Deepening Peace in the Niger Delta

Phase I - November 15, 2018 – July 15, 2019
Phase II - October 1, 2019 – December 31st, 2020

Partners
- State Governments - Bayelsa, Delta Rivers
- Security Agencies - Police, Department of State Security (DSS)
- Civil Society Organizations and Media Outlets
Project Overview

The Deepening Peace in Niger Delta project is focused on developing and reinforcing community-led peace architecture that contributes to a more inclusive, grassroots-informed dialogue process aimed at addressing conflict issues and vulnerabilities to violence, for long-term peace and stabilization in the region.

The overall goal of the project is to support an inclusive, multi-level dialogue process to peacefully address governance and resource issues driving conflict in the Niger Delta.

Specific objectives:

1) Strengthen linkages between citizens and local authorities in the Niger Delta to respond to drivers of violence in the region.

2) Amplified voices of key stakeholders, particularly women, youth and marginalized groups to contribute to discussions around regional conflict issues and promote peace in the Niger Delta region.

Context

The Niger Delta region continues to face a myriad of conflict issues, intertwining a complex web of organized criminality, militancy, and cultism. Moreover, conflicts over resources and land, communal clashes, political thuggery and competition, kidnapping, and other forms of violence and insecurity leave the region vulnerable to continued cycles of violence and insecurity that breakdown inter-communal relations and crystallize ethno-religious, political, and other social divides. Search’s recent conflict assessment in Delta, Bayelsa, and Rivers States revealed that cultism, struggle for political power, conflict over resources and livelihoods, domestic violence, and/or conflicts over territorial boundaries were among the top four conflicts in each state. Within this context, youth felt particularly sidelined from decision making and peace processes, making them particularly vulnerable to violence. Indeed, many respondents interviewed for the study noted that the use of violence can be justified; of all respondents who said violent conflict can be justified, 719 percent were from Delta state. Moreover, while there was no clear distinction between the opinions of male and female respondents regarding this, respondents aged 45 years and below were those who felt the most that violence can be justified if it is aimed at protecting one’s livelihood. These findings highlight the lack of voice felt by young and middle aged people in the communities, and their desire to use violence as a way to express grievances - it remains critical that these actors have constructive and positive platforms as alternatives to violence and to channel grievances productively. Moreover, cult groups and politicians were reported to be most involved in perpetuating acts of violence across all three states, with reports of politicians inciting cult groups to intimidate their opponents through killings, kidnapping, and ballot box snatching.

The Approach

The project builds on the peace architecture laid during Search’s previous work in the Niger Delta. A total of 20 local governments across three states in the Niger Delta were identified in the 3 states. Rivers State: (Okrika, Khana, Obio-Akpor, Omoku, Asari-Tooru, Port Harcourt City and Gokana); Delta State: (Isoko South, Warri North, Aniocha North, Udu, Ukwuani, Warri South West, and Ughelli South); Bayelsa State: (Southern-Ijaw, Kolokuma-Opokuma, Brass, Ekeremor, Sagbama and Ogbia). Target communities in these LGAs were identified as flashpoint communities for violence. Search conducted a folli-
ow-up assessment of the region in 2017 and found that these three states continue to be central in shaping the conflict dynamics in the region. The community members including women, youths and PWDs, along with their local government officials, security sector actors, and civil society organizations in the region are the target groups of the project. Media outlets and journalists are also targeted for project activities as their role in election coverage and rumour management is a vital part of mitigating potential drivers of violence.

**Project Achievements**

Established dialogue platforms are in project locations leading to participatory identification and resolution of local drivers of conflict.

Enhanced multi-stakeholders approach to entrenching locally led approaches to conflict de-escalation and enhanced social cohesion and security. Enhanced community capacity to advocate for sustainable peace, engage state institutions and policy makers as an option to violent confrontation.

Entrenched peace messaging and conflict sensitive reportage as part of an evolving reorientation process targeting vulnerable youths and conflict actors and violence entrepreneurs in the region.

Promoted strong and highly functional partnerships and inter-agency collaboration among security agencies and actors, Ministries, Departments and Agencies of government, Civil society organizations, regional bodies including PANDEF and state institutions to effectively drive their mandates for enhanced peace, security and conflict stabilization in the Niger Delta.

**Projections**

*Looking ahead:* The project is advocating for institutionalization and sustainability through:

1. The creation of Agencies/Ministries for Peace Building and Conflict Mitigation in the three project states
2. State and LGA annual budgetary provisions for peace initiatives to sustain dialogue platforms in the LGAs and states.

**Quotes**

*I have been involving myself in NGO works for many years but I have not seen any known INGO making impact in the Niger Delta region like Search for Common Ground whose approach to peace building is bottom up and participatory in nature, developing capacities of local citizens in the region. This good work should continue because Search has been able to improve our peaceful co-existence in the region*...Dr. Steve Wordu, Associate Professor of Sociology, University of Port Harcourt, Rivers State.

*“Through my active involvement in the Community Response Network Structure of Search as the Peace Architecture Dialogue State Chairman of Delta State, I have been trained to acquire skills in Conflict Analysis, Peace building and Common Ground Approach which is a unique strength of this INGO. Indeed, I have learnt that Transformative Dialogue is the best way to resolve conflicts and I have been championing this in our work in the Delta State PAD Structure and wish to continue with it because this is the way to go.”*... Bar. Smart Edge, Director Delta State House of Assembly, Asaba and Search for Common Ground’s PAD Chairman, Delta State.