

IMPACT OF THE NIGER DELTA CONFLICT ON WOMEN AND  
THEIR LIVELIHOOD IN NIGERIA

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## List of Acronyms

COVID	Coronavirus Disease
DDR	Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
FHH	Female Headed Household
HIV/AIDS	Human Immunodeficiency Virus/Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome
ILO	International Labour Organization
MEND	Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta
NDAP	Niger Delta Amnesty Programme
NDHS	National Demographic and Health Survey
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NNPC	Nigeria National Petroleum Corporation
OSAPND	Office of the Special Adviser of the President on Niger Delta
PAP	Presidential Amnesty Program
PIDs	Pelvic Inflammatory Diseases
SPD	Security, Peace and Development
SRT	Social Reproduction Theory
STIs	Sexually Transmitted Infections
UNCLOS	United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

## **Dedication**

To God Almighty.

## **Acknowledgement**

I am eternally grateful to God Almighty for bestowing grace on me, allowing me to complete my studies, and allowing me to persevere in the face of adversities. I have come to rely on your guidance daily, and I will continue to do so.

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## **Abstract**

The Niger Delta conflict has affected women and their livelihoods in the region. With the conflict affecting them through the operations of militants, pirates, and cultists, limited accessible paid jobs, patriarchy and social barriers, as well as their health, women's livelihoods have been impacted too. In times of war, women are seen as participants, victims, survivors, and protectors. Despite the violence, women in the Niger Delta have managed to participate in formal and extra-legal jobs to support their families. These livelihoods may not be viable after the war, which contributes to the conflict's persistence. Female headed households are significantly affected by the conflict, as they continue to support their families while also fulfilling their societal reproductive roles, they are limited by patriarchal society where they live. This study aimed at creating understanding on how women in the Niger Delta conflict and their livelihoods are impacted, as well as methods to transform their lives. The war in the region is fluid, and new obstacles emerge on a regular basis. How women were affected in the 1990s differs from how they are influenced today. This research is basically on the recounted experiences of the women in the Niger Delta region, how the conflict impacted them and their livelihoods and to explore intervention initiatives that can improve their means of livelihood. Finally, the humanitarian interventions have brought relative peace in the region, however, income diversification, recognising and respecting the labour contributions of women, engaging men, state and non-state actors to champion the cause of women, women supporting one another, and embracing innovation and technological advancements will boost the livelihoods of women in the region and cushion the effects of the conflict.

## **Relevance to Development Studies**

Understanding the impact of conflict on women and their livelihoods is important in development studies because it allows us to better understand who they are and what they go through as a result of the conflict. Women and their livelihoods are impacted by conflicts around the world irrespective of the fact that they are directly participating in it or not. Some conflict narratives of women portray them as victims rather than survivors with their own experiences to share. It is important to determine the effects of the conflict on women and their livelihoods to improve and enhance their quality of life. This study is critical for individuals and groups working on issues affecting women and their livelihoods, in the Niger Delta, Nigeria. The experiences of the Niger Delta women and the impact of the conflict on their means of subsistence cannot be over emphasised. This study looked specifically at how conflict affects female headed households and how they live in the post-amnesty era. The findings of this study will aid in understanding how humanitarian intervention methods implemented by various organisations may help to improve women's livelihoods.

## **Keywords**

Women in Niger Delta, Nigeria, Niger Delta conflict, Violent conflict, Livelihood, Women's empowerment, Presidential amnesty program, Women's paid and unpaid labour.

# Chapter 1 Background of the Study

## 1.1.Introduction

Women's means of livelihood is considered as not productive and meaningful in the society when it is not paid labour. The societal perception of working women is considered by the types of work they do and how much they earn. Jobs not remunerated for, including reproductive roles, produce feeding and shelter for women and members of their households as well as meet basic needs. Also, social reproductive duties performed by women at home, improve the well-being of the family and enhance livelihood. In acknowledging the meaningful contributions of women in labour, Nordstrom (2010:163) calls it the "vanishing point" which is the point where "the normative (what should be)" meets the "reality (what actually is)". Women are viewed only as home makers and certain kinds of jobs are assigned to them because of their biological and gender compositions. This method of stereotyping jobs for women is no longer viable as more women are engaging in both formal and informal jobs. Formal labour are jobs legally accepted usually with a wage or salary structure while informal labour are extra-legal jobs. Extra-legal jobs are not regulated, usually orally contracted without a form of written agreement that are binding to anyone. Extra-legal jobs pay less, employ more hands and require less educational qualification. Women contribute more to informal labour than men: these informal and extra-legal jobs are specifically taken up to sustain their families (Nordstrom, 2010). In the context of this research, livelihood would be perceived as a set of activities and assets that are essential to daily life and are carried out over the course of a person's life to make a living (Carswell, 1997; Bryceson, 1999). Such activities include but not limited to Income/financial status, employment, health, family, education, and emotions. Although women engage in diverse types of labour for their livelihood, certain dynamics such as cultural practices, patriarchy and conflict amongst others impact on their livelihood.

Conflict is one of the dynamics that poses devastating effects on women and their livelihoods. Women are affected by conflict differently from men due to the differences in duties and responsibilities which they perform in the conflict (Ezemonye, 2015). Women do more than just responding to conflict situations: they participate actively in all the conflict processes and equally contribute in shaping political and historical processes, because the conflict impacts them individually and collectively as women (Alison, 2004). Oftentimes, the way and manner women experience, respond to or are affected by conflicts are not included by men in their decision-making on who will benefit from the interventions of the peace building processes (Akubor, 2011). This research is particularly interested in women as a community and explores the effect of conflict on women and their livelihoods before, throughout and after the post-amnesty era.

The study focused on the Niger Delta region, which is in the south of Nigeria, West Africa. Nigeria is bordered on the west by Benin Republic, on the north by Niger Republic and Chad, on the east by Cameroon, and on the south by the Gulf of Guinea and the Atlantic Ocean (Fasina et al, 2010) . For administrative purposes, it is divided into six geopolitical zones: North-West, North-Central, North-East, South-West, South-South, and South-East. Nigeria has 36 states that operate independently of the federal government. The Niger Delta region is in the South-south geopolitical zone and covers nine oil producing contiguous states: Abia, Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Edo, Ondo, Imo, and Rivers respectively (Adetoun, 2005). Oil exploration began in Oloibiri in what is today, Bayelsa State in 1956 and spread to other parts of the Niger Delta. However, Nigeria joined oil producing countries in 1958 (NNPC, 2021).

Oil spills, loss of mangrove forests, depletion of fish populations, water hyacinth invasion, natural gas flaring, biological remediation, and conflict are just a few of the issues plaguing the Niger Delta



region. The problem in the region dates back to 1965 (Adetoun, 2005). However, different youth groups in the region have agitated against exploitation, deprivation, neglect and demanded for resource control through peaceful means before they eventually took up arms to fight. This crisis involved everybody including women and gradually became a conflict between the community, oil companies and the Nigerian government.

This study attempts to establish a link between the conflict in the region and its impact on women's work in social reproduction and their means of livelihood. It also focuses on how Female Headed Households (FHH) have survived the impact of the Niger Delta conflict and the interventions by the humanitarian organizations in the region, whether or not these interventions have enhanced the quality of life of women or not. Social reproduction is used here as roles women have at home like care giving, cooking etc. In defining the FHH, the US Annual Housing Survey (1990) refers to "a woman who identifies herself as head of the household and a married woman whose husband is living away from home for any reason. A female headed household is any household where a female is head. FHH is also defined as households which consist of single female-parent households, divorcees and widows fending for their families (China, Lilly & Igbemi, 2017:149). In this research work, FHH covered households headed by female adults because of being widowed, abandoned, or divorced, left behind by migrated husband, married into homes with more than one wife where such persons run a separate household, orphaned, and have kids but never married (Ezemonye, 2015).

The conflict situation in the region has already placed women at a disadvantage. Poverty is one of the greatest disadvantages of the conflict to women in the region. Poor women are found in different households including those headed by men and women. However, female headed households have greater number of poor women (UNFPA, 2002). In households headed by men, women contribute through paid and unpaid labour, and other social reproduction roles. The men contribute to the household financially for shelter, clothing, education, medical care and feeding based on how buoyant they are. But in FHH, everything from catering, financing and all social reproductive roles are taken care of by the woman. She most times barely have time to take care of herself as her earning first goes to the family before thinking about herself (Ashimolowo et al, 2017).

## **1.2 The Background of Conflict in the Niger Delta Region**

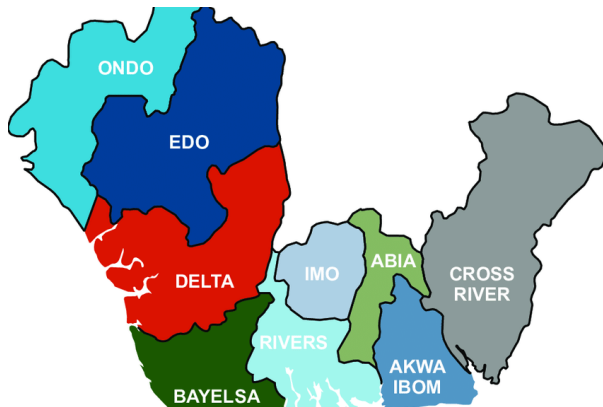
Conflict is defined as "incompatibility of interests, goals, values, needs, expectations, and/or social cosmologies (or ideologies)" (Dennen, 2005:3). Nigeria has experienced different types of conflict and most have been violent in nature. Due to the effects of the degradation on their lands and the need for resource control, the Niger Delta region has become a war zone (Okonta and Douglas, 2001; Oriola, 2012). The dynamics of the conflict gave rise to activities of pirates and cultists in the region.

Resource conflict has been identified as a major cause of conflict in Africa. (Williams, 2011). From the colonial era, resource control has been a challenge to the Nigerian nation. The British colonial masters came with the "divide and rule" mentality to govern areas they had interests in due to the available human and material resources. They traded in the Niger Delta region on elephant tusks, arts (craft), slaves, palm oil and other products. Governance was controlled at the centre using funds realized from sales of products from the region to run the cost of governance. Upon the discovery of oil in the region towards the end of colonialism, subsequent government regimes maintained the resource control formula used by the British colonial masters. The oil from the region was used in building Abuja, capital city of Nigeria and infrastructures in other regions while the people on whose lands the resources are extracted from were left poor, hungry and abandoned. Those at the helm of leadership are often accused of embezzling resources gotten from the oil (Ogbogbo, 2005).

Women and their livelihoods are impacted by conflicts around the world whether they are directly participating in it or not. Attempts to support them after conflict with economic empowerment initiatives have helped improve their livelihoods to a degree, but more needs to be done. Most of these interventions are designed without taking into account the unique requirements of women (Umejesi, 2014).

Map 1.1.

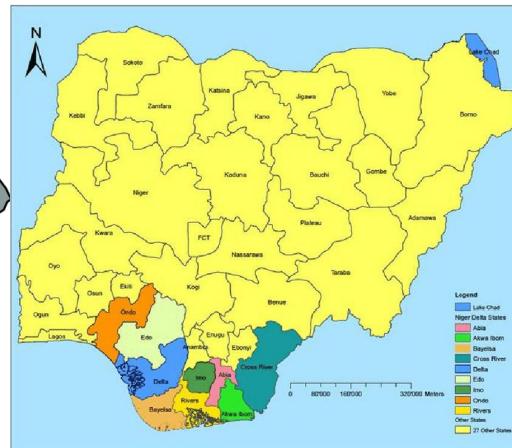
Map of Niger Delta



Source: Premium Times Nigeria

Map 1.2.

