

COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION AS TOOLS FOR MANAGING DEVELOPMENT IN THE NIGER DELTA REGION OF NIGERIA

Joe Duke II

Department of Business Management,
University of Calabar, Nigeria.
E-mail: joedukell@yahoo.com

Abstract

Identifying an appropriate approach towards rapid development of the conflict-prone Niger Delta Region of Nigeria has challenged policy makers over the years. The contemporary assumption is that by simply channeling adequate public funds towards infrastructural and other needs, the Region will become developed. This paper argues that a community management approach that features the principles and tenets of good governance and conflict management theoretically presents a credible alternative path towards transformation of the Region into an economically viable environment conducive for doing business.

Keywords: *Community governance, Conflict resolution, Development, Niger Delta, Nigeria*

1. Introduction

Years of deprivation and the failure of government to address the problems and grievances of communities in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria have culminated in deep-seated suspicion, apathy towards civic responsibility, open hostilities to guest business organizations and a resort to criminal activities including kidnapping, armed robbery and vandalism. Unfortunately, these have all had negative outcomes for the people of the area, who have lost economically, socially and politically in the scheme of things as a result. This scenario interprets at the macro level the circumstances of this part of the Nigerian state. At the micro level, unemployment, lack of sustainable means of livelihood, low literacy level, early mortality, disease, extreme poverty, suspicion, lack of trust for leaders, and, prevalence of primordial sentiments and prejudices have all coalesced into a state of near-anarchy and skepticism on the part of the people.

Against this above background, it is at best, difficult to expect good governance, low level of conflicts and fulfillment of peoples' potentials in local communities. Nevertheless, it is arguably under conditions of adversity that the true strength and resilience of a set or group of determined people, who are bonded together in a common identity and destiny, often comes to the fore. This therefore makes it imperative that the response of the peoples of this area to their dilemma and problems be re-strategized. The entry point of this discussion is an examination of the requirements for pursuing such response from the perspectives of community governance and conflict resolution, using best practices. The ultimate aim is to create a framework that can facilitate the establishment of a relatively peaceful atmosphere that will conduce internally-driven community development.

This paper attempts a discourse of the imperatives of governance and conflict resolution with a view to presenting frameworks and principles for solving development problems in Niger Delta Region communities. Ultimately, it presents an alternative internal management-based approach towards the desired transformation of this area of Nigeria.

2. Theoretical framework and discussion

The purpose of governance is to bring about orderly development of society and realization of the objectives and aspirations of members of the community. The underpinning philosophy of community governance is therefore that good governance of local communities is a critical requirement for achieving self-determination and socio-economic development (Hunt & Smith, 2005). This calls for designing and constructing effective, responsive and sustainable governance structures that enjoy the people's legitimacy. It is with such a vehicle that the community can position itself to effectively take advantage of the opportunities that emerge in the environment and contain the threats and challenges that confront them. Given a credible governance structure, the community can engage meaningfully with governments at various levels. This vital interface is the key to ensuring coordinated demand for rights, entitlements and support from government and other development partners towards societal development and progress. It is also with this apparatus that a community can deal effectively with issues of internal reconciliation. In view of this, attention should now shift from recrimination to facing the reality of developing a resilient governing system that can guarantee the achievement of a strong, economically viable, socially stable and politically sophisticated society in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria.

Upon building a sound governance structure, the next imperative is to infuse this mechanism with vibrant, responsible, informed and competent stewards who are committed to providing purposeful leadership. Such community managers must constantly seek ways of promoting harmonious social relationships and interaction between members of the community on the one hand, and between themselves and the members on the other hand. To facilitate this, there must be transparency, good communication, trust, participation and inclusiveness, continuing education of the leaders and community members and reasonable enforcement of governing rules of the community and society (Foundation for Community Association Research, 2001).

