

# Assessment of the Coping Capacity for Communal Conflict in Rivers and Bayelsa State in the Niger Delta, Nigeria

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**Abstract:-** The study examined the coping capacity for communal conflict in Rivers and Bayelsa States in Nigeria. The study employed cross-sectional and longitudinal research designs. A sample size of 400 for each State was determined through Taro Yamane formula for the questionnaire administration. Data collection was achieved through administration of questionnaires to the residents, and archived secondary data from the Nigeria Police and relevant State Ministries. The study employed descriptive tools such as percentages, frequency, tables and maps for analysis. Findings shows that migration to safer urban areas 65% for Bayelsa and 86% for Rivers, mediation as measures 82% for Bayelsa and 74% for Rivers., negotiation 72% for Bayelsa and 82% for Rivers. , adjudication/litigation 82% of Bayelsa and 77% of Rivers., land use planning 26% Bayelsa and 27% Rivers. , livelihood diversification 88% of Bayelsa and 87 Rivers. , early warning signal 62% for Bayelsa and 67% for Rivers and others 77% for Bayelsa and 78% for Rivers. , were reported helpful to alert the people regarding planned conflict as a measure to avert conflict in their different locations in the study areas. The study recommended collaborative efforts between the security agencies, NGOs, Communities, Ministry of community and chieftaincy affairs in the management and mitigation of the occurrences of conflict issues.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Conflict is a phenomenon of human society which can take its origin from social, economic, cultural, political, psychological, environmental and other factors that triggers it, which is seen as resulting from incompatible goals. Conflict have been perceived differently by various scholars notable among them is Adetoye and Omilusi (2015) who sees conflict as the struggle and rivalry for objects that individuals and groups attach importance to. The component of conflict according to Osaghae and Suberu (2005) as regards the material objects are money, employment, and political positions in private and public sector while the non-material objects are culture, tradition, language and religion. The personal interest of the parties' involved in conflict issue may vary as a result of scarce resources, competing value and unequal relations.

One feature of conflict is that it is seen as an inevitable aspect of human relationships in societies operating with social, economic and ideological differences. Globally, the origins and nature of conflict are best described or explained within the framework of human nature and a human environment (Albert et al., 1995.). In fact, it is described as a natural experience by the human relations school of thought. There is that natural tendency in every human to feel threatened by activities, actions and decisions of others, especially when differing perceptions exist. The world would not have experienced such turbulence in recent times if not for human brutish nature.

According to IPCR (2003), conflicts in the country and specifically in the North-Central region are driven largely by ethnic plurality, acute competition for political and traditional power, in addition to land ownership tussles, all of which are underpinned by systemic issues of access to economic resources and opportunities. Moreover, high poverty and unemployment levels and general limitations to alternative economic opportunities and bad governance are central to conflict phenomenon. This is because poverty and unemployment tend to encourage frustration, divisiveness, alienation and insecurity, all of which promote the preference to seek some sort of social security in ethnic nationalities, with the belief that other groups are responsible for the misery. On the effects of conflicts on the economy, NIPSS (2003) maintained that the magnitude and value of various losses have not been fully determined. However, there have been huge losses of lives and property, a growing class of youth unemployment and sometimes displacement of humans.

Capacity can be described as the combination of all the strengths, attributes and resources available within a community, society or organization that can be used to achieve agreed goals, individuals, households, communities and nations have resources that can resist the impact of a disaster and/ or recover quickly from them. Capacity may include financial resources, infrastructure and physical means, institutions, societal coping abilities, as well as human knowledge, skills and collective attributes such as social relationships, community networks, leadership and management.(ISDRR, 2009).

Capacity development therefore is the process by which people, organizations and society systematically stimulate and develop their capacities over time to achieve social and economic goals, including through improvement of knowledge, skills, systems, and institutions. United Nations Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR, 2017).

“Capacity development is a concept that extends the term of capacity building to encompass all aspects of creating and sustaining capacity growth over time. It involves learning and various types of training, but also continuous efforts to develop institutions, political awareness, financial resources, technology systems, and the wider social and cultural enabling environment”(UNISDR 2012).

