES AND ELECTRICITY**: Power supply in the community is unreliable and lack of a functional generator to power the water pump affects regular supply from the water scheme.

- **LACK OF ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES**: Economic barriers to community empowerment are apparent in the absence of an infrastructure to support economic growth in the community.
“There is no gain saying that non-violence is the best approach to issues. As a result of the strained relations between Oruma and Otuasega over the electric poles that were removed by Oruma youth, I am affected because Otuasega people have relatives in Oruma but because of the strained relations we became afraid to visit. One of our relatives died in Oruma, during the burial we could not go because we were afraid and they could not also come to Otuasega until the matter was resolved.”

FEMALE CIVIL SERVANT, OTUASEGA
VIOLENCE, MILITANCY AND PEACE

The following section outlines key historical instances of violence in the community and the perception of key actors involved.

KEY HISTORICAL INSTANCES OF VIOLENCE IN OTUASEGA

According to research findings, leadership is the common cause of conflict in the community. 60% of respondents identified leadership-related conflicts as happening frequently. This is against 40% who said that poor service delivery by governments is responsible for conflicts.

It was explained how the community proclaimed and violently dethroned the paramount ruler, Christopher Omonibo on 10th of August, 2010 after failed attempts to get him to resign on allegations of gross misrule and embezzlement. The Deputy Paramount Ruler 1- Chief Ramani Joseph who succeeded him in acting capacity was also accused of similar offences. Since then, the community has been without a paramount ruler. The Council of Elders and the Community Development Committee (CDC) have together formed the leadership.

The leadership issues have caused divides in the community between those who supported the ruler in power and those who tried to unseat him. This is evident in the following quote:

“The removal of the Paramount Ruler as a result of leadership tussle caused conflict in the past. Right from his inauguration, he had been facing one court case or the other until he was finally dethroned by the elders, CDC and the community. Since I was part of his government, his removal has made me and my family to have no say in the community because of our loyalty to him. The opposition sees us as enemies and my sons cannot contribute or join any meeting in the community since they see them as loyalists to the dethroned Paramount ruler.”

WOMEN LEADER

As a result of these divisions there has been a lack of cohesion and an ability to organise and collectively pursue common community targets within Otuasega.

PERCEPTIONS OF MILITANCY IN OTUASEGA

When asked about the use of violence and non-violence, a civil servant stated the following:

“Community uses both. Especially when oil company fail to listen to community needs/demands in a non-violence way, they use violence. What this means in essence is that when non-violence failed they engage violently. As a result of NGOs...”

FEMALE CIVIL SERVANT

With no leader and with divides within the community, more violence broke out in response to inadequate service delivery. For instance there was an inter-community conflict between Otuasega and Oruma over the removal and destruction of Otuasega electricity poles by Oruma youth:

“There is no gain saying that non-violence is the best approach to issues. As a result of the strained relations between Oruma and Otuasega over the electric poles that were removed by Oruma youth, I am affected because Otuasega people have relatives in Oruma but because of the strained relations we became afraid to visit. One of our relatives died in Oruma, during the burial we could not go because we were afraid and they could not also come to Otuasega until the matter was resolved.”

FEMALE CIVIL SERVANT
engagement, the community is using non-violent ways to address their grievances. This made it impossible to use harsh or violent means with Oil Company. We have changed approach."

The community perceive that, secondary to dialogue, violent intervention is justified and has proved beneficial in the past. This is manifest in interviewee opinion of militant groups. It is implied that the root cause of the ‘agitation’ is the relative deprivation of community member and the lack of viable employment for youths. For example, when asked about the effectiveness of militancy in the Niger Delta, a female civil servant said the following:

“They have brought about positive change, without their struggles, non-violence would not work. For instance, SPDC will not employ the youth instead they employ outsiders. For this cause, they need violent hands.”

The general view is that militancy has brought a level of change and peace to the Niger Delta region such as recognition, capacity building and empowerment.

KEY STAKEHOLDERS IN INSTIGATING AND RESOLVING CONFLICT

The elders and Community Development Committee play a key role in helping the community to resolve conflict. Ramani Abah, former Paramount Ruler, Hon. Claudious Enegesi, former Commissioner of Agric, Enaye Abbah, Ogbia LGA Chairman and Maxwell Oko, former Commissioner of Power were noted to resolve conflicts. It was said that whenever there was conflict in the community, the people would try traditional channels of settlement using ‘JuJu’ or traditional African Priest to swear oaths. The women interviewed stated that they would commonly turn to other female leaders for support. The police are a last resort when all traditional approaches have failed.

Otuasega citizens interviewed mentioned a number of chiefs and elders as responsible for instigating conflict. These individuals allegedly mobilise the youth to cause conflict, namely Godspower Walson and Okpukpu Telu (Aghologhol Compound), Welema Asemor, Bobby Moses, Dumoman Dornald and Awo Moses.

Interviewee agreed that youth groups are most prone to violent acts, particularly those who are in cult groups. Their status as ‘unemployed and uneducated’ individuals is cited as the reason the youth so often feel frustrated and turn to violent behaviour as the result.
COMMUNITY ACTION

YOUTH AND WOMEN’S GROUPS CAME TOGETHER TO LOBBY THE STATE GOVERNMENT TO PROVIDE IMPROVED POWER FOR THE COMMUNITY

Politically, the governments’ inertia to deliver suitable services is a blockade to economic empowerment. In Otuasega the advocacy focus is electricity due to the communities sporadic and unreliable electricity supply.

WHAT HAPPENED IN THE COMMUNITY

The community formed a committee to conduct a needs assessment within Otuasega that highlighted the community’s poor access to energy. As a result, the committee arranged a dialogue with the office of the Commissioner of Energy in Bayelsa state to demand electricity and the extension of the grid to new areas of the community.

Through direct engagement and dialogue with the commissioner for power, the group managed to pressurise the state government to use its existing budget to provide a power transformer to the community which solved some of their localised power challenges.

CHANGE RESULTING FROM COMMUNITY ACTION

Attitudes and perceptions of violence as the only approach to getting stakeholders’ attention have changed on account of the success of the advocacy process, tangible in the presence of power transformer.

“Previously we use to make demands through riots, blockades, demonstrations and even strikes. Since the introduction of advocacy in our community, we now know that advocacy is the best way of getting what the community needs.”

FEMALE, RUMUEKPE

Furthermore, the women were actively involved in the needs assessment and subsequent meetings with the Commissioner of Energy. The process pushed women to participate in community decision-making. Previously women had been marginalised and felt disillusioned about their voice having any influence at the LGA level. As a result, the community women acknowledged their role as decision makers, domestic leaders and peace keepers.

“Women played vital roles to resolve conflict in the community.”

FEMALE CIVIL SERVANT, RUMUEKPE

Similar for women’s groups, the allocated transformer arguably worked to empower youth groups. By proactively engaging appropriate ministries, youths gained crucial knowledge on how to identify key decision makers in the community and how to use the advocacy process to communicate effectively with them:

“We know that companies are not the only stakeholders we can engage. Instead, we can engage with all levels of government also...The government is responsible for the development of communities.”

PRESIDENT OTUASEGA YOUTH GROUP

This attitude was also expressed in regard to the activities of oil and gas companies such as Saipem, an organisation whom the community feel neglect their needs and have engaged in conflicts with before.

“We are still negotiating. If it were before we would have used violence to impound their vehicles, prevent them from work and destroy their equipment but we are able to use soft mind to address issues. Saipem was carrying out a road work on our road, we went there and they used military personnel to harass us. During the training, we learned how to negotiate...”

PRESIDENT OTUASEGA YOUTH GROUP
COMMUNITY ACTION

with people and took the voluntary principle and negotiation training skills to Saipem. Through negotiation, we are able to break through and get some employment opportunities for the youth.”

MALE, OTUASEGA

The community thus elevate peaceful ‘negotiation skills’ as the most effect mean to engage power holders. For the community, it is important to nurture these relationships as companies host employment opportunities for the youths.

“...We are now enjoying steady and stable light with little or no interruption. I and my family can now enjoy those appliances and electronics that are laying waste in those years of total blackout. My family don’t complain of malaria any longer as they used to when there was no light in the community. We can now sleep fine with our eyes closed without the normal noise of mosquitoes.”

WOMEN LEADER, OTUASEGA

EFFECT OF COMMUNITY INTERVENTION

Through peaceful advocacy, the Otuasega community received a transformer and extension of electricity to other parts of the community included in the 2011 budget of the Ministry of Energy. Presently the people have electricity supplied to all sections of the community. SPDC also provided access to some drinkable water. The fragile success of the project is reflected in the following statement.

ONE OF THE TRANSFORMERS YET TO BE CONNECTED
the youth President with one of the transformers in the community
ENTRY: SUMMARY OF NGO INTERVENTION

Youth groups and women's group received leadership and conflict management training, supported by SDN's Strengthening Transparency and Awareness in Niger Delta project.

Community formed a committee to conduct a needs assessment within Otuasega, highlighting poor access to electricity.

CAPACITY BUILDING

The aim of the sensitization on human rights was to build a strong community platform for demanding accountable governance and responsible use of public resources. The advocacy training:

- equipped the youth with the knowledge and skills necessary to mobilize and carry out non-violent actions that address real issues and promote change in the community.
- trained the community in project management and negotiation skills particularly for community leaders. The exercise helped them identify the right projects to push for based on core community needs and provided them with the basic negotiation skills to promote effective dialogue with key stakeholders.

CONFIDENCE AND ATTITUDE

Community members demonstrated confidence and the capacity to speak up when the need arose to ensure change was achieved. This confidence was a result of the community’s endowment with knowledge about how the government system works, such as budgeting process, which ministries to target and how to use the advocacy tools successfully.

Even after the direct engagement with the government, the community members have continued to monitoring government projects in the area, indicating their confidence and understanding of public policy.

COMMUNITY COHESION AND INCLUSIVENESS

Community cohesion as well as ownership of, and participation, in the advocacy process demonstrates the communities ability to unite in assessing the need for improved access to energy. A male Otuasega citizen states that, “Through negotiation, we are able to break through and get some employment opportunities for the youth”.

“In the course of dealing with our progress with Shell, the negotiations have been quite cordial, it has not been violent. It therefore means that knowledge has been impacted to the people in the community.”

YOUTH, OTUASEGA
This indicates the willingness of the community to support the needs of the youth, since it is their frustration with unemployment that often sparks violence.

**COMMUNITY ORGANISATION AND COOPERATION**

The community have demonstrated that they are able to work together and organise themselves to meet a common goal.

“The community deal with conflict in a non-violent way and this is evident in the way they settle issues out of courts. The community looks into the conflict and addresses it on their own, without outsiders.”

WARD CHAIRMAN

However, there is still evidence that there are conflicting interests within the group left over from the unseating of the paramount ruler in 2010.

**MOBILISATION, PARTICIPATION AND INFLUENCE**

“When the need arises for the community to deliberate on certain issues we cooperate...sometimes a congress is called. In my opinion it is participatory. We share ideas.”

YOUTH, OTUASEGA

The notion of ‘congress’ is a testament to community cooperation, engendered through the SDN led empowerment initiatives.

“Before they (leaders) start a project they call for a general meeting. They now give scale of preference...that is how they came up with the lodge for Corps members and a community guest house, so those things took priority because they were important, that’s why we chose them.”

COMMUNITY LEADER, OTUASEGA

**RESPONSE OR ITS LACK OF**

The government response was positive. The transformer verifies the achievement. This is a particularly poignant achievement since previously the government had been unwilling to listen to citizens and had blocked lines of communication with them. Of previous attempts with political representatives, an interviewee stated:

“The government did not know what the problem was in Otuasega. There was no avenue for dialogue and engagement of Otuasega community members with the government.”

COMMUNITY LEADER, OTUASEGA

Government bodies also arguably benefit from appropriate ‘avenues’ of communication with the community to track the progress of development projects and the reliability of budget allocations on the ground.
CHALLENGES

According to the community, the governments and SPDC have been reluctant to cooperate at times. For this reason, the community are averse to commit to new intervention plans due to their disillusionment with previous bodies’ attempts. As a result, the community has found it hard to convince some of their members that their situations can be improved.

HOW DID THIS PROCESS REDUCE THE THREAT OF VIOLENCE?

The community has been demonstrating leadership and innovative approaches to problem-solving. This is indicated by the peaceful transition from the old leadership to the present one. Due to the face-off between the community and the past leadership and the latter’s antics, to ensure it was succeeded by cronies to avoid investigation (as told by respondents), what could have been a crisis situation was averted. The interim leadership invited the police to maintain order while the election took place. According to a community member:

“In order to justify the fact that the community is graduating from violence to the non-violent stage, they are able to conduct a peaceful hand over of CDC and youth executives that will oversee the affairs of the community for another two years...Despite the fact that some hoodlums wanted to disrupt the process, it was peacefully conducted with the support of community members.”

FEMALE TRADER, OTUASEGA
KEY LESSONS AND NEXT STEPS: RIPE FOR REPLICABILITY

Interviewees prioritised that, in order for a media campaign to catalyse positive change, the following issues would be central to the intervention:

- **POST-FLOOD RECONSTRUCTION**: construction of the bridge linking Otuasega with Yenagoa. The bridge was destroyed by the 2012 flood.

- **FLOOD PREVENTION**: Construction of drainage systems to properly channel flood waters

- **TRANSPORT AND WATERWAYS**: Clearing the hyacinths off the river to allow for easy passage by boats/canoes and access to the farms by the farmers

- **EDUCATION**: Sensitising parents and young girls on the importance of early education for the latter

**LESSONS DRAWN FROM THE INTERVENTION PROCESS**

Strategic lessons can be drawn from the manner in which the social grievances in Otuasega have been addressed. Key issues noted below could inform subsequent response in the Delta.

- **TARGET CORRECT STAKEHOLDERS**: Otuasega’s success in approaching the right people in government who are better positioned to respond to the community’s needs as opposed to the ‘son’s of the soil’ or SPDC

- **CONTINUING LEADERSHIP ISSUES**: Not to underestimate the leadership problem in the community and its potential to drive future conflicts if it is not resolved.

- **PERSISTENCE AND ADAPTABILITY WORKS**: During the time in office of the previous paramount ruler, the community had managed to get five women into office. However, with his unseating, the women also lost their position. In response, the community advocated for female youth to be a part of the youth council, achieved via non-violent means.

“The community use non-violence for inter communal and intra communal conflict. They have not demanded service delivery from the government apart from the request for transformers because they always target SPDC for service delivery. With this experience, non-violence is the best approach to deal with conflict.”

FELICIA SYDNEY, FEMALE CIVIL SERVANT.
“The community deal with conflict in a non-violent way and this is evident in the way they settle issues out of courts. The community looks into the conflict and addresses it on their own, without outsiders.”

WARD CHAIRMAN
“Though we are not happy about using violence, there are times it brings about social change. The agitation with the militants and government brought about the opportunity for our people to be trained. People in other places heard our plight.”

FEMALE TRADER
The average weekly income of a fisherman is (N5000); an illegal crude oil refiner is reported to earn (N30,000); the average monthly income of a teacher is (N18,000).

Oporoza is a coastline community bounded by Escravos-Gbarama River to the North and the Chanoni Creeks. The community is less than 5 kilometres from the Chevron-Texaco Oil tank farm located at Escravos on the bank of the Atlantic Ocean. The community is accessed through Warri by boat. Because of its closeness to the ocean, the river water is always brackish and salty. Thus the community needs to depend on rain water for most of their domestic water needs. Houses in the community are a mixture of traditional raffia with thatched roofs and modern block and cement with aluminium zinc roofs. The traditional houses do not have toilets or bathrooms.

Oporoza is the headquarters of Gbaramatu Kingdom. The majority of people are of the Ijaw ethnic nationality. Their Language is Izon- the core dialect of the Ijaw. Other ethnic groups present, though not native to the community, are the Urhobo, Hausa and Ibo.

A 2010 education statistic put literacy rate in the community at 61%.

No reliable data available.


Television: Nigeria Television Authority (NTA), African Independent Television (AIT) and Independent Television Benin City (ITV). There is no internet service.
**Political Affiliations**

The community is situated in Warri South-West Local Government Area controlled by the People’s Democratic Party (PDP). Like the other communities in the local government area, Oporoza community is aligned to the PDP. The Chairman, Warri South Local government area is Hon. Augustine Uroye.

**Economic Profile**

The major economic engagements are fishing and farming, predominantly at the subsistence level. Other occupations include canoe carving, lumbering, periwinkle picking, palm-wine tapping, gathering and distilling of local gin.

Prior to the 2009 military invasion, traders came to Oporoza to buy fish in large quantities to sell within Warri and other States. Environmental pollution caused by the oil industry contaminated the soil and ground water, greatly limited production and commerce. Presently, only the Ijaws and Urhobos who live nearby buy fish from Oporoza to sell in small quantities in Warri.

The government’s 2012 allocation to Oporoza is: N 2,309,988,546.50

**Social Profile**

The community has two areas: New Jerusalem Zion and the main area called Oporoza. Six families make up Oporoza- Fiyowei, Olomuda, Afintuwa, Kenibra, Atoruwere and Ogelegbanwe families. Fiyowei is claimed to be the family that founded the community.

The ruling system is structured in a way that both the Zion area and main Oporoza make up the community executive council headed by a chairman from Oporoza. The community has chiefs, youth group and elders, who together make up the traditional leadership system. The king is both paramount ruler of the community and king over the Gbaramatu Kingdom.
In May 2009, Oporoza suffered a major attack by the Joint Task Force (JTF). Oporoza hosts ‘Camp Five’, the headquarters of Tompolo (Commander of the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta, MEND). The conflict killed many citizens, displaced hundreds of residents and desecrated Oporoza’s building and infrastructure.

In addition to this catastrophe, the government has continued to fail to provide adequate services to the community. The negligence of multinational oil companies has lead to environmental degradation of the river. This has significantly disrupted agricultural and fishing livelihoods.

**KEY CONFLICT DRIVERS**

- **2009 JOINT TASK FORCE ATTACK**: the destruction of Oporoza’s infrastructure during 2009 JTF outbreak at Camp 5 and the subsequent lack of support from the local government and neighbouring Chevron in renovating the desecrated buildings perpetuates conflict between the community and stakeholders.

