

## Utilizing Non-violent Communication for Conflict Resolution in the Post-Amnesty Era of the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria

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**ABSTRACT** The conflict in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria is a burning issue. In spite of the “efforts” of the Federal Government of Nigeria, there seems to be no practical approach to resolving the conflict. This discussion proposes the utilization of Non-Violent Communication (NVC) to resolve the conflict. Using explanation building and critical analysis based on non-violent canons, backed by Watzlawick’s Interactional View of Communication and Hearit’s Apologia theory, this discussion explains qualitatively how to use the canons of non-violent communication to resolve the conflict in the long run. These canons are: honest self-expression, honest self-expression longing for reconciliation and peace, honest self-expression devoid of violence and threat and empathy for another. Hence, this discussion recommends concretizing NVC language in all interaction with the Niger Deltans and synergizing NVC with political and economic resolutions/elixir.

### INTRODUCTION

*“Violence solves no special problem; it merely creates new and more complicated ones.” (Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.)*

As critically observed by Adejoh, “The situation in the Niger Delta is clearly a paradox. The region is so enormously endowed, yet it is so poor; it is also economically strategic, yet it is so marginalized and so voiceless.” Therefore, the Niger Delta region can be described as a goose that lays the golden eggs, but exploited and neglected. Successive governments of Nigeria have exploited the resources of this region with reckless abandon. Hence, the natural habitats of this region have revolted in protest after many years of complaints without adequate redress. Violence has become the only language of protest. This is marked by vandalism of oil and gas installations, killings, kidnappings, hostage-taking, general instability, youth restiveness, invasion of oil platforms, hijacking of helicopters belonging to oil companies and other “crimes.”

In spite of these, there seems to be no practical approach to resolving the mounting conflict. The basic questions are: why does violence continue in the post-amnesty era in the Niger Delta region? To what extent can non-violent communication be utilized for conflict management and resolution in the Niger Delta region. Using explanation building and critical analysis based on non-violent communication canons and backed by Watzlawick’s Interaction View of Communi-

ation and Hearit’s Apologia theory, this discussion adopts the following guides:

- (i) The role of communication in conflict management.
- (ii) Agitation of the Niger Delta people.
- (iii) The Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN) past management approach to the Niger Delta conflict.
- (iv) Theoretical framework.
- (v) Using non-violent communication (NVC) to resolve conflict in the Niger Delta.
- (vi) Justification for utilizing non-violent communication in the Niger Delta conflict.
- (vii) Tools of non-violent communication.
- (viii) Assessment of the state of NVC language in the Niger Delta during Obasanjo administration and the late Yar’Adua’s first year of administration.
- (ix) Assessment of NVC language in the Niger Delta conflict in the late Yar’Adua’s amnesty era.
- (x) Applying non-violent communication to heal the wounds in the Niger Delta.
- (x) Non-violent communication and amnesty: The way forward.

### THE ROLE OF COMMUNICATION IN CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

As operationalized in this discussion, communication is expressed as “The process of creating, transmitting and using information to influence the behaviour of others and be influenced

in return” (Ikpe 2000). In the process of communication, conflict may be generated. Hence, human conflicts are “situations of discord and disharmony, discontent and disillusionment, and of dissatisfaction and disaffection brought about by communication interaction” (Unoh 1990). From these preceding synonymous variables, it can be deduced that the major elements of human conflicts are “incompatibility of goals, opposition in human relations, interdependence and interaction” (Baron and Greenberg 1990; Morreale et al. 2000). Hence, conflict is expressed as an interaction among interdependent people who perceive others as opposing their goals, aims or values and having the potential to frustrate them in achieving these goals, aims and values” (Morreale et al. 2000). Or simply put, “the process in which one party perceives that its interest are being opposed or negatively affected by another” (Mcshane and Von Glinow 2003).

Huseman et al. (1977) assert that communication plays a causal, preventive and curative role in conflict situation. Ikpe (2000) contends that communication performs “an informative, interpretative and mediatory role in conflict management.” Thus, communication can be described as a structural foundation for conflict as well as a structural destroyer and a managerial know-how for conflict management. Hence, communication can be described as a major structural foundation as well as the managerial know-how for conflict in the Niger Delta.

### **AGITATION OF THE NIGER DELTA PEOPLE**

Historically, the people of the Niger Delta have been peace loving and had been agitating for peace as a better option to crises in the Niger Delta. Abati (2004) comments thus:

*Many peaceful groups ... in the Niger Delta ... wanted a discussion of the peculiar problems of the region. Leaders of thought, and youth organizations in the region also called for dialogue, and specifically at various times asked for the convocation of a Sovereign National Conference to address the distortions and commissions in the Nigerian arrangement. Government refused to listen. Palliatives and tokenist measures were thrown in the direction of the people of the Niger Delta.*

Similarly, in a press release by Ijaw Youth Leaders’ forum, Oporoza, Delta State published

in the Guardian, December 18, 2007 captioned, “The Niger Delta Peace Process:

A Critical Review”, the forum presented the following preconditions as conditions for proper negotiation with the Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN).