Map of Nigeria showing Niger Delta



Source: Ite, A. et al, 2013

Prior to oil exploration, the Niger Delta people had contributed a lot to fishing and agriculture in Nigeria. The effects of oil exploration have greatly reduced fishing and agricultural produce from the area. Oil exploration or mining has been going on in the Niger Delta region for 65 years. This has brought a lot of revenue to Nigeria while leaving untold hardship to the people living in the Niger Delta region where this exploration takes place. From environmental degradation, issues on resource control, poverty, lack of infrastructure to other forms of deprivation (Azubuike, 2008). In the early 1990s, the people of Ogoni led by Ken Saro Wiwa began series of peaceful protests to demand for the clean-up of the environment and the improvement of the lives of Ogoni people. This gave rise to series of other peaceful protests across the Niger Delta region. Ogoniland is divided into 6 clans: Babbe, Eleme, Gokana, Nyo-Khana, Ken-Khana, Tai (Ekine, 2008:83). These clans have constantly witnessed oil spillage over the years since the oil exploration began (Azu, 2021). After the execution of Ken Saro Wiwa and nine other Ogoni people, armed conflict erupted in the region where mostly young men took up arms and hid in the creeks where they committed different kinds of criminal activities against the state and their communities as collateral damage in the process. This led to the kidnapping of expatriate workers and other violent conflicts. Thereafter, it also led to the Nigerian government's militarization of the region (Osah & Amakihe, 2014). In a bid to quell conflict and douse tension in the region, the government constantly uses the military to "force the people to behave". In other words, the military are used to maintain peace and order in the region and to suppress the agitations against mining in the region.

The women community in the Niger Delta region are known to have been actively involved in the pre-conflict, conflict, and post-conflict periods. From the colonial era, women are known to have often protested colonial polices that were unfavourable to them. In contemporary times, women in the Niger Delta region have protested against the oil companies because of the negative effects of oil exploration on their lands. They threatened being naked during protests which is a taboo and dreaded in the region. These women have often organized themselves in three major ways: as local associations or support groups, as community or ethnic associations, and as pan-

ethnic or regional associations (Oluwaniyi, 2011). These groups are used to demand for their rights at different levels of governance.

### 1.3 Women’s Experiences and How They Are Impacted by Conflict in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria

Before the oil exploration began in the Niger Delta, women found a means to sustain themselves and their families through paid labour at the same time effectively carrying out their social reproductive roles. Some women in the Niger Delta region leave their homes very early in the morning to go to farms or river to fish. Others wake up early to either go to the market in different areas to sell their products or go to their white-collar jobs. Women in the area have engaged in the afore mentioned means of livelihood for several decades and used these means to feed and cater for themselves and their families. A part of waking up early involves making breakfast for the family as well as preparing toddlers for school before heading out to pursue activities for their daily bread.

Farming is a major livelihood for women in the Niger Delta region. The rural dwellers in the Niger Delta region are affected a deluge of problems such as climate change, inability to have access to modern farming techniques, encroachment of farmlands by oil companies which has led to reduction in the available land left for women to farm on and land degradation caused by pollutions. These problems have resulted in shortage of farmlands and low crop yields since “These lands have been used for laying oil pipelines which crisscross the land and contaminate it. With this situation, there is acute shortage in arable land for agriculture, hence the attendant food shortage” (Akubor, 2017:27-28). The pipelines run through farmlands and when there is oil spill or explosion, arable farmlands are destroyed. This in turn causes disputes between the oil companies and the community dwellers especially the women. Each time this arises, the military is brought in to calm the situation and most of their victims are women and children (Aboribo, 2007).

Majority of women in the riverine area of the Niger Delta are fisherwomen. They also gain their means of livelihood from other sea food like periwinkle, oyster, crayfish, crab, pawn, shrimp etc. Before the oil exploration began, these fishing and sea food activities were viable means of livelihood for the women. Environmental degradation affects aquatic life. The degradation of the creeks and water makes fishing difficult. Water pollution has reduced fishing activities which has almost eliminated sea food as a diet in many homes. Fisherwomen must travel to other communities without oil spill to fish. This has increased cost of production and reduced profit from sales. An example of effects of oil spill on aquatic life is shown below.

**Figure 1-3: Images of dead fish on the sea shore from Eleme oil spill.**



*Source: Eyewitness account 2021*

Decisions that affect women in the Niger Delta especially where they work and who can employ them are left in the hands of men, state, and non-state actors. For instance, a woman's husband may not like her having an employment that will keep her long hours in the office that will affect her responsibilities at home or an employer may not want to employ a woman because of menstruation cramps or children's school runs that will take her out of the office and reduce her job performance. There is no evidence of a political will to remove obstacles to the improvement of women's means of livelihood to enhance their quality of life. The contributions of men to the Niger Delta struggles seem to be better acknowledged than that of the women. This has great impact on them, on the kind of jobs allocated to them and their means of livelihood. The men are given better contracts while some oil companies deny women employment. Instead of compensating women for their troubles, their husbands are killed in war which makes them automatic heads of household. This has further impoverished them and made them and their daughters more vulnerable as spoils of war with incessant raping and looting of their properties (Akubor, 2011; Azubuike, 2008).

Women's experiences in the Niger Delta conflict also include being spies and key informants, cooking and catering for men who fight in the conflicts, nursing the wounded, offering sex as protection and to stay alive, taking up arms and fighting, fundraising and recruitment, and being breadwinners to their families (Akubor, 2011; Alison, 2004; China et al, 2017, Shekhawat, 2015). Women spy on the Nigerian military to monitor their movements on closing in on the agitators and report back to them on safety and escape routes. They also do domestic errands and tend to the wounds of the injured. Some of them offer sex to both the military and the agitators for protection so that their properties will not be destroyed, so that they be given what to eat and generally to stay alive in the conflict. Sometimes, they fight alongside the men, help recruit new members for different groups or are breadwinners in their families. These experiences affect them and their means of livelihood. In pre-conflict era, women engaged more in paid labour. But they are forced by the conflict to abandon their work and engaging more in family care giving and other forms of unpaid labour. At other times, women who experience known violence in the conflict are forced to stay at home as stigma prevents them from getting paid employment.

Many younger women are forced into sex work and relationships with the police and military (Ekine, 2008). Some of the women who experienced sexual violence in the Niger Delta conflict are not willing to share their experiences. They see sharing such experiences as giving power to their violators to torment them long after the event happened. This has led women to be forced into silence as a weapon of resistance. To them, silence makes them stronger and not vulnerable to pity and other sympathetic tendencies thereby making their violators to 'win'.

Another experience women in the Niger Delta face is the problems of piracy. Piracy is a major challenge in the Niger Delta region and pirates are part of agitators in the region. They operate on the sea by hijacking ships, stealing their shipment including oil and kidnapping expatriates for ransom on the sea (Jacobsen, 2021). Some of the problems these women encounter from the pirates are the destruction of crops in their farmland and raping women on the way to farm. They also forcefully take all the fish and other sea foods proceeds fisherwomen harvest and leave them empty handed (Umejesi, 2014).

## **1.4 Research Objectives and Questions**

### **Research Objectives**

This research seeks to understand the impact of the Niger Delta conflict in Nigeria, on women and their livelihood. Through the recounted experiences of the women in conflict, this study generated knowledge on how women and their livelihood are affected by conflict in Nigeria. It explored the ways to mitigate the impact of the conflict on women and their livelihoods. Since the

conflict in the Niger Delta is dynamic, it brings new challenges as old ones are being tackled, new challenges spring forth. This study focused on how the conflict impacts on women and what could be done to improve their livelihood.

## **Research Question**

### **Main Question**

How does the Niger Delta conflict in Nigeria impact on women and their livelihoods?

### **Sub Questions**

1. How has the Niger Delta conflict affected female headed households (FHH) and their livelihoods?
2. In what ways do the intervention measures by humanitarian organizations after the conflict period improved women's livelihoods?

## **1.5. Methods of Data Collection**

This research adopted the phenomenological paradigm approach by focusing on the similarities or commonalities of lived experiences of the participants in the interview and focus group discussion. The reason for using this approach in the research is to use their situations and experiences to answer the research questions. The researcher's choice of using this method was to highlight Lester's (1999:1) view on using the phenomenological approach as "this normally translates into gathering 'deep' information and perceptions through inductive, qualitative methods such as interviews, discussions and participant observation, and representing it from the perspective of the research participant(s)". In justifying the choice of interview and FGD, the study sought to focus on the commonality of lived experiences as opposed to recounted experience that only secondary data provides. Interviews provided sensitive information that participants may not ordinarily want to recount.

Qualitative sampling used in selecting the research participants for the interviews and focus group discussion was based on willingness to share experiences and communities most hit by the conflict. In selecting the participants, the researcher considered persons who lived through the conflict with proven experiences. The researcher knew that women in different states in the Niger Delta region experienced the conflicts at different degrees and so the investigator put into consideration the states among the Niger Delta region with worse experiences of the conflict: Rivers, Bayelsa, Akwa Ibom, Delta, Abia and Imo States. Other states in the region: Edo, Cross River and Ondo are still part of the Niger Delta but experience the conflict in a more subtle way. The participants were therefore narrowed into age, educational qualification, employment status to make sure that the research represented women in these categories.

To have satisfactory evidence in the field work, key informants were used to gain access to the participants who were willing to share their experiences. The researcher interviewed three humanitarian organization staff (1 from Presidential Amnesty Program, 1 NGO and 1 human rights journalist), seven women from communities most affected by the conflict, and five women beneficiaries of the Presidential Amnesty Program. The sessions had one focus group discussion with 10 FHH. The FHH in the FGD were as follows: 3 widows, 1 abandoned, 1 left behind by migrated husband, 2 married in polygamous homes, 2 with children but never married, 1 orphaned. The participants for FDG were selected based on availability.

Accessing women who participated in this research was not difficult for the researcher as she had lived and worked in some of the states in the Niger Delta region. The research assistant, a seasoned social worker was also instrumental in having a hitch free focus group discussion.

Through the help of the research assistant, it was possible to secure a location that met the requirements of safe COVID-19 protocols and provided refreshment for the participants. The research assistant being fully vaccinated facilitated some of these processes as required by the Nigerian government. Ethically, as a researcher on the Niger Delta conflict, the researcher was committed to the objective and impartial in all the analysis on the recounted experiences of the participants to ensure that the findings met the requirements for stakeholders and policy makers' use. It is expedient that the identities of all participants be kept private in order to avoid victimization by any opposing group. Being a woman and from the Niger Delta, it was a bit depressing for the researcher to hear about their ordeals as most of their experiences were yet to be shared with people. However, the participants were eager to share their stories since it would be told by a woman. To sum the experience, the researcher was able to successfully carry out this research as members of her networks in the Niger Delta region took it upon themselves to invite some of the women in their locality in order to be reached online.

Using the FGD for FHH was a great idea. The research assistant used the local language for the FGD so that every participant felt at home and not intimidated by "big" grammar. Some of the interviews were done in "pidgin" (broken) English to accommodate the educational gaps of the participants and make them comfortable.

The secondary data depended on previous literature and reports on related areas of research on the Niger Delta conflict, peace resolution and the Presidential Amnesty Program all targeted at improving the quality of life of the people in the region. The Niger Delta Amnesty report contained disarmament, reintegration and empowerment program of the state and other actors who contributed to this process. The researcher collaborated the report with the interviews to be sure that nothing was missing in improving the livelihood of the Niger Delta women.

## **1.6. Limitations**

One of the major practical limitations to this research was the COVID-19 pandemic which has placed restrictions on travel and physical contacts with others. The researcher would have loved to travel to interview, observe and have the FGD personally instead of online. Although questions were structured for different categories of interviewees, because the interviews were done online, the respondents were asked general questions and they could not be observed in their environment. This has removed more depth to the research work. Whereas, if it were possible to observe and ask more questions and further explore their responses to the research questions, more information would have been garnered on the subject matter.

Accessing some of the women who participated in this research was not easy especially the beneficiaries of PAP. Female ex-militants could not be accessed by the key informants. Recounted accounts from female ex-militants would have made the research richer with their personal stories of first-hand experience in the conflict.

Some prospective participants demanded for money as compensation for telling their stories. Some of the prospective participants could not be reached online as the demands of daily work took them outside the network coverage areas. Even after the research assistant introduced himself and what the research was for, some of the participants were still withholding information thinking that the media or government was involved because of mistrust in them. If those demanding for money to participate had given their stories, this study would have contained additional information from them.

