



CPED

Building peace in the Niger Delta

By bridging communication gaps between the government and the people of the Niger Delta, the *Centre for Population and Environmental Development* (CPED) is building peace in hostile territory.

SETTING THE SCENE —Nigeria is Africa's leading producer of oil and gas, and the 13th largest producer of oil in the world. The country depends on crude exports for nearly 80 percent of government revenue, and more than 90 percent of export earnings. The majority of oil and gas extraction in Nigeria occurs in the Delta region, which hosts most of the country's notable multinational oil corporations.

The Niger Delta region is also home to over 40 million people belonging to more than 40 distinct ethnic groups. While oil has contributed significantly to development in other parts of Nigeria, the Delta region is severely underdeveloped. In communities where oil exploration and production happens onshore, there is widespread deforestation, erosion, destroyed farmlands and environmental degradation. People living in the Delta region and depending on the land to survive have had to contend with brutal poverty, unemployment and health risks.

As a result of the adverse environmental and human cost of petroleum-related activities in the Delta region, indigenous representatives, most of whom are young people, have clashed with the multinationals and the Nigerian government over a perceived lack of action. This resistance developed into militancy, with the use

of violence and open hostility to destroy oil installations and disrupt economic activity. As a result, oil companies cut back on their production, and output fell from 2.5 million barrels per day in 2005 to 1 million barrels per day in 2009. While military force has been used by the government as a stopgap measure, it has done nothing to foster peace or protect and guarantee oil and gas production. Stakeholders in the Niger Delta, including community and religious leaders, civil society, and the militants have therefore called for increased attention to the development of the region. This is where the Centre for Population and Environmental Development (CPED) became involved.

WHAT CPED DID —CPED is an independent, non-partisan, non-profit policy research organization, working to promote sustainable development and reduce poverty and inequality in Nigeria. The Centre recognized that the usual public policy response to the violent situation – the use of military force – would not serve to establish sustainable peace or promote the nation's economic survival.

In 2005, CPED initiated a research program on peace building in the Niger Delta, with the aim of influencing a review of existing policies in the region. CPED engaged in detailed field work and interactions with key



stakeholders in the region, as well as policymakers at the national, state and local levels. The Centre found that the diverse stakeholders in the Niger Delta wanted increased attention on the development of the region, in particular the training and employment of unemployed youth (as these individuals are often recruited as militants). The findings of this research indicated the willingness of all stakeholders, including militants, to work for peace in the region. CPED prepared a report proposing the need for dialogue between the leadership of the militant groups waging war in the Delta region and government representatives at the federal, state and local level.

However, CPED was challenged in its ability to communicate its research results and policy recommendations. In 2009, the Centre received funding from the Think Tank Initiative and was able to further develop its research and dissemination strategy. It was at this point that its findings were shared widely through policy briefs, workshops, seminars and personal communications with key players in the region.

THE OUTCOME —In 2009, the federal government and the militant leaders in the Delta region announced an agreement to put an end to the violence, later known as an amnesty program. This ended the military offensive against youth in the region and launched a program designed to rehabilitate, train and employ young people. In the four years since the amnesty program, relative peace has returned to the Niger Delta. Looking ahead, much will depend on whether or not the government and the leadership of the militant groups will keep their side of the bargain.

Through this experience, CPED learned that research findings will not have their anticipated policy impact unless they are communicated effectively to policymakers. While CPED's initial research was rigorous and provided much-needed evidence on the importance of dialogue between the government and the militant groups, it was its effective dissemination strategy that eventually resulted in policy influence and a process of change in the Niger Delta region.

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