- The release of Chief D. S. P. Alamieyeseigha,
- Withdrawal of troops from Ijaw towns and villages and replaced with police where necessary,
- Amnesty to Ijaw freedom fighters in detention, prisons and those under surveillance,
- Presidential visit to designated Niger Delta (Ijaw Communities) communities and the region and the declaration of a development emergency,
- Rehabilitate Ijaw communities destroyed by the federal troops, for example, Odi and Odioma etc.

As remarked by Adejoh (2005), the comment by Abati (2004) on the agitation of the Niger Delta had been founded on peace initiatives. The champions had been utilizing peaceful measures such as petitions, dialogues, communiqués, lectures, litigations, demonstrations and peaceful protests. Examples include the late Professor Ambrose Alli’s litigation against the Federal Government on derivation principle of revenue allocation, the executed leader of the Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP), Ken Saro-

Wiwa’s public lectures, local and international media campaigns as well as the involvement of such international lobby groups or civil societies such as Amnesty International, Green Peace, Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organizations (UN PO), the Parliamentary Human Rights Group, Rainforest Action Group and the Cultural Survival of America.

These efforts were directed at persuading the government of Nigeria and the oil companies toward non-violent management of the Niger Delta conflict. Ken Saro-Wiwa’s belief in non-violence reflects this in his campaigns:

*This is not, I repeat NOT a call to violent action. We have a moral claim over Nigeria ... Our strength derives from this moral advantage and that is what we have to press home. That the Ogoni people abjure violence in their just struggle for their rights within the Federal Republic of Nigeria. We must renew our faith in the Ogoni Bill of Rights and pursue the attain-*

*ment of our rights in non-violent manner (Saro-Wiwa 1994).*

It can be stated that in spite of the non-violent approach taken by the Niger Delta people, the Federal Government of Nigeria had not reciprocated non-violently. Rather, the FGN had always reacted militarily to crush the nonviolent protests in its conflict approach in the Niger Delta since 1999.

### **FGN PAST MANAGEMENT APPROACH TO THE NIGER DELTA CONFLICT**

The Federal Government of Nigeria's past management approach to the Niger Delta Conflict had been generally characterized with threat, coercion and manipulative subjugation. The reliance on threat and force is based on the Classical Theory characterized by threat, discipline and punishment. The FGN believes and uses the master servant relationship principles of Likert's Supportive Relationship to suppress and cow. Adejoh referred to this as "reactionary and repressive."

Since oil remains the mainstay of Nigeria's economy, the Federal Government views every protest by the Niger Deltans, whether peaceful or violent as criminal and must be crushed violently. An example is the wanton military destruction of Odi village of Bayelsa state in November, 1999. This behaviour had eroded the expected paternal supportive relationship of the FGN and portrays him as a wicked and unworthy father. The oil companies seem to have emulated the examples of the Federal Government and maltreated the oil producing communities - a neglect of corporate social responsibility obligations. The companies see themselves as accountable to the FGN and not the oil producing communities. Hence, the Human Rights Watch (1991) comments on the Federal Government and the oil companies extreme reliance on violence in managing the Niger Delta's conflict thus:

*...Virtually every oil-producing community has experienced an incident along the following lines. Community members stage a protest demanding compensation for oil company activities. In response to the protest, members of the mobile or other security forces come to the scene, the security forces carry out indiscriminate beatings, arrest and detentions, the protest is then abandoned. In virtually every community there have been occasions in which the paramilitary*

*mobile police, the regular police or the army have beaten, tortured or even killed those involved in protest, peaceful or otherwise, or individuals who have called for compensation for oil damage, whether youths, woman, children or traditional leaders.*

It is thus a paradox that Nigeria fought against and defeated apartheid policy in South Africa in the 1990s but turns round to cultivate it in her country in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Nigeria speaks violently, acts violently and even thinks violently towards her children in the Niger Delta. What has happened to paternal love and care?

Similarly, the Federal Government uses repressive manipulation to silence the Niger Delta people. Such manipulations include state creation, upward grudging revision of derivation percentage to 13%, creation of intervention agencies managed indirectly by the FGN, delay of the long overdue Niger Delta Master Plan of April, 2007, the deceitful invitation of the leader of NDPVF for dialogue, but arrest by President Obasanjo, selective token to the Niger Delta opinion leaders to serve as stooge against her people. The commissions are the defunct Oil Mineral Producing Areas Development Commission (OMPADEG), Petroleum Trust Fund (PTF), and the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC).

The militancy and manipulative attitude of the FGN had portrayed her as already declaring war against her children in the Niger Delta. Hence, military had been intensified in the region. The climax of this was the state murder of Kenule Saro-Wiwa in 1995 by the Abacha junta despite the protest of the international community. This singular act portrayed Nigeria as a violent country and a violator of human rights. No wonder, the last tears of Ken Saro-Wiwa, before his sentence by justice Auta titled, "Before I am hanged", earned Nigeria an international condemnation.

