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WOMEN AND THE PROMOTION OF PEACE AMONGST THE OGONI PEOPLE OF RIVERS STATE

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ABSTRACT

This study focuses on the efforts of women from Ogoni in Nigeria's Niger Delta region towards enhancing women participation in peace and security issues in Nigeria, through the activities of Non-governmental Organizations in the region. It specifically, examines the capacity building training scheme carried out by peace building organizations among the Ogoni women group in Niger-Delta region of Nigeria, as well as how the women are making use of their newly acquired skills in their everyday life. The objective of this study is to provide an insight into the transformation processes taking place in the Niger-Delta region of Nigeria. To meet this objective, the study utilizes qualitative method, employing primary and secondary sources of data collection. The findings from the study indicate that Organizations/groups such as Women in Peace building Network (WIPNET), Nigeria Stability and Reconciliation Programme (NSRP) and Search for Common ground (SFCG) are working towards changing gender relations in Ogoni, with hope of domesticating the UNSCR 1323. Furthermore, the finding indicates that the Ogoni women have been armed with basic skills and knowledge for community peacebuilding, and are using their new skill, to avert conflict within their communities from escalating but then continually face relegation by their male counterparts in the process of fully participating in peace building processes. The author recommends on the need to encourage more women's participation in peace building processes in Ogoni land by bringing them to the table when these issues are discussed.

Keywords: Women, Peace promotion, Ogoni, Capacity building.

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INTRODUCTION

Globally, there has been constant call for the involvement and participation of women in Peace processes. Women and children take the brunt of the world's conflicts and wars. During these conflicts, they get exposed to unimaginable terrible atrocities – kidnappings, massacres, sexual slavery and assaults, mutilations and forced marriage and mutilations including the spread of

HIV/AIDS. Rape on the other hand has often been used as a weapon of war. There is no gainsaying that women and girls get hit differently than men and boys, in conflict situation. Similarly, the women and girls are often invisible in most peace building initiatives and processes. The obstacles in the paths of women have continually played a huge role in making them unable to participate in violent confrontations.

The Geneva Graduate Institute's Broadening Participation Project examined the roles of women's groups in 40 peace and transition processes and found that the involvement of women made it more likely for an agreement to be reached and increased the probability that the peace agreement will last longer (Dylan, 2017). Findings revealed that women partakers in peace processes focus more on transitional justice, economic development, reconciliation, and education rather than the spoils of the war. In this way, more focus is on the critical elements of a sustained peace (Lindborg, 2017). This flies in the face of firm empirical evidence on the need for women's inclusion in peace processes. An International Peace Institute study of 182 signed peace agreements between 1989 and 2011 found that when women are included in peace processes, there is a 35 percent increase in the probability that a peace agreement will last 15 years or more (Lindborg, 2017).

In 2015, U.S. Institute of Peace commenced a project in Colombia to support a women's peace building network and women-led groups committed to mediation and nonviolence. Its members were drawn from every sector of society, this network helped strengthened the formal peace process as it got started. Hostages were recoded to have been successfully released when women's groups negotiated local ceasefires with armed groups. They pressured rebels to lift roadblocks and recorded human rights abuses. They sought solutions to illegal activities such as drug trafficking as well as protested budget priorities of local governments. During the Columbia peace talks which held in Havana, some of these women were invited to the negotiating table. Women participants occupied one third of the table. Among other roles the women ensured that that the concerns of the war's victims were captured in the accountability and reconciliation mechanisms in the final agreement (UN, 2010).

Such results were catalyzed by the landmark U.N. Resolution on Women, Peace and Security passed in October 2000, which confirmed the significant role women play in preventing and resolving conflicts and stressed the importance of their full involvement and equal participation (UN, 2010). Representative and systematic inclusion of women in a wide range of peace and security issues is goes beyond ensuring a successful negotiation, but rather ensures that women's interests are being addressed. Professor Valerie Hudson at Texas A&M University employed quantitative analysis to show that women's security is integrally connected to the nation's security in which they reside. Also, security has been discovered to be linked to the capability of women to sustain peace through becoming leaders and to build peace by being full participants in the process. Gender equality is a firm indicator of how peaceful a state truly is when compared to other indicators, such as GDP (Dylan, 2017).

The United Nations Security Council recognized that implementing the UNSCR 1325 and related resolutions at the national level is a critical instrument for promoting Women's agenda in Peace and Security. For this cause, the Presidential Statements of 2004/40 and 2005/52 called on Member States to accept Resolution 1325, comprising the development of National Action Plans (NAPs) or other country-wide strategies. (Nigeria Stability and Reconciliation Programme - NSRP, 2014). Nigeria acknowledges the relevance of the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 in implementing peacekeeping and peace-building directives and in conflict prevention activities to give greater recognition to gender perspectives. The Nigerian

government developed an Action Plan in response to this mandate. The action plan is aimed at contributing to the plan for Women, Peace and Security.

Thus, the Nigerian National Action Plan promotes and firms up women's participation and representation in all peacekeeping functions, peace talks, peace-building and post-conflict functions, as well as in decision-making processes at the state level. (NSRP, 2014). Women war victims have moved from just being the victims of the spoils of war to assuming leadership roles and aggressively addressing the causes and consequences of protracted, vehement conflict. Nigerian women's involvement in peace building processes has been very unbalanced and sidelined since the upsurge of violent conflicts in Nigeria, one that demonstrates women taking the peace-building enterprise only within the non-formal sphere at the community level. This is so as it appears to be the sole medium available to them via avenues such as non-governmental civil society organizations, informal-female-based clusters, etc., and very small or no representation in the governmental space.

