ARMED VIOLENCE TRENDS AND DEVELOPMENT IMPEDIMENTS: CONFLICT RESOLUTION FOR DEVELOPMENT MODEL (CRDM) PROPOSITION

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ABSTRACT

Existing armed violence in Nigeria has negative consequences on socio-economic development. The pervasiveness of armed violence has been attributed to the emerging trend of growing association between local, regional, and worldwide militant and terrorist groups till targeting the destabilization of Nigeria. Worried by these ugly developments, this paper examined the lingering conflict in the Niger Delta and resolution strategies to address them. The study drew samples from three communities having different ethnic groups in three local government areas in Delta State. The sampling strategy involved purposive technique and in-depth interviews using 15 informants. The data generated were organized and characterized in themes using NVIVO 10 software for the analysis and evolvement of models. Based on the findings, it was discovered that structural deficiencies are not just the main reasons to ignite conflicts but are triggered by other factors such as intimidation, disproportionate force, illegal detention etc. A model was proposed and the study recommends the need to strengthen all government actions that will harmonize development, political, policing, military, and diplomatic efforts.

Key words: Armed violence, Conflict management resolution, Development model, Niger Delta.

ABSTRAIT

La violence armée existante au Nigéria a des consequences négatives sur le développement socio-économique. L'omniprésence de la violence armée a été attribuée à la tendance émergente d'association croissante entre les groupes militants et terrorists locaux, régionaux et mondiaux jusqu'àcibler la déstabilisation du Nigéria. Inquiet de ces villains développements, cet article a

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examiné le conflit persistant dans le delta du Niger et les stratégies de résolution pour y faire face. L'étude a prélevé des échantillons de trois communautés ayant des groups ethniques différents dans trois zones de gouvernement local dans l'État du Delta. La stratégie d'échantillonnage impliquai tune technique téléologique et des entretiens approfondis avec 15 informateurs. Les données générées ont été organisées et caractérisées en thèmes à l'aide du logiciel NVIVO 10 pour l'analyse et l'évolution des modèles. Sur la base des résultats, il a été découvert que les deficiencies structurelles ne sont pas seulement les principales raisons de déclencher des conflits, mais sont déclenchées par d'autres facteurs tels que l'intimidation, la force disproportionnée, la detention illégale, etc. Un modèle a été proposé et l'étude recommande la nécessité de renforcer tous les actions du gouvernement qui harmoniseront les efforts de développement, politiques, policiers, militaires et diplomatiques.

Mots-clés: Violence armée, résolution de la gestion des conflits, modèle de développement, delta du Niger.

INTRODUCTION

Armed violence and ethnic agitations in numerous areas of Nigeria has intensified since 1999 and it is not abetting. (Oyeniyi, 2011).The vigilante groups have bounced back to defendthe local communities. Contending gangs in towns are involved in armed violence against each other besides the resentment with the state security forces. Many civilians have been caught in the cross fire (Halirru, 2012). More so, according to Florquin and Berman (2005), a gun culture and behavior has been established and there has been an increasing militarization of society. Most alarming is that small arms and light weapons (SALW) are now available without restrictions. The ethnic group leaders to a large extent are beginning to believe in violence as means to settle scores with other groups or even citizens and also to fostering their parochial interests (Shittu, 2013).

The accessibility of arms and their use have engendered sequences of violence, which made it imperative for the civilians to defend themselves. Given the utility of arms, several armed groups have been obtaining more and more arms to defend themselves or to launch attacks. This trend is leading to the militarization of the society, and also constitutes an invitation for more and more small arms and light weapons in order to keep up or maintain some form of parity among the groups.

The government is doing below the expected to protect civilians from being victims of armed violence and in fact some government agencies are entangled and are blaming other sections or ethnic groups in the population. All these have added to an insecure environment where mass dislocations are taking place. Many communities are now polarized along ethno-religious lines.

