

Mainstreaming Local Turn: Bringing the Niger Delta Development Commission into the Local Turn in Peacebuilding

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Abstract

The Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) is a locally conceptualized peace-building initiative to address the root causes of conflict and armed violence in the Niger Delta region. Extant literature on the Niger Delta conflict identified the inalienable responsibility of government to the development of the region but there appears to be limited studies on mainstreaming local turn in development governance and peace-building initiatives in the region. This article examines the core principles of local turn in peace-building and the paradox of development governance that precipitate a detour to neutralise its potency. This study adopted a qualitative research method utilizing the semi-structured interview approach. A purposive sampling method was used for selecting 29 participants which included contractors, consultants, community leaders, youths, ex-militants and officials of the commission. The study found that the use of local actors, resources, and processes enhance community participation and ownership in NDDC development and peace-building initiatives. The study contemplates the incongruence in development governance exemplified by government's preference for political gladiators to local actors. The article, therefore, concludes that the adoption of the core principles of local turn in peace-building would accentuate sustainable development and address militancy and violent community conflicts.

Key words: Development, Peace-building, Local Turn, Niger Delta Development Commission, Hybrid.

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INTRODUCTION

The literature on the Niger Delta is expansive as a result of oil exploration of crude oil, perceived exploitation of local communities, environmental degradation, micro-level conflagrations, and human rights issues. While it is a complicated scenario, extant literature exists on the Niger Delta question of what, why and how. The various debates identified a collocation of issues and theses which include corruption, class struggle, resource control, marginalization and frustration among local communities, failed state, bad governance, lousy constitution, improper practice, federalism, human security and related issues as conflict drivers in the Niger Delta. Ostensibly, there is an ever-expanding consensus among scholars, activists, and practitioners that development is a potent strategy to address the root causes, conditions, and most knotty issues associated with the Niger Delta conflict.

There is a strong consensus among scholars and analysts that the Federal Government has been at the epicentre of the Niger Delta conflict, either from its rent-seeking interest (Omeje, 2006, 211), mobilising state security apparatus to use force to quell violent protest, to the constitutional responsibility of developing the region. Also,

scholars and activists on the Niger Delta question have ceaselessly and seamlessly pursued the argument that socioeconomic development and environmental protection of the region is a potent and uncompromising factor in building sustainable peace in the region (Jarikre, 2016). Accordingly, they contend that this is only a moral stimulus for the Niger Delta militants to abdicate environmental criminality and threat to national security (Nwanolue, Osegbue and Iwuoha, 2013, 41). Thus, the government cannot be alienated from restoring law and order, conflict resolution processes and, ultimately, peacebuilding in the region.

The Niger Delta is an oft-cited example of the correlation between development-conflict trap and resource struggle in which non-state groups - community youths and ethnic militias use armed violence to confront issues of injustice and socioeconomic exclusion. One significant strategy to resolve the development-conflict trap and resource struggle is establishing state-owned institutions to address conflict drivers, essentially the social infrastructure deficit. Much has been written about the state agencies and peacebuilding in the Niger Delta (Omotola 2007; Ibaba 2012; Okolo 2014; Isidiho and Sabran

2015; Ebeku 2020; Saka, Moh'd Sani & Omede 2021), and a plethora of studies have raised strong reservation on the effectiveness and de-participatory approach and alienation of communities by state institutions of liberal peace (Ibeanu 2008; Akinwale et al. 2009; Aghalino, 2012; Jarikre 2016). This is not the case with the local turn in the development and peacebuilding framework. Therefore, this article explores the role of local agencies in the conceptualisation of peace and development to provide fresh insights into the debate on local turn in peacebuilding initiatives and to mirror the paradox of development governance in the Niger Delta. The normative narration of local turn as elucidated by Mac Ginty and Richmond (2013) underscores reactions against international policy makers to decide what is to be done about a specific conflict without sufficient local representation. However, this article is not intended to turn the state intervention into a context of global politics as the Niger Delta is a domestic context. Instead, it is about scoping the functionality of the principles of local turn necessary for understanding the activities of state institution within the broad and narrow definitions of international architecture of peacebuilding. In this way, the strategic significance of local turn within the domestic context brings state agency along the guiding principles of local turn, which Mac Ginty and Richmond (2013) identified as the stumbling of liberal peace.