- **POOR SERVICE DELIVERY**: Oporoza view weak the government as unable to provide basic amenities and services to the community. As such, infrastructural development is stunted in the community.

- **DAMAGED ENVIRONMENT AND CONTAMINATED WATER SOURCES**: Environmental pollution from Chevron-Texaco Oil tank farm located at Escravos on the bank of the Atlantic Ocean polluted the water and soil, affecting Oporoza’s fishing culture. With little alternative livelihoods, residents partake in the informal economies available, such as illegal oil refining.
“ALL THE SOURCES OF GROUNDWATER ARE POLLUTED. GO TO OUR RIVERS, THEY ARE COVERED WITH OIL. THE BOREHOLE DONE BY THE GOVERNMENT IN THE COMMUNITY IS NOT WORKING, SO MOST OF US RELY ON POLLUTED WATER FROM HAND DUG WELLS.”

YOUTH, OPOROZA
VIOLENCE, MILITANCY AND PEACE

Oporoza hosts a strong militant presence. Militant leader, Tompolo is an influential stakeholder in the community. The following section outlines key instances of violence in Oporoza and the perception of key actors involved.

KEY HISTORICAL INSTANCES OF VIOLENCE IN UZERE

On the 15th May 2009, the JTF attacked Okorokiro, Oporoza, Kunukunuma and Kurutie communities in Gbaramatu Kingdom. Oporoza’s Camp 5, the headquarters of the MEND chief High Chief Government Ekpemupolo, aka Tompolo, was targeted. The ‘security’ mission used armed helicopters, warships and gun boats in order to ‘remove militants and oil thieves’ from the state. Oporoza was ‘razed to the ground’. Exact number of civilian casualties are unknown.

‘Oil Thieves’ and their illegal oil refinery (IOR) camps are regularly targeted by the JTF. The increase in youth up take to the IOR camps is due to the lack of viable economic alternatives. The informal refineries add to the water and soil pollution from Chevron-Texaco Oil tank oil spills.

"Recently the cloud in Oporoza was dark for a whole day due to the destruction of illegal oil refineries by the JTF without considering the health effect on the citizens. The river was covered by the carbon and all the people too. That I say is environmental pollution."

YOUTH

COMMUNITY PERCEPTIONS OF MILITANCY

The community view the youth as most susceptible to join militant groups. Youths are said to vandalise oil pipelines, attack oil facility security officials, and kidnap expatriates working for the oil companies in demonstration of their dissatisfaction with the government and stakeholders in the South South. As such, the community view those who fought under Tompolo, not as militants, but as ‘freedom fighters’:

“The agitation from the freedom fighters brought change to our community.”

PRIVATE SECTOR WORKER

Although the community perceives the violence that the freedom fighters engaged in as ‘wrong’, the political and economic reality in the Delta justified the violent action of the Tompolo led ‘freedom fighters’.

“It was not right but the situation on ground warranted it. It is frustrating that there is no development in our community.”

FEMALE, OPOROZA

They did what they had to do. People were suffering.”

YOUTH

Frustration with the lack of development escalated instances of militancy in Oporoza is further supported by members of the communities’ youth groups:

“I believe that in some cases when you use non-violence nothing will happen especially when you are right, but when you apply some force they will listen to you.”

YOUTH MEMBER

For respondents, application of ‘force’ from rebel groups proved an effective way to express the inadequacies of the government services, angling a response from political stakeholders. The Federal government’s Amnesty Process; a disarmament, demobilization, rehabilitation and reintegration programme for former militants, aims to train youths with industry relevant vocational skills. The community report that 80% of Oporoza youth benefit from monthly Amnesty stipends and training programmes.

“The struggles by the youths, I mean the Ex-militants, brought about change our children now attend schools overseas and here in Nigeria, it is a good thing. The agitation from the freedom fighters brought change to our community.”

FEMALE, OPOROZA
There is consensus that the Amnesty Process bought stability to the community by giving the youth an opportunity to gain an education. In this sense, it is logical that the community feel violence can effectively bring about change as the ‘freedom fighters’ contributed to the introduction of the Amnesty programme.

“Yes militancy has brought about positive change every community in the Delta are enjoying the Amnesty Process.”

MALE, YOUTH

“I am a beneficiary of the amnesty process. I’m in school so it has brought great change for me and my family.”

MALE, STUDENT

Despite the community stating that the use of violence has been beneficial for the individual and communal development of Oporoza, respondents place value in the disarmament of the youth as a means to ensure the personal and social security of residents. The absence of guns reduces the frequency of escalated instances violence.

“Our youths have dropped their guns, most of them are in schools. Others have graduated and there is security of lives and properties now.”

FEMALE OPOROZA CITIZEN

In line with the dictum that youths have ‘dropped their guns’, interviewees also stated that in the majority of cases they favour a non-violent approach to resolving conflicts:

“We don’t normally take laws into our hands, we always try to talk to solve our conflict with the government and oil companies.”

STUDENT

According to field research, bar militants, the government and Chevron continue to not ‘talk’ with the non-violent factions of Oporoza, spurring frustration within the community. As a result, it is suggested that violent actions will re-occur unless the government provides the infrastructure to allow people to develop their businesses and lift themselves out of poverty. It is a widely held belief in the community that youths and others are entitled to engage in local oil refining as a legitimate revenue stream in the absence of alternatives.

KEY STAKEHOLDERS IN INSTIGATING AND RESOLVING CONFLICT

• Oporoza citizens interviewed identified the youth as the group most prone to violence due to their impatience and frustration within the community. Community wide, respondents state that it is the ‘youth who were the militants before the amnesty programme started’. 80% of community youths are currently benefitted from the Amnesty Process’ monthly stipend. Although pacified, a large portion of youths remain unemployed and the threat of violence remains.

• The people were unanimous in saying that when there are issues or conflict in the community they go to the community head. If he is unable to resolve the issue they move to the elders then the clan King. It is important to note that some elders have been linked to instigating violence.

• Tompolo is an influential figure in mutually resolving and instigating violence in the community. Community wide respect for the Tompolo Foundation is based on is ability to assist impoverished members of the community.

“My big brother Tompolo he is kind hearted he carries everyone along look at the foundation he built here to help the poor.”

FEMALE STUDENT
COMMUNITY ACTION

CITIZENS USED A LETTER WRITING CAMPAIGN TO ADVOCATE LOCAL GOVERNMENT OFFICIAL FOR IMPROVED HEALTH SERVICES AND SCHOOL EQUIPMENT.

For the residents surveyed, the 2009 Joint Task Force attack traumatised the community. For this reason, some members of Oporoza place renewed emphasis on peaceful engagements with stakeholders. An indicator of the change in perception is made real in the actions of community leaders. From the letter writing campaign, influential leaders organised a series of visits to government for the provision of basic health services and school supplies, rather than allowing the youths to advocate through violence.

WHAT HAPPENED IN THE COMMUNITY

The community mobilised to understand their LGA’s budget allocation process. Backed by this understanding, the community undertook a letter writing campaign to the education and health agencies of their LGA relevant government officers and agencies.

"Visits by the advocacy committee to local government brought about the provision of desk, chairs and marker boards in Gbaraun grammar school Oporoza."

STUDENT AND FORMER MILITANT

CHANGES RESULTING FROM COMMUNITY ACTION

It is implied that the roundtable discussion fostered change in the public’s perception of using violence for change. Respondents now believe that peace is a better way to pursue issues.

"We have learned new ways of making demands on the different stakeholders that live and work in our community.
Before now, when we asked for something, if it didn’t come either of two things would happen. The first is that we would beg for it. If it still wasn’t granted, then we would take up arms...
Now we seek information, for example the budget. This means that we know what is rightfully ours."

STUDENT, OPOROZA

"I write letters to the government or oil companies to make demands."

YOUTH

The change in perception toward using violence as a manner to gain attention form IOCs also influenced a group of women to organise a non-violent protest outside of the Chevron building to demand 24 hour access to electricity. They achieved a partially successful result; access to electricity remain ‘epileptic’.

"The protest to Chevron by the Gbaramatu women demanding for 24 hours electricity brought about the epileptic light we now see."

FEMALE TRADER
EFFECT OF COMMUNITY INTERVENTION

The letter writing campaign partially proved that dialogue enforces a productive and durable relationship with the government. The advocacy process produced the following tangible results:

- Completion of a mini water project with three pumps and a treatment plant. Community members currently drink and perform household chores with water from the project.

- On-going renovation and equipping of an abandoned health centre. The local government has promised to deploy health personnel to the facility when completed.

- Provision of 50 units of double-seater school chairs, 4 white boards and board markers, deployment of teachers to the secondary school.

Despite the people’s mobilization and success in receiving new resources for the local secondary school, the overarching view is that government structures continue to disregard the needs of the people.

“The companies I will say the problem we have with them is that they are always marginalizing us. We do not get our rights from them even when we advocate. We write them letters we do not get good turn ups.”

YOUTH, OPOROZA
“WITH THE COMPANIES I WILL SAY THE PROBLEM WE HAVE WITH THEM IS THAT THEY ARE ALWAYS MARGINALIZING US. WE DO NOT GET OUR RIGHTS FROM THEM EVEN WHEN WE ADVOCATE. WE WRITE THEM LETTERS WE DO NOT GET GOOD TURN UPS.”

YOUTH
ENTRY: SUMMARY OF NGO INTERVENTION

At the early stage of the SDN led intervention, the community, together with the intervening agencies, prioritised the development needs of Oporoza citizens. These were prioritised as: equipping and commissioning of the skill acquisition centre; equipping and staffing of the health centre; rehabilitation of the water project; deployment of more teachers to the secondary school; and completion of an abandoned primary school.

CONFIDENCE AND ATTITUDE

As a result of the advocacy process, the people garnered confidence evident in the positive attitude with which they attracted the government’s attention. This was demonstrated by the advocacy committee who persisted in calling on the government to address their concerns until initial results were achieved.

Knowing how budget allocation is decided has enabled the community to make informed demands about where they want money to be re-directed and hold the government accountable if their priorities differ from that of the community. Although more needs to be done in supporting sensitisation and awareness raising in the community on the value of peaceful response to situations, the intervention made a core group of community members understand the importance of non-violent actions aimed at engendering change.

COMMUNITY ORGANISATION AND COOPERATION

The community indicated a strong level of organisation and cooperation by forming the advocacy committee and organising advocacy visits. Having said this, there was also evidence of community members not willing to give out information and a persistent effort was required to gain details. Furthermore, the researchers were denied access to certain areas of the community during the investigation. This level of mistrust and underlying nervousness is a direct result of the trauma faced by the community and the reality of groups not delivering on promises and support in the past.

CAPACITY BUILDING

A twenty-member advocacy committee with representations from all segments of the community was constituted and the members were trained on:

- Basic rights
- Mediation, facilitation and negotiation
- Advocacy

The trainings targeted women and youth groups, chiefs and elders.

COMMUNITY COHESION AND INCLUSIVENESS

Community-led advocacy created cohesion since the advocacy committee formed was representative of the Oporoza population including female members, youth members, chiefs and elders. Community members committed their time to processes with the belief that it would address their collective developmental needs.
MOBILISATION, PARTICIPATION AND INFLUENCE

The community learnt new ways of making demands on government and oil company representatives. In spite of the system dominated by political patronage and bureaucracy, the community mobilised and secured some space to negotiate for better services.

The Gbaramatu’s women’s demonstration to Chevron is an example of community mobilization. In demanding for electricity, the process indicates that influencing government and IOC decisions is still a work in progress for the community.

RESPONSE OR ITS LACK OF

Government responded to the advocacy by renovating the Health Centre, providing seating for the secondary school and providing a mini water project. However, as aforementioned, the community still feel that their relationship with people in positions of power is lacking:

They didn’t want to see us. During all the visits we made, I can count the number of times we met with the Commissioner of a ministry or the chairman of this local government council, they were few.

MEMBER OF THE ADVOCACY COMMITTEE

CHALLENGES

- Disconnection: There was fundamental disconnection between “representatives” and the community. Elected representatives see no reason in building a relationship because their position in office is not reliant on the support from community they represent.

- Budgetary challenges: Local Government budgets in particular were not easily available to the community. The State Government also delayed or simply failed to provide copies of their budget and more crucially actual expenditure on services were rarely released.

- Service provision still inadequate and could create more conflicts

- Refusal of interviewees to be photographed for fear of being victimization

- Community members not willing to give out information

- Denial of access to certain areas of the community during the research

HOW DID THIS PROCESS REDUCE THE THREAT OF VIOLENCE?

The community leadership renounced violence and militancy in favour of informed, strategic engagements with the relevant stakeholders.

Non-violence can be effective, for instance if we talk, these people will know our problem, you will discuss it with them and solutions will come.

YOUTH

We did not know how much the council got as allocation and how much was earmarked to be spent on my community. They did not tell us.

MEMBER OF ADVOCACY COMMITTEE

- Persistent effort was required to get some information from community members

- Some community members resolved to always use violence
KEY LESSONS AND NEXT STEPS: RIPE FOR REPLICABILITY

Interviews prioritised that, in order for a media campaign to catalyse positive change, the following issues would be central to the intervention:

- **RE-INTEGRATION OF MILITANTS INTO THE COMMUNITY:** the community fears that former youth will return to the creeks if not properly reintroduced into society and incentivised to conform to formal employment.

- **POST- AMNESTY PROCESS EMPLOYMENT FOR PACIFIED MILITANT:** the monthly stipend to ex-agitators is set to end in 2015. There is a growing fear that those who receive training in welding, fabrication and other vocational skills will not be absorbed into national industries.

- **ILLEGAL OIL REFINING:** IOR camps means a sustain JTF presence in the community. Moreover, the violent attack on the informal economy camps continues to destroy the environment.

LESSONS DRAWN FROM THE INTERVENTION PROCESS

Strategic lessons can be drawn from the manner in which the social grievances in Uzere have been addressed. Key issues noted below could inform subsequent response in the Delta.

- **COMMUNITY LED, PEACEFUL PROTESTS** encourage a sense of empowerment, ownership and inclusiveness over their struggle.

- **DELIVERY IS KEY.** The Tompolo Foundation is viewed as a centre for development. The community thus align their trust with institutions who deliver. According to respondents, the community support Tompolo and the Tompolo Foundation above Government and IOC action because of this local delivery.

“Without violence, nobody will hear you but it is not the right way. When you send somebody for training for six months, after the training I don’t even know what they wrote on the certificate because when you take it to companies they just look at it and say there is no vacancy. Nothing has changed.”

OPOROZA CITIZEN
“WITH THE COMPANIES I WILL SAY THE PROBLEM WE HAVE WITH THEM IS THAT THEY ARE ALWAYS MARGINALIZING US. WE DO NOT GET OUR RIGHTS FROM THEM EVEN WHEN WE ADVOCATE. WE WRITE THEM LETTERS WE DO NOT GET GOOD TURN UPS.”

YOUTH
“The 2011 crisis in Uzere community has been an eye opener for community leadership and members. Instead of employing violence in solving crisis, the community opt for dialogue. As for solving conflicts with companies and governments, they write and negotiate until the grievances are addressed.”

WOMAN
A REVIEW OF NIGER DELTA COMMUNITY PERCEPTIONS

DOES VIOLENCE PAY?

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ECONOMIC PROFILE

Uzere is host to Shell Petroleum Development Corporation’s (SPDCs) 39 oil wells domiciled in two fields - Uzere East and West, both of which started operation in 1958. The two fields are reputed to be the oldest operating flow stations in Nigeria at the peak production of 56,000 barrel of oil per day.

SOCIAL PROFILE

Uzere consist of nine communities: Uhei, Ezede, Uweye, Afikioko, Uwhroko, Ekregbesi, Abale, Iwre-Ezede, and Iboro. The community is headed by a King (Ovie). As the custodian of the community, the “Ovie” oversees and manages the community’s engagements with oil companies, and resolves disputes among community members. In addition, the Isoko Development Union (IDU) is tasked with taking up developmental and community welfare responsibilities.

"The disposed king failed to provide pipe borne water for the community after collecting 25 million Naira as contract sum from DESOPADEC to construct pipe borne water for the community."  
WOMEN LEADER
Uzere is located in the Isoko South Local Government Area (LGA) of the Delta State of Nigeria. Uzere is known for oil exploration, but has recently developed into an industrial town with a Cassava processing factory in Uwhroko community.

For Uzere, interviewees stated that conflict is driven primarily by weak governance. Community members perceive that poor political practices disempower the population and reinforce the under development of the community. In parallel to substandard service delivery, citizens cite the refusal of Shell to sign a development agreement (GMOU) with the community to have an adverse affect on their economic, political and social lives. The community feel that, historically, some of their leaders have used their positions of power to mismanage and embezzle community funds for their personal interests rather than for community benefit.

**KEY CONFLICT DRIVERS**

- Respondents noted that weak governance in Uzere means the community relies on oil companies to provide basic amenities.

  > We have representatives like the local government Chairman and Councillors. But we don’t see them helping us.

  **WOMEN LEADER**

- Poor Service Delivery, inadequate road infrastructure and ‘epileptic’ power supply affects Uzere community.

  > The Aviara/Uzere road that was started by the government has been abandoned for years and is causing untold hardship for motorist in the community.

  **ELDER**

- Conflict of interest aligned to the Memorandum of Understanding (GMOU) with Shell Petroleum Development Commission (SPDC) drives conflict in Uzere.
“I hope for better things to come, I have been saving some money to start up a business.”

FEMALE ENTREPRENEUR, UZERE
The following section outlines key historical instances of violence in the community and the perception of key actors involved.

**Key Historical Instances of Violence in Uzere**

On the 29th of November 2011, mounted community tensions with the SPDC resulted in the dethronement of the Ovie (King) HRM Isaac Udogri. According to community testimonials, the Udogri’s palace and wife’s provision store was destroyed by ‘irate youths’. The community alleged that Shell ‘lured’ their King with contract awards and other financial inducements in exchange for the fulfilment and execution of human and infrastructural development programmes under the Memorandum of Understanding (GMOU). Udogri is accused of being partisan and corrupt; he is currently in exile.