2.1 Governance

All organizations, entities, institutions and communities need some form of governance to be successful. Governance in a broad sense describes the structures, mechanisms and instruments used in organizing the individual and corporate behavior of an entity. It is an essential element that ensures stability of the system and the protection of the interests of various stakeholders connected to it. The policies, rules, processes, practices, programmes and institutions used in administering, directing, controlling, guiding and restraining the operations and affairs of the entity collectively therefore constitute the elements of its governance. The governance structure distributes and assigns responsibility and authority. It also creates and allocates power bases within the system for specified individuals to make decisions and control resources in a responsible and accountable way. In a generic sense, governance deals with group decision-making in a way that addresses the common or shared problem of a group of people. Governance is more about the processes through which decisions are made, rather than the substance of the decisions made (Carrington, DeBuse & Lee, 2008).

2.1.1 Governance theories

The governance narrative begins with an attempt to understand a number of theories that serve to provide insights to its fundamentals. These theories can be interpreted, and are as applicable, to organizations as they are relevant for community settings. Principal among these theories include the subsidiarity theory, stewardship theory, governance as a minimal state theory, democratic theory and new public management theory.

Individuals in society usually surrender themselves to some authority. The basis of this surrender may be traditional or involuntary, for instance where a person is born into a particular community and becomes a member, he naturally and expectedly submits to the authority of the leadership of the place. At other times, people allow leadership to be exercised over them through their voluntary consent. Their decision under the circumstance is rational and legal in the sense that they consciously make this choice and in return have some expectations from the leadership. The *subsidiarity theory* explains that the leadership will exercise power and control over people only because such people have surrendered power to it. Therefore, by being a member of a community, a person has surrendered to a higher authority, under which he is only a subsidiary.

The *Stewardship theory* suggests that leadership is fundamentally concerned with the maximization of benefits of the entity, and their motives and actions will therefore be symmetrical with those of other connected stakeholders. It debunks the view that leaders will act in the interest of other stakeholders only when there are compelled with governance instruments. Accordingly, this theory implies that leaders should be viewed as stewards, rather than undertakers or appropriators of the entity's commonwealth. Following this, a more appropriate view of community governance is one that pre-supposes a relationship of trust between leadership and the other stakeholders.

The *theory of governance as the minimal state* suggests that an entity may operate without a formal governing leader in place, and what will ensure order and regulation of people's actions and activities is their commonly taken decisions or aggregation of objectives. Therefore, an invisible or unseen force or structure is what drives governance. The difficulty this theory throws up centers on the ability of all members of the entity to have asymmetry of objectives and goals at any point in time. This therefore means that there is no governance (Carrington, DeBuse & Lee, 2008).

The *democratic theory* of governance refers to a system under which leadership and members are collectively accountable for decision-making. This theory suggests participation of all group members as the key to ensuring legitimacy of governance. Essentially, participation engenders group ownership of decisions and therefore fuller commitment to the group's objectives. Democratic theory of governance instructively describes a system under which power actually rests with members, who exercise it through the electoral process. Therefore, for leaders to continue to enjoy legitimacy and relevance in office, they have to account for their stewardship in a way that meets members' expectations (Carrington, DeBuse & Lee, 2008).

The *new public management theory* prescribes the management of an entity using private-sector management methods and incentive structures (Ewalt, 2001). This is a results-based perspective that seeks to institute the principles that are aimed at efficient management of scarce resources and the promotion of

accountability. In order to make this theory operative, the governance mechanism must: have clear standards for measuring the performance of leadership; provide results-based management techniques; and, focus on corporate gain (Carrington, DeBuse & Lee, 2008). The new public management theory is essentially characterized by new concepts of management including marketization, privatization, managerialism, performance measurement and accountability (Tolofari, 2005).

2.2 The community

Although the term community may be interpreted in several different ways, it however basically describes a network of people, groups and organizations linked together by a web of personal relationships, cultural and political connections and identities, networks of support, traditions and institutions, shared socio-economic conditions, and common understandings, interests and objectives or common problems. Therefore, a community may not only be a discrete physically located settlement, but it could be a group of geographically dispersed people (like the Ijaw or Efik people of Nigeria), bound by a common interest or identity based on culture or history, with a common purpose and shared problems. It may also refer to a political or administrative grouping such as a state, federation or an authority (Hunt & Smith, 2005). A community therefore takes on social patterns, roles, functions and organizational structure and assumes a particular form through interaction with their constituent populations, other communities and the surrounding environment (Loomis, 2002).