This article contributes to the growing discussion on local turn in peacebuilding by interrogating state institutions within the concept of liberal peacebuilding. It pays critical attention to the nexus between development and peacebuilding initiatives within the context of the mandate, programmes, and projects of the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC, after now). It identifies it as a hybrid peacebuilding initiative based on the overwhelming local involvement and addresses issues of development as root causes and drivers of militancy and violent community conflicts in the region. The broad objective of this study is to mainstream the core principles of local turn in peacebuilding. The specific objectives include: to examine the core principles of local turn in peacebuilding; explore the key concepts and principles that underpin the local turn approach in peacebuilding with a focus on its application in the Niger Delta context; investigate the paradox of development governance in the Niger Delta; analyze the contradictions and challenges that arise from the intersection of development governance and peacebuilding initiatives in the Niger Delta; and, to identify the factors that precipitate a detour from the local turn in peacebuilding. This study also examined the factors that hinder the effective implementation of local turn principles in peacebuilding initiatives in the Niger Delta, and how these factors contribute to the neutralization of its potential.

This article focuses on precisely what NDDC should do to buy or build peace and continue to be relevant in the development-peacebuilding framework in the Niger Delta. The first part of the article provides a synoptic overview of Nigeria's Niger Delta. It is followed by a conceptual discourse of local turn in peacebuilding and closely followed by a theoretical framework. It then outlines the methodology and discusses the core principles of local turn in peacebuilding in the NDDC along a taxonomy of factors that precipitate a detour to neutralise the significance of local turn in peacebuilding within the context of NDDC.

Background of the Study

The Niger Delta is a distinct wetland ecological zone consisting of drier interior deltaic plains to the shoreline, moist lowland rain forests, freshwater swamp forests, mangrove forests and swamps, as well as tidal marshes and flats along the estuaries and shorelines. The Niger Delta is reputedly Africa's most prominent and the world's third most extensive mangrove forest, as well as the highest concentration of biodiversity in Nigeria. The region defined by its environmental, cultural, and political components is richly endowed with hydrocarbon deposits,

accounting for substantial crude oil extraction and exploration activities estimated to earn the nation over 90 per cent of its exports (Omoweh, 2011). In spite of the abundant resources found in the region, including the nation's oil wealth, the area represents extreme poverty and underdevelopment (Ibaba, 2005, 3). Paradoxically, "the oil wealth which has fuelled development elsewhere in Nigeria has had little effects on the peasants of this area" (Okonmah, 1997, 57). The reality of these structural problems have engendered a "sense of relative deprivation and marginalisation and "extreme poverty" (Ibeanu, 2002, 163) due to decades of environmental degradation, poverty amid plenty, economic underdevelopment and political marginalization.

The vulnerability of the Niger Delta region is exacerbated by increasing human-induced environmental degradation due to oil spillages and gas flaring (Ighedosa, 2020). Evidently, crude oil exploration activities have not only had detrimental impacts on the environment, atmosphere, soils, marine environment, and terrestrial ecosystems but also on the livelihood of the people (Ite et al., 2013). Consequently, different groups began to emerge to genuinely agitate for environmental remediation, poverty alleviation, social infrastructural development, and resource control. Since then, the murky unrest has become a major insurgency (Asuni, 2009). In the words of Augustine Ikelegbe, "the Niger Delta is embroiled in resistance against the Nigerian state and the multinational oil companies, and that the region is generally restive, with pockets of insurrection and armed rebellion" (Ikelegbe, 2005, 210).

