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# The Political Economy of Peacebuilding in Nigeria's Niger Delta Region

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## Abstract

Most conflicts including insurrection of militant movement in the Niger Delta are subject to contestation due to natural resources and the accruing benefits therefrom are inextricably linked to its political economy. Therefore, the political economy of peacebuilding is about response mechanisms evolved by the government to address their root or potential causes. The article examines the political economy of peacebuilding highlighting the vital roles of government agencies and their paradoxical nuances in addressing the conflict and deficit of development infrastructure. From a critical institutional perspective of the mandate of government agencies, the article attempts a kaleidoscopic reflection of the peacebuilding framework of the Niger Delta Development Commission, Presidential Amnesty Programme and Ministry of the Niger Delta Affair. The broad objective is to examine the peacebuilding framework evolved to address the root or potential causes and create a supportive environment to avoid relapse of violence. It is a descriptive survey using data generated from scholarly review, official reports and personal interviews from parts of a broader fieldwork in the Niger Delta. The article highlights arguments on the paradoxical nuances that precipitates a lack of coordination of the peacebuilding efforts of NDDC, PAP and MNDA and its negative implications for genuine security and sustainable development. In doing so, it proposes the establishment of a directorate of compliance with internal protocol to direct financial and performance reporting obligations by the agencies. Finally, the article concludes that in order to alter conflict dynamics into sustainable peace, the micro, meso and macro elements of political economy of peacebuilding should be mainstreamed.

**Keywords:** Niger delta development commission, ministry of the Niger delta affairs, peacebuilding, political economy, presidential amnesty programme

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## Introduction

The political economy of Nigeria is intricately linked to the political economy of the Niger Delta (ND) Region (Onokerhoraye, [2000](#)). Ostensibly, several reasons account for this. First, the region has continued to dominate Nigeria's political and economic development, accounting for 90% of Nigeria's foreign earnings (Omoweh, [2011](#)). Second, various ethnic nationalities with inter and intra-group disparities in the region constitute a crucial component of Nigeria. Third, there is an overwhelming consensus on the overbearing influence of politics on oil (Eluka et al., [2016](#); Ikelegbe, [2005](#)) and how political forces influence the economy and economic outcomes in Nigeria. The political economy of peacebuilding in the Niger Delta is also inextricably linked to the political economy of conflicts in the region, particularly resource conflicts. Oil conflicts are economic resource-based conflicts not necessarily fuelled by scarcity but by unequal distribution of accruing benefits, exclusion, and political marginalisation of host communities in the region. Thus, a symbiotic interaction exists between oil economics and political dynamics through the complex mix of multinational oil corporations and rentier state policy that has generated regional conflict conditions.

The inherent geological, geographical, ethnographic and political composition of the ND places the region in a dominant stead in Nigeria's political and socio-economic development as the first contact with Western civilisation in the 14<sup>th</sup> century was through the region (Onokerhoraye, [2000](#)). The ND is a distinct wetland ecological zone consisting of drier interior deltaic plains to the shoreline, moist lowland rain forests, freshwater swamp forests, mangrove forests and swamps, as well as saltmarsh and tidal flats along the estuaries and shorelines. The ND is reputedly Africa's most extensive and the world's third-largest mangrove forest, as well as Nigeria's highest concentration of biodiversity. The region, defined within its environmental, cultural, and political components, is richly endowed with hydrocarbon deposits, accounting for substantial crude oil extraction and exploration activities estimated to earn the nation over 90 per cent of its exports and, in essence, the prominence of the petro-dollar Economy of Nigeria. The region has an intricate network of rivers and streams, especially in the coastal communities. Road transport is virtually non-existent – the region has the lowest road densities in the whole country. The

forest resources and aquatic life of the ND have suffered severe loss as a result of oil exploration, exploitation and pollution.

Before the 14th century, the ND was a flourishing economy having trade relationships globally, exchanging local products such as salt and fish and slave trade with the rest of the world. The trade-in palm oil increased the interaction among the people of the ND, as well as their interaction with those outside the region. The establishment of the colonial administration brought a new set of impacts on the political economy of the ND Region, especially the fortune and dominance of the coastal intermediaries' traders. The colonial government continued to govern its territory through their traditional rulers. The discovery of oil in 1957 surprisingly altered the political economy of the ND region and the entire Nigeria. Since then, petroleum has sustained the Nigerian economy as the primary source of government revenue. On the contrary, it was a time when government played a major role in the economic development against the backdrop of the astronomic rise in world oil prices, which caused a sudden flood of wealth that can be described as dynamic chaos (Onokerhoraye, [2000](#)).