Disaster risk reduction entails the process of reducing disasters by identifying, assessing, minimizing the risk and lessening people’s vulnerability, property, management of the environment with the aim of improving their preparedness and early warning for adverse events as well as for sustainable development. Strategies and policies were also used here. This framework was used by Shaw (2017) Enhancing Local Responses through Disaster Resilience in Schools and Communities in Japan during a tsunami in 2011. The framework is relevant for this study because it deals with community resilience as a strategy in mitigating communal conflicts and also using community based disaster risk management technique. Community-based disaster risk management (CBDRM) is an approach which aims to reduce local disaster risks through the application of participatory assessment and planning methods. It is a practical bridging strategy to integrate local development efforts on one hand with strategies that reduce the impact of priority disaster risks on the other, the disaster here could be conflict. It is a process in which at risk communities are actively engaged in the identification, analysis, treatment, monitoring and evaluation of disaster risks in order to reduce their vulnerabilities and enhance their capacities. This means that people are at the heart of decision-making

and implementation of disaster risk management activities. Community-based disaster risk assessment provides the community and support role-players with disaster risk specific baseline data that can be integrated into Disaster Risk management Plan for development planning purposes (Thabang, 2009).

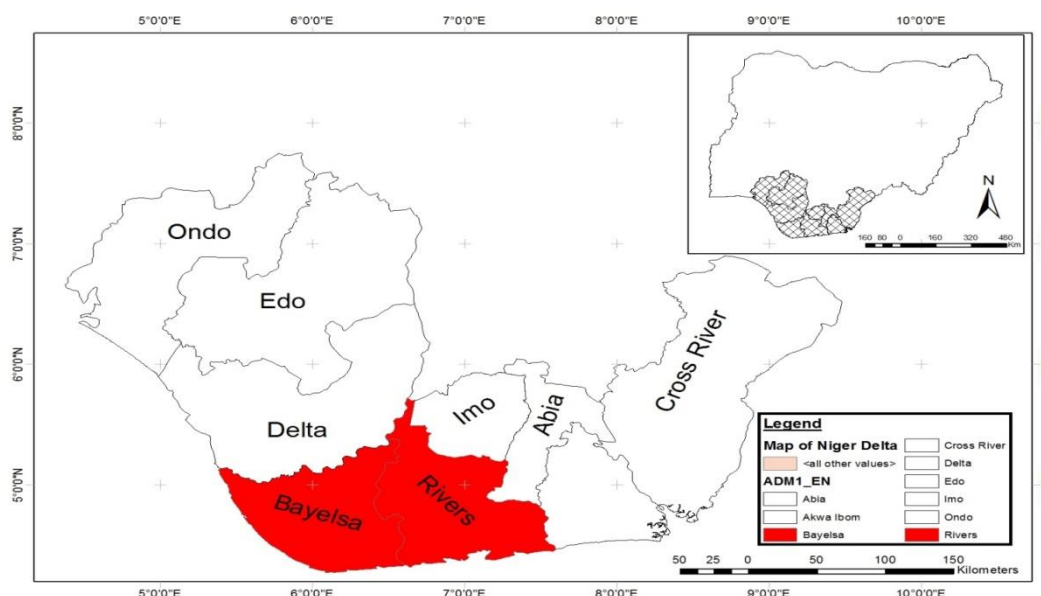
Communal conflict as one of the contemporary issues have led to destructions of lifes and property as well as researches being conducted by Afegbu (2010) who believes that virtually every country is ravaged by one form of conflict or the other while Gnisci, 2007 asserts that conflict has caused many people to die and migrate from their original place in West Africa. . Communal conflicts in the Niger Delta area lead to massive destruction of lives and properties as well as disruption of social, political and economic lives of the larger population (Omatayo 2005). For instance in Rivers and Bayelsa most communities have experienced conflict in one way or the other , this communities are Rumuekpe and Ogbakiri, Rundele,Ibaa, Egbeda, Afam-Ukwu.(UNDP, 2006). Based on the available literatures reviewed in the work there is scanty information on communities capacity to cope with communal conflict in the choosen states, hence the study would make available data on the strategies needed to mitigating communal conflict before it eventually become a disaster.