It took some time to be able to interview the NGO worker and the journalist as they had tight work schedules. During the FGD, some of the participants were not so eager to share their stories but when the bolder ones began to speak, they gradually open up and became a part of the discussion. They were concerned about confidentiality especially using their names and photographs. Being less confidential about their identity would have given more credibility to their participation in the study.

# Chapter 2 Theoretical Framework

## 2.1. Introduction

In understanding the impact of the Niger Delta conflict on women and their livelihood, this chapter explored how women in conflict survive, what they do and how their experiences and situations are influenced and shaped by their gender. Violent conflict involves using force to resolve disagreement. The use of physical force may be war, insurgency, militancy or the likes. In the case of the Niger Delta conflict, militancy was used against the state and the oil companies. Violent conflict affects women whether it is direct, structural or cultural violence. The dynamics of the Niger Delta conflict will be analysed using the conflict theory and social reproduction theory with emphasis on the human basic needs, performance of paid and unpaid labour, and informal labour by women, these were the focus of this chapter.

## 2.2. Conceptualization of Women in Conflict

Women in conflict assume multiple roles as combatants, agents, victims, survivors, and protectors. They are described by identity and participation, victims of conflict, peacebuilders, survivors, and protectors (Musingafi et al, 2013; Pampell, 2002; Stewart, 2010; USAID, 2007). These roles women in conflict have to do because of the situations they face in conflict.

Instead of stereotyping them as victims of conflict, it is important to examine what they do in conflict situations. They influence the outbreak of conflict by instigating the men to defend their territory, honour, livelihood, interest, and mutual well-being (Musingafi et al, 2013). Bloom (2011) identifies what stimulates women in conflict as “revenge, redemption, relationship, respect and rape”. Rape stimulates women to seek revenge against the perpetrator, whether it is pitching tent with the militants against the military or vice versa. This may be due to their losses in conflict, the kind of company they keep, need to identify that they are contributing to the struggles or need to be respected. Majority of studies on women and conflict are focused on the sufferings of women, however, there is need to focus on the impact of these experiences on their livelihoods. Globally, the experiences of women in conflict have some similarities in nature. During conflict, women play important roles: paid, unpaid and informal labour. These roles are significant in the survival of the community, however, when the peace building processes start, women and their contributions seemed to be forgotten (Shekhawat, 2015).

Women in conflict as combatants fight alongside men in battle. They are combatants who fight in battles and even assist men escape when there are invasions (Stewart, 2010). Women as combatants could be considered a positive example of “gender equality agenda” (Khalid, 2015:639). This is because instead of only participating in their social reproduction roles, women engage in fighting as well as the men. They also assist men in other functions like providing escape cover or disguise for them. They further render other forms of assistance in battlefield like cooking, cleaning, attending to the wounded and securing armoury. They guard the armoury where the militants keep their weapons because of accountability and not being easily influenced by rival groups unlike their male counterparts. They ferry the agitators across the river. The military do not harass boats women ride in during the conflict. So, the agitators hide in them to move from the riverine areas to the upland (Oriola, 2012). Some of these situations make combat acceptable to women (Mann, 2015). They see themselves as active participants in the conflict not only because the conflict affects them, but they are willing to contribute in fighting against deprivations in their lands. Unfortunately, during the post-conflict, these roles are not integrated in the Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) programs (Shekhawat & Pathak, 2015).



In conflict, women serve as emissaries between the fighters and their families. They report about the well-being of the agitators to their families and vice versa. They dispatch money to the families of the agitators and supply from their families to them. They spy for the militants and inform them of military presence and happenings in the communities (Oriola, 2012).

Conflict leaves women defenceless in all ways: economically, socially, psychologically, and physically (Bob & Bronkhorst, 2011). Women in conflict as victims are raped, their loved ones are killed, and their properties destroyed. They offer sex to their oppressors to survive. Amid the crisis, women have been reduced to “articles of trade” for the military, agitators, and oil workers “who promise to make life better for them outside the crises area” (Akubor, 2011:29). Sex work has tremendously increased in the Niger Delta area, including human trafficking as a result of conventional forms of work being less sustainable for these women because of limited available jobs. The conflict leaves them in fear of being kidnapped, raped, being forced, and exposed to sexual violence and being killed by stray bullets. Women in the Niger Delta region have been subjected to sexual abuse, brutality and other gender-based violence in the hands of the expatriate oil workers who take advantage of their vulnerability to feed their lust (Akoda, 2008; Akubor, 2011; Thomas, 2003). The oil workers return to their base when the activities that brought them to the creeks are over and usually no contact with their victims who they have been in relationship with. Their poor living conditions make it worse for them to assertively negotiate their way through this oppression. This has left them as single mothers, FHH, poor, unemployed and with child(ren) to feed when they have no clue on how to survive.

Women in conflict as survivors and protectors cater for the well-being of those left behind in conflict. During conflicts, a sizeable number of men are drafted to fight yet some hide or run away; it is women and children who are left behind while these men go to fight or run away. At the peak of the conflict, women provide for the family, cater for the health and general well-being of those left behind including extending care to orphans and others outside their families. They also point the next generation to their identities by teaching them experiences and effects of conflict on their land to avoid further conflicts in the future (Stewart, 2010).

Women in conflict provide direct or supporting role including economically as FHH in conflicts. They sometimes wilfully enter into sex work just to provide for their families. They step up to fill the gap provided by the absence of the men in the communities. They take up more responsibilities in the informal sector. No adequate compensation is given to them for their loss in peacebuilding processes especially DDR programs (Stewart, 2010; UNFPA, 2002).

Women in the Niger Delta conflict are agents of change who question environmental degradation in the region through peaceful protests which brought agreements between the oil companies and their communities. They are active and supportive participants who fought alongside the men in the conflict as caregivers, and also providing security and spiritual fortification (Oriola, 2012; USAID, 2007). These roles will be discussed in subsequent chapters.

### **2.3. Women in Workforce in Violent Conflict: Performance of Paid and Unpaid Labour**

Social reproduction theory acknowledges the contributions of unpaid labour as it recognizes that every labour contributes to capital build-up. “To deny the productivity of unpaid work activities is to assume that much of the world population is irrelevant to capital accumulation” (Federici, 2019:56). Most people who contribute to unpaid labour are women and they contribute greatly through social reproductive roles. Women are contributing in a large scale to paid labour. Globally, more women are embracing labour whether it is paid or unpaid. Kabeer (2005:18) posits that “the most striking feature of recent decades has been the large-scale entry of women into the labour market across the world: the 'feminisation' of the labour force”. This is because more women

labour to assist their families. Paid labour provides an escape for those in abusive relationship which aids in their negotiating their way out of such to become empowered. It provides succour for them and enhances their independent living conditions. Niger Delta women in this condition have survived and achieved a lot before the conflict took almost everything from them. Some of the women who left their abusive marriages and became FHH also lost their livelihood as a result of the conflict.

In understanding global capitalist political economy and its relationship with gender, SRT is regarded as an important part of Marxist feminist thought. SRT identifies social reproduction in three ways: biological, labour force and performance of paid caring labour (Bhattacharya, 2017). These three ways of social reproduction are what women in the Niger Delta region comfortably do and sometimes in addition to paid labour. SRT is concerned about understanding the way gender and other categories termed oppression can substantiate the value of labour.

Nordstrom (2010) groups paid labour into formal economic work and informal economic work. Formal economic work is known, or legally accepted jobs women do to earn a living while informal economic work are jobs done by women which are extra-legally acceptable. Both the formal and informal economic work provide means of livelihood for the women.

During conflicts such as the Niger Delta example, informal economic work done by women include spies and informants, cooking and cleaning for militants, selling fuel for generator to militants, sex (Kabeer, 2005; Nordstrom, 2010; Umejesi, 2014). The spies and informants gather information in the communities for the militants who in turn pay them or compensate them in kind. Sometimes it may involve cooking and cleaning for the militants to avoid their homes being burnt down. It may involve selling fuel to the militants in the creek that they use in powering their generators and transporting themselves from one place to another. Women also provide sex during conflict especially for survival or means of exchange for the military. These provide means of livelihood to the women involved during conflict which is a temporary situation depending on how long the conflict lasts. The above duties became available because of the conflict in the region. In order to earn a living in the post-conflict times, those who engaged in them have found sex work as an option for livelihood and survival (Coulter, Persson & Utas, 2008).

According to the International Labour Organization, 85.7 per cent of total employment in Africa are either informalised or informal (ILO, 2018). The Niger Delta conflict has caused changes in the means of livelihood of the average women. Women who once engaged in formal labour lost same because of the conflict and can only engage in informal or informalised labour. The informalised and informal jobs in Nigeria are often degrading roles which most women may not want to engage in. Due to lack, hunger, and responsibilities of catering for the family, women are left with no other option than to engage in such. Examples of informal jobs are cleaning and other household chores for other women who are more economically buoyant, short time exchange duty to cover up for sick persons or women who are on maternity leave, assisting others to sell in the market as apprentices, freelancing etc. These kinds of jobs are done by these women to “keep-body-and-soul-together” instead of being idle. Some of these jobs provide some measure of flexibility for the woman to take care of her family as she does not work every day of the week. For economic sustainability, a woman needs this kind of job in addition to her social reproduction responsibilities at home (Acker, 2006).

## **2.4. Violent Conflict: Greed Vs Grievance**

Globally, the drivers of transnational conflicts are “interstate conflict, economic/resource conflict, identity/secession conflict, and revolution/ideology conflict” (Ramsbotham, Woodhouse & Miall, 2011:123). The Niger Delta conflict is directly linked to economic/resource conflict. However, all the other drivers of the transnational conflict are also expressed in the region. As much as the

Niger Deltans on whose land and sea, oil exploration takes place wants to control the oil resources, they also do not want the activities of the oil companies to affect their identity. This brings us to Galtung's (1990) basic human needs framework: survival, well-being, identity, and freedom needs. Basic human needs are non-negotiable, and none is more useful than the other. They are important elements that when deprived lead to conflicts. Galtung (1980) further classified basic human needs in the following ways: survival needs include protection from violence and safety; identity needs are expressed in belongingness, actualization, self-expression; well-being needs are found in nutrition, movement, protection from illness; and freedom needs include freedom from fear, freedom to choose occupation and way of living. The Niger Delta conflict is an expression of the deprivations of all the basic human needs framework (Galtung, 1990).

Conflict theory centres on economic and social issues like greed and grievances. There is always struggles between those who control the resources (greed) and those on whose lands the resources are found (grievance). The economy as described here shows the inequalities or disparity between the resources gotten and the translation of economic power on the people. For instance, the Niger Delta lands produce the resources used by the whole country, yet they live in abject poverty. The disparity or inequality contributed to the conflict in the region because of agitations to upgrade the people and communities in the region to reflect the wealth the region produces.

Violent conflict can be explained as "human action about interests, needs, instincts, structures or choices that explain why and how people resort to violence" (Demmers, 2017:1). This shows why greed and grievance are drivers of violent conflict. Violent conflicts as experienced in the Niger Delta region go through direct, structural, and cultural violence (Galtung, 1990). Galtung (1990:291) defines cultural violence as "any aspect of a culture that can be used to legitimize violence in its direct or structural form". Furthermore, cultural violence x-rays how the performance of direct violence and the point in structural violence portrays violence as normal and legitimate (Galtung, 1990). In discussing culture, it is important to consider other elements like language, religion, ideology etc. The identity of a people is portrayed in their culture. Any attempt to alter it, usually leads to violence portrayed as resistance by the people. This is true also in the case of the Niger Delta people.

The Niger Delta conflict has impacted on communities in the region. The men are affected as well as the women including the young and old. Each group experience the impact of the conflict differently. Women in the region have experienced different kinds of violence; direct, structural, and cultural. Akubor (2011) argues on the travails of women in the Niger Delta conflict to include rape, human trafficking, health challenges affecting their reproductive health because of toxic chemicals on their land, HIV/AIDS, and sex work. He also explored the effects of the conflict on their means of livelihood, destruction of their farmlands and forceful eviction from their homes and business premises. However, the duration of these challenges as aftermath of the conflict are not highlighted. Some women still suffer these problems long after the conflict has subsided.