Frustrations among oil-bearing communities started to overflow in the 1980s, giving rise to waves of anger, desperation, youth restiveness and violent clashes between youths and oil companies operating in the area (Aghalino, 2009). Conversely, government institutions and several policies have been calibrated for the past two decades to address the region's complex conflict and development conditions. Without prejudice, the issues are predominantly socio-economic and political. Therefore, government and multinational oil corporations have attempted various intervention policies, schemes, strategies, projects, programmes and institutional responses to the Niger Delta problem (Akinwale, & Osabuohien, 2009).

The literature on conflicts and development on the Niger Delta broadly asserts the potential of interventionist agencies especially the NDDC, PAP and MNDA to address community infrastructure and human capacity development (Jarikre, [2024](#)). Yet, the literature appears to be silent about the specific aspect of distinguishing conventional development programming from development initiative in peacebuilding perspective to deconstruct conflict and entrench sustainable peace in the region. Since the NDDC and MNDA are designed to address infrastructural deficit and human security - the underlying causes of violence and armed resistance (Jarikre, [2024](#)). The PAP provide the basis for “stabilising, consolidating and

sustaining security conditions in the Niger Delta” (Ikelegbe & Umukoro, [2016](#), p. 27). The general assumption is that these interventionist agencies will bring about long term solutions to development and sustainable peace. However, it appears these agencies are implemented as a self-standing mission towards sustainable development, security and peace rather than a comprehensive framework for peacebuilding. It is imperative to examine how the absence of coordination of their programming poses a challenge to sustainable development, security and peace in the region. The limitations of self-standing in the delivery of development, security and peace in the ND resonate the broader absence of coordinated approaches, a key dilemma to peacebuilding. This study, therefore, is essentially important as it offers a means to understand how and why the intervention is not achieving the impact, and explain how to bridge the gap through a single institution to coordinating peacebuilding efforts. The broad objective seeks to provide an overview of peacebuilding framework evolved to create a supportive environment to address the underlying causes of agitations and armed resistance in order to avoid relapse of violence.

There is a plethora of existing research on the Niger Delta from the perspective of resource conflict and insurrection, for instance, Falola ([2021](#)) examined the political economy of oil while Ogbuku and Agbai ([2022](#)) interrogated the political economy of presidential amnesty programme. Few studies have delved into the connection between government agencies, their institutional capacity for peacebuilding and the imperative of coordination of peacebuilding efforts in the Niger Delta. Therefore, this study attempts a kaleidoscopic reflection on the function-oriented and paradoxical nuances (Falola, [2021](#)) of government established peacebuilding agencies such as the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC), Presidential Amnesty Programme (PAP) for Niger Delta Militants and Ministry of the Niger Delta (MND). Following research questions were formulated:

1. What are the state institutions in the political economy of peacebuilding framework in the Niger Delta?
2. What is the institutional capacity of NDDC, PAP and MNDA for peacebuilding in the Niger Delta?
3. To what extent does lack of coordination of peacebuilding efforts undermine sustainable peace in the Niger Delta?

Applying the political economy of peacebuilding lens on the function-oriented agencies of the government to address infrastructure deficit in order to avoid a relapse to violent conflicts in the Niger Delta is a critical academic undertaking, because it highlights the political economy that sustains the conflict trajectories (actors, conflict triggers and militant insurrection) and the mechanisms evolved by government to address the root or potential causes. In this way, it is essential to offer sociological insights into understanding the human behavior that triggers and drives conflict and the search for mechanisms to address the complex issues of distributing and redistributing economic benefits based on interests and incentives through institutions.

The article contributes to the growing discussion on the political economy of peacebuilding by substantiating the concepts of idealist and realist approaches (Abu-Nimer, [2018](#)). It also has the benefit of retrospection through the pre-and post-colonial political economy of the ND. This interrogation begins with the Political Economy of the Niger Delta, the contextual discourse of the political economy of conflict and peacebuilding. Then, attempt a kaleidoscopic reflection on function-oriented peacebuilding agencies of the government such as the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC), Presidential Amnesty Programme (PAP) for Niger Delta Militants and Ministry of the Niger Delta (MND) as well as their "paradoxical nuances" (Falola, [2021](#), p. 285). From a conceptual point of view, the paper critically examines the institutional capacity for peacebuilding and the fault lines that epitomise the complex dynamics of conflict and peacebuilding in the ND.

### **Political Economy of Conflict in the Niger Delta**

The conflicts in the ND are not geopolitical struggles; therefore, it is not a product of the ideological disposition of regional leadership to pursue domestic and regional political interests. However, Ikelegbe states, "the ND is embroiled in resistance against the Nigerian state and the multinational oil companies, and the region is generally restive, with pockets of insurrection and armed rebellion" (Ikelegbe, [2005](#), p. 210). It is rather a product of frustration arising from protracted neglect, hardship, poverty, deprivation, environmental degradation, etc. The complex mix of protest, greed, crime and political collusion has made the conflict intractable. The insurrection of the militant movement in the ND is inextricably linked to its political economy based on natural resources, with each group contesting

for a share. The rentier petro-business economy has created and shaped the conflict trajectories either by the government contesting every governable space to seek rents or oil-bearing communities seeking patronage. Perhaps one reason that explains this is that within the ND communities, the IOCs are perceived as government agents of impoverishment and environmental degradation of local communities, and have long had a rather problematic public standing (Tangen, [2003](#)).

