



## Peace and Conflict Impact Assessment of Development Intervention on Conflict Dynamics in Gbaramatu Kingdom

MATHIAS JARIKRE  
National Open University of Nigeria

**Abstract.** Infrastructural deficit accentuates the narratives on conflict and development trap in communities of Nigeria’s Niger Delta Region. Development intervention is a widespread strategy to address intractable conflicts in the region. This article examines peace and conflict impact assessment of development initiatives by Delta State Oil Producing Areas Development Commission on conflict dynamics in Gbaramatu Kingdom. The article adopted both survey and case study designs, using development projects in Okerenkoko and Oporoza communities. Empirically, indicators were carefully formulated to measure impact of development intervention and shed light on conflict dynamics against the backdrop of delta-wide analysis. The underpinning assumption was that development projects have heightened tension in Gbaramatu communities, the seat of militant resistance to the Nigerian government. This assumption was tested by an analysis of conflict indicators and lived experiences. Empirical evidence seems to affirm that this does not hold true in Gbaramatu communities that are yearning for rapid infrastructure development.

**Keywords:** Peace and conflict impact assessment, conflict dynamics, project partner, development intervention, Gbaramatu Kingdom, Delta State Oil Producing Area Development Commission

### 1. Introduction

Development intervention is a dominant strategy to address intractable conflicts in Nigeria’s Niger Delta Region. It has generated immense scholarly interest because of the entrenched violent culture, due to agitation for resource control and infrastructure deficit. The government, at different levels, had attempted various intervention policies, schemes,

programmes and institutional responses, with appropriate legislation, to engender inclusion and peacebuilding, through community participation and ownership. The various schemes and policy options were to address the hydra-headed challenges of underdevelopment and violent conflicts, emerging from perceived political and economic exclusion of communities from mainstream operations of the oil and gas industry. The Delta State Oil Producing Areas Development Commission (DESOPADEC), established on 16<sup>th</sup> July, 2007, was one of such government interventions. The mandate of DESOPADEC is to “rehabilitate, rejuvenate and revive the physical, economic and social well-being” of the oil-producing communities of Delta State (*DESOPADEC Act, 2006: Section 13 (1)*). Oil-bearing communities are communities hosting oil wells, manifolds, platforms, flow stations, pipelines etc., and have been impacted upon by oil exploration. Since its inception, DESOPADEC has been engaged in diverse development projects and empowerment initiatives to address the issues of infrastructure and human capital deficit. Thus, it has overtly and covertly addressed the root causes of conflicts in the region.

The interaction between social infrastructure deficit and the conflict situation in Nigeria’s Niger Delta underscores a complex phenomenon (Jarikre, 2016, 98) and development intervention, towards tackling the twin issues (conflict and lack of social infrastructure), though “development intervention processes remain insensitive to conflict dynamics” (IPCR, 2002:1). Hence, as a policy option, the Institute for Peace and Conflict Resolution (IPCR) recommended Peace and Conflict Impact Assessment (after now PCIA) a requirement for development interventions in Nigeria (Jarikre, 2016, 98). Given the extent and prolonged character of conflicts and

development interventions in the oil-bearing communities, PCIA promises to be very useful in making the interventions meaningful and sustainable. It promises, also, to contribute to the understanding of the uses and advantages, as well as developing the tools of PCIA.

PCIA is a means of assessing the ways in which an intervention may affect, or has affected the dynamics of peace or conflict in a conflict-prone region (Bush, 2009). Bush seems to have evolved the concept beyond a process that will help ensure that a development project does not make conflict worse and, as far as possible, it should help to build peace. According to him, it is a methodology or means of “anticipating, monitoring, managing and evaluating the ways in which an intervention may affect, is affecting, or has affected the dynamics of peace or conflict in a conflict prone region” (Bush, 2009, 7). As he noted, PCIA “differs from evaluation” in the conventional sense because its scope extends far beyond the *stated* outputs, outcomes, goals and objectives of conventional development projects” (Bush, 1998, 8).

After several years of development interventions, what is the relationship between development projects and conflict dynamics in Gbaramatu Kingdom? Is there an increase in conflict dynamics because there is increased development intervention? Does conflict dynamics increase development intervention? Therefore, a PCIA of DESOPADEC’s development projects on conflict dynamics examines whether the projects in Gbaramatu Kingdom generated new conflicts, fed into or escalated the ongoing conflicts (the unending resource control agitations due to underdevelopment in the region). In other words, has the commission’s development projects heightened the peoples’ vulnerability, by deepening the causes of conflict, introducing new conflicts and division among community members, and enhancing the opportunities of joining militant groups? The underpinning assumption is that development projects have heightened tension in a territory largely perceived as the seat of militant resistance to the Nigerian government. This assumption was tested by an analysis of conflict indicators and an assessment of people’s lived experiences.

This article will limit the use of the term PCIA to conflict dynamics (for the peace dynamics of development projects, see Jarikre, 2018). Whereas researchers have offered profound theoretical arguments on the nexus between development projects and peacebuilding, through evaluation of peacebuilding using PCIA lens, there is not so much

on PCIA of conflict dynamics in the Niger Delta Region. There is limited research on PCIA, in relation to assessing the impact of development projects on conflict dynamics, in the search for models and transition to sustaining peace and security in the region. Ostensibly, the article will attempt to bridge the existing gaps, posed by lack of data in the evaluation literature on impact assessment of development and peacebuilding in the region. This article will also contribute to the growing discussion on the nexus between peace/conflict and development by substantiating the concept of PCIA.

The first section of this article will provide a conceptual scoping of PCIA on conflict dynamics. It will be followed by historicizing the baseline and conflict profile of Gbaramatu kingdom to underscore the challenges of local communities in the Niger Delta. It will then discuss the impact of DESOPADEC’S development initiatives on conflict dynamics. Though the development projects are specific to Okerenkoko and Oporoza communities in Gbaramatu Kingdom, in many ways, the issues have broader Niger Delta implications in terms of causes, community grievance, escalation trajectory and micro-level conflicts. Empirically, the article conceptualized conflict indicators, that are dialectically connected to one another, to examine the impact of development intervention and shed light on the conflict dynamics.