Women work at different levels, from grassroot to national and, in some cases, even global, to advance political participation and to address the needs of their war-torn localities. Responses from women take several forms, Women's responses take many forms, which include coordinating grass roots, building coalitions, and becoming mediators and role models. They are creating mechanisms to advance the quality of life of their neighbors, societies, and families (Donna, 2000).

The community remains one of the best platforms women employ for their peace activism, given the relative dearth of women's presence in the formal political space of many conflict-torn countries such as Nigeria. It is exactly those women who are excluded from formal conflict resolution processes that are at the lead of grassroot groups that confront the issues brought on by protracted violent conflict (Donna, 2000).

Women's participation in peace processes is often recorded in their utilization of informal organizations and networks, such as credit committees, neighborhood alliances or mother groups, to voice out about conflicts, to settle conflicts in non-violent manner or to stimulate the conduct of more formal processes, particularly in instances where women are systematically quieted and made unseen in the formal, public space. This is far from saying that 'behind the scenes participation' is adequate, but to note that it is frequently necessary to look beyond the regular roles that women play at the grassroots in order to identify and advance the dynamic role of women in peace processes. It is against this backdrop that this paper seeks to examine women and the promotion of peace in Ogoni Land of Rivers State, Nigeria.

For centuries, many Nigerian women have played important roles in peace and war times, mainly as local peacemakers, as high priestesses who consult with gods to tell whether or not it was right to go to war, as praise singers for men during fights as an enhancement to guarantee their triumph. Examples are: Queen Amina of Zaria, who led the triumph of her people, in Ife its Queen Moremi, who freed her people through negotiations with the opposing side, similarly was the fierce general Efunsetan Aniwura, a female in Egbaland (Olaitan, 2018). In Plateau State, Nigeria, at least 4,000 persons have been slayed in recurring community conflict since 2001. UN Women set up a women-led peace network under the European Union-funded programme to support the promotion of women's engagement in Northern Nigeria's peace and security activities. Women's leadership has been greatly strengthened because of this intervention. It has also promoted gender equality and advanced the security of children and women in community conflict settings.

Women in Borno State have organized and partook in several marches, campaign, demonstrations, and rallies to raise awareness of exploitations, to call for involvement and to take actionable steps to achieve peace. Within grassroot vigilante groups, such as Kungiyar marhaba (hunters' association) some women join in the fight against Boko Haram and particularly the Borno State-based Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF). Women's groups also intercede, and help returned pregnant abductees or with children whose fathers are/were part of Boko Haram by building grassroot support. This remains a major hindrance to community reintegration, which women are aggressively working to transform.

According to Ekiyor and Gbowe (2005), many women's groups have emerged and empowered themselves to tutor community level women to protect their fundamental human rights. In Niger Delta's bleak situation, the women and their clusters are the unrecognized heroes. They have partaken in several regional peace-building enterprises. The women's group has often led in calling for regional interventions. A great example is the Kebetkache Women Development Centre – a non-governmental organization for women's advocacy and education that has trained several women from more than 15 oil-impacted communities, towns, and villages in the Niger Delta through capacity building in advocacy to facilitate their participation in community affairs. They have organized independent protests, recognized the needs and interests of women and their craving to act; they have commenced training in peace building and conflict management. (Osah & Odedina, 2017).

Another community-based organization – Tere-Ama Women's Association, took direct action to dissuade young men in the creeks of Okrika from partaking in armed violence in the run-up to the 2007 general elections. To avert bloodshed, the women worked closely with traditional leaders to resolve a land dispute that threatened the community livelihoods and existing markets. The Tere-Ama community market remains a huge source of income for the entire community. Another example of women's involvement in Peace Movement at the community level is non-violent protest by women against Chevron in Escravos (Delta State), in 2002, for destroying the livelihood and environment of several local villages.

Chevron was detained in captivity for 10 days by the angry women. During the negotiations, all of the company's operations were stalled and the cooperation was forced to announce "force majeure". The resolution comprised the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the women (Iruloh & Uche, 2017). Based on the above, this paper examines the efforts of women from Ogoni in Nigeria's Niger Delta region towards enhancing women participation in peace and security issues in Nigeria, through the activities and trainings of Non-governmental Organizations in the region. Furthermore, it investigates how well these women translate the acquired skills into practice in everyday life.

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION

To provide better understanding and clarity, some definitional clarifications of concepts used herein will be provided which are gender, peace, and security. The term "gender" refers to a social construct which symbolizes how the society views men and women as well as their expectations of both genders. This construct now results in hierarchical relationships between men and women in power and rights distribution favoring men and putting women at a disadvantageous position (Gender Equality Policy, 2020). Gender is a pertinent theme in the understanding of conflict and sustaining peace. Gender makes an integral part of every aspect of any given society. For several years now, gender equity, has remained a reoccurring topic on the agendas of all recent global meetings.

Peace is commonly defined as the nonexistence of war, violence, fear, anxiety, conflict and suffering, and about peaceful living (Francis, 2007). It is mainly focused creating and maintaining order in a just society and the resolving conflict non-violently (Dopamu, 2006). Generally, peace is defined as freedom from disturbance, tranquility, absence of war, fear, conflict, anxiety, suffering, violence, and about peaceful co-existence. Peace connotes freedom from violence and war, especially when people coexist and work jointly happily without disagreement. The UN's former Secretary General – Mr. Ban Ki-moon, defined peace to infer access to health, education, and essential services-particularly females; availing every human being an opportunity to live, to decide, protecting the planet's biodiversity and developing in a sustainable manner (Ogoh, 2008). More than ever, it connotes existing with others on the basis of mutual understanding, tolerance and respect.

