



Project Report

Niger Delta Regional Peacebuilding Strategy (NDRPS) State-Level Town Hall Meetings

Date: May 15th – 19th 2023

Location: Nine (9) Niger Delta States



Conflict and security dynamics in the Niger Delta region continue to change and historical tensions and a proliferation of armed groups (militant, criminal, and ethno-sectarian) are key to these changes. Conflict issues in the region include communal tensions, political competition, organized criminality, and resource-based conflicts and so on.

While current conflict mitigation approaches show some results in the short term, they seldom focus on the conflict drivers nor are they prefaced with conflict analysis which is often a precursor to effective conflict management. These approaches are often focused on engaging the conflict after it has occurred and measures are hardly put in place for conflict prevention. The effect is that too often the conflict situation rears its head again resulting in deaths and destruction of properties, and the suppression of economic growth in the region. The importance of adopting a holistic approach to dealing with conflict in the Niger Delta cannot be over-emphasized. Any initiative aimed at addressing conflict should necessarily adopt an approach that views the issue from both a security and a peacebuilding perspective. A peacebuilding approach would focus on the drivers of conflict and identifying proactive measures that look at conflict prevention as well as reduction and mitigation.

This presents the need for a regional peacebuilding strategy/ framework to drive conflict resolution efforts in the region rather than purely focusing on containing conflict or de-escalating violent situations. The designing and institution of a peacebuilding strategy provides an opportunity to adopt multi-stakeholder approaches to conflict resolution and peacebuilding

Based on the foregoing, PIND Foundation is leveraging its existing peace and security architecture to collaborate with the Ministry of Niger Delta Affairs (MNDA) in the design and development of the Niger Delta Regional Peacebuilding Strategy (NDRPS) document. The strategic document will provide the framework for the implementation of a Regional Peacebuilding apparatus. The key objectives of the NDRPS include to:



- Develop a peace and security framework for the entire Niger Delta which is not just security-focused but also serves the needs of the people through effective conflict prevention, resolution, and management through multi-stakeholder and inclusive approaches.
- Create a framework and drive the adoption of a multi-stakeholder approach as an inclusive strategy necessary for conflict resolution and management.
- Serve as home-grown solutions guide to the various forms of violent conflicts in a proactive, engaging, consultative, and inclusive manner, especially with consideration to the uniqueness of each state

As part of the process, On November, 30th and December 1st, 2022, PIND and the MNDA inaugurated the TWG in Port Harcourt, Rivers State. The TWG comprised at least 45 relevant stakeholders from government agencies, civil society, academia, security agencies, traditional and religious institutions, amongst others, from the entire Niger Delta region.

In continuation of the NDRPS document design and implementation process, PIND and the MNDA organized townhall meetings in the 9 Niger Delta States between May 15 to 19 2023. The town hall meetings aimed to document the views of relevant stakeholders on peace and security constraints, as well as suggestions to address them. Particularly, the focus of the interactive session was to harvest experiences and build on indigenous knowledge from a participatory appraisal of current situations in the region and consideration of home-grown solutions that will be proffered. The meetings had at least 35 stakeholders in attendance in each of the nine (9) states, thus a total of at least 315 participants that represented different communities, organizations, government institutions, unions or social groups.

The participants were drawn from the security agencies, student and youth bodies, the media, market and transportation unions, religious bodies, Community Based Organizations (CBOs) and



Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), relevant government Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs), traditional institutions, ethnic groups, people with disability (PWD), the academia, amongst others.

The stakeholders brainstormed actively in the forum that ended-up generating robust actionable outcomes that will feed into the comprehensive strategy plan. Various thematic areas of conflicts and conflict drivers in the region were highlighted including poor community - International Oil Companies (IOCs) relationships, lack of equity in resource distribution, youth restiveness and reward for youths that exhibit violent tendencies, absence of legislation on disbursement of security votes, cultism/proliferation of violent cult gangs, gender-based violence, unemployment and deepened poverty, projects and policies implementation paralysis, and erosion of societal values. Other drivers identified include loosed legal system, negligence of the oil host communities by the government, divide and rule strategies by community leaders/oil companies, lingered injustices, negligence of women in peace building and political participation, election violence, arms proliferation, distorted communication, multiple taxation by the government, ethnic biases, hijack of traditional institutions by politicians/organized criminal gangs, and lack of deepened awareness among the people at the grassroots, amongst others.

Across the States, both short- and long-term recommendations were proffered by the stakeholders. Some of the key recommendations bordered around citizen's education, sensitization and awareness raising on peacebuilding processes, strengthening of security architecture and operations, eradication of multiple/illegal taxation, inclusive and research-based development, moral acculturation and value re-orientation, and effective early response to conflict early warning signals. Others include improved communication and full disclosures by community leaders/public administrators, youth empowerment through job creation, de-politicization of traditional leadership and local governance, religious tolerance and unity, removal of vulnerable children from the streets, genuine corporate relationships between IOCs



and communities, addressing root causes of perceived injustices in the region, strengthening Alternative Dispute Resolution mechanisms in communities, full implementation of the Petroleum Industry Act (PIA) in the host communities, amongst others.

Because baseline secondary data is key to the design of any strategic document, the stakeholders also availed/promised to provide some existing information within their sectors. This includes published reports on the amnesty program, anti-grazing law in Ondo State, PIA documents, the Bill that established the Bayelsa Safety Corp, the Act with which the NSCDC operates, and so on.

The town hall meetings had the expected participants from different walks of life in the Niger Delta who participated fully at the sessions. A critical observation was their zeal to contribute ideas, the passion for a sustainable peace in Niger Delta and their commitment to the implementation stage. Apart from brainstorming sessions which availed the participants the opportunity to examine the challenges and solutions to peace and security, there were other outcomes from the events. For example, in Ondo State, the participants unanimously agreed to initiate the Ondo State Security Stakeholders committee to be coordinated by the office of the Senior Special Adviser to the Governor on Security.

The multi-stakeholder engagement approach adopted by PIND and the MNDA ensures that designing a security and peacebuilding strategy for the Niger Delta region cuts across different sectors so as to deepen interactions and proffer a robust and sustainable solution that has the interest of all. Having successfully inaugurated the NDRPS implementation TWG and conducted town hall meetings across the States, next steps include the harmonization of the reports from the meetings into a final NDRPS strategic document. This strategic document will subsequently be reviewed and validated by the TWG and launched by the MNDA.



Town hall meeting participants in Ondo State



Participants during the interactive session in Port Harcourt, Rivers State



Cross section of participants at the Abia State town hall meeting