

SURVEY ON WOMEN AND LIVELIHOODS IN THE NIGER DELTA: AN OVERVIEW OF WOMEN'S ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES IN OIL PRODUCING COMMUNITIES IN AKWA IBOM, BAYELSA AND RIVERS STATES.

BY SOFIRI JOAB-PETERSIDE

1. Introduction

The economic crisis in the Niger Delta has been accentuated by increased exploitation of oil and gas resources occasioned by the search of the Nigerian state for greater revenues and the multinational oil companies' quest for higher profits. The consequence has been disastrous as the area continues to suffer massive pollution of land, water, flora and fauna, which has decimated the resources on which inhabitants of the region survive. Productive land has been taken up by exploration and pipeline network and destroyed by frequent oil spillage. The rivers and streams have been polluted. The result has been prolonged economic crisis epitomized by aggravation of poverty, unemployment and hunger all of which fueled an environment of anger, bitterness, frustration, tension and conflicts.

Nigeria's return to democracy in 1999 brought with it hopes and challenges of nation-building. It also generated a lot of despair across the country as ethnic militias sprang up capitalizing on liberalization of the political space to demand for equity and fairness in governance. It is against this backdrop a number of ethnic and regional pressure groups have emerged in the Niger Delta to demand for better deals from multinational oil companies operating in the area, and resource control from the federal government. In context, several militant youth groups sprang up, while existing non-militant groups established militant wings to fight perceived state violence and brutality thereby give militant muscle to the demand for resource control (Sowunmi, 2006). This development has been explained as corollary of Nigeria's march away from military dictatorship. The emergence of ethnic militia who claim to promote the interest of their people has escalated violence as Kidnappings, killings, vandalization of oil pipelines, bunkering and organized criminal activities flourish in the area.

Women in the Niger Delta have been victims of gender based discriminatory practices and the economic crisis. They are under represented in the strategic heights of politics, government, economic, educational institutions and employed labour particularly in the oil industry. It is an indisputable fact that society regards women as inferior to men. In the rural areas even to this day women are only supposed to be seen and not heard. The inheritance laws favour the men as against women who are subjected to inhuman widowhood practices and other cultural bias. Militia and cult related violence in the region has resulted in humanitarian tragedies. The human cost of conflicts are high and are borne principally by the "civilian" population especially women and children frequently viewed as targets by warring parties and criminal gangs. For example, on Monday, February 22, 2008 Mrs. Oluwatoyin Nkwo, a senior staff of the Elf Petroleum

Nigeria limited(EPNL) was kidnapped by gunmen from Port Harcourt and taken to one of the communities in Khana Local Government Area of Rivers State.¹ In the early hours of Sunday, April 20, 2008 Margret Idisi, wife of chief Humphrey Idisi, Chairman/Chief Executive of Lonestar Drilling Nigeria Limited(a well known oil services company) was abducted by a group of kidnapers who invaded the family house of the oil magnate at Rumuokwrushi in Port Harcourt, Rivers State. On the same day at 12:30pm Mrs. Rose Deemor mother of former caretaker committee chairman of Tai Local Government Area of Rivers State was kidnapped by gunmen in her home. March 27, 2008 was the turn of Delta State as heavily armed gunmen struck at the home of Mr. Stanley Oforegbu² and kidnapped his pregnant wife who was due to be delivered of a baby. Kidnap of children³ increased the agonies and affected the productivity of women.

Women play critical roles in the region's economy especially in rural communities where they are producers of food. They have the responsibility not only for food production but also for processing, fuel, water, health, childcare, sanitation, and the entire range of survival needs of the country. Women also participate in the commercial sector, and local enterprise to generate income to meet the needs of their families. They are strong, resourceful but lacking in the opportunity to take full share in society and in development. In context of the Niger Delta, Women constitute majority of the poor, the uneducated, the marginalized, ignorant, and diseased. They are the most affected by the pollution of communal ponds and rivers that supply drinking water. The health hazards from toxic waste and the pollution of drinking water are borne more by women and their children, while young girls have been lured and deceived to respond to the lust of thousands of oil workers. The result include rising incidence of female prostitution, teenage pregnancies and mothers, and broken homes. Women have also been victims' of state security force harassment and repression. They have played active roles in the conflict between the oil producing communities and the State and oil companies and also intervened to mediate the conflict.

The usual response to women disempowerment is to seek answers to the general gender based discriminatory practices and disadvantages by analyzing them in conferences, workshops and drafting programmes of action to alleviate them. Little attention if any had been paid to the consequences of the Niger Delta conflict dynamic on women livelihoods and the active roles women can play in conflict resolution in the region. Consequently the research problematic is to determine the extent to which women have been victims of the economy of violence and their involvement in on going effort at conflict resolution.

¹ Mrs. Oluwatoyin Nkwo's husband is also the manager, training services of EPNL.

² Mr. Stanley Oforegbu was an assistant manager with Globestar Nigeria Limited, an oil firm in Delta State. A day after his wife gave birth in the kidnapers' den in the bush.

³ On Tuesday, February 27, 2008 gunmen heavily armed with AK47 kidnapped two toddlers, Chimoaroke and Kelechi Okocha aged two and one and half years respectively, from same family while on their way to the University of Port Harcourt Day Care in Choba; on Tuesday, June 26, 2007 Master Michael Stewart a nursery 1 pupil Tantua Group of Schools located along Elekahia Housing Estate in Port Harcourt was abducted by men armed with AK47 assault rifles. Master Stewart is son of Mrs. Linda Stewart, a member of Rivers State House of Assembly.

2. Study Setting

The Niger Delta is one of the largest wetlands in the world. It covers an area of 70,000 square kilometers and is reputed for its sandy coastal ridge barriers, saline mangroves, fresh water mangrove swamps and seasonal forests as well as low land rain forest. The whole area is traversed and criss-crossed by a large number of rivers, rivulets, streams, canals and creeks. The region's coastal line is buffeted throughout the year by the tides of the Atlantic Ocean while the mainland is subjected to regimes of flood by the various rivers, particularly River Niger. Niger Delta accounts for over 90% of oil and gas export earnings and up to 70% of revenues accruing to the Federation Accounts; it hosts Nigeria's oil and gas operations, whose assets and infrastructure include 5,284 wells, 7,000km of pipelines and flow lines in 31km², 275 flow stations, 10 Gas plants, and 10 Export Terminals. This implies that the economy of the area is mainly driven by the petroleum industry.

The region is made of over 40 ethnic nationalities spread over 6000 communities out of which 15000 host operations of Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) and its Joint Venture (JV) partners. The mainstay of the people is subsistence fishing and farming. Compared to the enormous oil reserves of the region and huge revenue accruing to the nation, poverty is endemic as GNP per capita is below the national average of \$280. Available figures show that there is one doctor per 82,000 people, rising to one doctor per 132,000 people in some areas, particularly the rural areas, which is three times the national average of 40,000 people per doctor, and only 27% of people of the area have access to safe drinking water. There is inadequate infrastructure, preponderance of unskilled youths, high unemployment, and perception of marginalization by the State, all of which breed frustration and anger. There are also communal disputes over ownership and control of land and associated resources, struggle for occupation of chieftaincy stools, ethnic and political disagreements.

Youth constitute 40% of the total population of the region. However, there is little provision for equipping them with skills, education and opportunities they need for self-reliance to effectively contribute to societal development. Early withdrawal from schools, child labour, high school dropout rates, early marriages, high teenage pregnancy and unemployment are major issues confronting the youths in the area. For example, while 76% of Nigerian Children attend primary school, in the Niger Delta the figure drops appallingly to between 30 to 40%, unemployment in Port Harcourt, the premier city of the region, is as high as 30%. Consequently, the youths have become quite restive in their situation and are protesting violently. The oil industry has been severely hit as attack on oil and gas infrastructure and personnel, seizure of drilling rigs, sabotage of pipelines and kidnapping of expatriate oil workers are regular occurrence.

Rivers State

Rivers was created from then Eastern Region of Nigeria on May 27, 1967. Prior to its creation, the territory was referred to as Oil Rivers Protectorate and it played a vital role in the industrial revolution of 19th century England providing vegetable oil, which served

multi purposes as raw material for industries and lubricant for industry machinery. At present, with crude oil taking over as the life wire of modern technology, Rivers State is reputed for its abundant wealth in oil and gas deposits. The State is the heart of the hydrocarbon industry, responsible for a great percentage of Nigeria's foreign exchange earnings.

As a major contributor to the country's wealth, Rivers State accounts for over forty-eight percent (48%) of crude oil produced on shore in the federation and one hundred percent (100%) of liquefied gas exported to several countries of the world. Thus the State is today known as the treasure base of the nation due to its intimidating percentage of oil and gas production. Port Harcourt, the state capital, is known as Garden city, a name derived from its beautiful layout and then decent environment. Port Harcourt is indeed one of the fastest growing metropolitan cities in Africa.

Rivers State occupies an area of about 30,000 square kilometers bounded on the south by the Atlantic Ocean, on the North by Anambra, Imo and Abia States, the East by Akwa Ibom State and the West by Bayelsa and Delta States. A network of creeks spans the riverine south, stretching into the Atlantic Ocean, through Bonny and Opobo. Its vegetation is characterized by mangrove forests in the south while the northern part has thick forest with arable land. Rainfall is heavy throughout the year. The dry season lasts from November to April, interrupted occasionally by sporadic down pour. Due to its tropical climate, numerous rivers and arable land, the predominant occupation of the people is agriculture, especially fishing and farming, commerce and industry. Beside oil and gas, the state has other natural resources including timber, white sand beaches, and clay for ceramics.