The President General of the kingdom, Chief Dr. Emeakpo Owhe (JP) ascribes the initially peaceful letter writing campaign to engage with the IOC:

“We have written to Shell since February 2011 asking them to come to Uzere to discuss and firm up the GMOU (Global Memorandum of Understanding) with Uzere Communities. In the month of October, we reminded Shell on the imperative of putting a frame work in place of the (GMOU) so that we can legally know the basics of our relationship partnering and cooperation with SPDC.

We have written to Delta State Government on refusal for Shell for GMOU. The Uzere community has, therefore, decided that if SPDC still wants to operate in Uzere land, it should come and sign this agreement with Uzere before carrying out further oil activities with effect from today, 29th day of November 2011.”

Uzere residents contend that the relationship with SPDC in Uzere has replaced the relationship with the government. Chief Dr. Emeakpo Owhe confirms that the Uzere community rely on the oil company, as opposed to the government, to improve community roads and create employment opportunities. The tensions with the IOC are rooted by poor service delivery, symptomatic of weak governance. In the absence of the government, oil companies are often viewed as the primary providers of development. Due to the failure of government allocation to support basic amenities and road infrastructure in Uzere, coupled with SPDC’s inadequate CSR legacy, potentially resource rich communities such as Uzere, suffer.

“‘There have been entreaties to Shell from the communities’ leadership for it to provide buses to the communities in Uzere kingdom but to no avail, while requests for construction of streets/roads, employment of our people and contract for the local content policy to our indigenes fell on deaf ears.”

**General of the Kingdom, Chief Dr. Emeakpo Owhe.**

**Community Perceptions of Militancy**

Uzere respondents experienced the 2005-2008 period of violence in the Delta as a catalyst for change. They view their government as an impassive administration which fails to provide basic amenities. As such, over half of those interviewed justify the actions of militants as it brought focus to issues in the Delta.

For an interviewee, the unresponsiveness of government and SHELL stakeholders frustrates the Uzere people. Ekper expressed this weariness when she said the following:

“The state government has eyes. We have representatives like the local government Chairman and Councillors. But we don’t see them helping us. We don’t have the power to go and meet the Chairman because he will tell you stories, come
VIOLENCE, MILITANCY AND PEACE

today come tomorrow, when you go today go tomorrow, you will get tired and sometimes they will not even listen to you!"

In line with the respondent’s notions that ‘local government chairman and officials [...] will not listen to you’, Uzere peoples feel the actions of militants were justified.

Militants intended to ‘proactively demanded’ attention of said decision makers. 90% of respondents believe the militants were within their rights to bear arms against government and oil companies. Failing dialogue and neglect by government and oil companies coupled with high rates of unemployment and desertion of the Niger Delta Region are, for Uzere citizens, a justification of Delta youths’ violent mobilisation.

In opposition, a small minority believe that the militants were wrong in their violent mobilisation; as a youth stated, ‘they fought for their self interest and not for the good of the Niger Delta’.

“The country has been in existence long before oil exploration, so the Niger Delta should not be asking for the lion share. Because the hand feeds the mouth doesn’t mean, it owns the body.”

YOUTH, UZERE

According to the sources, Uzere community does not host militants or beneficiaries of the Amnesty Process. Yet, militancy and the consequent Amnesty re-integration training is believed to have brought change in the Niger Delta by means of empowerment, capacity building and recognition to the plights of the people of the South states. The Amnesty Process is, however, viewed as unsustainable.

“The peace the amnesty has brought is very fragile. What happens when the federal Government stops paying the monthly stipends? Teach me how to fish and don’t give me fish, because I will look to crime when you can no longer give me fish.”

FEMALE TRADER, UZERE

KEY STAKEHOLDERS IN INSTIGATING AND RESOLVING CONFLICT IN UZERE

- Key people associated with resolving conflict in the community are the King (Ovie), Chiefs and Elders and the Community Development Committee.

- General Alexander Odearedu Ogomudia (Rtd) CFR DSS fwc psc(+) MSc FNSE, Chief Emeakpor Owhe (President General of Uzere Community) and Chief Iker (Dangote) further support the resolution process.

- In order to resolve conflict, the community leaders are the first point of call as they are the decision makers in the community. The Chairman or President General of Uzere Kingdom, Youth Leader and finally the King (Ovie) will step in at different stages to mediate where necessary. Cases are brought to the King when efforts by the President General of the community or the Youth and CDC leaders have been unable to proffer a solution to the crisis.

- Uzere community members interviewed state that youths groups were most prone to violence. Unemployment is viewed as a driver of this. Youths are perceived to be easily induced with financial gains to disrupt the peace in the community.

- Residents surveyed state that key role players in instigating conflict are the disposed King (Isaac Odhiwhu Udogri 1); Odio Pa Macaulay Osibo (head of the Ediagbor ruling house) Mr. Anthony Owhoro (secretary and treasurer) and Mr. Peter Igboyi.
COMMUNITY ACTION

WOMEN’S GROUPS ACTIVELY ADVOCATE FOR NON-VIOLENT ACTION IN UZERE COMMUNITY IN ORDER TO MAINTAIN THE SUCCESS OF THEIR SMALL BUSINESS.

RELIABLE LIVELIHOODS WORK TO QUELL VOLATILE COMMUNITY GROUPS.

In 2011, 120 community members mobilized to demonstrate against Shell Development Petroleum Commission. The community marched to the Uzere flow station to challenge SPDC on the lack of pipe borne water and power supply which SPDC refused to provide the community from its facility. The demonstration escalated. Security agents and mobile police men dispersed protestors with canisters of tear gas. Three youths were shot.

Interviewees state that the violence spurred by the SPDC security assault affected personal assets and livelihoods; businesses were ruined, residents were chased out of their homes into neighbouring Oleh, houses and motorcycles were torched.

In light of the clash with security personal at Uzere flow station, women’s groups continue to ground their ethics in non-violent action for change.

WHAT HAPPENED IN THE COMMUNITY

Uzere women’s use of non-violent action for change is evident through their adherence to community decision making structures. The women leaders’ ability to lobby for the end of logging is a gesture toward a strengthened intra-community social contract in Uzere.

The Women’s Group held a meeting to discuss the issue of timber loggers who were taking away their firewood. Collaboratively, the women engaged the community leaders in dialogue, as opposed to demonstration. Through a round table discussion, the women’s groups advocated for no logging on their farm land. This led to a declaration by the king to ban timber logging. This action shows that Uzere women have become more organized and proactive in demanding that their needs be met, and that their rights in the community are not infringed.

Although not targeted at government or SPDC in this instance, the non-violent action of women’s groups improves the communities’ relationship with their leadership. As the figureheads of the family and leaders in agriculture, women’s inclusion in decision-making circles in Uzere works to reduce the threat of violence. Through female employment in the tapioca industry in Uzere and women’s support of non-violent action, youths, arguably the most volatile social groups, are able to experience the secondary benefits of their mother’s formal employment and respected community social standing. It is implied that employment reduces the likelihood of violent action. Thus, youths align peaceful resolution with formal means of employment, as opposed to informal economies and jobs associated with conflict such as illegal oil bunkering.

The community leader supports the woman’s group’s belief that positive change is attainable in the community if community leadership structures use non-violent means to resolve conflict.

“The community leadership is better organised…it is our responsibility to guide the peace in any way we can. We have seen crises in this community and would definitely not want to continue in that way.”

COMMUNITY LEADER

CHANGE RESULTING FROM COMMUNITY ACTION

The negative experience of non-violent protest, which dramatically escalated into death and
property destruction, demonstrated the potential limitations of violence. However, tensions remain and even though the community is exploring non-violent options to address the underlying drivers of conflict, if they are not responded to by the government or oil majors violence may well reoccur.

“When you are dealing with SHELL, violence is the only language they will listen to and that is one of the reasons why we (Uzere community) drove Shell out of our land!”

YOUTH, UZERE

Following the accelerated violence of the November 2011 protest as Uzere flow Station, interviewees recorded the death of three youths-shot by security forces, residents were injured and property damaged; distrust enveloped the community. As a result, Uzere view violence as an unsuccessful means for development.

However, regardless of the damage ensued by the protest, a women leader interviewed maintains that she supports the community’s violent mobilisation to remove the now exiled Ovie (King) HRM Isaac Udogi through the following statement:

“If Uzere Community had continued to be patient with the disposed king, change would have never come to the community. Before now, only the people chosen by the king got scholarship from Shell but under the new leadership both the rich and poor are considered.”

For Uzere community, the change in leadership is arguably a successful outcome of the violent demonstration. However, the State Government refuse to acknowledge the change in leadership. The state’s lack of formal recognition supports the notion that violent action does not equate to formal change.

For Uzere community, the change in leadership is arguably a successful outcome of the violent demonstration. However, the State Government refuse to acknowledge the change in leadership. The state’s lack of formal recognition supports the notion that violent action does not equate to formal change.

“Whether the Governor of Delta State like it or not we have a new king (Ovie). The former king can be their Government King but HRM Henry Ukenukpepa, Etuwede III is the king of Uzere people.”

WOMAN LEADER

The respondents agreed that the community is increasingly using non-violent approaches to address inter community, intra community, and conflict with oil companies. Moreover, respondents reiterated that the crisis in the past was a non-violent protest, but for the actions of security operatives and the use of canisters of tear gas. Although currently pacified, the aggression toward SPDC perpetuates:

“Community members are aggrieved and feel cheated that after 52 years of hosting Shell petroleum Development Company, there is nothing tangible to show the presence of oil multinational.”

COMMUNITY LEADER

The community continue to feel aggrieved toward SPDC’s lack of CSR developments in Uzere, however this is arguably a displaced aggression toward the IOC, as state governments should strive to provide the necessary services to the community.

EFFECT OF COMMUNITY ACTION

The outcome of the 2011’s initially peaceful demonstration was destructive. Security agents fired indiscriminately into the air to scare away the protesters. As relayed, the use of fire arms prompted the villagers to invade the flow station, burn down two Hilux vehicles and shut down the flow station. This shows how quickly peaceful
protest can turn into violent action if not handled effectively. Field research responses state that the GMOU remains unsigned.

Despite SPDC security’s use of fire arms, the community continue to back non-violent activities to promote action. As demonstrated by the ban of logging in Uzere, Women groups are arguably at the forefront advocates peaceful resolution. Conflict disrupts their agriculture practices and the flow of customers at their kiosks. For one female resident, the SPDC gas flare is intrinsic to the success of her tapioca production. In this way, women’s groups actively advocate for non-violent action in Uzere community in order to maintain the success of their small business. Reliable livelihoods work to quell volatile community groups.

A women leader goes some way to explain the extent of SHELL’s effect on community livelihoods:

“The conflict worry us well as dem close the Shell station, because na where the women dey go to dry their tapioca. The heat wey dey comot from the Shell fire na wetin dey use dry the tapioca. So that time no business at all.”

WOMEN, UZERE

Following 2011’s initially non-violent demonstration, coupled with the women’s groups’ peaceful activism, qualitative research indicated that Uzere’s perceptions of resolving conflict predominated toward dialogue.

- 90% of respondents interviewed stated that they use non-violent ways to deal with conflicts in the home and community
  
  “Violence does not bring any change. It only brings death and destruction. There is nothing good about killing a human being you can’t create.”

  YOUTH

- 10% stated violence would get you swift responses from the government and oil companies.
  
  “Violence in some ways can bring about change, because with non-violence you have to be patient. But these days the patient dog would not even see a bone to lick, not to talk of meat to eat.”

  WOMAN LEADER

- 70% of Uzere interviewees admitted that violence was not an effective way to bring about change due to the destruction of housing structures in the community and the symptomatic cost of ‘rebuilding’ the community.
  
  “Violence brings change, but the destruction that comes with it, would take years to rebuild. So non-violence is better to solve problems.”

  FEMALE LEADER

- However, 30% of respondents were of the opinion that violence brings about change; oil companies are irresponsive to non-violent action.

Demanding accountability from the stakeholders was viewed as an elevated method of conflict resolution, as opposed to the communities’ prior mobilisation which sought to protest their grievance to SHELL for the company’s apparent unresponsiveness to the poor service delivery in the community.

There is still some tension in the community due to the perceived neglect by Shell who they believe has the primary responsibility to provide for their basic amenities, the people are now more inclined to explore peaceful means to getting the government and oil companies to respond to their needs.
COMMUNITY ACTION

PERSONAL STORIES:

The respondent grew up knowing peace in the community, until the crisis of November 29 2011. Though an avid believer in using non-violence to solve conflicts, she believes violence is not instantaneous, “as one party must be pushed to the brinks, before turning round to fight back, which may have catastrophic implication”.  

Self-employed female

PERSONAL STORIES:

“I have been a leader right from my childhood, I was chairman of the youths for so many years and I hold a number of positions of leadership in my church too. What I gained from the ONLAG project implemented by NIPRODEV is in the area of tolerance. There are certain things someone may do that I may not tolerate before.

But after the leadership training, I was able to learn tolerance as a key attribute of a leader. Also, from the training I have been able to realise that force is not the solution to achieving what we want. It is by means of informing them our needs and negotiating peacefully a beneficial position to both parties. Dialogue as I discovered solves many of the complex problems we encounter”.  

PRO OF THE UZERE COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT COMMITEE

On how the training has helped in carrying out his duties as the community PRO is said that it, “made me to be tolerant and to act as a good example for others to follow. As a person it built a sense of responsibility in me, even when I am tired I have to propel myself to reason that I have to do that job as agreed when the position was handed over to me.”
ENTRY: SUMMARY OF NGO INTERVENTION

In parallel to community self-mobilisation, third party support from Oxfam Novib strengthened community leadership skills. In 2012, Uzere was one of the 20 communities incorporated into the Oxfam Novib Livelihood and Governance in the Niger Delta (ONLAG) project implemented by Niger Delta Professionals for Development (NIDPRODEV).

By strengthening both people’s livelihoods and leadership capabilities, the project aimed to increase individual and collective business activities in the community, and in turn, increase community assets. Livelihood empowerment or improved incomes bolsters individual empowerment and reduce conflict. Research identified that skills acquisition across Uzere created incentives for people to participate in peaceful collective action. Collective empowerment is manifest in community mobilisation.

Within Uzere, it is arguable that the community’s mobilisation empowerment was heightened by the NGO intervention. However, the Oxfam Novib funded trainings in bookkeeping and business management, as well as NIPRODEV’s engagement with Bayelsa 94.1FM to air a weekly call-in discussions on agricultural practises, would fail unless individuals self-motivate and take responsibility for improving their economic situation.

Following the 2011 demonstration, community leaders received trainings in conflict resolution and transformation training from Oxfam Novib Livelihood and Governance in partnership with Niger Delta Professionals for Development. Whilst supporting the community leader’s existing capacity to peacefully resolve conflicts, the training further impacted communities’ perception of the importance in engaging in peaceful dialogue with SPDC and local government representatives.

As such, field research demonstrated that beneficiaries such as Comtade Ikre, are now able to see the benefits of a non-violent approach when dealing with government oil companies or other community members.

“We have explored both approaches in times past but I think we have come to the conclusion that non-violent means will bring about peace.”

COMMUNITY LEADER, UZERE

The latter approach, reinforced the Uzere leaders’ existing peace building skills:

“Weald training taught me how to be tolerant in dealing with issues of conflict and how to resolve conflict without using force [...] I would rather dialogue to achieve peace.”

COMMUNITY LEADER, UZERE

CAPACITY BUILDING

- NIDPRODEV trained 50 Uzere participants on bar soap and liquid detergent, shampoo, powder, pastry and crafts including bag and sandal making.
- 40 participants received a 7 week training in Bookkeeping and Business Management, 70% of which were females.
- NIDPRODEV entered into a written agreement with Bayelsa 94.1FM to air the radio livelihood program, in collaboration Songhai Agricultural Centre
- 18 cooperatives, including one from Uzere, gained access to the microcredit via the Farmers’ Development Union (FADU)
- 20 participants were trained on Gender Sensitization using Theatre for Development (TFD). These 20 participants then presented a drama in the 10 communities to educate citizens on the inclusion of women in community decision making processes.

CONFIDENCE AND ATTITUDE

The training schemes, as identified under the capacity building headline, worked to empower the Uzere community. Empowerment and the right attitude enable people to create opportunities for themselves, even with little resources or help.
Empowered Uzere citizens have the capacity to aspire and to imagine a better future for themselves and their children. Their initial success breeds more confidence which reduces instances of aggression and violence:

“I hope for better things to come, I have been saving some money to start up a business. I know I would do well in business because of my prudence.”

— Female Entrepreneur, Uzere

COMMUNITY COHESION AND INCLUSIVENESS

The ONLAG project contributed to enhancing community cohesion and inclusiveness. Various Community groups including the Chiefs and Elders, the CDC, the Youth and Women group were able to work together to resolve issues peacefully and settle disputes without the use of violence by:

- Group participation in activities
- Project monitoring groups
- Creation of advocacy group for women
- Community mediation teams

A beneficiary highlighted one of the project’s activities that contributed to this cohesion. He said: “when we were undergoing the training, we were asked to divide ourselves into groups of ten. After we organised ourselves, we were given different tasks to person as a group. Each group contained people from different parts and structures in the community, but we can become one, we became united. We have remained close even after the training. When some of us have problems we settle the problem within the group. So, I can say it has improved the cohesiveness of the community.”

COMMUNITY ORGANISATION AND COOPERATION

Through advocacy trainings, the women advocated for their representatives to be included in the governance and decision making structures in the community. Female figure heads in the community can work to quell aggression.

“There was no woman in the community leadership before. But with this project, women now know their rights, so from there they now took the challenge and brought the idea to the community that they need women to be among the executives, so that whatever thing they are saying, the women can air their views. We were able to achieve this and in that process that positive effect has been attained through this project.”

— Woman, Uzere

MOBILISATION, PARTICIPATION AND INFLUENCE

Community members were mobilised through town hall meetings, where community needs were assessed and discussed as a collective. In response to gender sensitisation theatre workshops, the advocacy group, Women’s Society Network (WSN) was formed. The group worked promoted female participation in governance and decision making.

A beneficiary typifies this new group of enlightened Uzere women. She describes the situation: “we did not know our rights, even me personally I did not know my right before but since this programme, I now know my right, I know what is good. If my husband did anything wrong to me, I will just tell him boldly, I will just tell him that this thing you did is not good, if it is before, I will be shaking but now I stand boldly and say it and when I say it to him when he sees that he is wrong, he will now apologise to me.”