The restive community youths and militant groups have sufficient motivation to take up arms against the state and international oil corporations (IOC) operating in the ND. Ostensibly, the restive community youths transformed into a network of formidable resistant militant groups under the umbrella of the Movement of Emancipation of Niger Delta (MEND) that stretches through a network of creeks. They procure small arms and ammunition from an array of ever-present arm merchants from Europe, Asia, South Africa, and America doing illicit business in the creeks of the ND to build a sophisticated and unprecedented armory. The insurrectionary movements recruited disillusioned and disenchanted youths from brigades of vulnerable and unemployed youths within and beyond the ND. Their activities were well funded by proceeds of illegal oil bunkering, illegal refineries, hostage-taking and kidnapping of expatriate and local staff members of IOCs and support from the political elite who are beneficiaries of the resource control struggle.

The region witnessed a resurgence of militant activities after the presidential amnesty proclamation when the Niger Delta Avengers (NDA) emerged as the most dreadful militant group to contest Buhari's Government's reprehensible marginalisation. Holodyn ([2016](#)) observed that the Niger Delta Avengers appears to echo the agenda of MEND, as a geopolitical organisation struggling for a greater part of oil revenue for the impoverished region. Quite aside from the NDA, other splinter militant groups such as Adaka Boro Avengers, the Reformed Egbesu Boys of the Niger Delta, the Niger Delta Greenland Justice Mandate, Joint Niger Delta Liberation Force, etc., sprang up to claim responsibility for various acts of destruction of critical oil and gas infrastructure. Gulf News ([2018](#)) posit that the Reformed Niger Delta Avengers (RNDA), though with its similitude of name, was not affiliated with the NDA.

The Political Economy of the Niger Delta gives a robust understanding of the conflict triggers and militant insurrection emerging from streams of

neglect, marginalisation, exclusion, deprivation and environmental degradation from crude oil exploration in a rentier state. What we see throughout the conflict trajectory is a culture of violence from the entire gamut of resource-based conflicts in the manner of ethnic conflicts, inter and intra-community conflicts, displacement, unemployment, rise in crime and criminality. It is not a coincidence, therefore, that illegal bunkering and proliferation of small arms in the ND are not a strange bedfellow with the Movement for Emancipation of Niger Delta (MEND). This is because militant activities like revolutionary movements are known to have been funded and sustained with proceeds from illegal and criminal economic activities. The militant activities not only left thousands of people dead but also decimated communities like Odi, Okerenkoko, Oporoza and Okuama, and forced majeure by multinational oil and gas companies due to constant attacks on critical oil and gas infrastructure and hostage-taking of expatriate and local staff. For instance, in 2014 alone, there were over 3,700 incidents of pipeline vandalism; from January to June 2016, there were over 1,447 incidents of vandalism. Between 1998 and 2015, over 20,000 persons died from fire incidents arising from the breaching of the pipelines, while thousands had health challenges mainly as a result of environmental pollution (Osinbajo, [2017](#)).

### **Conceptual Discourse of Political Economy of Peacebuilding**

Human existence is predicated on the intricate interactions of political, economic and social structures and belief systems (Ake, [1981](#)). While society may presuppose cooperation through human interactions, there is an inherent struggle among social groups as they pursue their interests. As Pryor ([1990](#)) contends, conflict in society is based on the mutual interactions of economic activities and political structures along ideologies, historical issues and self-interest of groups, which can be explained as political economy. Instinctively, the literature on the interaction between economic and political structures on social formation is in the sphere of political economy (Alozieuwa, [2010](#)). Kenton ([2025](#)) posits that political economy is still widely used to describe any government policy with an economic impact. The political economy is primarily concerned with how political forces influence the economy and economic outcomes and, more importantly, the premium on the distribution of benefits from economic activity (SOAS University of London). The interaction of economic and political activities in terms of the distribution and redistribution of economic





benefits in societies is a precursor to group formation, to influence or oppose policies and development outcomes for the interest and well-being of the group. Group formation over economic well-being is fundamental to human security and social order. More often than not, the distribution and redistribution of political and economic benefits have turned peaceful communities, states, regions and countries into divided societies.

The imbalance in the distribution of economic benefits propels an intrinsic and inevitable spectrum of violence, which illustrates the ontological base of human needs; consequently, any denial (real or perceived) results in violent behaviours. Fetherston ([2000](#)) stresses that conflict is about interest, and such interest extends to the application of violence to satisfy the interest. For instance, conflagration in Nigeria's Niger Delta region, like the conflicts and civil wars in Angola, Chechnya, Congo, Indonesia, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Sudan and the Gulf Region, were resource-driven due largely to political patronage and greed. Where conflict dynamics strongly influence economic dimensions, understanding the political economy of a conflicting society is inevitable. Thus, conflict and peacebuilding strikingly illustrate the intersection of politics, economics, and other considerations in the ND.