Port Harcourt, the State Capital is Nigeria's second commercial and industrial centre and has the second busiest sea port in Nigeria. Rivers State is composed of twenty three local government areas, with four degree awarding institutions, two refineries, a petrol-chemical plant, fertilizer plant and a liquefied natural gas plant. The state has a population of about five million people who have a rich and unique cultural heritage. The people came from various ethnic nationalities namely Abua, Andoni, Ekpeye, Engenni, Etche, Ibani, Ikwerre, Kalabari, Ndoni, Ogba, Ogoni and Okrika. Before the colonial era, these ethnic nationalities formed themselves/ kingdoms into autonomous communities but with deep social, economic, religious and historical ties. Rivers people are known to be hospitable, generous and warm hearted. This enables non-indigenes who came to the state to feel at home. The People live peacefully with strangers, who are found in all nooks and crannies of the State. During the colonial period the Rivers people played an enviable role as middlemen between the European traders and the people of the hinterland by trading in palm oil, kernel, timber, fish, cloth, beads etc

The population of Rivers State is projected to be 4, 654, 624 million people on a ratio of 52% male and 48% female, based on 2.83% growth rate since the 1991 Census⁴. The State has a high percentage of youthful population as persons between the ages of 0-29 years constitute 70% of the population. It is pertinent to note that this age bracket is the

⁴ Rivers State Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (RIVSEEDS) document, P.3.

worst affected by the crisis of unemployment therefore susceptible to manipulation by militia and cult gangs' leaders. Most members of the militia and cult groups fall within the age range of 20-39 years.

To illustrate, in a study of armed and cult groups conducted in eight Local Government Areas of Rivers State namely Akuku-Toru, Asari-Toru, Degema, Emuoha, Gokana, Khana, Okrika and Port Harcourt Local Government Areas it was found that most members of the groups fell within the following age range, 15-19 years(2.1%), 20-24 years(8.3%), 25-29 years(28.1%), 30-34 years(28.6%), 35-39 years(23.4%), and 40-45 years(6.8%).⁵ A recurring reason often mentioned to explain motive force of youth restiveness in the Niger Delta is unemployment. Most members of these armed groups are unemployed and without secondary source of income. Although many of them are unemployed and single, they still have people who depend on them for support. Those married have children; this situation puts them under pressure to adopt any means to earn a living.

Poverty incidence in Nigeria recorded increases between 1980 and 1985 and between 1992 and 1996. There were appreciable decrease in poverty rates between 1985 and 1992 and between 1996 and 2004. The drop in poverty rates notwithstanding, the population in poverty maintained a steady increase from 17.7 million in 1980 to 68.7 million in 2004. Unemployment is a manifestation of poverty. However, over 70% of the unemployed are relatively unskilled people between the ages of 13-25 years (FOS, 1996). The situation is not different from that of Rivers State. According to a World Bank study, GNP per capita in Rivers State is below the national average of \$280 and unemployment in Port Harcourt, the premier city of the Delta, is as high as 30 percent.⁶ Poverty assumed unimaginable proportions to the extent that the State was turned into an arena of intra and inter community conflicts, community-oil companies clashes and lately, kidnapping of expatriate and indigenous oil company personnel, and children.

Bayelsa State

Bayelsa State was one of six states created by the military administration of the late General Sani Abacha in October 1, 1996 from the old Rivers State with Yenegoa as the capital. Its name is an acronym of names of three of the then Rivers State's Local Government Areas (Brass, Yenagoa and Sagbama). It is located within latitude 04-15" North, 05.23" South and longitude 05.22" West and 06.45" East and the Atlantic Ocean on the West and South. Its population is estimated at about 2 million. It is culturally heterogeneous with the main cultural groups being Izon (Ijaw), Nembe, Ogbia and Epie-Atissa. Minor cultural groups include Urhobo in Ofoni and Isoko (Osekenewe) in Sagbama Local Government Area. Bayelsa State is essentially characterized by tropical

⁵ Sofiri Joab-Peterside, 2007 " Explaining the Phenomena of Ethnic Militias; Cult Groups; Drug Trafficking and Consumption in Nigeria's Niger Delta: Case Studies of Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa; Delta, Ondo and Rivers States"

⁶ See Sofiri Joab-Peterside "On the Militarization of the Niger Delta: the Genesis of Ethnic Militia in Rivers State" in African Conflict Profile, Journal of the Centre for Conflict and Ethnic Studies (CENTECS), University of Port Harcourt, Vol. 1. No.2 October 2005

rainforest traversed by big Rivers and bounded on the West and South by the Atlantic Ocean. In other words, a much bigger part of its land is swampy. The forests of Akassa are located on “three sand barrier islands” on the Bight of Bonny, and are separated from each other by substantial rivers especially Ohoniweitoru, Nun, and Brass.

The main occupation of the people is subsistence fishing and rice farming; the latter is of recent origin. Fishing is carried out principally on the estuaries, creeks and adjoining ocean. Other significant economic activities include lumbering, canoe carving, firewood extraction, and harvesting of non-timber products such as snails, honey, ropes, palm wine (from which local gin is distilled), oil palm fruits, chewing- sticks among others. The family is major source of labour supply; division of labour is determined by gender and age. Although the family is the basic unit of production, labour is sometimes hired for fishing and related operations for which remuneration is either in cash (for boat building and bush clearing for farming) or on a shared basis (especially for fishing). The main family economic activities are categorized as “Men’s Activities, Women’s Activities, and Children’s Activities (ACDP, NDWC and PNI 2005). The political system at both local and national levels failed to provide any form of sustainable development for majority of the population. Consequently, the State is characterized by either absence of essential infrastructure or mass of abandoned project- product of improper development planning. Another important feature of Bayelsa State is that about 97% of the communities are rural.

A combination of the rural nature, physical layout and ecological endowments have implication on varying degree of viability and sustainability of income generating activities and on livelihood support systems. It is an undisputable fact that Bayelsa State communities are highly susceptible to different environmental shocks, which makes living in this region a nightmare, hence it is acclaimed that Bayelsa State is a difficult terrain for physical development, hence it ranks lowest in poverty indices and in the provision of infrastructure facilities and basic social amenities. Bayelsa State represents the worst experience in all ramifications of the issues and factors that express perfectly to the Niger Delta crises. Socio-economic issues of the Niger Delta crises; from poverty, unemployment, development neglect, poor state infrastructures and social amenities – potable water, schools, hospitals, roads, electricity, makes Bayelsa State the worst place in Nigeria, going by Human Development Index of the Niger Delta (2005). On the criterion of politics of agitation, militancy, gangsterism, invasion by federal army and all the conditions necessary for high level of crime and brigandage to occur-kidnapping, bunkering, proliferation of small arms and light weapons, sabotage and vandalisation, are reckoned highest in Bayelsa State.

The state of infrastructure, its availability and functioning is used to measure poverty and living conditions in the community. It provides the basis for planning for community growth and development. The lack of infrastructures and amenities can also escalate conflicts. Electricity, drinkable water, roads, river craft and land facilities, hospitals, schools, etc in Bayelsa State is below national average. Facilities are generally either non-existent, grossly inadequate, dilapidated and abandoned. In some communities, particularly those that have been invaded by Federal Army – hospitals, schools etc have

been deliberately destroyed. Most communities are yet to be linked by road, railway or air travel just as telecommunications or functional postal facilities are not available. To access medical facility, the people had to do three to five hours journey by local transport.

This chaotic state of infrastructural development accounts for why Niger Delta's huge oil and gas endowment is a very strong thread of attraction and contention between various interests. For example, in December 1998, youth drawn from over 40 Ijaw Subgroups met in Kaiama, Bayelsa State to proclaim what is now known as 'Kaiama Declaration'. This declaration represents the beginning of concerted opposition to multinational oil companies and the Nigerian State whom the youth accused of Balkanization, political domination and internal colonization of the Ijaw. Both customary and statutory tenure systems exist in the Niger Delta. . The forests have provided the base for lumbering, canoe carving and related crafts, traditional medicine, food and food additives, hunting and fibre-related gathering. Thus, livelihoods of the majority of the population will continue to depend on utilization of natural resources.

The main natural resources of the mangrove area are the mangrove trees that are seriously exploited as firewood for household use, commercial fish drying, and with cultivation of rice in recent times, the mangrove swamps have come under great threat. The forests presently exhibit symptoms of severe over-exploitation and thus close to passing into a state of terminal exhaustion. The considerable growth of population and advent of reliable technology (power saws), and attendant public commercial transportation systems encouraged massive exploitation of forest resources. Access to land and other renewable natural resources (such as forests) derives from membership in community usually defined in terms of kinship or derived rights,⁷ through arrangements with those holding primary rights. Consequently, lumbering and canoe carving rights are granted lumberjacks and canoe carvers by compound chiefs whose family forests they wish to exploit. Local women have free access to an array of natural fibers that they exploit for basketry and weaving; and to mangroves – the wood they use for cooking and fish drying. As timber and non-timber resources⁸ become scarce and hence more valuable, competition amongst users for access becomes inevitable. For instance, intensive use of timber conflict with the interests of canoe carvers who need fairly large trees for production.

Akwa-Ibom State.

Akwa Ibom, with Uyo as the state capital, was created on September 28, 1987 out of Cross River State. The state is located in the southeastern corner of Nigeria along the ocean coast, wedged between Abia and Rivers States in the west and Cross River State in the east. It lies between longitudes 7°30'E and 8°20'E, and latitudes 4°30'N and 5°30'N.

⁷ Kinship is a cultural system whereby social identity derives from membership of a group who trace their origin or descent to a common ancestor, and this membership or arrangement with members of a group provides access to land and resource.

⁸ The forester for purposes of management, usually groups forests resources in to two categories, namely forest products (wood and timber) and minor forest product(all non-timber products). A major consequence of this classification is the tendency to confer lower status to non-timber forest products (Obot 2002).

The state covers a total land area of 8,421sq.km and a shoreline, which is 129km long. With this landmass, Akwa Ibom State is one of the smallest states in Nigeria. The state had ten local government councils when it was created. The number has since risen to thirty-one.