RESPONSE OR ITS LACK OF

- The various capacity building trainings have provided women with the proper skills to manage their individual business.

- Despite leadership and conflict management training, discussions are ongoing for signing a GMOU by the operating multinational (SPDC)
CHALLENGES

• Women continue to be excluded in community leadership.

• Female participation in the study was strained as the women, being farmers, prefer to have meetings and activities only on market days and it affects the set timelines.

• During the NIPRODEV intervention, the Community leadership tried to hijack the project. This was overcome through an equal representation of all sub-committees in the community. A faction of the community attempted to use the project as a way to favor some social groups. NIDPRODEV proposed that the representatives to the project’s activities come from the 12 quarters in the community to uphold equal representation.

• Distrust is a major challenge that needs to be addressed in Uzere. 60% of interviewees refused to allow photographs to be taken during field research.

• Researchers found that information can be very difficult to extract as community members still harbor security fears if they talk about certain issues or mention certain names.

HOW DID THIS PROCESS REDUCE THE THREAT OF VIOLENCE?

A community leader posited that the leadership training programme positively impacted self-restraint to him and other men in the community.

“It taught me how to be tolerant in dealing with issues of conflict and how to resolve conflict without using force. Before that training, there were sometimes when as a leader in the community I would subscribe to using force to achieve our goals, especially with oil companies. Now I no longer feel the need to use force again, I would rather dialogue to achieve peace.”

As the quotations indicates, the community leaders are becoming more receptive to women’s role in community decision making. Women are still overtly oppressed in Uzere. However the female economic empowerment initiative worked to further quell domestic conflicts. The power dynamic between men and women across the region hold possibilities for the proposed media intervention.
“There was no woman in the community leadership before. But with this project, women now know their rights, so from there they now took the challenge and brought the idea to the community that they need women to be among the executives, so that whatever thing they are saying, the women can air their views. We were able to achieve this and in that process that positive effect has been attained through this project.”
Inteviews prioritised that, in order for a media campaign to catalyse positive change, the following issues would be central to the intervention:

- **The Community feels an improved relationship with SPDC would appease recurring conflict.** SDN does not support community GMOUs with IOCs as it legitimizes exploitative contracts with the community. IOCs should strive for long life cycles of social legacy after extraction, as opposed to a social license to operate.

- **Employment and vocational training for Uzere youths.** Skills acquisition catering to the ‘volatile’ youth group would enable development and intra-community progress to stem from the developing Uzere generation.

- **Recognition of the stool, of HRM Henry Ukenukpepia, Etuwele 111, as the ‘new’ Ovie of Uzere by the Delta State Government to legitimize the communities’ leadership.**

**Lessons drawn from the intervention process**

Third party intervention looks to address the root causes of conflict in Uzere. Strategic lessons can be drawn from the manner in which the social grievances in Uzere have been addressed. Key issues noted below could inform subsequent response in the Delta.

- **Interventions with an economic incentive** allow community members to act as micro-entrepreneurs independent of third party intervening NGOs are arguably more sustainable in the community.

- **Empower people** through capacity building initiatives and employment opportunities could help channel youth aggression. The community is of the belief that “an empowered person is less prone to violence”.

- **A proper communication liaison** with the right stakeholders is critical to the success of a project, especially in communities which host factions. Not all Delta communities are homogenous.
“We have seen how violence has affected other communities. Houses you built 20 years ago are burnt to the ground. People are now refugees. Violence is not a good way of bringing change.”

BODO YOUTH

IMAGE: FISHERWOMEN SIT REDUNDANTLY NEXT TO THE POLLUTED WATERS THEY USED TO FISH.
The majority of the Bodo population have traditionally depended upon subsistence fishing and farming. Over 70% of people are engaged in agriculture.

Bodo is a shoreline community, located in the coastal lowland of the Niger delta, in the Gokana local government area of Rivers state. Bodo creek comprises of approximately 100,000 hectares of land, swampland and waterways.

Inhabitants are Ogoni speaking people of Rivers State. Other tribes include: Ahoada, Elele and tribes of the East and Northern parts of Nigeria.

UNDP Statistics record a 61.3% literacy rate in River State.

UNDP Statistics 2012: Average life expectancy - 52.05%, child mortality - 74.36% per 10,000 live births. Maternal - 630 per 1000 live births.

Responses from the community: Internet Access- Poor. However some youths access the internet through their mobile phones.

- Radio – 75% of respondents confirmed they listened to radio more than watching TV due to the lack of electricity. Popular radio stations include Nigeria Info and Wazobia FM.
- TV - Popular TV channels include Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) and the Rivers State Television (RSTV)

Bodo community is defined by its 35 villages, with over 38 voting units. The community has been controlled by the People’s Democratic Party since the creation of the Local Government Area.
ECONOMIC PROFILE

Bodo is a shoreline community located in the coastal lowland of the Niger Delta in Gokona Local Government Area of Rivers State. Prior to the August 2008 Bodo oil spill, the Bodo creek served as a significant fishing source for the Gokana area of Rivers State. Bodo hosts SPDC Trans Niger Pipe-line which produces 150,000 barrels of crude per day. The community has been addled by environmental, political and infrastructural issues that have acted as a catalyst for conflicts in the community. The 2012 budget allocation to River State is ₦226,525,608,940.47, the distribution to Gokhana LGA is ₦1,997,203,348.65 at 0.88% of the State’s budget.

SOCIAL PROFILE

The traditional institution in the Bodo community comprises of His Royal Highness (Chief Sunday Felix Bebebo- the Menebon), the Labon or Deputy Royal Highness as second in line (Chief Tai Koote) and next in the hierarchy is the council of the traditional rulers, made of the 9 members from the 9 dynasties. It is worthwhile to note that while the position of the paramount ruler and Labon are permanent, those of the members and council of chiefs is a tenure based for 3 years. An individual can only return if he performed credibly in his first tenure and is chosen by his dynasty. In terms of hierarchy, the council of traditional rulers is at the peak of the community. At the lower level of the hierarchy is the council of chiefs and elders, the Community Development Committee, The Central Working Committee (CWC), the youth group and the women.

POLITICAL STAKEHOLDERS

The current executive makeup of the local government includes: Ledeem Demua (LGA Chairman), Hon Magnus Abe (Senator) and Hon. Maurice Pronen. Bodo local, Maurice Pronen, represents Gokana federal constituency at the House of Representatives. An interviewee cited Pronen as a current instigator of conflict in the community stating, he tries to ‘maintain his political relevance in view of the 2015 elections’. Currently, however, the community respondents refer to a new group seeking political weight under the auspices of the Grassroots Development Initiative (GDI). This is headed by Paul Kobani. According to interviewees, GDI is an anti-Amaechi group in the community who feel the Governor Amaechi ardently neglects the Bodo people.
SUMMARY

In 2013, 6000 barrels of oil spilt from Shell’s Trans Niger Pipeline, south of Bodo. Decades of spills have caused widespread pollution in the Bodo. September 2013 saw UK based law firm Leigh Day take SPDC to court on behalf of 15,000 Bodo citizens to negotiate compensation settlement and clean-up of the local environment. Environmental degradation continues to deprive thousands of subsistence farmers and fishermen of their livelihoods. The subsequent pollution of water sources and SPDC gas flaring result in growing health concerns in Bodo. The community are of the stance that if Shell are ‘killing us slowly, why not fight?’

Oil company presence in the community is thus a primary driver of conflict. Contracts from SPDC for cleaning up the oil spills and basic service provision are the main sources of revenue in the community and as a result have been plagued with corruption, inaction and growing tensions. Moreover, the on-going presence of the Joint Task Force in the community is an area of concern for the community and this growing resentment could escalate into tensions and even violence.

With traditional livelihoods destroyed, illegal oil refining has become a key source of revenue and job creation in the community. A reliance on large illegal sources of revenue increases the risk of actors to use violence to protect their income, especially in the absence of viable alternatives.

KEY CONFLICT DRIVERS

- **WEAK GOVERNANCE:** The community stated that poor service delivery in the areas of education; health, power and water supply were central to the tensions in the community.

- **ENVIRONMENT:** Water sources have been contaminated by the recurrent oil spills, devastating the environment and health of Bodo people. From 2008, incessant oil spills have caused environmental degradation which has destroyed traditional agriculture and aquaculture. As a result, unemployment
and relative deprivation creates incentives for criminal and illegal activities. This sustains high levels of organized violence and criminality, such as illegal oil refining.

- **COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP:** The community perceive that the leadership receive contracts from SHELL and thus benefit from the state of conflict and environmental degradation in the community.

  “Shell is worse than the Nigerian civil service with regard to contracts. Why have they taken this long to clean it up? We do not have air to breathe. They use the policy of divide and rule. They came into the community without contacting the council of chiefs or leadership. They embraced the worst set of people in the community...the corrupt people. They are all fighting to make sure those people stay behind.”

  **FISHERMAN, BODO**
“I had 6 plots of land that I used as fish farm...Sadly the oil spill destroyed everything I had. Over 15,000 fishes were all dead. When we brought them out of the pond we discovered that all their gills were filled with crude oil, I thought it was a huge joke, I fell ill and had to be admitted to the hospital.”

FISHERMAN, BODO
VIOLANCE, MILITANCY AND PEACE

The following section outlines key historical instances of violence in the community and the perception of key actors involved.

HISTORY OF CULT VIOLENCE IN BODO

“I would say there is relative peace, because four years back the community was very volatile with cult related fights. But there is peace now. The cohesiveness of the youths has helped to keep the peace”

ELDER, BODO

Five years previous to this study, Bodo community was a site of active cult violence. Leading up to the 2007 elections in Rivers State, interviewees reported an acrimonious power tussle between the two political rivals, Kenneth Kobani and Gabriel Pidomson. Community members reported the death of over 30 Bodo youths. Some of these deaths caused deep community trauma, such as casting live bodies of suspected opposition members into wells.

This bloody and deeply destabilizing conflict was resolved by using traditional and deeply cultural methods of intra-community conflict management in order to resolve the conflict. The lull in violent activities came with an oath-taking initiative by the traditional leadership of the community. Respondents asserted that members of the rival cult groups took an oath, pledging that none will be party to violence in the community. The Debam and Dewell boys took the oath under the traditional laws (Juju) with reference to the traditional deities of the Ogoni Kingdom. However, it was alleged that when Gabriel Pidomson and Kenneth Kobani, the widely known political sponsors of these groups were called upon to come for the oath taking, they chose not to partake and thus many other politicians refused to partake in the exercise. Although their foot soldiers - the cultist took the oaths. The account of cult violence testifies to the majority’s belief in Juju to peacefully resolve intra-community conflict.

A key stakeholder in the community noted that the community use traditional priests as a means of quelling violence and managing intra-community conflict -

“If there is a conflict, we engage key leaders of the faction. If the dialogue fails we use our Juju in ending such conflict. We call the god of the land. The gods of land decide. That is how the Dewell and DeGbam conflict was resolved. We congregated at the town square and came to swear juju. You cannot violate the juju. This is how the crisis with Pidomson was resolved. If you violate the law then the gods of the land do not have any excuse”

FISHERMAN, BODO

The cult conflict caused the degeneration of existing standards of living, thus instigating a set back as children were prevented from continuing their education, farmers were unable to harvest crops and thus were not able to make a living. Psychologically, the people lived in suspicion of one another depriving themselves of peaceful coexistence.


“As a person it has affected my relationship with other members of the community as there is a lot of suspicion amongst members of the community. As whatever I do is looked with suspicion. The same situation goes for the community, Bodo used to be a very peaceful place, but with the crisis, most other communities now see Bodo as a place filled with crisis. This has also affected the image of the community outside as people now associate the community with conflict.”

YOUTH, BODO

Conversely, Bodo respondents claim that due to the absence of key political figures such as Gabriel Pidomson and Kenneth Kobani in the corridors of power in Rivers State, it is difficult to attract state development projects to the community.

Bodo respondents noted that oil company activities and the resultant pollution is a key driver of social, environmental and political disputes in the community. Most recently in June 2013, a large explosion was reported at the Trans Niger Pipeline, south of Bodo. This section of the TNP normally pumps around 150,000 barrels of oil per day under high pressure to terminals at Bonny. This explosion resulted in a large fire and an oil spill of at least 6000 barrels. This further environmental devastation reinforced a growing perception that the company does not care. The community view that, in the absence of legal and traditional ways to make a living, illegal oil refining is an attractive alternative.

CONFLICT DRIVERS

SPDC AND THE ENVIRONMENT

“I had 6 plots of land that I used as fish farm where I cultivated croaker fish, catfish, tilapia, and periwinkle. Sadly the oil spill destroyed everything I had. Over 15,000 fishes were all dead. When we brought them out of the pond we discovered that all their gills were filled with crude oil, I thought it was a huge joke, I fell ill and had to be admitted to the hospital. My children’s school fees became a huge burden I couldn’t pay, I had to withdraw them from school, feeding was even a problem.”

PASTOR, BODO

COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP

The traditional leadership structure of Bodo and council of chiefs have been undermined by internal infighting over contracts from SPDC. This has resulted in a long standing dispute, with SPDC recognising a different faction of the community as the community representatives, rather than that recognised locally by the majority of the community. This has resulted in growing mistrust resentment and intermittent conflict between the different parties. The recent illness of the paramount ruler HRH-Chief Sunday Felix has further raised tensions as his son Prince John attempts to maintain control, and access to contracts, rather than follow traditional succession processes. As a result, the community is divided into two factions, which affects decision-making processes, conflict management systems and the means of engagement with stakeholders.

PERSONAL STORY:

A community member goes someway to explain an instance of non-violent action and the intervention of one faction of the community leadership.

‘There was a period when, because of spills in our community, SPDC was supposed to carry out clean up in the community in collaboration with youths of the community as partakers in the projects. The SPDC moved behind the
community and colluded with some corrupt members of the community who wanted the contracts for clean-up. ‘Angry youths protested at the SPDC site and were dispersed by the military. With the intervention of Chief Kogbara, community members protested peacefully to the D.P.O, the C.P of Police, the JTF commander, LGA chair and other stakeholders in the community. Letters were written to them asking them to intervene in the ensuing conflict between the community and the oil company.’

COMMUNITY MEMBER

MILITANCY

“Government should not want for us to be militants to train us”

YOUTH, BODO

The Bodo’s engagement with the River State Government affirms to the use of non-violent action for change. Evidence collated from a recent field trip to Bodo contradicts such statements as interviewees are in support of the violent actions of militants or ‘freedom fighters’.

80% of respondents are of the opinion that the government ‘never listened’ to the plight of the people. Of these respondents, the consensus is that the ‘freedom fighters’ brought ‘international awareness to the Delta’. A Youth member believes Goodluck Jonathan’s presidential position was an attempt to soften the violence in the South-South.

“There is no way Jonathan would have been president. The country has no regard for minority people. Jonathon’s election was direct response from the government. The federal government thought we needed to bring someone from the Niger Delta or else they would lose the oil completely. Jonathon’s presidency has brought some responsibility to the South-South People. Even in school, you learn Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo. The federal government had no respect for the minorities and South-South people.”

YOUTH, BODO

Moreover, the Amnesty Process is viewed to temporarily bring peace by enabling youths to seek alternative employment. Across many delta communities, unemployment is aligned with violence. Interviewees place values in independent economic development.

“Militancy brought the development and awareness to the South-South. The Amnesty Process brings temporary peace. It has improved the capacity of some Niger Delta Youths. Peace in the Delta relies on good elections, better governance and a loan scheme to allow people’s business to grow”

YOUTH, BODO

Interviewees stated that there were no beneficiaries of the Amnesty process in the community. Respondents aligned the lack of youths absorbed into the government’s training schemes and monthly amnesty stipend with the uptake of youths into illegal oil refining camps in Bodo.

“We have no air to breath or fish to eat. These things come together, the environment, leadership and illegal oil bunkering. Some leadership work with the security forces on the pipeline. The boys that work in the camps have been abused and dropped. They were not taken in by the Amnesty. We had over 100 youths or ‘militants’ take up arms.”

YOUTH, BODO
KEY STAKEHOLDER IN INSTIGATING AND RESOLVING VIOLENCE

Community respondents highlighted that instigators of the 2007 cult wars were two prominent local politicians Mr. Gabriel Pidomson and Kenneth Kobani. Respondents also noted the influence of Retired Justice P.B Akere, Maurice Pronen (house of representative member) and Mrs Priscilla Vikwe, former state PDP woman leader. They are believed to back certain Bodo chiefs to win elected positions, most times imposing these candidates on the community, and in doing so creating tension.

‘Maurice (Pronen) controls finances. Our deprivation is a result of his decisions’
BODO YOUTH

However, respondents noted that members of the Community Working Committee (C W C ), made up of mainly public servants and academics from the community, have played key roles in resolving violence. Members of this committee include: Professor John Alawa (Dean Faculty of Agriculture-UST), Professor Ben Nanni, Dr.Livinus Barikor (Director- Rivers State ministry of information), J.P Nally (Permanent Secretary Ministry of Culture), barrister Nabolobari (Human rights activist) and Barrister Joseph Berebor. This highlights the singular importance of local power brokers in driving and resolving conflict in communities.

90% of respondent confirmed that youths are the key stakeholder group in the community most prone to violence. Respondents argued that youth groups are most vulnerable to be used as foot soldiers for cult groups and politicians if they are not formally employed.
“MUST PEOPLE BE VIOLENT BEFORE THEY ARE HEARD?”

HEAD OF THE COUNCIL OF CHIEFS AND ELDERS
COMMUNITY ACTION

COMMUNITY MEMBERS LOBBIED LOCAL GOVERNMENT TO RECONSTRUCT AN ABANDONED WATER PROJECT

The connection between Bodo’s weak governance, poor service delivery and environmental degradation are made real in the communities’ access to water. Water sources are contaminated by the recurrent oil spills, devastating the environment and health of Bodo people. A sample study carried out by the Centre for Environmental and Human Rights Development put the water source PH level at 6.3, below the World Health Organizations standard of 6.5-9.5%.

