

# **How to Ensure Peaceful and Sustainable Natural Resources Exploitation and Ecosystem Protection: The Case of Ogoni and Andoni**

Being an invited paper presented by

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**At a One-Day Workshop on:**

***“Empowerment of Women and Youths in the Niger Delta for Conflict  
Prevention and Sustainable Resource Exploitation”***

**Organised by**

**NIDEREF** (a Non-Profit Development and Advocacy Organization)

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## **Purpose of paper**

The purpose of this one-day workshop, as I understand from the organisers NIDEREF, is to reduce conflict and promote peace and sustainable resource exploitation in the Niger Delta. As a result, I am faced with the Herculean task to place the workshop in proper context since I have to talk on *“How to Ensure Peaceful and Sustainable Natural Resources Exploitation and Ecosystem Protection: The Case of Ogoni and Andoni.”* This paper has, therefore, been prepared to propose strategies and modalities to ensure peaceful co-existence and sustainable resource utilization for a better environment, especially, as it relates to Ogoni and Andoni.

## **Background**

Rich natural resources, particularly, mangroves and fish exist in the Ogoni and Andoni areas in the Eastern Niger Delta of Rivers State. These are common property resources that have sustained community livelihoods since they were founded. But, unsustainable exploitation of the natural resources in the area constitutes potential threat to adequate supplies of the various ecosystem goods and services that the communities depend upon for their livelihood, and peaceful co-existence of boundary communities. There is, therefore, the dire need to explore sustainable ways of exploiting the shared or

transboundary resources at both ethnic fronts, to ensuring continuity and forestall avoidable resource-related conflict in the Ogoni-Andoni area. One of such natural resource-related causes of conflict, which must be avoided is the uncontrolled development drive by the government without due consultations or opportunities for participation by all stakeholders, especially, the locals in the host communities. This paper provides an analytical background of the resources co-owned by Ogoni and Andoni neighbours, and of some common unsustainable exploitation practices in these communities that have great propensities to cause inter-communal conflicts. Finally, it suggests some pragmatic steps to be taken to nip such natural resource-related conflicts in the bud for peaceful co-existence and sustainable development.

### **Conceptual Framework of Paper**

**Co-existence:** this implies the living together of two separate entities for mutual benefit.

**Conservation:** this is the ethic of natural resource use, allocation and protection with the primary focus of maintaining the health of the natural world, which includes the forests, fisheries, habitats and biological diversity while, the secondary focus is on materials and energy conservation – both very important to protect the ecosystem.

**Natural resources:** these are simply free uncaptured gifts of nature that are useful to man. They fall into two groups: renewable and non-renewable resources. Renewable resources are resources that can be replaced, and are products of non-geologic short term resource cycles such as fish, timber, etc. Non-renewable resources are products of much longer resource cycles, e.g crude oil. For any naturally occurring stock of material to qualify

to be called a natural resource, it must be physically and technologically accessible (Kinako, 1989).

***Natural resource management:*** this is similar to environmental management and focuses on a scientific and technical understanding of resources and ecology as well as the capacity of these resources to support life. It also refers to the management of natural resources (such as land, water, soil, plants and animals) and how it affects the quality of life for both present and future generations as stated by the concept of sustainable development.

***Sustainable development:*** is a concept that ensures the wise global land management and environmental governance to conserve and preserve natural resources.

## **Study Areas**

The areas (Ogoni and Andoni) covered by this paper are two, strategically, important tribes located within the Niger Delta region. The proximity of both the Ogonis and the Andonis and the direct sharing of common properties make them neighbours that must devise means and modalities to co-exist peacefully for a secured and sustainable development.

## **Principles of Peaceful Co-Existence**

The term “Peaceful Co-existence” was said to be in use by the former Soviet Union and was a theory developed about 1945 during the post-World War II and was very much in

use by nations during the Cold War era (1945 to 1991), which was a period of continuing conflict, military tension, and economic competition existing after World War II (1939 to 1945). Peaceful coexistence was a theory believed to have been adopted by Soviet-influenced Communist states to enable them co-exists peacefully with capitalist states despite their differing ideologies. Entering into an agreement for peaceful co-existence will ensure that both parties do not continue to exhibit the same aggressive relationships they once expressed towards their perceived oppressors. Usually, there are Five Principles underlying any agreement for peaceful co-existence namely:

1. Mutual respect for each other's territorial integrity and sovereignty.
2. Mutual non-aggression.
3. Mutual non-interference in each other's internal affairs.
4. Equality and mutual benefit.
5. Peaceful co-existence.

