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## Findings, Summary and Conclusion

### **Overview of the Conflict**

The Niger-delta conflict began as an agitation of ethnic minorities in the western and eastern Niger-delta, by political society and ethnic activists, against marginalisation and exclusion in the then Eastern and Western Regions. With the commercial exploration of oil and growing significance of oil in the national economy, the agitation assumed a wider dimension through more demands for developmental attention. The conflict was first transformed into a youth insurgency in 1966, when some youths, under the aegis of the Niger Delta Volunteer Service, declared a Niger-delta Republic and took over and held on to some territory and oil installations. This was crushed.

The creation of Rivers and Cross River States and the Mid-west Region earlier, and later State, doused the initial agitation and insurgence. The region wide agitation was replaced with local agitations for resource benefits and particularly community development until the late 1980s. There were series of uncoordinated community conflicts, largely peaceful protests throughout the 1970s. By the early 1980s, the agitation for increased revenue flow to the region began. The Ogonis began the new wave of ethnic wide challenge for environmental remediation, resource control and ethnic autonomy in the early 1990s. By the mid 1990s, the agitation had become pan-ethnic and regional. Since the late 1990s, the region has been a melting pot of aggressive violent contestations and confrontations between the region's citizens and the oil companies and the Nigeria state.

There have been different vanguards of the struggle. Initially, there was a flowering of and concert of civil society and non-governmental organisations. By 2000, political society engaged the state in struggles for resource control and true federalism. A women uprising emerged in 2002. But the more consistent, combative and visible segment has been the youth, which has emerged rigorously since the late 1990s as the major platform and vanguard.

### Overview of the Study

The study is divided into two sections. In the first, the research problem, questions and objectives, and conceptual and theoretical framework for analysis are presented. Here, we present the youth problematic in Africa and the concepts of new social movements and contentious politics as a conceptual and theoretical framework for analysis. Furthermore, we elaborate on two concepts, self determination and resource control, as important to our study.

In the second segment of the first section, we address the conflict, from a secondary data base. The role of ethnic-cultural movements and ethnic and regional elites which dominated the early stages of the struggle and the native, and results of the struggle at this stage are highlighted. The entry of youths and how this transformed the conflict into violent contentions was identified. Then the study focuses directly on youth militancy, militias, cults and gangs, their objections, sources of arms and funding. The interfaces with the civil struggles and the current youth insurgency which have escalated since 2005 are also addressed. This section was based on primary data. The study investigated and drew insights from the perceptions of the self termination, resource control, the problems and goals of the struggle, the roles and perception of the youth, the profile and perceptions of youth militias, the roles of elders, elites, women and youths, the causes of the conflict, its effects, and how it has been managed..

### Findings

The study found that, though there are huge grievances and discontent, as a result of scanty development, marginalisation, poor resource inflow and majority ethnic domination. There is still a huge faith in the Nigerian state. But this is declining, particularly in the core Ijaw, Bayelsa State. Nigeria also remains the nation-state framework for the realisation of their aspirations. What they want is a re-configured nation-state that is more equitable, fair and just and founded on true Federalism and resource control. Thus, self determination is generally conceived as a regional, political and developmental autonomy through a re-configured nation-state project.

The conflict is centered on a struggle for resources. The region seeks control and management, and greater participation and stakeholdership in its oil resources. What is specifically sought ranges from an increased derivation based share to a 100 per cent control.

The perception of the struggle is that it is for development attention, resource benefits, inclusion and representation and fight against economic deprivation, neglect and negative oil externalities. The region is seeking adequate attention, recognition and participation in its oil resources, and fair, just and equitable treatment as minority groups. The ethnic group in the region wants massive development, resource control or at least adequate derivation based share, and a better federal framework that guarantees equitable, fair and just treatment as well as regional autonomy.