Historically, violence breeds violence. Based on the FGN example, the Niger Delta people have taken to armed struggle for self-defence. In pursuit of self-defence and determination for the survival of the Niger Delta people, many militant and miscreant groups had sprung up. They include: The Niger Delta People Volunteer Force NDPVF led by Alhaji Mujaheed Asari Dokubo, the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) and the Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP), Niger Delta

Vigilante Group (NDVG) and many others. This means that the Niger Deltans also speak violently, think violently and act violently. Their excuse is self-determination, self-defence and survival. Of course, retaliation for the past crimes of the Nigerian Army against the Niger Deltans cannot be ruled out.

Since the occupation of the Ogoniland by the Nigerian army in the 1990s, violence had been the expressive language from both sides. The “peace” move manipulated by Babangida junta turned out to be that of exploitation, victimization and brutality on the Ogoni people of the Niger Delta. Olorode (1998) captures the behaviour of the Nigeria army thus: “The force behaved like a typical army of occupation, looting, burning, raping, maiming and killing. Its activities generated one of the worst ‘peace’ time refugee situations in the history of Nigeria.”

“Violence solves no social problems, it merely creates new and more complicated ones” (Martin Luther King, Jr.). The violent approach of the Nigerian state emboldened and intensified armed resistance by the Niger Deltans. The brutal encounter with the Nigerian army led to the Kaiama Declaration, Ogoni Bill of Rights and other documented protest activities of various resistant movements. The FGN, by her actions had thus made herself the enemy of the Niger Delta people. Hence, the people had openly rejected the paternalism of the FGN and had vowed for the control of the Niger Delta people, land and natural resources. Thus, according to Adejoh (2005), the Kaiama Declaration insists on the destiny of the Niger Delta people as follows:

- (i) All land and natural resources in Ijaw land belong to the people and not the Federal Government.
- (ii) All undemocratic decrees, particularly the Land Use Decree, and the Petroleum Decree were no longer to be recognized in Ijaw land.
- (iii) All military personnel were to leave Ijaw land and oil companies using the services of security and military personnel were to be treated as enemies of Ijaw people etc.

The discussion so far has x-rayed the causes and the extent of bitterness of the Niger Deltans against the FGN. Dialogue and mediation seemed to have failed to produce useful results because both sides are saturated with bitterness and hatred. Democratic Consultative Decision Making (DCDM) in Dispute and Conflict Management -

an African Alternative recommended by Ikpe (2005), seems to be an uphill task since the wounds are deep-seated and the parties are very suspicious of each others’ intentions. Hence, I have opted for the utilization of non-violent communication (NVC) as the first step toward healing the wounds of the past.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This discussion on the utilization of non-violent communication for conflict management in the Niger Delta is based on two theories, namely: Watzlawick’s Interactional View of communication, Axiom 2 – communication = Content + Relationship and Hearit’s Apologia theory (cited in Encyclopedia of Public Relations, Volume I, 2005).

Watzlawick Interactional view of communication - Axiom 2: Communication = Content + Relationship is a shorthand version of the formal axiom: every communication has a content and relationship aspects such that the latter classifies the former, and is therefore metacommunication. Watzlawick chose to rename the two aspects that Gregory Bateson had originally named “report” and “command”. Report or content is what is said, command or relationship is how a message is said. Watzlawick refers to the relationship aspect of interaction as “metacommunication.” It is communication about communication. Metacommunication says, “This is how I see myself; this is how I see you; this is how I see you seeing me ...” (Griffin 2000). According to Watzlawick, relationship messages are always the most important element in any communication - healthy or otherwise. But when a family is in trouble, metacommunication dominates the discussion. Sick family relationships only get better when family members are willing to talk with each other about their patterns of communication. The Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN) and the Niger Deltans can be seen as one family. For metacommunication (command, unsupportive relationship, hostilities, belittling) to recede into the background for effective communication to take place, the FGN must relate humanely with the Niger Deltans and the militant groups through the content of her communication which should be saturated with non-violent stimuli, love and empathy. She must empathize with the Niger Deltans and thus sympathize with the people on the environmental problems

which the oil industry has brought on them and their future generations. This approach may create supportive relationship which may gradually heal the wounds of past hostilities and ill-treatment by the FGN. This kind of non-violent communication climate may lead to the resolution of conflict and crises in the Niger Delta. Therefore, the FGN should henceforth desist from violent communication such as the following by former President Obasanjo:

*All the operations of the oil industry in the upstream where exploration and production operations are hampered by community blockades and hostage taking, and the downstream, where production pipelines are sabotaged by faceless aggressors. The operating companies and their contractors are continuously embattled by militant groups that have taken over Niger Delta to the extent that it would not be an exaggeration to say that the Niger Delta is on a state of war (The Guardian, Nov. 17, 1999, p.21).*

Similarly, the Niger Deltans should reciprocate by abolishing all abusive language on the FGN and its agents. Hence, the Niger Deltans should acknowledge the FGN as a father and should remain respectful and humble without compromising their rights as bona fide owner of the Niger Delta environment.