Critical stakeholders in the region such as governments, multinational oil companies, international donor organizations and civil society organisations, have continued to calibrate and implement policies, strategies and programmes to address the impact of crude oil exploration and mitigate youth restiveness and militancy in the region (Benson, 2020). For instance, the Presidential Amnesty Programme (PAP) - a three-prong programme of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of ex militants ((Ajayi & Nwogwugwu, 2014; Jarikre, 2017), multinational oil and gas corporations' corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives on social infrastructural and human capital development (Uduji et al., 2020; Edefejrhaye & Alao, 2019) and the NDDC, established in 2000 to address the challenges of underdevelopment in the Niger Delta (Oriakh 2021). Civil Society Organisations (CSO) have also played a significant role in post-conflict peacebuilding in the Niger Delta (Popoola, 2020). The roles of the aforementioned agencies, CSR and CSO in community development and post-conflict initiatives in Niger Delta have been crucial, despite the challenges posed by peacebuilding efforts.

The NDDC was established to address the challenges hindering the growth of the Niger Delta (Oriakh 2021). The Commission was created to function as an agent for economic, social, and infrastructural empowerment and development in the region (Okere & Osemeke, 2020). The establishment of the NDDC was part of a series of interventionist bodies created by the federal government, including the Niger Delta Development Board (NDDB) and the Oil Minerals Producing and Development Commission (OMPADEC) (Ubiebi & Ogbonna, 2021; Jarikre, 2021b). These initiatives were aimed at providing rapid socioeconomic and physical development in the oil-producing areas of the Niger Delta (Makpor & Leite, 2016). However, the effectiveness of the NDDC in achieving its objectives has been scrutinised (Ebeku, 2020). Civil Society Organisations have also played a significant role in post-conflict reintegration and peacebuilding in the Niger Delta (Popoola, 2020). Their roles in the post-conflict reintegration of the Niger Delta have been crucial, despite the challenges posed by peacebuilding efforts (Popoola, 2020).

The NDDC is ostensibly an excellent case study of government interventions to address the socio-political and economic injustices as well as the culture of violence. Part of the strategy's significance lies in the NDDC and its consensus on its development mandate. The

NDDC is one good case study of the local turn in the nexus between development and peacebuilding in Nigeria. Undoubtedly, the story and analysis of local turn in peacebuilding in the Niger Delta begins with the NDDC. The NDDC is a government interventionist institution responsible for delivering development projects for the physical transformation and human capital development of the Niger Delta. The Commission was not set up to resolve violent conflict as a conflict resolution and management agency but as a social institution that underscores a political solution to address the underlying source of violent conflicts in the Niger Delta. In this way, the NDDC is a positive hybrid peace (Richmond 2015; Simangan 2018, 196) when, essentially, it addresses human security. Ostensibly, it will bring opportunities for community development and micro-economic growth with a new workforce (direct and indirect employment). Expectedly, as Schirch (2018) observed, the economic impact brings about positive social change. In this sense, it will not be an overstatement to say that development activities in the Niger Delta, like elsewhere, have been more than traditional peacebuilding intervention.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Peacebuilding as a concept has continued to stimulate dynamic and multidimensional global exercises with various tasks involving diverse instruments and actors (Jarikre, 2021a, 150). Paradoxically, fourteen years after the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) adopted the term in its February 2001 review, the UN "continues to call its agenda item as "post-conflict peacebuilding" (UN 2015, 17) to include a broad spectrum of programmes and mechanisms to prevent the recurrence or the continuation of armed conflict. More importantly, report of the comprehensive review of the UN peacebuilding architecture concluded among others things that, "building peace can only take place on the ground, and can only ultimately be driven by domestic stakeholders" (UN, 2015, 15, 24 -25). The conceptualization of domestic stakeholders reflects the local turn's broader concern for indigenous actors and resource. Hence, the attempt to reform international peacebuilding with the conceptualization of perpetual peacebuilding paradigm (Thania Paffenholz (2022, 367). Scholars drawing from the seminal conception of peacebuilding as dynamic and non-linear (Lederach, 2005) began to acknowledge the weaknesses of liberal peace theory and its inability to reflect reality beyond the linearity (De Coning 2018; Hirblinger et al. 2019; Randazzo 2021).

