

Entrenching Gender Inequality in the Niger Delta through the Niger Delta Development Commission's Interventions

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Abstract

Interventions are meant to cause positive changes in the life of a people. Extant literature has however, shown that they can equally impact negatively. This study relies on this widely acclaimed position in assessing the interventions of the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) on one of the possible areas of impacts—gender. Empirical works on the Commission have not investigated the nature, dynamics and implications of the NDDC interventions on gender. What is the institutional capacity of the NDDC for gender sensitivity? How did the interventions impact on gender dynamics in beneficiary communities? The study adopted qualitative research methods—grounded theory and case study designs. Primary and secondary data were collected through key-informant and in-depth interviews, documents and observation. ATLAS.ti 7.0 was used for data analyses. Data collection and analyses were iterative. Odi Community in Bayelsa State of Nigeria was selected as the case study. The Gender-Based Analysis of Intervention Framework (GBAIF) was used to assess the impacts of the interventions on gender dynamics of Odi. Findings show that the articulated guiding principles of the Commission stipulate gender sensitivity in its intervention programming. However, the NDDC lacks institutional capacity for gender sensitivity. Thus the interventions are gender-blind because the Commission does not mainstream gender in its interventions. Consequently, they impacts negatively on gender relations by inadvertently entrenching traditional power disequilibrium and gender roles between females and males. This happens because the interventions fail to recognise and include women group in its community engagement meetings; allocate more financial resources to males through income from wages as labourers in construction projects; by not making provision for women's needs in their training programmes, hence discouraging women participation; and by designing special programmes such as Home Management Business Skills that entrench women's traditional reproduction activities.

Keywords: Gender, NDDC, Niger Delta, interventions

Introduction

Gender refers to cultural roles, attitudes and values that a society assigns to its women and men, girls and boys, which define their behaviours and relationships. Gender roles are created and maintained by social institutions. It has been accepted that women in every society have been peculiarly disadvantaged as a result of marginalization and subordination by the menfolk. Interventions, which in this paper refers to development aid, humanitarian assistance, or peacebuilding, refer to a range of deliberate initiatives or activities, which aims at positively influencing a situation to bring about an improvement or to forestall deterioration. However, in the last two decades, there has been growing realisation that interventions in contexts characterised by conflict can also influence the situation negatively. The realisation of the potential of interventions for both positive and negative impacts has led to the emergence of Peace and Conflict Impact Assessment (PCIA). Starting from the early 1990s, literature on PCIA include methodologies, frameworks, approaches and tools to map, assess or evaluate the potential and actual impact of interventions on their contexts and vice versa (Barbolet, Adams, Rachel Goldwyn, Hesta Groenewald, and Andrew Sheriff, 2005). The overarching purpose of these approaches is that interventions will build rather than weaken or destroy peace; and reduce rather than exacerbate conflict. Four of the most prominent of such approaches are Kenneth Bush's *Hands-On PCIA*, Mary Anderson's *Do No Harm/Local Capacities for Peace (DnH/LCPP)*, Barbolet, Goldwyn, Groenewald and Sheriff's *Conflict Sensitive Approaches (CSA)*, and Thania Paffenholz's *Aid for Peace Approach*. A thorough analysis of conflict and identification of areas of potential or actual impact are generally common features of PCIA approaches. Gender is a regular issue that arises both in these conflict analyses and impact assessments. It is within the larger context of a PCIA of the NDDC interventions that the study reported in this paper was carried out.

Introducing gender sensitive lens to PCIA helps us understand women and girls, men and boys' roles as actors (participants in planning, implementation and monitoring and evaluation and beneficiaries) and victims of intervention programming. King (2007) opines that engendering intervention this way makes it more efficient, effective and delivers maximum good. According to Bush (1996, 1999, 2004, 2005, 2009), interventions can impact traditional gender roles positively or negatively. An intervention can entrench the traditional subjugation of women, cause tension between female and male gender, and/or build a gender's capacity or inadvertently allocate more resources to a gender at the expense of the other. Alternatively, it can empower women and girls and/or promote gender equality and equity. The point here is that interventions are never neutral on gender dynamics of the contexts where they are situated. The potential of interventions for positive and negative impacts on gender dynamics informs the argument for gender mainstream gender in intervention programming.

The Niger Delta Region (NDR), the third largest body of wetlands in the world, is located in the southern part of Nigeria and is home to about forty ethnic groups speaking two hundred and fifty languages and dialects (Master Plan, 2006). The region has a long trajectory of conflicts. Also, various actors—I/NGOs, IGOs, donor agencies, multinational oil companies, and government—have undertaken different forms of interventions in the NDR conflicts. The

Nigerian central government, at different times, established specialized agencies to cater to the needs of the region. These include: the Niger Delta Development Board (NDDDB) 1960-1966, the Presidential Task Force 1980-1985, the Oil Mineral Producing Areas Development Commission (OMPADEC) 1992-1999 (Master Plan, 2006). Through these establishments, the people of the NDR suffered from rising expectation, relative deprivation, and frustration. This resulted into aggression and violent conflict in the NDR. The Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) was established as another of Nigeria federal government's intervention agency. It was set up by an Act of Parliament as a socio-economic intervention agency in the Niger Delta conflict situation on the 12th of July 2000. It was officially inaugurated on 21st December 2000, and established in 2001 (The NDDC Act, 2000; Niger Delta Development Commission, 2012). The Commission was set up "to offer a lasting solution to the socio-economic problems of the Niger Delta people" (Master Plan, 2006). Its vision is to "offer a lasting solution to the socio-economic difficulties of the Niger Delta Region". It has the mission "...to facilitate the rapid, even and sustainable development of the Niger Delta into a region that is economically prosperous, socially stable, ecologically regenerative and politically peaceful" (Master Plan, 2006). The Commission has a 10-point mandate.