In view of the fact that the proliferation of arms requires serious measure of actions to curtail it, much attention has not been directed at establishing model to guide action and efforts of stakeholders. Alongside this, the growing associations between local, national, regional and global armed violence is boosting the resentment and severity of violence in the Niger Delta. The militants' onslaught is also an indication for urgent reexamination and need for viable model for understanding and tackling of these menace more so that the human and developmental costs of armed violence are far-reaching. In relation to this, Iwundu and Thom-Otuya (2013) have called

for restraint and urgent intervention in order not to cause apathy, disunity and human suffering further.

Irobi (2005, 2010) concluded that the conflict has been raging for so long and so can be described as intractable because of the inability to understand the dynamics of the conflict. It is therefore necessary to examine the subsisting conflict resolution strategies in the Niger Delta so as to find a lasting solution to the imbroglio. Effective conflict resolution requires a lot on the part of those affected taking into cognizance the fact that they can influence the process and ensure that proposed management measures are equitable and fair. It is against this background that the study explored the subsisting conflict resolution policies put in place in the Niger Delta region and the observations of the diverse ethnic groups in the Niger Delta about the suitable resolution strategies.

LITERATURE REVIEW
Armed Violence in the Niger Delta
The Niger Delta is evidently one of the difficult challenges of nationhood and progress in Nigeria's half century old statehood (Adeyeri, 2010). The Nigerian Government's typical response to conflict situation in the Niger Delta ever since colonial era; has been the use of the regulatory and reprisal methods which failed to produce a long term solution. If a conflict is well managed and resolved to the mutual satisfaction of the parties, it could lead to qualitative development in the relationship between them. It is imperative to know that efforts to resolving violent conflicts in the Niger Delta should be based on the strategy of bargaining whereby there is a redistribution of opportunities and benefits in favour of the minority claimants or an adoption of a framework that would facilitate the participation of the minority claimants in the decision making process (Isumonah, 2003). Genuine conflict resolution effort in the Niger Delta can be achieved by popular participation, equitable distribution of resources, environmental sustainability and free flow of information.

Conflict Management/Resolution Strategies
Conflict management describes the way we respond to and deal with conflicts while conflict resolution describes the various approaches aimed at terminating conflicts. Best (2006) described conflict supervision as the procedure of reducing the negative and destructive capacity of conflict over a number of trials and by working with and through the parties involved in that conflict. This procedure covers the entire area of handling conflict positively at different stages, including those efforts made to prevent conflict by being proactive. Conflict resolution is described by Miller (2003) as a variety of tactics aimed at stopping conflicts through the constructive resolving of problems which is different from management of conflict. Miall, Ramsbotlmnam and Woodhouse (1999) observed that in conflict resolution, it is anticipated that the deep rooted sources of conflict should be talked about and resolved in order to ensure that behaviour is no longer violent.

The issue of conflict resolution is not a recent phenomenon but has been on before the advent of colonialism. Conflict resolution is not restricted to African nations alone but fundamental to every society of the world because conflicts exist in all human societies and therefore, must be properly and genuinely tackled for sustainable development in any nation.

Violent conflict, Instability and Impaired Development
Violent conflict has been and is still shaking the Niger Delta region. Environment pollution and exploitation have exerted negative impact particularly on women and children. Farming and fishing which were the sources of the livelihood of the people remain the most affected by environmental exploitation and the ongoing violent conflicts. The poor and marginalized peopleoften end up being the main victims (Igwe, 2011). If violent conflict leads to hunger, the spread of diseases is increasing poverty and many communities are increasingly vulnerable. These constitute serious obstacles to development. If it results in the destruction of economies and local administrative norms, and drains resources for essential services, then it grinds down and reverses the gains of the development goals, as well as discouraging international partners from providing adequate assistance. If it has the consequences of destroying productive human capacity and the infrastructure necessary for development, it damages the necessary conditions for implementing of infrastructure and projects that can bring development. This in turn disrupts and weakens social, economic and political structures and, ultimately, contributes to more poverty and suffering. Therefore, armed conflict has deepened inequality: many suffer, while few benefit.

Ethnic militancy in the Niger Delta is continually fuelled by various issues and grievances against the government and oil companies. Perhaps the strongest grouse of the oil minorities is that the Federal government, dominated by the majority ethnic groups is using Nigeria's oil prosperity to develop other areas at the cost of the oil-producing minorities (Adeyeri, 2012).