Nevertheless, the centrality in the practice of peacebuilding is a lot more liberal with theoretical underpinning based on liberal peace. The liberal peacebuilding model emerged out of liberal democracy and market-oriented economy after the Cold War ended (Paris, 2010; Simangan 2017). The assumption was that sustainable peace and development can only be achieved through liberal democratic institutions and market-oriented policy (Russet 1996; Richmond and Mac Ginty, 2013; Joshi, Lee and Mac Ginty 2014; Simangan 2017). In this way, the framing of international peacebuilding resonates international dimensions and actors. As Paris (2010) described it as a form of "Western or liberal imperialism" (p337). In order to further buttress the imperialist angle of liberal peacebuilding, FitzGerald (2023) states that liberal peace ignores local conditions, knowledge, and histories, seeking instead to establish economic dependency on colonial centres. While Mac Ginty (2008) aver that liberal peace processes often foreclose spaces for indigenous or traditional alternatives (Mac Ginty 2008, 156). Framing resistance against liberal peacebuilding, Richmond and Mac Ginty (2008, 143) argued that liberal strategies are alien to the local reality because they are often designed with an unrealistic foreign vision in foreign atmosphere without the realistic local world view. While rejecting the liberal peacebuilding, it is imperative to understand that the broader experiences from prevailing conditions appears to support hybrid peacebuilding. Hybridity is the amalgamation of local and liberal practices in peacebuilding.

Like hybridity itself, hybrid peacebuilding is the ontological engagement of local and international knowledge, capacity and potential to create social structures that can strengthen conflict-affected communities. Hybrid peacebuilding "seeks to address the lack of attention to the local context, and the failure of liberal peacebuilding in a situation where the aid-recipient state is strong enough to deny intrusive outside intervention for state-building" (Uesugi, Deekeling, and Ingstedt, 2021, 25).

Basically, the local turn sought to reorient the theory and practice of peacebuilding away from top/down international interventions to prioritise the aspirations, capabilities and resources of local actors as essential ingredients to sustaining peace in conflict-affected societies (Hughes, Ojendal, and Schierenbeck, 2015).

The conceptualization of local turn reflects the importance of local actors, local agencies and local infrastructure and the broader concern of how they shape peacebuilding and peace formation. Wolff (2022) premised the local turn in peacebuilding practice and study on "local voices", "local agency" or "local ownership" (Wolff, 2022, 5). The local voices, agency and ownership are not mere aggregate concepts but resources that had to be "locally developed for peace to hold" (Richmond and Mac Ginty, 2015, 177). The point to note here is that the locally generated projects are not only comparatively cheaper but also involve the empowerment of local actors and local resource usage, which are germane to a long-term commitment to peace (Mac Ginty, 2008). This line of argument is further buttressed by (Ghunta, 2020) who made the point that contemporary peacebuilding projects are most effective when localized.

Empirically, some scholars dispute the negative outcomes that are associated with local turn on the ground that local turn in peacebuilding may not always produce peaceful outcomes and cannot be predicted (Björkdahl et al 2016; Thania 2022). A plethora of scholarly works demonstrate how local turn in peacebuilding risks undermining the tenets of sustaining peace. For instance, Uesugi, Deekeling, and Ingstedt (2023) warned against such dangers essentially when specific values and critical components of peace may appear "unnoticed or unconceived by local actors due to different cognitive frameworks and world views they hold" (p.26). Similarly, Wallis et al. (2018) cautioned against the risk of magnifying the local and downplaying significant power differentials at the local level. For Ferreira and Richmond (2021, 2, 4), criminal governance by local agencies and local actors undermines the processes of peace formation and efforts towards peacebuilding by pushing the state away from citizens because of conflict of interest. Overtly, there is profound linkages between corruption and criminal governance in development governance and peacebuilding intervention in the Niger Delta. As Jarikre (2016) observed, development initiatives of interventionist agencies create and exacerbate conflict through the character of appropriation and implementation, which also "relates to the people's disposition to corruption and the in-between-conjectures" (p, 91). The challenge that the inevitable disposition that forces to the fore of local turn in peacebuilding is not basically about how to overcome the negative manifestation of cognitive framework or world view, but rather how to properly integrate aspects of local turn in peacebuilding into development interventions for perpetual peacebuilding.

