
Analysis of Conflict Resolution Methods Adopted in Managing Conflicts in Niger Delta Region of Nigeria

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Abstract

Historically, Nigeria's has witnessed tragic and carcinogenic communal conflicts that has left indelible wounds in people's heart and society's Conscience which axiomatically tends to be very difficult to heal. Appositely, this study analysed conflict resolution methods adopted in managing conflicts in Niger Delta Region of Nigeria, and the result showed that unemployment, poverty, bad leadership, lack of government presence and repatriation of money to foreign countries were significant factors militating against the peace of the Niger Delta region. Correspondingly, the conflict resolution methods adopted in managing conflict in Niger Delta among others were negotiation, arbitration, mediation, media, public opinion, provision of employment and education. The study concludes that the most effective solution to conflict is that community leaders and managers should take all necessary measures to stop or prevent it from escalating where it has already developed and recommends amongst others that government should embark on policies that will canvass support for free and affordable education for the people of the region to engage their mind on something positive rather than destroying properties and kidnapping expatriates and thereby helping in exposing them to understand the dynamics of conflict resolution.

Keywords: Conflict resolution methods, Niger Delta, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

Nigeria even with the discovery of oil had been dependent mostly on agriculture for its economic growth and development till the early 80's. However, by early 80's the nation had become almost solely reliant on petroleum. Undoubtedly, almost all the Nigeria's oil comes from the Niger Delta Region. Also, the region is the location of massive oil deposits, which have been extracted for decades by the government of Nigeria and by multinational oil companies. Assertively, the Niger Delta is one of the 10 most important wetland and coastal marine ecosystems in the world and is home to some 31 million people (Niger Delta Technical Committee Report, 2008). Oil has generated an estimated \$600 billion since the 1960s (Wurthmann, 2006). Although many Nigerians both skilled and unskilled have been employed by oil corporations, most of the people from the region where the oil is being explored still dwell in abject poverty (UNDP Report, 2006; Ihayere et al, 2014; Essential Action and Global Exchange, 2014). Seemingly, the advent of oil in Nigeria can be likened to a double faced gift just like two sides of a coin: 'the boom' and the 'doom'. On one side is massive wealth that has been accrued to the nation and on the other hand are the environmental pollution, destruction of the ecosystem, poverty (Okonta and Douglas, 2001; 2003) and many social vices. The region has been described by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) as suffering from "administrative neglect, crumbling social infrastructure and services, high unemployment, social deprivation, abject poverty, filth and squalor, and endemic conflict" (UNDP, Niger Delta Human Development Report, 2006). Notably, the disparity between the wealth generated by oil and poverty in the Niger Delta has become one of the world's starkest and most disturbing examples of the "resource curse" (UNDP, Niger Delta Human Development Report, 2006).

Factually, the current conflict in the Niger Delta is asserted to have arisen in the early 1990's as a result of tensions between oil corporations and a number of the Niger Delta's minority ethnic groups who felt they had been exploited (Human Rights Watch Report, 2005). Also, the region does not have adequate access to clean water or health care (UNDP, Niger Delta Human Development Report, 2006). Moreover, the widespread and unchecked human rights violations have pushed many people deeper into poverty and deprivation, fueled conflicts led to a pervasive sense of

powerlessness and frustration (Amnesty International Report, 2009). Thus, this paper seeks to expound the various methods adopted in resolving conflicts in the Niger Delta region.