2.2.1 Community governance

Community governance describes the formal and informal structures used in organizing and running a community. It is identified by the governance processes and structures used by local indigenous communities. Community governance is also reflected in a number of other ways: how members of the group are identified and organize themselves to represent their interests and negotiate their rights within the wider environment of competing communities; how they manage their affairs; how they conduct themselves and negotiate with outsiders; and, how they make their leaders accountable. Community governance is determined or affected by, and it affects, the culture, values, ethos, beliefs, attitude and other institutions of the people (Hunt & Smith, 2005).

Governance at the community level interrelates with other institutions in its internal and external environments in an almost interdependent way. It interconnects with governments at the local, state and the national levels and their agencies. It also relates with private sector organizations, indigenous community-based organizations, non-governmental organizations, etc. According to Hunt and Smith, community governance has inter-cultural dimensions operating across all these layers, and as such, it serves as: a field of inter-connected (and disconnected) players; a network of relationships, rights and interests; layered institutions where decision-making, differential power, governing functions and economic activities are dispersed among diverse entities; institutional spheres (state, market and customary) which have an intimate presence in communities; and, is marked by different languages of governance and competing expectations.

Community governance may either be poor or good. Poor governance is characterized by lack of accountability, widespread corruption and rent-seeking, arbitrary policy making, avoidable bureaucratic bottlenecks, inequitable and unenforced legal systems, abuse of executive power, an apathetic and disinterested civil society distanced from public life. On the contrary, good governance features

transparent, predictable, open and enlightened policy-making, a bureaucracy imbued with professional ethos acting in furtherance of the public good, the rule of law, transparent processes, respect for human beings and their individual rights and a strong and engaged civil society participating in public affairs (UNWVLC, 2011).

Good governance is essential at the community level because it is the single most important catalyst that can trigger and sustain the achievement of common development goals. In addition, it creates the conditions that support societal order and participation of the people.

2.2.2 The purpose of governance

Apart from providing a mechanism for facilitating socio-economic and other development of the community, governance exists for the purposes of: Enforcement of community rules; Adapting rules as required; Mediating conflict; Building citizenship trust and legitimacy; and, Ensuring accountability in the use of public resources (UNWVLC,2011)

2.2.3 Good governance strategies

Carrington, DeBuse and Lee (2008) suggest five strategies for assuring good governance to include: democratic strategies; results-based strategies; order-derived strategies; systemic strategies; and, procedural strategies.

Democratic strategy - The democratic strategy prescribes a governance structure that is based on democratic principles of accountability, participation, inclusion and direct elections. This is aimed at ensuring that leadership is manned by persons who are perceived by members as the most qualified and experienced.

Results-based strategy – Founded on Max Weber’s bureaucratic principle of appointment based on technical competence, which proposes that the selection of leaders is made neutrally and devoid of sentiments (cited in Etzioni, 1964, pp.53-54). Leadership is then expected to deliver on the expected results and standards set by members. This element ensures that managers of the governance system strive to deliver on results in order to justify their tenure.

Order-derived strategy – This prioritization strategy prescribes governance by exercising authority that builds on tradition and provides order and stability for the system. This strategy is founded upon clarity and stability. Clarity entails transparency in revealing the process of decision-making and identity of the people responsible for policy-making. Stability on the other hand means consistency and longevity in developing a sustained track record of operations.

Systemic strategy – The strategy suggests a governance structure that decentralizes and devolves power and responsibility across the system in a way that ensures checks and balances. The underlying principles of this strategy are: power sharing, legality and fairness.

Procedural strategy – This approach is one in which the leaders acquire legitimacy for themselves by focusing on the process through which they make decisions. Accordingly, as transparency increases in decision-making, deliberation, participation and due process, so does legitimacy of leadership rises.

No one single strategy among the above is a best strategy than can guarantee good governance. Each circumstance demands a peculiar solution. Indeed, a simultaneous combination of the strategies may sometimes offer the best results for improving governance.