Theoretical Approach

The theory of participation is germane to local turn in peacebuilding and intrinsic to development governance (Radtko, Holstenkamp, Barnes, & Renn, 2018). Participation is as the de facto form of engagement in local turn in development and peacebuilding. As Vesga & Mejia (2025) noted, peacebuilding needs broad social participation and empowerment of people. The infrastructure for building peace require socio-economic and socio-cultural resources (Vesga & Mejia, 2025). Socio-cultural resources refers to people and their diverse cultural traditions, which

are fundamental to peacebuilding. The theoretical significance of participation theory in this study underscore the adoption of strategies that consider local conditions and actors in peacebuilding processes. The literature on the evolution of theory of participation is unclear but there is some evidence that Rousseau might be called the theorist par excellence of participation in relation to political participation. The theory of participation as is commonly used in the humanities and social sciences involves taking part in an activity either as individual or group. In spite of its positive meaning, scholars have continued to argue on the participatory procedures and how exclusion undermine peacebuilding outcomes (Ikelegbe & Umukoro, 2016). However, the theoretical discussion of this study considers local conditions and actors in peacebuilding processes to explain the concept of bottom – top, active participation and empowerment of local actors

METHODOLOGY

The study employed a qualitative research method utilizing the semi-structured interview approach. The approach is intended to provide an interpretive explanation for a clearer understanding of the realities of local turn in peacebuilding within the context of NDDC interventions in the Niger Delta. The choice of qualitative research methods was predicated on gathering data from critical stakeholders such as NDDC officials, contractors and consultants, community leaders, women and youth groups leaders who understand the issues of the region. A purposive sampling method was used for selecting interviewees in the three core Niger Delta states (Bayelsa, Delta and Rivers State) on the basis of their relevance to the research objective. This sample size though not pre-determined comprises of 29 key informant interviews with contractors and consultants, community and youth leaders, ex-militants and official of the commission. The interviews are part of a broad range of continuous fieldwork since 2014, as the author was a research assistant to the Delta State Technical Committee on the Niger Delta and team member of a study group that conducted a peace and conflict impact assessment of some state-owned intervention agencies in the Niger Delta. A significant amount of data for this paper was generated from my discussions and interviews with relevant stakeholders at the stakeholders' summits. The stakeholders' summit organized by the NDDC on 12 and 13 July, 2024, provided a platform for dialogue and constructive engagement with critical stakeholders. Essentially, the stakeholder engagements availed the study insights into NDDC's peacebuilding initiatives. Both primary and secondary data were used in the article, the secondary data were used to supplement qualitative data. The article used to thematic and complement with content analysis of official documents such as NDDC Act 2000, Niger Delta Regional Development Master Plan (NDRDMP), and literature reviewed.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The Core Principles of Local Turn

Framing the strategic significance of NDDC development intervention as peacebuilding initiative within the broad and narrow domestic context attempts to explain the functionality of the principles of local turn in peacebuilding. Drawing from the qualitative data and literature, a discursive framing of the development intervention, activities and functionality of NDDC sought to bring the commission within the development framework, theory, and practice of local turn in peacebuilding. Some of the principles discussed include: utilisation of local actors, use of local content / resource, bottom – top approach, and inclusive multi-dimensional stakeholders' participation.

Utilisation of Local Actors

Using local contractors as NDDC project partners in development intervention is an intentional and strategic policy option. According to an NDDC official, "it is a policy issue contained in the operational guideline to always award project to indigenous local contractors but not necessarily community contractor who may not have requisite capacity and expertise" (field interview, 2024). It is designed to guarantee investment and empowerment, strengthen local skills, knowledge and expertise of individuals, and community member organisations. NDDC engagement of local contractors underline inclusive and locally-led development wherein the project contracting and service delivery process engenders a sense of ownership. According to NDDC officials, the engagement of local actors with the requisite capacity and technical expertise as project partners is sacrosanct. Nonetheless, it would be rather inappropriate not to mention the assertions of some participants who aver that avoidable danger of failure and abandoned project have occurred from engaging incompetent community contractors because of operationalising 'local actor'. Scholarly literature supports these findings. Previous studies such as MacGinty (2008), Uesugi, Deekeling, and Ingstedt, (2021), Hughes, Ojendal, and Schierenbeck (2015), and Wolff (2022) have consistently premised the local turn in peacebuilding practice and study on local actors, resources and ownership for locally-led solutions.