The youth movement emerged from a displacement of the regional elders and elite by the youths who were growingly poor, unemployed, discontented and frustrated, and angry at their predicaments in spite of their region's resource endowments and contributions. They lost confidence in their elders and leaders, asserted themselves and constructed a youth platform of struggle through militant agitation and engagement. The youth vanguard and direction of the conflict seemed to have been understood and accepted. Hence, the youths and youth militants are seen as a determined, articulate, bold and courageous group of freedom fighters. The youths' role is seen considerably as purposeful, just as directed against injustice, exploitation and deprivation and to compel development. The youths are seeking in and through the struggle, development and resource control at the general level and, in relation to the youth themselves, employment and guarantee of a better future or better life.

The youth militia phenomenon arose, from 'a loss of confidence in the Nigerian state and the regional and ethnic leaders. But it is frustration founded on degenerating poverty, mass unemployment, deprivation, long suffering and a rising mass of anger and discontentment. The militias appear as community and ethnic militias, armed bands and cults. They are in camps. They have fairly organised hierarchical commands, are commanded by camp commandants and have mechanisms for disciplining erring members.

A considerable chunk of the militias, units and bands are self sponsored and built around commandants. However there is some element of sponsorship by ethnic and political leaders and communities. These also do business with the groups, which provide funds and sustains relevance. There are two broad segments: the genuine militias that pursue altruistic regional and ethnic objectives, and the criminalized militias that pursue self interests and livelihood. The latter are small cults and bands and operate less under broad ethnic and regional youth platforms such as the Youth Council. Criminal militia groups have also resulted from proliferation and loss of control by major ethnic nationalistic and liberation driven militia leaders. The militia phenomena are on the decline. This is in terms of the dwindling popular support, acceptability and condemnation of some militia behaviour. A central factor is the increasing criminality, cult wars and horrendous violence associated with some militia groups.

Apart from the youth, traditional rulers, chiefs and elders, business and political elite and women have played some roles. The elite dominated the struggle until the 1980s, and still play active roles in the civil realm and particularly in the mediatory, advisory and peaceful engagements. The women support the struggle but have lacked continuity in their activism. They are however the moral conscience in terms of moral support, moderation and peace building. The traditional, political and business elite are however de-legitimated and are seen as using the struggle for their personal gains. The decline of confidence and integrity and the overall significance of roles of these groups is, in part, responsible for the emergence of youth militancy, escalating violence and criminality.

Violence is the preferred method of struggle, because of its seeming effectiveness. Violence in itself is conducted by the failure of government to dialogue with the youths and the communities at large or respond to peaceful agitation, and its use of excessive force and violence against the communities. Within the violent methods already utilised, hostage taking is seen as most effective, particularly in terms of drawing national and international attention and compelling quick response from the government. Furthermore, and this is quite disturbing, many of the region's citizens are ready to continue using every available actions and measures, including violence, sabotage and support for militias, in pursuance of the struggle and to persist until there is solution to the region's problems. This denotes the probability of a prolonged, protracted and escalating struggle.

The conflict has had terrible consequence on the economy, the nation's revenue profile, the communities, youth, stability and security, inter-ethnic and communal relations, and living conditions and livelihoods. There is growing disrespect for traditional institutions and governance systems, general degeneration of social values and order, increased restiveness, laziness, aggression and violence among the youths pervading violence, destruction, insecurity, lawlessness, and increased suspicion, rancour, acrimony and disunity. There is a paralysis of social and economic activities and commerce, restriction of movements and worsening cost of living and living conditions.

Indicated in the analysis of the causes of the conflict are poverty, unemployment, environmental devastation and resource scarcity, and the nature of state and corporate governance. Poverty and unemployment brewed discontent, frustration and anger. Environmental pollution exacerbated poverty and unemployment. The nature of corporate and state governance particularly in relation to scanty developmental efforts, insensitivity, failure to keep promises and agreements, and military suppression and repression were seen as catalysing or provoking greater frustration and agitation.

The military and suppressive strategy of management of the conflict is said to be associated with excessive force, extortion, abuse of rights and intimidation. The military is seen as escalating the crisis and is ineffective. The effort of the Obasanjo administration towards resolving the crisis is seen as having been weak, feeble, slow, ineffective and disappointing. The Niger-delta people are still hoping for the resolution of the conflict through the institution of a true federal framework that guarantees regional autonomy, resource control, massive and accelerated development, and a kind of Marshall Plan or affirmative action. They hope to achieve this through dialogue and preferably through a conference of ethnic nationalities or a national conference.