Closely related to Watzlawick's Interactional View of communication is Apologia theory. As asserted by Hearit (2007), in today's increasingly turbulent and mediated environment, companies regularly face criticism for their actions. How they respond to allegations of wrongdoing constitutes the form of communication generally recognized as corporate apologia. This conceptual knowledge forms the background to the Apologia theory.

A corporate apologia is a response to accusations of ethical misconduct in which a company has as its primary motive the defense of its reputation and to which it offers discourse in self-defense that denies, explains and apologizes for its actions. The theorist notes that an apologia is not an apology, though it may have some elements of apology; rather it is a justification of the actions that seeks to present a competing interpretation of "the facts." In so doing, the organizations damaged reputation may be repaired.

This apologetic communication theory has the following strategies: denial, bolstering, redefinition, differentiation, transcendence, provocation, defeasibility, good intention strategy and

minimization, dissociation and conciliation strategies (Hearit 2005). The FGN, oil companies in the Niger Delta, the Niger Delta people, the militant and miscreant groups are seen as corporate bodies who in their course of relationship with each other had committed some wrong doings which hurt the partner's feelings. By applying the principles and strategies of apologia theory with the intent of mending the fence, these corporate bodies will respond appropriately to alleviation of wrongdoing. This approach may heal the wounds and rebuild a supportive and peaceful relationship in the Niger Delta.

### USING NONVIOLENT COMMUNICATION TO RESOLVE CONFLICT IN THE NIGER DELTA

With the seeming failure in the use of force, constructive confrontation (Burgess and Burgess 2003), and the Democratic Consultative Decision Making (DCDM) (Ikpe 2005) in the Niger Delta conflict/crisis, the only reasonable approach is to return to the greatest endowment of man - the spoken word. Hence, non-violent communication (NVC) or compassionate communication is recommended as the preferred alternative. So what is non-violent communication? What are its tools? How can it be used in resolving the deep-seated and aged-long conflict in the Niger Delta?

#### Conceptualizing Non-violent Communication

*"What I want in my life is compassion, a flow between myself and others based on mutual giving from the heart" (Marshall Rosenberg 2003b).*

The above resolve captures the essence of non-violent communication (NVC), which is a process of "interacting that facilitates the flow of communication needed to exchange information and resolve differences peacefully. It focuses on shared human values and needs, and encourages the use of language that increases goodwill and avoidance of language that contributes to resentment or lowered self esteem" (Rosenberg 2003b). It is as Rosenberg puts it "giving from the heart" when violence has subsided. It focuses on two communicative behaviours, namely: honest self expression and empathy. Honest self-expression means exposing what matters to oneself in a way that is likely to inspire compassion

in others, and empathy is listening with deep compassion ([http://ourpla.nct/cgi/pikle?Nonviolent Communication](http://ourpla.nct/cgi/pikle?NonviolentCommunication)).

Violent communication intensifies hatred, bitterness, criticism, attack, hostilities, disempathy, pride, aggression and destruction. Non-violent Communication on the other hand replaces these old inhumane patterns of behaviour. It elevates the individual to a pedestal of empathy and forgiveness. We thus perceive relationship in a new light. Non-violent communication helps to intensify our empathic senses of hearing, sight, feeling and touching our own deeper needs and those of others. These considerations foster respect, attentiveness and empathy and engender mutual and supportive desire to give from the heart. This transcendental experience according to Rosenberg is more than a process of communication or language. I would like to describe it from the Christianity perspective as a "born again spirit", a spirit of love and joy to share with others. This spirit will break many barriers, namely: cultural, ethnic, religious, race, colour, sex, politics etc. Hence, Rosenberg (2003) sees NVC as "a way to train my attention - to shine the light of consciousness - on places that have the potential to yield what I am seeking." This is the vision of this writer for the FGN and the Niger Deltans in search of a resolution for the Niger Delta conflict.

#### **JUSTIFICATION FOR USING NVC IN THE NIGER DELTA CONFLICT**

As observed earlier, the use of force as a strategy has failed; dialogue and consultation seem to be laden with suspicion. Frustration has emboldened both parties as they are saturated with hatred and eagerness to revenge. Hence, non-violent strategies are preferred. Non-violent communication offers three core processes aimed at healing and resolving deep-seated conflict such as the Niger Delta conflict. These three core processes are self-empathy, empathy for another, and honest self-expression (Rosenberg 2003b; Moore 2004). As explained by these authors, the honest self-expression process consists of five functional and interrelated process directed at resolving conflict. These are:

- (i) Observing without evaluation, judgment or analysis;
- (ii) Looking for feelings behind words that are expressed;

- (iii) Looking for unmet needs, connected to these feelings, evaluating which needs are not (yet) being met instead of evaluating action in "right" or "wrong";
- (iv) Making request how another person could enrich life. Essential in this is that the other person is to be left free to honour or decline the right.