From the foregoing, the NDR and the NDDC interactions present a good case for studying the impacts of intervention on gender dynamics in conflict contexts since conflicts and interventions have both been part of the NDR context for decades. Extant literature covers the history, people and culture, conflicts and interventions in the Niger Delta (Dike, 1956; Ikime, 1969; Alagoa E. J., 1999; Human Rights Watch, 1999; Albert, 2001a; Institute for Peace and Conflict Resolution, October 2002; Isumonah A. V., 2003; Ogbogbo, 2004; Internaitonal Crisis Group, 3 August 2006a). Also empirical works on gender issues in the Niger Delta do exist (Aina, Adeyemi, Waziri, & Samuel, 2009); however, a gender-based assessment of the interventions of the NDDC and its implications for the context of the interventions has also not been adequately covered. Also, the institutional capacity of the NDDC for gender sensitivity has not been empirically assessed. This study therefore assessed the capacity of the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) for gender sensitivity and its implications for gender dynamics in the study area. The objectives of the study therefore include: assessing the extent to which gender sensitivity is mainstreamed into the NDDC institutional context; assessing the extent to which gender sensitivity is mainstreamed in the NDDC intervention programming; and assessing the implications of the NDDC interventions for gender dynamics in the Niger Delta. From these are three research questions, including: to what extent is gender mainstreamed in the NDDC institutional context? To what extent is gender mainstreamed in the NDDC intervention programming? What are the implications of the NDDC interventions on gender relations in the Niger Delta?

To answer the questions posed above, the study employed a combination of purposive or deliberate sampling methods—maximum variation sampling, snowballing/network or chain referral technique, informant sampling, concept/theory sampling, and site selection and comprehensive sampling strategies. Seventy-eight interviews sessions were held with 45 purposively selected participants comprising 10 programme beneficiaries, 10 community stakeholders, 7 technocrats, 6 NGOs staff, 3 law-enforcement agents, 6 NDDC officials and 3 consultants using semi-

structured guides. Interviews were recorded using digital voice-recorder and transcribed. The Niger Delta Regional Development Master Plan, NDDC Act, official documents, and website contents were analysed. Unstructured observations were carried out at NDDC Offices and Odi. Odi Community was considered appropriate area for this study first, because it is an Ijaw Community, and Ijaw being the largest ethnic group in the NDR and the fourth largest in Nigeria. Also, at the time of the fieldwork, the community was not involved in any violent conflict, which makes it safe for the researcher and respondents. Moreover, preliminary investigation revealed that the community has enjoyed relatively high number of NDDC interventions. Furthermore, it is a home to one of the major NDDC consultants on its agricultural support programme—the Biotechnology Resources Development Centre (BIODEC). ATLAS.ti 7.0 was used for data analyses. Data collection and analyses were iterative.

The next five sections of the paper present the study area, the concept of gender mainstreaming, gender sensitivity assessment, that is, the framework for assessing the impacts of the NDDC interventions on gender dynamics of the beneficiary community, findings on the gender impact assessment of the interventions, and the implications of the gender sensitivity of the NDDC interventions respectively. The sixth section is the conclusion.

The Study Area

Odi is an Ijaw community in Kolokuma-Opokuma LGA (with headquarters in Kaiama), Bayelsa State. It is located beside one of the tributary rivers of River Niger, bordered in the north by Odoni and Agbere, in the south by Sampou and Kaiama along the River Nun bank. Its western neighbours are Patani and Abari, while in the east is Okordia Zarama. Its built-up area is 3.85km north-south and 2.6km east-west. Odi has twenty-seven communities (essentially compounds but rechristened for political reasons) and divided into north (Asanga) and south (Tamanga) parts. There are thirteen communities in Asanga and fourteen in Asanga. Communities in the north include Amakiriebi-ama, Amatus, Ebereze, Ede-ama, Ekpevama, Fisin, Ifidi, Keminanabo, Mamuagha, Osiakeme-ama, Ogien-ama, Payo, and Timbo-ama. The south parts include Ayakoro-ama, Bethlehem-ama, Bolou-ama, Burudani-ama, Ikiri-ama, Ineinfagha/Akangele-ama, Obimo, Oboribengha, Obuka-ama, Ofouwara/Gbagba-ama, Ogboloma, Sounbiri, Tamukunoun, Tonbere-ama. The community has three wards.

There are four cardinal groups in Odi Community—the traditional council, the Community Development Committee (CDC), the Youth Council, and the Women Group. The traditional council is headed by His Highness, the Amananaowei (King) and has twenty-seven chiefs representing each of the communities in Odi. Membership in the traditional council is by election. While the Amananaowei is elected for life, the chiefs are elected for a period of three years. Upon the demise of the King, his first son act as a regent for a period of two years before election is conducted for the next King. Membership of the Youth Council is open to all female and male youths age fifteen to forty-five who has a maternal or paternal affiliation to the community. Interested individuals register with a token fee to become members. Any member can vie for elective post by campaigning and seeking vote through elections. Elections are held every two years through open or secret ballot system. The Youth Council is a vibrant and

formidable organization in the community, with well-articulated twelve-point objectives covering almost every facet of community life. Divergent views between the Tradition Council and the Youth Council often lead to tension between the two groups. However, in Odi the Youth Council usually defers to the traditional council on many occasions out of respect for the elders and in order to 'allow peace to reign'.

