

Coping With the Consequences of Violence: Niger Delta Women and The Praxis of Survival

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Abstract: The Niger delta region has become a theatre of violence and political conflicts over the years. This has been attributed to environmental degradation due largely to oil exploration and utter neglect by successive government in Nigeria. A major consequence of this development has been formation of violent groups, leading to clashes between militants and security operatives. By convention, men, in most traditional societies, serve as bread winners of households and thus are responsible for the care of families. Thus, the incessant killings, maiming and absence of Niger Delta men, due to violent activities have tended to shift the family responsibilities to their women. Using a case study of Oloibiri community in Ogbia local government of Bayelsa State, Nigeria, this study investigates how the women cope with the consequences of the violence and the effects of men involvement in violent conflict on family welfare. The study finds that the petty trade and agricultural activities are the main strategies of survival adopted by the Niger-delta women. Also, much as there are negative impacts of violent in the region, men involvements in violent improve family welfare and responsibilities are shifted to women. It is thus suggested that government should take steps in ending the violent and also provide incentives that can propel women empowerment in the region.

Keywords: Women, Consequences of Violent, Praxis of Survival, Niger Delta

I. INTRODUCTION

The Women of the Niger Delta are not different from their counterparts in the world, in spite of their number and important functions. The sex and social stratification of most cultures rank one gender (male) above the other (female). As a result, women tend to suffer various forms of neglect, discrimination, inequality and violence. Thus, it is paramount to know the plight of women generally in the world so as to comprehend the particular case of the Niger Delta women and their travail during and after the Niger Delta violent crises. Niger Delta Women perform certain economic responsibilities within the family; as care giver to the husband and the children, bread winner, chief food producer and as wage earners. This is due to the incidence of poverty and the pattern of intra house income distribution of the country which make them assume active financial role in their homes. A greater percentage of Niger Delta women are not educated and depend mainly on agricultural activities for livelihood (Inokoba and Imbua, 2010). Coastal ridge barriers, mangrove and fresh water swamp forests combine with the soil types, water, climate, plants, animals and the overall ecosystem dictate the extent and type of activities women can engage in the Niger Delta (Justino, 2006)

There are two incontrovertible facts about the Niger Delta region (i) It is a region of strategic importance to both domestic and international economies (ii) It is a region of great and troubling paradox. It is an environment of great wealth as well as inhuman poverty (Inokoba and Imbua, 2010). Despite over 40 years of oil exploration and the realization of hundreds of billions of dollar of oil revenue, the inhabitant of this region especially the riverside areas (creeks) remain in abject poverty, with the people living without the most basic amenities like water, road and electricity (Justino, 2006). Their ways of life is not different from those in refugee camp (Mukagbo, 2004). Marginalization, abject poverty, massive unemployment, environmental degradation, poor governance, and divide and rule policy of the oil company contributed to the emergence of these militias (Snapps, 2012). It was these inhuman conditions that lead to the rise of militancy and the stockpiling of arms and ammunitions in the Niger-Delta towards the end of 1999. The militants used these arms to carry out their nefarious activities which range from kidnapping, hostage taking in exchange for ransom "typical hundred thousands of dollar" (Justino, 2006). Illegal oil bunkering and euphemism of oil theft has assumed considerable dimension in the Niger delta ranging from 30,000 to 200, 000 bbl/day (Joab- Peteside, 2005). Construction of illegal refineries, downsizing of oil companies employees and finally disruption of business activities. Women in the Niger delta become the savior and bread winner of homes because of the absence of their men who were involved in militancy as a result of neglect (voluntarily or involuntarily) their primary responsibilities of taking care of their families and wives/women. The dominant patriarchal ideology in many countries perceives men as the head of the households and the bread winner for the family; therefore, they are seen to be responsible for women welfare (Verpoorten, 2005). Women becoming the households head have a greater tendency to face financial difficulties due to having to play the role of provider and caregiver on top of their low earning capacity (Garfinkel and Mclanahan, 1986). The low level of education and lack of marketable skills of women in the Niger delta makes it impossible for them to find a well-paid job even among the multinational companies in Niger delta region. Again, during the crisis period some of these women usually find it difficult to engage in their legitimate trading activities due to fear of being attacked by security personnel. There were instances where means of livelihood of women were destroyed by security personnel as a means of weakening the militants in the area in a bid to force them surrender all their weapons and embrace peace. This aim of this study is to interrogate the measures adopted by the Niger Delta women and how they

managed to survive with the absence of their men who were involved in violence conflicts thereby neglecting their primary responsibilities of taking care of their wives and children (as some got killed in the process, some ran away in search of greener pasture in other states and after the amnesty programme some were sent abroad while stipend were sent homes) coupled with environment degradation and fragile environment they found themselves. This study is to be carried out in specific oil producing areas of Niger Delta states in Nigeria, for example, Rivers, Delta States