2.2.4 Requirements of good governance

As has been gleaned from the experience of governance in the North American Indian indigenous context, the factors found to be common among successful communities were:

- i. *Practical self rule* – possession of genuine power and ability to control decisions relating to their own governance and development;
- ii. *Capable governing institutions* – the existence of which facilitates effective exercise of self-determination, conflict management, confrontation of corruption, quarantine of business decisions from political influences, and the management of their the day-to-day affairs; and
- iii. *Cultural match* – enjoyment of cultural legitimacy. That is, their organizational form reflects the cultural expectations of how authority should be exercised, and be aligned with the political culture of the group. This however does not mean that only traditional structures can be used, rather that in new circumstances, new forms can be developed but these will only work if the authority they exercise has the support of the people they govern and serve (cited in Hunt & Smith, 2005, p.2).

2.3 Conflict

Conflict simply describes a situation under which two or more parties have competing objectives and this creates an incompatible interaction or relationship between them. Existing literature (Alemika, 1998; Dunmoye, 1998; Coker, 1968 as cited in Gyong, 2007, p.63) points in the direction of differences between parties as the source of conflict. Conflict expresses a direct or indirect relationship between two or more actors in which each attempts to undermine the interests of the other, often using violence (Ibeanu, 2006). The violence may be direct, which will involve physical or psychological actions against the opponent. It may on the other hand be structural, in which case it is subtle and opportunistic and built into the governance system. And, it may only be exercised by a person that possesses some power over his opponent using such instruments as exclusion, deprivation and poverty (Galtung, 1990). Albert (2007) argues that conflict can either be positive or negative. Conflict is considered to be positive if it ultimately leads to positive change, experience and development for the parties involved, and they discover new ways of relating and dealing with one another. On the other hand, conflict is described as negative if it produces results such as physical harm, death, vandalism or destruction of property and other unwholesome outcomes. Francis (2007) considers conflict to be an intrinsic and inevitable part of human existence. For him however, conflict need not have a violent outcome.

2.3.1 The conflict theory

The most influential theory of conflict is that which draws mainly from the works of Karl Marx (cited in Duke, 2010, p. 87). Marx suggested that the most definitive element of all social relations among people in society is economic in nature. Human beings are basically driven by a need to satisfy their livelihood requirements, which in turn compels them to work in order to earn some income. It is in this process of securing an income that they necessarily come under economic arrangements that typically deliver the levers of power and control to the owners of capital and other critical resources used in production. Therefore, the dynamics of the resulting relationship is what defines the structure of society rather than a deliberate effort by a particular class to dominate the other.

As the owners of production capital naturally seek to ensure the maintenance and protection of their interests, so do conflicts arise between them and the economically weaker section/class of that society or

group. These conflicts eventually lead to deep resentment, revolts and ultimately, revolution. While the effects of such revolution may be disruptive in the short-term, the long-run results are often arguably progressive for society. It is the disruptions occasioned by revolution that have informed the transition of society from a feudalistic to capitalist and then socialist one. It is still these disruptions that have partly informed the emergence of what can conveniently be termed here as a *socio-capitalist economy* in contemporary times, which is best represented by a mix of both socialist and capitalist principles of economics in macro-economic management of states – a trend that has recently manifested across United States of America and European Union states in the management of the financial crisis in the state economy and its institutions.

To maintain continued dominance of society, the owners of capital necessarily employ the instruments of oppression. These instruments are typically represented by the obvious and subtle control and use of government, police and religious institutions. Added to this is the continued appropriation of the ownership of land as a tool of marginalization in African societies including Nigeria. Arising from this dominance is the insinuation and support of the superiority of the controlling class in virtually all facets of social life.