Underpinning Theories
Two theories are adopted to aid the discussion of this work. These include the structural and stakeholder's theories.

Structural conflict theory
The fluid and elastic nature of conflict as a concept has generated arguments among scholars (Ademola, 2011). The core argument of the structural conflict theory is that conflict is constructedinto the specificways societies are structured and systematized. The theory focuses at social problems such as political and economic segregation, poverty, inequity, injustice, disease, exploitation, etc. as sources of conflict. According to Halirru (2012) structuralistsuphold that conflicts ensue because of exploitative and unjust nature of human societies which is mostly established in a way that one class dominates another, one political and ethnic group dominates the political scene at the expense of another. This explains that although ethnic groups struggle over interests such as poverty, domination and lack of resources, which are the social contexts that cause conflicts as identified by structural conflict theory, the way these interests are pursued has a significant veiled element which is not always understood and therefore overlooked by researchers.

Structural theory is remarkably strong on the immediate and underlying factors that lead to armed conflict. It presents such phenomenon to make the emergence and escalation of internal conflicts possible (Brown, 1996). Structuralists present factors such as environmental degradation, persecution, poverty, unemployment as the major motivating factors that set the stage for armed conflict.

Stakeholders Theory

Stakeholders' theory has been articulated in a number of ways but in each of these ways stakeholders represent a broader constituency including corporate responsibility. Idemudia and Uwen (2006) contended that pressure often arise when business enterprises fail to accommodate societal goals together with their corporate goals. The stakeholder theory further suggests that in a normative sense, it will be unwise, impudent and ethically unjustified to overlook those other constituencies. It is also noted by Stakeholder theorists that there are a number of interested parties to be considered in the formulation of objectives. This is where the stakeholders' theory becomes relevant in illustrating the situation in the Niger Delta.

The application of stakeholders' theory shows that the host communities who are the oil producing communities also have vital role to play. This is because in a free enterprise, the communities are owners of the business, so their duty is to protect the oil installation and facilitate peace within their domain which must be accompanied with reciprocal gestures from the multinational oil companies(MNOCs) by fulfilling their social responsibility and M.O.U which centres on the demand of the people.

Approaches to Armed Conflict Resolution

In view of the fact that conflict is such a perilous factor in hampering development in numerous places; it becomes necessary that efforts to prevent conflict and help communities recover from violent conflict when it does occur must be strengthened.

Putting in place conflict prevention and early warning systems

Reacting efficiently to an occurrence of violence is not an adequate response. Adequate response is to know that conflict is inherent in human nature and in societal interaction, especially in a multiethnic and multi-religious society, therefore, prevention of violent conflict and peace-building need to be at the core of policy and program planning in order to realize development. Early warning systems to detect the crucial elements of violent conflict and measures to handle the root causes of conflict will reduce the propensity to wait until violence breaks out and insecurity prevails. Effective use of the information from an early warning system and making intensive effort to avert violent conflicts will undoubtedly diminish the heavy costs of violent conflicts. In the absence of responsible governance, people resort to violence in their quest for substitute livelihoods, or are tempted to fight for 'justice' with impunity, thus exploding a new cycle of violence.

Rule of Law

Though veneration for human rights and the rule of law arecrucial to durable peace and enduring development, this is absence from the Niger Delta region, especially in the early days of the struggle. All peaceful effort and campaign against environmental exploitation be Ken Saro-Wiwa and the Ogoni people fell on the deaf ears of the government. Justice was not only elusive butalsonon-existent, as Ken SaroWiwa was judiciary murdered by the federal authority.

Tackling poverty

Prevention of conflict may directly and indirectly comprise tackling poverty through a huge scaling up of public investment, capacity-building, and domestic resource mobilization.

Strengthening initiatives and efforts
It is possibly at this level that the best chance lies for finding new tactics to deal with those accused of committing crimes against humanity, war crimes and profiteering from war economies, as well as to combat corruption; despite the fact that it is significant to tackle issues such as impunity and corruption.

