



THE NIGER DELTA LEGACY ENGAGEMENT NARRATIVE REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A tangled web of factors underlie the Niger Delta's propensity for violence. Poor governance, inescapable poverty, environmental degradation and inadequate public services have all contributed to the increasing securitisation of the region.

Disillusioned and desperate, the Niger Delta has become militarized, with citizens resorting to illicit activities to survive, including attacks on oil installations, illegal oil bunkering and kidnapping. In the absence of effective channels to communicate grievances, tensions manifest themselves in intra and inter-community conflict.

"I believe the root causes of violence could be tackled by more employment opportunities in our communities, as unemployment makes many desperate youths resort to theft."

Richard Clinton, Community Facilitator Trained By The Niger Delta Legacy Engagement

As the 2015 National Presidential Election approached, there was fear that the volatility of the region would destabilize any attempt to deliver free and fair elections.

THE NIGER DELTA LEGACY
ENGAGEMENT SET OUT TO
REDUCE ACTS OF VIOLENCE AND
INCREASE THE LIKELIHOOD FOR
A MORE PEACEFUL FUTURE IN
THE REGION.

Designed to address the root drivers of conflict, the Engagement's focus was on changing the attitudes of individual citizens. A preference for peace cannot be bestowed upon an individual, it must be self-generated.

The Engagement prioritised the youth population of the Delta. Youth who grow up around conflict are highly susceptible to militarization, they grow accustomed to ways of violence. Lack of access to livelihood, taking away immediate means for survival, adds a trigger cause for the turn to militancy.

In addition, youth involvement in conflict prevention and resolution is pivotal to delivering sustainable peace. Young people are powerful agents of change, their participation in the community promotes wider civic engagement.

"If youths are given the opportunity to express themselves in other ways, this will prevent them from venting their anger through violence."

Israel Umukoro, Trained As A Community Facilitator By The Niger Delta Legacy Engagement

So, The Niger Delta Legacy Engagement aimed to reduce the risk of violence by mobilizing widespread support for non-violence; training youth to become positive role models at community level; and strengthening channels of advocacy for citizens to communicate with government and leaders.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

“ I believe that the use of non-violent problem solving will help the community a great deal. The people have always used the same approach to the same set of problems and these issues have not yet been resolved.”

Franklin Isaiyae, Trained As A Key Influencer By The Niger Delta Legacy Engagement

UNDERLYING THESE AIMS WAS AN EMPHASIS ON THE USE OF A MULTIMEDIA CAMPAIGN, AS A MEANS OF REACHING A WIDER AUDIENCE WITH THE VALUES OF THE ENGAGEMENT.

At the centre of this approach was the creation of a reality TV series Dawn in the Creeks, which documented the transformation of 21 Niger Delta youths who had been involved in violence in the past.

Over the two year span of the project, the Engagement visited seven communities with direct interventions and reached millions with its regular TV and radio broadcasts. The Niger Delta Youth Forum was the culmination of the increased dialogue that the Engagement facilitated, and reflected the power of engaging active citizenship. The success of Dawn in the Creeks TV Series enabled its creation as separate, ongoing entity that will continue to impact lives in the Delta.



INTRODUCTION

Urgency to address the complexity of problems that the Niger Delta faced was evident in the run up to the 2015 Presidential Election. Concerns over the outbreak of violence during the elections prompted international investment into an initiative that would address the root drivers of conflict.

An initial baseline assessment to evaluate perceptions of violence and the level of frustration amongst the people of the Niger Delta showed that dissatisfaction with governing structures is commonplace. Up to 94% of community members felt that government is less disposed to legitimate practices, and felt unable to engage leaders. 54% of respondents felt that increasing employment opportunities was their top priority for their community, and so lamented the negative impact of violence on businesses and investment opportunities.

“Because of the insecurity caused by gang-related activities, many traders have locked their shops up and run away. Investors will not come to a place where the safety of their business cannot be guaranteed.”