Greed and grievance thrive on rebellion. The aggrieved, usually the people who felt deprived rebel against the state (Collier & Hoeffler, 2004). Using the Niger Delta case, the people in the region have engaged in protests demanding for separate nation, to resource control and finally resulting to conflict (rebellion) in the region. Greed and grievance play a role in post-conflict reconstruction in patriarchal society as women are left behind and their contributions in the conflict are forgotten. More men greedily benefit from humanitarian interventions including DDR and women are aggrieved.

Collier & Hoeffler (2004:570) recognizes causes of grievances as "ethnic or religious hatred, political repression, political exclusion, and economic inequality". It may be difficult to estimate the effect of ethnic or religious hatred in the Niger Delta conflict. The south-south region belongs to the ethnic minorities in Nigeria which gives them a sense of marginalization. It is a known fact that community members were not happy that employment by oil companies were given to foreigners instead of indigenes. This formed the reasons women protested in Rivers and Delta

States asking Shell and Chevron to give employment to their children. On religious ground, some of the militant camps pledged allegiance to “Egbesu”, the Ijaw god of war for protection during the conflict (Oriola, 2012). This formed unity of purpose for different militant camps which later led to forming Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND).

On the other hand, political repression of the region where so much revenue comes from, yet little development; this has impacted on the livelihood of the women of the region. Prior to the amnesty program, the South-South never produced a president in Nigeria. The region suffered from political exclusion as major decisions about the region at the federal level were done by those not from the region. At the state levels, women were excluded politically as very few of them are in government to champion the cause of women. Finally, economic inequality is a grievance for the conflict in the region where poverty level among the oil producing communities is alarming. Women are the worst hit whether it is in male headed or female headed households.

The Nigerian government’s attitude to the Niger Delta agitators had an impact on the agitators going into war. They started with protests and pipeline vandalizations. Though the conflict in the region started by the militants with greed for resource control, grievance for oil exploration and subsequently unleashing terror in the region followed. Communities especially the oil producing ones were badly affected. When war broke out, between the militants and the military, men were first drafted into combat. Women in those communities were sadly worst hit as they were forcefully drafted into combat and also became spoils of war (Saygi, 2020).

## **2.5. Linking the Conflict Theory and Social Reproduction Theory to the Study**

This study explores the how women are impacted by the conflict and ways to mitigate them. This section emphasizes on Galtung’s (1990) mutually reinforcing dynamics of violence: direct, structural, and cultural violence. Direct violence is consequence of deprivations of human basic needs: survival, well-being, identity and freedom. Where these needs are denied reactions appear in form of direct violence. Structural violence is exploiting of the relationship between those at the helm of affairs and those at the bottom. It is a subtle way used by governments in conflict to “dangle carrots” in front of the agitators. Cultural conflict is violence where the perpetrators oppress others in the name of norms etc (Galtung, 1990).

Women in conflict as participants whether active or passive, willing or forced are thorn between structural and cultural violence. At a time, they believe they are fighting a just cause. At other time, they are exploited by the men they work with. As participants in the conflict, they combine their social reproductive roles with social, material or spiritual roles they play to earn a living. At the peacebuilding process, through the patriarchal role men play, such participatory role in conflict are scrapped and no compensation is given to them. Most women participants are left with option of sex work for survival (Coulter, Persson & Utas, 2008). Women as victims of the conflict experience oppression, inability to find paid employment to raise money to cater for their families. They depend on men as partners for survival in a casual or committed relationship. This takes away their reproductive rights. They lose the ability to make choices on having children and the number to have. They cannot afford healthcare services so access to contraceptives are limited. As survivors, they are a huge part of the labour force. They contribute through their social roles as well as providing for the family. Their contributions whether formal or informal economic work bring income to the family (Mezzadri, 2020). Some of these jobs impact on their health and may become terminal.

They provide economic succour to the family left behind in conflict as FHH (Stewart, 2010; UNFPA, 2002). They are protectors, caring and catering for others apart from family members. This they do through informal labour to earn a living including engaging in illegal activities like

bunkering, refining and selling of fuel and sex work. This informal labour whether paid or unpaid is temporary, done in the conflict only (Bhattacharya, 2013). They are lost during the post-conflict era as a result, the motivation lingers the conflict in the region.

The Niger Delta conflict has elements of direct, structural and cultural violence. The direct aspect of the conflict is the killing, raping of women and young girls which put them in fear to go about their businesses. The structural nature of the conflict is how the Nigerian state oppresses the people using the military to subject them to inhumane conditions. And the cultural side of the conflict is how the activities of the military, oil company and agitators oppress women and their livelihood while the culprits do so in the name of a cause (Demmers, 2017; Galtung, 1990).

The above theorizing of women in armed conflict is going to help analyse data and answer the research questions by exploring the obstacles women in the Niger Delta region face including FHH and how to prioritize improvement in their means of livelihood.

# Chapter 3 Problems Women in the Niger Delta Face That Impacts Their Means of Livelihood

## 3.1. Introduction

In this chapter, the researcher explores how the obstacles that the Niger Delta women encounter impacts upon their livelihood. From the interviews and focus group discussion carried out in this study, it is evident that the Niger Delta woman desires an improved life; one that makes them economically stable. On the issue of the devastation of their land, this has caused untold hardship especially on the women who are mostly farmers and fishers.

One of the contributing causes of conflict in Africa is resource control (Williams, 2011), which threatens the identity of the indigenous people. Resource control when left in the hands of the government makes the people feel “naked” as their bona fide heritage has been taken from them and given to others to control. It led them to question their identity and how relevant they are in determining what happens in their ancestral lands. Identity needs when deprived leads to struggle for survival. Borrowing a clue from Sri Lanka, “Sri Lanka's civil war has been dominated by the question of identity, especially ethnic, linguistic and religious identity” (Jayasundara-Smits, 2015:187). Like Sri Lanka, the people of the Niger Delta region engaged in violent conflict to fight for their land which is their identity. Through the conflict they show that linguistic, ethnic and religious differences in the region are strengths rather than divisions but the common goal is to fight for who they are and having a say in the proceeds from their lands.

Another need that is deprived which causes conflict is “people or nations will fight each other to secure access to the resources necessary for their survival: the scarcer the resource” (Le Billon, 2001:564). Another cause of conflict is “governments that repress their populations or important subpopulations” (Watts et al, 2017). This prevents them from fully expressing themselves against the injustice done on their lands. Each time they try to exercise their freedom, the region is militarized to maintain orderliness. These needs are part of human basic needs which cause conflicts (Galtung, 1990). In as much as greed and grievance are contributing factors to resource war, basic human needs are the triggers of the Niger Delta conflict which has caused losses and damages in the region.

## 3.2. Activities of Militants, Pirates and Cultists

Militancy involves using violence and confrontation to demand change for a social cause (Shekhawat, 2015a; Osah & Amakihe, 2014). Militants in the Niger Delta region demanded resource control, clean up exercise on the degradation in the region and stopping further oil exploration in the region. They lived in the creeks and visited their communities when they were off duty. Piracy involves robbing ships and passengers at sea. Pirates declared war on the political economy of the Niger Delta by guarding the sea to stop the exportation and importation of crude oil through the sea. “The Gulf of Guinea region has a legacy of piracy, armed robbery and armed criminality” (Jacobsen, 2021:7). The following are types of pirates’ criminal groups that operate in the Niger Delta region: Deep Offshore Pirates, Coastal and Low-Reach Pirates and Riverine Criminals (Jacobsen, 2021). The last group is locally referred to as pirates because the ordinary Niger Deltan, sees pirates as local criminals who use speed boats to operate on the coastal region. This definition does not necessarily mean the same as United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) definition of pirates (UNCLOS, 1982:61). Pirates in the Niger Delta region increased sea piracy in the region to steal crude oil exported and/or imported into the country. They also steal other valuables and more recently added kidnapping to their profile (Jacobsen,

2021). They are found in all Niger Delta states but with more pronounced criminal activities in Bayelsa and River States. Cultism involves operations in secrecy by initiating their members into their sworn doctrines. Their activities in the region became more pronounced post-amnesty period. There are speculations in the region that their leaders were part of the militants who were not captured in the amnesty programme.

The devastating effects of militancy, piracy and cultism in the region is a major cause of poverty for women. In the region, women especially, live in fear of these groups. They are their victims of kidnapping, rape, destruction of properties and theft.

The conflict in the region has led to increase in organised crime. Kidnapping in the region began when the oil workers and their family members were forcefully taken for ransom before moving to others in the region. Organized crime affected women and their livelihood. Fear of kidnapping has caused some women to change their businesses. This is because of constant harassment they face early in the morning while travelling to different villages to purchase goods for sell. Cultists, militants, and other criminals waylay them and steal the money meant for their business. When the women have no money to give, they are either taken for ransom or raped. For the women whose businesses are sea foods, the pirates often forcefully take away their hard work without paying them for their labour (Ihayere, Ogeleka, & Ataine, 2014; Okonta, 2000; Okenwa, 2001).

One interviewee recounted her encounter with militants, pirates and cultists:

“When we go to fish, sea pirates are worrying us too much. After fishing, before we leave, the pirates will come with their flying boat and collect everything, and we come back empty handed. This affects even the children’s training as we cannot raise enough money to train them and cater for their needs. I followed my friend again to go to farm. But when we go to farm again, before you know, these bad boys will go and cut the plantain, uproot the cassava. In short, I am tired. That is why you see me sometimes I am very sad. On the way to the market from Ogbia to Ndiama, bandits way lay the market women and collect the little money we have at hand to purchase items for upkeep. I stopped going with them” (48 years old, Oloibiri, August 2021).

The activities of these militants, pirates and cultists have increased fear of violence among the women as no one feels safe. One interviewee recounted: “I remember a woman in the Okirika crisis whose son refused to join cultists and he was forced under gun point to sleep with his mother. After this event, the young man ran away. Till date the mother does not know whether he is alive or dead” (50 years old, Port Harcourt, September 2021). The woman in question is going through trauma including not knowing the whereabouts of her son. Her son was the one assisting in her business. In addition to the trauma from the rape/incest, the woman’s business is also suffering because there is no one to assist her in sales since her son ran away.

The above stories portray cultural violence where deprivations and oppressions on women are seen as doing so in the interests of their groups (unleashing terror in their communities to show their displeasure in degradation) without considering the effects of their actions on these women (Galtung 1990). In this case, the militants, pirates and cultists see violence against these women as a “good” thing as long as it is in line with using terror to make the government know they dominate their territory. Such oppressions are meted on women because little or no importance is attached to their labour activities as going to the market is perceived as care related duties not labour.

### **3.3 Employment Available to Women in the Niger Delta Region**

According to ILO (2008) in Ukpong, & George (2013:51), “Three-quarters of the world's working hours are used by women, and 50% of global agricultural products are produced by women according to one source, women account for two-thirds of the world's illiterate population. They put in the most effort but earn less than one-third of the world's income. Men control policies and

decisions affecting women, which often results in disparities between the sexes.” This depicts that employment for women depends on opportunities, education and availability. Also, policies and decisions cause disparity in employment for men and women.

Employment available for women in the region is limited. Most women in the rural communities are into farming and fishing. A large number of women engage in social reproduction roles, and extra-legal and informal jobs. Those who do white collar jobs are more into professions mainly for women like nursing, teaching etc. The Niger Delta women invest so much time in agriculture even those who have paid employment also cater for the family.

**Table 1.1**  
**Classification of Employment Status of participants in the study.**

Type of Women	Paid la-bour	Unpaid La-bour	Self Em-plied	Employee
Community Women	2	5	6	1
Amnesty Beneficiaries	2	3	3	2
FHH	1	9	10	0
Humanitarian Organisations	3	0	2	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>4</b>

**Source: Fieldwork 2021**

The above figure gives a broad idea in relation to the disparity in paid and unpaid labour of the Niger Delta women. Majority of the women engage in one form of labour or the other mostly unpaid. Apart from their social reproduction unpaid labour, some of them also engage in odd jobs or informal labour which may be extra-legal. These jobs are cleaning in homes and offices, clearing of farmland for others done by these women to earn a living.