Method
The study involved three target populations, namely; the Urhobos, Izons, and the Itsekiris which are also oil producing ethnic nationalities. The first stage was to purposively choose three local governments in Delta State for the study (Keyton, 2015) namely; Ughelli North local government area, Burutu local government area and Warri North local government area. In the second phase, one oil producing community was selected from each of the local government areas, namely; Effuni-Otor community, Ogulaha and Ariogbodo communities respectively. In the third stage, five interviewees were randomly selected from each of communities giving a total of 15 interviewers for the three communities.

According to Creswell (2012), interview augments participants -researcher interactions helps to support research findings. Hence, this study adopted interpretive standpoint which places more importance on qualitative data value in a pursuit of knowledge (Kaplan & Maxwell, 1994) and providing contextual depth. Therefore, data were arranged and characterized in themes using NVIVO 10 software. So, ensuing from the interviews was the generation of coding frames which comprised of conceptualizing rudiments that explained the perspectives and experiences of Niger Delta people in Nigeria. Then, subcategories were further developed in other to deepen the probing for rigorous and reliable findings on the appropriate resolution strategies.

Findings
In the In-depth interview, questions were asked on the forms, nature and dimensions of resolution strategies and the reasons why the subsisting conflict resolution has not been effective in the Niger Delta.

Theme 1: Subsisting Resolution Strategy
From the study conducted reports gathered from the Informants of Urhobo ethnic group on the reasons for the ineffectiveness of the subsisting conflict resolution strategies, majority of them indicated poor consultation as a major barrier. Similarly, among the Informants from the Izons and the Itsekiri communities, poor consultation as well as lack of political will were mentioned respectively. For instance, Informant U2 noted thus:

> For me, no headway because the communities leaders and government agents don't consult we the members".

Another Informant IZ7 insisted that:

> As long as they (government agents) refuse to recognize us in what they do, there can be solution to the crisis.

The second obstacle to solution of armed conflict in the Niger Delta based on this study finding is corruption. According to Informant IT12:

> The leaders that supposed to protect our interest are usually collude with government agents and contractors to steal money meant for our communities.

Similarly, perception was expressed by Informant U5 who said:

> Diversion of project fund by government officers is a major reason why people still feel aggrieved.

Other emerged deficiencies identified with subsisting resolution strategy are Lack of political will and Involvement of Military. Majority of the Informants complained about these as problems impeding peace in the Niger Delta. The figure 1 shown below presents a graphical representation of the Informants perceptions.
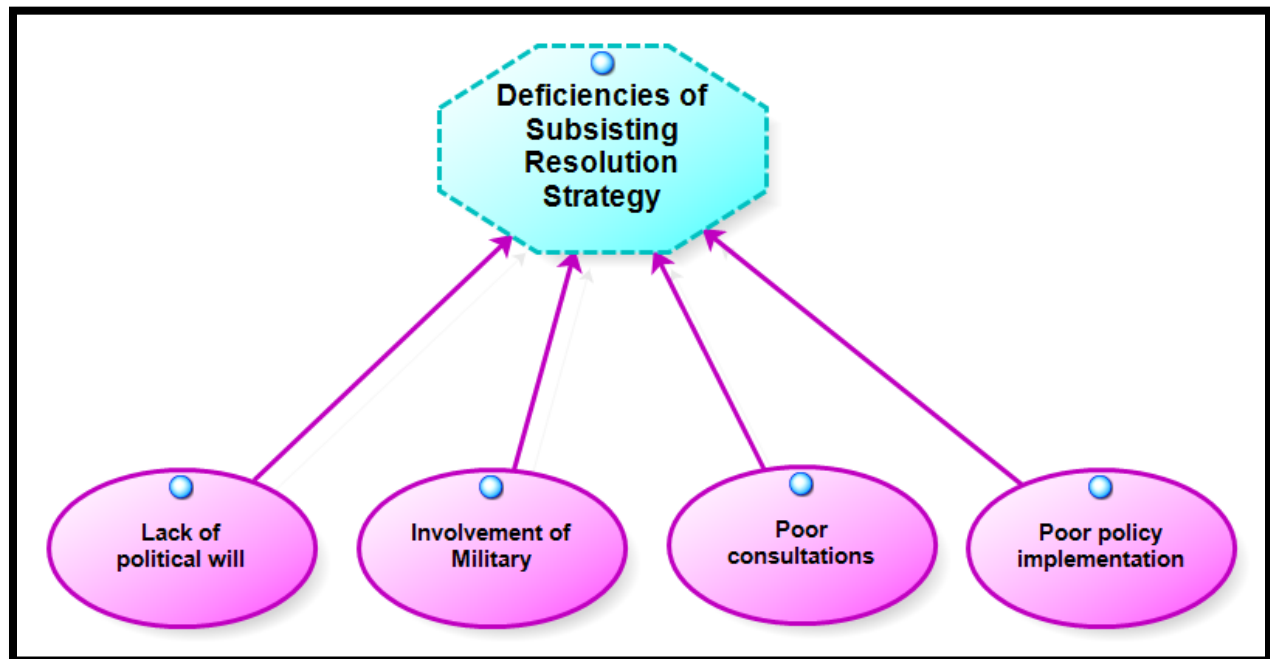