Empathy as practised in NVC involves understanding, the essential core of an individual's experience and a kindly "energy" of connection and "presence". The process involves guessing the feelings and needs of another (empathy for another), or sensing one's own needs (self empathy). Using empathy in conflict resolution brings about understanding of the needs of the one "receiving" empathy, and also relieves emotional charge. Emotional charge is often uncomfortable and is a barrier to being able to hear others clearly and respond in a flexible fashion. Thus, empathy should be used to relieve distress in the Niger Delta, increase understanding and readiness for hearing.

The preceding discussion points to the usefulness of non-violent communication in conflict and other interactive situations. This shows that through non-violent communication individuals and parties will understand as asserted by Rosenberg (2003a) that:

- (i) Anything that anyone does is an attempt to fulfill unmet needs. This justifies the actions of the Niger Deltans who yearn for the development of the Niger Delta region, healthy environment, compensation for the pollution of their air, water and soil and the attendant destruction of their traditional occupation - farming and fishing. Above all, the need to control the resources of this region, particularly oil. On the other hand, the FGN needs to have full authority and control over the Niger Delta, as a region within her country. She also needs full control of resources of this region and other regions of the country as provided for in the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.
- (ii) Meeting needs through cooperation rather than competition or struggle is healthier for everyone. This should serve as a lesson in the Niger Delta-FGN conflict.
- (iii) People naturally enjoy contributing to the wellbeing of others when they can do so willingly. This tendency is inherent in the disputants, but has been suppressed by

hatred, disempathy, pride and selfish ambition.

### TOOLS OF NON-VIOLENT COMMUNICATION

Non-violent communication relies on the power of sincere communication or communication “from the heart.” Four major tools originating and radiating from communication from the heart are used in the NVC process. These are observation, feeling, needs expression and requests. These four tools are put in a functionalist action-oriented paradigm as follows (Rosenberg 2003c).

The concrete action we are **observing** that are affecting our well-being.

How we **feel** in relation to what we are observing. The **needs**, values, desires, etc. are creating our feelings.

The concrete actions we **request** in order to enrich our lives.

When properly applied, this intrapersonal communication will generate a compassionate flow of communication from the heart. This action-oriented functionalist paradigm can be expanded based on the key words as follows:

- **Observing:** This refers to searching introspectively to assess offence committed, fair-play, injustice, intent and outcome.
- **Feel:** This can be translated as deep feeling beyond the ordinary, the present, projected feeling to the future, deep feeling for the soul and spirit.
- **Needs:** These refer to desire for peace, desire for security, need for survival, need for self esteem and self actualization.
- **Request:** This refers to the concrete actions to enrich our lives, concrete evidence of development, healthy environment, freedom of expression, acceptance, fair treatment, receiving appreciation, empathy and sympathy for our plights.

### ASSESSMENT OF THE STATE OF NVC LANGUAGE IN THE NIGER DELTA CONFLICT DURING OBASANJO ADMINISTRATION AND YAR’ADUA FIRST YEAR ADMINISTRATION

The ultimate goals of NVC among others are to resolve conflicts peacefully and powerfully, and to heal and reconcile without compromise.

According to Ibeanu (2007), peace is “a process involving activities that are directly linked to increasing development and reducing conflict, both within specific societies and in the international community.” In the face of violence, peace can be attained through deliberately speaking and acting peace. Using NVC, let us assess the reflections of peace in the “Niger Delta Peace, Process: A Critical Review” during Obasanjo administration and Yar’Adua first year administration published in The Guardian of December 18, 2007 and also in the “Niger Delta Master Plan” published as an advertorial/press release by the Ijaw Youth Leaders’ Forum. Using NVC, an analysis of these documents reveal as follows:

#### Honest Self-expression

In the first two paragraphs of this document, the Niger Deltans have re-expressed their grievances devoid of hostile language as follows: The over five decades of oil exploration and exploitation in the Niger Delta and its attendant environmental damages resulted in agitations in various forms/manifestation (protest, peaceful demonstrations, short-ins). These acts are the manifestations of poverty in the midst of plenty. The Niger Delta has suffered a great deal due to oil activities in the territory. Vigilant Ijaw youths, having studied the trend of events in the Nigerian state proclaimed the now famous Kalama Declaration of December 11, 1998, which was simply greeted by violence: maiming, rape, arson murder and outright pogrom by the then military administration of General Abdulsalam Abubakar (retired).

The frustration instinctively arising from such militant reaction from Nigerian State precipitated the acts of kidnapping, hostage-taking, and disruption of oil exploration and exploitation activities during the last days of General Olusegun Obasanjo as civilian president, simply as ways and means of protecting, defending and preserving ourselves and communities that were designated for extinction and or decimation.