2.4 Peace

Peace is defined as the absence of war, fear, anxiety, conflict, deprivation, suffering, violence and peaceful co-existence. It describes the creation and maintenance of a society that is orderly and just, where conflicts are resolved without recourse to violence (Francis, 2007). Although Ibeanu (2007) has eloquently argued that the absence of war does not adequately describe peace, the closest explanation of a situation where conflict does not exist is peace. The logic behind this position is that peace is a process, the state of which may change at short notice. Secondly, peace can actually be found within the milieu of war, where for instance warring parties, during a war, mutually agree to respect a *no-fly* zone within the theatre of their conflict. However, where peace may accurately be interpreted as the absence of war, the two basic perspectives that can be summarized from it are: *peace as an instrument* and *peace as a function*. Peace is an instrument if it serves as a means to an end, where the absence of war allows for socio-economic progress and development. On the hand, peace may serve the social function of facilitating integration and order. From either perspective, peace enables society function properly. This therefore means that peace is central to good governance and the achievement of societal goals.

2.4.1 Peace as a social process

Ibeanu (2007) identifies four forms in the peace process: peacekeeping; peace enforcement; peacemaking; and peace building. (see Figure 1. Forms of the peace process) Each of this is a stage in the peace process. *Peace enforcement* is an attempt at creating the space needed for increasing development and reducing conflict. *Peace keeping* involves efforts at keeping the parties to the conflict apart from one another. *Peace making* describes conditions where conflict is high, but opportunities exist for pursuing development. *Peace building* applies to a situation where conflict is low and development prospects are high.

As an enabler of societal progress, peace can be seen as having the following features (Ibeanu): *Relativity* – it relates to existing social conditions rather being an ideal state; *Dynamic* – it is an ever-changing condition which can be identified, analyzed and understood; *Work-in-process* – it is never completed because human societies typically seek higher levels of development, and therefore peace; *Socio-economic and political sensitivity* – it depends on the conditions found in society, and it may consequently increase

or decrease based on these conditions; *Measurability* – peace can be measured and benchmarked at any time; *Non-linearity* – it is complex and multi-faceted.

A depiction of the interface between peace and conflict is demonstrative of the point that there is an inverse association between both; as one increases, the other decreases, along with implications - for development or underdevelopment (see Figure 2: The Peace vs. Conflict interface). The two phenomena taken within context appear to obey Pascal's Law of Hydraulics (physics), where in this case, an increase or decrease in peace or conflict will bring about an increase or decrease in development or underdevelopment.

3. Strategies for managing and resolving conflict

Ojiji (2007) suggests that two broad alternative attitudes or orientations could be taken in managing, handling or resolving conflict: *cooperation* and *assertiveness*. Cooperation is indicative of the contending party's desire to simultaneously satisfy his need as well as those of his opponent. Here, such tactics as accommodation, avoidance, collaboration and compromise will be used. Whereas, assertiveness describes the desire to satisfy one's own desires to the exclusion or at the expense of the others. The tactics used typically include domination, arbitration and confrontation.

Accommodation – the party neglects his own needs in a self-sacrificing way and focuses on satisfying the other's needs as means to end the conflict.

Avoidance – This is a somewhat middle course tactic in which the contending party tries to ignore the issues in conflict or simply lives in denial about them. In a way, he is actually postponing addressing the conflict issues.

Collaboration – This is also a somewhat middle course approach in which the parties together try to work with each other in an effort to find a solution that will be mutually satisfactory to both. Here, both parties listen to each other and try to understand the other's view point. This is considered to be a win-win tactic as no party loses anything.

Compromise – This involves adopting an expedient and mutually acceptable solution in which both parties make concessions as a way of resolving the conflict. This also is a middle course tactic. However, unlike in collaboration, each party loses something. A compromise applies where the positions of the parties are so incompatible they cannot be reconciled meaningfully. Compromise is a win some-lose some approach that leaves the parties only partially satisfied.

Domination – Under this tactic, little or no interest is given to the opposing party's position. The contending party attempts to override and obliterate the other party. A person uses this tactic where he believes he possesses greater power than the other.

Arbitration – Here, the contending party seeks justice as a means of winning in the conflict. The issues of conflict are brought before an adjudicator who considers the facts of the dispute and makes judgment objectively according to his findings.

Confrontation – This describes recourse to physical or psychological attack as a way of resolving the conflict in the favour of a party. This is a win-lose tactic that often has damaging consequences and long-lasting effects on the losing party's resources, memory and dignity.