Security means protection against enemy acts, law breaking, external aggression, violence, danger, attack, risk, want, insufficiency, poverty, unemployment, illiteracy, environmental degradation, disease, suppression, oppression, inhumanity, rebellion, destruction, natural disaster, etc. (Francis, 2007). Security could further be explained as freedom from, or removal of threat not only to a State's physical existence but also to the capability for self-protection and advancement and the development of the general populace (Dopamu, 2006). This is not to say that securing the State is not important but rather its security should be geared towards securing humans and not of the current regime. In conceptual terms, national security appears bogus and ambiguous. It is an ideology that accentuates the holistic and overall security of a country politically, environmentally, economically, socially, etc. Once a breakdown of security occurs in any society, it has always proved to have severe adverse consequence depending on the scale of the breakdown.

The State of the Nigerian Security

Nigeria has experienced myriads of violent clashes and currently experiencing armed conflict between governmental armed forces and armed groups. Resources or land access, terrorism, ethnicity, economic inequalities, politics, religion, and personal clashes between groups makes Nigeria vulnerable to conflict. According to Dakas (2020), States in the Northeast of Nigeria have been the most affected the conflict which has lasted over a decade. Violence and conflict in North East Nigeria is largely attributable to Boko Haram – a terrorist group responsible for human rights abuses across Nigeria, Chad, Cameroon, and Niger. The violent radicalization of Boko Haram members and the ensuing military operations has supposedly affected nearly fifteen million persons since 2009. Conflicts in the Northern part of Nigeria centres on nomadic cattle-herding groups and agricultural households who come into conflict over land access. This rivalry over land and resources is intensified by ethnicity and religion.

Herders are generally members of the minority Fulani ethnic group and are mostly Muslim. Farmer-herder fights often comprise attacks by one group and ensuing retaliation from the other locality. Similarly in southern Nigeria, there has been several incidences of high-profile armed groups in the region (Niger Delta) which ensued in the amnesty programme launched by the late head of State – Umaru Musa Yar'Adua to curb acts of political thuggery, cases of bombing or attempted bombing at political rallies, kidnapping and illegal refining (Women Peace and Security Network, 2020). Till date there has been seldom response directed towards the victims of the conflict as well as other affected parties across the north and southern parts of Nigeria (Olaitan, 2020).

Youth, women, and children are often the target groups. While the females endure the similar trauma as the entire populace, they remain targets of specific types of abuse and violence, including sexual exploitation and violence (Stewart, 2010). In order to assess the level of insecurity in Nigeria, the following factors need to be considered; the general literacy level and quality of education; crime level and the capability of social control institutions to combat crime nationwide; environmental sustainability level and; the height of technological progression (Ogoh, 2008). The agenda of combating Nigeria's insecurity surpasses the question of military strategy and might but proceeds to comprise the uptake of diverse methodologies to address the problem in form of panels of enquiry, policies, truth and reconciliation commissions, etc. (Olaitan, 2020).

Gender Equality in International Law

In 1974, the UN General Assembly adopted the Declaration on the Protection of Women and Children in Emergency and Armed Conflict. The dangers to children and women, and the need of including women in peace issues, were also considered during the deliberations at the United Nations Conference on Women in Mexico in 1975. Women and girls tend to experience conflict differently than men and boys. International human rights law also applies in times of armed conflict, and is of specific pertinence in the context of local armed conflict, where international humanitarian law may not apply. The major conventional tools for protecting victims of armed conflict are the four Geneva Conventions of 1949 and their two Additional Protocols of 1977. Protocol II applies to local/internal conflicts.

There are special guarantees and protections stated by the Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols for females. Many of the guidelines provided by these treaties form part of customary international law, and are thus binding on both States and NGOs (UN, 1993). Precisely, in 1993, the General Assembly adopted the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, which recognizes that women in violent/armed conflict situations are exclusively susceptible to violence (UN, 2010). At the global level, the main platforms of redress for women and girls' victims of conflict-related abuses are through claims of war crimes, genocide and crimes against humanity. In some instances, such females could also claim fiscal compensation for their war-related hurts (UN, 2010). The United Nations Secretary General, in his narrative to the Security Council's meeting, opined that: 'the Council should deliberate on women's security because marginalizing women can undermine or delay the achievement of sustainable peace, reconciliation and security (UN, 2010).

There is growing global recognition that a holistic methodology to security issues needs women's inclusion, their perspectives and experiences. A comprehensive method to security, thus is one which is gender sensitive – that identifies the contributions, needs and interests of both women and men. Recognizing women's critical roles in resolving conflict has been formalized by the United Nations Security Council (UNSCR) via four of its resolutions by addressing gender concerns in peace operations and armed conflict contexts. The UNSCR 1325 hence calls for actions around four topics:

- Women's full involvement in peace processes (comprising conflict prevention and post conflict rebuilding);
- Incorporation of gender viewpoints in peacekeeping training and operations.
- Guarding women and girls; and respecting their rights (and preventing violence); and

- Gender mainstreaming in the UN implementation and reporting systems. (UN, 2000).

The UNSCR 1325 National Action Plans (NAPs) offer guidelines to State and non-state personnel on the duties and tasks to be implemented in a specific national or regional setting to fulfill the women, peace and security (WPS) agenda. Protecting civilians, particularly women, is critical peace operations credibility.