One of the reasons given by the participants in the study is the inability to get jobs as a result of positions already filled up before advertisement and not having the right educational qualification. This is a “Nigerian factor” where jobs advertised do not have vacancies as the requirements provided by law for such provisions before advertisement. So, the employer placing an advert was just to fulfil “all righteousness” as no vacancies existed for the positions or the jobs have been nepotically given out before the advert. Such jobs are advertised because labour laws require such before employment is given.

Searching for paid employment is not easy for women. In addition to paid jobs not being available and the ones available are sold and reports of sexual harassment are common. An interviewee recounted, “I have gone to look for jobs in some companies that I saw an advertisement in the newspapers I saw online. Unfortunately, the jobs were already allocated before the advertisement was published. I also have experienced sexual harassment while searching for job. This almost discouraged me, but I have learnt to work hard” (35 years old, Upenekang, August, 2021). Another interviewee collaborated thus:

“Jobs are bought and given to the highest bidders. I have heard that some women experience sexual harassment in trying to get a better job, but I have not experienced it. Maybe it is because my husband protected me from seeking employment and after his death, I took up farming and food processing to cater for myself and my children. I searched for white collar jobs but each time, I am told that the vacancies I saw advertised on the newspaper, the position has been filled up” (62 years old, Eket, August, 2021).

These stories show how dynamics of conflict have made old practices of nepotism become more pronounced. For the companies, the conflict brought agitations, advertising jobs whether available or not will not bring protests. However, the conflict was supposed to provide an opportunity for more women to be employed so that it will be on record that the companies are



fulfilling their responsibilities to the host communities. This would have been an opportunity to renegotiate some of the socially regressive norms and practices, fulfilling quota and demands of the host communities as regards to previous agreements with these companies.

It is critical to note that women hold critical positions in the conflict that may be referred as informal jobs because they are extra-legal paid employment. Some of these important positions are emissaries that dispatch messages and money between the agitators (militants, pirates, and cultists) and their families; spies and informants; spiritual fortification; and providing security cover up when the agitators move from one place to the other (Oriola, 2012). Some of them may be girlfriends, wives, sisters, cousins, or mothers of these agitators.

The women in armed conflict assume material, social and spiritual roles that prolong the conflict. Some women in the conflict provide spiritual fortification to the militants. This was done by women who are post-menopausal. This ritual can be done through bathing where women and militants will be naked together. During and after this ritual, it helps them to see and hear things an ordinary human being cannot. This is also to ward off evil, make them invisible to their enemies and fortify them against bullet penetration in crossfire. Some of the agitators do not allow women of reproductive age in their camps. This is to prevent them to lose focus and not to defile their charms (Oriola, 2012). One of the interviewees said, “The ‘boys’ in the creeks are not smiling. Dem dey fortified wella (They are well-fortified). When some of them are seen in the communities, they do not go alone. They get visits from only very old women who provide spiritual help to them” (42, Eleme, August 2021).

While conflict is ongoing in the region, some women engage in selling fuel and other essential commodities to the agitators in the creeks to earn a living. This new role assumed by these women feed the conflict dynamics. One of the proxies for opportunity in greed and grievance is extortion of natural resources for financing rebellion (Collier & Hoeffler, 2004). This is done by vandalizing pipelines and engaging in illegal refining of crude oil and sales. For the women who sell fuel, the conflict may continue since they have a means of sustaining their families. For the agitators, the conflict does not affect supply and the military are making extra money from the bribes they collect from the women. These combined efforts prolong the conflict. Women also engage in oil bunkering. For them going to fetch oil to sell is not bunkering or stealing. There is a believe that one cannot steal what belongs to them as anything found on one’s land is their right to use as they please. Once there is a pipeline explosion, community members rush to the scene to scoop oil for refining and for sale. An interviewee said, “We go to fetch crude oil to refine. For us, this is not bunkering. Is it because the oil is in their hands? Bunkering is associated with stealing; you cannot steal what is yours. The oil is in our land so we cannot steal it” (28 years old, Ogbodo, August 2021). For the people of the Niger Delta region, oil found on their land belongs to them. Therefore, if they vandalize the pipeline to scoop oil, they are not stealing but rightfully taking what belongs to them which the government has denied them. Their land is their identity and taking oil from their land even though it is bunkering, is a way of showing their grievance. To them, the government and oil companies are greedy by mining from their land while leaving them poor.

Some other women, work as teachers, cleaners and other jobs that are referred to as not-meant-for-men. Those who stay at home care for the family which is unpaid. These means of livelihood that women engage in the Niger Delta region are affected by resource control conflict between the Nigerian government and the militants which has caused low productivity and decline in income generation. At other times, some of these women lost their means of livelihoods because of the conflict and resolve to managing whatever situation give them to survive (Acey, 2016; Ihayere, Ogeleka, & Ataine, 2014; Umejesi, 2014).

### **3.4. The Effects of Patriarchy and Social Inhibitions on Women**

Nigeria has a strong patriarchal society where men are the major decision makers. Women are often defined only by their social reproduction roles. The society provides strict guidelines on what women should or should not do. This includes if women could have rights to ownership of land and property, even to the kind of jobs they can do. In almost all the parts of the Niger Delta region, land ownership is an exclusive reserve of the men. Sometimes, families where there are no male children, upon the demise of their father, the land is automatically transferred to the male next of kin even where there is a widow (wife) and daughters of the late man. Men own lands and when compensation comes from the oil companies, they get compensation without putting women who farm on the lands into consideration. Socio-economic rehabilitation post-conflict has often failed to acknowledge women as there is little or no reward of compensation to stabilize the economy for them (Umejesi, 2014). There is more focus on revamping the economy for men than women as most DDR programmes are targeted at men. There is emphasis to stabilize family economy more on male headed households than female headed households.

The society places stigma and discrimination on women who suffered sexual abuses in the conflict which compounded their problems. Married women who suffered sexual violence are culturally banned from performing any conjugal duties to their husbands. They are treated as people that have been defiled as shown below. One interviewee said, “One of the chief’s wives was raped. She now lives in a separate building, cooks and eats her own food” (50 years old, Port Harcourt, September 2021). Some of the women who were raped account for FHH who are married in homes with more than one wife, those abandoned or divorced and part of those whose husbands migrated to other places. Sometimes, when the news gets out about the rape, they hardly sell their wares at the market as nobody wants to buy from them. The alternative to living a normal life and mixing freely with others in the community is appeasing the gods without which, the women are regarded as divorcees (Ekine, 2008; Umejesi, 2014). Raping a married woman takes away their freedom needs. This makes a lot of them shy away from associating with others by making them keep to themselves.

The exclusion of women in compensation plans is because of the patriarchal nature of the society. When the oil companies bring any form of compensation to the community, men see to the sharing processes. Even other developments are headed by the men. Women do not have a say in it. To the men, a woman is to be seen not heard.

A participant in the Focus Group Discussion explained:

“When there is oil spill, it kills fishes and there will be no more fish in that river. Even when we report to the men, they will not listen (accept what was said) and will say is it women that will detect what happens in the community? It is very difficult for women especially widows in this community. Even rice sent from the local government for women to share, they men will hoard it and distribute among themselves. It will not get to the women. The men of these community are wicked. Even when it is to be distributed in households, men will still hoard it for themselves. They will ask the widows that when our husbands were alive, they benefitted why complain now that it did not get to us” (50 years old, Abacheke, FGD, August 2021).

This situation is worse for widows who are FHH. Most of the communities in the Niger Delta region practice widowhood rites, where a widow undergoes certain rites to prove her innocence in her husband’s death. To undergo these rites, it does not consider whether the man died in conflict, in sickness or in health even if at an old age. This is worse for widows who are young. They are being pressured to remarry from within their late husbands’ family or go back to their parents to remarry. Even the female children of these widows are treated like their mothers. When a widow decides to remain unmarried after her husband’s death, she goes through hard times and exposed to pressures from men. In conflict, it is more difficult for widows to find what to eat, get information on happenings in the conflict and other things accrued to women. When food items are shared, the men who are in charge maybe some of those who approached her and she turned them down, therefore, no item will be given to her. It is common knowledge men do not like their

wives to associate with widows because it is believed that they may have killed their husband, associating with her means she will teach other women how to kill their own husbands (Ajayi et al, 2019; Blackburn, 2010). Married women are not allowed to associate with widows. Their husbands fear that widows will transfer “bad luck” of early death to other women. This is the structural violence against women where punishment given them are gradually killing them and also impact on their livelihood.

### **3.5. The Impact of the Conflict on Women’s Health**

In Nigeria, there is poor attitude to healthcare on women’s part due to lack of education, exposure, and poverty. Better educated women pay more attention to their health. Also, women who are financially capable take their health more seriously than poorer women. In rural communities, “96% of women with secondary and higher education, 53% of those with primary education, and 47% of those with little or no education had sought post-natal care” (Kabeer, 2005:16). Access to good healthcare depends on education and financial capacity of the woman involved. Women who are less educated have poorer attitude to healthcare.

While the conflict is ongoing, healthcare centres operate skeletal activities in the communities which limits women accessing healthcare needs. On the other hand, healthcare is not subsidized in Nigeria; poverty prevents women from being able to pay for healthcare services. Women’s inability to access and pay for healthcare services took away their reproductive rights leaving them with children they cannot cater for. Their poor living conditions make it worse for them to assertively negotiate their way through this process. This has left them as single mothers, FHH, poor, unemployed and with child(ren) to feed when they have no clue on how to survive. One critical issue in discourse on health is the poor state of the health facilities and unfriendly health workers. This greatly affects women’s attitude to healthcare which in turn affects their livelihood. If women have access to free healthcare irrespective of the kind of employment they have, dependence on others including employed partners and lovers will be low. They will be better equipped to make their reproductive health choices, and be able to cater for their own dependents without neglecting their social reproductive duties (Bhattacharya, 2013). This will minimize their sufferings and oppressions they encounter; if there is affordable, accessible and friendly healthcare delivery in public and private healthcare centres in Nigeria.

Women from conflict to post-conflict are faced with a lot of health challenges. Some of these health challenges become terminal. This, if not properly handled can led to long time obstacle to improving their means of livelihood. Women return from conflict with different kinds of health challenges. “Some of the most experienced health conditions are STDs and pelvic inflammatory diseases, effects of drug abuse, chest pain, pain from beatings, genital injuries or infections such as swelling, fistulas, vaginal discharge, genital itch and pain from trauma to the genital and anal regions and sexual abuse” (McKay and Mazurana 2004:67 in Coulter, Persson & Utas, 2008:34). Some of the above-mentioned sicknesses are treated one-off while some become lifetime. Women in the Niger Delta region have faced brutality, sexual and other gender-based violence in the hands of the expatriate oil workers who take advantage of their vulnerability (Akoda, 2008; Akubor, 2011; Thomas, 2003).

One of the FGD participants still suffers pain from being hit in the conflict. She said, “Due to my health challenges from being hit during the conflict, I cannot do any work. I visit the orthopaedic hospital in Owerri monthly for treatment whenever I can raise (borrow) money. When I visit the hospital, they examine me and give me medications, once the medication is finished, the pains will continue. I cannot go to farm or do anything else” (51 years old, Mmahu. August 2021). The above examples address the relationship between social oppression and economic exploitation (Bhattacharya, 2017). Women experience oppression through direct violence like beating. They

also experience economic exploitation by subjecting them to labour that is harmful to their health without provision of adequate healthcare services.

Pollution from gas flaring, oil spill and chemical substances is hazardous to the health of the Niger Delta women (China, Lilly & Igbemi, 2017). “Gas flaring, a process whereby crude oil is burnt off, pollutes the Delta's rivers and streams and emits some 35 million tons of carbon dioxide and 12 million tons of methane a year” (Ihayere, Ogeleka, & Ataine, 2014:17). It leaves them with increased health challenges that impact on their means of livelihood. Some have life threatening sicknesses and diseases that they spend a lot of their meagre earning on. Two of the participants in the FGD complained of being patients of high blood pressure as a result of the conflict. This is an example of health challenges that sometimes may lead to loss of means of livelihood as they depend so much on medication which may not give them the opportunity to attend to their jobs, businesses, and responsibilities in the home. Eaton (1997) said, “the rate of cases of cancer, infertility, leukaemia, bronchitis, asthma, still-births, deformed babies and other pollution-related ailments are unusually high in this region” (Ihayere, Ogeleka, & Ataine, 2014:17).

