REPORT ON THE PAN NIGER DELTA YOUTH SUMMIT

ORGANISED BY Dawn in the Creeks & Stakeholder Democracy Network
“IN MY OPINION, THERE ARE TWO PARTIES TO THE SOLUTION OF THE PROBLEM- GOVERNMENT AND THE PEOPLE- GOVERNMENT CAN AT BEST CREATE AN ENABLING ENVIRONMENT WHILE THE INDIVIDUAL MUST CONTRIBUTE TO THE SOLUTION OF THE PROBLEM. [...] WE ARE DOING WHAT I WOULD CALL AREWIRING PROCESS OF OUR OWN PERCEPTION OF SOLVING THE PROBLEM [...] IT ISBEGINNING TO SNOWBALL INTO SOMETHING MEANINGFUL.”

Dr. Kombo Mason Braide, Guest Speaker and Panelist

“OUR ULTIMATE INTENT IS TO CREATE A PLATFORM THAT ALLOWS CITIZENSHIP PARTICIPATION IN THE ALTERATION OF THE SOCIAL NARRATIVE OF THE NIGER DELTA; SO THAT IT IS NOT WHAT IS SAID ABOUT THE NIGER DELTA BUT IT IS WHAT THE PEOPLE OF THE NIGER DELTA SAY THAT BECOMES THE CONTEXTUAL UNDERSTANDING OF THE REGION.”

Andre Blaze Henshaw
PROGRAM OVERVIEW

The new Federal Government administration has not yet articulated its vision for the Niger Delta. As a result, the leaders in the region are concerned that the pledges for national development may not be inclusive. If these concerns are not addressed through a comprehensive and holistic approach, in the next 6 – 12 months the Niger Delta may be engulfed in a fresh wave of violence.

There is no military solution to the Niger Delta conflict. The incoming administration has a window of opportunity to address the problems of the region in a comprehensive manner through meaningful engagement with the region before the tensions escalate.

The Niger Delta Youth Dialogue process therefore set out with the goal to ensure that the citizens of the Niger Delta, supported by the International Community, participate in shaping a holistic and sustainable strategy for the region, in order to address the drivers of conflict and lay foundations for long-term stability of the region and West Africa.

Following State-level Forums in Bayelsa, Rivers and Delta States, the Pan-Niger Delta Youth Summit brought over 100 individuals from across different ethnic, regional and potential militant groups in the Niger Delta together to discuss their concerns and the region’s future. The Summit was held over two days (28th-29th July 2015) in Port Harcourt, Rivers State.

Key issues raised from State Forums formed the foundation for inclusive discussion that focused on solutions to the major challenges confronting the region, and ultimately towards sustaining peace and inclusive development.

What follows is a summary of the approach and key concepts emanating from the dialogue.

“A PLATFORM LIKE THIS IS IMPORTANT WHERE POSITIVE MINDED YOUNG PEOPLE CAN WORK TOGETHER AND PROJECT A NEEDS ASSESSMENT”

Ross George, Rivers State
ACTION AT THE SUMMIT

Participants were split into groups and discussions were facilitated centered on the key topics established at the State-level meetings: economic growth, environmental sustainability, access to energy, and peace and stability.

The groups then came together to present their ideas to the floor for scrutiny by their peers. With the broad range of backgrounds and breadth of expertise within the room, the ideas for solutions were examined under what is appropriate for the entire region and what is technically feasible to implement.
This process was complimented with addresses from notable entrepreneurs, innovators and champions of peace and development from the region.

“AT THE STATE LEVEL, WE DISCUSSED —AS A FAMILY—ISSUES THAT ARE PECULIAR TO BAYELSA STATE BUT HERE IN RIVERS STATE, WE ARE ARTICULATING VIEWS WITH PEOPLE FROM DIVERSE BACKGROUNDS BUT WE HAVE NOTICED THAT THE ISSUES ARE QUITE SIMILAR BECAUSE OF THE OIL FACTOR. WE WANT TO SEE THAT WE ARE AT A COMMON GROUND SO WE CAN TABLE A HOLISTIC APPROACH TOWARDS SOLVING THE PROBLEMS OF THE NIGER DELTA.”