1.1 Statement and Justification of the problem

Economic activities in the Niger Delta area have been hampered by increased exploitation of oil and gas resources coupled by the search of the Nigerian state for greater revenue and the multinational oil companies' quests for higher profit, without concern for the lives of Niger Delta people. This results in prolonged economic crisis leading to aggravation of poverty, unemployment and hunger, all of which fueled an environment of anger, frustration, tension and conflicts. The negative implication of militias' pressure group through vandalization of pipelines, oil theft, and high cost of living, destruction of economic activities, fear and panic make the economy of this region depressed. This furthered impoverish the women and children in the area, as some of the security personnel who were to maintain law and order usually failed to adhere to the rules of engagement while performing their constitutional duties as they destroy wares and take advantage of the absence of men (who were killed, taking captive, absconded and those who were sent for training and never come back) whose responsibilities of taking care of their families and women have been neglected (voluntarily or involuntarily), thereby making living much more difficult for the women.

But in spite of the challenges, women are still coping with life, still surviving the violence and struggling for survival. And this raises some questions: what are the coping mechanisms of the Niger Delta women in the face of incessant violence engineered by men? What survival methods have been designed and how are they working? What psycho-social cum economic variables are involved in the coping strategies? And, what interventions are in place to lessen the burden of the women? This study seeks to interrogate the foregoing questions.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

The broad objective of this study is to analyze the strategies of survival adopted by the Niger Delta women in the midst of incessant violence conflicts in the area. However, the specific objectives are:

- i. to identify the various survival strategies adopted by Niger Delta women

- ii. to ascertain as to what extent men involvement in violent conflict improve or aggravate economic burdens of households

II. METHODOLOGY

Data

The study employed both primary and secondary data, which were collected from the Niger Delta area of Nigeria. The study concentrated on Oloibiri of Bayelsa state. Primary data for the study were sourced through the use of personal interviews and structured research questionnaires. Secondary data were derived from published texts, journals, newspapers, magazines, declassified information and the Internet through content analysis.

Method of Data Analysis: The primary data so collected were subjected to both qualitative and quantitative analyses. Specifically, the study dwelt more on statistical analysis, both descriptive and inferential. The descriptive aspect of this statistics involves the use of tables, percentages, graphs and charts to arrange, categorize, manipulate and summarize data to be collected in order to achieve the fore-stated objectives. The inferential statistics used is Chi-square test, using 5% level of significance to ascertain if men's absence actually affect (aggravate/improve) household's economic burden.

III. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

This section provides and discusses the results of the study on the consequences of violence conflicts on Niger delta women and the praxis of survival in the region. Data collected were analyzed with the use of tables, percentages and charts to arrange, categorize, manipulate and summarize data in order to achieve the afore- stated objectives. The structured questionnaire was of three sections; section A is on respondents' bio data, section B asks questions on survival strategies and section C is on the men involvement in violent conflict and the consequence on family.

3.1 Socio-Economic and Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

This is the descriptive analysis of respondents' socio-economic and demographic characteristics. It entails sex, age, and marital status, number of children, educational attainment, level of their monthly income and employment status, and how these influence the survival of Niger delta women.

Table 1 presents the socio-economic and demographic characteristics of 60 respondents. About 63.3 percent of the respondents are female, who are the primary target of the study and 36.7 percent male, who are the direct players in the conflagration.

Table: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

		Freq.	Percentage (%)
Sex	Male	22	36.7
	Female	38	63.3
	Total	60	100.0
Age	20yrs and below	4	7.1
	21-30yrs	34	60.7
	31-40yrs	18	32.1
	41-50yrs	0	0
	Total	56	100.0
	Missing values	4	6.7
Total	60	100.0	
Marital Status	Single	13	21.7
	Married	46	76.7
	Separated	1	1.7
	Total	60	100.0
No of Children	1-2	28	48.3
	3-5	9	15.5
	5 and above	4	6.9
	None	17	29.2
	Total	58	100.0
	Missing values	2	3.3
Total	60	100.0	
Education	Primary Cert	6	10.5
	Secondary Cert	23	40.4
	OND/NCE Cert	21	36.8
	HND/BSC Cert	5	8.8
	None	2	3.5
	Total	57	100.0
	Missing	3	5.0
Total	60	100.0	

Employment			
	Private Sector	9	18.0
	Public Sector	7	14.0
	Agricultural Sector	6	12.0
	Trading	5	10.0
	Apprenticeship	10	20.0
	Others	10	20.0
	Missing	3	6.0
	Total	50	100.0

Source: Author's (2021)

There were three (3) missing values in the age distribution of respondents, however, the result shows that 4(7.1%) of respondents were 20 years and below, 34(60.7%) were between 21-30 years and 18(32.1%) were between 31-40 years. About 77 percent of respondents were married while 21.7 percent were single and 1.7 percent were separated. In view of the fact that the primary target of this study focuses on women, the number of respondents with between 1-2 children were 28(48.3%), while 9(15.5%), 4(6.9%) were with 3-5 children and more than 5 children respectively.