Critically looking at women's health, the trauma they experience in the face of killings has driven some of them to serious mental illness. Those who experienced violence: killing and maiming have mental health crisis that are difficult to treat. One of the interviewees said, “one of the women in our community has adopted a culture of silence. This started when she witnessed the killing of her husband and sons. She has refused to cry and speak to anyone since then” (38 years old, Ogbeljaw August 2021). Another participant said, “when we attend Niger Delta meetings, there is a woman who keeps shouting randomly, “our people are dying”. This happens in every meeting” (45 years old, Okirika, August 2021).

The activities of the militants, pirates and cultists are influenced by cultural violence, where the perpetrators feel they carry out these crimes on behalf of their groups and in the name of their cause. Structural violence (Galtung, 1990) is the reason agitators in the region chase away students, close down schools, rape girls on their way to school. These actions were not targeted at destroying educational opportunities but aimed at leaving a message to the government of the day. Over the years, these girls deprived of quality education grow into women with less education with challenges of employment options. With low education, women resort to social reproductive roles and informal labour as a means of sustenance. Minimizing access to finance which includes paid labour is a direct way of curbing access to funds that the agitators have which sometimes they get from relatives. Le Billon (2004) is of the opinion that halting access to resources will stop resource war.

An important element in women's health is reproductive rights. Conflict leaves women with less options to reproductive rights. Those who have partners who live with them, chances of conception are high. Others are raped or forced into sex work as survival strategy while some women wilfully co-habit with oil workers, the military or agitators. For any of the above, their ability to choose their reproductive rights and birth control options are limited. They may not be able to make decisions on the number of children to have and how to raise them. This is why (Bhattacharya, 2013:1) asks the question of “who labours, for whom and for how long”?

# **Chapter 4 Prioritizing Women's Means of Livelihood Post-Conflict in the Niger Delta**

## **4.1. Introduction**

In advocating for the improvement of the livelihood of the Niger Delta women, there should be a conscious effort to provide services that are relevant and sustainable. To improve the quality of life of the women in the region, sustainable projects should be specifically targeted at women and their livelihoods. It should not just be based on agriculture but to diversify their income in order for them to cater for themselves and their families. Improving women's means of livelihood should not be influenced by political under tones, discrimination or gender bias. "The discrimination of men against women is carried into the political terrain and is being reinforced in successive regimes. To this effect the emancipation of the girl-child and women is only a lip service and fanfare of 'First-Lady's' pet programmes" (China, Lilly & Igbemi, 2017:152). Women need a better society that is conducive for them to thrive in. The Niger Delta women should not be left behind as women in other parts of the world are moving forward.

Women in the Niger Delta region should be provided more opportunities to thrive including access to mechanised farming and other opportunities away from oil. There is need to empower FHH to enable them become independent and better equipped to sustain their families. Reviewing humanitarian and PAP initiatives to consciously attend to the needs of the women will improve their lives. Also, with the provision of social infrastructure in the communities, migration will reduce, the environment will be cleaner and better to live and work.

## **4.2. Providing More Opportunities for Women Than Oil Dependence**

Since the negative effects of the oil exploration has devastated the land and farming is no longer as viable as it used to be, providing more opportunities is sensible to improving the livelihood of the Niger Delta women. Globally, there is an increase in informal jobs. The world is moving away from oil to electricity, solar and nuclear energy. Women need to be equipped with relevant skills and given more opportunities to survive and cater for their households.

Women who want to continue in agricultural production should move from subsistence farming to more industrialised farming. Moving to industrial farming will provide better output than what the current situation of oil pollution produces. Women in industrial farming will have access to improved seedlings, soil management and other innovative farming techniques. It is necessary to expand their production to provide better income instead of just feeding their families and protecting their health so they will not need to spend days in the farms away from home. Bryceson, (1999:172), encourages the expansion of income for rural dwellers away from household labour to waged labour and increasing more activities that are not agriculture.

Young women who provided care services during the conflict have demonstrated willingness to learn new skills but inability to fit into community life post-conflict had led them to co-habit with their former bosses (militants, pirates, and cultists) or become sex workers as a means of survival (Coulter, Persson & Utas, 2008). This is usually due to stigma and the inability of this new skills to pay them (in cash) what they were used to earning.

Some of the responses from interviews and FGD on providing more opportunities for women are below:

“Women should be provided alternative means to fishing like ponds as the water is not clean for fishing. Give them storage facilities to help women farmers store their goods so that farm produce is available all year round. Provide education and assistance to women to engage in food exportation. Provide food processing mills to engage more women in increasing their livelihood. Provide modern farm implements for more women to go into mechanised farming. Train women in politics as policy makers” (35 years old, Upenekang, Interview, August 2021).

“The first thing in creating more opportunities for women is education and providing them with need new skills. (45 years old, Okirika, Interview, August 2021).

“One thing I will like is bringing in all these training centres where women can learn vocational skills like sewing, bead making, canopy making. Something that can empower them. It will help us so much because so many of us rely on farming. This farming job is putting a lot of stress on the women. When you see them, they will be just 30 years old, but you will look at them as 50 years old because they are always in the farm. They don’t have any other thing than that farm to do. If they are taught how to do these things and sell, they will do it and get money rather than farming especially with the effects of the oil exploration, it is becoming more difficult to survive on farming alone. They go to job (hired to farm for others) from morning to night and they will pay them 1000 naira only. Vocational skill centres to teach them hair dressing, make up and others will really help them” (37 years old, Mmahu, FGD, August 2021).

From the above, mechanised farming come with some emerging challenges like fabricating and servicing the equipment, dependence on land and struggling to cushion the effects of oil degradation, reliance on fertilizers to boost production etc. These problems require a lot of funds which interventions from state and non-state actors can assist these women. If properly handled, this will boost agricultural production.

Dependence on oil, farming and fishing is no longer sustainable for women and their families in the Niger Delta region. This calls for consideration of the use of more innovative techniques in farming that will not be solely dependent on land. Examples include; planting in bags and containers, using fish pond, using drones to detect oil spill etc. These examples will encourage and train more women on using more technologically advanced methods of fish and sea food growth to boost harvest while keeping it organic because these methods keep products organic without genetic modifications. Teaching women vocational skills will provide better income that will not impact negatively on their health.

### 4.3. Empowering Female Headed Households

Female headed household is common in violent conflicts due to loss of breadwinner before or during the conflict, suffering with many forms of deprivations, subjugations because of their social status. Some of the FHHs who widows are encounter worse circumstances in the conflict. They suffer stigma because of losing their husbands and seem to be forgotten (Makama, 2013).

**Table 1.2**  
**No of FHH in FGD by their categories**

Categories of FHH	No of FHH in FGD
Widows	3
Abandoned or Divorced	1
Left Behind by migrated husband	1
Married in more than one wife marriage	2

Have children but never married	2
Orphaned	1
Total	10

**Source: Fieldwork 2021**

The Table above represents FHH who participated in the FGD. This shows a representation of all categories of FHH. Most of them had been FHH for over 10 years. They identified their problem as need of financial assistance as the burden of raising their children and catering for every member of their family rested solely on them. Everyone who participated in the FGD mentioned access to direct cash as a need.

To alleviate women’s sufferings, there is need to empower them with start-up capitals, grants, soft loans and other credit facilities to do business that will bring more income to the family and enhance their livelihood. In any attempt to provide empowerment for FHH, attention should be given to sustainable means of livelihood.

One of the participants in FGD said, “One NGO came to train us on vocational skills. I had interest in catering and confectionary. I know that food business will always sell. But I was trained in sewing. I didn’t gain much from the training. I sold my machine on the graduation to use the money to cater for my children” (Egbema, 53 years old, FGD, August 2021). The above shows that in improving the livelihood of women especially FHH, attention should be given to skills, jobs and programs that are sustainable. Vocational skills that are transgenerational should be encouraged so that such can be passed from one generation to another. The state, organised private sector and NGOs should take up more responsibilities in seeing that more women benefit more from sustainable skills.

Empowering FHH will improve their living conditions, this one of the participants in the FGD said, “I live in a thatch house. I am not the only women in my village who live in this kind of house. I wish I can live in a better house than what I currently live in. Our community is not as developed as others.” (Abacheke, 53 years old, FGD, August 2021).

Having a sustainable livelihood will improve family value system as FHH will take care of the basic needs of their families which will reduce social vices in the community. A participant in the FGD said, “I want a life where peace would reign and with enough finance where we are able to cater to our families.” (Assa, 40 years old, FGD, August 2021).

#### **4.4. Reviewing the Presidential Amnesty Program (PAP) and Other Humanitarian Interventions**

There are many humanitarian interventions completed and ongoing in the Niger Delta region. Some of these interventions are targeted at women for them to have improved lives and means of livelihood. The feedback from beneficiaries are sometimes negative including complaints of extortion on prospective beneficiaries to have their names shortlisted from their leaders. At other times, the vocational skills are not based on needs assessment but on what the organizers of such interventions deem suitable for the beneficiaries. Unmet needs that communities in the Niger Delta face are part of the reasons the conflict is prolonged as the foundation of the conflict is yet to be addressed.

Nevertheless, these humanitarian organisations have done a lot. Without these interventions in the region, the women will be poorer and in worse situations than what is obtainable today. The activities and interventions of the humanitarian organizations have made reasonable improvement of lives in the region. This can be improved so that more women benefit from these interventions. It is the NGOs in the region most especially that have been assisting communities especially women to have a better life. They have been providing assistance to women in the area of farming.

Some of these communities with constant oil spill cannot grow the improved seedling given to them because the land cannot yield anything.

On June 25, 2009, the Government of Nigeria declared the Presidential Amnesty Programme (PAP) for all Niger Delta militants. The amnesty program was aimed at Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) of the militants (Osah & Amakihe, 2014). This meant that the program was to end conflicts by disarming the militants and reintegrating them back to the society through an economic empowerment process. This program benefitted the militants who were mostly men without considering the women who suffered economic and other losses during the militancy.

The PAP was an initiative of the Nigerian government to bring peace in the Niger Delta region. Under the program, former militants mostly men are reintegrated into the society through various economic empowerment programs, women are left behind. Women lost their husbands, the head of their households, their dignity, basic human right and means of livelihood during the conflict in the Niger Delta without adequate compensation to them. While men involved in the Niger Delta militancy are sent abroad to study on scholarship, their women counterparts are trained in vocational skills acquisition locally. According to Omadjohwoefe, (2011: 258) “The highest number of the ex-militants registered during the first phase of the disarmament exercise came from Rivers State, with 6,997, closely followed by those of Bayelsa State origins, with 6,961, and those from Delta with 3,361. The others came from the other Niger Delta six states. This number included 20049 men and 133 women” but “no record of child soldiers” (Osah, & Amakihe, 2014:3). This number of women was very small and proves how the programme evidently ignores women’s contributions through paid and unpaid labour in the Niger Delta conflict. In all, the PAP has 30,000 persons enrolled on the program and 65% of them are in vocational training or school (NDAP, 2009). The exclusion of women who suffered losses makes the PAP look like it deliberately left women because of the patriarchal nature of the programme. There have been unfulfilled promises and unmet expectations associated with the programme.

An example of the ripple positive effect of the PAP was encountered during the 2012 flood in several villages in the Niger Delta region. Former militants and beneficiaries of the PAP partnered with humanitarian organisations to contribute money from their monthly stipend, a total of ₦52,700,000 for relief materials to affected communities (Osah, 2014; Osah, & Amakihe, 2014). A good number of those affected by the flood were FHH.