Abu-Nimer ([2018](#)) argued that peacebuilding as a field emerges from the idealist rather than the realist power paradigm. Whereas the Idealist places a preference on human relations, justice, mutual recognition, nonviolence, etc., the realist approach, in contrast, is based on the assumption that the world is anarchic and only power balance establishes order and stability while individuals' primary objectives are to pursue and preserve self-interest. Nevertheless, peacebuilding is amorphous (Chetail & Jütersonke, [2015](#)) and multidimensional. Perhaps this explains both paradigms in the light of underlying structural and societal issues in the economic, social and political spheres to circumvent relapse to violence (Boutros-Ghali, [1992](#)). Various political, economic and social variables are responsible for violence and instability.

Conversely, these variables galvanise the objectives of peacebuilding initiatives (Pugh et al., [2008](#)). For instance, in a resource-driven complex situation like the ND, it is essential to identify and deconstruct the conflict drivers - elements of political economy that sustain the trajectories by distributing and redistributing economic benefits based on interests, incentives, and institutions. In this way, searching for strategies to address

such complex issues is a fundamental responsibility confronting both state and non-state actors.

Frieden ([2020](#)) underscores the integration of political and economic factors in the analysis of modern society because politics and economics are intricately and irretrievably interwoven —politics affects the economy and vice versa. Therefore, a plethora of literature classified as the political economy of violent conflict investigates how economic issues and interests shape conflict dynamics (Wennmann, [2019](#)). Conversely, the political economy of peacebuilding focuses on measures to address the socio-economic challenges confronting conflict societies by decreasing the vulnerabilities of the population to avoid relapse. Therefore, this paper on political economy of peacebuilding is about state sponsored response mechanisms to address the root causes in order to avoid relapse of violence. In this context, the NDDC, MNDA and PAP, are three important state institutions in the Niger Delta.

### Methodology

This study has been carried out using the semi-structured in–depth interview method with documentary analysis. The author had the privilege of attending and utilizing the outcomes of stakeholders’ summit and meeting organized by the NDDC and PAP. The NNDC’s Niger Delta Stakeholders Summit: Renewed Hope for the Niger Delta held on 12 and 13 July, 2024, and it was designed to foster collaboration and activate new paths towards sustainable peace. While the PAP stakeholders’ meeting with critical stakeholders was held from 21 – 23 June, 2024, with the theme “Fostering, Consolidating and Collaboration for the Peace, Security, Stability and Development of the Niger Delta”. The meetings provided platforms for dialogue and constructive engagement with critical stakeholders. Ostensibly, it underscores the imperative to address the unsatisfactory performance of both agencies of the government, and the need to initiate and execute community and people driven projects and programmes. More importantly, all of these stakeholder engagements allowed the study to have diverse perceptions on the mandate and its peacebuilding initiatives as well as the need to address the interest of stakeholders in the Niger Delta. The stakeholders’ analysis helps to determine the interest, preferences, influence and iteration of individuals, groups and communities that have a stake or interest in, or are affected by, projects, programmes or policies of the institutions under study (Bodenstein, [2024](#)). It is used to understanding and



explaining the relationship between state peacebuilding institutions and stakeholders such as officials, leaders, local communities and the various outcomes (Kujala et al., [2022](#)). The stakeholder model improved the relevance of research, increased stakeholder trust, enhanced mutual learning by stakeholders, and researchers (Boaz et al., [2018](#)).

A purposive sampling method was used for selecting interviewees on the basis of their relevance to the research objective. This sample size though not pre-determined comprises of 27 key informant interviews with critical stakeholders which include officials of the NDDC, PAP and MNDA, community and youth leaders, women group leaders, and ex-militants. The choice of respondents was based on the respondents' understanding of the issues of the Niger Delta and the activities, projects and programmes of these state agencies. The bulk of the data for this paper was generated from my discussions with relevant stakeholders at the stakeholders' summits, interviews and the observations of the authors while secondary data were collected from official documents, the *Niger Delta Regional Master Plan (NDRMP)*, books, journal articles, newspapers, official newsletters and magazines. The study utilized both thematic analysis and content analysis. The thematic analysis is well-suited for analyzing data from semi-structured interviews as it helps identify code, and categorize patterns and themes in the data, which is essential for understanding the complexities of the Niger Delta conflict. In addition, it allows for flexibility and iteration, enabling to refine codes and themes as data is analyzed. Content analysis is used for analyzing documents, texts, and other media, which provided additional context and insights into the Niger Delta conflict. Suffice it that thematic analysis helped to identify patterns and themes in the interview data, while content analysis provided additional context and insights from documents and texts. Using both thematic analysis and content analysis provided an opportunity for triangulation.