Dede Nwaudo, Community Filmmaker, Dawn In The Creeks

The US State Department approached Stakeholder Democracy Network (SDN) to implement a Niger Delta Legacy engagement that could address underlying drivers of violence and frustration by focusing on three objectives: reduction of risk of violence through challenging the narrative that violence pays; supporting youth to become positive role models at the community level; and rebuilding a constructive relationship between government and citizens.

With this in mind the Niger Delta Legacy Engagement was driven by a specially appointed Board of Advisors (BOA), with expertise of the problems of the region and a range of industry sectors. The strategy of the project, as outlined by the US State Department, with the guidance of the BOA, was implemented by a Secretariat hosted by Stakeholder Democracy Network. The project was defined by an initial focus on a widespread mass media campaign to spread the message of nonviolence, which would then be reinforced by a phase of direct community interventions.

In order mobilize support for non-violence and engage citizens in dialogue with decision makers and each other, the Engagement used two interlinked processes to reach out to a broad audience. A multimedia approach, spearheaded by the Dawn in the Creeks reality TV series, was complemented by direct community interventions and trainings. This dual approach aimed to ensure the message delivered would be entrenched and sustainable.

TOWARDS THE OBJECTIVE OF PEACE

DAWN IN THE CREEKS AND A MASS MEDIA TRANSMISSION

A unique reality TV series, created by the Engagement, called Dawn in the Creeks (DITC) followed the lives of 21 youths from three Niger Delta communities with a violent past, who were given the rare opportunity to become filmmakers. Trained and supported by Jeta Amata, a famous Nollywood director, the young filmmakers documented their story of positive change. Equipped with their new skills, these youths showed that expressing frustrations through the right channels can be productive and rewarding. The production and screening of two seasons of DITC also proved to be an effective way of promoting non-violent messages and peaceful alternatives to achieving change.

“I have learnt from this project that violence does not pay. I hope to engage other people in my community to continue the peace process that we have started. I would like to grow a larger network of peace ambassadors that can reach out to neighbouring communities. My ambitions go beyond just my own community.”

Festus Umiegwa, Community Filmmaker, Ozoro Community

The messages contained in Dawn in the Creeks was further disseminated through the use of radio and social media. The engagement’s decided emphasis on mass media was validated by the success of the TV series. DITC became very popular among its audiences and provided a vehicle for expression for community issues. **The young filmmakers have become role models for their peers.** The ability of DITC to capture the attention of the Niger Deltans was pivotal in the project’s ability to amplify its message that the use of violence is counterproductive.

We are working for a Niger Delta where the young people are more engaged, and where they are ready to act and to take leadership. They will be empowered, they will be better organised in their communities, they will be better mobilised around issues of conflict and they will work for non-violence and peace building.

Amaechi Kelechi (CCADI), one of the program facilitators



TOWARDS THE OBJECTIVE OF PEACE

BUILDING COMMUNITY COHESION

The large-scale media initiative was complimented by interventions that directly targeted youths, to stem their recruitment into military groups, and encourage active citizenship.

BY ENGAGING YOUTHS AS ROLE MODELS AND LEADERS, THEY WERE ABLE TO BECOME AGENTS OF CHANGE.

This community and governance element of the Engagement focused on skills training, awareness raising and further embedding the messages of non-violence contained in the media campaign.

A united community voice, articulating demands peacefully, is a more effective means by which to leverage and decision makers to respond to long-standing grievances. The Niger Delta Legacy Engagement targeted individual communities, and educated them in methods for non-violent conflict resolution and the use of constructive dialogue.

With the provision of new mediation skills, this created an opportunity for youths to play a significant role in their community. Active and articulate young leaders in pilot communities were engaged to become advocates for their peers. These community ‘Peace Ambassadors’ – some of them former militants – have become positive role models for other youths, mentoring their peers and being their advocates thus facilitating their inclusion in community leadership structures.