The climate of Akwa Ibom state is characterized by two seasons namely, the wet or rainy season and the dry season. In the south and central parts of the state the rainy season lasts for about eight months but towards the far north, it is slightly less. The rainy season begins about March-April and lasts until mid-November. The state receives relatively higher rainfall totals than other parts of southern Nigeria. The total annual rainfall in the state varies from 4000mm along the coast to 2000mm inland. The dry season begins in mid-November and ends in March.

Akwa Ibom has relative humidity, which varies between 75 percent to 95 per cent with highest and lowest values in July and January respectively. In January areas, which lie within 30 to 40 km from the coast, experience mean relative humidity of more than 80 per cent while values in areas further north vary from 70 per cent to 80 per cent. The vegetation and fauna of the state have been largely depleted because of strong population pressure. The native vegetation has been completely replaced by secondary forests of predominantly wild oil palms, woody shrubs and various grass undergrowths. The state is still the principal home of palm and raffia trees in Nigeria. Mangroves cover extensive parts of the coastal local government councils of Eastern Obolo, Ikot Abasi, Eket, Mbo, Oron, Itu, Uquo-Ibeno, Uruan and Okobo.

The earth material-based economic potentials of the state include, gravel deposits, sands, clay and limestone. At present, clay and laterite are being quarried at Itam as raw materials for the state-owned ceramic industry. Prior to establishment of this industry, the indigenous communities in Ibiono and Itu had exploited the lateric material for a flourishing traditional pottery industry. Offshore production of crude oil, condensate and gas by Mobil Petroleum Nigeria Limited, now Exxon/Mobil has turned the state into a leading petroleum producer in Nigeria. Other oil-producing companies operating offshore in Akwa Ibom State are Elf and Addax. The entire oil produced in Akwa Ibom State is processed on-shore at Qua Iboe Terminal, a development that has had serious adverse consequences for the environment in the state.

The state is the largest producer of oil palm products in Nigeria. Oil palm production and related employment in agriculture is the major occupation of over 60 per cent of the active labour force in the state, with 25 per cent in commercial oriented while the remaining 15 per cent is employed in the public sector. Among the major food and cash crops produced in the state are yams, cassava, fruits, vegetables, oil palm produce, rubber, coffee(grown in Abak, Eket and Uyo), and cocoa (Ikono). The Aluminum Smelter Company of Nigeria (ALSCON), established by the Federal Government, is located at Ikot Abasi on the western coast of the state. ALSCON started production of aluminum in 1999 and is jointly owned by two foreign aluminum manufacturers: Ferrostal (German) and Reynolds (American) companies, the operators of the plant.

The people of the state constitute a homogenous group. They have a common linguistic heritage. The dialects spoken in the state are Ibibio, Annang, Oron, Ibeno, Andoni and Eket. However, the Ibibio language is widely spoken in the state. The majority of the people in the state profess Christianity, leaving a small minority as adherents of African traditional religion. The state experiences ecological problems especially erosion.

Gully erosion in the upland areas, and beach erosion along the coastal areas have attained a high degree of severity and destructiveness. Gullies are now destroying agricultural land and even forest reserves in the northern parts of the state while coastal erosion has resulted in loss of landmass to communities located on the shorelines. In addition, oil exploration and exploitation constitute major threats to the environment of the coastal areas. Environmental pollution of air, water, soil, crops and recreational facilities are the concomitant effects of petroleum exploitation that have adversely affected the riverine ecosystem of the state. The coastal fisheries have been extensively depleted through oil spillage. Gas flaring from Mobil and Shell flow stations and oil wells has also been another environmental hazard, which has caused much damage to houses, the vegetation and to animal life. The major oil producing area in the state is Eastern Obolo Local Government.

Methodology

The study relied on two main sources of data- primary and secondary and both yielded quantitative and qualitative information. The primary data came from questionnaires and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). Questionnaire: one of the research instruments is a set of Self completion-Questionnaire (SCQ). Each questionnaire consisted of closed ended questions (structured), which permitted respondents to tick from a list of suggested answers. The opened questions (unstructured) provided respondents freedom to answer in their own words and to express any idea(s) they consider pertinent.

The study was conducted in selected communities (Iko; Akakumama; and Soku) from three Local Government Areas in Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa and Rivers State. Iko Town was selected from Eastern Obolo Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State. Eastern Obolo Local Government Area was created out of the then Ikot Abasi Local Government in December 1996. The Local Government Area shares boundary with Mkpato Enin Local Government Area and Andoni in Rivers State. Iko Town has a population of over twelve thousand (12,000) people with 10 political wards. The people are predominantly fishermen and women. Other income generating activities include trading and farming. Being an Andoni community their major language is Andoni although they speak Ibibio which is a major language in Akwa Ibom State. Oil exploration activities started in the community in the 1960s by Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC).

Akakumama in Nembe Local Government Area of Bayelsa State was surveyed. Akakumama is a small community made up of nine (9) families and of the families has a head. The Community which has a population of about six thousand (6,000) was founded by the first king, King Oveh the senior. Akakumama is an oil producing community and the company prospecting for oil in this small island is Agip. The main occupation of the

people are fishing, farming and trading. Soku an island community Akuku Toru Local Government Area of Rivers State was selected. The community is made up of nine (9) families (chieftaincy houses) and governed by a paramount ruler. Each of the chieftaincy houses is led by a chief that represents it on the community council of chiefs. The estimated population of the community is four thousand (4,000). Language spoken by the people is kalabari while their major occupation is fishing and trading. The main means of transportation is outboard engine boats.

The number of study site selected from each of the states was determined by the scope of oil production activities, intensity of oil related/militant activities and reflection of the upland and riverine diversity in the three states. Although thirty questionnaires were distributed to each community making a total of ninety respondents, only 82 questionnaires were retrieved. Out of this number, twenty six questionnaires were retrieved from Akwa Ibom State, twenty nine from Bayelsa, and twenty seven from Rivers State. This implies that eighty two respondents were sampled from the three states for the questionnaire administration.

A mixture of probability and purposive sampling techniques were used to ensure representation of different categories such as age and special interest groups. For Example, gender of the respondents was selected purposively while clocking technique was used by the research assistants in selection of streets or neighbourhood. In each household selected for study, the research assistants randomly selected a respondent that fits the gender quota. This was done by asking the contact to list names of all residents, 18 years and above, in the house that fit the gender quota and asked the contact to pick from a set of pre-numbered cards. The person whose serial number corresponds with the number on the card picked was selected for interview. Thus, if Mrs. A is number 5 on the list and the contact picked No 5, Mrs. A was automatically chosen for the survey. Where the person selected for interview was not at home, the research assistants arranged to return. Substitution was allowed after a second trial. The substitute came from a different household, applying the same sampling method. A conscious effort was made to ensure all the respondents were women.

Composition of participants in the Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) ensured representation of different interests including Age, Women Organizations, and Women in Politics as well as Women Religious leaders. Twenty respondents were invited to participate in the Focus Group Discussion (FGD) in each community. Discussions at the FGD focused on establishing the socio-economic challenges faced by women, the impact of oil exploration activities and militancy on women livelihoods, and assessment of the role of women in efforts to resolve the crisis of militancy in the study area, and issues that arose from questionnaire administration. For effectiveness, questions were translated in local languages. The secondary data came from journals, books, news bulletin, government and media publications.

Discussion of Results

Socio-Economic Characteristics

The survey revealed diverse background of respondents. 2 or 2.4% of the respondents fell within ages 10-19 years, 18 or 22.0% stated 20-29 years, another 36 or 43.9% indicated 30-39 years, 18 or 22.0% belonged to the category aged 40-49 years, while 8 or 9.8% of the respondents were aged 50-59 years. Majority of the respondents were educated. The percentage of respondents with primary and secondary education was 25 or 30.5% and 44 or 53.7% respectively. Other 5 or 6.1% of respondents had tertiary education. 6 or 7.2 % of respondent attained neither primary nor secondary education just as only 2 or 2.4% of the respondents had other educational qualifications. The high percentage of educational attainment of the respondents notwithstanding, economic realities of the study area and families require young girls to drop out of school early in order to help their mothers while some were forced to leave when they were pregnant. It came out strongly from the survey that an overwhelming percentage of the respondents (29 or 35.4%) were engaged in petty trading, 14 or 17.1% of respondents were unemployed, 11 or 13.4% and another 11 or 13.4% respondents were engaged in farming and fishing respectively. 3 or 3.7% of respondents indicated they were students while 7 or 8.5% stated that they were skilled workers. The finding revealed lack of employment opportunities for women. Participants in the Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) argued that lack of employment opportunities and the low wages offered in the formal sector, forced them to resort to the informal sector for employment. In the informal sector, these women apart from fishing and farming engage in hawking, vending, sewing and cooking (Mama-put or small restaurants).

Although as high as 35% of the respondents stated that their predominant economic activity was petty trading, they ranked fishing highest (79) as their main economic activity followed by farming which was ranked 52, trading and white collar job were ranked 47 and 6, while work in the oil industry was ranked 6. Both males and females take part in fishing but the women folk dominate swamp and creek fisheries. Operating singly in paddle-propelled canoes, women harvest shrimps using woven traps and baskets. In Akakumama community in Baylesa State, shrimping in the creek waters is essentially a preserve of women.