### **Ethical Considerations**

The study is mindful of research ethics, guidelines and standards as deliberate efforts were made to adhere to a conflict sensitive method that covers all cultural and official concerns in a study of this nature. Therefore, specific attention was given to variables, official status, confidentiality and autonomy. In this way, the study is committed to the use of appropriate words to avoid misrepresentation and offensive language. Interviewees had the liberty to respond to questions at their own will.

## Result

The findings of this study are presented along three broad themes in tandem with the research objectives, which reflect the projects and programmes of state agencies (NDDC, PAP and MNDA with a peacebuilding lens) in the political economy of peacebuilding, their institutional capacity for peacebuilding and the fault lines and the need for coordination of peacebuilding efforts in the Niger delta. Experience has shown that thriving state institutions are quintessential blocks of building peace in conflict zones. This is because the policies, programmes, schemes, projects and activities of well-functioning public institutions could generate a peace matrix and sustainability of community resilience, leading to a foundation for peace and a non-violent future.

### **State Institutions in the Political Economy of Peacebuilding in the Niger Delta Region**

#### ***Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC)***

The NDDC was designed with the stated vision to offer a lasting solution to the socio-economic difficulties of the Niger Delta Region and with 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" (Niger Delta Development Commission [NDDC], [2006](#), p. 103). The Act establishing the Commission provided generous funding (NDDC, [2006](#)). Thus, since its inauguration on Dec 21, 2000, according to the former Minister of Justice and Attorney General of the Federation, it is on record that the Federal Government has approved ₦3,375,735,776,794.93; as budgetary allocation and ₦2,420,948,894,191.00 as income from statutory and non-statutory sources, which brings the total figure to the sum of approximately N6 trillion given to the NDDC (Premium Times, [2021](#)).

Many of the interviewees in this study asserted that the NDDC categorizes its interventions into two broad areas: infrastructure development projects (physical development projects) and human capacity development programmes and schemes. The specific physical development projects include electrification - energy/power supply with installation of solar-powered street lights, construction of roads, bridges, and jetties including internal township roads, water supplies, school building and infrastructure projects, dredging and desilting of waterways projects,

building and equipping health centres, etc. The human capacity development programmes include social welfare and community empowerment programmes, which include supporting educational programmes such as scholarships, health care services especially during Covid-19, skill acquisition and training programmes for youths, support for small and medium-scale enterprises (SMEs) and agro-allied industries. Several communities have benefited from the various projects and empowerment programmes as narrated by a community leader: “my community in Southern Ekeremo in Bayelsa State through NDDC have a portable water project and some of our youths benefited from the skill acquisition programme”. This assertion underscores the lived experiences of communities who have been positively impacted by the NDDC.

### **Ministry of the Niger Delta Affairs (MNDA)**

Since its creation in 2008, the Ministry has been responsible for developing human capacity for youths in various regional states. The youths were trained in various entrepreneurial vocations in poultry, piggyery, apiculture, photography, fishery, sewing, tailoring, weaving, bead making, oil, and gas (Johnson, [2021](#)). In addition, the Ministry built nine skill acquisition centres, one in each state, and beneficiaries of the training programme are empowered with a start-up package, ranging from N300,000 to N500,000 to start small businesses. The core objective of these training sessions was to develop physical infrastructure and human capital to enhance the quality of living significantly and to consolidate human security in the ND. Similarly, towards improving human capacity development at an early age through infrastructure, the Ministry, among others, built blocks of six classrooms at Uwheru in Ughelli North Local Government Council of Delta State, Nneise and Tombia in Imo and Bayelsa states, respectively.

Apart from its star project of 338-kilometre dualisation of the East-West road, the Ministry has been involved in the construction of other road projects across the region, including the reconstruction of Elele – Owerri road, Benin – Abraka road, Ogriagbene – Torugbene road, Orhoror Junction – Odurobu –Kpakama – Bomadi road, etc., To address the issues of environmental remediation and sustainability, MNDA constructed 360 housing units, with 40 units of 2 and 3 bedrooms bungalows in each of the nine states of the ND and embarked on remediation, reclamation, and rehabilitation programmes, including building jetties, canalisation, shoreline, and erosion control in various communities.