## 2. PCIA and Conflict Dynamics

Conflict as an inherent phenomenon ubiquitous with human existence has been conceptualized and theorized “as a multi-dimensional construct” (Humphrey, Aime, Cushenbery, Hill, and Fairchild, 2017, 58). The etymological foundation of the word ‘dynamics’ is rooted in the sciences and ascribed to the experimentation of Galileo, a 16<sup>th</sup> century scientist (Encyclopedia Britannica). Within the social sciences, dynamics involves any systemic social interaction (Social Dynamics Definition, Types & Examples, 2023), and energy supporting moving society forward and changes in society. In this sense, dynamics encompasses the energies of men and the results these energies have wrought accordingly (Vance, 1945, 123). Thus, Nicaise, (2014, 15) described conflict dynamics as the resulting interaction between the conflict profile, the actors and the causes of conflict.

Not only do scholars provide fundamental definitions but they also provide a strong sense of the multifaceted nature of conflict dynamics. While Rothbart (2020, 23 - 24) asserts that the power of state management significantly impacts on conflict dynamics, Weiss, Tsur, Miodownik, Lupu, and Finkel (2022), argued, in

particular, that scholars could well comprehend conflict dynamics by focusing beyond the established, typical, and predictable patterns of violence. This is because “atypical violent events can fundamentally alter established conflict dynamics.” They define atypical violence as “if they differ from the observed contemporaneous conflict dynamics” (Weiss et.al, 2022, 1, 2).

Conflict dynamics in development intervention is complex to define and measure as Barron, Diprose and Woolcock (2011,8) bluntly observed, “no one knows how to do this, at least not in the way we know how to do other complex tasks such as removing tumors from the pre-frontal cortex (brain surgery) or putting spaceship on mars (rocket science).” Ostensibly, the amorphous nature of conflict dynamics could be due to lack of toolkit and the endemic feature of the type of development challenge (Barron, Diprose and Woolcock, 2011, 8). As Diehl (2006) observed, there is a plethora of studies on conflict dynamics that focus on narrow time frame and immediate outcomes. For him, to break free from the strong hold of single conflict shape analysis, he suggested the examination of several distinct phases of conflict to determine the connection.

Development interventions in complex environments of vulnerable individuals and communities, can cause grievances, which are precursors to conflict dynamics. The issue, therefore, is how can these be prevented or mitigated in ways that do not inadvertently fuel them? This is supposedly the broader goal of peacebuilding. Thus, the recognition that domestic conflict could seriously disrupt development projects made the consideration of violence and its impact central concerns of development initiatives (Barron, Diprose and Woolcock, 2011, 29). This provided the impetus for the search for new instruments, either through adaptation or to further develop requisite planning and management tools (Zupan, 2005, 50). One of such instruments developed was PCIA, as a means of ensuring that development projects in conflict zones reflect the priorities of peace and conflict dynamics. Retrospectively, PCIA was formulated by Kenneth Bush in 1998 who conceptualized it as a “means of evaluating (ex post facto) and anticipating (ex ante, as far as possible) the impacts of proposed and completed development projects” (Bush, 1998, 7). In view of Bush’s definition, it becomes clear that PCIA is concerned with assessment of impact through a series of processes, and ultimately as a framework to overcome structures of violence (Jarikre, 2018, 50) and long-term sustainable change. This line of argument is further buttressed by Barasa – Mang’Eni (2014, 59) who asserts that PCIA is viewed as a means

to assess how interventions and assistance in conflict situation carries the potential to either exacerbate conflict or contribute to peace. In this sense, PCIA focuses on affected populations and impacts across sectors (social, economic, political and environmental), as well as assesses actions that bring change in people’s lives.

### 3. Baseline and Conflict Profile

Gbaramatu Kingdom, with nine communities, several fishing ports and hamlets, lies along the fringes of the Western Niger Delta. Gbaramatu communities are oil-bearing, hosting oil wells, manifolds, platforms, flow stations, pipelines, etc. The local population is predominantly engaged in fish farming but unfortunately the environment and aquatic life have been negatively impacted upon by extractive activities, particularly oil exploration/exploitation. There is a huge deficit of social infrastructure, such as health care facilities, and pipe borne and portable water (Jarikre, 2018:51). The social and economic environment depicts negligence and government absence, as the national economy depends more on government expenditure and capital investment. Interestingly, as Courson (2007) noted, this deplorable socio-economic environment of a host community to Chevron Texaco Unlimited is precursor to community grievance and militant activities.

Tompolo’s ‘Camp 5’, located along the dreaded Chanomi Creek in Gbaramatu Kingdom was the garrison headquarter of the Movement for Emancipation of Niger Delta (MEND) (Omonobi, 2009, Jarikre, 2017). Presumably, MEND, under the command of Tompolo, was a defunct militia group against government policies of political exclusion, marginalization and underdevelopment of the Niger Delta oil-bearing communities. MEND militants on the Chanomi creeks coordinated attacks, hostage taking and killing of staff (especially foreigners and expatriates) of multinational oil and gas corporations (Owen, 2009; Jarikre, 2017). They were also involved in pirating local traders on transport boats to cart away their wares. They also raped women, while some lost their lives in the process.

At the peak of the Warri crisis in March, 2003, the Joint Military Task Force (JTF) launched massive military onslaughts against militants’ strongholds in Gbaramatu Kingdom. Also, in 2009, JTF launched another military offensive to dislodge the dreaded forces of MEND, under the command of Tompolo (Jarikre, 2018). In 2016, the Niger Delta Avengers (NDA) emerged to contest government’s reprehensible marginalization of the Niger Delta

Region (Courson, 2017). It reportedly claimed responsibility for the attack on critical oil and gas infrastructure and assets in the Niger Delta (Courson, 2017; Jarikre, 2017). As Holodyn (2016) observed, the NDA appeared to echo the agenda of MEND, struggling for a greater part of oil revenue for the impoverished region. Between 2016 and 2018, the JTF in the Niger Delta launched a manhunt in the creek communities, in search of the former MEND warlord, Government Ekpemupolo, popularly known as Tompolo, who was believed to be holed up in the labyrinth of Oporoza, his ancestral home.

Due to its dynamic nature, Gbaramatu kingdom is replete with militant activities and social disintegration, due to agitations for resource control. Ethnic conflicts provide profound contexts to explore the nexus between development and conflicts, in order to understand the fundamental complexities of conflict dynamics in development intervention. The communities in Gbaramatu appear like hundreds of thousands of creek communities in the Niger Delta. Ostensibly, Okerenkoko and Oporoza communities are significant hot beds of violent confrontations between state and non-state actors (militia groups) (Courson, 2017). Suffice to say that it is not a quintessential creek or riverine community; therefore, the task of development intervention could not be straight forward, not only because it is a difficult terrain, but also one with intense insecurity challenges. Gbaramatu Kingdom, though considered a highly volatile hub of militant activities, the communities are oasis of harmony and cohesion, bonded and loyal to the leadership of Tompolo, former MEND commander and spiritual leader of Egbesu Cult.