Mr. Charles Ariye, Bayelsa State
PARTICIPANT’S SOLUTIONS TO CHALLENGES FACED ACROSS THE NIGER DELTA

ECONOMIC GROWTH

• **Invest in a system that adds value to the Agriculture and Aquaculture system**

   This means better technologies to improve processing techniques to increase the value of the primary products. They can then be sold to the domestic market, and when capacity improves eventually be exported.

• **Help farmers access market for their produce**

   There is no use investing in production if there is nowhere for the produce to be sold. Roads are the first thing needed to improve connection to local markets. Supporting value chains and cooperatives to boost their capacity to operate nationally means that produce grown in the fertile Niger Delta can be appreciated by the Nigerian population.

• **Initiatives to Support Young Farmers**

   Government should facilitate schemes for micro-farms with financial loans and grants to young people. It will give them jobs, and Nigeria food security. This is a key opportunity available across the region so it will be important for absorbing the growing youth population, which at the moment, has very little options available to build a future.

• **Extend Support to Small Businesses**

   Agriculture is not the future for every young person in the region. The youth need autonomy over their futures to realise their true potential and sustain a livelihood for themselves. Entrepreneurs need support from the government to get their enterprises running. Government should nurture a favorable business environment for them by providing designated economic clusters for cottage industries. When the conditions are right the bright and talented across the region will continue to find the solutions we need.

• **Invest in Technical and Vocational Training**

   Our educational systems that were once strong need resuscitating for the sake of the future of the region. Tertiary institutions should be built across the region – particularly in riverine areas where education is at its lowest – expanding opportunities for vocational training in skills that are necessary to develop the economy. Mechanical engineering is one area we stress, as this can feed into the resurrection of manufacturing and engineering.

• **Rehabilitate Key Infrastructure**

   The completion of East West Road is a must for the new government because it is so important to the region’s future. To truly unlock the region’s potential the coastal ports should be rehabilitated to international standards, not for more imports but to open access to the international market to stimulate domestic production.
LOCAL GOVERNMENT REVENUE

Allocations made to local government areas (LGAs) are being restricted across the region. The Federal Government needs to visit this issue and remove the grip held of local governments to let them perform their duties and create the right opportunities for business. Borrow a leaf from the Kaduna state governor and give LGA’s account autonomy.

INFORMATION COMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGY (ICT)

The plan for our future needs to be in sync with the upward trend of global modernization. Start by supporting small ICT businesses by providing business space at ‘ICT hubs’ with reliable power to develop the infrastructure and technical skills needed to provide services to industry and the public. To complement big investments in the infrastructure, Government-led Angel investor platforms would source funds for specific projects of entrepreneurs.
PARTICIPANT’S SOLUTIONS TO CHALLENGES FACED ACROSS THE NIGER DELTA:

ACCESS TO ENERGY

• **Addressing Fuel Scarcity & Oil Bunkering**

   Oil bunkering is caused by lack of access to petroleum products. Refineries cost a lot of money and take a lot of time to setup. The government should fund modular refineries in the region.

   “HE WHO FAILS TO PLAN HAS PLANNED TO FAIL”

   ~Dr. Mina Ogbanga

• **Gas Utilization Initiative**

   Electricity is critical to sustainable economic growth for Africa’s giant, so gas being flared all over the Niger Delta should instead be used to generate power. There are too many obstacles to power generation and distribution, these should be removed so that private investors and state governments can improve the situation without delay.

   “THE DIVERSE ASPECTS OF THE CHALLENGES AND ISSUES WE NEED TO DEAL WITH CANNOT HAVE ONE PARTICULAR SOLUTION BUT WE HAVE TO TAKE IT IN A VERY PRAGMATIC MANNER AND BE METICULOUS ABOUT IT”

   Patterson Ogon, Human Rights activist/ Panelist
PARTICIPANT’S SOLUTIONS TO CHALLENGES FACED ACROSS THE NIGER DELTA

ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

• **Enforce Laws that Stop Pollution Across the Region**

The Niger Delta has to be one of the most polluted regions in the entire world, and this is known internationally. The Federal Government cannot continue to allow it to happen. The law is failing us so it needs to be amended. Oil spills need to be prevented, and when they do happen cleaned up. The same applies for gas flares. We are exposed to toxins in the air, the waters and in the soil that are significantly diminishing our quality of life and will continue to do so for future generations.