“Must people be violent before they are heard?”
HEAD OF THE COUNCIL OF CHIEFS AND ELDERS

The Bodo community mobilised to form an advocacy committee of 12 members. The group analyzed their local government budget allocation to water sources as a basis to advocate for improved water services from the Rivers State Government.

As a result of the community led monitoring of government spending, the committee were confident in their approach of government representatives. The review of the state and local government budgets established that the Bodo community was shortchanged in the allocation of water projects across the state, in comparison to neighboring communities. Through engaging with government it was apparent that the project was stalled as a result of conflict of interest among principal government officials who wanted the contract awarded to their preferred contractors.

An understanding of the Public Procurement Act (PPA) gave the committee the supporting knowledge to demand transparency from the Ministry of Water Resources in assigning contracts for the restoration of the Bodo Water Scheme. The advocacy committee discovered that the government was in breach of the PPA and by demanding their legal rights they forced the government to appoint a contractor. As a result, a water project which was hitherto abandoned was renovated by the rivers state government.

A local health worker, noted:

“The rehabilitation and re-opening of the Bodo City water project has special importance for me. As a child, I remember going late to school because I had to wake up every morning to go in search of portable water. By the time we got there, there was already a crowd and by the time we got water, it was too late to go to school. Now I see the same thing happening to my younger ones. A lot of times my father complained he had no money for books and other things needed in the house because we were spending so much buying portable water. Two months ago I had recurrent malaria. This was eventually diagnosed as typhoid. And I know that the only way that would have come was bad water.”

WHAT CHANGED?

“We have seen how violence has affected other communities, like our neighbours Rumuekpe. Houses you built 20 years ago are burnt to the ground. People are now refugees. Violence is not a good way of bringing change”

BODO YOUTH

Despite a recent history of cult violence, interviewees ardently want to move away from violent demonstrations. The initial success of the
COMmUNITY ACTION

ter project is testimony to this.

“We went to the Ministry of water resources...initially, the Commissioner told us that Bodo was not included in the water scheme for that year, however because of our argument they were able to include Bodo in that water scheme”.

Preceding the community’s non-violent activism and their government’s response in providing a temporary water source, government funded development projects were viewed by the locals more as a ‘gift’ from the state and not their fundamental right. One of the direct benefits of this community led intervention, as reported by interviewees, was that low income earners who spent over 1,500 hundred Naira monthly just to buy water, were able to save extra monies for funding of their children’s education or paying of medical bills, which in turn, works to economically empower individuals. This linking of success to personal economic empowerment was central to respondents in Bodo.

This process has built the confidence of members of the community in their ability to cause change and bring development to their community through constructive and evidenced based dialogue with government.

This position is aptly described by a member of the advocacy committee.

“Before now the Bodo people found it hard to go to the Ministries and local government because if you do not have your person there you would find it difficult to get things done. But now we can decide and go to any ministry or office of our choice to demand for our rights just like last year when we went to ministry of health, water resources and their commissioners. Now we can go even to the President, in Abuja, to ask for what we need”

MEMBER OF BODO COMMUNITY

Results from field research connote that confidence of the community stems not from the success in the water project per say, but that for the first time members of the community came together and brought about change in their community.

WHAT ARE THE RESULTS OF COMMUNITY INTERVENTION?

The abandoned water project (formerly built by the Oil Mineral Producing Area Development Commission (OMPADEC) and later abandoned) was completed by the Rivers State government.

However, on SDN’s recent visit to Bodo, a member reported that the water project was no longer functioning. Interviewees maintain that the government had not provided adequate contracts to maintain the water facility. This linking of services to contracts will be an ongoing challenge to any interventions in the region. The initial success of the committee’s peaceful mobilisation accelerated the communities; belief in non-violent action for change. However, the case study suggests that community activism and government response were not enough to sustain improved access to water.

Community testimonials highlight the Bodo peoples continued efforts to place values in non-violent action. The initial rejuvenation of the OMPADEC water project motivated Chief Tella to focus on improving opportunities for skills for youths, this supported those moving away from the cult violence of Debam and Dewell cult groups.
On evidence based activism, Tella stated:

“I hope that the same advocacy process that achieved the rehabilitation of the water scheme will also be employed to address other needs of the community.”

CHIEF, BODO

Moving away from violent mobilisation to draw attention to community needs, respondents confirm that fact based advocacy increases the likelihood of dialogue with stakeholders.

“We realise the power of advocacy as a tool that gives the community and individuals like me a voice. I hope that the success recorded with the rehabilitation and reopening of the Bodo City water Scheme/Reservoir can be replicated in addressing the other needs faced by the community. The general hospital and health centre in the community have both been abandoned for a long time, forcing people from the community to seek medical attention at the general hospital in Bori and in Port Harcourt. I hope that the power of advocacy can be brought to bear on this need and others that face the community.”

CHIEF, BODO

“I can now walk to the local government and demand for my rights and I can also write through media”

CHIEF, BODO
When you talk about cohesion, Bodo is well organised...when we have a decision all groups are represented

Chief in Bodo Community
“I have had that knowledge now to ask or demand for what I want”
CHARITY- MEMBER OF ADVOCACY COMMITTEE

Stakeholder Democracy Network (SDN) supported a series of training programmes in advocacy and budget analysis to strengthen transparency and accountability in Bodo community, in order to enable citizens to demand for better service from the Rivers State Government.

PROCESS

• Entry and mutual understanding of core perceptions and community positions in relation to peace and development.

• Providing the tools for community-led peace building and advocacy- lectures, roundtables.

• Assessment of services and identification of community priorities - community members decide on most pressing community needs.

• Preparation for community led advocacy- sensitization rallies, posters, concerts on the issues.

• Preparation for sensitization on rights, budget allocations and advocacy trainings.

CAPACITY BUILDING

• 12 member non-violent advocacy committee were trained on appropriate approaches in demanding for service delivery from the state, local government and International oil companies through letter writing and state budget tracking.

• Basic knowledge on local government allocations, questionable government priorities versus the real needs of communities and budget tracking skills.

• According to interviewee, residents expanded their knowledge base on issues relating to socio-political and economic rights and have learnt how to identify, prioritize and seek solutions to problems and needs via rights based advocacy.

“We never had a community development plan till the training we had from STAND, the Bodo people have developed and their capacity has been built....We have a letter that was sent to the LGA and we got a feedback from them, all these are because of the training we had”
FORMER BODO YOUTH COUNCIL SECRETARY

CONFIDENCE AND ATTITUDE

• Increased confidence to demanding for their rights from the appropriate stakeholders.

COMMUNITY COHESION AND INCLUSIVENESS

With support from STAND, members of the chief’s council, the CDC, youth and women mobilised. Although there has been modest improvement in terms of women participation in decision-making, the woman leader is now part of the Council of Chiefs. Bodo community is still largely dominated by the opinions of the men in power. Field work confirmed the formalised yet minimal representation of women in the Community Development Committee (CDC)

“We can now see all the stakeholders, the chiefs, youths, and women, coming
together to discuss important needs in the community. Gender cohesion has been built.”

MEMBER OF BODO COMMUNITY

“When you talk about cohesion, Bodo is well organised. We have the chiefs; the paramount ruler, the council chiefs, the CDC, the youths and when we have a decision all groups are represented”

CHIEF IN BODO COMMUNITY

Prior to the advocacy committee’s training in budget analysis, leaders in the community felt that they lacked the necessary knowledge of how to engage in evidence-based dialogue with the government on their right to clean water. Field research indicated a clear departure in Bodo people’s perception regarding their ability to make a difference in their community by confidently demanding for their rights from the appropriate stakeholders.

“There used to be disparity in gender irrespective of how organise we are. Some time ago we had a town hall meeting in Saint Pius college and because of the training we had so far, the chiefs and organisers of the programme went to every club that was invited to make sure they all participated in the event and contributed to the development of Bodo city.”

FORMER SECRETARY OF BODO YOUTH COUNCIL

“The community is passive. They do not react violently. They grumble. The people are adjusted to corruption. No matter what they do, those leaders are still in charge. Security is watching. They do not act out violently.”

YOUTH LEADER

CHALLENGES

• Lack of community ownership.

• The advocacy committee has embarked on only a couple of advocacy pursuits in the years following the end of the STAND project. What has been sustained, however, is the awareness and knowledge base of the residents of Bodo with respect to their socio-political rights.

• Community is separated into two conflicting factions; the current leadership conflict and environmental conflict going on in the community has caused real tensions in the community, as such the advocacy committees earlier set up have not yielded much in terms of trying to broker any peace between parties in the conflict.

HOW DID THIS PROCESS REDUCE THE THREAT OF VIOLENCE?

“We don’t have to fight to be in charge of the community. You do not have to fight to change things.”

YOUTH

• The key stakeholders interviewed confirm that they believed that there was still a focus on non-violence rather than violence in order to resolve the ongoing conflict in Bodo. In view of the oil spills, respondents noted that, unlike before, the community would have applied force to compel SPDC to clean-up the community, they now are engaged in a process of mediation and litigation.

“I know to write to the appropriate quarters. The first time I wrote to Shell I did not get a response. But the last one I wrote after my training, the CLO of SHELL SPDC replied that they have acknowledged my write-up”

PASTOR, BODO COMMUNITY
KEY LESSONS AND NEXT STEPS: RIPE FOR REPLICABILITY

Relevant to Bodo, however applicable Delta wide, a media intervention in Bodo community would look to address on-going environmental and economic grievances in the community. Interviews prioritised that, in order for a media campaign to catalyse positive change, the following issues would be central to the intervention:

• **Residents lack adequate health care:** Community members place importance in the renovation of Bodo health centre, with adequate staffing and the provision of free drugs.

• **Lack of affordable access to water** means residents drink form contaminated water sources. The renovation and maintenance of the existing water project.

• **Vocational training for the Bodo youths:** Currently cult groups and illegal oil refining camps absorb Bodo’s man power.

• **Mediation process:** Leigh day law firm are currently negotiating the compensation and clean-up of the 2008 oil spill. The restoration of the environment is necessary for the social and economic development on the community.

LESSONS DRAWN FROM THE INTERVENTION PROCESS

Strategic lessons can be drawn from the manner in which the social grievances in Bodo have been addressed. Key issues noted below could inform subsequent interventions in the community.

• **The community is still in a state of trauma:** Following the conflict between the Debam and Dewell cult groups. This affects community mobilization and cohesiveness as families have preconceived notions of youth groups. However, a third party initiated reconciliation process was not suggested by community.

• **The community is not united.** The leadership conflict between the council of traditional rule and Prince John’s faction affects equal community participation internally and in third party interventions.

• **The restored water project was not maintained.** As a result, the community still has poor access to clean drinking water. This testifies that community activism and government engagement can be insufficient to bring about sustained positive change.

“**We tried to mobilise against Shell. We are tired**

FISHERMAN, BODO

“There was a lot of bad blood in the community. We could not co-operate as our children had killed other’s children.”

MOTHER, BODO

“When we have resumed the leadership of community, what we need is an alternative means of livelihood for the people worst affected by the spill. The people want to be self-reliant. We want skills acquisition.”

HEAD OF THE COUNCIL OF CHIEFS & ELDRERS
“THEY COME, O, THEY COME FIRE ON US. THE BOYS, WE NO CARRY GUN. WE PUT DOWN OUR TOOLS FOR AMNESTY. BUT GOVERNMENT COME FIRE ON US IN OUR HOME. WHAT TING WE GO TALK NOW?”

FORMER MILITANT
The approximate population of Okrika waterfront is between 15,000 and 20,000.

Okrika waterfront, a separate entity to Okrika Island, has three major ‘polos’ or districts; Darick polo, Warika polo and Aminatari polo. The smallest polo has approximately 320 buildings with an average family of 5.

480,000 of Port Harcourt’s population live in 49 waterfront communities. There is currently no reliable demographic data on Okrika Waterfront. A participatory mapping with residents would provide a truer reflection of the community make-up. Moreover, the names of areas and polos are to some degree contested and reflect an underlying ethnic tension in the community.

For residents, occupations in the low income bracket earn very little disposable income beyond day-to-day necessity. Such services include: ‘beauty services’, tailoring repairs and small scale fishermen. Respondents note that young men in the community would be involved in casual labour and construction. The low to medium income bracket includes skilled traders; owners of small businesses; and small landlords or property owners. Senior civil servants and large landlords would be in the medium to high earning bracket.

Okrika waterfront is the result of a federal government sand fill project. As such, it could be classed as an ‘informal settlement’. Although the waterside communities are home to 480,000 people, they are yet to be included on a formal map of the city.

Many residents have access to DSTV, often through informally shared connections. Young people access internet through their phones. Residents use radio handsets to access news. Popular radio stations are: ‘Wazobia’, ‘Family Love’ and ‘Rhythms’ radio stations.

Port Harcourt City is People’s Democratic Party affiliated. River State is led by R. Amaechi Local Government Chairman. Respondents perceive the internal PDP tensions between Amaechi and President Goodluck Jonathan to disrupt the dynamic
between River State and the Federal body. Moreover, interviewees in the community perceive Amaechi’s forced evictions are based on an ‘ethnic’ agenda to remove Okikan peoples from an Ikwerre dominated PHC. The communities questions whether the violence demolitions are centered on political hostility or tribal hatred. The local government chairman X.

**ECONOMIC PROFILE**

Lying on the river banks of greater Port Harcourt, the ‘mother’ city became the operational base for multinational petro-businesses post 1950. The oil boom led to a rapid influx of migrants in search of job opportunities.

Reliable data on Okrika Waterfront’s economy is limited due to the current perception that the waterside communities are informal ‘townships’. However interviewees depicted that, much like the varied districts of Port Harcourt, the waterfront houses civil servants, academics, fishermen, fisherwomen and construction workers.

UN Habitat’s 2009 assessment of Port Harcourt stated that the growth in the number of waterfront and waterside dwellers is due to the lack of affordable housing. ‘Faced with the high cost of inner-city rentals and urban shelter deficits in Port Harcourt for many households, especially rural migrants, the only access to affordable housing was through reclamation of swamps along the many waterfronts and subsequent self-help housing construction.’

Relative deprivation of Okikan, in relation to Port Harcourt City, is manifest in the local’s economic exclusion from the housing market. The communities reclaimed the sand filed river-sides; now PHC’s densely populated Okrika Waterfront.
Exclusion from the housing market arguably extends to exclusion from the formal job market. Although those interviewed define themselves as construction works and civil servants, many inhabitants depend on income-generating activities in the informal sector. From Amaechi’s view, the uncontrolled growth of Okrika Waterfront and influx of migrant labours to the city, means the city cannot absorb the numbers needing: health care, piped water, sewer lines, roads and street lights.

The Budgetary allocation for Okrika, EMOHUA LGA is ₦2,129,693,980.31

SOCIAL PROFILE

‘Community’ is central to Okrikan’s social development. Interviewees proclaim that their relationship to the land is tangible in their investment in their homes. ‘As communities gain wealth they reinvest in their housing and neighbourhoods’.

With a former economy reliant on aquaculture, residents align a ‘cultural bond’ with water. The river silt extends the shorelines of Okrika waterfront and is the foundation of family homes. Chicoco mud, collected from the mangrove swamps in the creeks, is dug up and taken by boat back to waterfront neighbourhoods. The Chicoco is laid to create an extended shoreline upon which residents build homes, usually in concrete block. Respondents noted an average household of five persons.

Moreover, water sanitation affects the social mechanics of the community and health of the household.

One set of eight public toilets service the community. The toilets are not maintained. Okrika waterfront is deprived of affordable, accessible and acceptable facilities. Irrespective of this, respondents note that children swim in the creek despite most of the locals waste discharging directly into the water. The Human City Project team confirm, ‘This is the biggest challenge facing this self-built neighbourhood and contributes to the negative perception of waterfront communities.’

“We dump our waste in water, where else can we put it?”
George, Okrika Waterfront
Poor urban governance drives conflict in Okrika Waterfront. The forced evictions and demolitions of 2009 aggressively disrupted the community. Waterfront wide, the perception was that large scale demolitions and displacement has the potential to spark an “urbanisation” of militancy.

Following the Presidential Amnesty Programme, demobilised militants returned to urban centres. Sources note that, ‘having surrendered their weapons, former political rebels returned to the waterfront communities to find them at risk of forced eviction’. After the initial demolitions of Njemanze, Okrika waterfront felt there was risk of violent mobilisation due to the number of ineffectively integrated former militants with easy access to arms in the region.

Interviewees felt Amaechi’s initial strategic push behind the demolition programme was ethnic. Okrikan’s perceive the planned waterfront demolitions by the RSG as an attempt to remove the residents from the predominantly Ikwerre ‘uplands’ of Port Harcourt. The continuation of demolitions could further ‘spark’ an escalation of ethnic tensions.

Conflict, symptomatic of political marginalisation and diminished developmental opportunity, is intensified by cult clashes between the Greenlanders and Icelanders in Okrika Waterfront. Arguably proxy political battles for territory, sources state that cult violence is often deployed by political actors as a pretext for ‘security response’.

It is implied that cult groups use the waterfront as a space to play out their battles. The waterfront acts as a route or thoroughfare for militant groups in the area.

‘Majority of militants come by boats and exit by boats, so the waterfront is a route for militants. Militants do not have camps in Okrika waterfront.’

RESIDENT OF OKRIKA

Confronted with poor urban governance and volatile cult groups that are able to operate in the area, the community see the necessity to empower residents.
SUMMARY

KEY CONFLICT DRIVERS

- **POOR URBAN GOVERNANCE**: Forced evictions and demolitions carried out in 2009 have already displaced 19,000 people and resulted in the shooting of tens of people by security forces. The threat of large-scale demolition and displacement has the potential to provoke violent opposition in a region marked by insurgency and to immediately produce a huge internally displaced population. No plans exist to compensate or resettle residents. Given that 79% of Nigeria’s urban population live in informal settlements, mass demolition - legal or otherwise - is unfeasible.

“Development of the whole waterfront area is desired, in a carefully planned way. Development creates opportunities. The sensitive relocation of some homes is acceptable if important infrastructure is required that will benefit the wider community.”

WATERFRONT COMMUNITY ELDERS


VIOLENCE, MILITANCY AND PEACE

The following section outlines key historical instances of violence in the community and the perception of key actors involved.