3.1 Mediation in conflict resolution

Mediation describes an intervention in a negotiation or conflict by a mutually acceptable third party who does not have a definitive decision-making power over the disputants, but whose effort assists both parties in arriving at a mutually acceptable settlement of issues in their dispute (Moore, 1996). Mediation seeks to

achieve an acceptable settlement for parties in a conflict through non-violent means. It represents a unique pseudo-cooperation strategy under which parties to a conflict negotiate their position through the intervention of a neutral third-party. Mediation is often necessitated where the contending parties are unable to negotiate their needs and goals because of the emotions involved. This strategy however is one that must be sought and agreed to by the parties involved (Godongs, 2007). The key difference between mediation and arbitration lies in the process. While arbitration relies on hard, cold facts as means of arriving at objective, logical and legally just settlement of a dispute, mediation seeks to provide a platform for the contending parties to achieve a voluntary settlement of their dispute in a way that will promote opportunities for a better future relationship (Cooley, 1992). This presupposes that mediation is more likely to result in longer lasting peace than arbitration.

While mediation may be considered to be a potent tool for resolving conflicts, it may however not be applicable to all conflict situations, including: where the parties involved are unable to articulate their position sufficiently as a result of emotion, panic, fear or confusion; where the sincerity of a party to the dispute cannot be guaranteed; where a meaningful negotiation cannot be held because of the disputants' inability or unwillingness to listen; where the issue is non-negotiable; where a fair agreement cannot be reached because of the overbearing strength of one party; and, where it is in public interest that the details of the dispute be publicized rather than kept confidential as is the case in typical mediations (Godongs, 2007).

A mediator plays several roles in a dispute including: leadership; opening channels of communication; legitimizing the rights and interests of the disputants; facilitator of negotiations; problem analyzer; agent of reality; and, scapegoat.

Mediators fall into three broad categories: Independent mediator; Social network mediator; and, Authoritative mediator.

The independent mediator – This is one who is neutral and does not have vested interest in the dispute or its outcomes. Such a person is usually an expert who has received formal training and experience in mediation.

Social network mediator – This is one that has a relationship or shares some common values with the disputants. Their legitimacy as a mediator draws on the disputants perception about the individual's integrity and discretion. Such an individual may be a co-worker, business colleague or family member of the disputants.

Authoritative mediator – This is an individual who is accepted as mediator because he occupies a position of authority in the disputants' organization and therefore has leverages of control of the disputants. Although such a mediator does not impose himself or his decision on the disputants, each of them however recognizes the influence they can exert on them.

3.2 *The stages of the mediation process*

The mediation process follows a number of stages or phases: Initiation; Preparation; Introduction; Statement of the problem; Clarification of the problem; Generation and evaluation of alternatives; Selection of alternatives; Agreement; Adjournment (Godongs, 2007).

3.3 Alternative Dispute Resolution

Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) is less costly and more productive than litigation. It is comprised of three phases: negotiation, mediation, and arbitration. In negotiation, the parties identify the issues, educate one another about their needs and interests, propose settlement options, and bargain over the final resolution. In mediation, a neutral mediator facilitates the negotiation between the association and resident to help them agree on a solution that is acceptable to each of them. In arbitration, a neutral arbitrator hears both sides of the case and renders a decision based on evidence and testimony. An arbitrator's decision is as legal and binding as a court decision; however, the process is much less formal and far less expensive (Foundation for Community Association Research, 2001).

A number of elements or factors must be present in order for ADR to be effective: trust; good communication; perception of similar values and beliefs by the disputants; acceptance of each other's legitimacy in the issues; and stakeholder participation (UNWVLC, 2011).

3.4 Ways to Minimize Disputes in the community

In to minimize rules violations as a way of reducing conflict between members within the community, the following are suggested.