“This project is indeed a very useful one as it will strengthen existing youth structures and help to develop a new crop of youth ambassadors. I enjoin all communities present to put all efforts into making this project a success”

Comrade Emeka Okonta, Umueze Community

ACTIVITIES TO SPREAD THE MESSAGE

The activities that the Niger Delta Legacy Engagement facilitated took place over a two year period, and were witnessed by a great number of people. Many youths were trained in skills that will enable them to promote peace, and citizens worked towards the improvement of democracy and accountability.

KEY INFLUENCER TRAININGS

The engagement identified a group of people in target communities that have a proven record of established networks and influencing young people, as well as people with genuine interest in spreading the message of nonviolence. The project supported a series of ‘key influencer’ trainings for youths in advocacy, mediation, facilitation and leadership skills. Capacity building was considered crucial to changing mind-sets and creating a pool of skilled and knowledgeable ‘Ambassadors of Peace’. The trainees represented a wide variety of community groups: religious leaders, teachers, market women, youth and women’ group leaders. A total of 72 participants were trained, who then facilitated step-down trainings to their fellow community members.

“My life has been influenced positively by the project. I now have the confidence and enthusiasm to make a difference in my community. There is so much need for peacebuilding work in Erema: even last week, someone was shot dead. This shows how aggrieved parties continually resort to violence instead of using peaceful mediation.”

Chukwu Daniel, Key Influencer

COMMUNITY FACILITATOR TRAININGS

The Niger Delta Legacy engagement also involved marginalised youth by equipping them with skills in non-violent mediation, facilitation and conflict management through ‘community facilitator’ trainings. Building on the creativity and dynamism of the 24 participants, the engagement supported them to collaborate with their peers on creating platforms where they could voice their concerns peacefully and encourage community folks to do the same. They became the advocates of their community members and facilitated their inclusion in community decision-making structures. The engagement enabled young influencers to reach out to as many community members as possible. Working with their peers as advocates of nonviolence, they discovered their potential as peaceful leaders that can lead productive and satisfying lives and have a positive impact in their communities.

“The community is aware of my capacity as a facilitator and problem-solver, which gives me the mandate to intervene in situations. The elders even seek my opinion on community matters.”

Ahuju Eze Chigozie, Community Facilitator

ACTIVITIES TO SPREAD THE MESSAGE

RADAR CITIZEN JOURNALIST TRAININGS

One of the pillars of democracy is the provision of space for free and impartial journalism. However, today's political reality of Nigeria is that stories are too often biased, poorly reported or not reported at all. To address this, the project team partnered with a communication rights organisation, On Our Radar, to link international quality journalism with local capacity and enthusiasm, thus helping in objective quality reporting while providing a unique opportunity for locals to have their voices heard internationally.

36 young people from different communities were equipped with grassroots investigative journalism skills, ranging from information gathering to the development of multimedia content. This network of newly trained journalists was mobilized to report on the conduct of 2015 elections. Locally available technologies were applied. This new, innovative way of reporting greatly contributed to painting a more realistic and reliable picture of the events on the ground. The quality of the stories also managed to attract the attention of international media.

With support and mentoring from the project team the group of citizen journalists will stand as positive role models influencing and mentoring their peers. Further utilizing the practical skills gained during the training, the journalists have a great potential to act as a link between citizens and the government promoting non-violent engagement in post-elections Nigeria.

"I have seen within our region how grass-roots reporters, rights activists and other stakeholders have used blogs and social media networks to fight rights of marginalized population, oppressed children, youths and women groups, especially, during the just concluded general elections."

Okonta Emeka, Citizen Journalist

RAPID RESPONSE NETWORK

As the threat of violence became more apparent leading up to the elections, the BOA and other key stakeholders came together to develop a strategy that could limit the possibility of and efficiently respond to electoral violence in the region.

Building on the extensive database created by the aforementioned activities- over 1500 contacts- the project team has set up a network of committed 'peacebuilders' named the Rapid Response Network to facilitate quick and effective response to any violent incident leading up to the elections in order to reduce tensions and support peaceful and democratic voting.