Figure 1. Perceptions on subsisting resolution strategy deficiencies

Theme 2: Emergent Resolution Strategy

The next sub-themes in response to the question on the appropriate conflict resolution strategies for Niger Delta indicated included communication, that is sharing and exchanging information, constructive dialogue with all stakeholders, arbitration, that is assistance of a neutral party in conflict, sustained community development projects, youth orientation on the future and implicationsof armed conflict, promotion of skill acquisition for unemployed population and finally accountability and transparency in the spending and implementation of projects.

Majorly, communication as appropriate resolution strategy featured prominently among the Informants across Urhobos, Izons and Itsekiris respectively. They claimed that sharing and exchange of information goes a long way to help remove doubt, suspicion and also to build confidence between the parties. For instance, Informant U3 stated thus:

> Most of the time we don't know what they are being
> done about our distress, they keep us in the dark
> which then made us feel suspicious and unhappy.

Another Informant, IZ6 reiterated that:

> If they stop taking us for fools and instead talk to
> us, listen us and brief us, sure, things will be
> better because we will be part of everything.

The need for sustained community development projects is professed as most appropriate conflict resolution strategy for bringing an end to the conflict in the Niger Delta. According to Informant IZ10:

> If relevant community project that will help develop
> our communities is started and completed surely we
> will appreciate and join government efforts but where
> projects are abandoned people will not benefit.

Expressing similar perception, Informant IT15 noted that:

> Most of the projects started were abandoned which
> made not useful for the purpose of development of our
> region.