Environmental Problems and factors Militating against women Participation in Agriculture

With respect to environmental problems confronting their communities, the respondents ranked pollution of Air, Land and water highest, followed by deforestation, land degradation, excessive soil deposits and in water hyacinth in that order. Participants in our Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) in Akakumama community complained that their water and air had been contaminated with carbon dioxide, forest animals chased away because of the odor of chemicals used for oil exploration, while the productive capacity of their farmlands had been reduced due to oil production activities. Similarly, Participants in the Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) at Iko Town contended that oil drilling activities had made fishing difficult, destroyed their roof, and resulted in low agricultural yield because their land had been soaked with oil while skin infection (craw-craw) is prevalent. To ascertain problems militating against women's participation in agriculture we posed question NO 10 "what are the major problems of women's participation in agriculture in this community? The survey revealed that lack of access to

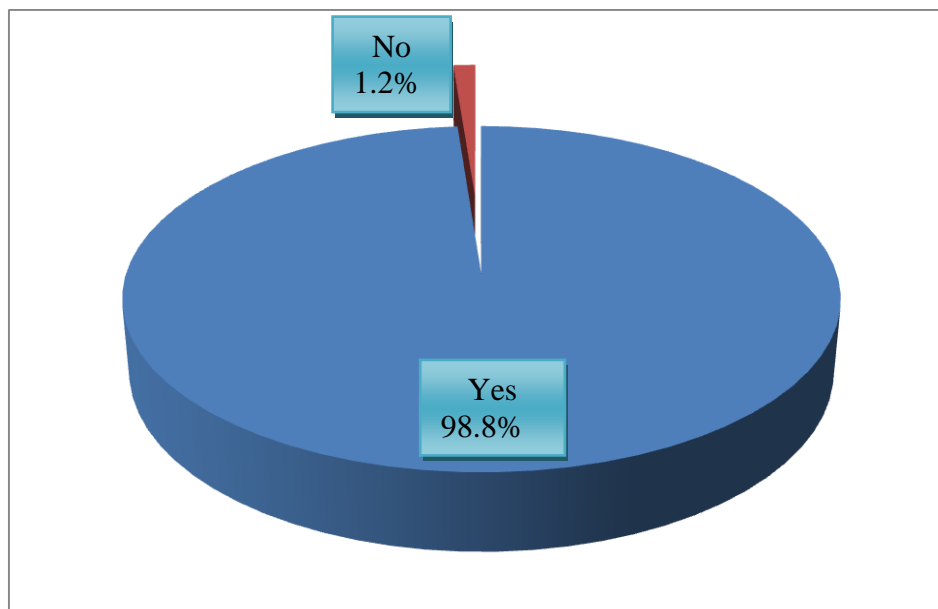
markets was ranked as the highest problem, followed by lack of access to credit, low productivity, and implements in that order.

Next in the hierarchy was lack of access to arable land and fishing sites. Lack of access to arable land and fishing sites could be traced to oil exploration activities. Shell Petroleum Development Company in 1956 struck its first commercial well at Oloibiri in present day Bayelsa state; this discovery proved oil exploitation a commercially viable venture. A more competitive base for foreign penetration of the oil and gas sector was created through statutory relinquishment of the concession granted shell in 1958. Subsequently, between 1960 and 1963, Mobil, Texaco, Gulf (now Chevron) Agip, Esso, Philip and Safrap(now Elf) were allotted concessions including offshore blocks. This set the stage for large-scale expansion in oil exploration and production activities. These multinationals were joined in late 1960s by Japan Petroleum, Occidental, Deminex, Union Oil, Niger Petroleum and Niger Oil Resources (Onosode, 1999; Obasi,2007). At present the oil multinationals in Nigeria are operating over 159 oil fields and producing from over 1481 oil wells all of which is almost exclusively in the Niger Delta (Dule and Nwankwo, 2001). Today, Shell’s oil mining lease cover 31,103 sq kilometers, a little less than half of the 70,000 sq kilometers of the Niger Delta. Shell Petroleum Development Company(SPDC) also has 391 producing oil wells, linked by a net work of 4,786 km of field pipelines and 154 km of trunk lines to 87 flow stations all located in the same Niger Delta (Dule and Nwankwo,2001). The implication that flows from this is that more than ninety percent of SPDC’s oil is pumped from on shore concessions, unlike the other oil multinationals that operate off shore or have relatively small on shore operations. It is thus evident that the oil industry’s demand on land is immense (Dule and Nwankwo 2001).

Impact of Oil and Gas Activities on Women Livelihood

It was necessary to establish the impact of oil and gas production activities on livelihood means, thus we introduced question No 12 “Do you think that Oil and Gas activities have negatively affected or impacted on farming, fishing and environment in your community? Figure 1 below presents responses of the respondents.

Figure 1: The impact of Oil and Gas activities on farming, fishing and the environment



Source: Field Survey: January 2009

Figure 1 shows that an overwhelming majority of the respondents (81 or 98.8%) indicted that oil and gas production activities have negative impact on farming and fishing as well as the environment. For most local people, seismic surveys means invasion of their communities because it entails clearing paths in forests for access and firing explosives. Impacts from drilling and field development include land take for access and locations and flaring of gas, disposal of wastes, chemicals and sludge and spills. “Spills are uncontrolled releases of any product including crude oil, chemicals, or waste caused by equipment failure, operation mishaps, human error or intentional damage to facilities. Participants in the FGD at Soku community highlighted the following: pollution of air and water and lack of access to storage facility as impact of oil and gas activities on livelihoods.

The study revealed that militancy accentuated environmental problems derived from oil and gas operational activities in the area of study. The Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) following the arrest and detention of one of its leaders, Henry Okah in September 2007 in Angola and his extra diction to Nigeria to face a secret trial in Jos, Plateau State resumed its characteristic hostility against the Oil industry. Consequently the Movement on April 24, 2008 MEND claimed its heavily armed fighters provided cover for its detonation engineers who successfully sabotaged the Adamakiri and Soku pipeline in Akuku-Toru Local Government in Rivers State. The organization on April 25, 2008 launched an attack on a trunk pipelines operated by the Anglo-Dutch Shell PLC in Nembe in the Nembe Local Government Area of Bayelsa State. On April 26, 2008 MEND also coordinated another major attack on the Elekuma oil facility located in Akuku-Toru Local Government Area of Rivers State. The facility belonged to Shell too. The result of these attacks was persistent leaks on the pipelines belonging to the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC).

To investigate the extent of the impact of oil and gas exploration and production activities, the study introduced the question No 13 if yes; (to question No 12) what are the major impacts in order of importance. Table 1 below presents responses of our respondents.

Table 1: Ranking order of major negative impacts of oil and gas Activities

Negative impacts	Responses
Destruction of farming and fishing implements	72
Low productivity	69
Degradation of fishing and farming sites	66

Abandonment of farming and fishing for other activities	27
Destruction of house and properties	2

Source: Field survey, January 2009

The survey showed that 72 responses of the respondents indicated that the major negative impacts of oil and gas activities were destruction farming and fishing implements, 69 responses stated low productivity; 66 other responses ranked degradation of fishing and farming activities as the next major negative impact, another 27 responses selected abandonment of farming and fishing for other activities, while only 2 responses of the respondents stated destruction of house and properties as major negative impacts of oil and gas activities. State by state analysis of the responses shows that of the 72 responses that ranked destruction of farming and fishing implements as major negative impact, 21 of the responses were from Akwa-Ibom, 27 from Bayelsa while 24 were from Rivers State. The low productivity impact is more on Bayelsa States and less on Rivers State. For instance, out 69 responses of low productivity as major negative impacts of oil and gas activities, 28 responses were from Bayelsa, 24 another responses were from Akwa-Ibom, while 17 other responses were from Rivers States. Similarly of the 66 responses recorded for degradation of farming and fishing sites, 28 of the responses were from Bayelsa, 20 from Rivers, while 18 of the responses were from Akwa-Ibom States.

Most of the responses of the respondents (78) indicated that government and the oil companies had done nothing to ameliorate the adverse impact of oil and gas exploration and production activities on agriculture and the environment; 12 responses claimed that reclamation of land had been embarked upon, another 11 responses reforestation and cleaning of polluted land, water, and air respectively. 9 and 7 other responses stated erosion and control and protection of wild life as action taken by government and oil companies. Only 1 response claimed that government and oil companies were involved in killing human beings. Table 2 below presents responses of the respondents.

Table 2: Rank Ordering of Government and Oil Companies Action to address the Impact of Oil and Gas Activities on Agriculture and Environment

Action taken Government & Oil Companies	Responses
Nothing	78
Reclamation of land	12
Reforestation	11
Cleaning of polluted land, water and air	11
Erosion control	9
Protection of wild life	7
Killing of human beings	1

Source: Field survey, January 2009.

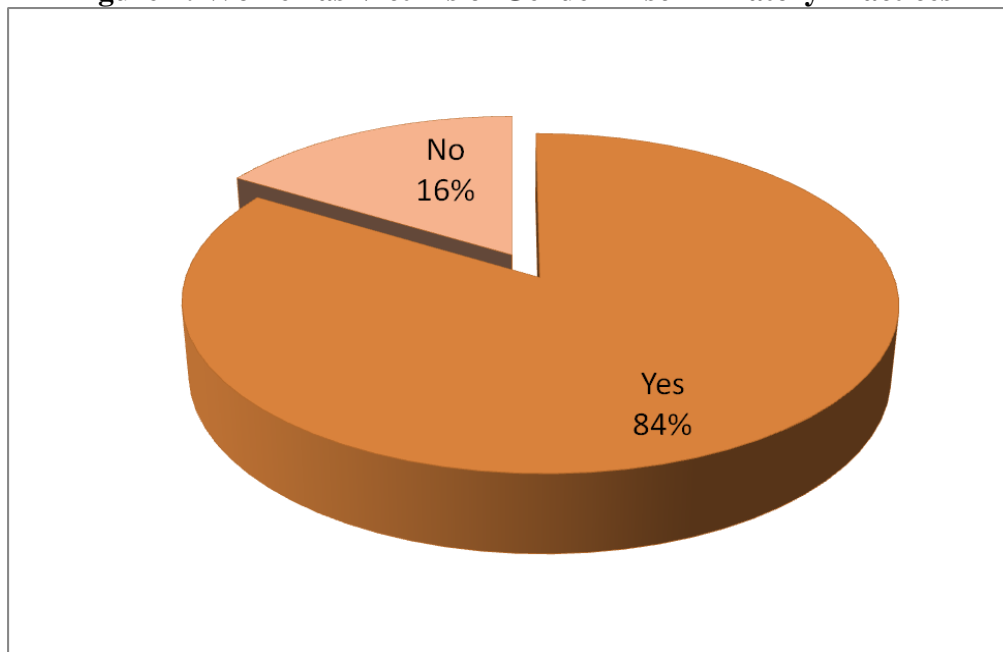
Collection and Distribution of Claims over Land Acquisition and environmental degradation