1. Provide a constitution for governing the community.
2. Inform and educate community members about the rules—what they are, why they are important and why compliance maintains community values. Use every vehicle and opportunity to remind members of these rules.
3. Enforce rules consistently and even-handedly.
4. Intervene as early as possible in order not to allow the violation to continue or to become serious.
5. Establish a policy that outlines how the community will resolve conflicts. This policy may suggest timelines, hearing procedures, hearing panel composition, and support the community's commitment to alternative dispute resolution. Adhere to the policy and apply it in all situations.

3.5 Conflict transformation

Although similar in various aspects, conflict transformation has emerged as an alternative to conflict resolution. The two terms are used interchangeably in terms of their meaning and application, with a greater emphasis towards the term conflict transformation. Conflict transformation canvasses a superior argument over conflict resolution and conflict management, as it seeks to induce change in the disputing parties' relationship through improving mutual understanding. Importantly, conflict transformation emphasizes peace building. The term conflict particularly applies in three ways: (i) the fundamental change in the relationship between parties and a change in recognizing each others' ethnic and national aspirations; (ii) the fundamental social and political changes made to correct inequities and injustice to provide all groups with their fundamental human needs, where transformation also is defined as the restructuring of social institutions as well as a redistribution of power from high-power groups to low-power groups; (iii) changing the consciousness and character of human beings through transformative mediation (cited in Botes, 2009).

The three goals of conflict transformation are: an engaged community; a responsive governance; and, a capacity for solving problems and resolving conflicts (Dukes, 1996):

An engaged community - A transformative practice seeks to nurture a strong democracy by helping constitute and support communities of dialogic relations at local, state, regional, and national levels. It

seeks to establish and sustain a standard of public discourse that empowers people to articulate their needs freely and to explore their differences fairly. It moderates powerlessness and alienation by insisting on inclusion and participation. It opposes the polarization and demonizing which too often accompany conflict by offering recognition of shared humanity and purpose. A transformative practice educates for a civic consciousness. It recognizes that individuals, through their participation in the public realm, are capable of transcending pressures of self-interest in search of common goals. And it encourages productive, realistic relationships both within and among communities of all kinds that recognize and affirm their interdependence - their relatedness - within this shared public domain.

More responsive Governance - While not ignoring the need for improved capabilities of public management, the transformative practice conceives of these desired capabilities as responsive to, rather than directive of, the public. A transformative practice acknowledges the importance of well-functioning administrative, legislative, and legal institutions. It recognizes their expanding role in a society whose problems are rapidly increasing in complexity and in scope. It seeks these institutions as potential channels of participation by an engaged citizenry. It wishes to enhance their capabilities by sensitizing them to public needs and by facilitating appropriate responses to public demands. And, it strives to strengthen these public institutions by encouraging active, lasting and meaningful public participation in decisions made on that public's behalf.

A capacity for solving problems and resolving conflicts - A transformative practice addresses a wide range of problems, including pivotal issues of ethnicity, social class, and gender. It recognizes that underlying many disputes are struggles over power, status, and human needs such as identity, recognition and security. It also recognizes that ordinary disputes are often the manifestation of these deeper societal divisions. It acknowledges the disparities of power that favor relations of dominance along these divisions, and embraces the opportunities for revealing injustice and mobilizing concern presented by the inevitable conflicts that accompany and uncover these relations. It assists in efforts to equalize and even transcend power, by acknowledging these disparities in public forums open to previously unseen faces and unheard voices. It recognizes that movements for justice are also capable of harm. It intervenes in the demonizing and polarization which pervade these disputes by advocating for openness, inclusion, fairness, and understanding.

4. Conclusion

Good community governance is required for driving the development and transformation of a local community into a vibrant, modern and viable society that is capable of taking advantage of the opportunities that abound it, and also protecting itself from threats of the environment. To assure this, appropriate leadership needs to be instituted.

Conflicts need not be avoided at all cost. Rather, when they are inevitable, conflicts should be managed with a view to building peace and strengthening relationships, trust and accommodation among community members. Peace is conducive for community progress. Effective leadership usually facilitates peace. Good governance will therefore lead to better socio-economic development of the community.

The principles of community governance and conflict resolution, as discussed in this paper, can be applied or replicated in the conflict-prone communities of the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria as an alternative path towards transformation and sustainable development of the area.