#### (a) *Honest Self-expression Longing for Reconciliation and Peace*

The Niger Deltans have demonstrated honest self-expression for reconciliation and peace in the following part of the document: Suffice to state unequivocally that the advent of

the Yar'Adua/Jonathan administration heaved a sigh of relief demanding of us a critical imperative for consultation and dialogue between the Niger Delta (Ijaw) people and the Nigerian State. In reverence of Dr. Goodluck Jonathan, General A. O. Azizi, General Ogbomudia, Chief (Dr.) E. K. Clark, Major General David Ejoor, and other prominent sons of the region, we embrace the Jonathan led peace overtures of the Yar'Adua administration with a sense of sincerity and commitment. Vice-President Goodluck Jonathan consequently visited Okerenkoko, Oporoza, and several other communities to consult directly with the agitating leaders of the region on June 28, 2007. the progressive effect of the Vice-President's timely visit to the depressed creeks were inauguration of the Senator David Brigidi led Presidential Committee on Peace and Conflict Resolution in the Niger Delta with Hon. Kingsley Kuku as Secretary on 2<sup>nd</sup> July, 2007 and the nomination of the T. K. Ogoriba 9-man Committee for consultation on Road map to peace implementation by the Ijaw Youth Forum was also inaugurated on the 24th August, 2007 at the Presidential Villa, Abuja. These novel peace initiatives without doubt have contributed immensely to the seeming scenario of cease fire and truce in the region, though not without pockets of dissent still under appraisal and handling. Every decent mind can surely attest that this era has been better than the pre- Yar'Adua/Jonathan era. Boldly, hostage-taking, kidnapping and oil and gas activities disruption have been on an alarming decline in the region in tandem with the spirit of commitment to the peace process.

**(b) Honest Self-expression Devoid of Violence and Threat**

The Niger Deltans have demonstrated honest self-expression devoid of violence and threat in the following part of the document.

The Ijaw Youth Leaders' Forum presented the following pre-conditions and. conditions for proper negotiation with the Federal Government:

- The release of Chief D. S. P. Alamieyeseigha
- Withdrawal of troops from Ijaw towns and villages and replaced with police where necessary.

- Amnesty to Ijaw freedom fighters in detention, prisons and those under surveillance. Presidential visit to designated Niger Delta (Ijaw) Communities in the region and the declaration of a development emergency.
- Rehabilitate Ijaw communities destroyed by the federal troops, for example, Odi and Odima etc. These clearly stated honest self-expression have not, to my knowledge been stated by the FGN. It thus shows the search for peace to be one-sided. This negates the principles NVC.

**Empathy for Another:** This important element in NVC is lacking in the peace process in the Niger Delta conflict. It can be said to be one or the important factors prolonging the Niger Delta conflict. The following part of the document reveals thus:

The federal government to date is yet to meet any of these pre-conditions for proper dialogue with Ijaw nation. However, in the "Secret brief" by Brigadier-General (as he then was), now Major General L. P. Ngubane, the Commander of the Joint Task Force to the Chief of Staff dated July 2007, referenced TFRI 1/25/G with Tel/Tax Number: 053-2522HO, it is stated loudly on page 8 thus: "to stem out militants in the Niger Delta with particular reference of Bayelsa and Delta ... the following lines of operation will be pursued concurrently:

- (a) Political line of operation
- (b) Information/psychological line of operation
- (c) Military line of operation.

Each of these lines of operation will be highlighted but more emphasis will be given to the military line or operation. Furthermore, it states that" ... the operation will be intensive in manpower and will also demand close air support, casualty evacuation and supply by air."

In consonance with this secret military document amidst the ensuing peace process, the Federal Government adhering to military advice of deploying more troops to the region instead of withdrawal (as demanded by the Youth Leaders' Forum revealed the lack of empathy and a breach of peace process as noted in the document thus.

- (i) Henry Okah's arrest in Angola. Henry Okah is one of the prominent Niger Delta freedom fighters.
- (ii) Military invasion of Gbaraun in November, 2007.
- (iii) Attack on Tom Ateke. Ateke is a youth leader from Okirika, Rivers State whose home town was bombarded with aerial attacks and armoured tanks burning down his property worth hund-



- reds or millions of Naira. What new offence has Tom Ateke committed? Is peace a crime? Or does the military flourish in crime?
- (iv) The 444.6 Billion Naira security estimate for Niger Delta.

The aforementioned manifestations of lack of empathy by the FGN had led to provocation and intensification of the Niger Delta conflict as shown by the resolutions of Ijaw Youth Leaders' Forum.

### The Niger Delta Master Plan

Similar to the "Niger Delta Peace Process: A Critical Review", "The Niger Delta Master Plan" raises serious questions bordering on the FGN commitment and empathy for the Niger Deltans. The Guardian Newspaper editorial of April 10, 2007 raises the following questions:

- (i) Why is only now that the master plan is surfacing at the end of the road in the life of this government (Obasanjo administration), especially when it is realized that it took such a tortuous, indeed a most fortuitous route of insurgency, carnage and criminal official gerrymandering to come up with the plan at all? It makes genuinely concerned Nigerian citizens to ask a follow up question about the context, framework and platform the federal government, NDDC and the state governments have been adopting to spend multi billions of budget funds to find a solution to the Niger Delta debacle.