Conflict in the Niger Delta Regions of Nigeria

For a better comprehension of the Ogoni Crisis, it is equally imperative to view the Niger Delta conflict background. The Niger-delta conflict could be said to be one which is quite difficult to analyse. Several opinions have emerged from researchers concerning the root cause of the conflict in the region. These opinions revolve mostly around the “grievance or greed” dichotomy. Some of the often-mentioned themes are; the issue of relegation of smaller ethnicities, the Nigerian federal system of government, unemployment challenges, among others (Ibeanu 2002). While other authors argue that the lack of satisfaction related with monetary compensation paid to the indigens was the reason for the on-going conflict (ibid). In furtherance, others attribute the root cause of the conflict to the “feeling of entitlement” tendencies of Nigerian government (Omeje 2005).

The Niger-delta region comprises nine states – Abia, Cross-River, Imo, Edo, Delta, Akwa-Ibom, Ondo, Bayelsa and Rivers (Ogoni is located in Rivers State), summarily, the region covers 70,000 squares kilometers. The name Niger-Delta was given to these States because of the crude have one thing in common – grievances against the federal government of Nigeria and the multinational oil companies operating within the region. This feeling is an offshoot of the years of neglect by the multinationals and the Nigeria government to their plight of a degrading environment brought by the exploitative activities of the oil companies in the region. This degradation has resulted in loss of livelihood, farmlands for agriculture, pollution of drinking water and the rivers, streams, etc.

These grievances resulted in agitations by different groups in the region such as the Niger-Delta Liberation Front, Niger Delta people’s Volunteer Force (NDPVF), Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP), Movement for the Reparation of Ijaw Elders Forum and Movement for the Emancipation of Niger-Delta (MEND), etc (Ikelegbe, 2005). The yearnings and outcry of the Niger Deltans has further drawn the attention of both local and international NGOs such as Institute of Human Right and Humanitarian Law, Oil Watch Group, Human Right Watch and Amnesty international, etc (Ikelegbe, 2005).

The NGOs in this region were particularly involved in monitoring and documenting environmental and human rights abuses, and the ‘socio-economic’ empowerment of groups and individuals (Francis, 2007). While some protesting groups are doing so to advance the development and protection of the environment through negotiations, others remain violent in their approach (Oviasuyi & Uwadiae, 2010). Several violent clashes between the indigens of the region and the Nigerian government have been recorded. Often, the indigenes indulge in the kidnapping of Oil companies’ staff and destroy pipelines, while military action becomes the response gotten from the Nigerian government.

The Ogoni Struggle

The Ogoni is made up of the existing minority ethnic groups in Nigeria. They have several local government areas in Rivers State and are one of the groups blessed with abundant oil reserves in the Niger delta region. In Ogoni land, oil commercialization commenced in 1958 by Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC) – a subsidiary of the Royal Dutch/Shell, (Human Right Watch, 1997). Although some multinational oil corporations such as Agip and Elf, are engaged in oil production in Nigeria, SPDC operates the major joint venture with Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) and as hence produces the largest percentage of oil for commercial purposes in Nigeria (Human Right Watch, 1995) and Ogoni land houses most of its major oil fields. Several years of oil extraction and exploration without adequate compensation or cleanup, has defaced Ogoni land just as other oil producing communities in Niger-delta suffer similar fate, thus threatening their livelihoods since they depend largely on the environment for survival.

Ibeanu (2002) opined that when people's livelihoods are threatened, it awakens a feeling of anxiousness and deprivation, thereby ensuing in insecurity among them. He holds that, in the Ogoni situation, it will need the "removing deprivation", to improve their "insecurities" (Ibid). This infers depending on their environment which has now been degraded, thus ensuing in resource scarcity in addition to lack of compensation from the Nigerian government. The people of Ogoni had no choice but to sort different means of addressing their source of deprivation, and one of such ways was their call for change. In communicating their discontentment, the people gathered and formed a group known as Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP) through which they embarked on various non-violent protests. MOSOP was birthed in 1990, shortly after presenting the Ogoni Bill of Rights to the Nigerian government. The Bill wanted that "the Ogoni indigenes be granted political Autonomy to partake in the activities of the republic as a separate and distinct unit" including control and oversight of the economic resources gotten from Ogoni land for the growth of Ogoni land amongst others (Saro- Wiwa, 1995).

MOSOP was established for the sole reason of bringing forward this demand, (Saro-Wiwa, 1995). Other groups such as Council of Ogoni Traditional Rulers (COTRA), Federation of Ogoni Women (FOWA), National Youth Council of Ogoni People (NYCOP), Ogoni Council of Churches (OCC), Ogoni Student Union (OSU) and Council of Ogoni Professionals (COP), to partake in the struggle. As an affiliate of MOSOP, these groups got the opportunity to contribute to the deliberations on the issue. But, sadly, their "Bill of Right" demand was not accepted by the then administration, and instead of proffering a workable alternative of the conflict, the government employed violence.

The Ogoni struggle was globally recognized in the early 1990s, during this time, series of great human rights abuses were meted out to the Ogoni people by the Nigerian military government to suppress their voices. MOSOP's chief spokesperson – Ken Saro-wiwa (and 8 other Ogonis) were detained, and executed by the then administration, without employing any due legal process; an action, which ensued in international condemnation against the then administration. The Joint Military Forces (JTF) ruthlessly carried out their actions in the region (HRW, 1995). Several incidents of indiscriminate shooting, extrajudicial killings, floggings, lootings, rapes, etc. were recorded (Mial, 2007). Houses, properties, and some communities were burnt down thereby rendering the Ogoni's as refugees in their own home.