#### **4. PCIA of DESOPADEC's Development Projects on Conflict Dynamics**

Sharing the laudatory objective of reducing violence and the development of Gbaramatu communities for peace, DESOPADEC's development intervention in Gbaramatu Kingdom is a sterling case study of institutional capacity for conflict sensitivity. This is so because its mandate derived from the Act establishing the Commission. Its operational guidelines and financial regulations are explicit, thorough and coherent for the purpose. For instance, the commission's policy for project delivery is that development projects are outsourced to local contractors who should also take responsibility for community relations. In this way, contractors are to address community conflicts, issues and interests arising from the implementation of the project. The use of local contractors is a strategic step to empower community members, ensure efficient community

relations and mitigate possible risk implications for security. However, it leads to conflict over obtaining contracts in some cases (WAC Global, 2003; Jarikre, 2018).

Findings from a study on the institutional capacity of DESOPADEC to mainstream conflict sensitivity, in its development intervention in Gbaramatu Kingdom, appears consistent with conflict-sensitive approaches in development practice (Resource Pack, 2004, McIntosh and Buckey, 2015; Jarikre, 2018). The approaches are about how DESOPADEC's activities will not create, feed into or contribute to the exacerbation of tension. From the study, development interventions in peacebuilding and conflict sensitivity exist in a web of relationships where the interactions are intrinsically linked. As Jarikre (2018), argues, the use of its human and organizational capital (skill, knowledge and competencies), capacity of project partners, policy framework and practice underscore its capacity within the broader framework of conflict sensitivity in development and peacebuilding interaction (p. 141). This presupposes that the bulk of conflict sensitivity lies on the institutional ability of development agencies to mainstream conflict sensitivity into the development project delivery process (See Jarikre, 2018).

This article adopts the ex post facto research design, using both survey and case study designs. PCIA is dependent on lived experiences and their participation is central to assessing the impact of project intervention. As Bush (2003:6) noted, the people living in the conflict environment are "the real experts in PCIA" as they share their experiences and perceptions on the impact and outcome of the intervention on conflict dynamics. The population of the study consisted of Gbaramatu women, youths, community leaders, DESOPADEC's staff (field and headquarters), project partners/contactors and project staff. The sample population consisted of 432 respondents, spread across the two communities and DESOPADEC. The distribution of sampled population is as follows: Oporoza (196), Okerenkoko (170) and DESOPADEC (66). The population was drawn from selected personalities, including those who are staying outside Gbaramatu area, but are conversant with the conflict in the area, the programmes as well as the activities of DESOPADEC, project partners, staff, government officials (DESOPADEC) and consultants, whose inputs were germane to the study. Random sampling technique was used for the survey while purposive and snowballing sampling techniques were employed for the interviews. The study carried out four major activities of data collection: the use of questionnaire,

In-Depth (IDI) and Key Informant Interviews (KII), Focus Group Discussion (FGD) and case – (a non-participant observation of specific community projects).

This article, like most impact assessment studies, extensively used attribution and triangulation to demonstrate and explain change. Primary data consisted of 432 respondents, derived from two sets of questionnaires administered to community members and DESOPADEC staff respectively. Seven in-depth interviews were conducted with the Commissioner representing Ijaw communities on DESOPADEC's Board, four community chairmen, a traditional ruler and Chairman of Gbaramatu Community Development Committee. Eleven key informant interviews were also conducted with two Special Assistants to the Commissioner, three youth leaders, two contractors, one site Engineer, one market woman and two community members, while a focus group discussion was conducted with DESOPADEC staff. Two levels of sampling were used to elicit relevant information: purposive and incidental. Incidental was used for the survey, and purposive snowballing for the interviews.

Empirically, indicators were carefully formulated to measure impact and shed light on conflict dynamics in development intervention, against the backdrop of lived experiences analysis. These include: factors relating to increased vulnerability of the people and communities, trends that deepen the root causes of conflicts, issues responsible for introducing new conflicts and escalating existing conflicts, and motivation to join militant groups/taking up of arms. For the analysis, the article used the development projects in Okerenkoko and Oporoza and the field responses from the sampled population.

### **5. Factors Relating to Increased Vulnerability of People and Communities**

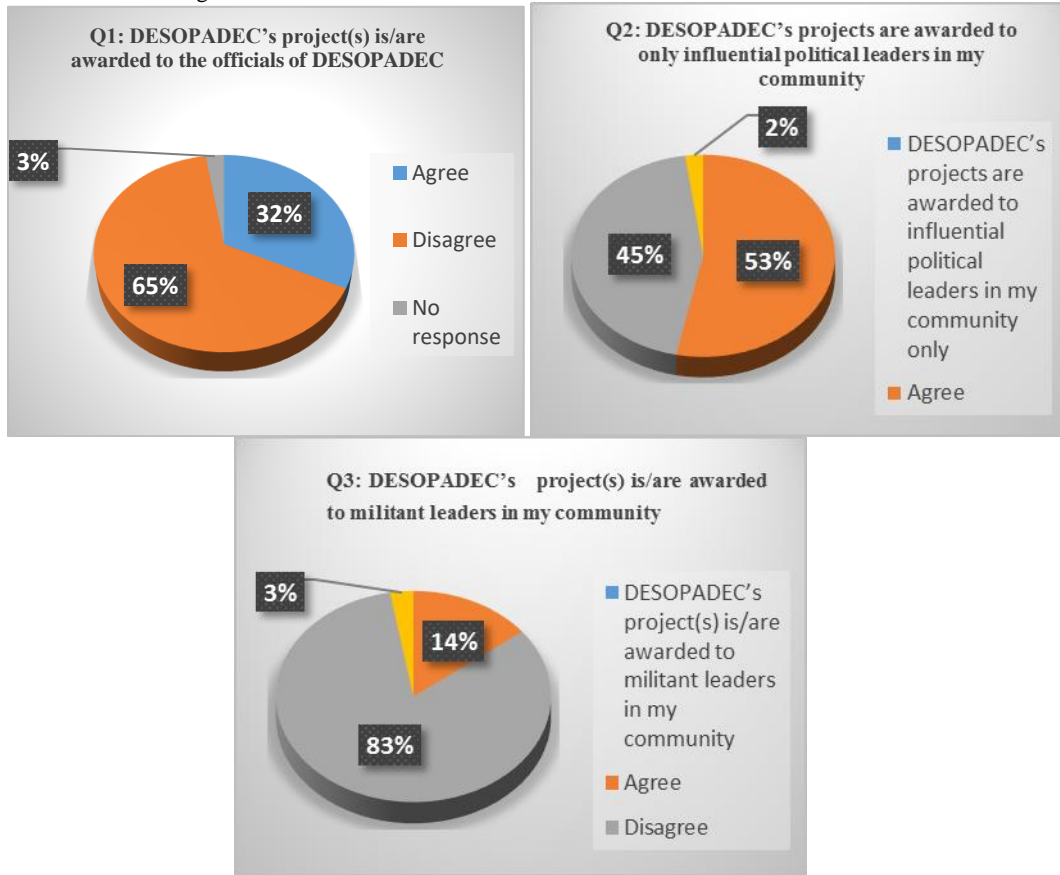
The award of contracts for development projects, in the communities of the Niger Delta region has been a major source of conflict. Project administration in Nigeria, especially contract award, is fraught with malfeasance, due largely to conflict of interest, greed and political patronage. This is often done without consideration of local ownership and contractor's competence, which are germane to project delivery and peacebuilding. Contracts awarded for community development are not accessible by community