One of the causes of inter-communal conflict in the Niger Delta is the issue of collection and distribution of compensation paid to oil bearing communities. The survey revealed

that traditional rulers, youth groups, contractors and community development councils make claims and collect compensation arising from land acquisition, pollution and devastation of farmlands and fishing waters. 46 responses from the respondents indicated traditional rulers make claims and collect compensation arising from land acquisition, pollution and devastation of farmlands and fishing waters on behalf of the communities. This finding confirms the practicability of the legal provision (Land Use Act) that empowers the chieftaincy institution to collect and disburse monetary compensation over land used for oil production activities on behalf of host communities. This provision of the Land Use Act had fueled both inter and intra community conflicts by funneling large sums money to the institution many of which it failed to distribute to all segments of its population. Due to this dubious and corrupt practice, in many communities, internal splits have emerged with common divide being between elites of communities and chiefs, youths and the chiefs, youths and multinational oil companies' staff and between factions of youth. 23 other responses stated that youth groups make claims and collect such compensation. This should not be a surprise as since the mid 1990s, the youths of communities in Niger Delta started aggressive demands for dismantling of the hierarchical traditional leadership institutional structures in favour of more horizontal arrangement that will afford them the opportunity to participate in the decision making process over sharing of money from the oil companies. Multinational Oil Companies determined to remain in business, have in turn been compelled to make cash payments to the youths for access to facilities or to ensure the security of their business operations (Peterside, 2007d). 21 responses claimed that contractors make claims and collect compensation, another 10 responses said contractors collect same, 3 responses said women make claims and collect such compensation, just as 3 other responses stated that local elders make claims and collect compensation on behalf of their communities. Participants in the FGDs identified Intra-Communal fights over Chieftaincy Stools and distribution of oil related benefits and electoral violence as conflict escalators.

Analysis within states showed that more traditional rulers in Akwa-Ibom(19 responses) and Rivers States(23 responses) make claims and collect compensations arising from land acquisition, pollution and devastation of farmlands and fishing sites, while 12 responses from Rivers and 7 responses form Bayelsa State claimed that youth groups collected the compensation. 4 responses from Akwa-Ibom State indicated youth groups make claims and collected such compensation. 2 of the responses that indicated that women make claims and collect compensation on behalf of their communities were from Rivers State while only 1 of the responses that stated that women did so was from Akwa-Ibom State. The responses showed marginalization of women in making of claims and collection of compensation arising from land acquisition, pollution and devastation of farmlands and fishing sites notwithstanding that their livelihood means were affected. Question No 16 sought to know why this is so. 67 or 81.7% of respondents stated that women were victims of gender discriminatory practices while other 13 or 15.9% of the respondents indicated that women were not victims of gender discriminatory practices. Figure 2 below presents responses of the respondents as to whether women were victims of gender discriminatory practices or not.

Figure 2: Women as Victims of Gender Discriminatory Practices



Source: Field Survey, January 2009

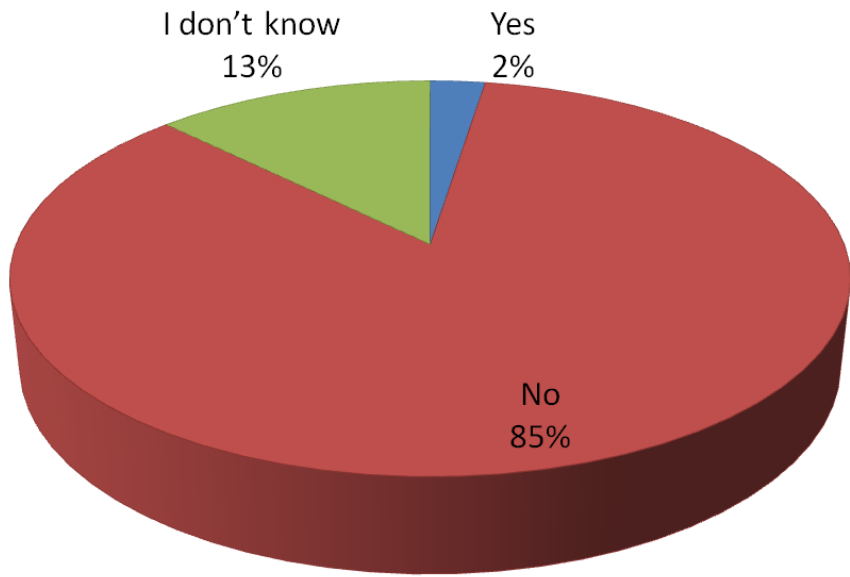
The gender question in the Niger Delta like the larger Nigerian society is historically, a socio-cultural phenomenon which denigrates the female person (whether as a girl-child, or adult woman) as an inferior and weak human-being who is incapable of participating in leadership; while her male counterpart is celebrated as the superior person, imbued with all the potentials for leadership. The Nigerian woman was thus utterly subjugated to the male authority of her father, her brother, and her husband and who, severally dominated her with paternal power. She was so virtually depersonalized that she was categorized into disempowered group. Upon the adoption of the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, in 1979, all States parties to the convention agreed to pursue by all appropriate means and without delay, a policy of eliminating discrimination against women, and accordingly undertook to embody the principle of the equality of men and women in their national Constitutions or other appropriate legislation, and to ensure through law and other appropriate means, the practical realization of this principle. In compliance with its policy obligation, Nigeria as a leading African nation and a party to both the United Nations Convention, and the African Charter, has not only embodied the provisions of the convention, and the Charter, in her municipal laws, but has also established appropriate frameworks for the enforcement of their provisions. This implies that the provisions of the United Nations Convention, and the African Charter, are now fully part of Nigerian domestic

laws. See for example, the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (ratification and Enforcement) Act (Cap. 10 Laws of the Federation of Nigeria, 1990); and Nigeria's Treaties in Force (1970-1999), volume 2 (pp. 313-329). The study however, revealed existence of gaps between the law and practice.

Existence of Special Programmes and Financial Expenditure Designed for Women

Although state governments in the Niger Delta region had programmes designed to promote the welfare of women in general; and the full utilization of women in the development of human resources in particular, and sustainable development process as a whole, the study showed absence of programmes and special financial expenditure for women in our area of study. 2 or 2.4% of respondents stated that there were programmes and special financial expenditure for women while as high as 67 or 81.7% other respondents claimed there were none, another 10 or 12.2% of the respondents indicated they don't know of such programmes and special financial expenditure for women. Figure 3 below presents responses of the respondents on the existence or otherwise of programmes and special financial expenditure for women. Eradication or reduction of poverty remains the most significant challenge facing the Niger Delta in particular and Nigeria in general. We have shown somewhere earlier in the study that women are the worst affected because of lack of access to opportunities and that is why most commentators have rightly described poverty as having a female face. Some states governments have made efforts to address this intractable problem. In Rivers State in particular several programmes were designed to positively impact on the lives of women. For instance, the Skills Acquisition Programmes which was extended to all the Local Government Areas in the State through the Adolescent Project (TAP) established by Justice Mary Odili, the Ministry of Women Affairs and the Ministry of Employment and Economic Empowerment under the Dr. Odili's administration contributed to the empowerment of women. The study showed that a lot more needs to be done in expanding the vistas of available opportunities and acquisition of new skills.

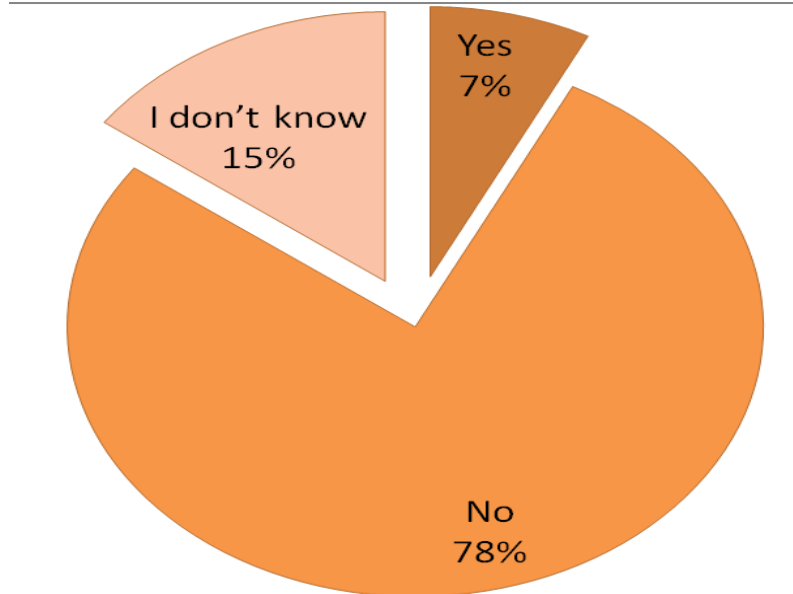
Figure 3: Programmes and special financial expenditure for women



Source: Field Survey: January 2009

It was revealed that women were not making efforts to ensure that such programmes and special financial expenditure packages were established. 19 or 23.2% of respondents stated that women are making efforts to establish such programmes, 48 or 58.5% respondents indicated No as their response while 10 or 12.2% other respondents said they don't know. This finding throws up the need for continuous enlightenment programme for women to appreciate their role in women emancipation and to take pro-active action to fight for provision of the necessary supporting social services. Promotion of development of micro enterprise which invariably translates to empowerment and economic independence for women is another area that requires massive support. However, only 6 or 7.3% of respondents were aware of opportunities for women to gain access to resources, 62 or 75.6% of the respondents were not aware of opportunities, just as 12 or 14.6% other respondents claimed they don't know. Figure 4 presents response of the respondents.