### ***Presidential Amnesty Programme (PAP)***

The Presidential Amnesty Programme (PAP) as a peace process involves a triad peacebuilding component of disarming, demobilising and reintegrating repentant militants into civil society (Ikelegbe & Umukoro, 2016). President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua proclaimed amnesty on June 24, 2009, to all militants with a two-month deadline (from Aug 06 to Oct 04 2009) to surrender their weapons. Since the proclamation of the PAP, the programme has evolved from the disarmament and demobilisation stages and is currently reintegrated. A total of 23,358 ex-militants were successfully demobilised between June 2010 and December 2011 (Joab-Peterside et al., [2012](#)), and 15,434 people participated in the training program offered (Agbiboa, [2015](#)). At a stakeholders meeting of the PAP, it was revealed that several beneficiaries have been empowered through its various programmes. For instance, a total of 6067 beneficiaries were trained and empowered in the plastic industry, oil, and gas sector. While 2040 were also trained and empowered in agriculture and the allied sectors of poultry and fish farming. The beneficiaries in other sectors include information, communication technology and building industry. 840 beneficiaries of entrepreneurs including small and medium scale commodity shops, 3365 for catering, transport, media and, marine fabrication had 2646 beneficiaries. The beneficiaries are not restricted to ex-militants but cut across various segments of the communities in the region. Similarly, the council of elders speaking through their leader asserted that the PAP is adding value to the ND and develop human capital of the region but emphasized the need for women empowerment as part of the impacted community issues. Narratives of these critical stakeholders underscore the significance of the PAP on the socio-economic wellbeing of the people and impacted communities in the region.

The PAP has been a critical and strategic approach to mitigate the culture of violence and destruction of the critical oil and gas infrastructure in the Niger Delta region. Before the PAP, the oil industry witnessed decreased production output to the tone of 700,000 barrels per day (bpd) at the height of militant activities in January 2009. Consequently, due to the amnesty of the militants, there was an unimaginable increase in production output to the tone of 2.4/ 2.6 million bpd in December 2012 (Jarikre [2017](#)). Ajaero submits that Nigeria lost N2.46 trillion in 2006, N2.69 trillion in 2007 and N2.97 trillion in 2008 through attacks on oil



installations resulting in shutdowns and spillages. In spite of increase in the production output, several ex militant camp leaders complained of exclusion and non-payment of monthly stipend to some of their footmen. They accused managers of PAP of mismanagement as they claimed to have enriched themselves.

### Discussion

The intersection of violent conflict, underdevelopment and insecurity underscores crafting policies and establishing strategic institutions to eliminate or reduce poverty and violent conflicts through development initiatives in the ND. The assumption within the peacebuilding field is that development will reduce or resolve the Niger Delta conflict. The dialectics of determining the truism of the above assumption on the impact of development initiatives in the region is not in the scope of this article. However, the future of peace in the region depends on keeping the region's development window open. In this way, the government has adopted various policies, programmes, schemes and initiatives with relevant legislation for the development of the Niger Delta region. These include the establishment of the NDDB in 1960, the Niger Delta Basin Development Authority in 1976, the Oil Minerals Producing Areas Commission (OMPADEC) in 1992, and the NDDC in 2000 (Aghalino, 2009). The failure and unsatisfactory performance, ineptitude, corruption and lack of focus of previous interventions, especially of OMPADEC, precipitated the scrapping in 1999 and the establishment of NDDC in 2000 (Aghalino, [2009](#); Luqman, [2011](#)).

The Niger Delta Regional Master Plan (NDRMP) is the collective vision of the stakeholders encapsulated as the NDDC strategic road map for the accelerated development of this hitherto turbulent and underdeveloped region into Africa's most peaceful, most prosperous and most pleasant region. In this way, the NDRMP has some similarities with the 1979 United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) sponsored Nicosia Master Plan (NMP), designed to redevelop the Cypriot capital as a result of the conflict that balkanised it into Greek and Turkish Cypriot zones. The NDRMP as a navigational map of a context-specific mandate of the NDDC is to address the collective objective of employment creation and social integration, economic development, human capital and social infrastructure development, and securing livelihoods, which were/are drivers of increasing poverty, deteriorating conditions and intensity of conflict and



militancy in the ND. In this sense, NDDC projects, policies and activities are supposedly designed to address the root causes of militancy and identify structures for peacebuilding.

However, scholars have argued that the NDRMP is a comprehensive document but lacks the capacities and strategies to "address the lingering spate of militancy in the region" (Akinwale & Osabuohien, [2009](#), p. 154). The character of appropriation and implementation of NDDC projects, policies and activities necessitated the Federal Government to order a forensic audit of the Commission's operation in 2019. The forensic audit report was submitted in 2021. Still, the government has not released any authoritative report or guide on the outcome that addresses the issues and their prospective solutions. However, the submitted forensic report on the NDDC and other official documents have not been able to give accurate statistics of projects delivered by the Commission. However, it is on record that there are over 13,777 projects, the execution of which is substantially compromised" (Premium Times, [2021](#)). This is corroborated by Osinbajo ([2017](#)) when he said that in the Niger Delta of today, anywhere you go, there are signboards of proposed infrastructural projects, mostly incomplete, and many are abandoned.