members, who are local contractors, but awarded to proxies (such as government officials, including DESOPADEC's staff, politicians and militants) who are external contractors with the same capacity. Such awards create local resentment and antagonism in the community. Broadly speaking, contract award and allocation to community members is a strategic means of building local capacity and community resilience. Conversely, when such contracts are awarded to external contractors, it may result in disempowering the community. Consequently, it inadvertently engenders community vulnerability and violent behaviour because opportunities for community contractors to improve their standard of living and move away from conditions of poverty are denied.

The assumption here is that an overwhelming apathy existed on account of contracts awarded to external contractors, politicians, DESOPADEC's staff and militant leaders, thus, the questions in Cluster 1. Responding to the first question on the cluster, 32% of the respondents agreed that the projects in their communities were awarded to the staff of the commission, while 66% disagreed. In respect to the second question, 10% agreed that militant leaders were the beneficiaries of contracts awarded, while 5% strongly agreed. However, an overwhelming percentage of respondents (82%), in a disaggregated proportion of 50% and 32%, disagreed and strongly disagreed, respectively, that contracts were awarded to militant leaders. For the third question, there appears to be a near balance of responses, as 53% agreed that DESOPADEC's projects were awarded to influential political leaders in their community only. 42% thought otherwise while 2% were undecided.

The aggregate responses in the cluster show that 33.3% agreed, 64.2% disagreed, while 2.3% did not respond to the questions that projects were awarded to politicians, staff, or militants only. The data presented above confirms that the commission's contract award has not been a source of conflict, as no particular group was identified to be the sole beneficiary of contract awards. However, data indicate that the political class appears to enjoy some form of patronage and preference from the commission. Broadly speaking, in Nigeria, the scenario of contract award is fraught with malfeasance due largely to conflict of interest, greed and political patronage (whereby politicians are compensated with contract awards) without consideration of contractors' competence, experience and expertise, which are necessary ingredients for project delivery.

**Cluster 1: Percentage Distribution of Orientation towards the Award of Contracts**



*Source: Fieldwork*

The study further confirms that the engagement of local contractors, as project partners by funding agencies and corporations, to deliver projects in the Niger Delta, is a critical factor in several ways. Experience has shown that using local contractors is one of the ways the community can directly benefit, through empowerment and development of local capacity. Another reason is to strategically reduce the incidence of violent conflict and mitigate risk of work stoppage, due to community interference. Also essential is that the process allows for community participation and ownership of the project, premised on the usual complaint that many development projects, delivered by external contractors, are often substandard and unsustainable and, therefore, not functional.

The assumption that external local contractors, who are not indigenes of project benefiting communities, often execute substandard and unsustainable projects is ostensible. After all, we have seen numerous cases of indigenous contractors who have abandoned projects where external contractors have achieved greatly. As Okolie & Edo (2023) noted, neglecting competence and the right skilled people for any

unqualified contractor, on any construction project, will always yield poor project delivery. On account of the above, Yemi Osinbajo observed that “there are signboards of proposed infrastructural projects, mostly uncompleted, and many are abandoned” (Osinbajo, 2017). In fact, incidents abound of community contractors who had abandoned projects soon after collecting contract mobilization (first tranche payment) fees. What is palpable is that efforts to mainstream local turns in peacebuilding (use of local resource, actors and ownership) have diminished project intervention with unsightly effects, due to poor contracting and contractor practices linked to nepotism and corruption. Even so, DESOPADEC's development intervention in Gbaramatu appears atypical, as data reveal a collective will of the people to support and embrace any development project that will alter not only the physical structure but also the socio-economic status and living standards of members of the community.

**6. Deepening the Root Causes of Conflicts**

Given the complex situation of infrastructure deficit and conflicts in the Niger Delta region, it is clear that

deepening the root causes of conflicts embodies a wide range of issues with differing impacts. They have loosely emerged from frustration resulting from inequitable distribution of infrastructural projects and reduction of communities' ability to legitimately benefit from oil-related resources and opportunities. The issues are due to prolonged neglect, marginalisation and exclusion by government and multinational oil corporations, susceptible political manipulation, and distrust of community leaders who represent selfish interest. More often than not these conditions accelerate, escalate and deepen the root causes of structural conflicts and violence in oil-producing communities such as Gbaramatu. In fact, they have largely intensified and deepened conflicts during development interventions.