5. Recommendations

1. Provide a constitution that will be the guiding charter for the conduct of the affairs of the community.
2. Provide strong and responsive leadership that will play the principal role of guardianship of the community's interests.
3. Institute transparency and accountability in financial and other matters of the community in a way that emphasizes stewardship.
4. Encourage the active involvement, inclusion and participation of as many community members as possible in the governance mechanism (such as in committees and other ad hoc opportunities).
5. Provide opportunities for frequent or regular interaction between the leadership and community members in order to facilitate legitimacy of actions and decisions taken on behalf of the community.
6. Ensure the education of community members on the need to uphold and pursue commonly agreed decisions.
7. Seek the true empowerment of the people through relevant education and capacity building beyond primary and secondary levels.
8. Seek and maintain sustained cooperative relationship with government at different levels.

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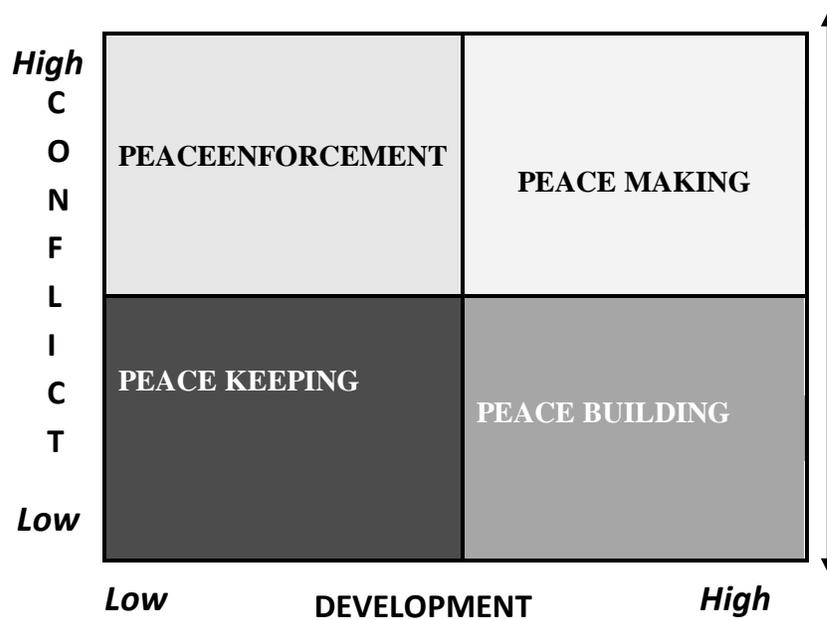


Figure 1: Forms of the Peace Process.

Source: Ibeanu, O. (2006)

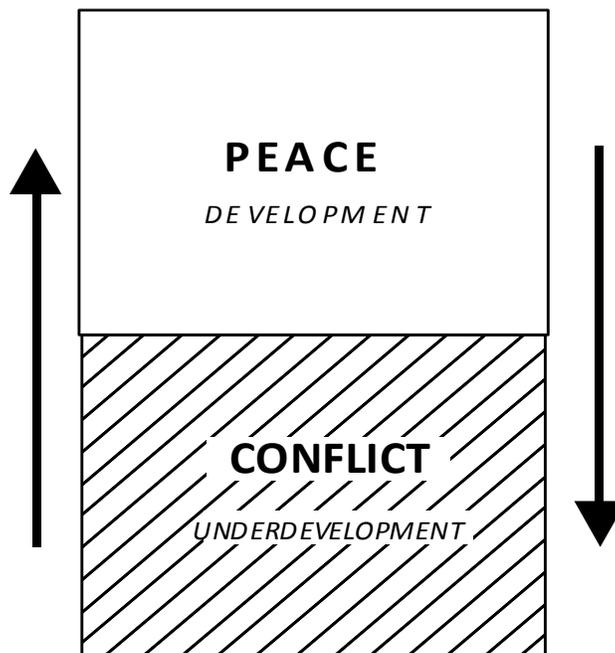


Figure 2: The Peace vs. Conflict interface