Building capacity for sustainable peace in the Niger Delta

*Project led by the Centre for Population and Environmental Development (CPED) – Nigeria*

**Abstract**

In collaboration with the Intervention Council for Women in Africa and Community Projects Against Poverty, CPED set out to promote peace in the Niger Delta region by strengthening the capacity of stakeholders to monitor the implementation of an amnesty program. CPED carried out a monitoring and evaluation exercise to assess the impact of the program on conflict prevention and peace building, and worked to strengthen the technical and advocacy skills of stakeholders engaged with the process.

**On The Matching Funds**

In 2011 the Think Tank Initiative established the Matching Funds program as another source of financial support. These funds support efforts by TTI-funded think tanks to achieve their long-term objectives, and also promote peer learning and collaboration.
COLLABORATING INSTITUTIONS

CPED led the project, in partnership with two civil society organizations based in the Niger Delta region: the Intervention Council for Women in Africa and Community Projects Against Poverty.

WHAT THEY DID AND WHY

The return of democracy in Nigeria in 1999 has provided new opportunities for civil society to influence policy on socio-economic development. However, after over fourteen years of democracy, the use of research results to inform policy development and implementation is still quite limited. More challenging is the fact that even when research results have successfully informed the formulation of policies, success in their implementation has often been limited. This can be explained in part by the fact that key stakeholders are not sufficiently empowered to effectively monitor and advocate for better policy implementation.

The Nigerian Federal Government ended its military offensive in the Niger Delta and initiated an amnesty programme, approved by the Council of State and proclaimed by the President in early 2009. The programme was aimed at youth rehabilitation, training and employment and militias were given 60 days to renounce all violence and weapons in exchange for being pardoned for all actions undertaken in the course of militancy.

Through this project, financed in part with TTI Matching Funds, CPED sought to contribute to the successful implementation of the amnesty programme by empowering key stakeholders in the region, helping them to participate more effectively in monitoring its implementation. The specific objectives were to:

- Review the main features of the amnesty programme in the Niger Delta, and analyze its main strengths, shortcomings, and impacts on conflict prevention and sustainable peace building in the region;
- Improve the knowledge of key stakeholders on the main elements of the amnesty programme;
- Strengthen the capacity of key stakeholders to effectively monitor the implementation of the programme; and
- Build the capacity of journalists and other advocates to investigate and report on the programme’s implementation progress.

Toward this end, CPED carried out several activities. Firstly, it conducted a baseline survey of the amnesty programme. It then identified and mobilized key stakeholders to participate in the project, and established three state implementation committees. Capacity building workshops were also organized to enable stakeholders and journalists to effectively monitor and report on the programme’s implementation. Finally, outreach activities were undertaken to encourage uptake of the project’s results by policymakers.

RESULTS

The literature review and baseline survey of sampled communities has generated critical knowledge about the impact of the amnesty programme in the Niger Delta region – knowledge that is essential to its overall success. It was found that the amnesty was largely welcomed by the militia but with some reservations due to doubts on the sincerity and commitment of the federal government to resolving the grievances and demands of the region. The review also revealed that the amnesty programme does not seem to have benefitted from careful planning and implementation and that several critical issues were ignored. For example, there was no clear definition of a militia, militant and militia group. The programme has a blanket definition of groups that reported at designated centres and surrendered arms. But the actual determination of militias that should benefit from the amnesty programme is important. The entire programme has been haphazardly designed,
packaged and implemented. It also lacked experienced and technically capable personnel to manage it. Beyond pledges of support and funds, there was also a clear absence of technical advice and support from international organizations, which would have helped confer credibility to the programme, strengthened technical competence, facilitated monitoring and moderated the behaviour of state officials.

Nonetheless, the review of the impacts of the programme so far indicates that the cessation of hostilities between the government troops and armed militias, has resulted in relative peace, security and stability in the region. Since the amnesty, oil production has steadily risen from about 1 million barrels per day (bpd) in early 2009 to about 2.5m bpd in March 2010, and gas production has recovered as well. Most oil companies such as Shell and Chevron-Texaco have returned to hitherto abandoned sites. The increased production and export of oil and gas has translated into more revenues and higher economic growth rates, as well as more foreign direct investments in the region. With declining attacks, the stoppage of kidnapping of oil workers and reduced youth restiveness, the human security situation has undoubtedly improved. However, the amnesty programme has so far had minimal impacts on socio-economic development at the community level, especially with respect to social service provision, employment and infrastructure development.

Over 150 stakeholders participated in the project’s capacity building workshops, enhancing their ability and motivation to monitor the implementation of the programme within their communities. They are now in a position to interact with policymakers on how to improve its implementation strategies. In particular, over ten journalists reporting on Niger Delta issues for various media houses have increased their awareness and knowledge on the challenges of the programme, thereby increasing the amount of media attention given to this most important issue.

The workshops also enabled participants to appreciate the importance of playing an active role in finding solutions to the challenges facing the amnesty programme in particular, and broader development challenges more generally. As well, three implementation committees have been set up in the target communities to carry out monitoring activities. These community members are now playing a critical role in improving human rights and supporting peacebuilding efforts in their communities. For instance, target community members are now aware of their civil and political rights, which is expected to translate in public officials – especially the police – being more careful when handling cases in these communities. Already, some cases of abuse of rights have been taken up by volunteers to prevent their reoccurrence. They have thus become CPED partners, empowered to inform policy on socio-economic development and peace building in the Niger Delta region.

**NEXT STEPS**

This project was a success and has generated new knowledge that builds on local insights and has the potential to contribute to the formulation of new policies and peace building efforts in the Niger Delta. By empowering key stakeholders in rural communities that have never benefitted from similar interventions over the years, the project contributed to laying the foundation for sustainable peace in the region.

A key element of the project’s success was the partnership between CPED and two local civil society organizations. The project demonstrates how partnering with civil society organizations can be beneficial to knowledge generation, capacity building and policy influence in developing countries. While collaboration between TTI-funded institutions is essential, partnerships between TTI-funded institutions and other locally-based civil society organizations are key to further enhancing their respective reach and impact.