From the foregoing analysis, it seems the FGN was the cog in the wheel of using NVC to resolve the Niger Delta Conflict. If the FGN had shown sincerity of purpose to use NVC, the conflict could have been resolved.

### ASSESSMENT OF NVC LANGUAGE IN THE YAR'ADUA'S AMNESTY ERA AND THE NIGER DELTA CONFLICT

*"Amnesty is as good for those who give it as for those who receive it. It has the admirable quality of bestowing mercy in both sides."* – Victor Hugo

On June 25, 2009, President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua proclaimed the state pardon for the militants in the Niger Delta. This marked the new era, the Amnesty era in the Niger Delta Crisis. What does this mean in relation to non-violent communication?

As commented by Mr. Dafe Akpedeye (SAN), Delta State Attorney General and Commissioner

for Justice in The Guardian newspaper of July 14, 2009, amnesty involves pardon, demilitarization, disarmament, rehabilitation and reintegration of those militants who would take advantage of the presidential reprieve. The contents of the proposed amnesty by the FGN further states that the repentant militants must be willing to lay down their arms and be rehabilitated by way of a variegated form of training for their human development through skills acquisition, specialized education, and other training packages depending on the area of interest of the surrendering militants.

Furthermore, after the training period, there are programmes for the reintegration of the former militants fully into society to enable them to lead normal lives again. Finally, the government is willing to fully support the process of redirecting the energies of these able-bodied young men and women into the process of sustainable development of the region in every ramification. Using NVC, an analysis of the full text of the presidential amnesty reveals as follows:

(a) **Honest Self-expression:** In the full text of the presidential amnesty, the FGN had expressed her grievances devoid of hostile language. The FGN bemoaned the serial attacks on oil facilities in the region, which had almost brought oil exploration and production to a standstill. She sympathizes with the crisis in the region, the loss of lives and property and yearns for "a crisis-free Niger Delta."

(b) **Honest Self-expression Longing for Reconciliation and Peace:** The FGN has demonstrated honest self-expression longing for reconciliation and peace by proclaiming unconditional amnesty for the militants. The honest self-expression longing for reconciliation includes rehabilitation, reintegration and training. This expression translates into creating new life. Hence, NVC is seen as a language of life.

(c) **Honest Self-expression Devoid of Violence and Threat:** The FGN has demonstrated honest self-expression devoid of violence and threat. The presidential amnesty is characterized by appeal, commitment and sincerity in the offer. Furthermore, the president is soliciting cooperation from the militants by offering sixty days for compliance. After the expiration of the period appointed for the militant to repent, what is referred to in law as locus principles will be applied on the unrepentant militants in accordance with the provisions of our penal laws.

These proposed lines of action by the FGN support the principles of NVC.

(d) **Empathy for Another:** This important element in NVC which was lacking in the FGN's previous administrations is now emerging as a strategy for the acceptance of amnesty and resolution of the conflict. The FGN is now interacting with and listening to the grievances of the Niger Deltans. This is demonstrated with the presidential visits to some Niger Delta states and communities and the release of Henry Okah, the leader of MEND from detention. There is also the proposed overall development of the Niger Delta through the Ministry of the Niger Delta Rehabilitation, reintegration and training of the surrendered militants. These point to empathy for the militants. Furthermore, the promise of redirecting the energies of the Niger Delta Youths is an empathic proposal.

#### APPLYING NON-VIOLENT COMMUNICATION TO HEAL THE WOUNDS IN THE NIGER DELTA

To accomplish the goals of NVC in the Niger Delta conflict, some interdependent and interrelated core processes should be applied. The three core processes are self-empathy, empathy for another and honest self-expression. Various forms of honest self-expression from both parties are necessary to resolve the conflict peacefully. These are:

- (i) **Honest Self-expression Devoid of Hostile Language:** Both the FGN and the Niger Deltans should re-express their grievances, aspirations and expectations in a different manner from the past. The language should be devoid of hostilities. Such language should be characterized with words of vision of fulfillment and peace such as "confident, glad, optimistic, hopeful, proud, moved, thankful, trustful, relieved, transformation, truth, peace, harmony etc. These human relations and pains-healing expressions will bring about sustainable ethical climate in their relationship. A good example of such honest language is the one expressed by Henry Okah the leader of the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND): "I pray Nigeria has peace soon" (The Guardian, August 24, 2009).
- (ii) **Honest Self-expression Longing for Reconciliation:** Utterances from both

parties should project friendship, cooperation, willingness to work together for the benefits of the two parties. Above all, utterances from both sides should project the willingness to listen to each party.