Figure 4: Awareness of Opportunities Available for Women to Gain Access to Resources



Source: Field survey: January 2009

The level of awareness was high in Akwa-Ibom(3) and Rivers States(3) as 6 or 7.3% respondents who claimed of awareness of opportunities available for women to gain access to resources were from both states. There was low level of awareness in Bayelsa because as high as 29 or 48.% of the respondents claimed they were not aware, another 18 or 29.0% respondents from Rivers State stated they were not aware while 15 or 24.2% respondent from Akwa-Ibom State claimed No as their response.

50 or 61.0% of respondents indicated there had been conflict in their community. On the other hand, 23 or 28.0% of respondents stated No as their response while 3 or 3.7% other respondents said they were not aware of any conflict in their community. Analysis within states showed that conflict was more prevalent in Bayelsa and Akwa-Ibom states than in Rivers State that had in recent past been the hot spot of militant activities. For example, 21(42%) out of the 50 respondents that stated that there had been conflict in their communities were from Bayelsa State, 16(32%) from Akwa-Ibom State, and 13(26%) other respondents were from Rivers State. Causes of the conflict were traced to environmental degradation, unemployment of indigenes of oil producing communities, protest over sharing of oil related benefits, chieftaincy tussle and political thuggery. It came out strongly from the survey that state (17 or 20.7%) and local (20 or 24.4%) governments played and are still playing active role in resolution of conflicts in the Niger Delta. Facts at the disposal of the study showed that there is less resort to the judiciary for resolution of conflict as only 6 or 7.3% of respondents stated that courts played and are playing active role in conflict resolution. This response may not be unconnected to the high cost of justice, accessibility of law courts and frustration associated with long duration of court cases.

In a similar vein, only 2 or 2.4 % of respondents indicated that women were involved in conflict resolution effort (the two respondents were from Rivers State). The situation is different for religious bodies and traditional rulers as 9 or 11.0% and 33 or 40.2% of the respondents claimed that religious bodies and traditional rulers were and are still involved in conflict resolution effort respectively. Another 29 or 35.4% of respondents said government security forces, especially the Joint Task Force were and are still involved in conflict resolution in the area of study. 20 or 69% out of the 29 respondents who indicated that security forces played major role in conflict resolution were from Bayelsa State; 7 or 24.1% from Rivers State, and only 2 or 6.9% of the respondents were from Akwa-Ibom State. This response should not be a surprise because the military is currently being used to quell the crisis in the Niger Delta. Consequently, the Joint Task Force (JTF) has been posted in the region since 2003. Originally planned as an interim measure to quell rising violence in Warri area and provide protection to oil installations in the area, the JTF has remained in the Niger Delta, and to date there are no plans for its removal. The army leads the JTF, which also includes officers from the navy, air force, the paramilitary mobile police, and the regular police force. The JTF has held primary responsibility for security in the region, including responding to kidnapping incidents. The JTF has been accused of excessive use of force in quelling protests, or raiding villages believed to harbouring or aiding militant groups. This has raised questions about both the JTF's tactics and its level of firepower.

30 or 36.6% of our respondents admitted there had been militant activity in their community, 44 or 53.7% of respondents stated No, while 3 or 3.7% said they don't know. Surprisingly 16 or 53.3% of those respondents who stated that there had been militant activity in their communities were from Akwa-Ibom State, 2 or 6.7% of respondents from Bayelsa State, while 12 or 40.0% of the respondents were from Rivers state. Similarly, 27 or 61.4% of the respondents who claimed that there had not been any militant activity in their communities were from Bayelsa State, 11 or 25.0% from Rivers State and 6 or 13.6% other respondents from Akwa-Ibom State. Unfortunately, in the Niger Delta region, especially the three core States of the region-Rivers, Bayelsa and Delta States, people are murdered, kidnapped brutalized with impunity while communities are destroyed with reckless abandon by militants and government security forces. Expatriates are kidnapped almost on daily basis irrespective of armed security operatives assigned to them as guards. Participants in the FGD at Soku complained of activities of militants on their waterways especially harassment and raping of women. In 1995, competition for control of oil rents created two cult groups in Nembe: Isongoforo and Agbara-foro and resulted in 3 eruptions of violence on November 12th and 25th and December 14th, 1995. By 2000 conflicts within and among cult groups in Nembe proliferated and deepened in an environment of rampant insecurity and lawlessness associated with the arms they controlled.

The relocation of headquarters of Warri South Local Government Area from Ogbe-Ijoh an Izon community to Ogidigben an Istekiri community and control of oil related benefits resulted in Istekiri-Izon wars of 1997, 1998, and 1999 which claimed many lives and property. This crisis led to formation of ethnic militias by both ethnic nationalities to prosecute their course. Among the Izon the following militia groups were active Egbesu

Boys of Africa(EBA), Feibagha Ogbo, Feibokirifagha Ogbo, Meinbutu Boys, Alagbabagha Ogbo, Alabrako-opri, Ogbokonde, Agelebagha Ogbo, Niger Delta Volunteer Force(NDVF), Federated Niger Delta Ijaw Communities(FNDIC), Torudigha Obgo, Mubotundigha and Dolphin.

On 1st October, 2003 Icelando cult unleashed terror on residents of Abonema Wharf area of Port Harcourt for five days an offensive that was targeted at another cult known as Deebam a street cult affiliated to Klansmen konfraternity (KK). Furthermore, from 9th - 11th January, 2004 Icelanders cult attacked Amadi-ama community in Port Harcourt local government area while on 27th January,2004 Niger Delta People Volunteer Force (NDPVF) launched a fierce attack on Icelando cult base in Okrika. On August 22, 2004 Njemanze Water Front in Diobu area of Port Harcourt was burnt, over 5000 tenants and landlords displaced and six people killed. Also in August 2004, an armed group visited Ataba community and brought the community to its knees in an attack that left 60 people dead over a chieftaincy tussle that began in 1988.To show how insecure Rivers State was, militants numbering about three hundred in January 2007 stormed the Headquarters of the Rivers State Police Command, subdued the policemen and the military personnel brought in to assist them, broke into two heavily guarded police cells and freed about 126 detainees including one of their leaders. About eight people were reportedly killed in a midday operation which lasted about four hours, while many people sustained injuries (THE HUMAN RIGHT NEWS, Vol. 1 No. 4 January, 2007).

23 or 28.0% of the respondents stated that government's response to militancy was deployment of military security forces to quell the crisis, 21 or 25.6% other respondents indicated No as their answer. On the other hand, only 2 or 2.4% of respondents said they don't know if government deployed troops to quell militancy. Analysis within state showed that 17 or 73.9% of those respondents who stated that government deployed military forces to quell the crisis of militancy were from Rivers State, 5 or 21.7% of respondents were from Akwa-Ibom State; another 1 or 4.3% of respondent were from Bayelsa State. The finding confirmed that state response against popular pressures from youths of host communities assumed the form of deployment of military forces that operate more like an army of occupation to demobilize the people with the aim of silencing opposition voices. The point of fact is that the State's approach to security is dominated by the character of deterrence exhibited by unrestrained willingness to show maximum force at the slightest hint of insecurity. For example:

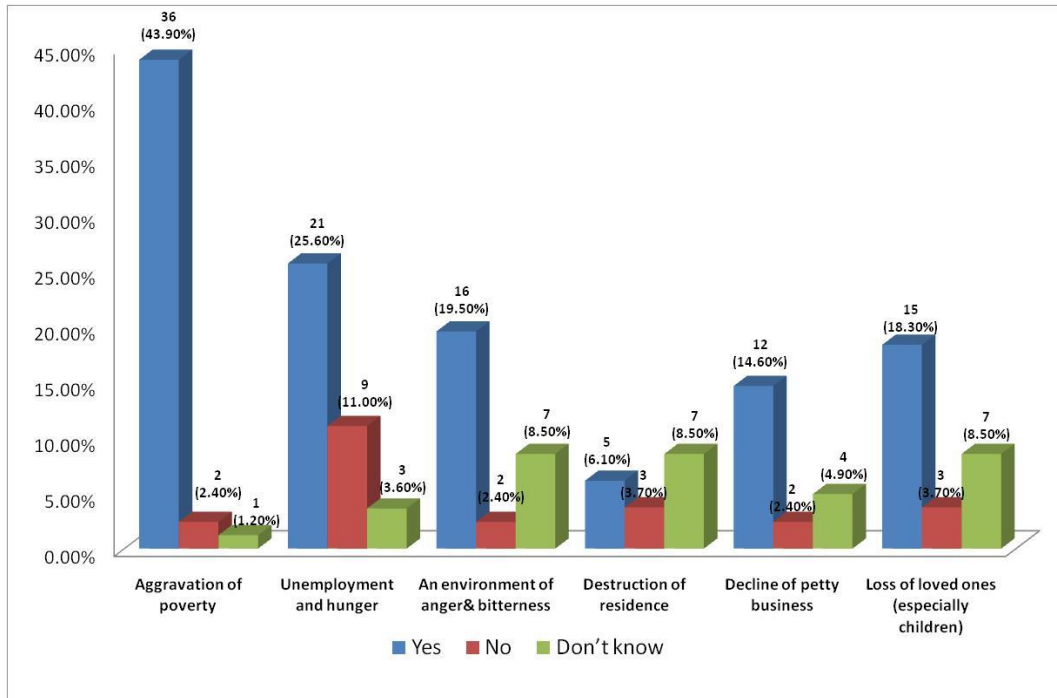
Two communities of Tombia in Degema Local Government Area of Rivers State were raided on Wednesday, October 26, 2006 by the military Joint Task Force (JTF). The rampaging military team stormed the two communities (Iyalla-Ama and Elem-Tombia) along the cawthrone Channel area in seven boats gunboats and another three boats fully loaded with battle soldiers. On arrival, the soldiers opened fire shooting and bombing sporadically. A military helicopter also participated in bombing the communities. Virtually all the houses were completely brought down, rendering the entire population homeless. 10 people were reportedly killed while several others received various degrees of injuries. Most of the survivors according to available information, fled into the creeks and mangrove forests to take refuge. It was gathered that the communities were

destroyed as retaliation to the recent killing of 14 soldiers by militants at Krakrama, near the Cawthron Channel, Rivers State few weeks ago The Tombia communities raided were said to be the hideout of militants who killed the soldiers(THE HUMAN RIGHTS NEWS, Vol 1 No. 1 October 2006:7). The action of the military against the communities affected innocent poor villagers.