2.0 REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Beginning from the time of classical management writers, conflict has continued to increasingly dominate discussions on group influence on organizational performances. Since then, a plethora of definitions appears predominant (Lewicki et al, 2008). Conflict can be defined as behaviour between parties whose interests are or appear to be incompatible or clashing (Action Aid, 2006). "Conflict" is a fluid and infinitely elastic concept which can be twisted into different shapes and has become an issue over which scholars find themselves in sharp disagreement with their colleagues. Divided opinions on that nature, causes and impact of conflict are reflected in the fact that there is no single widely accepted theory on which scholars agree though it is also possible to explain this as being a result of the multi-disciplinary nature of conflict research. Conflict is defined as a struggle over and claims to scarce status, power and resources in which the aim of the opponent are to neutralize, injure, or eliminate their rivals (Cosser 1986) in this sense, conflict may be conceptualized as way of settling problems originating from opposing interest and from the continuity of the society. Thus, Park and Burgess (1971) argue that conflict is designed to resolve divergent dualism and achieve some kind of unity even if it is through the annihilation of the conflict parties. Conflict may therefore not be regarded only in a negative light of dysfunctional or disjunctive process, and breakdown of communication as some scholars tend to suggest, (Lundberg 1979, Wilson & Kolb 1989), conflict is a conscious act involving personal or group contact and communication. Nwosu (2006), classified conflict into simple or complex; "Latent or manifest"; "Individual or group"; "Intentional or unintentional", ; and globalized or localized conflict or international versus domestic conflicts.

Burgess and Guy Burgess (2007), must have taken the above classification into consideration when they came up with their popular categorization of conflicts which are as follows: Communal conflicts, institutionalized conflict, domination conflict, environmental conflict (i.e physical or natural environments), community conflict ethnic and racial conflicts, family conflicts, gender conflicts, generational conflicts, identity conflicts, role conflicts, interpersonal conflicts, intra and extra group conflicts, labour-relations, value conflicts, armed conflicts, technological conflicts, personality conflicts, intra-personal conflicts and others. Mojisola (2004) posit that, conflict can arise in some of these ways:

a. Goal incompatibility: This occurs when people have goals that interfere with each other. This form of conflict can place take at any level. At the intra-personal level for instance, a person's decision to make a certain choice excluding other alternatives will result in an interplay of positive and negative outcomes. Goal incompatibility also explains why at the interpersonal, inter-group, Intra-group or intra-organizational levels, one party attempt to achieve the best outcome at the expense of the other, is met sometimes with very stiff opposition.

b. Differentiation: People have divergent beliefs and attitudes due to their unique backgrounds, experiences or training. This predisposes them to see issues or problems in a particular way and have difficulty in understanding each other's perspectives. It is even more difficult for people from different cultural backgrounds to understand and accept each other's values or beliefs. There is always the tendency for people from bigger cultural background to consider those from smaller cultures as inferior, less worthy and less competent. The temptation is to overvalue themselves, their opinions and contributions. This process may encourage costly conflicts by pitching people against themselves in manner of "us" versus "them".

c. Interdependence: Generally in life, people are dependent on each other to an extent to get things accomplish. The poor need the rich, the strong need the weak, government needs the people, students need teachers and vice versa. Interdependence makes it difficult for one group to proceed in its duties without inputs from the other group. Without this, need to interact by the mutual performance of their roles, the desired outcomes may not be attained, besides, when such input is delayed or delivered in an unsatisfactory form, strong conflict may result from it. The idea of independence may not be as conflict prone as the events stemming from it.

d. Communication problem: Conflict can occur due to the lack of opportunity, ability or motivation to communicate effectively. People sometimes communicate with others in a way that

angers or annoys them even when it is not their intention to do so. This often stems from a lack of necessary communication skills, clarity, not being diplomatic or non-confrontational and to criticize in a destructive rather than constructive manner. People may also resort to the use of stereotypes or faulty attributions to explain past behaviour and anticipate future ones. When people are wronged or find out that their interests have been thwarted-by another person, they naturally try to see or know why the person did that. More often than not that action is judged based on some past behaviour that individual had put up or some utterances he made in the past.

e. Ambiguity over responsibility or jurisdiction: When people are uncertain or when no defined boundaries exist as to what duties people are carrying out, there is bound to be a clash of interests and roles. One party would likely interfere with the other party's goal or disclaims responsibility. Conflict can develop over such issues but where there are rules and defined limits, people will tend to abide by them.

f. Scarce resources; No institution or group of persons have unlimited resources. When people realize that resources are scarce, it motivates them to compete with others who are also in need of the resources to achieve their goals. Conflict often arises on how to share these resources between the competing parties. Each party would bring out all sorts of claim to lay hands on a sizeable chunk of the resources. The moment an interested party realizes it has been "outsmarted" by others, there would certainly be trouble.