Another strategic initiative of the government to tackle the grim security situation due to insurrections by MEND militia in the region was the creation of the MNDA by Alhaji Umaru Musa Yar' Adua's administration. The Ministry had a twin mandate of infrastructure development and youth empowerment. The strategic plan was to merge development projects, including roads, electricity and other utilities, implemented by multiple ministries, departments, and agencies to be coordinated by the Ministry for better and quicker impact. Between its inception in 2009 and 2015, the Ministry spent N423 billion, and the number of projects awarded during the period was 427. Despite spending N423 billion in 6 years, MNDA had only 12 per cent of project execution (Premium Time, [2017](#)). In another breath, the Nigeria Senate condemned the meagre vote of N23 billion for capital projects by the Ministry in the 2020 budget for the outstanding N21 billion worth of projects not implemented in the 2019 budget.

Since the adoption of the 'Strategic Implementation Work Plan (SIWP) in 2021,' the Ministry has collaborated with the NDDC to complete the building of 66 apartments, armoury, parade ground, underground cells and



a gatehouse unit (Nnabuike, [2021](#)) for the Special Protection Unit (SPU) of the Nigerian Police Force (Base 6) (Nnabuike, [2021](#)). The project's significance goes beyond supporting security operations in the region; it also addresses the issues of critical infrastructure deficit in Nigeria's security architecture. Nevertheless, the creation and activities of the Ministry suggest potential duplication and conflict of responsibilities (International Crisis Group, [2009](#)). This is because other ministries, departments, and government agencies are engaged in different projects at ND.

### **Institutional Capacity for Peacebuilding: NDDC, PAP and MNDA**

The political economy of peacebuilding in the Niger Delta underscores human security. Understandably, the government's use of force (joint military task forces- JTF) as deterrence and containment of militia groups impacts human security the same way as youth restiveness and militant activities affect human security and national security. As Schirch ([2018](#)) observed, human security includes "violence caused by both state and non-state armed groups, poverty, economic inequality, discrimination, environmental degradation, health and other factors that undermine individual and community well-being" (p. 62). Evidently, the data suggest a state designed human security approach in peacebuilding to tackle the issues of militancy and community violence. For instance, those interviewed observed that the human security component of peacebuilding is overwhelmingly encapsulated in the mandate of the agencies to provide sundry opportunities to address the development and security of individuals and communities.

The NDDC, PAP and MNDA are the government's strategic approach to the human security component of peacebuilding and, of course, the joint military task forces engaged in safeguarding national critical assets in the region (national security). In this way, government assumes that both human and national security should be complementary. Therefore, properly coordinating the human security component by NDDC, PAP, and MNDA and national security by the JTF could help find common ground between the former and the latter. The critical issues of complementarity presuppose that all components of human security (NDDC, PAP and MNDA) and national security (JTF) in the region should appreciate their interdependence to each other's core mandate and competencies, and coalesce for proper coordination.

The NDDC, MNDA and PAP are tripods of critical reflection of the political economy of peacebuilding, underscoring the truism of no one-size-fits-all model to reduce resource-based violent conflicts. Therefore, there should be no overreliance on one of the three peacebuilding programming tripods to focus only on one aspect, such as development, to the exclusion of other aspects of human security, demobilisation, disarmament, and reintegration initiatives. Government efforts should reflect a need to balance proactive and reactive responses to instability and violence (Hume & Strawmyer, [2018](#)). There should be no disproportionate focus on development using the programmes and projects of NDDC and MNDA to falsely implicate reintegration and reinsertion of ex-militants. Neither should the focus be exclusively on ex-militants while it falsely mistreats people who otherwise would not have engaged in violent extremist activities (Hume & Strawmyer [2018](#)). Conversely, there should be no disproportionate focus on the DDR of PAP against the development and human security objectives of NDDC and MNDA. For instance, Jarikre ([2017](#)) admonished that the "plans to address several conflict triggers as it affects some ex-militants but not for the aggregate good of the entire region underscores this point" (Jarikre, 2017, p. 169). He went further to state that though the transformational potency of the PAP is significant, the "ex-militants disposition to the existing plight of the region (underdevelopment plaguing the region) in the post-amnesty context appears reducible to the behaviour of selfish revolutionaries who seize power after which they continue in the same spirit of the oppressor" (Jarikre, 2017). Thus, to avoid setting the stage for continued structural conflict (Baare, [2007](#)), the various institutional responses should operate at equilibrium and build synergy to adequately and constructively address the conflict triggers. Suffice it to conclude that NDDC, MNDA, and PAP, taken together, should operate under a new set of evidentiary assumptions despite their distinct mandates and responsibilities to collaboratively address the immediate impact and root causes of community violence and militancy.