There have been other humanitarian interventions in the region. This has not taken away the pains of the people because there are challenges which have not really addressed the needs and losses of the Niger Delta women. Some of the negative feedbacks on the PAP are:

“One of the foremost negative feedbacks is that women were not included in the program even when they suffered as much as the men in the conflict. Also, the women in the community that were also deprived of their livelihood of going to the farm, going to the river to fish and pick periwinkle but they couldn’t go to farm to plant or harvest and couldn’t go to the river to fish or pick periwinkles. There was hunger, they only tried one way or the other to survive. For those that couldn’t, some of them died in the process out of starvation, scarcity of food. While the conflict was ongoing, some medical staff were not working as they should because they felt unsafe to go out. Those of them that were not resident in the communities with crisis found it difficult to go to work in those communities. When the women or their children were sick, they couldn’t get to the clinic because there were no medical staff to treat them. I don’t think these issues were considered when they drafted the PAP. The community members were not captured into the PAP especially the women” (38 years old, Kaiama, Interview, August 2021).

“The PAP office is in Abuja. We are not privy to what transpires there. This is not supposed to be so because you cannot solve the problems from a particular region at the centre” (36 years old, Ibeno, Interview, August 2021).



“Amnesty program is very streamlined. It is forcing contracts on people who are neither qualified nor trained to handle such programs. Amnesty workers receive percentage cuts from contactors. This drives contractors to buy contacts and inflate prices. Some of the PAP employees encourage contactors not to meet up with their responsibilities and demands that the contracts require. Example, where a contractor is meant to train and equip the trainees in sewing skills, an employee may ask the contractor to buy only sewing machine without other instruments. Vocational skills are forced on the beneficiaries without any needs assessment. This has caused a lot of the beneficiaries of these skills to sell off their starter packs to those who need such without using them (34 years old, Warri, Interview, September 2021).

“Women tend to shy away from the amnesty program because of fear of what their husbands will think. Their husbands want money as compensation for the land instead of the PAP which they feel is bribe from the government to give up their rights. The amnesty program does not have any form of sensitization to the communities. They squander money meant for the program, PAP increases crime, greed to steal from others” (42 years old, Yenagoa, Interview, August 2021).

“At first, my community thought the program was meant to recruit people into the military. People were not eager to join at first. This is because there was no form of sensitization (51 years old, Izombe, FGD, August 2021).

The above are conversations drawn from individual interviews and FGD which indicates that the PAP and other humanitarian interventions need to be reviewed to address the needs of women especially FHH who suffered losses in the conflict. The PAP “benefited perpetrators rather than victims of violence” (Nextier SPD, 2020:9). Initially the PAP was designed to last for 5 years. But there were concerns about what can be achieved and fear of what may happen if they programme stops. The exclusion of those who suffered losses at the community level need to be revisited as to minimize recurring conflict in the region (Nextier SPD, 2020). There is need to critically address the points provided in above conversations by:

- including more women especially those who suffered losses,
- locating the PAP head office in the Niger Delta region,
- making the PAP more flexible and awarding contracts to those qualified or more efficient to handle such to achieve greater results
- sensitizing communities on the benefits of the program
- auditing the gains and failure of PAP to improve delivery.

#### **4.5. Provision of Social Infrastructure in the Communities**

With the revenue coming from the Niger Delta region to the rest of Nigeria, one would think that social amenities and social infrastructure will be the order of the day for them. Unfortunately, this is not the case. Many communities in the region lack basic amenities like good roads, portable (pipe borne) water, electricity, healthcare centres and others. In most of the communities, women fetch water from the same river where the community defecate, where oil spill, and where chemicals are deposited. They use this same water for cooking, drinking, bathing, and washing, and for other domestic use (Ihayere, Ogeleka, & Ataine, 2014:15). One of the interviewees speaking in pidgin English said, “we no get water to use. Na for river we get water and oil don cover am. The one we dey drink na from tanker or borehole. We no get money to dey buy all the

time. We no fit use the river water wash ordinary plate because oil dey everywhere (We do not have water to use. We fetch water from the river and it is covered in oil. We buy the one we drink and cannot afford to buy all the time. We cannot use the river water to wash plates because of oil spill)” (Ogbe-Ijaw, 38 years old, Interview, August 2021).

Improving the provision of social infrastructure in the communities will reduce urban migration. It will improve quality of life and reduce child and maternal mortality rates in the region. The women in the Niger Delta region will have improved lives and means of livelihood if they have basic amenities in their communities. With electricity they can preserve perishable goods for sale instead of allowing such to rot away. When each community has healthcare centre, women will enjoy improved healthcare delivery. When women’s health is in order, their paid and unpaid labour will yield more dividends. One FGD participant said, “if we have good road, light and water; life becomes easy. When we work hard, we will reap the fruits of our labour. But without these things in place, life is hard” (55 years old, Abaezu, August 2021).

In search of greener pastures and better living conditions, providing more opportunities for women as a shift on oil dependence, empowering FHH, reviewing humanitarian interventions in the region to include more women and provide sustainable income, and provision of basic infrastructure will lead to reduction in women who migrate to other places in semi-urban areas. A clean environment in the region without oil pollution will relatively calm the agitations in the Niger Delta. Once oil degradation is cleaned up in the region, peace will return to the region. Women in the Niger Delta need a peaceful and clean environment to live in, take care of themselves and their families and means of livelihood. The Presidential Amnesty Programme (PAP) brought a measure of peace to the region, but this has not improved the livelihood of the women in the Niger Delta. When the environment is clean and peaceful, the activities of the militants, pirates and cultists will drastically reduce to the barest minimum. Improved means of livelihood for women requires hard work. It is not an impossible situation for women in the Niger Delta region. It is a doable thing. With the right infrastructure in place, women can be able to do their business where it is suitable for them not just where it is available to do such business.

## Chapter 5 Conclusion

### 5.1. Summary

The research addressed the impact of conflict in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria on women and their livelihoods. The two research questions raised to provide direction for the study were: to determine how the Niger Delta conflicts have impacted on the livelihood of Female Headed Households and the ways that intervention measures by humanitarian organisations after the conflict period has improved the livelihood of the women in the area. Some theories were reviewed to provide direction for the study. The theories were conflict theory and social reproduction theory. Also, Galtung's mutually reinforcing dynamics of violence (direct, structural and cultural violence to address issues on patriarchal culture, norms and values was reviewed and the relevance of these theories were linked to the study.

The research design adopted for the study was the phenomenological paradigm approach which focuses on the similarities or commonalities of lived experiences of the participants. The study was conducted in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria, made up of nine oil producing states namely: Rivers, Bayelsa, Akwa Ibom, Delta, Abia, Imo, Cross River, Edo and Ondo. However, only states with intense experiences of the conflict which were: Rivers, Bayelsa, Akwa Ibom, Delta, and Imo were used for data collection. The population for the study comprised of all women with pre and post-conflict experience in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria and qualitative sampling technique was used in selecting the participants. The participants had varying but similar characteristics such as age, educational qualification, employment status to ensure that the research represented women in all categories. The instruments used for data collection was a structured interview schedule developed by the researcher in consultation with other stakeholders who possess cognate knowledge and experience of the conflict in the Niger Delta region, Nigeria.

Interview and Focused Group Discussions were used to elicit responses from the participants which served as data for the study. The researcher and research assistants gathered the data during the interview and focused group discussion sessions. To ensure compliance with COVID-19 protocols, the focus group discussions were conducted online. To have satisfactory evidence in the field work, key informants were used to gain access to the participants who were willing to share their experiences. The researcher interviewed three humanitarian organization staff (1 from Presidential Amnesty Program, 1 NGO and 1 human rights journalist), seven women from communities most affected by the conflict, and five women beneficiaries of the Presidential Amnesty Program. The sessions had one focus group discussion with 10 FHH. The FHH in the FGD were as follows: 3 widows, 1 abandoned, 1 left behind by migrated husband, 2 married in polygamous homes, 2 with children but never married, 1 orphaned. The participants for FGD were selected based on availability. Responses obtained from the interview and focused group discussion sessions were analysed.

Findings revealed that women's experience of the oppression and deprivation in conflict are gender-based and complex. This study showed that conflict had impacted livelihoods of women in the study area negatively especially for FHH. As a result of the cultural nature of the violent conflict, they experience rape, dead of spouse, extortion, lack of opportunity for education. These experiences are done for a cause by the perpetrators of the conflict without putting women's needs, contributions and wellbeing into consideration.

Findings also indicated that, the experiences women go through in conflict had resulted in their being stereotyped as victims or spoils of war, as revealed by the participants. They are survivors, participants, protectors and chart new cause of socializing the younger ones to know their identity by recounting the conflict situation as a way of averting such in the future. These women have

survived by engaging in informal labour in form of material, spiritual and social duties to earn a living even in conflict. They do not allow obstacles like activities of the militants, pirates and cultists, limited available paid employment, effects of patriarchy and social inhibitions, and impact of the conflict on their health; making them age abruptly from the effect of excess farm work with low or no yield, discourage them from earning income in the midst of poverty. These women have some resilience to earn a living in conflict even if their roles prolong the conflict.

The study further showed the dynamics of the conflict had created a shift in women's role. Some rose from their social reproductive roles to become head of households. This changed them from women who were care givers to women who are also breadwinners. The findings from the research shows that women who lost their breadwinners take up the full responsibility of providing and catering for their families.

On the intervention measures by humanitarian organisations towards post conflict losses, findings showed that the PAP and other humanitarian interventions in the regions had brought some measure of stability and tranquillity back to the region. Although most of such programs were geared towards assisting perpetrators than victims, yet the programs have made significant positive changes in the region. The PAP needs to be reassessed to accommodate more women especially those who suffered loss in the conflict. Like other DDR programmes, PAP needs to be reviewed to transition into a program that will be owned by the people in the region instead of the Government. The participants postulated the need for mechanised farming and a deviation for the conventional farming practices occasioned by the fact that their farmlands had been polluted by oil spillage; financial empowerment of FHH and sustainable vocational skills that are transgenerational in nature. The participants suggested needs assessment by PAP and other humanitarian organizations and the need for sensitization of women on the objectives of these programmes as well as provision of social infrastructure to stem urban migration amongst others.

Finally, this research was tailored to answer specific and peculiar questions on the impact of the Niger Delta conflict on women and their livelihoods. It should not be used to generalise conflicts in different regions. However, the findings of the study, the impact of the conflict on the women and their livelihoods are relevant to policy makers, development workers and researchers working in the Niger Delta. The research brought to limelight that women are functional participants in the conflict through various ways they contribute to the conflict and peacebuilding processes contrary to victims of conflict they have been stereotyped. In view of the above finding, the researcher concludes that conflict in the Niger delta region in Nigeria negatively impacts on women's livelihood in the study area.

## **5.2. Going Forward**

Due to age-long cultural hold on agriculture, exploring other means of sustainable livelihood for the Niger Delta women, one that is devoid of dependence on subsistence agriculture nor oil is very key for their survival. Whether any woman, female head of household or one who has benefitted from humanitarian interventions, the most important thing is having a sustainable livelihood. A livelihood that thrives no matter the condition or situation in the region. Rural income diversification is the way forward for the Niger Delta women in order to have improved livelihood.

The labour contributions of the Niger Delta women should be recognized and respected. This recognition will make it easy for women to take care of themselves and their households. If her capacity to contribute to the family's upkeep is dependent on what others provide for her, her ability to make choices that affect her will be limited.

Social inhibition limits women in conflict, keeps them stereotyped and impacts their livelihoods. Every key decision on what women get during or post-conflict depends on how willing the men

are to cooperate with them because men still make decisions without considering the impact especially on women. Changing cultural norms and values is not easy to achieve. Women need to collaborate with men, state, other institutions in championing their cause, improving their livelihood and being safe in the region.

More women coming together at the community, local, state and regional levels to form strong cooperatives will provide strong networks that will also assist more women become financially independent in the long run. Women in the region are eager to assist other women become better and gain financial stability. As more women benefit from these initiatives, they will train other women thereby having positive ripple effects on the women in the region.

Living in a clean and peaceful environment will create better opportunities for the women. Communal lifestyle brings out the best in women when it is in peace. Care-giving and other reproductive duties will be shared without putting the burden on key few women.

Women in the Niger Delta need to embrace innovation and technology as the new normal post-COVID pandemic for more opportunities for sustainable livelihoods. Acquiring some skills like coding, data science, artificial intelligence and internet-of-things will create better opportunities not dependent on oil or land. These will enhance their chances of being sort after in the labour market, being role models to upcoming women and becoming major players who need no validations from men. This is a right step in carving a niche for women.