• **Reduce Deforestation and Invest in Forestation for Coastal Protection**

Trees are cut down for fuel in the absence of alternative sources of energy. Give the people power and educate them on the importance of protecting the forests. The pollution to the waters means that the mangrove forests can no longer repair themselves. A plan needs to be made to support them as they are critical to protect the entire region from coastal erosion and rising sea levels caused by global warming.

“**THE GOVERNMENT SHOULD COME UP WITH AN AGRICULTURAL PROGRAM THAT IS NOT ONLY CENTERED ON PROVIDING FOOD FOR THE POPULACE BUT TO SEE HOW TO RECLAIM AND REPLENISH THE LAND THAT HAS SUFFERED DEGRADATION. THE PROBLEM OF EROSION SHOULD ALSO BE LOOKED INTO BECAUSE A LOT OF OUR LANDS HAVE BEEN ERODED AND RESULTS TO FLOODING.**”

Ikwerre Ikwerre, Akwa-Ibom State

• **Campaign against illegal refineries**

It has been going on for too long so cut off the market by giving people alternative sources of electricity in parallel with employment opportunities.

• **Implement the recommendations made in the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) Report on Ogoniland**

The delegation of scientists have given us a clear picture of the damage done by oil exploration and the steps needed to restore the environment. This was in 2011, and the government has not yet acted. Implementation of the works necessary for the clean-up can create thousands of jobs, and a cleaner environment will mean people can go back to traditional livelihoods and drivers of the local economy such as fishing and farming.
“WE HAVE COME HERE AND DISCUSSED BUT I AM STILL GOING BACK TO MY COMMUNITY WHERE WE URINATE AND DEFECATE IN THE SAME WATER THAT WE DRINK. LET US THINK OF COMING TOGETHER NEXT TIME TO SEE HOW TO IMPLEMENT AND NOT TALK ABOUT THE PROBLEMS.”

Prince Agonaemi Evah, Oporomo Clan, Delta State

- **Water Treatment & Sanitation**

  Water is polluted by oil activities and the absence of waste management systems. The government must provide water treatment plants that are simple to use so safe drinking water is freely available. It will save income spent on the treatment of water-borne diseases for other economic activities, and spare thousands of lives.

- **Value the Environment**

  It is a crime that the pollution can continue unchecked. We demand a full Environmental Impact Assessment across the region, similar to that completed by UNEP. This will expose the scale of the destruction and be supporting evidence for the declaration of an environmental state of emergency in the Niger Delta.
PARTICIPANT’S SOLUTIONS TO CHALLENGES FACED ACROSS THE NIGER DELTA:

PEACE & STABILITY

• **Post-Niger Delta Amnesty Programme**

The new Government cannot simply stop the Programme without any alternative. It should redesign and remold the initiative based on the needs that are evident in the Niger Delta. Restive youth are not going to have much patience if nothing is done to show them they have a part to play in Nigeria’s future.

• **Shoreline protection**

If policing of the creeks is going to be effective it needs to take a non-military coast guard approach to matters. This means engaging with the scattered communities and working with traditional leadership structures. A priority should be mopping up small and large arms to remove the tools of violence.

• **Engagement and Education**

Government needs to complement the removal of violent tools with the establishment of platforms for individuals to express themselves non-violently through dialogue. Politicians and their advisers should meet regularly with the people and relevant stakeholders they are representing to make sure that they are attuned to the needs of the region. The process should be reinforced with education for the youth on negotiation and peaceful dialogue techniques to equip them.

“**THERE IS A DISCONNECT BETWEEN THE LEADERS AND THE LED.**”

Patterson Ogon

• **Signal Political Will by Implementing Policies**

We have too many reports and committees and initiatives, but no action. Instead of expensive lip service the government needs to summon the political will to implement the recommendations of these reports. You cannot expect PEOPLE’S WILL without POLITICAL WILL.