Use of Local Content and Resource

NDDC operation is overwhelmingly rooted in local content with a particular focus on the empowerment of the indigenous people and communities of the Niger Delta. There is an overwhelming consensus among participants and key stakeholders that the value chain of NDDC infrastructure development, especially the provision of manpower and supply of construction material is preponderantly a local resource. As an example, according to a community leader, "many community members had economic benefits in form of income generation through job creation and supply of sand and other construction materials" (field interview, 2024). In this way, the local content component of the development projects and human capacity development programmes are designed to crystallise community participation and local ownership as peacebuilding initiatives. Richmond and Mac Ginty (2008) underlined the significance of local content when they observed that "local resource usage leads to a long-term commitment to peace" (pp 143). It is a Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN) response to the youth restiveness, agitation, host community violence against multinational oil and gas corporations and armed struggle against state security forces, providing a sufficient window for local citizens' participation in the development and peacebuilding process.

Bottom – Top Approach

The operational guidelines of the NDDC, as it were, stipulate adopting a 'bottom-top' approach, community relations, conducting community and regional need assessment, local empowerment, and community ownership of infrastructure development. These are essential determinants of positive hybrid and local turn in peacebuilding. Arising from field interviews and interactions, respondents claimed that contrary to the operational guidelines, in practice, NDDC development projects are imposed on communities because they have never been consulted or a need assessment conducted in their community before infrastructure development. A respondent cited an instance whereby the dire need of his community is provision of potable water but because they were not consulted NDDC built a skill acquisition centre. According to him, although skill acquisition is economically desirable for youth empowerment and self-reliance, the community would have preferred provision of borehole water project to overcome the challenges of potable water (Field interview, 2024).

The operational guidelines prioritise the processes of appropriation and implementation, such that projects are defined or determined by the people or community context through needs assessment with specificity of benefiting community. In this way, development projects that have the buy-in of community members often underscore socioeconomic relevance and sustainability through community ownership. The findings is in line with Hughes, Ojendal, & Schierenbeck (2015) emphasis that peace is built on best cultural practices that underscore prioritising the principle of a 'bottom-top' in sustaining peace in conflict-affected societies. Adopting a similar perspective, Leonardsson & Rudd (2015), Hughes, Ojendal, & Schierenbeck (2015), Uesugi, Deekeling, & Ingstedt, (2021), and Gamboa-Vesga & Quijano-Mejía (2025) highlighted that bottom-top approach like local capacity building and local resource are of great relevance to the local turn in peacebuilding.

Inclusive Multi-dimensional Stakeholders' Participation:

The hybridity concept of peacebuilding suggests a strategic model that combines local and international capacities (Richard and Mac Ginty, 2014). The International Oil Companies (IOCs) operating in the region are major partners in funding of NDDC. As an example, Section 14 (2), (b) of the NDDC Act of 2000 provides that IOCs operating in the region shall contribute 3% of their annual onshore and offshore operations to fund the NDDC. Section 14 (2), (d) and (e) also mandate the Commission to seek money as grants-in-aid from any other body or institution, whether local or foreign. Implicitly, through a wide-range of funding, the NDDC Act of 2000 fosters inclusive multi-dimensional stakeholders' participation in developing sustainable social infrastructure in susceptible oil-bearing communities to prevent resource-related conflicts and armed struggle. Furthermore, the Niger Delta Regional Development Master Plan (NDRDMP) designed by GTZ, a German-led consortium, suggests international collaboration. It is a strategic road map like the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) sponsored Nicosia Master Plan (NMP) of 1979 to accelerate development and transform the Niger Delta into a peaceful region (Jarikre, 2016).