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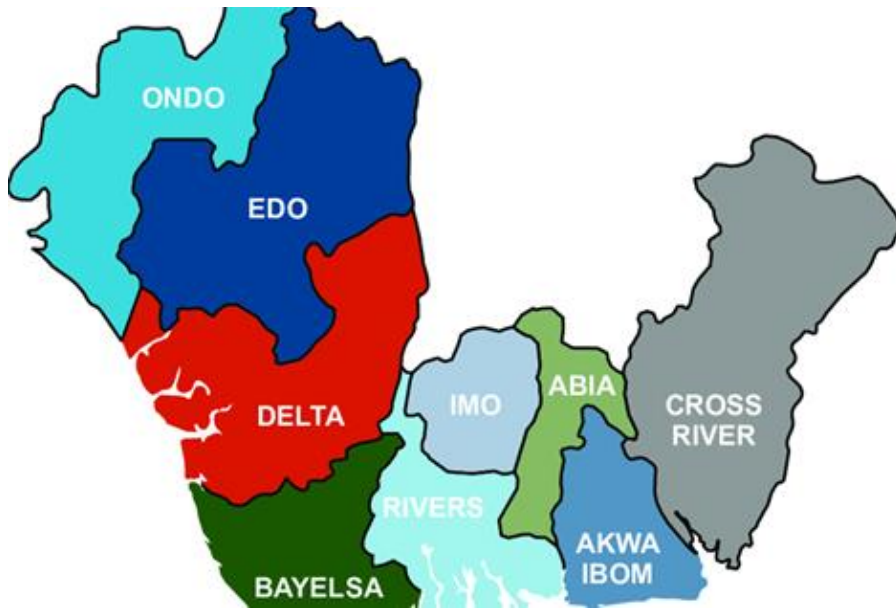


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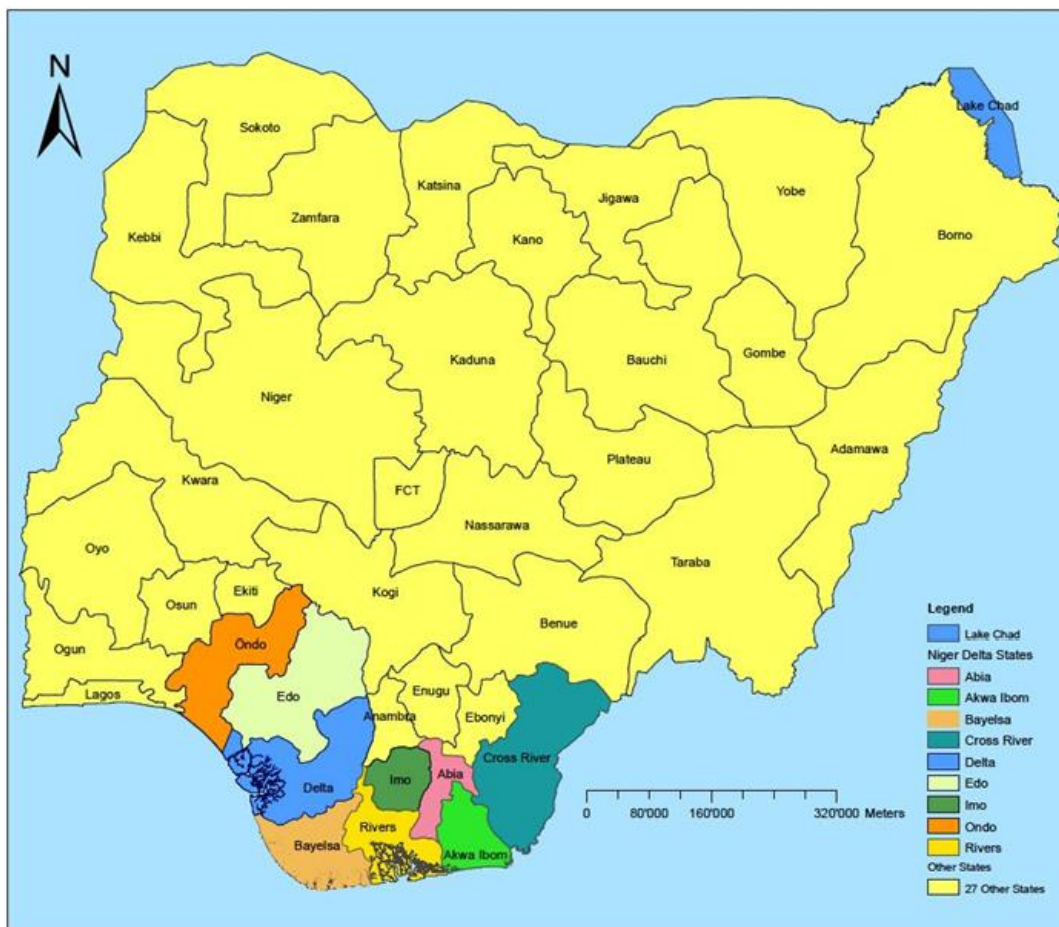
# Appendices

1.1: Map Showing the Niger Delta



Source: Premium Times Nigeria, 2007

1.2: Map of Nigeria showing the Niger Delta



Source: Ite, A. et al, 2013

1.3: Images of dead fish on the seashore from Eleme oil spill.



Source: Eye witness account, Fieldwork 2021

1.4: Classification of Employment Status of participants in the study.

Type of Women	Paid labour	Unpaid Labour	Self Employed	Employee
Community Women	2	5	6	1
Amnesty Beneficiaries	2	3	3	2
FHH	1	9	10	0
Humanitarian Organizations	3	0	2	1
Total	8	17	21	4

Source: Fieldwork 2021

1.5: No of FHH in FGD by their categories

Categories of FHH	No of FHH in FGD
Widows	3
Abandoned or Divorced	1
Left Behind by migrated husband	1
Married in more than one wife marriage	2
Have children but never married	2
Orphaned	1
Total	10

Source: Fieldwork 2021



## 1.6: Request for Consent Letter to Participants

### REQUEST FOR CONSENT

Good day all,

I am Basseyanwan Usoroh, a postgraduate student at the International Institute of Social Studies, The Hague, Netherlands majoring in Human rights, Gender and Conflict studies. My family and I lived and worked in Ibeno, Akwa Ibom State while I had most of my education in Cross River. My job responsibilities have taken me to almost all the states in the Niger Delta region which has made me observe how women in the region survive.

As a woman born and raised in the Niger Delta region, and one who is development specialist, I have witnessed first-hand the devastating effects of the oil crisis in my village. Growing up, I witnessed how we had to walk very far distance to go to school in neighbouring community, it was a traumatizing experience having to pass through the river where oil spill was a common occurrence. I saw the devastating effects of the oil exploration on our land which led to the conflict in the region. I am sharing this story to let you know that I understand the impact of the conflict on women. I am currently writing my thesis on the topic: The Impact of the Niger Delta Conflict on Women and the Livelihood in Nigeria.

My research is basically on the recounted experiences of the women in the Niger Delta region, how the conflict impacted them and their livelihoods and to explore intervention initiatives that can improve their means of livelihood. As part of the research requirement, I am conducting field research to understand the experiences of women affected by the Niger Delta conflict, and how they have survived with the ongoing violence. This is to account for women's voices and experiences during this conflict within the development studies.

I hereby request your consent to an interview session and I hope that your response will assist me to explore the impact of the violent conflict in the region on women and ways their livelihoods can be improved. I will protect your identity in reporting my findings with utmost confidentiality.

Please find attached a letter of Introduction from the Institution for your information. Thank you for your cooperation.

Best regards,

Basseyanwan Usoroh

## 1.7: Interview Questions

**Participants' Introduction** (Please note that everyone participating here will answer this general questions)

1. How old are you?
2. Where do you live?
3. What is your educational qualification?
4. What do you do for a living?

**Background of the interviewee** (General for all participants)

1. What work were you doing before the conflict?
2. How long did you do the job? Was it sufficient to cater for you and your children?
3. What obstacles do you face in getting a better job?

**Experiences in the conflict** (This is for women who are not female heads of household only).

1. What were your experiences during the conflict especially its impact on your livelihood?
2. What challenges did you face in the conflict?
3. How did you get finances for upkeep during the conflict?
4. What kind of work did you do during the conflict?
5. How did the conflict influence your decision to change your means of livelihood?

**Post Amnesty** (This is for women who benefited from the Presidential Amnesty Program only)

1. What benefits did you get from the Presidential Amnesty Program (PAP)?
2. What are the reasons you joined the PAP?
3. How has the PAP impacted your life and means of livelihood?
4. How can the PAP improve your means of livelihood?
5. Are there any negative impacts of PAP?

**Humanitarian organisations** (this is for NGO workers only)

1. What is the Presidential Amnesty Program?
2. How has women benefitted from PAP?
3. How has PAP enhanced women's means of livelihood?
4. What obstacles do women face in accessing the benefits of the PAP?
5. What complaints or negative feedback women have of the PAP if any?

**Female Head of Household** (Focus Group Discussion)

1. When and how long have you been a female head of household (FHH)?
2. What kind of work were you doing before you became FHH?
3. Give reasons if you would like to change your current job?
4. What are the obstacles to your ideal job?
5. What kind of community life and livelihood you imagine for you and other women in your neighbourhood?

## 1.8: Signed Consent Forms for FGD

### Informed Consent Form for Focus Group Discussion

**PROPOSED RESEARCH TITLE:** The Impact of the Niger Delta Conflict on Women and their Livelihoods in Nigeria

#### PURPOSE OF STUDY

The purpose of this study is to provide valuable discussions that attempt to identify essential linkages between the impact of the Niger Delta on women and their livelihood especially as regards to female head of households. It will also look at how women survive the conflict while supporting their families. This research is being done as partial fulfillment for the requirement of the Master of Arts in Development Studies at the Institute of Social Studies, Netherlands.

You are being asked to participate in this research as a female head of household and for this reason, it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please ask the researcher if there is anything that is not clear or if you need more information.

#### CONFIDENTIALITY

For the purposes of this research study, your comments will not be anonymous. Every effort will be made by the researcher to preserve your confidentiality including the following:

- Assigning code names for participants who are willing to remain anonymous which will be used on all research notes and documents if it goes by publication.

#### CONTACT INFORMATION

If you have any questions regarding this research, you can directly contact the researcher whose contact information is provided here, (busoroh@gmail.com).

#### VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION

Your participation in this research is voluntary. It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part in this study. If you decide to take part in this study, you will be asked to sign this consent form. After you sign the consent form, you are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason.

#### CONSENT

I have read, and I understand the provided information. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving a reason and without cost. I understand that I will be given a copy of this consent form. I voluntarily agree to take part in this study. I (consent/do not consent) ~~do not consent~~ for my picture to be used for this research.

Participant's signature  Date 29/8/21

Informed Consent Form for Focus Group Discussion

**PROPOSED RESEARCH TITLE:** The Impact of the Niger Delta Conflict on Women and their Livelihoods in Nigeria

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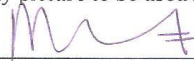
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**CONSENT**

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Participant's signature  Date 29th August 2021



Informed Consent Form for Focus Group Discussion

**PROPOSED RESEARCH TITLE:** The Impact of the Niger Delta Conflict on Women and their Livelihoods in Nigeria

**PURPOSE OF STUDY**

The purpose of this study is to provide valuable discussions that attempt to identify essential linkages between the impact of the Niger Delta on women and their livelihood especially as regards to female head of households. It will also look at how women survive the conflict while supporting their families. This research is being done as partial fulfillment for the requirement of the Master of Arts in Development Studies at the Institute of Social Studies, Netherlands.

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Participant's signature  Date 29th Aug 21

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Participant's signature  Date 29-AUG-2021

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Participant's signature ICI Date 29/8/21



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Participant's signature 01 Date 29/8/20

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Participant's signature  Date 29/08/2024

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Participant's signature  Date August, 29, 2021

Informed Consent Form for Focus Group Discussion

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Participant's signature  Date 29/08/2021



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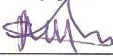
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