The Rapid Response team within the Secretariat relied on this extensive network for gathering information and establishing facts through several hotlines, the online reporting platform Niger Delta Watch and bulk SMS. The team responded to numerous incidents going through clear response mechanisms. After relatively peaceful elections in March and April, the team's mandate has not expired. The established networks are continuously relied on for awareness raising, reporting and responding to violent incidents, making these strong relationships beneficial for future initiatives and a peaceful transitions of power in Nigeria.

ACTIVITIES TO SPREAD THE MESSAGE

RIVERS GUBERNATORIAL DEBATE

The engagement also convened Rivers States' premier Gubernatorial Debate in March 2015. Candidates of the top three political parties– Dakuku Peterside (All Progressives Congress), Tonye Princewill (Labour Party), and Nyesom Wike (Peoples Democratic Party) - were all in attendance, putting aside prevailing party and personal conflicts to stand before citizens to discuss problems and propose their ideas to take Rivers State forward.

The debate was a clear demonstration that Nigerians are increasingly demanding that their representatives offer the solutions to help society. All candidates challenged the perceptions held of them, not just through their attendance, but by the way they engaged with the issue-based questions and proposed steps for progress. Audiences could tune in across the nation to the live TV and radio broadcast, and could follow the events unfold through online updates. The #TheRiversDebate2015 hashtag was trending on twitter for more than 24 hours.

With support from both political parties and citizens, the Rivers Debate was a significant milestone in the ongoing process of change. By enhancing the accountability of the political process, the social contract is strengthened therefore potential for frustration and conflict is reduced. Including the public in the democratic process and discussion of policies enhances transparency, accountability, and the relevance of the decision. The Rivers Debate 2015 serves as unprecedented example of how the citizens of the Niger Delta can collaborate with the government to strengthen the currently broken social contract in the region.

YOUTH POLICY FORUM

Building on the vast network of people engaged throughout the project SDN brought together different youth, ethnic, religious and potential militant group leaders from across the Niger Delta to discuss the region's future in the Niger Delta Youth Policy Forum. A series of events in Rivers, Bayelsa and Delta States were facilitated to amplify voices calling for change as part of an ongoing effort towards empowerment of citizens.

The voices of the youth from across the Niger Delta were 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 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

THE IMPACT:

TRANSFORMING LIVES AND MINDSETS

The Niger Delta Legacy engagement contributed to reducing the likelihood of violence in pilot communities in the Niger Delta through enhancing citizen's understanding of conflict and use of facilitation techniques.

BY IMPROVING THE LOCALS' CONFIDENCE AND GIVING THEM A CHANCE TO OBTAIN SKILLS IN FACILITATION AND ADVOCACY, INDIVIDUALS WERE CONVINCED OF THE EFFICIENCY OF A NON-VIOLENT APPROACH.

Many youths became role models and leaders in this non-violent approach. Many youths that were previously disengaged from their community, and therefore prone to becoming embroiled in violent activities, were able to ensure their voices were not overlooked. With the adoption of this new peaceful approach citizens were better positioned to hold institutions to account, in turn making them more responsive to community needs.

"I CAN NOW INTERACT BETTER WITH THE PEOPLE, I AM BOLD AND FEARLESS. ALL THIS HAPPENED THANKS TO THE PROJECT."

Enenmiepre Grace, Community Facilitator, Nember Community

The Dawn in the Creeks TV series provided an opportunity for youths to express themselves and engage positively. The use of this platform, and its wide dissemination through mass media allowed the project to inspire an unprecedented number of communities across the Delta.

83% INSPIRED AFTER WATCHING DAWN IN THE CREEKS
83%

67% FELT CONNECTED TO THE SHOW
67%

88% BELIEVE DAWN IN THE CREEKS WILL INSPIRE CHANGE
88%

The project had a significant impact on the personal lives and perspectives of those involved in the Niger Delta Legacy activities. SDN has collected numerous individual stories reflecting on the engagement's successes on an individual level. Touching upon a wide range of issues, from the engagement's impact on democratic processes in the communities, to supporting the empowerment of women and youth, these personal accounts highlight the complexity of issues faced by many in the Niger Delta. The enthusiasm of these accounts highlights the importance enabling individuals to express their views.