Neutralising the significance of Local Turn

The dire absence of coordination of development-peacebuilding initiatives in the Niger Delta underscores the lack of political will to frontally address the infrastructure deficit and the protracted agitation and armed struggle. Jarikre (2021b), in his screening of the risk factors implicated in development governance, observed that such risk factors have consistently weakened the institutional capacity of development interventionist agencies to deliver its context-specific mandate of development for sustainable peace in oil-producing communities of the Niger Delta region. Understanding the risk factors in practice underscores criminal governance, which, in the view of Ferreira and Richmond (2021, 2, 4), "undermines the processes of peace formation and efforts towards peacebuilding". Collectively, this section will examine several evidential presumptions that undermine the local turn, specifically:

- i. Top-down approach - Project Imposition
- ii. Undue Political Influence
- iii. Red tape and bureaucracy
- iv. Corruption

First, 'top-down' approach leads to project imposition on communities and people. The practice negates the objectives of peacebuilding, whereby "consultation, constructive engagement and deliberative dialogue, inclusive of all views are essential to accurately understanding the sources of violence and addressing them" (Lederach, 2018, 242). In theory, NDDC operational guidelines provide that a need assessment should be conducted to determine community needs, but in practice, the Commission has almost always moved away from a 'bottom-top' approach to project delivery. Consequently, as the author observed elsewhere, development intervention has undermined not only peacebuilding measures in the Niger Delta region but also the

micro and macro (economic) outlook of national and human security objectives (Jarikre, 2021b).

Second, as mentioned earlier, the NDDC is a government response to agitations and armed conflicts with concrete human needs. This explains why political gladiators in the region and even beyond have almost always subjected the activities of the Commission under their strict political influence (Jarikre, 2021b). As a case in point, the funding of the Commission and appointment of management team is the prerogative of the executive arm of government but the process is political, lacking professional consideration. While, the legislature (both the House of Representatives and Senate), is responsible for the approval of the Commission's budget estimates and other oversight functions. The Senate, is specifically mandated to screen the nominated management team submitted for appointment by the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. In this way, the NDDC is susceptible to undue political influence and manipulation in terms of project choice, location and contract award.

Third, the bloated staff and bureaucratic red tape of NDDC as an interventionist agency reflects a mixed impact. This is because the large number of employees including political appointees on its recurrent expenditure, though underscore its desire to address unemployment and living standards, affects capital expenditure on infrastructure development. In fact, according to Jarikre (2021), "an interventionist agency should not indulge in the sort of bureaucracy associated with the civil service, a practice that is lacking in flexibility as well as sound administrative and financial systems with rigorous expenditure planning" (p 149). Suffice it that the bloated personnel overhead cost is not a tenable option to infrastructure delivery.

Fourth, corruption as a governance issue is antithetical to development (UNDP 2008). The study drawing data from audit reports, administrative actions and convictions by courts of competent jurisdiction surmised that the "NDDC is not just a victim but a part-and-parcel of Nigeria's intractable problem of corruption, involving contract inflation, contract splitting, non-contract performance, fraud and misappropriation of funds" (Jarikre, 2017a, 84). According to a forensic audit report, the NDDC received approximately six trillion naira between 2001 and 2019. These monies were spread across 362 bank accounts without proper reconciliation of accounts, and there are over 13,777 projects, of which the execution is substantially compromised (Mallami, 2022). Similarly, the then Acting President of the Federal republic of Nigeria, Professor Yemi Osinbajo, in 2017 alleged that only 12 percent completion rate was recorded in several projects undertaken by NDDC since its inception, while the rest were abandoned. He lamented that sometimes, projects are designed not to succeed, but just for some people to make money (Adebayo, 2017, Punch online).