We all, here gathered, can we claim to have abided by the above five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence both as individuals to individuals or even as a collective entity? In the development and eventual agreement of the above Principles also note that, the hard-liner Communist People's Republic of China was the proposing party while, the other party (the Republic of India which was a British capitalist colony) conceding. The Ogoni and Andoni people can choose to live peacefully by consciously adopting the above Five Principles of peaceful co-existence to be able to mutually exploit their common property

natural resources without conflict. This approach would not only ensure security of lives and property but, will result to the conservation and protection of the environment.

## **Principles of Sustainability**

Sustainable development in this context would mean development that satisfies the most efficient needs of the present generation without unduly jeopardizing the ability of the future generations to meet their own pressing needs. In other words, the goal of sustainable development is to enable all people throughout the world to satisfy their basic needs and enjoy a better quality of life, without compromising the quality of life of future generations (UK Government's Sustainable Development Strategy, 2009). Hence, there is need to ensure we live within environmental limits in a strong, healthy and just society through the means of a sustainable economy, sound science, and good governance. Thus, the five principles upon which the shared vision of sustainable development lies are:

1. ***Living within environmental limits:*** respecting the limits of the planet's environment, resources and biodiversity – to improve our environment and ensure that the natural resources needed for life are unimpaired and remain so for future generation.
2. ***Ensuring a strong, healthy and just society:*** meeting the diverse needs of all people in existing and future communities, promoting personal well-being, social cohesion and inclusion, and creating equal opportunity for all.
3. ***Achieving a sustainable economy:*** building a strong, stable and sustainable economy which provides prosperity and opportunity for all, and in which

environmental and social costs fall on those who impose them (*Polluter Pays – those individuals or organisations who pollute the environment are made to pay a fine for that action*), and efficient resource use is incentivised (*individuals or organisations who act to protect or conserve the environment are rewarded through incentives*).

4. **Using sound science responsibly:** ensuring that policy is developed and implemented on the basis of strong scientific evidence, whilst taking into account scientific uncertainty (through the Precautionary Principle) as well as public attitudes and values.
5. **Promoting good governance:** activity promoting effective, participative systems of governance in all levels of society – engaging people’s creativity, energy, and diversity.

### **Shared Resources between Ogoni and Andoni communities:**

Wild fishery resources, especially the fin fishes, (e.g. mullets, croakers, snappers, bonga fish, etc) are mobile resources that cross private or communal water boundary lines and therefore are regarded as common property. Water itself is included in this category of resources, along with air, wildlife other than fish, underground aquifers and scenic beauty. Fishes being migratory resources are also known as shared or transboundary stocks; and no single user have exclusive rights to such resources. From this circumstance arises the special problem of managing the resources. A user of a private resource can plan his use for his benefit for whatever time he wishes, whereas the user of a common property

resource is in direct competition with everyone else who wants to use it. Users of common property usually have erroneous belief (but in a sense true) that if they restrain their exploitation rates to prevent damage to the resource, other users do not have the same conservation agenda and would overexploit the resources; making more short-term benefits while, the burden of the lack thereof would be borne collectively. This has been called the tragedy of the commons (Hardin, 1968).

Most rural communities in Nigeria, especially along the seascape, do not have well defined physically demarcating boundaries. Increasing population and pressures on available space and resources are making some communities to cash in on the lack of visible demarcations (such as survey pillars) to disregard age-long understanding over communal boundaries, making claims and counterclaims over land and sea ownership commonplace. Such boundary issues, if not amicably resolved, sometimes degenerate to violent inter-communal clashes. Ogoni and Andoni communities, like most parts of the geographic Niger Delta, are blessed with abundant natural resources such as crude oil, water bodies, fish, mangroves, sand, etc. Claims of ownership over straddled mangrove swamps are, therefore, thorny and potential conflict stimuli among bounded Ogoni and Andoni communities. Given the framework of our discussion, emphasis will be placed on fisheries and mangrove resources shared by Ogoni and Andoni:

**Fisheries:** The Andonis and coastal Ogoni people are predominantly fisherfolks because, of the copious surface water-web that characterises the area. Fishing and fish trading have, therefore, sustained livelihoods and animal protein security in these communities

since remembered time. Nearly all of the 199 brackish and marine fish species described (Tobor, 1992) from the Nigerian coastal waters are exploited in the Andoni-Ogoni area.