Ogoni Struggle and Women

Women's reproductive and domestic roles draws them close to the environment thereby leading to their over reliance for their existence, (Omeje, 2005). Ogoni women's societal status is same as what is seen in the patriarchy that plays in the Nigerian society, where the "economic, social and political opportunities and rights" are not equitably distributed (Ibeanu 2002). In the Ogoni women's stance, several of them are farmers and housewives who depend on agrarian activities for survival. Nevertheless, the oil business in Nigeria has greatly hindered access to these resources due to several exploitation/pollution of their land. In addition to the degraded, fishing ponds, portable drinking water, women also bore the stress of unemployed family members (Ikelegbe, 2005). The Ogoni women were recorded to have revolted against the cause of their turmoil having endured the situation for too long.

FOWA became a visible platform for the Ogoni women to err their views about their travails which. FOWA functions as the MOSOP's women's wing established in 1990 (source: interviews, 2021). Its membership comprises several categories of women from Ogoni. Several of their activities are implemented in the form of demonstrations and protests carried out in a non-violent manner (ibid). They also partook in educating young women on sexual issues – a drive aimed at reducing the spate of sexually transmitted diseases, which was rampant among the youths at the time. FOWA came into limelight because of their momentous role played, during the Ogoni struggles in the 1990s, where several women put their lives on the line when they protest alongside their men (Ibeanu, 2002). On some instances many of them were wounded, beaten, detained and arrested by soldiers (Human Right Watch,1995; UNPO, 1995).

Efforts towards Peace facilitated by Non-Governmental Organizations in the Region

Presently, the insecurity in Ogoni land and the Niger delta region at large is far from being eliminated in its totality (UNDP, 2006). The outcome of the region's underdevelopment has ensued in deep rooted mistrust amongst the people towards the administration" (Francis, 2007). Nonetheless, various efforts aimed at promoting peace and improving living conditions of the Niger Deltans are still being carried out. Among such comprises the development of both the environment and human aspect of the region. The human aspect focuses more on helping them become agent of peace by building their capacity in conflict management and transformation. More importantly is working with women who often are at the receiving end in conflict situations. Such pragmatic and technical work have so far been achieved through the actions of International and grass root non-governmental organizations operating in the region and by extension, Nigeria. Below are brief descriptions of some amongst many NGOs that have worked with Ogoni women with the aim of building a lasting peace in Ogoni land.

Search for Common ground (SFCG) – Nigeria: Search for Common Ground is an international non-governmental organization that works to end violent conflict and build safe, healthy, and just societies. SFCG remains to date the largest such organization dedicated to building peace. It has offices in over 30 countries and employs the media to reach roughly 40 million people. It started its operations since 2004 in Nigeria. In the Niger Delta, SFCG started the implementation of the Tomorrow is a New Day project (SFCG, 2016). The project was aimed at promoting peaceful reconciliation and reintegration of ex-militants in the Niger Delta region. In Ogoni, SFG through its partners such as the Centre for Environment, Human Rights and Development (CEHRD) trained women and youths of Ogoni on conflict transformation and

advocacy. Available reports showed that the trainings had resulted in building confidence the confidence of women and youth to participate in peace talks and also lead processes such as mediation and negotiation over communal disputes.

WANEP-Nigeria

WANEP-Nigeria was established in 2001 as a peace building body. Its mandate was to develop an organized platform for partnership among various peace actors/ organizations in Nigeria. WANEP-Nigeria engages in several activities such as, the transformative approach to conflict resolution through one of its intervention programs – Active Non-violence and Peace Education. Other interventions include: Conflict prevention, Women in Peace building Network (WIPNET); Good Governance and Democracy. WANEP-Nigeria membership comprises local organizations/actors operating within the several geopolitical zones in Nigeria. With over 300 members, WANEPs activities are spread across Nigeria (Ibeanu 2002).

WIPNET

Women in Peace Building Network (WIPNET) – a program under WANEP came to be in 2002, with the mandate of closing the security and peace gender gap (WIPNET, 2010). This procedure is aimed at facilitating geared towards the “domestication of the UNSCR 1325” which stresses the pertinence of the equal involvement and participation of women in all peace building initiatives and talks as well as ensuring its legitimacy as a legal peace building tool in Nigeria (Ibid). WANEP believes that WIPNET will be very instrumental to supporting women in war torn/conflict areas through capacity building with the expectations of achieving the UN’s peace and security agenda (WANEP, 2007).

In Ogoni, WIPNET collaborates with Kebetkache Women Development and Resource center – a member organization. The executive director of this grassroots organization – Emem Bridget Okon serves as WIPNET’s focal point in the South-south region of Nigeria. WIPNET has thus been carrying out its activities and working with women in Ogoni and by extension, the Niger Delta region through its partner, Kebetkache. Between 2004 – 2007 WIPNET implemented three projects in the Niger Delta region. The first was titled: “Strengthening the Capacity of Women’s groups in Nigeria to Participate in Peace Advocacy and Conflict Prevention” (source: WIPNET’s internal Report). The second which was a follow up of the pilot was implemented between 2007-2010 and titled: “Institutional Mechanisms for Sustainable Participation of Women in Peace Processes in Nigeria” (WIPNET, 2010).