THE IMPACT: TRANSFORMING LIVES AND MINDSETS

“Stories and reporting can attract governmental bodies, philanthropic organisations and NGOs to visit, discuss, and offer solutions to the problems. Creating traffic between government officials and community leaders through the generation of physical content can improve relations between communities and their governments. The more attention is paid to communities and their concerns, the less frustrated citizens are.”

Nkaiso Akpan, Obio/Akpor, Citizen Journalist

“After the training, I had a new attitude towards violence. Meeting many different people gave me an understanding of many aspects of life that were unknown to me. I have in turn used this knowledge to teach the people around me, especially my peers.”

Enenmiepre Grace, Nembe, Community Facilitator

Throughout the project a robust monitoring and evaluation strategy ensured that the engagement took the right steps towards achieving its objectives. The evaluation research clearly demonstrates how DITC and related activities altered people’s perception of violence.

The mid- term evaluation survey conducted in December 2014 found that 96% of those who watched Dawn in the Creeks, and 90% of those who have listened to one of the related radio programmes believe that such TV show and radio program personally inspired them to spread the message of peace in their own community.



THE IMPACT:

TRANSFORMING LIVES AND MINDSETS

75% OF RESPONDENTS BELIEVED THE NIGER DELTA LEGACY ENGAGEMENT HAD CREATED PRESSURE ON COMMUNITY MEMBERS AND LEADERS TO REDUCE POLITICAL THUGGERY.

96% OF RESPONDENTS BELIEVE THE ENGAGEMENT HAD CREATED PRESSURE ON YOUTH TO REDUCE THEIR PARTICIPATION IN ACTS OF POLITICAL THUGGERY.

Key informant interviews and focused group discussions also revealed that the Niger Delta Legacy engagement has incentivised community members to respond collectively to conflict, and more effectively engage leaders.

70% OF THE RESPONDENTS ALSO CLAIMED THAT THE PROJECT'S COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PROGRAMS HAVE INSPIRED THEM TO ADDRESS ISSUES WITHIN THEIR COMMUNITY IN A NON-VIOLENT MANNER.

"After the training my thinking about violence changed significantly, I am also at the forefront of encouraging my friends to shun violence. I also know that violence during elections is very wrong."

Doreen Areh, Community Influencer



THE WAY FORWARD

Although the Niger Delta Legacy engagement in its current form has come to an end, its achievements and successes demonstrate that its legacy is to be carried forward.

Significantly building on the influential networks built during the project, the successes of the Rapid Response activities, the unprecedented momentum of the Rivers Gubernatorial Debate and, most importantly, the outcomes of the Youth Policy Forum, highlight the project's achievement in strengthening democracy and accountability.

Following the Youth Policy Forum all those participating in the summit expressed sincere commitment towards nonviolent and constructive engagement with the incoming administration. The ideas emanating from the dialogue have been consolidated and reviewed by prominent leaders in the region. This process holds great potential to develop these grass roots ideas into viable policy recommendation that could influence the future and the legacy of not just the Niger Delta region, but Nigeria as a whole.

“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

While further supporting the efforts to rebuild the social contract between citizens and the government, and creating platforms where locals have the means to influence democratic processes, it is important to also utilise the mass media strategy developed, established and tested while the duration of the Niger Delta Legacy Engagement.

After months of strategic planning, the Dawn in the Creeks brand became an entity separate from SDN or the US State Department, and was registered as a social enterprise to carry forward a commercially viable media engagement. A clear cut business model for the new entity is yet to be developed, however the current planning is focusing on using corporate sponsorship opportunities, joint venture partnerships, and consulting opportunities as the pathways to generating the surplus to deliver social engagement as well as fund operating cost.