Other emerged strategies which were identified as appropriate as solution to Niger Delta conflicts are Constructive dialogue, arbitration, youth orientation, skill acquisition and accountability. The Informants assumed that if all these strategies are implemented sincerely, there will be sustained peace which will bring about development for the region. The figure 2 below generated through Nvivo qualitative analysis software presents details of these perceptions.
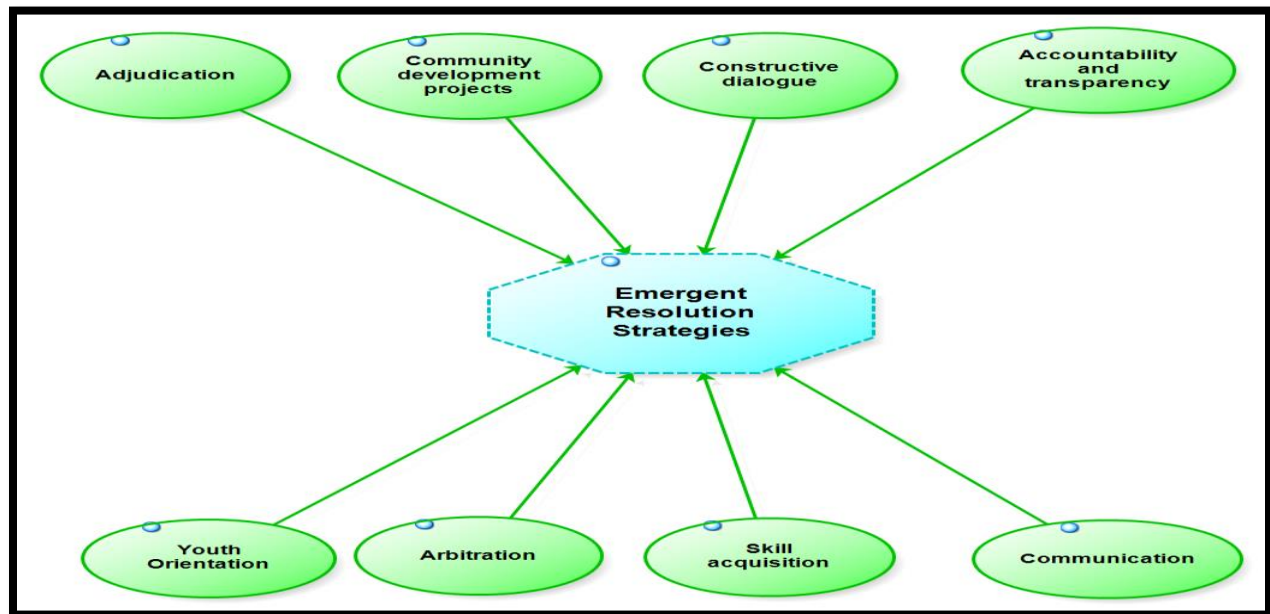

Figure 2. Appropriate resolution strategy for sustainable development in Niger Delta

The study contribution

Niger Delta conflicts and armed violence have remained a challenged while the erstwhile causes identified and solutions offered have not really helped in the containment. Based on this, the need for a new approach to build peace has become imperative. This therefore was the impetus for this study: exploration of the appropriate resolution strategy toward attaining sustainable development in Niger Delta. This process therefore produced a proposed model tagged Conflict Resolution for Development Model (CRDM) which can be applied.

One of the critical gaps, which this study have responded to, is what Hutchison (2013) designated as insufficient research consideration that is devoted to determining factors responsible for changes in individual defiance and behavior that eventually lead to armed conflict and problem of development.

Proposed Conflict Resolution and Development Model(CRDM)