To consolidate the gains of the previous two projects, WIPNET commenced implementation of the third project titled: “Strengthening Women Social Network for Effective Participation in Peace and Human Security in the Niger Delta Regions of Nigeria” (ibid). Based on the foregoing, WIPNET has successfully translated the UNSCR 1325 into several indigenous languages in Nigeria. In the similar trajectory, the peace building training manual, has been successfully translated into 20 local languages amongst four geopolitical zones in Nigeria (Moussa et al, 2007). As of 2008, WIPNET’s membership had grown to over eighty women groups in four geographical zones in Nigeria who joined between 2004- 2007 (WIPNET’s internal Report 2008). There is also documented increase in women’s involvement in campaigning on peace and security issues, owing to the increasing number of community women receiving trained from WIPNET (ibid). Through these training received; women have been

reported to have started influencing the states Ministry of Women's Affairs to establish a policy to promote the rights of women in public transports in their respective states (Ibid).

Nigeria Stability and Reconciliation Programme (NSRP)

The Nigeria Stability and Reconciliation Programme (NSRP) commenced in 2011 and ran through 2017 with funding support ran from the UK government's Department for International Development. The programme was aimed at identifying and working with partner organizations and the Nigerian government to reduce violent conflict and promote stability, peace and reconciliation in the country. NSRP worked to improve outcomes for vulnerable groups that had experienced conflict, including women and girls, young men and people with disabilities (NSRP, 2014). In the Niger Delta, NSRP worked with WIPNET to encourage the promotion of the UNSCR and its domestication at the State level (Source: CEHRD's internal reports).

Furthermore, in Ogoni land, NSRP implemented an intervention – Integrated Response Mechanism for Reducing Violence Against Women and Girls through one of its partners, Centre for Environment, Human Rights and Development (CEHRD). The program focused on training women and girls to become agents of peace. The trainings armed with several peace building skills including early warning skills. Through the trainings received women and girls in Ogoni gained recognition and many were incorporated into their community's development committee (CDC) which was initially male dominated before the commencement of the program. In furtherance, the women also were seen mediating over cult-related conflicts in their communities as well (Source: CEHRD's internal reports).

METHODOLOGY

The study employed a gender relations approach. Gender relations comprise social relations of power, which eventually fix roles, responsibilities as well as benefits and resource allocations (Little & Panelli, 2003). This perspective helped create an understanding of the cultural factors that shape men and women peace-building activities as well as factors that inhibit women's full participation in peace processes. Data collection was drawn from both secondary and primary sources through the review of related literature and key informant interviews. It is pertinent to state that the interviewees have been identified to be authorities on the subject matter at the local level. Speaking with them gave the author a better perspective and first-hand information on the subject matter as it related to Ogoni women's involvement in the promotion of peace in Ogoni land. The data gathered was analysed and reported using a combination of descriptive and non-descriptive methods such as counts, graphs and documented statements from the interviewees.

Interviews /Findings

Whilst it seems like there is ceasefire in the conflicts in the Ogoni environs and the entire Niger-delta region when compared to the early 1990s, it is however worthy to note that some tensions still exist, owing to occasional violence involving armed youths of the region (Davidheiser & Nyiayaana, 2011). The chart below shows a graphical representation of groups alleged to be contributing to the existing conflicts in Ogoni land:

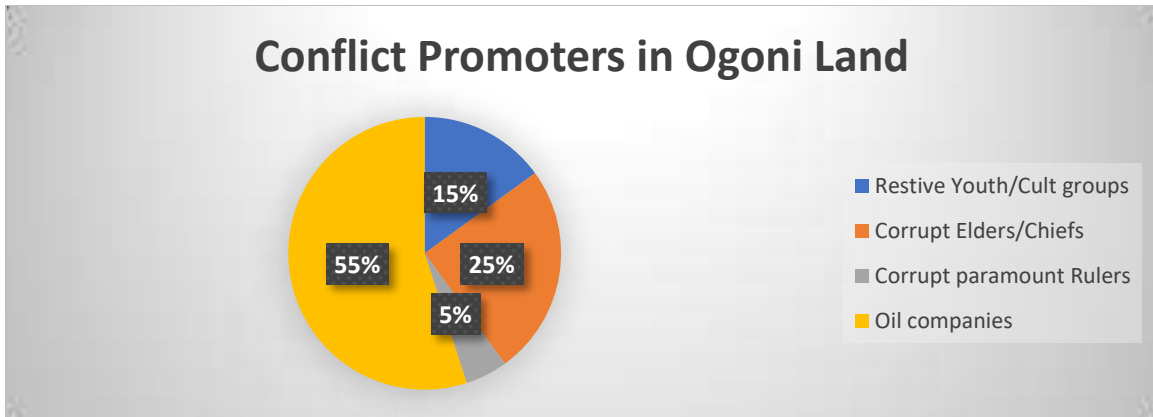


Figure 1: Graphical representation of alleged conflict promoters in Ogoni land. (Source: field data, 2021)

The issue did not sound strange to the research respondents who partook in the key informant interviews. Below is an information shared by Mrs. Lekia who seemed very knowledgeable about the recent happenings and can be said to have been employing a systematic manner to monitor the trends of violent outbreaks within her community. According to her:

“Here in my community, you would not find old men coming out to cause trouble; but rather it is the youth. They are solely responsible for all these conflicts, and they want and think about is free money. The oil company on their own side are taking advantage of the desires of these troublesome youths by giving funds to their elders who often do not give back to the community after receiving from the oil company. The restive youths at having the information will resort to causing violence until the chiefs give them some of the money. This situation often leads to a divide and rule situation where the peaceful youths and other community member become disgruntled over the fact that they never received any share of the money paid in by the oil companies for the community”.