The various potential causes of conflicts as suggested by Kindler (2002), are:

- a. Inaccurate or incomplete information: Interpretation of things are based on perceptions, which are influenced by social conditions, personal history and vested interests. While one person interprets an events as a challenging opportunity, another sees It as a threat, or one person sees a report as definitive and clear, another sees it as ambiguous and obscure. Different people can interpret an event differently
- b. Inappropriate or seemingly incompatible goals: Conflicts or disagreements frequently occur when the goals of interdependent people diverge or clash.
- c. Ineffective or unacceptable methods: Disagreement may exist over methods, techniques for completing a task by different people. Conflict over methods depends on how people weigh the risk and merits over another, how people assess personal costs and benefits and the people's personal values and ethical concerns.
- d. Antagonistic and other negative feeling: A situation can arise where fresh conflict results from left over resentment from previously mismanaged conflict. When conflict stems from old wounds, it may be difficult to diagnose, because it is rarely acknowledged by the parties involved and often, presents as a "personality clash".

2.1 STRATEGIES FOR RESOLVING CONFLICT

Strategies are the art of planning operations in war, skill in managing affairs. It will then follow that the skill of managing crisis is that proper strategy to use. Strategy works hand in hand with tactics. Strategy involves the master plan for wining a campaign. This involves long range planning. Tactics is normally a short term project that makes strategy works. It covers skillful use of tools and techniques in winning the several battles that make a campaign (Attah, 1999).

Seymour Lipset quoted by Wilson (2007), opines that "stable society requires relatively moderate tension among its contending political forces". For conflict to be effectively managed there must be what Register (1999), calls "Crisis Contingency Plan" He points out that not only should such plan exist, but it should be constantly reviewed. Crisis management is the act and process of restoring harmony in an organization or society through strategic actions aimed at reconciling opposing parties and views, or reaching opposing parties and views, or reaching a compromise or consensus.

Register (2006), posits that conflict management has some elements of anticipation of potential crisis, developing positive attitude towards crisis management, building credibility through a succession of responsible deeds being prepared to act on the opportunities during a crisis and catalogue to potential crisis situations. Register says "add credibility to your cause by inviting objective authorities, bodies to help end crisis".

He insists that the sting has been taken out of many a crisis by open cooperation with respected bodies clearly seen to be taking an unbiased view. The important fact to note of course is that the

bottom line in effective crisis management according to Register (In Salu 2003), a well know British crisis management expert "is seizing the initiative, taking control of what happened before it engulfs the company, planning for crisis as the key to cooperate survival".

Effective communication has also been shown by research and experience to be at the heart or centre of effective crisis management. Register has stated that the best antidotes, in the end, are consistent and persistent communication-day in, day out, year in, year out. With consistent communication and thoughtful planning, companies are either prepared to encounter crisis with a measure of calm and emerge with a measure of success. With the above in mind, we recommend the adoption and application of Register's 15-point plan for crisis management in various contextually modified forms. The plan is as follows:

- i. Faced with a disaster, think of the worst possible scenario and act accordingly.
- ii. When the dust has settled, look to see what lessons you might be able to teach the rest of industry from your experience and act accordingly.
- iii. Have a crisis management plan.
- iv. Be prepared to demonstrate human concern for what has happened.
- v. In communication terms, be prepared to seize early initiatives by rapidly establishing the organization as the single authoritative source of information about what has gone wrong and what steps the organization is taking to remedy the situation.
- vi. Whenever possible, look for ways of using the media as part of your armory for containing the effect of the crisis.
- vii. At the outset of the crisis, quickly establish a war room or emergency control centre and staff it with senior personnel trained to fulfill specified roles designed to contain and manage the crisis.
- viii. Set-up telephone hotlines to cope with the flood of additional calls that will be received during a crisis.
- ix. Get your opponents on your side, getting them involved in resolving the problem. x. Know your target audience and listen their grievances, xi. Get authoritative bodies to help end the crisis.
- xii. In communicating about crisis, avoid use of language that shows your care about what has happened and which clearly demonstrates that you are trying to put matters right.
- xiii. Have a clear picture of what grievances are held against you by those affected by the crisis. If possible use research to verify your beliefs.
- xiv. Whenever possible, seek outside advice when drawing crisis contingency plan, xv. Train yourself and others in various area of crisis management.