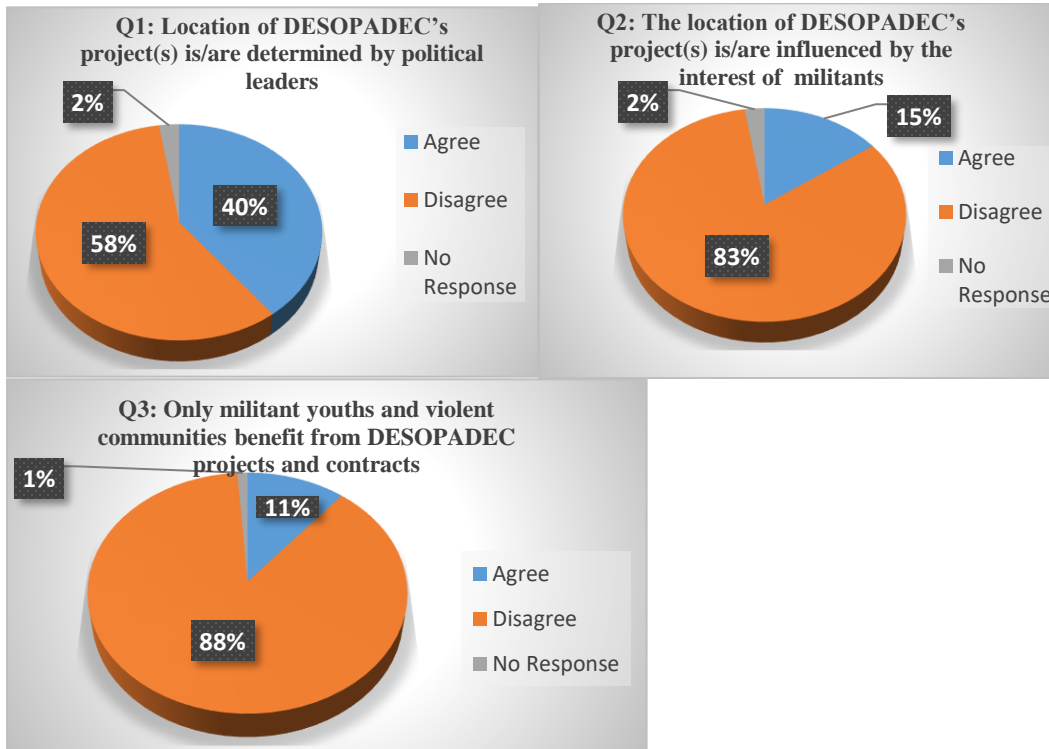
Execution of projects cannot be effectively implemented without the proper selection of project locations at various stages of pre-project planning, either at the level of the commission or the community. The location of development projects is a major source of competition, rivalry and violent conflicts in oil-producing communities of the Niger Delta region where infrastructural deficit is a common denominator. The absence of development infrastructure has been complicated by the consequences of petroleum exploration/exploitation, and increasing materialism as a result of petro-economics. One reason for the unseemly competition and unhealthy rivalry is the desire by individuals, groups and communities to access the benefits of project location such as cash, contract awards, employment opportunity, and legitimacy. The attempts to take such advantages have almost always resulted in leadership tussles and other forms of conflicts in communities.

Thus, many decisions on project location sometimes feed into, escalate, or even introduce new conflicts (WAC Global Services, 2003). For instance, distrust exists among Ijaw communities due to government patronage and location of projects in Gbaramatu Kingdom. There is the common belief, by other Ijaw

communities of Delta State, that Gbaramatu communities received more patronage from DESOPADEC, in terms of project location and appointments, because they are more militant. An implicit assumption of the study in this regard, therefore, was that the location of projects was determined by the interest of political and militant leaders based on community volatility. To this end, the study tried to determine how the location of DESOPADEC's projects impacts on the conflict dynamics in the study locations.

Three questions (Q1, Q2 and Q3) were used to assess how the location of DESOPADEC's projects could feed into, escalate and create new conflicts in Gbaramatu communities. Data obtained suggests that respondents believe that politician have a fair chance of determining the location of projects than militants and violent/militant communities. Responses to the first question on the cluster show that 40% of respondents (25% agree and 15% strongly agree) believe that project location is usually determined by politicians, 58% respondents (55% disagree and 3% strongly disagree) do not believe that politicians determine where projects were located, while only 2% abstained. Responses to the second question in respect to militants' interest show that only 15% (disaggregated as 7% agreed and 8% strongly agreed) believe that the location of DESOPADEC's projects were determined by militants' interests. An overwhelming 83% of respondents debunked the general assertion that militants' interests cannot be ignored in project location. Again, as in responses to the first question, only 2% did not respond to the second question. Responses to the last item in this cluster, indicate that less than 11% (4.3% agreed and 6.2% strongly agreed) claimed that only militant youths and violent communities benefitted from DESOPADEC's projects and contracts. Meanwhile, 88.3% of respondents (disaggregated 58% disagreed and 30.3 strongly disagreed) did not believe that militant youths and violent communities were given preference in terms of project distribution and contract awards. Only 1.2% left the question untreated.

*Cluster 2: Percentage Distribution of Response to the Location of Projects*



Source: Fieldwork

The aggregate of responses in the cluster shows that 22% agreed, 76% disagreed while 2% did not respond to the questions. The data suggest that politicians appear to have an edge over militants or violent communities in determining the location of projects. It does appear to debunk the assumption that militant youths and violent communities are rewarded with projects and contracts. This reality in the Gbaramatu context, however, is inconceivable and atypical, which affirms Weiss et al.'s (2022) contemporaneous conflict dynamics. Ostensibly, one scenario, which supports and informs the assessment by the respondents, is the location and distribution of housing units built by DESOPADEC in Okerenkoko. Field observation and interviews (KII and IDI) revealed that the location of the housing units in the community was based on certain criteria such as being a victim of ethnic conflicts and military offensive, especially those whose houses were destroyed. According to Kingsley Otuaro, “the families who got housing units were those whose homesteads were destroyed during the ethnic violence (1997 – 2003) and military invasions of 2003 and 2009, and as such a housing unit was built on the same piece of land” (oral interview, 2018).

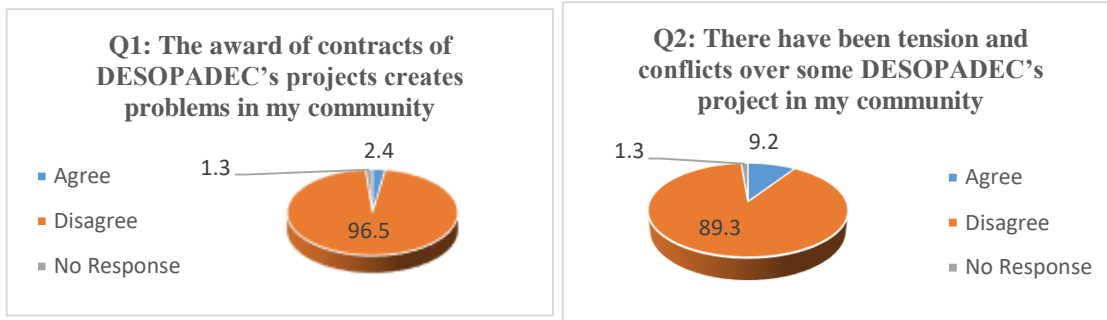
In practice, the award of contracts and location of projects remains a strategic measure used by government and multinational corporations to quell the most vocal and potentially-violent groups in communities. However, a reward system that is based on narrow identities, is a pointer to fragmentation of groups. For example, during the pilot study many youth leaders of other Ijaw communities observed that Gbaramatu area had benefited, more than any other community, from DESOPADEC's projects, appointments and programmes, not because of production quantum but as a hotspot of violent extremism and Ijaw resistance to government (oral interview). A perception of this nature could be an inducing factor that feeds into, creates and sustains micro-level conflict among Ijaw oil-bearing communities.