The above statement clearly establishes the fact that the respondents has sound understanding of the conflict dynamics at play in her environs and the causative factor. More remarkably, is Barikereol who demonstrated the non-violent ways they employ in addressing these violent outbreaks in their communities. She notes:

For those of us in Gokana local government area in Ogoni land who are of the catholic faith, we work with Father Abel, a catholic priest who has taken it upon himself to ensure there is peace and calm in Ogoni. We work with him to send out messages of peace, we embark on peace marches as we chant our peace songs. We often use these activities to tell the restive youth about the importance of peace, as well as the ill/side effects of violence and conflict on their lives and the community in general.

Also supporting the above respondent was Grace who added:

To add to my sister's point, as women, we also go to God by engaging in prayers and fasting. Our prayers are for the almighty to give the youth a rethink as well as others who might be supporting them to do evil. It doesn't end there, we do fasting and prayers, praying that God should send down peace and touch the minds of youths, these amongst others are the initiators of conflicts and crisis. Because most Ogonis are of the Christian faith, attending church or Christian events are taken very serious by everyone. We therefore use Sundays as an opportunity to reach out to the youths as many of them often make out time to attend church services

Usually, Christian activities are designed to devote time for worshipping the almighty, but then, it also serves as a platform to discuss or address other issues bothering the community. Consequently, the respondents believe that such avenues create opportunities to carry the community along in the search of lasting peace in Ogoni land. Aside the campaigns and church service, my informants also take on the task of preaching peace at individual levels. According to Dum:

As an agent of peace, I go from community to community to talk to those angry youth about the need to embrace peace. My focus is to see them change their behaviors into peace-loving individuals. My one-on-one discussions with them also cover topics on how to disassociate from bad conducts.

In furtherance to the above, the chart below captures the methods/avenues in which the Ogoni women use in propagating the message of peace within their communities:

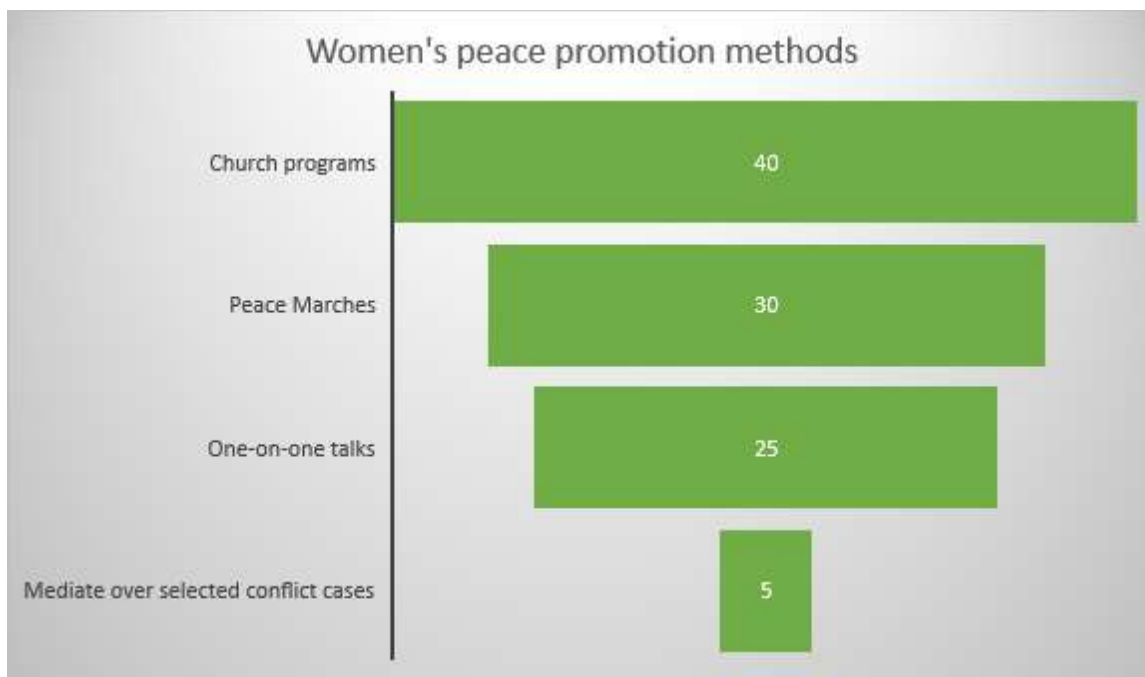


Figure 2: Graphical representation of how Ogoni women promote peace. (Source: field data, 2021)

Apart from offering prayers and peace campaigns, my informants also adopt various peaceful measures, to prevent conflict from escalating in their community. Sometimes, they mediate, and other times, they march physically to the scene of the conflict to rescue the situation. Narrating one of such instances, one of my informants the Lead WANEP representative in Rivers State by name Loretta said:

In 2019 WANEP network had trained 40 Ogoni women leaders as peace builders, and they had succeeded in amongst other areas in resolving a chieftaincy tussle that had lingered for over eight years before their involvement in the matter. She further added that while the women used the church platforms as avenue to preach about peace, the women peace builders still suffered some setbacks in the areas of not being included in formal peace processes and always advising that the women go through the community Queen to share their views on a particular matter. This Queen in questions is not always given the needed audience when matters are arising either.