## Conclusion

The Niger-delta conflict attracted national attention in 1966 and has been escalating since 1990. It has shifted from a dominantly peaceful agitation to violent challenges conducted by the youths. It shifted from an ethnic and regional agitation between the 1950s and 1960s, to local conflicts conducted by communities in the 1970s and 1980s. Since the 1990s, it has become an ethnic and regional conflict conducted by civil society, political society, youths and women.

The focus and extent of engagement has been growing and shifting between the Nigerian state in the 1950s and 1960s, to the oil companies in the 1970s and 1980s, and then the state and oil companies since the late 1980s. Increasingly, the conflict has become national in its engagements, confrontations and militarisation and international in concerns and effects on world energy supplies. The conflict has also increasingly become an insurrection or insurgency since 1998. Since 2000, it has become internationalised with the interests, and sometimes intervention, of the United States of America and its European command. The security and stability of the Gulf of Guinea and its oil has become a major international security issue.

Just as the conflict base has been shifting, so has the extent. From a broad extent in the 1950s and 1960s, it became Ijaw based in the 1960s. Then, it became largely Ogoni in the early 1990s. By the mid-1990s, there was a region wide cauldron, as the Ijaws, Itsekiris, Ilajes, Ikweres, Isokos, Ogbas and others began to engage the state and oil companies in violent protests. While militancy has been widespread, the militia phenomenon is largely within the Ijaws.

We have noted the changes in the evolution of the conflict and its methods. Violent engagements have become the norm. From petitions and protests, the region's youths have since the 1990s targeted the dislocation or devastation of the oil industry, the forceful evacuation of oil industry personnel and the compelling of resource benefits from the oil companies. The conflict has further involved the acquisition, by force, of oil resources through participation in the theft and sale of crude oil. It has meant a militarisation and brutalisation of the region and a counterforce in the militias. It has been military actions and militia attacks. It has to be noted that the nature of state and corporate responses, treatment and governance made violence the only option. They pushed the region into violence, insurrection and insurgency.

A question that arises is what brought about the conflict? It is the perceived insensitivity of the Nigerian state and oil companies and the persisting challenges of under-development, negative externalities of the oil industry, poverty and unemployment. These brewed frustration and discontent which began to manifest in growing protests. Then, rather than accede or dialogue, government and the oil companies resorted to force, suppression and repression. The youth chose to chest out and challenge the state with counter violence. The proliferation of youth

groups and militants and the emergence of numerous militant leaders soon led to loss of control and focus. Then criminal elements emerged. The elections of 1999 and 2003 further proliferated militant groups, leaders and arms, and soon there emerged cults and bands. Then, to some, the struggle became that of enrichment through an illegal economy. The continued militarisation and military occupation and actions since the early 1990s has meant persisting violent confrontation between militias and the military and has turned the core states of the region - Bayelsa, Rivers and Delta into perennial battle grounds.

There is the issue of what has underpinned the mobilisation, transformation and persistence of the conflict. The answer is the deep grievances that border on ethnic domination, marginalisation and mistreatment. This fostered ethnic and regional nationalism and a sense of siege or threats to survival. Further economic decline has brought to the fore, the externalities of oil and scanty benefits which has fueled the struggle for resource control and participation for self development. The key drivers of the conflict since the 1990s are the persisting problems and the nature of state and corporate responses. The illegal oil economy is sustaining the conflict. It is also creating internal incoherence, fractionalisation and inter-militia and cult wars. The access to arms, the relevance created by activities in elections and elite funding are also sustainants.

The conflict project has been state and corporate reform. From the 1950s, the region has been seeking inclusion in representation and developmental attention. In the 1970s and 1980s, the communities sought more sensitive and socially responsible oil companies, but this has not been realised. Since the 1990s, the struggle for state reform has intensified as the region is seeking regional autonomy, a reverse to the 1963 Constitution, the abrogation of obnoxious decrees, increased resource inflow through derivation and resource control, true federalism through restructuring of the existing centralised state, constitutional and state reform through a conference of ethnic nationalities, demilitarisation and minority rights.