Managing conflicts is akin to managing change. Effective masters of change combine a steadfast vision of where they are going and the willingness to flexible along the way (Cohen et al 2005). According to Cohen et al, (2005), The main methods of managing conflict in an organization can be summarized to include conflict stimulation, reduction and resolution by:

- i. Restructuring the organization, the authority responsibility, relationship should be clarifies when the structure is changed.
- ii. Rearrangement of task and work relations.
- iii. Human Resource policies and procedures can be made more equitable and attention paid to the possibility of monetary rewards.
- iv. Development of staff interpersonal group process skills.
- v. Bringing in outsiders to an organization with different values and styles.
- vi. Encouraging a more participative and supportive style of leadership with the aim of creating greater employee commitment and cooperation.

Burgoom and Ruffner (1988), identify seven strategies for managing conflicts. These include:

- a. Recognizing the type of conflict present and at which level it is operating.
- b. Leaving the field by physically and psychologically departing or by changing topic.
- c. Use of effective communication. The message communicated should not be accusatory. Rather, it should be accurate representation of the source conflict, and it should identify the

specific attitude, values or behaviors in question. People cannot resolve their differences unless they make them known to each other.

d. Re-establishment of mutual trust through honest desire for reconciliation.

e. Effective persuasion. Because conflicts involve differences in attitudes or behaviors, persuading someone to change his or her behaviors or attitudes will eliminate the conflict.

f. Bargaining and negotiation. This would be effectively handled by a neutral third-party or arbitrator considered credible and held in respect by parties in conflict. This would engender free flow of communication and prevent "Conflict of interest"

g.. Leveling: There is no better way to manage or resolve conflict than to admit that you are wrong. Reconciliation would be faster if parties in any conflict admitted having been at fault.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted in the three different Areas of Niger Delta region which comprises three states namely Abia, Rivers and Imo state. The states to a greater extent share essentially similar characteristics. The oil companies existing in this areas include Nigeria Gas company and Shell Petroleum Development Company. The oil exploration existing in these areas led to the misunderstanding with the affected communities and that led to the choice of the study area. The major occupation of the people is farming and fishing. The farmers grow similar crops with most similar cropping systems. The common staples grown are root tuber crops -(yam, cocoyam, and cassava), sweet potato, plantain, banana and leafy vegetables. Nigeria as a nation lies wholly within the tropical zone, There are wide climatic variations in different areas of the country. Temperature rarely exceeds 32 c (90 f), but humidity is very high and nights are hot. Inland, there are two distinct, seasons: a wet season from march to late October, with generally lower temperature and a dry season from November to February, with mid-day temperatures that surpass 38 c (100 f) but relatively cool nights. As in most of West Africa, Nigeria's climate is characterized by strong latitudinal zones becoming progressively drier as one moves north from the coast. Rainfall is the key climatic variable and there is a marked alteration of wet and dry seasons in most areas. The South-East zone of Nigeria is located on latitudes 5° 06'N to 6° 34'N of the equator and longitudes 6° 38'E and 8° 08'E of the Greenwich Meridian (Microsoft Corporation, 2009).

The study used sixty (60) inhabitants of Etiche in Rivers State, sixty (60) inhabitants of Ukwa-West in Abia State and sixty (60) inhabitants of Ohaji Egbema in Imo State. This meant that one hundred and eighty (180) respondents were total sample used. In the course of this study, source of data was primary. The primary data were collected with instrument of questionnaire and interview schedules from the 180 respondents.