.Another informant I spoke with – a male who hails from Ogoni and works with community based organizations in the person of Koate expressed his displeasure over the issue of male dominance interfering in the works of women peace builders. He had this to say:

I have personally set up a women peace building club in one of the Ogoni communities strictly for females. Along the line, the women insisted that males should be part of this club and then gradually whenever issues of conflict would arise, they would be seen taking the back sit while they allow their male counterparts champion the cause of the peace building process. The women gradually started feeling comfortable with just airing their positions and sharing their advice with the males whilst the males in return implement the advice given.

Based on the experiences shared above, it submits that the study's key informants have good grasp and of conflict dynamics as well as the players within their communities. In addition, the different strategies employed by women in resolving conflicts have been highlighted above. However, it is expedient to bring to light the most effective approach to peace building employed by the Ogoni women to resolve conflicts in their communities. The graph below captures the information:

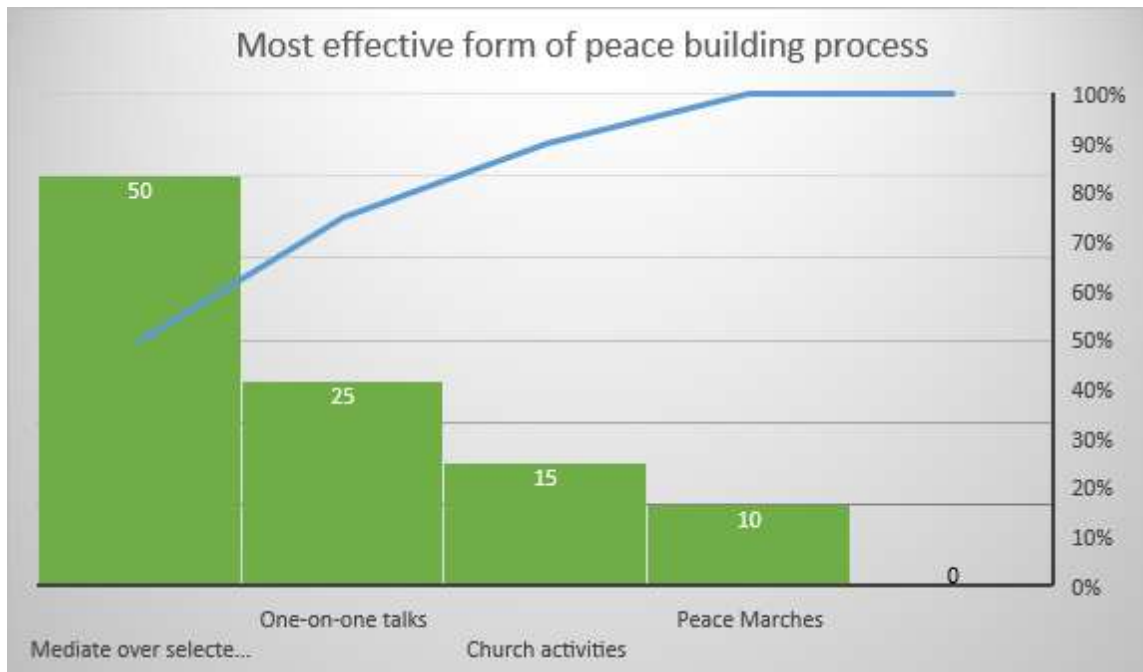


Figure 3: Most effective form of peace building strategy employed by Ogoni women. (Source: Field data, 2021)

The above chart clearly established that the Ogoni women have recorded huge successes in their peace building activities when they mediate over selected cases. Following that is the one-on-one talks they have with the aggrieved youths and conflicting parties in the community. Based on the aforementioned, it is obvious that these women have the propensity to do great if given more opportunity participate fully in peace processes.

CONCLUSION

The analysis of field data has shown that Ogoni women are very much interested and active in peacebuilding and doing all they can to participate in peace processes as captured in figure 3, above. The review of past works/activities by different non-governmental organizations demonstrated that these groups are empowering the Ogoni women through organizations/groups, such as FOWA, Kebetkatche women's and development center, Centre for Environment Human Rights and Development (CEHRD) and other grass root organizations, through several training schemes aimed at equipping women with skills in conflict prevention and peace building. The findings also revealed that the oil companies, aggrieved youth/cult groups, greedy elders and paramount rulers are alleged to be fueling the on-going conflict, albeit not full blown at the moment.

As captured in figure 2; the Ogoni women employ different strategies to peace building such as taking advantage of Christian gatherings to preach the message of peace, one-on-one engagement with conflicting parties, mediation and organizing peace marches with the sole aim of promoting a lasting peace in their communities. There is no gainsaying that armed conflict impacts children, women and men differently, hence the adoption of the UNSCR 1325, on women's full involvement in peace and security processes. However, challenges bothering around the lack of political will by some states (Anderlini, 2010), and traditional norms amongst

others, have in several African nations, hindered the equal contribution of women in decision making relating to preventing conflict, peace building and resolving conflict.

As various studies targets uncovering hindrances and challenges to conflict resolution in Ogoni land, it is pertinent for studies to also focus on the small gains achieved by the works of others in the region working with Ogoni women to promote peace in Ogoni land and by extension the Niger Delta region. This paper provides an alternate way of evaluating the Ogoni struggle; it proposes that amidst the sad pictures of destructions and violence therein, there remains however a remarkable transformation taking place in the region, ensuing from the activities of non-governmental peace building organizations in the Niger Delta. The study outcomes suggest that the organizations are working towards domesticating the UNSCR 1325 in Ogoni and its environs and by extension the entire Niger Delta region. In addition, is the fact that the Ogoni women are engaged in various peaceful and security projects/activities and are working tirelessly towards the promotion of lasting peace in their communities.

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