**II. MATERIAL AND METHODS**

**STUDY AREA**

**Location and extent**

The study was carried out in Rivers and Bayelsa States. These states lie in longitudes between 5° 20’ 0” E and 7° 25’ 0” E; and latitudes between 4° 0’ 0” N and 8° 26’ 1” N. Niger Delta region is located in the Gulf of Guinea between longitude 5° E to 8°E and latitudes 5°N to 6°N.It is bounded at the east by Cross River, Anambra, Imo, Abia States and at the west by Ogun and Osun States and at the north by Ekiti, Kogi, States.



The area has low relief and poor ground drainage and is underlain by soft, young sedimentary rocks, gently undulating plains. These plains become waterlogged in rainy season (Udo, Ajayi, Kirk-Greene & Falola, 2017). According to NDDC (2006), the nature of the terrain and available dry land, determines the pattern of settlement in the Region. Most settlements comprise largely rural communities. The study area has two ecological zones: the mangrove forest and coastal zone and the Freshwater Swamp forest zone. The Mangrove forest and coastal zone consist of saltwater inundation. Acid sulphate, silty clay, clay loam and peat (Chikoko) soils are dominate in this zone. The soil is saline and has almost neutral pH when wet but when uncovered and dry, the sulphides become oxidized to sulphuric acid. Then the soil becomes very acidic with pH 3 and incapable to support vegetation (Abere & Ekeke, 2011). Bayelsa State and Rivers State has a land mass of 11,007 and 10,378 with a population of 1,710,000 and 4,858,000 as at 1999 respectively. It is expected therefore that population of the area will increase to between 3,2106,000 and 9,1212,000 based on projections of 2018, Amangabara and Obenade (2015).

Rivers and Bayelsa States enjoy a tropical rainforest climate. They experience regular rainfalls and warm temperatures (National Geographic Society, 2017). They has two seasons, a wet and dry season. The wet season last between 7-8 months; from March to October with a brief break in rainfall usually in the month of August. The dry season usually starts from November and ends in February.

Rivers and Bayelsa States in the Niger Delta are described as being a “rich region with poor people but they are blessed with abundant Crude Oil and Natural Gas, which is the main stay of Nigeria’s economy (Omofonmwa & Odia, 2009).

The region is endowed with both renewable and non-renewable natural resources. The major non-renewable resources include fossil fuels, crude oil and natural gas and construction materials such as gravel, sand, clay and earth. Sand is obtained from both land and river beds. (Niger Delta Development Master Plan, 2016 ).

**Sampling technique**

This study employed the cross-sectional research design and longitudinal research design based on detailed information on conflict issues and the length of years being assessed. The study population comprises of the entire population of the upland communities with cases of communal conflict in the study area. Stratified Random Sampling techniques was used to select Local Government area, this in line with Oyegun, (2013) From the two states, upland LGAs with communal conflict cases were used for this study. This gave a total of eleven (11) LGAs for this study. All the communities with communal conflict cases were used for the study, Taro Yamane sampling size technique was applied to give a sample size of 400 for each of the States. Data for this work were from both primary and secondary source. The primary data were obtained from the field specifically from structured questionnaire, field observation and in depth Interviews while the secondary source were from Information from gazette newspapers, journals, reports, National Population Census Reports, Local Governments Areas, Security agencies and other relevant bodies and this data were reviewed and analyzed accordingly.

**III. RESULTS**

**Coping Capacity / Strategy**

For the analysis of the conflict resolution strategy and how they have been implemented, the researcher, first of all, attempted to understand the traditional conflict resolution mechanisms in both states Bayelsa and Rivers. As put forward by emic and etic theorists, culture is relevant to conflict resolution . Daniel & Milton (2014). The emic approach in particular emphasizes the use of relevant native terms and institutions. To this end, the researcher probed the extent to which traditional conflict resolution mechanisms were applied in both Bayelsa and Rivers community conflicts. The work then examined the various conflict resolution mechanisms employed in a bid to resolve the conflict, focusing on their successes and failures.