While the employment status of respondents is widely spread among all categories of employment, a large proportion of respondents are secondary school (40.4%) and OND/NCE (36.8%) certificates holders.

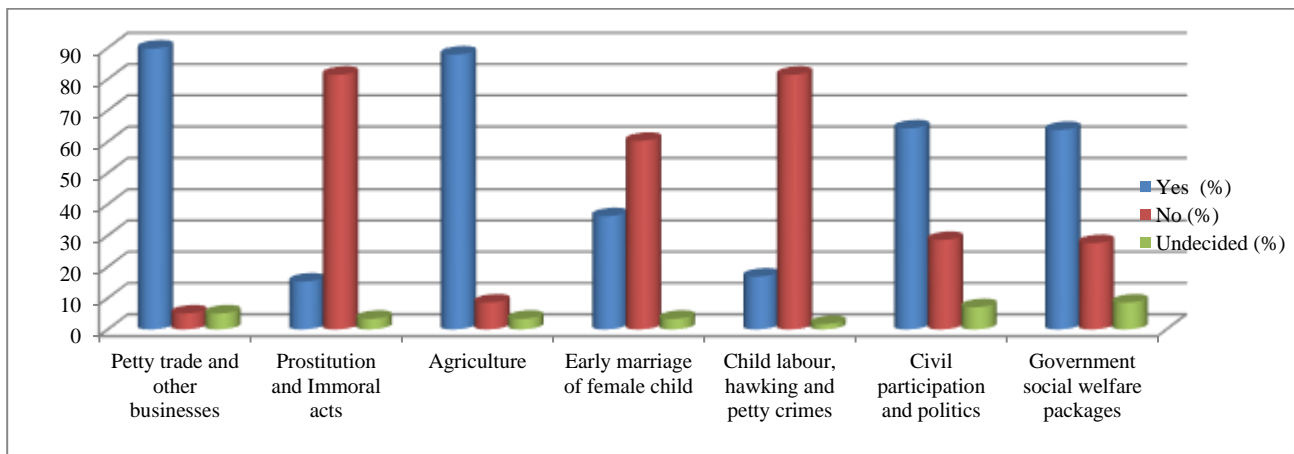
3.2 Analysis

This section presents the results from the analysis conducted;

3.2.1 Objective One: The Survival Strategies of Niger Delta Women

Amongst the seven (7) survival strategies for coping with the consequence of violent by the Niger delta women, which are petty trade and other businesses, prostitution and immoral acts, agriculture, early marriage of female child, child labour, hawking and petty crimes, civil participation and politics and government social welfare packages.

Chart 1: Survival Strategies of Niger Delta Women



Source: Author' (2021)

About 90 percent of respondents are of the opinion that petty trade and other forms of businesses is the major survival strategy of Niger delta of coping with the aftermath of violent conflict in the region. This is followed by 88 percent of respondents for agriculture as a survival strategy

3.2.2 *Objective Two*: There is no significant relationship between men involvement in violent conflict and family welfare in Niger delta. The objective is hypothesized differently as shown below

- i. H_a : Men involvement in violent conflict improve family welfare
- ii. H_a : Families benefit from their men involvement in violent conflict
- iii. H_a : Men involvements in violent conflict shift family responsibilities to the women
- iv. H_a : Financial responsibilities increase as a result of their husband involvement in violent conflict which make them to be incapacitated

These hypotheses were analyzed using one of the non-parametric techniques called ‘chi-square’,

Hypotheses Testing

- i. H_a : Men involvement in violent conflict improves family welfare.

Table 2: Violent Conflict and Family Welfare

Response Remark	X_0	X_2 calc.	X_2 tab.	DF	Level of Sig.
Strongly agree	6	21.14	11.6	4	0.000
Agree	8				
Strongly disagree	21				
Disagree	19				
Undecided	4				
Total	58				

Source: Author’s (2021)

From table 2, about 10 percent of the respondents strongly agreed that men involvement in violent conflict improves family welfare, 14 percent agreed, however, 36 percent and 33 percent strongly disagreed and disagreed respectively. About 7 percent were undecided on whether men involvement in violent conflict improves family welfare or not.

The chi-square (X_2) calculated value of the response was 21.14 which is greater than the tabulated chi-square (X_2) tabulated value is 11.6 at 0.05 level of significant. Hence, we accept the alternate hypothesis which states that men involvement in violent conflict improve family welfare in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria.