4.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The results on the distribution of respondents according to Existence of conflict are presented and discussed in Table 1 which shows that 136 respondents representing 75.56% indicated that they have conflict issues in their area, while 44 respondents representing 24.44% have contrary opinion on conflicts in their area. The implication of this result is that almost all the regions are characterized by one form of conflict or the other.

FACTORS THAT BRING ABOUT CONFLICTS IN THE NIGER DELTA

The result table 2 indicates that unemployment is the major cause of conflict in the Niger Delta region. This is in conformity with the findings of Elesho and Mukwuzi (2003) which claim that the Niger Delta "have had their fate tied to the same apron string of poverty and economic neglect." They stated further that though the region produces more than eighty (80) percent of the nation's wealth, greater number of the inhabitants live below poverty line, unable to afford more than a meal per day, which affluence practically dwelt in the neighbourhoods." Ehiri (2003) summarizes it this way "we are not asking for total control, but asking for 50 percent control of our God-given wealth is not to ask for too much.

The results in table 2 show the rating scale and rank analysis of factors that give rise to conflict in the Niger Delta region. The results show poverty (4.40), unemployment (4.50), bad leadership (4.10), lack of government presence (3.8), and repatriation of money to foreign countries (3.20)

were the most important factors that give rise to conflict in Niger Delta region and ranked 1st, 2ⁿ, 3^r, 4th and 5th respectively. The mean values were also greater than the likert means value of 3.0

CONFLICT RESOLUTION METHODS ADOPTED IN MANAGING CONFLICTS IN NIGER DELTA

The relevant methods which have significant influence on conflict resolution are identified and discussed below [table 3]:

The coefficient of negotiation was positively signed and significant at 10% level of probability. This implies that any increase in the level of negotiation will increase the probability and extent of conflict resolution in the area. This is in line with Miller (2002), who argued that parties in conflict should negotiate with each other and end the grievances to avoid escalating the conflict.

The coefficient of level of mediation was negatively signed and significant at 5% level of probability. This implies that any increase in level of mediation will lead to decrease in probability and extent of conflict resolution among the parties/stakeholders. This is contrary to a priori expectations probably because there is always a contradiction among the parties involved.

The coefficient of arbitration was positively signed and significant at 5% level of probability. This implies that any increase in the level of arbitration will increase the probability and extent of conflict resolution in the area.

The coefficient of level of enquiry was negatively signed and significant at 10% level of probability. This implies that any increase in the level of enquiry will decrease the probability and extent of conflict resolution in the area because the investigators in most case require more time to investigate the remote and immediate cause of conflict in the study area with the expectation of making a long lasting recommendations on how to curb the conflict and through such process community conflict can be resolved.

The coefficient of education was positively signed and significant at 1% level of probability. This implies that any increase in the level of education will increase the probability and extent of conflict resolution in the area. This indication is that when one acquire more education, he is expected to understand that conflict has a very high risk of distracting activities but if effectively managed can achieve a lot.

The coefficient of household size was negatively signed and significant at 1% level of probability. This implies that any increase in household size will decrease the probability and intensity on conflict resolution in the area. This is because the higher the size of the household, the risk of high conflict and decrease in conflict resolution.

The coefficient of native of community was positively signed and significant at 1% level of probability. This implies that any increase in the number of respondents who are natives of their communities will increase the probability and intensity on conflict resolution in the area. This also indicates that the people of the region to a greater extent equally understand the essence of conflict resolution and its effects to the development of the region.

Finally, the coefficient of mass media (x4), public opinion (x5), and employment status (x10) were positively signed but there were not significant.

5.0 Summary of findings

Conflicts exist in the Niger Delta region and if not, resolved peacefully will leave indelible wounds in people's heart and society's Conscience that will be very difficult to heal. The study analysed conflict resolution methods adopted in managing conflicts in Niger Delta Region of Nigeria and the result of the analysis on the factors that causes conflict in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria showed that unemployment, poverty, bad leadership, lack of government presence and repatriation of money to foreign countries were significant factors militating against the peace of the Niger Delta region.