- (iii) **Honest Self-expression Portraying Safety and Mutual Respect:** Utterances from both parties should generate a climate of mutual respect and sincerity.
- (iv) **Honest Self-expression Devoid of Violence and Threat:** All forms of violence and threat from the FGN's military and the Niger Delta militants and miscreants should be abolished.
- (v) **Honest Self-expression Encouraging the Use of Language that Increases Goodwill:** Both parties should put the past behind and start to generate friendly and kindly attitude toward each other. The FGN should take a lead.
- (vi) **Honest Self-expression, Yearning for Peace:** The ultimate goal of NVC is to speak peace in a world of conflict (Rosenberg 2005). Both parties should sincerely communicate their yearning for peace. This should be in words and in actions.
- (vii) **Honest Self-expression with Determination to Resolve the Conflict:** It is not impossibility. With determination, utterances such as "we can work it out" should be the slogan of the two parties as they attempt to resolve the conflict peacefully and powerfully.
- (viii) **Honest Self-expression Mourning for the Hostilities and Pains Afflicted:** Leu (2003) labels this approach "mourning: healing the past." This approach is intended to connect the disputants compassionately with themselves, liberate them as they feel sorry and mourn over their past inconsiderate and inhumane treatment of the other. The FGN should mourn openly over the past hostilities and the Niger Deltans should do so. This is apologia theory in action. Their mourning should expose their misplaced intentions.

#### Empathy for Another

This has been a neglected factor in the Niger Delta Conflict; both parties are guilty of this. The FGN has not sincerely assessed the yearnings of the Niger Deltans. These include the development of the region, healthy environment, com-

pensation for the pollution of air, water and land, the destruction of the traditional occupation of the people – farming and fishing, poverty amidst plenty, the use of military to crush peaceful protests. On the other hand, the Niger Deltans have not guessed the feelings of the FGN who has the constitutional right of controlling the Niger Delta and its resources. Hence, there is lack of mutual empathy for each other. If the right of each party is considered and respected compassionately, their relationship is bound to improve.

### **Self-empathy**

This calls for sensing one's own feelings and needs. This means that both parties should honestly assess their feelings and needs vis-à-vis the rights of the other. Searching questions such as these could be adopted. How fair and justified am I in my actions? Are my feelings selfish? Are my needs generating pains on others? As a father (FGN), have I forgiven my children? As a child (Niger Delta), have I humbled myself and respected my father? Honest answers to these introspective questions can improve the relationship and heal the wounds.

### **NON-VIOLENT COMMUNICATION AND AMNESTY: THE WAY FORWARD**

There are two dimensions to resolving conflict in the Niger Delta using non-violent communication and amnesty. These are concretizing NVC language in all interactions with the Niger Deltans, and synergizing NVC with political and economic resolutions/elixir.

#### **Concretizing NVC Language in All Interactions with the Niger Deltans**

Non-violent communication advocates honest self-expression devoid of hostile language, self-empathy, and empathy for another. To resolve conflict gradually in the Niger Delta, all interactions between the two parties should concretize these elements of non-violent communication. This means that NVC should be purposefully injected into the following rehabilitation and reintegration activities for the militants:

- Skills acquisition, poverty alleviation programmes, youths and women empowerment.
- NVC should be used to promote structural mental orientation or adjustment for the two

parties. Such intrapersonal and interpersonal self-revolution campaign slogans include, “we will promote sustainable development, democracy and peace (FGN); “We will embrace peace and shun violence (Niger Deltans).

- NVC should be injected into songs, plays, poetry, video, radio, and television programmes.
- Intensive media campaigns should be carried on to promote peace using NVC language.
- Christianity, Islam and Traditional African Religion advocate peace through NVC. These major religions should preach peace using NVC. They should organize solemn religious assemblies where they should pray for the militants' acceptance of amnesty and peaceful resolution of the Niger Delta conflict.

#### **Synergizing NVC with Political and Economic Resolutions/Elixir**

In addition to concretizing NVC language in all interactions with the Niger Delta militants, efforts should be made to synergize NVC with political and economic resolutions/elixir in the following ways:

- (i) As recommended by Adejumobi (2009), the Nigerian state should shelve her vile moral ground and meaningfully and genuinely engage all sectors in the Delta region. He went further to explain that this is not by creating a Ministry of Niger Delta or appointing high profile people to positions in the Delta region. Rather, it is through an inclusive dialogue with the Niger Delta people founded on non-violent communication (not only with their governors and traditional rulers, but more importantly with organized interest and social forces across the region including the voluntarily surrendered and unsurrendered militant groups). This should take the approach of Democratic Consultative Decision-Making recommended by Ikpe (2005).
- (ii) The Nigerian state should not speak for the Delta region, the region should be allowed to honestly and frankly speak for herself in terms of her needs and how it wants to co-exist in a peaceful and prosperous Nigeria federation.

- (iii) Another suggested solution is making democracy work in Nigeria. This will promote fundamental human rights which include among others, rights to freedom of thought, conscience and religions, rights to peaceful assembly and associations, rights to freedom of expression and the press etc. These rights enshrined in the Nigerian Constitution, and democratic institutions will promote non-violent communication.

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