**Mangroves:** Mangroves have been classified as keystone ecosystems. Mangroves provide rural communities with goods and ecological services that cannot be paid for. Products derived from mangroves include firewood, poles, charcoals, tannins, medicine, honey, etc. Mangrove ecological services are protection against floods, reduction of shoreline and riverbank erosion, maintenance of biodiversity and water quality, etc. It is a universally acceptable fact that mangroves act as nursery grounds for many marine fishes. Mangrove dispersal and primary succession along the coastal shores is tidal driven: the seedlings fall into water and are carried by current before they get stuck to sediments, sprout and grow to adult trees. Having such migratory life history, mangroves can be grouped under common property above.

#### **Kinds of unsustainable natural resource exploitation and conflict stimuli:**

In order to maximise profit and minimise time spent on exploitation, some fisherfolks engage in unscrupulous fishing practices. Every form of illegal fishing practice is detested in the communities and attracts assorted penalties, which are rarely enforced due to the erosion of traditional leadership grip on the citizenry, in recent times. Some of such unsustainable practices are:

**(a) Dynamite fishing:**

The use of explosives (dynamites) for fishing in the Niger Delta evolved with oil production. Dynamites are used in exploratory oil operations, and when used in water environment the explosion kills fishes and other aquatic life. Consequently, with the levelling out of natural fish stocks and the increasing demand for fish by an ever increasing population, some unscrupulous fishermen– mostly those in the youth age bracket– started to use dynamite to fish in preference to conventional fishing methods. Fishing with dynamite is non-selective; that is, it kills fish belonging to all age classes and the target groups. Dynamiting also impacts, negatively, on the structure and quality of water environment.

**(b) Fishing with chemicals and poisonous plants:**

Some fishers also indulge in the use of poisonous chemicals and plants in fishing. Poisonous chemicals, usually, in liquid forms include Gamalin 20, Adex 40 and Didimac 25. Some plants noted to produce chemicals that narcotize or kill fish have also been utilised by some fishers. The roots, leaves or bark of these plants are ground with tobacco or dried pepper to obtain active paste, and applied in different ways. These poisons are non-selective as well as being persistent in the environment; causing protracted damages to susceptible biota.

**(c) Overexploitation of mangrove resource:**

Besides the problems of mortalities sequel to oil spills, nypa palm spreading and clearance for development, mangroves in the Ogoni-Andoni area (and generally in the Niger Delta) are increasingly being overharvested. Cutting of immature mangroves for fire wood does

not allow for the production of seedlings needed for mangrove expansion and replenishment. In a special CNN documentary tagged "*Hopes and Anger in the Niger Delta*" aired on January 8, 2009, I posited that: "the rate at which mangrove resources are exploited in the Niger Delta is capable of causing conflict, because there's the possibility of one community pushing into another community to exploit the resources".

### **The drift to criminal oil economy:**

As a response to the interplay of unemployment and depletion of livelihood-dependable resources, some youths in the Niger Delta (including Ogoni and Andoni) engage in various acts of oil theft. These range from illegal bunkering to the once flourishing condensate theft at Soku oil terminals, and now booming local refineries, within the land- and seascape. The latter involves stealing crude oil through artificial holes bored on pipelines, and refining the oil by heating in locally crafted drums, having been added with some chemical additives. Diesel is the principal output of the above artisanal distillation process. Besides the criminality of it, the entire process of illegal bunkering and local oil refining is laden with uncontrollable oil spills into the environment, killing flora (plants) and fauna (animals) that community livelihoods depend upon. Moreover, the health of operators of local refineries is seriously endangered since they inhale the oozing poisonous aroma; crude oil is one of the most complicated natural mixtures on earth, having cocktail of poisons. Worse still, some local refiners have been burnt to death, while some suffer first degree burns!

### **Resource use conflicts:**

Aston-Jones (1998) listed four kinds of conflicts arising from the demand for resources beyond the ability of an ecosystem to supply, namely,

1. Conflicts between the ways resources are used,
2. Conflicts about resource ownership,
3. Conflicts between present and future needs, and
4. Conflicts between development methods.