**7. Introduction of New Conflict and Conflict Escalating Factors**

There appears to be a consensus, among scholars and practitioners of development and peacebuilding, that development interventions in conflict zones have been known to generate, feed into existing conflicts and even create new conflicts. According to Bush (1998), development challenges traditional values or authority structure, increases the stakes in the realm of economic competition as well as creates new winners and losers. It is along this conceptualisation that the introduction of new conflicts by development interventions is explained in this cluster. Therefore, the extent to which development intervention creates new conflicts or generates conflict properties can be

explained in terms of how contracts for projects are awarded. It also includes how manpower engagement of outsiders, when concerned communities can provide local labour, non-payment of development levies, absence of community relations and engagement as well as attitude of project staff. Empirical evidence in a Delta-wide context suggests that the impact of isolation in contract awards and exclusion of local unskilled labour characterised community grievances and aggravated unemployment, leading not only to new conflicts (micro) but also an overt desire to join militia groups (macro).

**Cluster 3: DESOPADEC's Projects and New Conflicts**



Source: Fieldwork.

The combination of Q1 and Q2 consists of several matrixes of factors that reflect isolation and the ‘us and them’ thinking – a synonymous conflict driver with capacity for increased recruitment into militia group in the Niger Delta. Responses to the first question on the cluster showed that only a small percentage of respondents (2.4%) agreed that the award of contracts for DESOPADEC’s projects created problems in their community. However, this was not the view of over 96% of respondents who thought that the award of contracts for DESOPADEC’s projects was not a source of conflict in their community. To the second question, only 9.2% agreed that there had been tension and conflicts over some DESOPADECs projects in their community, 89.3% thought otherwise, while 1.3% did not attend to the question.

The aggregate responses in the cluster (Q1 and Q2) shows that 6% agreed, 92.5% disagreed while 1.5% of the respondents were silent on the questions. The low rate of agree response was ascribed to the fact that project staff were cautioned on their relationship with community members. For instance, according to the Chairperson of Oporoza Community, Emami Ebimene, “Project staff are warned during contractor’s pep talks to avoid sexual relationship with married women and underaged female community members” (Oral interview, 2014). Furthermore, to ensure social decorum, project staff were warned from embarking on alcohol drinking spree and smoking of Indian hemp. Such warnings, according to the leadership of the community, were necessary to nip in the bud behaviours that could generate micro conflicts (a story was told of a project staff, who was involved in making sexual advances to a married woman and how he was removed from the project site and the

community to resolve the conflict with her spouse). In this way, community efforts to evolved safety valves and mechanisms to minimise conflicts enhanced harmonious relationship between project staff and community members in the process of project execution.

Given the commission’s understanding of the aforementioned context, it vigorously pursues the policy and practice of developing local capacity and participation, by engaging local contractors as project partners for capacity-building and community empowerment. This is done essentially with principles to underscore a strong sense of participation and ownership, through a conflict-sensitive approach that guarantees proactive risk mitigation against project failure, insecurity and sabotage. However, from field observation, the commission appears not to take responsibility for community relations in project implementation, as the contracting policy implicitly states that contractors are responsible for their own community relations. In this context, various principles guide the execution of projects to ensure that the core values and benefits of interventions are maintained without creating new conflicts or escalating existing ones. The principles were derived from taking cognizance of the sensitive context and environment. It is obvious that these principles are not new to participatory development and effective peacebuilding practices, but provide dialogical space, inclusive of all views and strategic engagement with a wider set of people and stakeholders.

**8. Motivation to Join Militant Groups / Taking - up Arms**

Militant and violent youth activities in the Niger Delta arose from feelings of deprivation, inequality and inability to take advantage of employment and contract opportunities in the oil industry as host communities. Current thinking about militant and youth interference in development project implementation, in the Niger Delta region, underscores a criminal disposition. Arguably, the motivation to join armed/ militant groups is not to challenge marginalisation but an opportunity to access personal economic benefits through gang criminality. Therefore, the assumption here is that youths are attracted to enlisting as militants because of criminal financial gains, especially through coercion and intimidation of contractors of development projects in their locality. The iteration of youth interference and violent attacks on development projects create insecurity and apprehension for project partners, while also negatively affecting the intervention to improve the woefully-inadequate development infrastructure, as they often result in work stoppage.

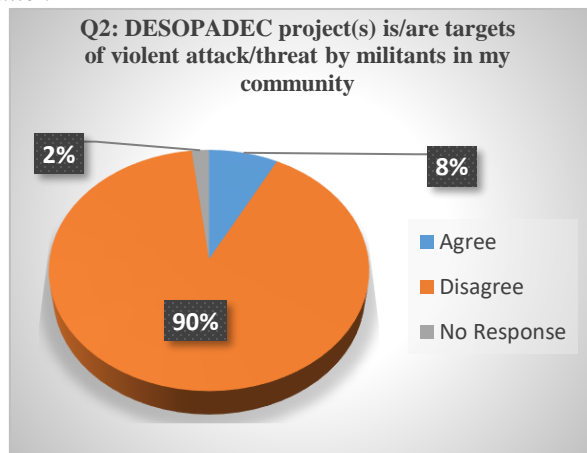
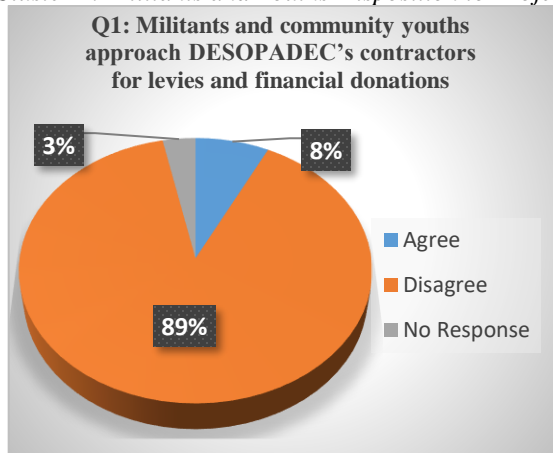
A common knowledge and orientation in the Niger Delta is that contractors working on any community development project should pay some kind of community administration levies (known as deve) to the community and the youth or militant leadership. Arising from any breach of this orientation, to pay prescribed community administration levies by any contractor, could lead to violent interference, disruption of operations and outright work stoppage. Field observation shows that the commission's project partners are responsible for their community relations. It is against this background that three survey questions, in addition to other instruments, were used to elicit lived experiences on how militant and community youths' interference in the execution of