The Women Group, headed by the Ereamini da-arú, comprises of every community woman by default. The Ereamini da-arú is chosen by the women themselves to manage their affairs. The current Ereamini da-arú has assumed office since the 1999 Odi Massacre. (The Odi Massacre was a recurrent theme in the discussions with all the community people) The Community Development Committee is a group set up for the development of the community. It is supposedly the community's contact with any development initiative coming into the community. Each of the 10 members is elected democratically from communities. No community can have more than one member. The group is headed by a chairman. At the time of the fieldwork, the CDC was being reconstituted—eleven years after the massacre—Odi Community has become a peaceful community. There were no open conflicts. However, low intensity dissatisfaction abound.

Gender Mainstreaming

The international community first showed special interest on women issues in 1946 when a Commission on the Status of Women was set up as the first gender perspective on the International Bill of Human Rights. In 1967, the Declaration on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women came into being. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women was presented at the World Conference of the UN Decade for Women, in Copenhagen 1980. The Development Assistance Committee-Women in Development (DAC-WID) Guiding Principles on Women in Development came into existence in 1983. At the Third World Conference on Women 1985, there was a shift from WID to Gender and Development Approach (GAD). GAD is an approach to development that focuses '...on social, economic, political and cultural forces that determine how differently women and men participate in, benefit from, and control resources and activities.' 'Gender mainstreaming' was first coined at the United Nations' Third World Conference on Women in Nairobi in 1985 and then explicitly endorsed with the adoption of the Beijing Platform for Action (PFA) ten years later at the Beijing Conference—the Fourth World Conference on Women. Gender mainstreaming is defined as

[t]he process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in all areas and at all levels. It is a strategy for making women's as well as men's concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated (ECOSOC Agreed Conclusions 1997p 2 in King, 2003, p3).

[a] set of processes and strategies that aims to ensure the recognition of gender issues on a sustained basis [...] an approach that situates gender equality issues at the center of broad policy decisions, institutional structures and resource allocations, and includes women's views as priorities in making decisions about development goals and processes' (NCRFW)

According to Heyzer (2003), gender mainstreaming insists that every aspect of a given activity be assessed for its gender implications. The process of gender mainstreaming, in the words of Heyzer

“...requires persistent effort, including regular monitoring, reporting, follow-up training, and evaluation of progress made and obstacles encountered, as well as systems for holding the operation/organisation accountable for achieving its goals. All of this requires resources and, above all, political will at all levels.’

Gender equality and gender equity are two key goals of gender mainstreaming. Gender equality means women and men should have equal value, enjoy the same status and conditions and should be accorded equal treatment. It refers to the full equality of men and women to enjoy the complete range of political, economic, civil, social and cultural rights, with no one being denied access to these rights, or deprived of them, because of their sex. It means they should benefit equally from the results of development (CEDAW, 1979). Gender equity goes beyond gender equality. World Health Organization (2001) defines gender equity as “fairness and justice in the distribution of benefits and responsibilities between women and men” It refers to giving to the disadvantaged gender on the basis of needs, taking steps to compensate for historical and social disadvantages that prevent women and men from operating on a level playing field. Equity is the means of achieving equality.

Gender Sensitivity Assessment (GSA) Framework

Gender responsiveness or sensitivity of an intervention refers to the extent to which consistent and systematic attention is given to the differences between females and males in the intervention, with a view to addressing structural gender inequality in the context of the intervention. This is the rationale of frameworks such as Gender-Responsive Development Planning (*aka* Gender-Responsive Planning, GRP) and the Gender and Development Approach that attempt to ensure and assess gender mainstreaming in an intervention. The core assumption of such frameworks is that mainstreaming gender makes development planning and programming more people oriented and people focused, emphasizing their impacts on women in particular. For the purpose of this study, a Gender Sensitivity Assessment (GSA) framework was developed to assess the gender sensitivity of the NDDC interventions.

The GSA involves two separate but integrated parts. The first part assesses the NDDC's institutional and policy framework for gender sensitivity. This involves assessing the extent to which gender is mainstreamed in the NDDC institutional context. It involves determining whether or not the Commission has a gender policy. Adopting a gender policy is a conscious effort to

mainstream gender in an organisation's structure and culture. Moreover, an intervention agency with a gender policy is more likely to have a gender policy for its interventions, which is also a deliberate effort to mainstream gender in its interventions. The second part of the GSA assesses each stage of the intervention programming cycle—conception and planning, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation for sensitivity to and actual impacts on gender dynamics in the beneficiary community. A gender sensitive intervention will be one in which gender is fully mainstreamed. There are four main components of gender sensitivity of an intervention—gender sensitive community participation, gender sensitive communication/facilitation, gender sensitive logistics and gender equity at each stage of the programming cycle. GSA also involves gender impacts assessment (GIA), which in this study refers to analysing or measuring how an intervention, policy or programme affects female and male differently within a given context. The gender impact assessment indicators in the GSA are whether the intervention entrench the traditional roles of women and men or it challenges it; build the capacity of a gender at the expense of the other; foster tension among the genders; and increase the vulnerability of women and girls both socially and economically.