“**INSECURITY HAS BEEN A MAJOR REASON WHY WE ARE STILL WHERE WE ARE IN TERMS OF DEVELOPMENT. THE YOUTHS ARE BEING USED TO PERPETRATE SOME OF THESE CRIMES SO WE ARE ALSO LOOKING AT MEANS WHERE WE CAN ALSO EDUCATE OUR PEERS ON THE NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES.**”

Comr. Aquila Akpan, Akwa-Ibom State
CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS

“WE HAVE SEEN A LOT OF THINGS LIKE THIS IN THE REGION AND AT THE END OF THE DAY, IT ENDS UP AS A REPORT AND NEVER GET TRANSLATED TO ACTIONS. THE DIALOGUE IS NOT A ONE-OFF THING, IT SHOULD CONTINUE AND MORE IMPORTANTLY, IT WILL BE INTERESTING TO SEE HOW THE RESOLUTIONS AND THINGS DISCUSSED ARE TRANSLATED TO ACTIONABLE ITEMS AND GETS TO GOVERNMENT ACTORS WHO ARE NOT MUTUALLY EXCLUSIVE IN THIS KIND OF DELIBERATION”

Tombari Siebe, Rivers State

The voices of the youth from across the Niger Delta have been documented, and they have set the agenda of governance and development for government at all levels. Speaking in solidarity, all those participating in the Summit expressed sincere commitment towards this process of constructive engagement with the new administration.

To ensure that the discussions will not end on paper as is so often the case, the ideas emanating from the dialogue will be consolidated for review at multi-stakeholder group policy workshops. The aim will be to examine the proposed ideas in the broader context of societal issues in the Niger Delta to reinforce the final drafting of the policy roadmap.

Drafting the roadmap will be done in parallel to direct engagement with the Federal Government to keep them informed of the process from the beginning, and hopefully take their consultation on formulation of policies so that they remain within the parameters of what is possible to implement.

“WE FROM DELTA WILL ENSURE THAT WHATEVER IS DISCUSSED DOES NOT END HERE, WE HAVE DECIDED ON OUR OWN TO TAKE THE INITIATIVE; WE WON’T BE DISBANDED AND WILL CONTINUE TO PURSUE THE IDEAS THAT WE HAVE ARTICULATED.”

Gibson Ikanone, Delta State
ANNEX 1: COMMUNIQUE ISSUED AT THE END OF PAN NIGER DELTA YOUTH DIALOGUE

The Dawn in the Creeks team (DITC) and Stakeholder Democracy Network (SDN) with support from United States, State Department brought together youth from different ethnic, religious and potential militant group leaders across the Niger Delta together to discuss the region’s future. A series of events in Rivers, Bayelsa, Delta and Akwa – Ibom states to amplify voices calling for change as part of an ongoing effort towards empowerment of citizens. The dialogue took place on Wednesday, July 29, 2015 at Presidential Hotel, Port Harcourt, Rivers state. It was attended by about Two Hundred and Fifteen (215) participants.

The dialogue was aimed at understanding the aspirations of the youth and to ensure that they participate in discussions about the future of their region and continue to building a peaceful and prosperous future of the Niger Delta.

Within the thematic discussions, it is clear that the following areas stood out and are considered as critical for the Niger Delta youth - Economic diversification, Environmental sustainability, Regional security and stability. The contributions of seasoned speakers like Dr. Kombo Mason Braide and Dr. Mina Ogbanga and their presentations on Youth Entrepreneurs & Enterprise solutions to Development - Opportunities for Sustainable Economic Growth & Regional Stability in the Niger Delta and Youth & Leadership - The role of mentoring in the Niger Delta laid concrete foundation for a successful dialogue.

The participants observed:

- Mismanagement and corruption in Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) and Ministry of Niger Delta Affairs (MNDA)
- Lack of transparency and accountability in governance in the region.
- The emergence of cult groups, kidnapping and sense of insecurity
- A reward system that recognizes and evaluates actions of violence
- Lack of critical infrastructure to stimulate development
- High level of unemployment and young people without the right aptitude and skills
- Lack of Vocational education facilities in the region
The participants at the dialogue recommended the following:

1. Environmental Audit of the entire Niger Delta region and clean up action implemented. e.g. UNEP report / Technical Committee report

2. Introduction of Coast Guards to safeguard the waterways.

3. Reform and restructure the Amnesty Program to involve communities and especially young people earning wages without work to be used for pipelines surveillance in conjunction with security agencies.

4. Liberalization of seaports in the region to become competitively commercial and functional like the seaports in the South - West.

5. Implementation of the Coastal rail line project in the region

6. Kick – off the Brass and Bonny NLG projects

7. Legalise and support for modular refineries in the region

8. That the federal government should invest and develop alternative and smart energy sources, including the generation and distribution of electricity from the Atlantic Ocean to creek communities.

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