The study also determined conflict resolution methods adopted in managing conflict in Niger Delta and the results shows that negotiation, arbitration, educational status, native of communities were positively signed and significant at different levels of probability and the coefficient of public opinion,

mass media and employment status were also positively signed but there were not significant and it equally shows that the coefficient level of mediation, enquiry and household size were negatively signed and significant at different level of probability.

Excerpts from the study inferred that the most effective solution to conflict is that community leaders and managers should take all necessary measures to stop or prevent it from escalating where it has already developed and recommends amongst others that government should embark on policies that will canvass support for free and affordable education for the people of the region to engage their mind on something positive rather than destroying properties and kidnapping expatriates and thereby helping in exposing them to understand the dynamics of conflict resolution.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

This work was self-sponsored by the authors

6.0 CONCLUSION

Despite the clarion call by different individuals and groups to end community conflict in Nigeria, it is rather becoming endemic. Every community or state groans under acrimonies conflict without a commitment to resolve it. The study concludes that the most effective solution to conflict is that community leaders and managers should take all necessary measures to stop or prevent it from escalating where it has already developed and recommends that government should embark on policies that will canvass support for free and affordable education for the people of the region to engage their mind on something positive rather than destroying properties and kidnapping expatriates and thereby helping in exposing them to understand the dynamics of conflict resolution. Also, that policy should be formulated using Negotiation as the approach in identifying the actual need of the people in the region before providing them with basic amenities as corporate social responsibility.

Table 1 Distribution of respondents' status on Existence of Conflicts

Existence of Conflict	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	136	75.56
No	44	24.44
Total	180	100%

Source: Field survey 2015,

Table 2: Rating Scale Analysis of the Factors that led to Conflict in the Niger Delta Region

Factors	SA	A	U	D	SD	Total	Mean	Rank
Poverty	108 (540)	43 (172)	15 (45)	14 (28)	- -	785	4.40	2
Unemployment	117 (585)	36 (144)	27 (81)	- -	- -	810	4.50	1
Bad leadership	74 (370)	58 (232)	38 (114)	5 (10)	5 (5)	731	4.10	3
Lack of government presence	72	31	51	21	5	684	3.80	4

	(360)	(124)	(153)	(42)	(5)			
Repatriation of money to foreign countries	28 (140)	54 (216)	39 (117)	50 (100)	9 (9)	582	3.20	5
Interdependence	14 (70)	13 (52)	72 (216)	59 (118)	22 (22)	478	2.66	8
Communication problem	14 (70)	49 (196)	27 (81)	53 (106)	37 (37)	490	2.72	6
Scarce resource	27 (135)	29 (116)	33 (99)	42 (84)	49 (49)	483	2.68	7

Source: Survey data, 2015. Figures in parenthesis are likert frequencies.

SA-Strongly Agree, A-Agree, U-Undecided, D- Disagree, D-Strongly Disagree

Table 3: Tobit Model estimates on the Methods of Conflict Resolution among the Respondents in the study area.

Variable		Coefficient	Std. Error	T-Ratio
Constant		-2.0958	1.8836	-1.11
Negotiation	(X1)	0.3291	0.1885	1.75*
Mediation	(X2)	-0.5267	0.2274	-2.32**
Arbitration	(X3)	1.429139	.5406895	2.64**
Media	(X4)	.3418963	.2259731	1.51
Opinion	(X5)	8943413	.9621918	0.93
Enquiry	(X6)	-.4104457	.2129256	-1.93*'
Education	(XT)	.2377107	.0741371	3.21***
Household size	(X8)	-.2397319	.0601262	-3.99***
Indigene	(X9)	2.200034	.5556038	3.96***
Employment	(XI0)	.7737372	.5302708	1.46
Chi ² value (3 [^])		46.79***		
Log Likelihood		-309.4113		

Source: Computed from STATA 8A Tobit results/Surveys data, 2015

***, ** and * are significant levels at 1.0%, 5.0% and 10.0% respectively

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