An essential element of gender sensitive community participation is ensuring that both genders understand the need for gender mainstreaming in the intervention programming. Gender mainstreaming in community participation involves setting a representative quota for both sexes to participate as individuals and groups equally or equitably. This may necessitate employing innovative and non-traditional means to mobilize and enrol women and girls, who studies have shown to be disadvantaged, at each stage of the intervention programming. Bunch (N.D) cites examples of innovative means such as holding planning sessions where women traditionally gather, providing services and incentives to women so they can forgo their daily tasks in order to participate. To ensure gender sensitive community participation at the stage of conception and planning, women and girls, and community based women and girls' groups may need to have representative quota. It may also include ensuring that women and girls participate in setting goals and objectives for the intervention. At the stage of implementation, it involves employing representative quota (equality or equity) for both sexes to be selected as beneficiaries of the intervention. This involves affirmative action. In case of physical project involving physically tasking unskilled labour, conscientious effort should be made to bring willing women and girls on board or create alternative or compensatory benefits for them. Equitable participation may involve special empowerment programmes for women and girls where need be. However, care must be taken to distinguish between those programmes that truly empower women and girls and those that reinforce their subordination to men. At the level of monitoring and evaluation, women and girls should be part of the monitoring and evaluation team and should be consulted as participants in the evaluation.

Gender Sensitive Communication/Facilitation

Facilitators or conveners must be trained on gender sensitivity. This is to ensure gender sensitive language while addressing participants. This also ensures reinforcement of gender

sensitivity at different stages of the intervention programming. Also, instructional materials must be gender sensitive. Gender stereotypes in narrations and illustrations should be avoided.

Gender Equity

Activities at every stage of intervention must address power imbalance between the sexes. Deliberate effort must be made to empower women and girls in role playing, task assignments, sharing of responsibilities, group leadership, selection of beneficiaries, leading group discussions and other innovative ways.

Gender-sensitive logistics

In selecting time, venue, and other logistics, convenience and safety of women and girls should be put into consideration. Special considerations should be provided for women on child-care and conveniences as well as other things (e.g. transportation) that will ensure their full participation at each stage of the programming.

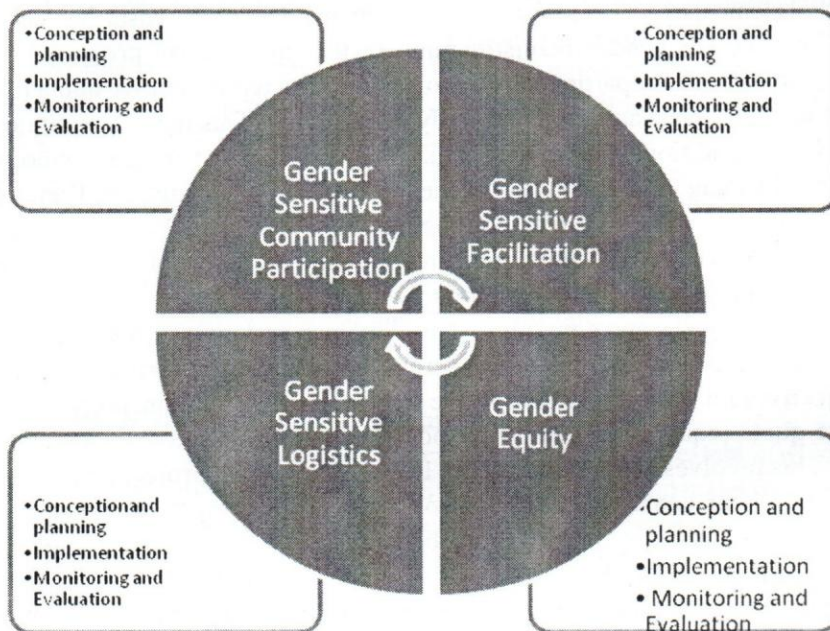


Figure 1: Gender Based Analysis of Intervention Framework (GBAIF)

Gender Mainstreaming in the NDDC

Empirical evidence shows that the Commission does not have a gender policy. All NDDC staff and consultants interviewed reported not to have knowledge of a gender policy. If it exists at all, the policy is not well known outside the Commission's board membership. A participant—a high ranking NDDC official—noted:

“...my sincere answer to that question is that I have not seen...NDDC policy, ok...I wouldn't say...such a policy concerning gender equity, eh, whatever, doesn't exist, I've not seen any, ok. It could be there and I, I guess that, you know, if you have the opportunity of talking with a board member or a management staff they'll be able to answer that question better, authoritatively as well.”

—NDDC Staff, State Directorate

Nevertheless, one cannot say that the Commission discriminates against women in job opportunities. A male respondent, an assistant director in a directorate, authoritatively claims “Oh, sure, sure we have more women than men in this directorate, but it may not have been deliberate. Sometimes you look for the very best.” Another NDDC Staff in another directorate claims:

“We don't look at gender in being assigned to do work. But as you can see, we have many women in the directorate. But to say this is number of women must go to the field or do this or that, we don't.”

Participant observation by the researcher confirms that, in number, women are not discriminated against. In fact, at the time of fieldwork, the Community and Rural Development and the Agriculture and Fisheries Directorates were headed by women. However, only four of the twenty-three member Management Board are women.