- ii. H_a : Families benefit from their men involvement in violent conflict

Table 3: Violent Conflict and Family Benefits

Response Remark	X_0	X_2 calc.	X_2 tab.	DF	Level of Sig.
Strongly agree	5	38.88	11.4	4	0.000
Agree	7				
Strongly disagree	13				
Disagree	29				
Undecided	3				
Total	57				

Source: Author’s (2021)

In respect of whether family benefits, table 3 reveals that about 51 percent of respondents disagreed that families benefit from their men involvements in violent conflicts while 23 percent strongly disagreed. The percentage of those that agreed was about 21 percent in total.

The chi-square (X_2) calculated value of the response was 38.88 which is greater than the tabulated chi-square (X_2) tabulated value is 11.4 at 0.05 level of significant. Hence, we accept the alternate hypothesis that families whose men are involved in violent conflict benefit from the violent.

The results for hypotheses (i) and (ii) can be seen from the light that politicians could make use of these men, having shown potentials through their violent activities for thuggery and the perpetration of their political ambitions. Also, some are giving amnesty by the government and this form a large source of income for the family, hence improvement in welfare particularly when money is repatriated home.

- iii. H_a : Men involvements in violent conflict shift family responsibilities to the women

Table 4: Men Involvements in Violent Conflict and Shifting of Family responsibilities to Women

Response Remark	X_0	X_2 calc.	X_2 tab.	DF	Level of Sig.
Strongly agree	16	18.03	11.6	4	0.001
Agree	21				
Strongly disagree	9				
Disagree	10				
Undecided	2				
Total	58				

Source: Author’s (2021)

Table 4 presents the chi-square result on men involvement in violent and shifting of responsibilities to women. The result shows that 36 respondents out of 58 believed that men involvements in violent conflict shift family responsibilities to women as against 19 respondents that both disagreed and strongly disagreed.

The chi-square (X_2) calculated value of the response was 18.03 which is greater than the value of tabulated chi-square (X_2) of 11.6 at 0.05 level of significant. Hence, we accept the alternate

hypothesis that men involvement in violent conflict shifts family responsibilities to women.

iv. Husband Involvement In Violent Conflict Increase Family Financial Responsibilities

The result in table 5 shows that 38 respondents out of 57 believed that men involvements in violent conflict increase family financial responsibilities as against 11 respondents that both disagreed and strongly disagreed.

Table 5: Husband Involvement in Violent Conflict and Family Financial Responsibilities

Response Remark	X ₀	X ₂ calc.	X ₂ tab.	DF	Level of Sig.
Strongly agree	18	17.83	11.6	4	0.005
Agree	20				
Strongly disagree	4				
Disagree	7				
Undecided	8				
Total	57				

The chi-square (X₂) calculated value of the response is 17.83 which is greater than the value of tabulated chi-square (X₂) of 11.6 at 0.05 level of significant. Hence, we accept the alternate hypothesis that husband involvement in violent conflict increase family financial responsibilities.

Here, we also confirm that husband involvement in violent conflict increase family financial' responsibilities

IV. CONCLUSION

This study investigates the consequence of violence and the survival strategies of women in the Niger delta. Objective one is to investigate the survival strategies of Niger Delta women owing to the consequences of violent-conflict in the region. The study discovers that petty trade and agriculture are the main survival strategies adopted by the women. In examining the extent to which men involvement in violent conflict improve or aggravate economic burden of household, four hypotheses were analyzed and all rejects the null hypotheses that state that(i) men involvements in violent conflict do not improve family welfare (ii) families do not benefit from men involvement in violent conflict in Niger delta (iii) men involvement in violent conflict do not shift families' responsibilities to women (iv) financial responsibilities do not increase as a result of men involvement in violent conflict. The study discovers that men involvements in violent conflict

improve family welfare in the region as men also benefit from the crisis. The incessant killings, maiming and absence of Niger delta men due to violent activities have shifted households' responsibilities to women. Also, the absence of most male from home due their involvement in conflict has shifted most of their responsibilities to the women. Some of these men are incapacitated, maimed, while some have lost their sources of income due to violent conflict. Hence, financial responsibilities also increase with men involvements in violent conflict.

V. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Given the outputs of this study, it is important that the government and community stakeholders see to the unending violent conflict in Oloibiri community of Bayelsa state. Hence, the study suggests the followings;

- a. Sensitization and public enlightenment on violent-conflict and its attendant's consequences.
- b. Skill development and entrepreneurship should be encouraged.
- c. Studies have shown that empowered women provide the spring board for families to move out of poverty, particularly when it is induced by violent conflict, while the community will benefit from its spillover effects. Facilities such as good roads to transport farm products, education for women and the girl child for continuous impact. Thus, government should endeavor to provide necessary incentives for women empowerment.

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