**Table 1: The coping strategy/capacity employed in your community to reduce conflict occurrence**

S/N	Coping Strategy/Capacity	Total per state	Response Categories									
			Strongly Agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly Disagree		Undecided	
			F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
1	The movement to refugee Camp	Bayelsa=339	44	13%	25	7%	122	36%	118	35%	30	9%
		Rivers=371	12	3%	39	11%	131	35%	187	50%	2	1%
2	Migrate to safer urban areas	Bayelsa=339	21	6%	199	59%	97	29%	9	3%	13	4%
		Rivers=371	162	44%	156	42%	28	8%	24	6%	1	0%
3	Mediation	Bayelsa=339	188	55%	92	27%	38	11%	15	4%	6	2%
		Rivers=371	171	46%	103	28%	86	23%	11	3%		0%
4	Negotiation	Bayelsa=339	166	49%	112	33%	34	10%	24	7%	3	1%
		Rivers=371	83	22%	185	50%	68	18%	29	8%	6	2%
5	Adjudication/Litigation	Bayelsa=339	159	47%	119	35%	28	8%	14	4%	19	6%
		Rivers=371	89	24%	198	53%	53	14%	31	8%		0%
6	Land-use Planning	Bayelsa=339	104	31%	143	42%	68	20%	19	6%	5	1%

		Rivers=371	106	29%	160	43%	77	21%	21	6%	7	2%
7	Livelihood diversification	Bayelsa=339	164	48%	134	40%	24	7%	5	1%	12	4%
		Rivers=371	122	33%	201	54%	32	9%	14	4%	2	1%
8	Early warning signal	Bayelsa=339	74	22%	150	44%	97	29%	18	5%		0%
		Rivers=371	172	46%	98	26%	78	21%	15	4%	8	2%
9	Awareness	Bayelsa=339	91	27%	168	50%	43	13%	26	8%	11	3%
		Rivers=371	152	41%	137	37%	51	14%	31	8%		0%

When asked what the conflict resolution mechanisms are in these two states, movement to refugee camp attracted percentage rate of 71% for Bayelsa and 85% for Rivers respondents. This implies that movement to a refugee is not an appropriate measure in resolving communal conflicts. Migration to safer urban areas attracted high percentage responses agreement from both states as 65% for Bayelsa and 86% for Rivers respondents while 26% Bayelsa and 12% Rivers respondents disagreed. Mediation as measures attracted percentage responses of 82% from the Bayelsa respondents and 74% from Rivers respondents while 15% Bayelsa and 26% Rivers disagreed. On Negotiation, 72% reflecting Bayelsa respondents and 82% of Rivers respondents agreed that Negotiation was one of the strategies used to resolve conflict in their various locations. Additionally, 82% of Bayelsa and 77% of Rivers respondents agreed on Adjudication/Litigation as also one way of resolving conflicts in different locations. Similarly, 73% respondents from Bayelsa and 72% from Rivers agreed with the statement that Land Use Planning is also a strategy of resolving communal conflicts, 26% of Bayelsa and 27% of Rivers participants were in disagreement with the view. On the statement regarding Livelihood diversification, 88% of Bayelsa and 87% of Rivers respondents agreed on the livelihood diversification as strategy of resolving communal conflicts. Early warning signal was reported as a measure

to avert conflict in different sampled locations with the percentage responses of 66% for Bayelsa and 72% for Rivers respondent’s agreement. The study findings showed that the majority 62% and 67% respectively from both states believed that early warning signal is appropriate to avert any perceived conflicts in the communities. The report further pointed out that numerous communities in Bayelsa and Rivers states agreed that creating Awareness to the perceived conflict is another strategy of resolution with high percentage responses of 77% for Bayelsa and 78% for Rivers participants while 21% of Bayelsa and 22% of Rivers respondents disagree to the view.