The conflict is essentially a struggle for resources. Individuals, groups, communities, ethnic groups, the states in the region, the youth, political society and traditional elite are struggling for access to oil resources and benefits from the oil companies and the Nigerian state. Resource control then is a struggle at different levels, and with different methods. The communities organise protests and the elite manipulate the youth so as to derive benefits from the oil companies. The militias and armed bands utilise force to compel benefits from the state and oil companies. The militias also use force to appropriate oil resources through oil theft and sale.

The youth movement and in fact the activism of communities and women has transformed the conflict into a popular, mass based uprising anchored on the youth. Furthermore, the proliferation, activism and the concert of forces and networks that have emerged from communal, ethnic, gender, environmental, rights, youths, civil and non governmental organisations and groups, have

transformed the conflict, particularly since the late 1980s, into a mass movement based conflict. It is to be noted that there has been a considerable coherence and synergy in the conduct of the conflict. The perception of problems and goals and the operating methods of conduct have largely been the same. There is considerable support for the agitation. There have been common platforms among political societies since the 1950s. The youth movement was across the entire ethnic groupings and had considerable networking and linkages. Even among the youth militias, there are relations, joint operations and networks.

All the militia groups have been involved in the current insurgency, which began in 2005, and which was catalysed by the arrest of the leader of the Niger-delta Volunteer Force, Asari Dokubo. Several of the militia groups relate to the Ijaw Youth Council, which is the coordinating body of the Ijaw Youth Movement. Among the core altruistic militias, there is considerable synergy, commonality of goals and operating methods. Certain social and cultural processes and factors have undergirded youth responses and methods. First, there is the issue of role perception and occupation. The youths merely assumed traditional roles of aggressive and combative reactions to communal and ethnic mistreatment and dominance in the militant and violent engagements as foot soldiers. We noted that youths displaced the elders and communal and ethnic leaders, and asserted dominance in the liaison with oil companies and the conduct of conflict. This resulted from a de-legitimation of the traditional governance institutions and personnel and the elite.

A critical issue is the examination of the implication of this de-legitimation on the youth conduct of conflict and the conflict itself. We noted earlier in the examination of effects of the conflict, a growing criminalisation, lawlessness, youth restiveness, aggression, violence, insecurity, destruction and breakdown of social values, fabric and order. The loss of focus, internal incoherence of the youth militant groups, inter-militia and inter-armed band and cult wars are possible fallouts of the absence of the matured, moderating, mediating, dialogic roles and the ensuing absence of social control, order and coherence that could have emerged from elders and elite that had integrity and the people's confidence.

The youth appropriated soci-cultural symbols and practices. The first is the Ogele which is a form of traditional peaceful protests which began from the village square. The youth action in the late 1990s began with the Ogele. The youth sang and moved in peaceful protests. Secondly, the youth resuscitated the Egbesu rites and initiation to provide some traditional religious and cultural empowerment and sense of invincibility. The Egbesu became the common mobilisation and identity platform for the militants.

We noted that the general perception of the altruistic militia is that of a freedom fighter and hero. The question that arises is, what is the implication of this for the conflict, its escalation and resolution? We think that this has arisen from the populist and mass movement base, the deep grievances, the persisting problems

and the poor status of state and corporate governance. But it means that the conflict can be prolonged, sustained and aggravated. The state would have to change its tactics from military suppression to dialogue. But dialogue must go beyond the de-legitimated elite, to the leaders of the youth movements, militias, women groups and civil society.

We attempted to construct a causality thesis or, more humbly, a portrait of causality. We fingered a poor and unemployed youth, amidst a growing negative oil externalities and economic decline. The ensuing frustration, discontent and anger pushed the youths towards militant actions, when confronted with state and corporate insensitivity, abuse, intimidation, violence and militarisation. The mass of angry and frustrated youths became also amenable to elite manipulation, particularly during the 1999 and 2003 elections, and empowerment with arms. Militancy, militant movements, militias, cults and armed bands then emerged.