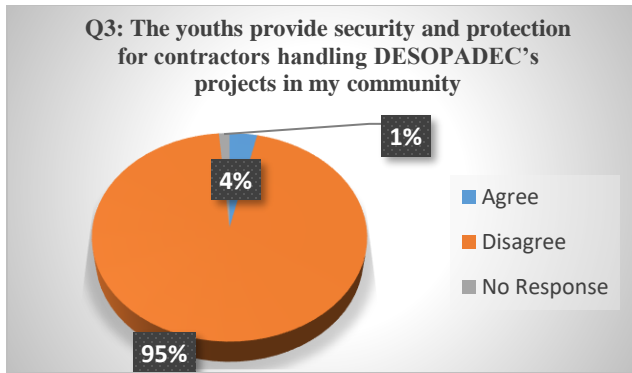
projects feeds into the insecurity in Gbaramatu Kingdom, as presented in Cluster 4.

Responses to the questions showed a level of consistency in the assessment of youths and militants' interference in project execution. The negative effects of youth interference were marked by more of "agree and strongly agree" responses to questions 1 and 2. Expectedly, the "agree" responses to questions 1 and 2 (10% and 4% respectively) reflected the negative responses. This is due to interference, intimidation and extortion by militant/youth groups, targeted at contractors of development interventions. Conversely, the preponderance of the "disagree and strongly disagree" responses to questions 1 and 2 (89% and 94.4% respectively) reflected the positive disposition of youth/ militant elements to development interventions in Gbaramatu. Unlike the trend in other communities, the data shows that militants and youth groups had neither interfered with project execution nor had there been any incident of attack on contractors, irrespective of the donor organization.

The data suggests a positive communal disposition to attract, encourage and support infrastructural development to improve Gbaramatu communities. This could also be attributed to the pervasive conflict fatigue on the part of the community. However, it is imperative to point out that, from field observation, the only recorded case where the community did not support a development project, of 350 housing units, by the Delta State government after the military invasion of 2009, was in Okerenkoko community. The project was rejected and stopped on account of wrong housing models for a coastal community. The contractors used wood instead of a more durable brick or block walls.

*Cluster 4: Militants and Youths Disposition to Project Execution*





Source: Fieldwork.

The general view obtained from key informant interviews supports the data presented above. According to Apostle Haggai Maware (JP), community leader and spiritual head of Okerenkoko Zion, “the elders have often counselled the youths that any project that is coming into the community is for the benefit of all, therefore, they should, rather, assist the contractors and not cause any harm or disturb the contractors” (Oral interview, 2014). Evidently, the tendency for communities to support infrastructural development is reflected in the positive response to the last question in the cluster (86%). This is predicated on the desire for rapid infrastructural development. Therefore, the communities are poised to support any contractor or donor agency (not limited to DESOPADEC). To this end, the youths, as vanguards of security, are saddled with the security task of protecting the staff and the equipment of contractors. Less than 13% of respondents disagreed that youths provided security for contractors. This response could be ascribed to the fact that youths have often been responsible for breaching peace, stealing, and acts of mindless vandalism.

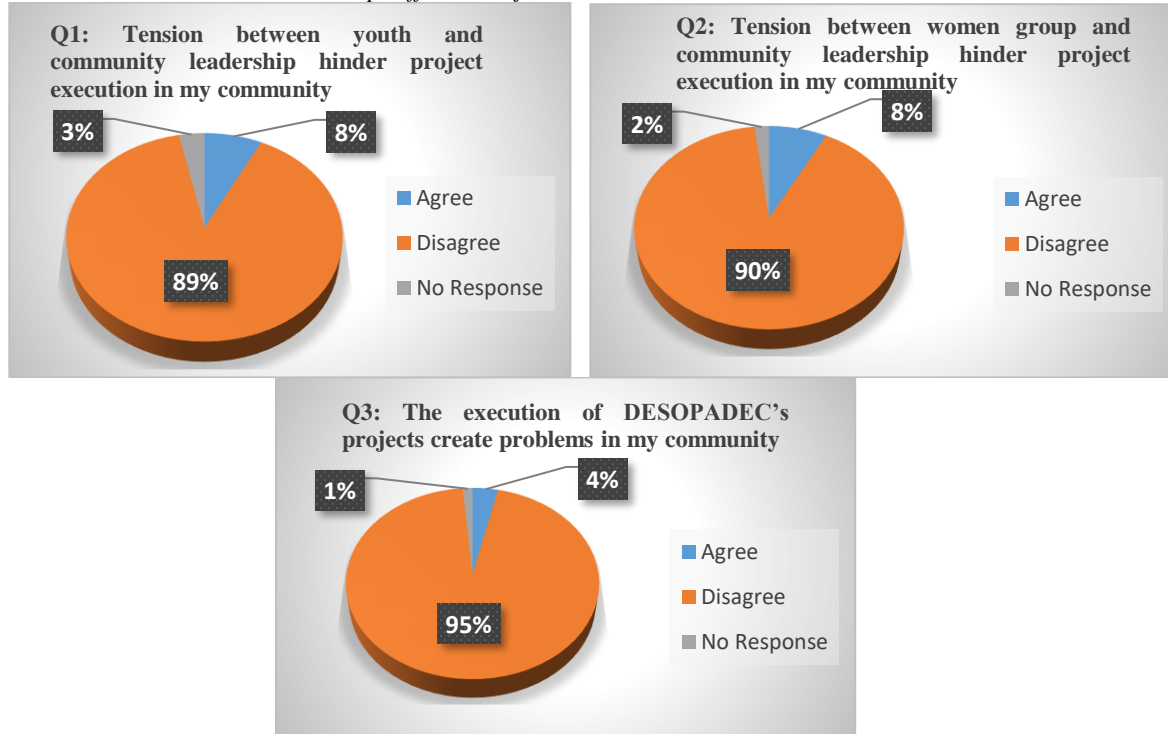
Responses to the questions in this cluster shows a level of cooperation and support for contractors handling projects in Gbaramatu communities, irrespective of the donor agency. The aggregate responses in the cluster show that 33.3% agreed, 65.4% disagreed, while 1.2% of the respondents were silent on the questions. The data suggest that Gbaramatu is atypical and the finding is not consistent with the pre-field assumption. This is because elsewhere in the Niger Delta, militants and violent youth groups use force to extort money from contractors to fund their activities. Furthermore, the study observed that the impact of the Federal Government’s twin interventions; namely, the presidential amnesty programme’s training and skill acquisition for ex-militants at home and abroad, and the oil pipeline surveillance contract to ex- militant leaders, had significantly contributed to the prevailing situation in Gbaramatu.