Operation Sweep, Operation Fire-For –Fire, Operation Hacunri No.1 and No. 2, Operation Restore Hope, and Operation Flush 1, 2, and 3 are examples of high profile security initiatives that mirror the repressive mood and tendencies of the State. Unfortunately, military might dramatically escalated violence as militant groups emerge resorting to the use of arms ostensibly in self-defense provoking bloody clashes with federal troops deployed to contain violence, to drive home their point of deprivation and marginalization.

Question No.28 investigated the consequences of deployment of military forces to quell militancy in the study area. 27 or 32.9% of the respondents stated harassment and repression of women; 5 or 6.1% other respondents indicated battering, while 15 or 18.3% respondents claimed rape as one of the consequences. The incidence of harassment was higher in Rivers State (18 or 66.7%) than Akwa-Ibom(8 or 29.6%) and Bayelsa States(1 or 3.7%). Battering was high in Akwa Ibom(2 or 40.0%) and Rivers States(2 or 40.0%), and low in Bayelsa State(1 or 20.0%). With respect to rape, Rivers State came first with 9 or 60.0%; Akwa-Ibom second with 4 or 26.7%; while Bayelsa State ranked third with 2 or 13.3%. On the other hand, 3 or 3.7% of respondents indicated maiming and out right killing of women as one of the consequences of deployment of military forces. Participants in the FGD in Soku contended that the military personnel deployed to their community apart from destroying their community through bombardments, had raped, harassed and violated the rights of women.

Figure 5: The Impact of Militancy on the Social and Economic Livelihood of Women



Source: Field Survey, January 2009

The survey revealed that aggravation of poverty; unemployment and hunger were potent impact of militancy on the socio-economic livelihood of the women folk. As figure 5 shows the percentage of respondents who think aggravation of poverty is a major impact of militancy on livelihood means was 43.9%; 25.6% of respondents felt unemployment and hunger were impact of militancy; 19.5% of respondents believed militancy created an environment of anger and bitterness while 6.1% of respondents indicated destruction of residence. On the other hand, 14.6% and 18.3% of respondents indicated decline of petty business and loss of loved ones (especially children) respectively. The prevalent state of insecurity in the Niger Delta has engendered loss of socio-economic and political gains associated with development. For instance, a survey conducted by the author in 2008 on the implications of militancy in Rivers State showed that over 80% of companies that had foreigners on their employment closed down. For example, in June 2007, the Eleme Petrochemical Company acquired by Idorama was shut down due to due to attacks on its expatriate residential compounds at Eleme. The shut-down rendered 3,000 youths jobless thereby aggravating the unemployment situation in the state. Willbros group which had been doing business in the Niger Delta since 1962 with its operational base in Choba, Rivers State, sold off its Nigerian operations because of escalation of hostilities against oil and gas facilities. Similarly, the atmosphere of insecurity prompted Julius Berger to abandon the contract for renovation of the Port Harcourt International airport because the expatriates were afraid of being kidnapped. Passengers using the airport had to fly through the Owerri airport. The impact of this on business is enormous. On December 18, 2006 two bombs exploded in Port Harcourt, one in SPDC residential area and the other at Agip's headquarters. SPDC had to evacuate all dependants from the mostly expatriate residential area in Port Harcourt, other companies followed suit. SPDC at a time planned to relocate its headquarters from Port Harcourt to Lagos. The company had to lay off its Nigerian staff on basis of unfriendly business environment. The killing of an American

who worked with Huges and Baker was the climax of the attack on the expatriate community in Port Harcourt.

Movement of these staffers meant job losses for their domestic staff, and low business for the hospitality industry in the region. The social life in the state capitals was adversely affected. For example, most of the nightclubs and bars exclusively patronized by the expatriate community ran out of business. The same fate befell petty traders and business people who operate at strategic locations at night. The booming Trans-Amadi industrial area in the city of Port Harcourt became a ghost zone as most companies with expatriate employees shut-down and laid-off their workers. For instance, Michelin is yet to resume full operations while Julius Berger Construction Company scaled down its operation threatening to close-down completely due to militant attacks.

Women Involvement in Conflict Resolution and Peace-building Initiatives

More than half (48 or 58%) of respondents felt that women were underrepresented in peace process in the study area. 25 or 30.5% of respondents indicated that women were not underrepresented, while 6 or 7.3% other respondents claimed not to know the extent of representation of women in the process towards enthronement of peace in conflicted communities. Analysis of representation of women on committees and commissions appointed by both federal and state governments with the aim of restoring peace in the Niger Delta supports our finding. For example, the Special Security Committee on Oil Producing Areas, chaired by the then Chief of Army Staff, Lt. Gen. Alexander Ogomudia which submitted its report to former President Obasanjo on February 19, 2002 had few women representatives. The Federal government created the Niger Delta Peace and Security Strategy (PASS) in 2005 to address issues of conflict and sustainable development in the region. Emphasis was on oil theft, corporate responsibility, reconciliation, illicit arms, money laundering, good governance, implementing an early warning system, and developing a disarmament strategy. The Peace and Security Blue Print produced by PASS was intended to complement the economic strategy embodied in the Niger Delta Master Plan. Although this committee had few women, the PASS process was facilitated by a woman – Dr. Mrs Judith Asuni. Mrs Asuni had in 2000 established a Non-Governmental Organization known as Academic Associates Peaceworks which main area of focus was in conflict resolution. The organization intervened in conflicts in Okrika, Okrika/Elem, Elem Sangana/Soku, and Bonny/Nigeria Liquefied Natural Gas (NLNG) Company (all in Rivers State), Ijaw/Itsekiri/Urohbo conflict (Delta State).

In April 2006 the Obasanjo's government created the Consolidated Council on Social and Economic Development of Coastal States of the Niger Delta (COSEDECS) as response to the growing violence in the region and a "Marshal Plan" for development. Government at the inauguration of the Council announced the award of contracts for dualization of the East-West Road to connect the Delta to other parts of the country, and plans to recruit citizens of the Niger Delta into the armed forces to ease the problem of unemployment. Although the fifty member council archived very little due to its poor origin the council had more women representation than any government appointed committee on conflict resolution in the region.

On July 2, 2007, the federal government inaugurated a twenty-member peace and conflict resolution committee for the Niger Delta. Members of the committee are: Senator David Brigidi(Chairman); Kingsley Kuku(secretary); Gorge Timinimi and Godwin Ebosa(Delta State); Alhaji Hasan Douglas and Jerry Needam(Rivers State); Chief James Jephtah and Joshua Benamesia(Bayelsa State); Esoetok Ikpong and Elder Bassey Ekpa(Akwa Ibom State); Chief Asaka Umeh and Barrister Bassey Okim(Cross River State); and Prince Francis Iyasere and Florence Gbinije Erhabor(Edo State). Other members of the committee were drawn from the oil companies (Four representatives), the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC)(one representative), Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation(NNPC)(one representative), the Nigerian Police Force and the State Security Services(SSS). The committee which was inaugurated by Vice President Goodluck Jonathan was designed to liaise with regional actors and security agencies on conflict across state borders and hostage-taking. In addition, it also coordinated similar committees established by federal government directive in each South-South State. The committee played important role in obtaining cessation of hostilities by militants, and release of hostages. The activities of the Brigidi committee were hampered by mistrust between government and the militants as well as composition of the committee. The point of interest is that the committee had only one female member.⁹

Women played active role in Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) of armed groups in Rivers State from October 2004- July 2005. A combination of Academic Associates Peace Works(led by Dr. Judith Asuni) and Our Niger Delta(OND) officers worked with the Rivers State Rehabilitation Committee, chaired by Chief Priscilla Vikue planned and executed the 2005 DDR project in Rivers State. For instance, Chief Priscilla Vikue started a technical training programme at the Approved School, Borikiri where over seven hundred young men were trained in new skills.

The wife of then Rivers State Governor, Justice Mary Odili(JCA) established The Adolescent Project(TAP) to ethically rehabilitate, morally re-orientate and economically empower the adolescents of Rivers State. TAP is perhaps the most visible programme on employment generation and poverty alleviation in the state. For instance, estimates indicate that TAP empowered 550,000 women and youths¹⁰ through various skills acquisition training, and provided them with equipment to practice their skills. Shortcomings of the State government initiatives include that the real poor are rarely selected rather party loyalists have more access than others do, while a comprehensive participatory capacity needs assessment study of beneficiaries to determine their capacity building requirements was not conducted. Government determined to address the intractable militia and cult related violence appointed the Rivers State Peace and Rehabilitation Committee and made entreaties to youths involved in gangsterism and hostage taking to renounce such acts by offering One Million Naira to any of them that did so to start a new business. This committee had no woman representation.

⁹ Florence Gbinije Erhabor(one of the two representatives of Edo State).

¹⁰ Hon Justice Mary Odili accepted over one hundred participants from the Peace Ambassadors Camp, held at Shere Hills, Jos into her TAP training programme. Over seven hundred people (mainly members of armed groups) participated in the Shere Hills Camp project.