This study found empirical evidence which provided answer to the needed sustainable resolution strategy for Niger Delta in Nigeria. The proposed model shown in Figure 3 below emerged from the perceptions of the people of the Niger Delta and the application of theory which will go a long way in solving the problem if properly implemented.
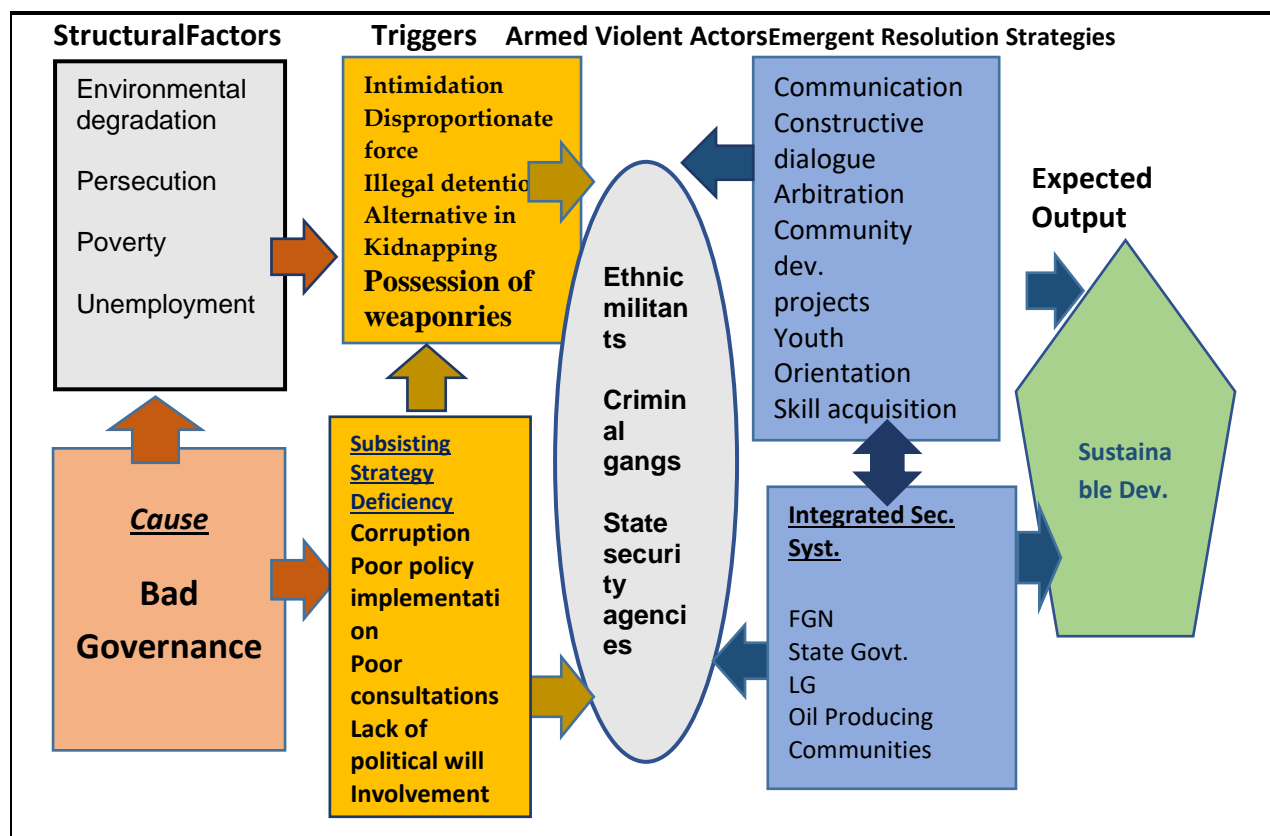

Figure 3. Proposed conflict resolution and development model (CRDM) explaining problem and solution to Niger Delta armed conflict

The aims of this model is to establish the connection and distinguish between the structural factors and armed conflict triggers to Niger Delta conflict actors whose behaviour determine the cycles of conflict being experienced. The model graphical display can serve as guide at every stage of Niger Delta conflict. The model comprises of the initial reason for latent Niger Delta conflict which is otherwise tagged structural factors. As shown in the model it is discovered that bad governance was the structural reasons. The study also established that in most cases structural reasons don't just ignite conflict but other happenings tagged triggers in the model. Meanwhile, the study discovered the major influence on triggers is inadequate strategy which subsists. Arising from this is the emergence of armed violence actors.

The possible resolution tagged emergent resolution strategy is being advanced by this study having discovered that the existingresolutionshave failed to solve the conflictproblem. In line with existing literature, this model suggests that if integrated security system is adopted along with emergent strategy, there is possibility of attaining peace in addition to sustainable development in the Niger Delta.

CONCLUSION

The fundamental argument of this paper is to better understand the extent that the subsisting resolution strategy for Niger Delta has helped in resolving the conflict and if possible identify appropriate strategy. This study therefore concludes that the major barrier to the subsisting conflict resolution strategies emanate from poor consultations, poor policy implementation among others. Arising from this, the study concluded that the most effective resolution strategy applicable for resolving the conflict in the Niger Delta revolves around regular communication, relevant project implementation, and accountability among others.

This study therefore concludes that conflict is not static but dynamic in nature and has the tendencies of degenerating into fierce dimension, as the case may be if not properly handled. The study finally posits that, for an effective conflict resolution strategy, the ideas and views of the different communities involved in the conflict should be put into consideration for proper planning in the intervention process.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study therefore, recommends that there should be well-laid structures for community development and government monitoring in different oil producing communities to properly and adequately address the needs of the youth to help curb the criminal activities such as the incessant kidnapping of persons in the Niger Delta. Similarly, based on the proposed model, the study recommends the need to strengthen government efforts that will synchronize development through political, military, policing and diplomatic involvements.

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