### 9. Division in the Community along Subgroups

A prevalent view of community leadership, in the conflict history of the Niger Delta region, is that individuals and groups have used community platforms to further personal agenda, at the expense of community interests where poverty and inequality are visible indices. This transactional community leadership tendency is the pivot on which distrust between members and community leaders, and youth violent behaviour revolves. This reality has continued to create conflict and problems in communities among subgroups (youths, women and elders) as well as engendered leadership tussle. The implicit assumption here, therefore, is that community leadership undermines the interest of other subgroups in the execution of DESOPADEC’s projects. This explicitly provides insights into the drivers of certain conflicts in the community.

Two critical subgroups – the youths and women’s groups in Gbaramatu communities were used to conceptualise how relations between subgroups and community leaders can hinder a development process. The youths constitute about 62.1% of the population in the Niger Delta (UNDP, 2006). They are full of energy and at the vanguard of security and community defence. The myriad of challenges confronting the youths are responsible for social disintegration and perhaps the attraction to join militant groups, as a means of survival. The womenfolk, though demographically computed to be 46%, is less than the male population of 54% (NDRMP, 2006), but they constitute a critical segment of the society. Women in Gbaramatu have been victims of ethnic conflicts and militant resistance struggle. The combination of Q1, Q2 and Q3 are intended, therefore, to analyse the vulnerability of different groups.

**Cluster 5: How Tension between Groups Affected Project Execution**



Source: Fieldwork

In the responses to the first question in the cluster, 7.3% of the respondents agreed that existing tension between youths and community leaders hindered the execution of projects in their community, whereas 89.2% disagreed. While a significant 3.2% declined response. Similarly, 7.6% agreed while 90.3% disagreed that tension between women and community leaders hindered project execution, and 1.9% did not attend to the question. Responses to the last question show that 3.3% agreed, 95% disagreed that project execution created problems, and only 1.3% were silent on the question. The data suggests that majority of the respondents (90%), in response to questions 1 and 2, believed that there was no tension between community leaders and youth/women groups that hindered the execution of DESOPADEC's projects. Only about 10%, in response to questions 1 and 2, contended that the execution of projects was hindered by tension between community leaders and youth/women. Their responses also depict that there were contentious issues but might not be significant enough to hinder the development process. The response to the third question further supports the response to questions 1 and 2 in the cluster.

The aggregate responses in the cluster show that 6% agreed, 92% disagreed while 2% were silent on the questions on tension between subgroups. The absence of tension between subgroups could be attributed to

two reasons. First, it was a popular belief that every development project implemented was for the common good of the community and it was incumbent on every member to support it. Second, the fulfilment of mandatory community relations and engagement obligation, by the contractor to every subgroup (community leaders, youths, women and the elderly), engendered trust. As Wariya Goodness Fany (Former Chairman, Gbaramatu Community Development Committee) noted:

Contractors must engage the women, youth groups and elders in the community just to abreast them with the fact that this kind of project is coming to the community with some little token to let them know that certain benefits are coming to the community. There are things (token) usually spelt out for the women, youths and elders of the community. So I don't think DESOPADEC projects have in any way caused disunity or disharmony in the area (Oral interview, 2015).

Evidently, the reduction of conflict dynamics in development interventions in conflict zones is a combination of factors including organizational policy and practice and commitment of all stakeholders in overcoming socio-economic and cultural barriers. In this context, the policy and practice of DESOPADEC and the community codes of Gbaramatu must seek to

locate and create opportunities to change conditions from which conflict dynamics emerge.

## 10. Conclusion

Infrastructural deficit and the socio-economic exclusion of oil-bearing communities from ‘mainstream development’” (*Niger Delta Human Development Report*, 2006:6) poses serious threat to sustainable peace in Nigeria’s Niger Delta region, accentuating the debate on the linkages between conflict and underdevelopment. The living conditions and visible alienation from socio-economic activities in the oil and gas industry in the region is germane to the culture of violent conflict. Notwithstanding, economic development and improvement, in terms of human capital and social infrastructure can be a major marker in assuaging the almost entrenched culture of violence that has emerged from underdevelopment, marginalisation and exclusionist tendencies. Within the context of causal – effects of the entrenched culture of violent conflicts in the Niger Delta, development and peacebuilding become symbiotic. This is because the development of the region, within peacebuilding paradigms, is capable, in a more appropriate way, of addressing the core causes of the conflict.

This study attempted a systematic assessment of the impact of DESOPADEC’s development projects on conflict dynamics against the backdrop of issues confronting development practice in the Niger Delta region. The patterns and potentials of development interventions in the Niger Delta have almost always manifested some inherent challenges and problems. While conflict-generating properties and factors such as violence, tension and insecurity may appear physical and tangible, peace-generating factors are abstract in nature. Arising from the research findings, indicators that were primarily designed to define the conflict impact of development interventions, turned out to be useful in explaining the intensification of peacebuilding impact in Gbaramatu communities as well.

Most DESOPADEC projects, like many other projects in the region, are not preceded by Peace and Conflict Impact Assessment (PCIA), unlike the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA), Social Impact Assessment (SIA), Cost-Benefit Analysis (CBA) and Social Cost-Benefit Analysis (SCBA). Consequently, the negative impacts of major projects on the environment and lives of the people are hardly taken into account. Yet, such negative impacts constitute additional elements of gross underdevelopment, poverty, ecological degradation and disempowerment, which resonate with relative deprivation - a precursor to conflict.

Although, the findings of this study suggest context specific lessons, they can alter the conflict dynamics of development interventions in the region. Therefore, this study concludes that development interventionists should adopt strategies that are based on localised decision-making.

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