Governor Rotimi Amaechi on November 29, 2007 set up a seven man Truth and Reconciliation Commission with the following terms of reference:

- To search for and identify in full, the nature of the discontent.
- To identify the grievances and the remote and immediate causes, which have given rise to and resulted in the acts of killing, maiming, kidnapping, cultism and intra-cultism wars.
- To examine in detail the extent of the damage that has been done to the people and projects and also to the degree of damage to peace and concord in the state.
- To identify the various factions and people who have been involved in fostering the discontent.
- To examine and advise on the ways and means of bringing peace, amity and concord among all concerned.
- To advise upon a mechanism by which such reconciliation could be maintained and retained as a permanent feature in the state.
- To make any other findings and/recommendations, which the Commission may consider necessary.

The Commission which submitted its report in March 2009 and which succeeded in reconciling fifteen communities¹¹ had only one female member.¹²

In response to the dangerously worsening Niger Delta, The Federal Government, announced the setting up of a 40-member Technical Committee under the chairmanship of MOSOP Leader Ledum Mitee, to ferret out all and every report ever produced on the Niger Delta, examine them and make suggestions for government's necessary and urgent attention. The forty member technical committee had only four female members.¹³ Other contributions of women towards peace building and conflict resolution in the Niger Delta include preaching and advocacy for peace by stressing to stakeholders the need for dialogue and peace, advising parents to take upbringing of youth and children seriously, and collaboration with relevant government agencies, Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and faith-based organizations for economic empowerment of youth.

The Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) threw up challenges which women face in conflict resolution and peace building. These include poor education, poverty and unemployment,

¹¹ See National Point of March 28, 2009(page 9)

¹² Mrs. Ngo Ogarn from Okrika.

¹³ Mrs. Nkoyo Toyo(secretary of the Committee), Obongawan Grace Ekong –Akwa Ibom State(Chairman of health and Education Sub-Committee), Prof Ayebaemi Spiff –Bayelsa State(member, Critical Infrastructure Sub-Committee), and Senator Stella Omu –Delta State(member, Community, Youth and Women Empowerment Sub-Committee).

inadequate information and enlightenment on the role of women in societal development especially access to opportunities for peace building, lack of organizational capacity, and familial constraints. For example, participants in the FGD at Soku complained of lack of inclusion of women in decision-making in their community, those at Iko contended that all the ten (10) wards in Eastern Obolo Local Government Area had male councilors. In addition, the chairman of the local government council (Charles Udoyok) is a man.

Strategies to Mainstream Women in Peace- building and Conflict Resolution

On strategies to adopt to mainstream women into on going and future peace building in the communities, the respondents stated increased representation of women in government at decision-making levels, eradication of poverty(particularly financial empowerment), educational development(especially adult education for the less privileged), affirmative legislative action against laws, custom and practices which discriminate or dehumanize womanhood.

Income Regeneration Activities for Women

Table 3: Rank Ordering of Recommended Income Regeneration Activities for Women

Consequences	Responses
Micro-credits for development of alternative livelihood means.	65
Employment in oil companies and public service.	12
Peaceful environment for promotion of petty business.	16
Stop of environmental degradation activities by oil companies.	11
Withdrawal of government security forces.	10
Cessation of militant activities	9

Source: Field Survey, January 2009

From table 3 above micro credits was ranked as the most important income regeneration activity (65%), followed by peaceful environment for promotion of petty business (16%). Both responses should not be a surprise for governments in the Niger Delta States have embarked on micro credits schemes to assist rural inhabitants reposition their businesses. It is also an indisputable fact that violence had affected petty business in the region especially evening- street- trading and other business activities. 12% of the responses indicated employment in oil companies and the public service as means of regenerating economic activities in the study area. Stop of environmental degradation activities by oil companies (11%) was ranked the next in order of importance. There were protests by women over aggravation of poverty arising from declining incomes derived from oil based degradation. The women sought compensation for devastation of their land and water resources as they cannot fish and there is no profitable agricultural output because

of oil based environmental degradation. Consequently in the Ogoni protests, women were quite active in the shut down of oil production facilities of Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC) in Ogoni land through the Federation of Ogoni Women Associations (FAOWA). In Delta State, there more frequent women mass action against oil companies in 2002. For example, Itsekiri women took over the Escravos Tank farm disrupting the operations of Chevron. Similarly, Ijaw women invaded four of the company's flow stations located in the swamps of the Niger Delta, while in August 2003, Amukpe and Sapele West oil flow stations of Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC) was shut down following women protest.

10% of the response stated withdrawal state security force from the communities. It was found that the Niger Delta Women for Justice in conjunction with the Ijaw Youth Council (IYC), organized women in a protest march in Port Harcourt as far back as January 11, 1999 and delivered a letter to then military administrator at Rivers Sate Government. They were protesting the military occupation, human rights abuses, rape and assault of women in Bayelsa State. In Yenagoa, Bayelsa State, women marched to the Government House to protest extortion of money and harassment by soldiers of occupation in their area. 9% other response indicated cessation of militant activities. This attests to the fact that women had been victims of militant activities. For example, in July 2007, Hansel Seibarugu, 70-year mother of Wenipiri Seibarugu, speaker of Bayelsa State House of Assembly, was abducted by gunmen at AKAibiri village, Ekpetiama. Ma Hansel Seibarugu was released fifteen days later to the leadership of Bayelsa State Peace and Reconciliation Committee headed by Jepheth James. On 19 October 2007, gunmen abducted 70-year old Madam Goldcoast Dickson, mother of Henry Seriake Dickson, a member of the House of Representatives representing Sagbama Constituency, Bayelsa State. In addition, the mother of the former Rivers State Governor, Celestine Omehia was kidnapped. Kidnapping is now used to blackmail people, extort money, recover debts and extract vengeance.

Participants in the FGDs identified capacity building in various trades, access to storage facilities, safe drinking water, financial empowerment and provision of efficient and effective transportation system as some means for regeneration of income for women.

Conclusion

Women play active role in the informal sector of the economy as a means of earning a livelihood and supplement family income. Oil exploitation activities has destroyed their sources of livelihood as those who depend mostly on fishing and farming for survival have been subjected to untold hardship more than ever before following the pollution of their land, and creeks by oil spillage and other environmentally harmful practices. Because of the low income they earn from fishing and farming, they often need additional income and the only option is to generate their own income through self-employment. Despite these responsibilities which they fulfill with the greatest drudgery, women receive very little support from their men, private and public institutions. If the vicious circle of poverty and hunger is to be broken women must be provided with access to credits. Credits will result in significant qualitative changes in the lives of women. Unfortunately micro finance institutions focus on loans for commerce which has fast

turnover hence high profitability rather than on agricultural loans which seem more risky and held longer. The economic disempowerment of women in the Niger Delta has been aggravated by youth militancy and the activities of men and officers of rampaging military Joint Task Force (JTF) deployed in the area to curtail militancy. Invasion and bombardment of communities in search for militants by men of the JTF had resulted in destruction of houses rendering the entire population homeless, while several others (especially women and children) received various degrees of injuries. Women had been victims of kidnap by militants who run hostage-taking business just as petty trading was on decline due to activities of militants.

In spite of available legislative and administrative frameworks for fostering gender-equality in Nigeria, there are still structural and cultural discriminations against women. For instance, women lack voice in the decisions that affect their lives. Data at the disposal of the study showed abysmally low representation of women in institutions created for conflict resolution and peace building in the Niger Delta. Granted that state governments in the region are constantly expanding the vistas of available opportunities and acquisition of new skills by women, a lot more needs to be done. Education is one of the critical pathways to promote social and economic development, yet women's access to it is limited by too many obstacles. Indeed the success of the other areas of development hinge on the education of women, because increased literacy level guarantees increased decision-making power and better opportunities for women.

Recommendations

Processes of socio-economic empowerment of women is slow because the obstacles, barriers and bias that hinder their development are numerous, and deeply rooted in culture, in spite of the laudable gender-equality policy of the Nigerian State. Although the bias against women is longstanding and monumental, it is not insurmountable. Success is contingent on flexibility in approaches and strategies. It is against this backdrop that we put forward the following recommendations:

1. Oil and gas exploration activities have no doubt impacted negatively on the ecosystem, resulting in destruction of women livelihood means that make the Niger Delta vulnerable to food crisis, and deepening poverty. It is therefore important that companies operating in this sector clean up oil spills immediately and put an end to gas flares, support conservation and environmental restoration activities in impacted communities.
2. The oil companies should commence payment of special compensation to communities devastated by environmental degradation occasioned by oil prospecting and exploitation operations.
3. Education is key to development of any society; therefore equal educational opportunities should be given to both boys and girls and indeed women. Consequently increased percentage of states budgets should be set aside to provide quality education, especially Information Technology.

4. Affirmative legislative action should be taken to enact new laws, modify or abrogate existing laws, regulations, customs and practices which discriminate or dehumanize womanhood and establish administrative and monitoring frameworks to enforce compliance.
5. There is urgent for sustained pressure by women leaders and activists at the Federal, State and Local Government levels for increased representation of women in government and at decision making levels.
6. The wanton destruction of communities, properties and violation of human rights of inhabitants of the Region derives from invitations of state security forces by oil companies to maintain law and order in their areas operation, hence the need to demilitarize the region. Demilitarization of the Niger Delta should begin with disbandment of the Joint Task Force (JTF). The military ought primarily be confined to the barracks domestically and used for border operations or navy patrol of coastal waters, or for contributing to international peace keeping operations rather than being deployed as an army of occupation.
7. The logic of creation of states and local government areas negates the real interests of ethnic nationalities. Important as states and local government areas may be for development, the creation process was trailed by complaints of un-demarcate boundaries a situation productive of inter-ethnic and community conflicts and creation of ethnic militias as collective response to insecurity. Government should therefore embark on boundary demarcation and adjustments in areas identified as flashpoints and potential trouble spots.
8. Women should by their role in society as mothers and daughters be co-opted in current and future peace-building and conflict prevention initiatives in the Niger Delta.

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