It is essentially important to understand that social infrastructure is at its lowest ebb in the region and local turn in development - peacebuilding framework cannot be viewed through the prism of the character of appropriation and implementation with the type of brinkmanship and identity politics that have been displayed so far. The NDDC is supposedly designed to address the socio-political injustices of a rentier state to achieve positive hybrid peace but the brinkmanship and identity politics appear to foster negative hybrid peace that preserves the culture of violence in the Niger Delta. The character of appropriation, implementation and political collusion within the operational space of the NDDC including the funding authorities is fraught with complexities that can be described in the words of Ferreira and Richmond (2021, 2, 4) as criminal governance of development project delivery for peacebuilding. Ultimately, the broadest benefits of development and peacebuilding in addressing underdevelopment and violent behaviour are diminished. Consequently, it inhibits the goals of peacebuilding as it denies community engagement, deepens the root causes of conflicts, and introduces new conflicts in the region.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

The article provided new insights and analysis extensively on how to mainstream local turn in peacebuilding outside the broader context of international peacebuilding using indigenous local agency and how it could shape the formation of peace in the Niger Delta. Thereby making critical contribution to knowledge in addressing gaps in the debate on the nexus between security, development and peacebuilding. The paper offered substantial evidence from diverse local stakeholders regarding the engagement of local actors and resources in the appropriation and implementation of NDDC projects. It further demonstrated that not imbibing local turn in peacebuilding NDDC project implementation neutralizes and compromises the empowerment of local actors and communities' priorities. By exploring the ignored potent capacities of local turn in peacebuilding, the finding revealed downplayed local actors and resources for peacebuilding. The analysis illuminated the core principles of local turn in peacebuilding and its dynamics in development intervention that forces to the fore the near-absence of study that addresses the phenomenon sufficiently. Evaluating the NDDC along the local turn in peacebuilding forces to the fore, new insights on a taxonomy of factors that precipitate a detour that neutralises the potential for peacebuilding.

Finally, the study utilised the seminal postulations of different scholars to formulate some core principles of local turn in peacebuilding: Hughes, Ojendal, & Schierenbeck (2015) emphasise on moving away from top-down international interventions. Mac Ginty (2008) suggested the empowerment of local actors and local resources usages, and (Wolff, 2022, 5) revising concepts, normative premises and related practices and "local voices", "local agency" or "local ownership" to explore critical determinants that tend to underscore the debate on the importance of local turn and hybrid peacebuilding. These four principles of local turn in peacebuilding: utilisation of local actors, use of local content / resource, bottom – top approach and inclusive multi-dimensional stakeholders' participation are of immense significance in their respective contexts such that there is no order of preference in their listing. Besides, not one principle in isolation could achieve the aggregate impact of a locally led solution in peace formation in a complex situation. Suffice it to say that while it is positive in theory, the broad scope of NDDC intervention and initiatives in practice should not be assumed as a straight-line graph in a conflict zone. Therefore, as Thania (2022) noted, the Commission's peacebuilding initiative as a political solution must avoid templates, formulas and one-size-fits-all solutions.

Despite the recognition of the fact that there exist a plethora of literature on development intervention in the ND, this study revealed some conceptual and empirical gaps. Therefore, further research can build on these findings on theoretical assumptions on grass-root engagement and empowerment in peacebuilding, policy frameworks on local context participation, and empirical study on NDDC community development and local turn in peacebuilding in the Niger Delta.

Recommendations

The article reveals how top - down approach encourages criminal development governance and precipitates a detour of local turn in peacebuilding. The findings accentuate the critical need for restructuring existing guidelines for appropriation and implementation of NDDC development programming along the core principles of local turn in peacebuilding for sustainable peace in the Niger Delta. The article revealed incongruence in development governance with government preference for political gladiators to development professionals and peacebuilding practitioners.

The findings corroborate previous studies that development initiatives in conflict zone are designed to secure peace, however, inappropriate

top - bottom procedure undermines intended and unintended positive outcomes. Development and peacebuilding have a potent voice that could be experienced both mentally and physically. However, when they are not professionally coordinated with conflict sensitivity, it can neutralise the potential for peacebuilding. Therefore, it is pertinent for government to establish a peacebuilding commission to coordinate infrastructure development and other peacebuilding programmes in the region.

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