**KEY HISTORICAL INSTANCES OF VIOLENCE IN OKRIKA WATERFRONT**

“In August 2009, Njemaneze, one of the waterfront settlements in Port Harcourt, was demolished as part of the state’s so-called urban renewal programme for the city. An estimated 17,000 people were forcibly evicted from their homes. Thousands of people, including children, women and the elderly were left homeless and vulnerable to other human rights violations. They have not received any adequate alternative housing.

A few months later, in October 2009, the Port Harcourt security forces opened fire on a crowd of people peacefully protesting against the proposed demolition of their homes in Bundu community. At least 12 people were shot and seriously injured. To date there has been no investigation of the incident.

Residents from different waterfronts have been mobilizing to prevent further forced evictions and to demand justice for the human rights violations they have faced. A number of local and national organizations are supporting the residents in claiming their rights.”

**AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL/ CMAP FORCED EVICTIONS AND RIGHT TO ADEQUATE HOUSING CAMPAIGN**

**PERCEPTIONS OF MILITANCY IN OKRIKA WATERFRONT:**

‘Taking away their arms will not take away their agenda.’

**STUDENT, OKRIKA WATERFRONT**

Internal conflict management systems in Okrika Waterfront operate unilaterally from the River State Government. Residents surveyed support that the intra-community justice systems operate under traditional leadership structures and is separate from the police systems, to the extent that community members receive a fine if they invite a police presence into the community.

‘There is a leadership structure. We do not want any government official in our community. Our leaders are active.’

**MALE, OKRIKA WATERFRONT**

Although the ‘active’ leadership in Okrika Waterfront favour discussion to resolve disagreement, our interviewees maintain that violence has enabled political attention to be refocussed toward the waterfront, which in turn affects change. The 2005-2008 period of militant action in River State is testament to this.

Interviewees see change as the product of a constant conflict between government misallocation of services and the frustration of the people. The Islamic group Boko Haram are sighted as the North’s response to the 2008 militant movement in the Delta. The comparison between the ‘rebel’ movements are seen as ‘partially’ positive as they bring attention to the hardship of people in the North and South.

‘When the militancy was happening, people from the North and West should have supported the agitation. It is the same as the Boko Haram, we need to unite as nation and support each other. It needs to be collective idea- of feeling the same pains as other Nigerians.’

**MALE, OKRIKA WATERFRONT**

Some community respondents view the action of ‘rebel groups’ or ‘freedom fighters’ as necessary to highlight the government’s inadequacies. In this
way, rebel as are seen 'illegitimate' spokes people for politically marginalised and disenfranchised communities.

'I am not saying taking people's lives is the best. But Boko haram have done good to us. We need instances of conflict like this in the North to show our government that the security is very weak. Our government now knows they needs to build a better security network'

MALE, OKRIKA WATERFORNT

The Amnesty Process; the current 'security' measure to prevent recurrences of militancy in the Delta, benefitted a small number of Okrika Waterfront youths. Residents surveyed referred to one prominent youth who now studies India. Residents view the Amnesty Process as unsustainable. The general perception is that militants continue to engage in illegal activity and the Amnesty Process stipend takes focus away from those attempting to co-operate within the state's legal channels to education and employment. On the continuation of the cash for guns scheme, a respondent noted:

'We will face more challenges like this. They will be paying people monthly for years; money for militants; money for Boko haram. Other people are waiting; waiting non-violently; waiting for jobs. But hand outs go to those that commit crimes. For those submitting university applications, the day they start taking up arms, they will receive money.'

MALE, OKRIKA WATERFORNT

It was further argued that the Amnesty Process has further brought increased instances of small scale crime to Okrika Waterfront.

'When militancy was on, there was no armed robbery in Okrika. After the Amnesty and Militancy, we see robbery cases everywhere'

During 2008, the waterfront areas arguably saw less instance of petty theft as youths were absorbed by active militant. It is implied that now unemployed, pacified youths engage in small scale thievery for commercial purposes as they are unable to partake in the formal job sector.

KEY STAKEHOLDERS IN INSTIGATING AND RESOLVING CONFLICT:

At the state level, River State Governor Amaechi is viewed as a 'passive' instigator of violence due to the forced evictions, demolitions and shootings of water front residents associated with his destructive urban development initiative.

"When I am coming, mobile men will be there with their guns, police men will be there with their guns; Army will bring their own; Aire force will bring their own; Navy will bring their own for me to go and take my land back.”

GOVERNOR AMAECHI

Cult violence leaders further drive conflict in the area. Okrika Waterfront has experienced a resurgence of armed groups, the Green Landers and Ice Landers, in the community. Icelanders trace their leadership to Comrade Ateke Tom of the Niger Delta Vigilante and the deceased Soboma George. The Greenlanders owe their leadership traits to deceased Sunny Opuaembe, leader of the Bush boys of Okirika. Youths are viewed as the most volatile community groups. Likely to be rapt in cult clashes, research states that youths are most vulnerable to be absorbed by informal 'security contracts' by corrupt politicians.

The community view intervening third parties such as Amnesty International and Collaborative Media Advocacy Platform (CMAP) as ‘initiators and pushers’ of peace.
COMMUNITY ACTION

COMMUNITY LED GROUP,
CONCERNED CITIZENS
ADVOCATE FOR BETTER URBAN
GOVERNANCE

Concerned Citizen’s Network engaged in strategic, fact-based conversations to stop forced evictions and re-house displaced peoples. The community enforced court injunction temporarily immobilised Amaechi’s bulldozers in Okrika Waterfront. However, the demolitions continued. 20,000 people lost their homes and businesses when neighbouring community, Abonnema wharf was demolished in June 2012.

WHAT HAPPENED IN THE COMMUNITY?

Founded in response to the threat of slum demolitions, the Okrika waterfront community mobilized to form the group, the Concerned Citizens. Concerned Citizen’s works to raise awareness of citizen’s right to housing in River State.

On 30 July 2009, community leaders from Okrika waterfront filed a suit in the Federal High Court seeking ‘an order of perpetual injunction’ on the Rivers State government (RSG), in an attempt to prevent the further demolition of the waterfront settlements. On 14 August, the case was adjourned to 13 October 2009, and the court advised all parties to ‘maintain status quo ante’. The Rivers State government ignored Federal High Court orders and on 28 August 2009, Njemanze waterfront was demolished. It is estimated that between 13,800 and 19,000 people were forcibly evicted from their homes.

Concerned Citizens continue to engage in non-violent activism in order to raise awareness concerning the plight of the ‘sidelined’ water ‘siders’. Through cultural activism, community mobilisation and awareness raising programmes, the group works with Okrika and their partners in civil society to advocate for democratic and sustainable development.

Okrikan leaders of Concerned Citizens supported community demonstrations and public events such as World Habitat Day and Njemanze Remembrance Day.

“More than 1,000 people from different waterfronts moved to the street [during world habitat day, 2011]. I have never seen so many people taking to the street in my whole life. This is all because of the awareness of the people.”

RESIDENT, OKRIKA WATERFRONT

Concerned Citizens demonstrates the communities’ capacity to effectively mobilise multiple waterfront networks around strategic ‘development not demolition’ messages. As such, CC proves that non-violent action can be effective at improving community-to-government relations and strengthening the social contract for at-risk residents of the waterfronts.

‘Forced Evictions tried to reduce violence as they targeted the areas as criminal areas. Our campaign tries to make people understand that although we are densely populated, we live here, families live here.’

CONCERNED CITIZENS MEMBER

WHAT CHANGED?

“Initially I was on the other side thinking we cannot fight government. But now I’m aware we have rights.”

A RESIDENT OF URALA WATERFRONT

Increasingly, the people of Okrika Waterfront perceive dialogue as the appropriate means to engage key stakeholders on communities’ housing
COMMUNITY ACTION

rights. Peaceful demonstrations and community participation in Njemanze Remembrance day signified a change in tact.

“It has affected the way people think; now people feel more confident to ask the government to take action.”

CIVIL SERVANT, OKRIKA WATERFRONT

Community respondents now place values in strategic and informed mobilisation against the government, as opposed to “emotive and visceral” action. Away from violent action, interviewees favoured alternative channels of protest to protect their rights, in response to the government’s threats of eviction.

Moreover, Concerned Citizen’s engagement with local CSOs demonstrates an increased willingness to partner and participate with civil society. Comparable to a former disinclination to work with external actors, the CSO presence in Okrika is a further indication of the shift in community reaction to non-violence for change.3

Notably, there is a change in levels of community activism. Since Okrika Waterfront’s Concerned Citizen’s partnership with CMAP, Waterfront resident’s ability to oppose forced evictions through fact based arguments has strengthened. However the scope of this confidence needs to be broadened to encompass the whole community.

Despite the communities’ effort toward peaceful protest and advocacy visits to the RSG, Okrika waterfront continues to be viewed as a criminal slum. Respondents noted that Port Harcourt citizen’s negative perceptions of the waterfronts endures:

“General perception about the waterfronts hasn’t changed much. There are people who sympathize [with] us, they are our brothers. There are also who think they are happy to get rid of criminals by getting rid of us.”

OKRIKA COMMUNITY MEMBER

WHAT ARE THE RESULTS OF COMMUNITY ACTION?

As a response to the Concerned Citizens led community mobilisation and the subsequent local and national awareness of housing rights, the language of Amaechi’s ‘development’ has changed. There has been a marked shift in policy posture away from demolitions, toward the guised “urban renewal”.

“If the evictions had continued in Okrika Waterfront, crime, and theft would increase. You need to struggle to earn a living to rent a new place. There are no jobs. What do these boys do?”

YOUTH, OKRIKA

The outcome of Concerned Citizen’s court hearing attempted to stunt Amaechi’s “urban renewal” scheme. The adherence to appropriate streams of conflict management, i.e the courts, improved citizen wide perceptions of non-violent activism in order to promote better urban policies for slums.

In partnership with local CSOs, the community received increased media attention from local media channels wanting to document the social action. Increased visibility further worked to spread Okrika community’s informed and strategic position on evictions and their status as a group who are aware of the abuse of their human rights.

“...What you’re doing is creating awareness...that is basically what you’ve done...People are concerned, people are watching. It also keeps us on our toes as a government...certainly...That is the impact it is having...When we hear what you’re doing then we say oh...there is a watchdog...kind of...that keeps us on our toes...”

GOVERNMENT REPRESENTATIVE

The Government tenet that ‘we hear what you’re doing’ supports the Waterfronts armament to
form Chicoco Radio. In 2010, volunteers in the waterfront constructed the ‘media shed’. Built from local material, the ‘Shed’ functions as town hall for the community, whilst hosting media and radio trainings for citizens. Chicoco Radio Station upholds the dictum that informed citizen need to speak up about their human rights. Supported by CMAP’s Human City Project, Concerned Citizens backs the development of the community, owned, governed and operated enterprise, Chicoco Radio.

“Many voices make a city, and this is our rhythm, our right, our voice.”

CHICOCO STUDENT

Moreover, some respondents claim that increased media visibility also worked to improve inhabitant’s relationship with police. As Amnesty International reported: “the police escorted the demonstrators during the World Habitat Day 2011 event in complete contrast to previous years when they used to shoot and harass them”. 4

However, in light of community activism, the waterfronts have seen limited change in the government’s attitude or institutional policy and position regarding the waterfronts. As such, communities like Abonnema Wharf, continue to be demolished in response to the RSG claim that the slums harbour cult violence.
PROCESS: INTERVENTION ENGAGEMENT

“...Ownership is not with Amnesty, the ownership of the project is with the communities themselves. It’s with the people...”

- AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL STAFF

ENTRY PROCESS

Collaborative Media Advocacy Platform (CMAP) works in the urban communities of Port Harcourt with residents whose rights are routinely violated by violent and corrupt security forces in the Niger Delta. CMAP shares media skills and technologies to encourage their local partners in the waterfronts to use video and radio to record and respond to violations.

CAPACITY BUILDING

In order to provide staff capacity for the community led radio station Chicoco Radio, CMAP facilitated trainings and workshops targeting residents, existing Concerned Citizens group and local activists.

35 waterfront residents with transferable skills in sound engineering, field recording, studio operation, news gathering and human rights journalism have completed basic radio technical training, human rights journalism training and online/social media journalism training.

The construction of the Media Shed facility required the recruitment and training of a community construction team. Informed community members with transferable skills in media are less likely to engage in violent behaviour as their focus is on formal employment and personal/community improvements.

CONFIDENCE AND ATTITUDE

Respondents are progressively able to recognise and express forced evictions as human rights violations. The improved level of confidence is reflected in enhanced participation in campaign events.

CMAP’s People Live Here Campaign marked the national and international community's attitudinal and behavioural change toward residents in the waterfronts. The cross cutting media campaign improved resident’s confidence as they felt they were part of a global community.

Just to know the fact that thousands of people from other parts of the world had signed a petition against forced evictions in Port Harcourt raises our confidence and motivates us to engage in the campaign.

Resident of Okrika Waterfront.

COMMUNITY COHESION AND INCLUSIVENESS

Concerned Citizens is an Okrikan led network that extends across PHC waterside communities. The demolitions and subsequent community action brought the communities together.

“It encourages me to fight for my place. To build a better place for better relationships with all ethnic groups. The Evictions brought us together. We asked other ethnic groups and other watersides to join our cause.”

YOUTH, OKRIKA WATERFRONT

Cinema screenings in the waterfront further worked to mark community cohesion. 1000 waterfront residents attended screenings at the Media Shed, at which urgent urban development and tenure security issues are discussed and the project’s responses to them are shared and critically considered.
COMMUNITY ORGANISATION AND COOPERATION

Emergent radio and media centre, Chicoco radio is a community-built waterfront radio station and media facility which aims to empowers residents to articulate their needs to authorities; develops and demonstrates local capacity; and fosters political will to transform policy. Chicoco radio is a sustainable community-owned, governed and operated radio station that serves the city. The community view the centre as a catalyst for community-led initiatives allowing people to directly improve their neighbourhoods.

Concerned Citizens and Chicoco Students co-operate with CMAP and local CSOs to research human rights abuse that worst affect their community. CMAP state that 50% of station programming addresses residents' priority issues, including those related to tenure security. CMAP further implement:

“You Are Here” A participatory Mapping project to collect spatial and demographic data to help inform future development plans, and literally put the waterfronts on the map.

“The People’s Plan” The drawing up of a policy framework for an inclusive planning process, increasing security and investment in slum upgrading and providing more sustainable development options for the city.5

MOBILISATION, PARTICIPATION AND INFLUENCE

Community participation in, and Concerned Citizen’s leadership of, CMAP and Amnesty International events in Okrika Waterfront exhibits the progressive ownership of the ‘Housing is a Human Right’ Campaign. Demonstrations, such as World Habitat Day and Njemanze Remembrance Day, provide an opportunity for community members to partake as activists and logisticians, representing their community.

RESPONSE OR ITS LACK

In response to Concerned Citizen’s led injunction to stop the demolitions in Okrika, there were no further recorded demolitions of Okrika Waterfront. The construction of the CMAP Media centre, steered by President of Concerned Citizens Marcos Irinmaka, is a semi-permanent structure that’s presence resists Amaechi’s demolition strategy. Irinmaka speaks for the community when he states, “Nobody is against development”. Architect, Jeff Forbes, furthers supports Irnmaka:

“The act of building a project like this is good for the community - people didn’t believe such a project could happen here. The quality of construction means that the government won’t knock it down.”

Community’s self-reported levels of confidence in their capacity to articulate their needs to government. As expressed by surveyed waterfront residents, the use of ‘cameras’ not ‘guns’, suggest a steer away from violent action.

Concerned Citizens advocacy visits, as well as their support of the CMAP radio and media training, validates to the community, the benefit of using dialogue and documentation as tools for change. Interviewees see Chicoco radio as a gesture toward empowerment and employment as opposed to violent mobilisation against RSG’s weak urban governance policies.

HOW DID THIS PROCESS REDUCE THE THREAT OF VIOLENCE?

“How did this process reduce the threat of violence?

“What a difference this could have made. All those youths who went on the outside to militancy, if instead of picking up a gun they could have used a camera... what a difference.”

COMMUNITY ACTIVIST

http://cargocollective.com/jeffforbes/The-Human-City-Project-Nigeria

5 CMAP
6 Ibid
'The people do not like to start with violence because they have a long history with crisis. We are cautious of doing things violently. If there was a conflict over land dispute, the community leaders talk. Dialogue is the main strength of most of these waterfronts.'

Demolitions imposed the threat of an urban militancy in PHC. However, surveyed residents said that the visibility and awareness the CMAP campaign has increased people’s feelings of security and attachment to their homestead. Stability of one’s environment arguably empowers politically marginalised peoples.

Cult violence, as substitute political clashes for land ownership, continue to affect community.
“The act of building a project like this is good for the community - people didn’t believe such a project could happen here. The quality of construction means that the government won’t knock it down.”

JEFF FORBES
Forced evictions threaten residents in informal settlements across Nigeria. In August 2013, close to 9,000 residents of Badia East, Lagos lost their homes and livelihoods. However, senior officials in the Lagos state government had claimed that the area was a rubbish dump.

A media and advocacy campaign needs to address what is the most effective ways of engaging local and central government authorities opposed to informal settlements, and ensuring they become more accountable to slum dwellers in the long-term. Interviewees prioritised that, in order for a media campaign to catalyse positive change, the following issues would be central to the intervention:

- **Slum Upgrading**
- **Improved Access to Water and Sanitation**
- **Employment for Okrika Youths**
- **Policy Framework to Support Tenure Security of Residents in Okrika Waterfronts**
- **Comprehensive Mapping of Okrika and PHC Waterfront**
- **Sustained Support to Chicoco Radio**

**Lessons drawn from the intervention process**

Strategic lessons can be drawn from the manner in which the social grievances in Okrika have been addressed. Key issues noted below could inform subsequent response in the Delta.

- **Community Mobilisation**: It is important to ensure that mechanisms for community mobilization promote community capacity for self-mobilization rather than create dependency on partners.

- **Engaging with the Government**: In order to influence government, it is important to shift away from a one-off and reactive engagement to a more sustained and proactive approach.