Similarly, empirical evidence reveals that the Commission does not have a gender policy for its intervention programming. The NDDC Strategic Policies for Change is documented in page 22 to 46 of the Master Plan. The Plan has eighty-six policies covering five thematic areas of economic development, human and community needs, the natural environment, physical infrastructure, and human and institutional resources. None of the policies was solely on gender. Although gender issues were mentioned in Section A in Goals on Education (pp. 34-35) under Policy for Human and Community Needs. One would have expected women and girls to be listed amongst vulnerable groups that deserve special attention in Social Welfare and Community Goals. The need to build the capacity of women in conflict resolution is also mentioned in Policy HR 14—Capacity Building for Conflict Resolution. Section five of Policy G1—Strategic Planning Principles—reads:

A sound planning process has to be based on participatory decision making. This entails meaningful involvement of the ‘Active’ and ‘Passive’ stakeholders—public sector, private sector, community and NGOs—and ensuring that their respective needs and constraints are taken into consideration when policies and proposals are formulated, including attention to issues such as **gender** and youth.

In spite of the above quote, none of the study participants knows of any NDDC gender policy on its intervention programming or of any deliberate attempt by the Commission to ensure gender equity in its intervention programming. In other words, there appears to be no framework to ensure that women and girls, men and boys participate equitably in the conception and planning.

implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the NDDC interventions. The Commission only involves members of the intended beneficiary community in the implementation of its interventions. Community participation at this stage, in the case of HCDPs, is limited to selection of programme beneficiaries and in the case of the IDPs, to employment, usually as menial labourers. The Commission only informs the community about its intervention when its staff comes to introduce the contractor, in case of the physical development projects. At such occasion, only the Traditional Council, often the chief and some of its members are present. The impromptu nature of such meetings does not permit all chiefs to be present. The current Ereamini da-arau—the women leader/chief—a primary school head teacher, who has held this position for over a decade at the time of the fieldwork) claims she has never participated in such meetings. Moreover, unlike some NGOs working in Odi, the NDDC has never directly sought the participation of women group in its activities through their leader. She explained the situation as fallout of the patriarchal nature of the traditional African society:

I was not informed...I only heard of it. I only heard of their meeting...I wasn't informed at all... You know, in everything there is monopoly now. In our African society, even this eh...especially Ijaw culture everybody want to bring women down. Everybody wants to put women down. They feel if women come out they will usurp our power. I think that's my belief. So most of the things they refuse to involve women, unless women will react on it.

—Ereamini da-arau

So-to-say, I am part of it [the Traditional Council] but when you are not called upon, you will...you will not even know what they are doing. Because you won't know when programmes are going to...[trails off] and women we are not involved, so you have to wait and look what they are going to do.

—Ereamini da-arau

You know, I will say African System. The Africans, we look down on women. We feel women can't do anything, they are housewives. They remain in the house and then bring up children. That is, that is the way [...] we see our fathers manage their households.

—Traditional Council Member (male)

Since gender is not mainstreamed in the NDDC interventions, the NDDC policies and interventions are gender-neutral or gender blind. That is, the Commission implicitly assumes that its policies and interventions affect everyone the same way regardless of gender. Using the Gender Based Analysis of Intervention (GBAI) Framework earlier, results show that the Commission does not make any deliberate effort to ensure that women and girls are especially encouraged to participate in the programme. This is the case throughout the stages of intervention programming as confirmed by the submissions of community people:

I've not heard any of their programmes specify, given number of women.[...] Because most of these their programmes they only come to the Bioresource and they will organize it and go. Because they don't come to the community, highlight the council, sensitize the people ever before they start. They just say they have so-so-so programme, they can write to the community or they announce over the radio. [...] every community just pick; politicians will pick their people, there is so-so-so programme the NDDC is trying to organize in Bioresource, Odi. I have included your name o, you go, like that. They just come and go. And those people picking too, unless [...] maybe their girlfriends or their own sisters, if not...it is the male, because we the male take care of the women.

—Traditional Council Member (Secondary School teacher)

“...when they tell the town crier to announce, they didn't say anything about only female or male. But they talk about both sex. Both, not only one group of people, or not only youth, or not only women, or the men or something like that, no. Everybody should be there, so that they will benefit.”

—A female programme beneficiary (Federal Government Worker)

“It is open to everybody, of which, maybe, they said they want to train hundred so they will put it in quota form. And the quota, anybody can come to represent their community.”

—A male programme beneficiary (Graduate of Political Science, Niger Delta University)

In fact not giving women special encouragement to participate generally lowers women's participation in the NDDC intervention. For instance, the researcher's direct observation in the field shows that during the day, Odi women are busy, perhaps, more so than their men. A number of men—game men—were seen playing draught. However, throughout the five-day stay of the researcher in the community, hardly was any woman seen idle. Women were usually engaged in agricultural and economic activities such as small-scale farming, fishing, cassava processing, firewood collection, retail business, among other endeavours. However, this does not imply that all Ijaw men do, is play draught as some scholars erroneously concluded. Rather, men are usually involved in more physical activities such as large scale farming and fishing on the high sea. Fishing on the high sea is seasonal and the fish migrate during the season. The migration of fish determines the location of the men—in or out of town. Also men fish in the night. So during the day, when they are in the town, most of them engage in leisure activities to relax until the night time when they embark on their vocation. At times, they leave the town for a number of days. However, women are usually involved in reproduction activities, which often require such personal involvement. The traditional division of labour in the community, therefore, naturally favours men's participation in the NDDC intervention. Women would therefore require special encouragement and accommodation within the NDDC programme schedule in order to be able to participate. They typically find it difficult to abandon their responsibilities and attend

the NDDC HCDPs. Although the Commission pays stipends to participants, and equal stipends are paid to women and men, both complained that the stipends paid after the training is usually lower than what was promised. For instance, they claimed that they are paid between one and two thousand naira (instead of fifteen thousand promised) after participating in a two to three-day workshop. For women, this amount is too low an incentive to make them leave their agricultural and economic activities which yield greater incentives. Past records of the Commission in not living up to people's expectation or in fulfilling its promises in stipend payment and not providing post-training financial and material empowerment seem to further discourage women and girls' participation.