**Respondents’ perception on measures adopted by the communities**

In exploring the mechanisms for resolving communal-related conflicts in the various communities across states of interest, the two states that participated in the study were asked whether Measure(s) adopted by their community brought a solution. In this case, the respondents could select as many options that apply in their community. The options from which they made their choices are: strongly agree, Agree, Disagree, strongly disagree and Undecided. The responses of the respondents were subjected to multiple responses analyses in SPSS, and the outcome was illustrated in Table 2.

**Table 2: Measures adopted by your community brought a solution.**

State	Responses					Total
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Undecided	
Bayelsa	112(16%)	149(21%)	49(7%)	29(4%)	-	<b>339</b>
Rivers	172(24%)	135(19%)	39(5%)	25(4%)	-	<b>371</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>284(40%)</b>	<b>284(40%)</b>	<b>88(12%)</b>	<b>54(8%)</b>	-	<b>710(100%)</b>

From the multiple responses of the respondents on the modalities for resolving communal related conflicts as illustrated in table 2, it can be inferred that 149(21%) agreed, 112(16%) Strongly agree, 49(7%) disagree and 29(4%) strongly disagree reflecting the view of Bayelsa respondents while on the other hand, most Rivers respondents’ 172(24%) strongly agree, 135(19%) agree, 39(5%) disagree and the remaining 25(4%) strongly disagree. The study findings showed that the majority (80%) of the respondents from both states agreed that measures adopted by their communities brought solutions.

**IV. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

The community’s capacity to cope with community conflict in the study area. When asked what the conflict resolution mechanisms are in these two states, eight (8) items out of 9 were agreed on by the respondents from the

two states while item one (1) attracted disagreement from both states respondents which is on Movement to refugee Camp with 68% for Bayelsa and 83% for Rivers respondents. This implies that movement to a refugee is not an appropriate measure in resolving communal conflicts. Item two which is migration to safer urban areas attracted high percentage responses agreement from both states as 69% for Bayelsa and 82% for Rivers respondents. Mediation as measures attracted percentage responses of 82% from the Bayelsa respondents and 71% from Rivers respondents. On Negotiation, 79% reflecting Bayelsa respondents and 69% of Rivers respondents agreed that Negotiation was one of the strategies used to resolve conflict in their various locations. Additionally, 78% of Bayelsa and 73% of Rivers respondents agreed on Adjudication/Litigation as also one way of resolving conflicts in different locations. From the responses, it emerged that the majority of 78% and 73% of



respondents believed that Adjudication/Litigation is one better way of resolving conflict in their region.

Similarly, 68% of respondents from Bayelsa and 65% from Rivers agreed with the statement that Land Use Planning is also a strategy of resolving communal conflicts. On the statement regarding Livelihood diversification, 85% of Bayelsa and 84% of Rivers respondents agreed on the item. Respondents also reported that 62% of Bayelsa and 67% of Rivers respondents agreed with the statement that early warning signals help to alert the people regarding planned conflict as a measure to avert conflict in their different locations. The study findings showed that the majority 62% and 67% respectively from both states believed that early warning signal is appropriate to avert any perceived conflicts in communities. The report further pointed out that numerous communities in Bayelsa and Rivers states agreed that creating Awareness of the perceived conflict is another strategy of resolution with high percentage responses of 72% from Bayelsa and 78% from Rivers participants.

The Findings shows that Migration to safer urban areas, Mediation as measures, Negotiation, Adjudication/Litigation, Land Use Planning, Livelihood diversification, Early warning signal, and others were reported helpful to alert the people regarding planned conflict as a measure to avert conflict in their different locations in the study areas.

## V. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Communal conflict is an aspect that cannot be separated from our society as long as there is an existence of human beings living together but we need to be proactive in the measures and procedures we adopt in mitigating this contemporary issue, the study have attempted to x-ray some of the proactive measures, resilience approach to this communal conflict.

1. There should be collaborative efforts between the security agencies, NGOs, Ministry of community and chieftaincy affairs in the management and mitigation of the occurrences of conflict issues.
2. The severity of the effect of conflicts on the facilities, structures need to be regularly assessed to avoid reoccurrence.
3. The government should set aside funds for conflict preparedness for communities.

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