- **Strategic Partnerships**: Partnership with organizations that have a better understanding of the community is crucial in ensuring and enhancing the active participation of the community.
“Violence does not really bring about any positive change in any place.”
Rumuekpe shares boundaries with Rundele Community in the East, Ahoada communities in the West and South, and Elele-Alimini in the North. Rumuekpe is surrounded with mangrove forests and experiences heavy rainfall.

The community members are of the Ikwerre Ethnic Nationality and speak Ikwerre, a distinct language similar to that of the Igbos.

The national average of 61.3% literacy level may not be applicable to this community because most of the women seem illiterate.

52.05 years. Data from the 2012 UNDP indicate that the Infant Mortality Rate is 74.36 deaths per 1,000 live births. The Neonatal Mortality Rate is 40 per 1,000 births. Thus, almost half of childhood deaths occurred during infancy. It is an indictment on the level of decay in the health system from the Federal to the community level.

Respondents interviewed suggest that because of the lack of electricity in the community, they have no access to television and are only opportune to use their battery-powered radios to listen to Nigeria Info 92.3 FM and WAZOBIA FM.

The community is predominantly aligned to the Peoples’ Democratic Party PDP. Its Representative at the council ward level is a PDP member Honorable Gaius Ajuru (Rumuekpe Councilor Ward 8). Also the women leader for the community Victoria Godspower is a PDP ward leader in her community. Hon. Chidi Lloyd – PDP Leader Rivers State House of Assembly (Representing Emohua Constituency). At the Federal level Hon Andrew Uchendu representing Ikwerre/Emohua constituency while Senator Wilson Ake represents Rivers West Senatorial District at the senate (they are all PDP members).
COMMUNITY PROFILE

ECONOMIC PROFILE

Subsistent farming in cassava, yam, vegetable and fruits continued to thrive despite the incursion of oil companies into the farmlands. Agricultural produce is sold at the nearby Elele, Ahoada and even up to Mbiama market in Bayelsa State.

Rumuekpe hosts the biggest manifold of Shell Petroleum Development Company’s Eastern Division, with a flow station processing 10,000 -15,000 barrels of oil per day (Chigbo, 2011 in Wilson:2013). According to Chigbo’s report, Rumuekpe community hosts criss-crossing oil and gas pipelines that produce an approximate value equal to 100,000 barrels of oil per day.

Oil and Gas companies operating in Rumuekpe include AGIP, Niger Delta Petroleum Resources, Shell Petroleum Development Company and Total ELF. Apart from the oil installations, the community’s terrain is farmland, forest and swamps. The most visible effects of oils extraction are the oils spills which date back to the 1990’s and Shell’s Gas Flare.

The 2012 River State allocation is ₦226,525,608,940.47 The 2012 Budgetary allocation to Rumuekpe, Emohua LGA is ₦1,987,181,818.51.

SOCIAL PROFILE

Rumuekpe clan consists of 8 communities; Ovelle Nvakohia, Imogu, Ekwutche, Omagwa, Ovelle Oduoha, Mgbuodo, Mgbuhie and Omoviri. The political structure of Rumuekpe is segmented into smaller units of family heads in each village. Eight chiefs and 16 opinion leaders operate in eight communities.

Prior to the conflict in 2005 there was a youth group that was responsible for development challenges and engagement with oil companies. As at the time of this report, the youth group had been disbanded following the order by the Justice Kayode Esho led Peace and Reconciliation Commission.
SUMMARY

The 2005 – 2008 Rumuekpe Crisis was caused by a multi-layered struggle over land, power and access to rents from the oil production. It resulted in the displacement of approximately 18,000 and the death of over a hundred people. The intra-community violence severely damaged the social infrastructure of Rumuekpe community.

KEY CONFLICT DRIVERS

- **OIL COMPANY PRESENCE IN THE COMMUNITY:** the 2005 – 2008 conflict in Rumuekpe was caused by a struggle over power and resources being allocated by SPDC to a community that is severely underdeveloped.

- **CORRUPTION:** Shell’s divide and rule corporate practices deepened deprivation of some landowners and spawned a culture of corruption which left the community destroyed and thousands of inhabitants displaced.

- **LOSS OF LIVELIHOOD:** the violence has left the community members with very little sources of livelihood. The over dependence on oil and oil related contracts has left the community members disenfranchised.

- **WEAK GOVERNANCE AND POOR SERVICE DELIVERY:** the government and other stakeholders have failed in their responsibility to provide basic amenities to its citizens in Rumuekpe. The lack of facilities perpetuates the communities’ deprivation and political marginalization.

- **SOCIAL DISINTEGRATION:** Rumuekpe has experienced a fracturing of traditional society hierarchy. Disengaged youth become increasingly restless and challenge traditional power structures. Social values are replaced by scramble for meagre hand-outs by politicians who manipulate the youths to act violently.

“The violent conflict came as a result of a leadership tussle between two members of the youth federation. A second factor is environmental conflict which was caused by the IOC especially SPDC coupled with its divisive policies. All these factors were exacerbated by the clamor of few members of the community for the profits from the oil resources we had in Rumuekpe.”

MALE, RUMUEKPE
VIOLENCE, MILITANCY AND PEACE

The following section outlines key historical instances of violence in the community and the perception of key actors involved.

KEY HISTORICAL INSTANCES OF VIOLENCE IN RUMUEKPE

“... Conflict can be handled when it occurs and without the involvement of truth, mercy, justice and peace, conflict resolution cannot be successful in any community”

CHIEF

The 2005 – 2008 conflict in Rumuekpe was caused by a leadership struggle over power and resources. Community respondents state that Shell distributed ‘community development’ funds and contracts via Friday Edu, a youth leader and Shell Community Liason Officer (CLO). The isolated and exclusive arrangement via Edu intensified the risk of unilateral mismanagement of resources. By 2005, Friday Edu’s monopoly over SPDC’s resources and perceived inaction as a community leader sparked a leadership struggle with another youth called, SK Agala.

Agala and Edu’s respective armed gangs waged war over access to oil contracts and payments. SPDC allegedly distributed contracts to whichever gang controlled access to its infrastructure. The residents surveyed accuse SPDC of funding the Edu and Agala factions who later purchased ammunition to oust their rivals, thereby fuelling the crisis.

Thousands of inhabitants fled Rumuekpe due to the continuing violence. Housing and school structures were destroyed. Community members have reconstructed shelters from tarpaulin and corrugated iron. Field research documented continuing malnutrition, poverty and homelessness.

Interviewees depict that, even after the local war, the state and local government have not attempted to provide infrastructural support for community members.

At the time of this study, the community was still in the process of healing. Respondents reported a lack of healthcare facilities, schools, electricity and water amenities. Community members suffer from deprivation and political marginalisation. Despite this, the community collectively embraced non-violent actions to resolve conflicts and demand for the provision of basic services.

Rumuekpe is traumatised by on-going violence. However, research marked a significant change in the communities’ view of violence as a means to improve government and IOC policy. A beneficiary of the presidential amnesty Committee noted that “Violence does not really bring about any positive change in any place”.

PERCEPTIONS OF MILITANCY IN RUMUEKPE

Although community members collectively agree that taking up arms does not equate to sustainable peace in the region, interviewees maintain that the militants were justified, given the level of neglect suffered in the hands of both the government and the oil companies.

It was recognised that for the reintegration to be sustainable, equally important as the amnesty are measures targeting the demand side of the labour market. Ex-agitators in Rumuekpe are at risk of becoming more frustrated if training and education assistance do not lead to job security.

“I do not know if the amnesty objective was achieved. I have a lot of them who went to study abroad but are now roaming the town these days. They come to pipeline repair sites and stop work..."
VIOLENCE, MILITANCY AND PEACE

through cult-related actions. They still belong to the cult groups.”

CHIEF, RUMUEKPE

For residents surveyed, there was a consensus that the Federal Government’s Amnesty Process brought relative peace to the Delta due to the ‘cash for guns’ transaction. However, it is perceived that the ‘boys’ granted the presidential pardon are still involved in criminal activities in Rivers State. Unemployment in Rumuekpe, lack of formal education or vocational training for youths and absence of industries to absorb the pacified militants, drives ex-militants to ‘roam’ around town. Moreover, respondent reiterates that the peace is ‘temporary’:

“I can say there is some measure of peace in the region, because of the amnesty programme especially for those who are beneficiaries of the programme. But I think it is still a temporary peace because the root causes of the crisis are still yet to be addressed. Members of the amnesty process who are in the community still engage in nefarious acts in the community, they have not completely changed.”

RUMUEKPE RESIDENT

For ex-agitators, the root cause is arguably unemployment. When employment opportunities do not materialise for ex-militants, experience has shown that ex-combatants can engage in protest, destructive actions or are likely to resort to violence and illegal activities such as weapon trafficking or illegal oil bunkering, which can have potentially destabilising effects locally, nationally and regionally. In Rumuekpe, it was reported that ex-militants maintain their cult group status, reverting back to executions as a mean of conflict management. In August 2013, a former rebel was executed by his cult group:

“The youths are the ones most prone to violence. For instance just this week a notorious member of the community (known as Promise) was killed purportedly by his own cult group members.”

RUMUEKPE RESIDENT

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RUMUEKPE RESIDENT

KEY STAKEHOLDERS IN INSTIGATING AND RESOLVING VIOLENCE:

Field research suggests that the present political structure of Rumuekpe has created a void in the relationship between community members and perceived stakeholders. As such, there is no consensus of a specific party that actively instigates peace. In order to resolve intra-

community conflict, the majority of interviewees confirm that you initially engage the Community chiefs. Respondents noted that the eldest male in the community will offer the deciding resolution if a consensus can not be found.

Each interview stated that Friday Edu and S. K Agala, leader of two formerly warring factions in the community, as primary proponents of conflict.

SPDC were noted to ‘fuel’ the crisis in Rumuekpe. SPDC awarded contracts to the party that controlled the leadership and infrastructure of the community. Thus both Edu and Agala controlled factions received funding from the IOC.

Youths were identified as those most prone to violence. Reasons adduced for this was the lack of sustainable employment for youths groups. As such, unemployed youths are vulnerable to opportunities to ‘carry arms and wreak havoc by unscrupulous politicians especially during election periods’. 
COMMUNITY ACTION

WOMEN OF RUMUEKPE LOBBIED FOR THE CONSTRUCTION OF A SECONDARY SCHOOL FROM TOTAL ELF

Conflict in Rumuekpe is complex. Residents surveyed stated that weak governance in Rumuekpe perpetuates the communities’ poverty. The communities’ deprivation, relative to the IOC operating in the community, draws interviewees to place access to oil related opportunities as the root cause of conflict, deflecting responsibility from local governments. In the wake of the crisis, all existing school buildings were burnt down in Rumuekpe. Displaced citizens returning to the community noted that there were no schools for their children to attend.

COMMUNITY INTERVENTION

The Prayer Warriors are a group of women led by Queen Omano and Charity Woke. In 2012, the Omano and Woke women’s group led a non-violent protest to the Total Fina ELF offices in Port Harcourt City. Women from the eight communities of Rumuekpe came together to discuss the destroyed school site and lack of teaching facilities for their children. As opposed to requesting development contracts from their LGA, the women’s groups agreed that ELF are the most responsive IOC.

ELF agreed to reconstruct classroom blocks at the secondary school and primary school in Rumuekpe giving hope to the citizens that there might be some normality returning to their community after several years of intense conflict and destruction.

CHANGE AS A RESULT OF COMMUNITY ACTION

The Total Fina ELF sponsored construction of the school block is on-going. For this reason, measurable change in the community is limited, but expectations remain high.

However, the Prayer Warrior’s engagement with ELF supports Rumuekpe’s move away from violent action. The on-going construction of the school facility is a tangible output of the womens group’s meetings and discussion with the IOC. This validates dialogue as way of bringing development to the community. The following quotation attest to the change in attitude:

“The on-going secondary construction project by ELF came as a result of the peaceful protests by women of the 8 communities in Rumuekpe to ELFs office. The response of ELF is the completed secondary school. The company has also started the primary school in the community.”

STUDENT, RUMUEKPE

During the escalated conflict between Edu and Agala, violence was the way in which the community attempted to resolve the leadership issues. The dominant discourse on the conflict is horrific.

“Dialogue is a very potent way of creating change in Rumuekpe”

MALE, RUMUEKPE

“No the boys who took up arms against the state were not right. If the members of both families in 2001 had adopted dialogue in resolving their lingering dispute, there would not be crisis in the community in the first place.”

LOCAL FARMER, RUMUEKPE

“As you can see the entire community is almost like a ghost town, all the houses in the community were either partially destroyed or completely burnt down.”

STUDENT, RUMUEKPE
A lot of promising youths from the community were also killed. The crisis was really bad, human heads were cut off, live humans were thrown into the wells, in short it was very gruesome.”

FEMALE RESIDENT OF RUMUEKPE

Post 2008, the death of community youths and destroyed building are testament to the ineffective outcome of the conflict.

Violence is arguably embedded and ingrained in Rumuekpe. The on-going process of reconciliation wants to offer a form of closure for residents.

“My mind is still bitter with the perpetrators of the violence that changed my life. They have caused me so much pain that I find it hard to forgive.”

RESIDENT, RUMUEKPE

Violence used to resolve the leadership battle traumatised the community. The transformational change in attitude now places non-violent action as the forefront of conflict management processes in Rumuekpe.

RESULTS OF COMMUNITY INTERVENTION:

As a result of the women’s group request to Total Fina ELF, February 2013 saw the community sign a ₦33 Million MOU with the IOC. Residents channel their demands toward oil companies because the community believes that the government will not provide Rumuekpe with basic amenities. Beyond the initial reconciliation efforts of the Justice Kayode Esho’s committee, the community respondents view the government as negligent. As such, findings attest a need to strengthen the confidence of community members to approach the government, with their demands.

Moreover, despite the actions of the Prayer Warriors, perceptions of some community members are still skewed towards violent conflict resolution as highlighted below:

“I usually adopt non-violent peaceful methods in addressing conflict at home because violence is not an effective way of dealing with issues per say. But sometimes people listen to you easily when you employ some measure of violence”

YOUTH, RUMUEKPE

PERSONAL STORIES:

The 2005 crisis caused a lot of pain to every family in Rumuekpe, all our properties were burnt. I lost brothers and other relatives and still think of what this community would have become if the crises had never happened. The only schools we had were equally burnt down. Students walk as far as Elele to get secondary education because we no longer have a secondary school here in Rumuekpe.

I thank God our protest to ELF has made them start the construction of classroom blocks at the other side of town. My family still stay in Elele because there are no basic facilities here to ease our stay. As you would have noticed there is no Light (electricity) and I no longer have a house to stay in my own village. When you get to the other side of town, you will see children learning inside uncompleted building. It was even worse, today it is
better because there is a roof so that when it trains they will not get wet.

I was among the few selected women who attended SDN conflict transformation and capacity building training. It has helped me a lot in using non-violent approaches in resolving conflict. Today I am a women’s leader of the community and have been saddled with the responsibility of representing my community in the SPDC GMOU under the Emohua cluster.

WOMAN LEADER

ENTRY PROCESS

SDN’s work in Rumuekpe has focused on building a significant level of trust within a deeply divided and traumatised community. The present situation in Rumuekpe creates a special set of circumstances that represent both a threat to peace and a significant opportunity to address the complex economic, socio-political and environmental issues that fuelled the recent conflict.

CAPACITY BUILDING

Community Reconciliation Process: In May 2013, SDN facilitated focus group interactions between 40 perpetrators and victims of violence in Rumuekpe. The discussion groups focussed on removing communication gaps between the traumatised parties in order to help the flow of dialogue. Key personalities in the community, such as chiefs and religious leaders, were invited as reputable mediators to advocate for reconciliation between the warring factions.

“It is high time we bury our hatchet and come together for the total rebuilding and peaceful Rumuekpe community. The women and other groups must not be left out in the process. This forum is a good channel of uniting people irrespective of their differences”.

WOMAN LEADER, RUMUEKPE

CONFIDENCE AND ATTITUDE

Bar Prayer Warrior led peaceful demonstrations, research findings suggest that levels of confidence in Rumuekpe is low. Community members interviewed sight the on-going focus group discussion as safe space to discuss traumatic instances of violence with other families. As such, the community place expectation in these sessions as a move toward increased intra-community confidence, to firstly engage each other and service providers. The community understand that attitudinal and behaviour change will take time.

“The workshop was effective and interesting. It will go a long way to facilitate the process of peace building and reconciliation in Rumuekpe community.”

RUMUEKPE RESIDENT
Mobilisation, Participation and Influence

The community elders mobilised in order to discuss warning signs to forestall violence in Rumuekpe. According to Chief Lawson Igwe, the leaders held fortnightly meetings for the progress of Rumuekpe. In November 2010 they called the warring factions together to join in celebrating the peace accord. Through traditional conflict management systems, the elders invoked their Ogoni deities in order to pacify cult violence in the community. Their deliberations led to the use of traditional oath-taking and cleansing of the community members involved in the Edu/Agala conflict.

Response or Lack of

It is arguable that the following memorandum of understanding between the community and SPDC is a result of the community’s use of non-violent action to engage stakeholders. Whether the GMOU would benefit the community is unknown.

• N78 Million SPDC GMOU: The Global Memorandum of Understanding was signed with SPDC under the Emohua cluster in a peaceful manner. Community members including participants from SDN Peace Building Training (Igwe Agweru and Victoria Godspower) were part of the 3-man community development board members in the SPDC GMOU.

Challenges

• Community members remain antagonistic towards visitors.

• The community level of participation in non-violent advocacy campaigns is still low. This is partly due to levels of distrust in the community.

• Militancy brought a national audience to the situation in the Delta. Community members are still of the view that violent confrontation brings change.

• Local government budgets are not accessible. It is difficult to understand the LGA’s allocation for service development in the community. The lack of public facing government documentation problematizes an analysis of what projects are on the ground in Rumuekpe in comparison to budget provisions.

How Did This Process Reduce the Threat of Violence?