She say the people that they came to train they promised them that they would give them because...they delay them in their farming work, they said they will give them 15,000 [Naira] each but they only bring one, one thousand to them. And they said that they hear, that they have paid the money into their account and they contributed some amount of money, but still they have not seen anything.

—A female beneficiary (speaking through an interpreter)

To further confirm relatively lower participation of women in the NDDC interventions, community participants reported the following.

As I told you, the list came out and there were a lot of women but most of the women did not participate hoping that this is something that we have been seeing. What is there? And they did not go further...there were less women, you see. Because a lot of these women feel that these things they are not relevant. So, probably in a hundred you see about ten or fifteen.

—Male Programme Beneficiary, Politician

...sometimes they [women] even give out their spaces. Their names might be there [on the list of successful applicants] all right. They will give it to one of their brothers. 'Go there abeg. Every time we dey go there wetin we dey benefit?' There was this, eh, the comm...she was a commissioner or something in Niger Delta representing Bayelsa State. The woman from Mende, she came and open this thing there. She actually said 'The women population is so few, why?' So she made an effort to lure women but it was not possible.

—Male Programme Beneficiary, Politician

Moreover, facilitators of training do not have gender training hence, their language and that of the materials provided for participants are not gender sensitive. Furthermore, the logistics was not gender sensitive. For instance, there were no special arrangements for child-care for nursing mothers during the training. There was no evidence of any deliberate effort by facilitators to empower female participants during the training. Empirical evidence suggests that in organizing and executing training programmes, female and male participants are treated as if their social, economic, political realities, experiences and needs are the same. There was no special recognition

and acknowledgement of the 'inferior' status of women in the community and no provision was made to improve their lots. Hence gender equity was absent from the NDDC intervention programming in Odi Community.

The policy and programming of the NDDC, as the findings reveal, supports patriarchy. In other words, it maintains an unjust system for the male to benefit more from the NDDC intervention programming at the expense of the female members of the beneficiary community. The above findings are consistent with the argument of the socialist feminists that patriarchy in the structure of the human society subjugates the female folk under their male folk. They argue that there is need to overcome gender blindness in the struggle for development and against shared oppression of women, especially in the developing world.

The NDDC designed some programmes—the Home Management Business Skills—specifically for women. This, nonetheless, may not indicate gender sensitivity. The Home Management Business Skills (HMBS) is designed with a view to helping women perform their socially assigned roles as homemakers. This HMBS initiative has the potential of entrenching women in their traditional roles as homemakers and preventing men from benefitting in such programmes. So it will likely lock women and girls, men and boys in their traditional gender roles. According to an NDDC staff,

But on the other hand, we do design programmes specifically for the girls and women. We call them home management business skills, basically designed to cater for the needs of our girls and ladies. Bearing in mind that if you have a wife and a mother that is being engaged, it might contribute to the well-being and stability of the family, so we do have programmes specifically designed for women. That's not to say that we are shutting women out of the other ones... They select the very best, the most qualified and I do see a couple of ladies there. But the home management skills is specifically designed for our girls and women. So if you see a few men there, it's just by accident.

—NDDC Staff, Headquarters

The response of the NDDC Staff, "...if you see a few men there, it's just by accident" shows that already men are being seen as misfit in such HMBS. Men interested in such programmes may be discouraged or reluctant to apply for such programmes because the HMBS is "...specifically designed for our girls and women." This implies that the Commission by its intervention is suggesting that there are some business skills for women, which men do not have to acquire. And from the list of the HMBS programmes, they are skills for less paying, inferior, women jobs like baking and sewing. This inadvertently indicates the NDDC's endorsement for labelling low paying, low skill home management jobs as women's jobs, which are not meant for men. This implies that the Commission supports the view that men deserve more rewarding, high profile or highly skilled work, thus strengthening the traditional view of men as the superior sex group. Findings also, show that while women are not exempted from other NDDC interventions, special provisions or considerations are not made for them to be able to compete favourably with their men counterpart in benefiting in the programmes. Literature on gender

equality and feminism assert that women have been disadvantaged by the dominant patriarchal structure in the society (Aina, 2009; Mejiuni, 2012). This makes it slightly difficult for them to compete favourably with their male counterparts. Hence there is need to recognize their disadvantaged position and make deliberate attempt to make them benefit equitably from social programmes. However, this is not the case with the NDDC intervention. According to a high ranking officer of the Commission:

As I speak to you there is a[...] in the programme we are running in Turkey, and em, it's an international welders' Programme... I saw a lady there, she came there on merit. She passed the Aptitude Test. Yes, at the maritime trades. The ladies that came on merit, they did not come as ladies. They came because they were qualified. They passed the Aptitude Test and every other test that was required. Those kind of things, I wouldn't say they are not gender sensitive, but they are gender blind.

—NDDC Staff, Headquarters

Empirical evidences reveal that mainstreaming gender in intervention programming is not strange in Odi community as participants reported that NGOs do bring women empowerment programmes and they do involve women in the intervention programming. According to the community people:

Our women leader and her group, they have many projects...programmes that they used to attend [now] and then they have some projects which they want the government to help them. They have programmes, like they want to build Town Hall. That is their meeting hall...It was...only NGOs used to bring, bring those...programs.