### **Fault Lines and the Need for Coordination of Peacebuilding Efforts in the Niger Delta**

Paradoxically, the character of appropriation and implementation of NDDC, MNDA and PAP present fewer encouraging prospects in normative thinking of peacebuilding. Currently, as it appears, the management of NDDC, PAP, and MNDA are unaware of their common human security



responsibilities even as they are funded by a common source. Rather, without understanding that they are undermining the strategic import of their mandate to address underlying security challenges posed by the overwhelming deficit of mental and physical infrastructure. The fault lines precipitate negative implications for genuine security and sustainable development to address conditions that have sustained insurrection. The fault lines explain how the interaction of a combination of risk factors is attributed to the ultimate neutralisation of peacebuilding benefits. The fault lines could be surface or deep level. Still, they are not hypothetical situations but potent and real risk factors that gravitate toward a homogenous catalyst to neutralise positive impacts and outcomes of peacebuilding. Such fault lines include exclusion, corruption, red tape, undue political influence, top-bottom approach, project imposition, and project duplication as potent risk factors.

Despite the SIWP, there appear to be some fault lines in the peacebuilding efforts of NDDC, MNDA and PAP at the end of the spectrum. The separation of the NDDC, MNDA, and PAP as independent agencies creates a precarious situation whereby the opportunity to offer more cohesive services and facilitate peace is lost due to the lack of collaboration, synergy, and partnerships between these agencies. The lack of coordination in peacebuilding efforts is inappropriate and has been counterproductive. One possible exception is that the whole situation was misconceived due to the prevalent errors of judgment, which seem inexplicable in planning. For instance, due to real or perceived threats, the PAP is built around ex-militant leaders.

The lack of a conceptual protocol and policy for coordinating the NDDC, MNDA, and PAP peacebuilding initiatives is most seriously affecting the outcomes. There should be a coordination point: advising the president on the situation and dealing with it under his direction. The situation where the NDDC and MNDA are under the supervisory responsibility of the Minister of the MNDA while PAP is under the supervision of the National Security Adviser has an evidentiary negative implication, as both form a significant chunk of the problem. The deficiency that this represents is, in part, the consequence of sundry fault lines in executing their context-specific mandates. Therefore, coordination should not be in any of the two but rather in establishing a special coordinating unit and protocol under the direction of the president. The special unit should

assume the status of a directorate of compliance with internal protocol to direct financial and performance reporting obligations. In this way, the Independent Compliance Director, using best global practices, especially the UN and OECD models, should ensure a monthly briefing and submission of key performance indicators reports from the agencies.

## **Conclusion**

Most conflicts in Nigeria's ND region are subject to contestation due to natural resources and the accruing benefits thereof as underlying symptoms of the Nigerian political economy. Therefore, the peace process should be multidimensional, involving a broad spectrum of actors and strategies. The political economy of peacebuilding in the ND within the context of this paper is increasing our understanding of how institutional agencies can affect peace. Such insight can help us understand the assumption that development, human capacity building and human security are fundamental strategies to deconstruct violent behaviour. Understanding the environmental context (conflict dynamics) and political-economic (power, utility, wealth, value, commodity, labour, land, capital) legacies may help to develop more effective strategies for preventing and managing militant behaviour in the Niger Delta. There are, however, generic development-peacebuilding processes that predispose communities and individual resilience and coherence, and these are useful to remember when studying ways and means to prevent and deconstruct militancy and insurrection.

## **Limitations**

The examination of political economy of peacebuilding underscores the symbiotic relationship with political economy of the Niger Delta and the violent conflicts and insurrections that requires an all-inclusive grasp of the socio-economic and political context of the region. While this study attempts to provide discernment on this issues, there is observable exclusion of the host community engagement and programmes of non-state actors such as the multinational oil and gas corporations and multilateral development agencies working in the region. Therefore, this presupposes a constraint on generalization of the findings. Perhaps, more importantly, the methodology relied on qualitative data drawn from a small size of 27 interviewees, which could limit generalizability of the findings against the backdrop of a heterogeneous context of people and communities with diverse lived experiences.



## Research Implications

Drawing from the limitations and observable gaps, there is an overwhelming assumption that peacebuilding intervention will reduce or resolve the Niger Delta conflict without specificities. The dialectics of determining the impact and outcomes of peacebuilding projects presupposes an empirical study beyond evaluation of conventional goals and objectives of a project. It is an attempt to discern the “ex post facto and ex ante” of a project or programme impact on the conflict context. Therefore, it is imperative to expand the scope of political economy of peacebuilding by carrying out examination of the peace and conflict impact assessment of peacebuilding interventions in the region.

Furthermore, considering the limitation in the use of qualitative data in this study and the need to enhance an inclusive analysis, future research could utilize quantitative data to provide survey and statistical analysis to evaluate and anticipate the prevalence and specific peacebuilding impact on the conflict environment.

## Conflict of Interest

The authors of the manuscript have no financial or non-financial conflict of interest in the subject matter or materials discussed in this manuscript.

## Data Availability Statement

The data associated with this study will be provided by the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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