The community members have shown a willingness to continue the process of healing and re-integration of community members. Enabling community members to express their needs and interests will bring together leaders and disadvantaged groups and it will facilitate communication and consensus building in contentious areas.
KEY LESSONS AND NEXT STEPS: RIPE FOR REPLICABILITY

Interviewees prioritised that, in order for a media campaign to catalyse positive change in Rumuekpe, the following issues would be central to the intervention:

- **ECONOMIC DIVERSIFICATION IN RUMUEKPE.** The community request training on alternative sustainable livelihoods in order to increase citizen’s confidence and enable the community to work toward the development of their homesteads.

- **IMPROVED RELATIONSHIP WITH OIL COMPANIES.** Interviewees feel oil companies need to improve their social responsibility contracts and respond to the need of the community.

- **SERVICE DELIVERY.** Rumuekpe requests improved school, health and water facilities.

- **TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION PROCESS.** A mediation process between the two warring factions in Rumuekpe could improve social cohesion.

LESSONS DRAWN FROM THE INTERVENTION PROCESS

Key issues noted below could inform subsequent response in the Delta.

- **POST AMNESTY PROCESS RE-INTERGRATION OF MILITANTS:** The Federal Government Amnesty sought to disarm and demobilize militants in Rumuekpe. It is necessary to focus on the reintegration of formerly violent youths back into the community.

- **TRAUMA:** Rumuekpe is traumatised by recent violence. The SDN intervention process highlights the necessity to understand that violence in embedded and ingrained in community conflict management. When violence is the dominant discourse, peace and reconciliation efforts need to understand and work within the fragile state of Rumuekpe.
KEY LESSONS AND NEXT STEPS: RIPE FOR REPLICABILITY

- **DEPRIVATION:** Stark poverty in Rumuekpe means community members’ primary concerns are supporting their families. As such, restoring the environment or training on government issues seems futile for the persons interviewed. Further intervention would need to build an understanding of the importance of fact based advocacy for long-term change.

- **COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION:** For a third party led intervention, project coordinators would need to consider an equal representation of community factions at meetings

- **LONG TERM GOALS:** Peace building is a long term process and has created the medium for a sustainable relationship that will guide the reconciliation and reintegration process to a logical conclusion
CONCLUSION

ISSUES THAT COULD CONTINUE TO SPUR VIOLENCE IN THE DELTA

OGBIA

Even though Ogbia is the most peaceful of the case studies it faces the same challenges and frustrations with poor services as many other communities in the region. The absence of immediately active conflict drivers and potential willingness of some community leaders to play a role in proactively engaging with government to improve service delivery based on a fact based budgetary analysis present an interesting opportunity for this intervention. Politically, Bayelsa is also less likely to be plagued by political violence and the governor is keen to be seen as a reformer. This opens further opportunities for this intervention but also might be seen as an easy choice as the tensions and violence are relatively controlled.

POTENTIAL DRIVERS OF CONFLICT ESCALATION:

- Citizens still seem unconvinced of the government’s commitment to safeguarding their welfare.
- It is clear that the relationship between the LGA and the community needs to be strengthened further.
- The Youth are the group who most commonly engage in violent behaviour. Therefore it is these individuals who need to be convinced that their needs and those of their community are reflected in LGA budget allocation. Without this they are likely to continue with their violent outbursts if they feel their priorities are not being responded to.

OTUASEGA

Although some major successes have been achieved in Otuasega the fragile nature of tensions around contracts from both government and oil company sources provide critically important insights to
the regions stability. This combined with youth interest in illegal oil refining provides an interesting test case to examine the impact of economic alternatives as a way to tangibly reinforce the media messages and awareness raising undertaken by other sections of the intervention.

POTENTIAL DRIVERS OF CONFLICT ESCALATION:

- Corruption in leadership

- A major challenge is the attitude of government and oil companies to community requests. Experience has shown that channels of communication are usually closed.

- Communities do not have easy access to the institutions even where the approach is peaceful. Sometimes communities get discouraged to continue with the advocacy process as it is seen to take too long to create change.

- Equally, potentially challenging is the lack of confidence most communities have in intervening bodies.

- If advocacy doesn’t prove successful, the community are likely to return to violence as this approach has enabled them to have their voices heard in the past.

OPOROZA

Oporoza will be by far the hardest community to operate in. Any media process would have to be endorsed by Tompollo and the relative remoteness of the community would make regular engagement harder. The levels of mistrust and resentment are high and even taking photos was a challenge. However, Oporoza is a potential flashpoint if violence was to resurface in the Niger Delta, therefore other engagements that were not media focused, but reinforced the messaging of the campaign would have a higher chance of success.
CONCLUSION

POTENTIAL DRIVERS OF CONFLICT ESCALATION:

- The government and IOCs are still not completely willing to engage with community members and to listen to their demands.

- The strongly held belief in the benefits of militant violence could result in renewed tensions if the government and oil majors continue to not deliver basic services and economic opportunities.

- The dominant and respected role of Tompolo is both a stabilising and potentially volatile dynamic that is central to the communities stability.

UZERE

Uzere typifies the four main pillars of violence and tension in the Niger Delta. The legacy of oil production mixed with non-responsive governance has resulted in case studies of neglect and tension that every community in the Niger Delta can sympathise with. The unresolved issues around the shooting and death of some of its citizens provides an interesting case study for resolution that would demonstrate that citizens can engage with government and oil majors in the search of justice. Uzere also highlights provides a unique opportunity to highlight the important role of women in resolving conflict.

POTENTIAL DRIVERS OF CONFLICT ESCALATION:

- Corruption in leaderships over contracts awarded to the community

- Relative poverty and no improvement in basic service delivery

- Poor service delivery reinforced by a lack of access to and lack of accountability of government at both council and state levels.

- Politicians influence on the youths: due to lack of employment opportunities, youths are easily
induced with bribes for political violence and are vulnerable to organize crime.

**BODO**

Bodo’s collective effort at using the international courts supported by Leigh Day provides a clear example of people power and an ability to transform the status quo. This court case and potential settlement will play out during the next 18 months and does have the potential to demonstrate that non-violent processes can hold an international oil major to account. However, as this case is likely to result in millions of dollars for the community and local tensions remain surrounding the traditional beneficiaries of oil rents the potential for local conflict is high. A media intervention that puts a spot light on this issue, if structured in the right way, could play a pivotal role in turning this opportunity into a nationally important success.

**POTENTIAL DRIVERS OF CONFLICT ESCALATION:**

- Corruption within contested community leadership around contracts from government and oil majors
- Oil spills clean up contracts
- Potential settlement / award of court case from Leigh Day suddenly brings millions of dollars to a community with no structures to manage it.
- Poor health and education services not improving and a growing sense of helplessness

**OKRIKA WATERFRONT**

The Okrika Waterfront community is increasingly organised and proactively engaging with government to bring about citizen led transformation of the city. The people’s plan has the potential to demonstrate the importance of redefining relationships between politicians and the citizens they represent. This case
study thus has the potential to be central to any media intervention as long as that process reinforces and supports the existing plans and efforts by the community and CMAP. For the community, change matters, a proposed intervention in Okrika Waterfront would look to address the Policy framework to support tenure security of residents in Okrika Waterfronts, Comprehensive mapping of Okrika and PHC Waterfront and Sustained to support to Chicoco Radio.

**POTENTIAL DRIVERS OF CONFLICT ESCALATION:**

- Poor service delivery and a lack of accountability of government at both council and state levels.

- Politicians influence on the youths: due to lack of employment opportunities, youths are easily induced with bribes and are vulnerable to organize crime.

- The waterfronts become an area of active conflict between the Presidency and Governor a testing ground for influence and power.

- Further forced evictions.

**RUMUEKPE**

Rumuekpe is one of the worst cases of what happens when community contracts are the only source of economic development. The resultant destruction of and within the community has left a deeply troubled social make up that is both challenging and a crucial lesson for what happens in communities if violence does take control and tensions flare up. If carefully handled a media intervention in rumuekpe has the potential to warn others of the devastating impact of intra community violence, militancy and cultism whilst supporting an internal community healing process. Any intervention would have to leave significant improvements in the community both in terms of self led economic opportunities and the state delivering some primary services.
Potential Drivers of Conflict Escalation:

- Deep divide and miss trust within the community result in renewed conflict.
- Community residents fear the Amnesty re-integration process will fail and currently pacified militants will return to the creeks.
- Most of the ex-agitators, cultists and militants in Rumuekpe are unable to find work thus turn to criminal activities or aggressive outlets when stipends finish.
- Continued disenchantment of citizens with IOC CSR development projects and tensions around contracts for such.
- Exclusion of community input in priorities of service needs in the community.
- Corruption: the incursion of politicians in co-opting community members against one another; election rigging and vote buying by the political class.

Need for a Holistic Intervention

Mass Media Approach Needed to Reach Broad Enough Stakeholder Population

With just 12 months before political party primaries and an adult population of over 20 million in the coastal Niger Delta states there are logistical challenges that can only be overcome by a mass media approach. The increasing penetration of radio and social media create opportunities for this to have greater impact than it may have done in the past. Without a strong mass media component to interventions the number of villages and discrete populations in the region would create daunting logistical challenges. In the past interventions have been limited to thinly spread pilots simply because of the cost of reaching rural populations in an environment with limited security. New work must carefully proceed with mass market approaches with a realistic view of the extent of reach.
NO “MAGIC BULLET” MEDIUM – ESPECIALLY WHEN TARGETING URBAN & RURAL AREAS

Interventions in Nigeria have often relied excessively on a single medium – usually radio or television as a way of conveying key messages. This clearly will be inadequate in the present media environment in the Niger Delta. The data available for detailed analysis is limited, but research to date shows that different stakeholder groups access varying sections of the media. For example political elites and those in patronage networks follow print media closely and some online sources. Rural populations use radio for news and information, but also have some access to television. “Youths” are by far the most active in social media, but there are significant parts of the younger population who have very limited access to any conventional media.

This means that a mass media approach needs to have a reach across several different outlets and a better than average idea of its audience. The growth in some outlets such as radio and social media is rapid but has an obvious urban bias. Because of the emerging competition in radio and television it is important to have a realistic appraisal of audiences and the potential reach of campaigns.

STILL NO SUBSTITUTE FOR INCLUDING GRASSROOTS OUTREACH

Nigerian audiences are naturally sceptical of mass media campaigns that look flashy but show no evidence of teeth or commitment on the part of their proponents. They have been over exposed to messages of dubious credibility from government, oil majors and political actors for over a decade so new messaging has an obvious hurdle to garner attention. The best panacea to this problem seems to be sufficient grassroots level activity to demonstrate some ‘on the ground’ capacity with the benefit that when some momentum is created there are strong ‘word of mouth’ effects that can act as multipliers. Thus grassroots action to compliment interventions need to be strategic and have some idea of a path leading to wider dissemination of an overall message.

NEED TO REINFORCE “SELF STARTING” INITIATIVES THAT CAN COME FROM COMMUNITIES

In 2011 there were several “self starting” local initiatives that promoted non violence, participation in the elections, and a path to better governance in parts of the Niger Delta. Their origin and orientation varied – some aspired to political neutrality while others overtly sought change. Their success in parts of Delta and Imo states are particularly notable. The initiatives reinforced the point that there are
considerable grassroots skills already in place in many communities and that the critical barrier to their release is confidence that the political environment will make interventions worthwhile. The scale of the Niger Delta is such that any intervention must take into account the importance of local ownership not only being developed in areas of direct intervention but also inspiring other communities to play a greater role in their destiny.

**NEED FOR HIGH QUALITY/INSPIRATIONAL MESSAGING**

The interventions of the proposed project will be coming into an extraordinarily crowded media environment where political messaging from different actors will increase throughout 2014 and 2015. The overall resources available to the intervention are very modest in comparison to the spend that can be anticipated from even mid-level actors. This means that resources will have to be extraordinarily well used with full advantage taken over multipliers that come at no additional cost. To break through both background noise and community level scepticism it will be crucial that credible messages are also inspiring and show a degree of vision that will be memorable to the target audiences. This will mean striking a very carefully balance between elevating the view of communities and being marginalized because aspirations are seen as unrealistic.

**HOW TO LINK MEDIA PROCESSES TO DIRECT IMPACT IN THE COMMUNITY**

- **TALK IS NOT ENOUGH**; use small gestures of goodwill to community leaders to build respect.

- **GOVERNMENT BODIES NEED TO RESPOND** to interventions on specific items, i.e services in targeted community. The intervention need to address local conflict and well as regional conflict dynamics.

- **USE OF TRADITION AND CULTURE**; a campaign that can build on the pride of the region will create impact in the communities and the state.

- **GOVERNMENT AND OIL MAJORS NEED TO AGREE** to take non-violent interventions seriously and lay the necessary foundations of conflict management and peaceful resolution, as opposed to ‘fire-fighting’ conflict.
TECHNOLOGY ALLOWS COMMUNITIES TO COME TO US

This research has shown that the personal, short term reward and direct impact in the community of those you are targeting is a key motivator for both potential frustrations spilling over into violence and most importantly peace and hope in potential hotspots. This project will not be able to deliver direct services or economic opportunities on a scale need to prove that non-violence pays. Thus it needs to create platforms and areas for support and intervention that will complement and reinforce the messaging from the media campaign.

Technology and interactive mapping linked to mobile phone applications, such as that designed and built for the federal government to manage and track oil spills could also be useful in this context. A online platform that allows community members to visually rank local and state government performance on addressing the core drivers of social tension as well as publicly displaying the state of the services in their community could create a very powerful channel for nonviolent expression of frustrations. This would be the first time that citizens can directly communicate their frustrations on a public platform. If a strong communications / direct government engagement process could be developed off the back of each case study this could be a very powerful tool to help address the power dynamics between citizens and their elected politicians.

Such a platform could also be used to identify interesting case studies for the project team to follow up on. If designed into the project from the start of the main intervention this could be linked to a weekly TV / Radio programme that would send a crew to investigate the most interesting case study submitted that week. Investigations could even be voted for online / from mobiles which would build interest and public participation in the process through a competition element which is perceived as much less risky than directly challenging the government for improved service delivery. Such a platform would take about 8 weeks to operationalize if resourced adequately.
IMPORTANT LESSONS FROM STATE LEVEL CAMPAIGNS AND NETWORKS THAT CAN BE DRAWN UPON FOR THE OUTREACH PHASE OF THE CAMPAIGN

Two contrasting campaigns may be of particular note to the project:

1. The grassroots campaigns of democratization and opposition advocates in Delta State in 2011
2. The “Stop the Theft” Campaign targeting illegal oil refining and bunkering.

The Delta initiatives were modestly resourced at best and used a number of locally driven techniques that made excellent use of volunteers. The end result was a contribution to elections that remained relatively peaceful and a uniquely successful degree of success for opposition political aspirants. This built on the large grassroots sentiments of protecting their own space and making a change to their own situation. Although this project must remain apolitical this does not mean that important lessons cannot be learnt from successful political mobilization campaigns that have emphasized peaceful grassroots approaches. In Delta state both democratization and party campaigners described locally initiated door to door campaigns that started 3-6 months ahead of the elections. Both argued that communities could protect their vote under the administration of a reformed INEC and made compelling cases for the interest of communities in such efforts.

The only resources available to these initiatives were locally generated volunteer resources and for political groups; a much more limited pool of resources than the ruling party. In both cases, a merit was made of their limited resources by distinguishing their initiative from other actors who were already seen as wasteful. To an extent, the limited resources were converted into an asset for their messaging. The door to door approach would be prohibitively expensive for a directly funded campaign but is viable for local volunteer initiatives, such as highlighting your services to government or something similar.

In contrast, the “Stop the Theft” Campaign is relatively well resourced and media savvy yet likely having far less impact. Its message well intended and addresses a critical issue – yet its design and approach mean that it is almost certainly missing the mark with grassroots audiences. Its central messages are framed for elite audiences and do not have sufficient relevance or sympathy for those involved in the
complicated front line of illegal oil refining and oil theft. It suffers from association – with numerous other messages over the years from central government whose credibility has been called into question.

Most importantly the message of the campaign largely ignores the trickle down economic benefits for communities that although illicit are now a significant part of the rural economy. Thus a government message opposing illegal oil refining is extremely unlikely to gain traction when refining has brought significantly more economic activity to many communities than any government initiative. It is almost the perfect example of a campaign sorely in need of more sensitive messaging and a clearer program associated with its advocacy. It is this ability for a media process to leave tangible benefits that must be taken seriously by any intervention, if resources are not going to be spent on a process which misses its core objective.

NEW COMMUNITIES & BROADENING CAMPAIGNS

Obviously there is a significant challenge for upscaling work from a limited number of communities to a broader reach within a short timeframe. There will be tough choices to be made around prioritizing vulnerable communities, the geographic spread of the target area, and the capacity of SDN and its partners.

The outreach process for new communities assumes that in the three states a mixed media campaign will have had some opportunity to penetrate all but the most remote communities either by television or radio; the latter having particularly good reach in rural areas. Subject to guidance by the Board, SDN expects that new communities will be identified through a number of overlapping criteria and markers:

- Peer initiatives [NSRP & PIND’s P4P] assessments of conflict risk
- Direct SDN assessments of pre-election risks
- Media reporting of increased tensions or incidents in communities

The choices of communities in which additional outreach activity will be made is based on a ranking of the risk and the capacity of other actors to combine key messages. There are a number of critical
actors that will need to be engaged—such as security agencies and state governments—but it is critical to note that not all of them will be perceived locally as unbiased.

SDN will place an emphasis on reinforcing relationships with other civil society organizations, INEC, the Nigeria Human Rights Commission and the more independent sections of the media. We think that the correct combination of these bodies will help with access to communities who are likely to be highly suspicious of many actors by the time we are engaging.

The process of mapping can begin relatively early—it is not too difficult to map the most obvious fracture lines in Rivers State and some of the key actors as a desktop exercise. Because this project will have limited resources it is critical that effective collaboration with other organizations leads to a nimble and responsive intervention.

We also anticipate a need to frame community interventions within a strategic analysis and messaging focused at a state level. Many of the anticipated problems will originate from political actors who are operating across a state with new fronts being swiftly opened up. Understanding and engaging the situation at this level will help prevent the project becoming overly reactive at a community by community level where available resources could be swiftly overwhelmed.
“My mind is still bitter with the perpetrators of the violence that changed my life. They have caused me so much pain that I find it hard to forgive.”

RESIDENT, RUMUEKPE