—CDC Chairman

However, findings show that some desk officers may use their initiative in mainstreaming gender in implementing some NDDC programmes. A desk officer of the Commission reported:

No, for me, ok, I have a background, before coming to NDDC, I worked with several non-governmental organisations, so I have, you know, schooled in the culture of being gender-sensitives. Okay, so there is nothing that I do, eh, if we have, say maybe a conference, a seminar, I ensure that even if it's not fifty-fifty, then it's sixty-forty [male-female ratio], that's a personal...

This last two quotations show that mainstreaming gender in the NDDC interventions in the community is not an impossible task. The question then is why is gender not mainstreamed? Is it a consequence of ignorance or nonchalance?

Implications of Gender-Neutrality of the NDDC Interventions

The gender-neutrality of the NDDC interventions has implications for the context of the intervention. These are evident in four main ways. First, it sometimes brings tension between

female and male community members; and often brings tension and suspicion between the women chief and the Traditional Council. As noted earlier, the women chief (a member of the Traditional Council herself) claimed she has never been called upon to participate in any meeting between the NDDC and the Traditional Council (The meetings are briefings in the real sense as NDDC only comes to inform the community leaders of their intervention and introduce the contractors to them. This is strictly about the IDPs and occurs shortly before the commencement of the intervention).

“I was not informed...I only heard of it. I only heard of their meeting...I wasn't informed at all” So, they say I am part of it, but when you are not called upon, you will...you will not even know what they are doing. Because you won't know when programmes are going to...[trails off] and women we are not involved, so you have to wait and look what they are going to do.

Apparently, from her facial expression and choice of words, she resents the idea of excluding her in meetings with the NDDC. The NDDC meetings (or rather briefings) are usually impromptu and this makes it impossible for every member of the Traditional Council, especially, civil servants (which she is) to participate. However, not to have been informed at all is a different case entirely. Another male member of the Traditional Council, also a civil servant (a teacher, like the women chief), reported been unable to attend such meetings in some cases, but at least he was informed when the NDDC officials came in for the impromptu meetings. The women chief interprets this situation as a continued deliberate subjugation of women in the African society, especially the Ijaw culture. The second quotation shows that she feels that the council makes deliberate effort to make her redundant;

“You know, in everything there is monopoly now. In our African society, even this eh...especially Ijaw culture everybody want to bring women down. Everybody wants to put women down. They feel if women come out they will usurp our power. I think that's my belief. So most of the things they refuse to involve women, unless women will react on it.”

The quotation above also hints at deliberate male subjugation of women. She became so reflectively and distant when she made the statement above (As if it is something she has contemplated upon and confirmed many times). The tone of her voice suggested to the researcher that men are so afraid of women's power that they have successfully invented several ways to tame them to satisfy their selfish ends (As a male interviewer, the way the respondent described the situation, made the researcher somehow ashamed as a man. At the same time, I felt slightly jittery of a fleeting thought that the respondent was going to make me a scape goat because of the concealed and controlled anger that seemed to course through her at this point in the interview)

(Although not directly linked to the NDDC intervention, the researcher gathered from some members of the community that the Ereamini da-arau (women leader), a former head teacher in a public primary school was recently demoted to a class teacher. Her demotion was punishment for her political party affiliation. The Labour Party of which she is a member ousted Peoples Democratic Party in the election for the House of Representatives. The PDP-controlled state and local government therefore decided to punish her for her political activities).

Second, not involving women in the conception and planning has a tendency to impact negatively on women culturally and economically and consequently, lead to conflict. For instance, there was a case of communal conflict involving the traditional ruler, the NDDC contractor and the community women. An NDDC contractor—the Elite Company—has been awarded the construction of Odi-Trofani Road. The road would pass through a channel of river where women harvest fish, lobster, and firewood for home use and sale. In short, the channel has been a source of household food and income for women for generations. Thus women have higher stake in the channel. However, the Elite Company decided to block the channel since that was cheaper than constructing a bridge. When the community women realised that the men and the Traditional Council were not going to do anything about this, they took their fate in their hands and reacted. According to the Ereamini da-arau:

They wanted to block the place instead of making bridge so that even this rainy season people can pass through. They were blocking it—the Elite Company—because they think that will be cheaper for them. The community women reacted... Yes the women reacted. So we were called to the king's palace because we find out that they were not doing anything. So we... we reacted. And actually we went to Elite. The company had to take the complaint of the women and they had to do it. Though the bridge was not properly done, but at least, people can pass through (even this [rainy] season) to go and bring whatever they want to bring.

The women's 'reaction' was a nonviolent demonstration involving almost all the community women. Men felt unconcerned and the sincerity of the king's committees set up to look into the case before women intervened directly was questionable. According to the Ereamini da-arau:

They [women] are concerned. They are in the kitchen so they're concerned. So if the easy means to go and bring their woods is being blocked and in this [rainy] season, the lobsters that they bring, this season, they make a little money out of it. And even the family they will eat part of it. But most of our men they are feeling unconcern. If not, the channel is for everybody but you know at least if something happens some people will be touched the most. So the women feel that it is their right because they are the people going there more. You know the population of the women are more. And people using the place..., it's women that use the place more than the men, so...we went there later and we succeeded in making that bridge.

According to him [king], he set up three committees to go and meet the company. But the company or the people that are working there, but we don't know, that is what we don't know. We now went to take permission from him that whether they agree or not we have to go there. So we went there and got in touch with the white man that was in charge and that unless they agree with us then the road cannot be built. —Ereamini da-arau

Yes, the whole community women, the whole community women went there. The crowd was so much mighty that eh... —Ereamini da-arau

...so when they were trying to build that place, they were trying to close up that place. The women now woke up, they said, 'You cannot.' The company said that they will. So the women leader and all the women in the community stood up and said: 'No, we are making use of that place and the company cannot close down that place.' ...So all the women went there when the company was working and stopped the company. All the women o...stopped the work. And the company was trying to prove stubborn. Some of the women that know how to drive cars took their keys from them, drove the car to different places, charge [rev] them very well.

—Youth President (male)

The above support Ereamini da-arau submission, “[s]o most of the things they [men generally] refuse to involve women, unless women will react on it.” And in this case, women reacted, although in a nonviolent way.

Thirdly, not mainstreaming women in the Commission’s interventions creates more power imbalance between female and male community members by directly empowering men economically. In respect of the IDPs, one way men and boys benefit directly is through direct employment as labourers—semi-skilled and unskilled. Considering that the IDPs have been more regular than the HCDPs and that this has been the situation since the inception of the Commission, one begins to have an idea of what this meant in financial advantage to men and boys over women and girls. As of the time of this fieldwork the Home Management Business Skills have not been kick-started (although interested people have submitted their applications. The researcher even sighted some applications at CID office at the NDDC headquarters). Male youths, as militants or demonstrators, are usually the beneficiaries of “marching ground” paid by NDDC contractors to allow them to execute their projects, since they are those that demand it through violent agitations. Hence, through direct employment and marching ground, men and boys benefit exclusively from the NDDC physical development projects. As commented by an NDDC personnel:

...most times when we talk about youth, especially in the Niger Delta region where, eh, youth, you know, have seen violence, as, you know, as a vehicle for agitation, it tends to exclude women. Young girls, who, naturally, should see themselves as, part of...you know, that category called youth, so because of violence they are unable to come out openly when young people come out, you know, to participate in that process of agitation or advocacy, whatever.

Also, in its ad-hoc responses to agitations arising from its interventions, the NDDC has not been gender sensitive. The Commission’s “settlement” usually takes care of the males who are more likely to champion such violent agitations, either against the NDDC or their contractors. As noted by an NDDC Staff in the quote above, young female seldom participate in agitations

and since the agitations yield fruit for the “head ones”, that is, the leaders as referred to by a programme beneficiary, females are not likely to reap the fruit of such agitations. Thus male youths benefit exclusively from NDDC as reapers of tangible fruits of violence—in cash and in kind.

Finally, gender neutrality of the NDDC intervention misses opportunities for women and girls empowerment, especially through its HCDPs. Women involvement in the entire intervention programming are good avenues for empowering women and promoting gender equity. If as noted by the Ereamini da-arau, the Ijaw culture subjugates women, affirmative actions to empower women and girls would be a worthwhile goal for the Commission to pursue. However, the Commission fails to exploit this opportunity in programming its intervention. This probably is a case of underutilization or a skewed prioritization of the NDDC resources. Empowering women this way may reduce the likelihood of violent agitations in the Niger Delta. Casual observations on the pattern and dynamics of agitations in the Niger Delta reveal that it is engendered. It appears that violent and nonviolent agitations are characteristic of male and female agitations respectively in the NDR. In other words, the NDR women are more likely to be involved in nonviolent agitations, while their male counterpart is more likely to employ violent tactics. Militants are essentially males. And empirical women’s nonviolent tactics appear to be more effective. As noted by the Odi youth president:

At that time point in time, are you going to bring police there, when women are taking action? Now because of that action, it led to the construction of bridge at that place. If not for the women, they would have closed up the place. People are now passing through, to go and fetch firewood and do their farming activities.

This shows the strategic effectiveness of nonviolent agitation by Niger Delta women. Hardly can any government justify the use of force against women engaged in nonviolent protest. As the case of Odi Community shows, women appear to be able to get result for their agitations than male youth. Also, the outcome of women’s protest is more likely to produce result for the benefit of all. The phenomenon of settling the ‘head ones’ syndrome did not come up during the women’s protest, unlike the youths. Hence it was difficult to discredit their movement. If in their present relatively subjugated state, women are able to achieve this feat, one wonders what they will achieve in their empowered state. Although, this aspect of the study is inconclusive, the potentials of women group taking the lead in improving the interventions of the NDDC is worth exploring.

Conclusion

In spite of the popularity of both international and national policy frameworks on gender equality, the NDDC does not have a gender policy. There is also no such policy for its intervention programming. Hence both the NDDC and its interventions are gender-neutral or gender blind. Despite this, women are well represented in the Commission. Gender-neutrality of the interventions, however, has negative implications for gender equality in the study area. The NDDC interventions entrenches the power disequilibrium between females and males in the

community. The programming of the interventions systematically give male more benefits at the expense of their female counterparts. Also, it engenders conflict between the roles and discriminates against women. By not mainstreaming gender in its intervention, the NDDC loses on the unique perspective that women could bring to enrich its interventions. In cases where intervention impacted negatively on their livelihood and income, community women took collective nonviolent action to demand a change in the implementation, and they succeeded. Women nonviolent collective action achieved better result than the usual violent agitations of the youths (essentially male). Hence the women's nonviolent approach offers a potential source of leverage for communities in negotiating intervention with the NDDC. With abysmally low capacity for gender sensitivity, the NDDC cannot deliver gender sensitive intervention in the NDR, rather it entrenches the traditional power imbalance and roles between female and male members of the beneficiary communities.

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