### **Consequences of Uncontrolled Exploitation of the Natural Resources**

Uncontrolled exploitation of the natural resources come in different forms although, it is widely believed that conflict between man and nature is responsible for most of the devastating effects on the ecosystem. Such areas of conflicts include forest-clearing, devastating forest fires, disproportionate urban expansion and reckless development and all these have the rich tropical rainforest as their principal target. The Niger Delta region of Nigeria has had its fair share of all the aforementioned conflict situations coupled with the serious threat to mangrove forests. Vegetation along the shores of Ogoni and Andoni creeks are dominated by mangroves, especially the red mangrove (*Rhizophora* spp). Identified causes of natural resources conflict include poor governance and corruption.

Thus, efforts to consciously avoid such conflicts between man and the ecosystem to ensure harmony are highly desirable.

Some of the major consequences of natural resources conflict include incomes tending to fall, mortality (death) rises, and diseases spread faster and more easily. Often times, the most affected are the non-combatant (that is, the vulnerable women and youths) who tend to have little influence on when, how, and where such conflicts begin and end. Other impacts of conflicts and even years after the conflicts have been resolved are: a situation of uneasy calm usually mistaken for peace, which is evident by the refusal of government to cut down on military spending (the case of the Joint Task Force popularly referred to as JTF); violent crime tends to explode affecting people and their investments; there would be continuous capital flight with the result that private investors (local and foreign) remain sceptical. Further consequences include the prevalence of epidemics and disease remains higher than before the onset of the conflict, and finally other important evidences of human and social capital (connectedness amongst people in a society) will be destroyed or seriously weaken in a conflict situation that can take decades to recover.

Some other obvious and political consequences of natural resources conflict include kidnapping for ransom and violent secessionist movements notably the Biafran war in Nigeria, the Cabinda in Angola, and recently the agitations for resource control in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. Such conflicts most times do have great effects on the affected area's neighbours as well with the attendant increased pressure on available facilities due to migration thus increasing the risks of infectious diseases such as malaria, tuberculosis, typhoid, and HIV/AIDS pandemic. However, there have been peculiar and very limited

cases where conflicts have resulted to social progress or led to the dislodgment of a bad government or leadership.

### **Strategies for Natural Resources Exploitation and Ecosystem Protection**

Ecosystem or environmental protection, when done appropriately, is often a collection of both regulatory and no-regulatory programmes that enables concerned agencies to pool resources, get more stakeholders involved and set goals. Usually, such ecosystem protection programmes adopt the **ecosystem approach** by establishing priorities all designed to achieve environmental results that are not readily attainable through implementation of traditional regulatory programmes of environmental protection agencies alone. Here in Nigeria, it is common knowledge that most ecosystem protection policies or regulations involve only the traditional regulatory programmes as is largely carried out by the States and Federal Ministries of Environment (SME and FME), which is why tangible results are very difficult to observe resulting to several agitations by conservationists. A typical ecosystem approach to environmental protection has eight typical steps namely:

1. The area of interest / concern for protection must be defined.
2. Allow the locals to lead the process by involving stakeholders.
3. All involved must develop a shared vision of the desired state they want to see the ecosystem.
4. Characterize the historic ecosystem and the present economic, environmental and social conditions and trends.

5. Stakeholders should then establish environmental goals.
6. There has to be a joint development and implementation of an action plan.
7. The conditions must be monitored and the results evaluated for compliance to acceptable international best practices.
8. Then, effect the necessary changes to the management of the process if the need so arises, and should be based on new information as the process is driven through.

### **The Way Forward: Peaceful Co-existence and Sustainability Approach**

At the international scene, for example, peaceful coexistence has been largely responsible for the People's Republic of China (a Communist state) opening wide the doors of its economy to all nations including the capitalist United States of America. This was against, widely, held views by the antagonist contradiction school of thought at the time that Communism and capitalism could never exist in peace. Even in our contemporary nation state, there are those who believe that they can never coexist peacefully with other neighbours and this accounts for the unending crises witnessed all over due to their continued contravention of the five fundamental principles of peaceful coexistence. There is also the dire need for developing countries to reduce the extent of their economic dependence on the leading industrialized nations, which would always prevent them or at least minimize the impacts of such economic depressions as witnessed in the recent economic meltdown. This they could easily achieve by entering into agreements whereby

they provide technical assistance to one another; the exchange of experts and technical assistance for development projects. This could further be improved to include exchange of technological know-how and the establishment of regional training and research institutes.

The government should create situations or enabling environments that make people less and less dependent on primary commodities that have tremendous impacts to reduce the risks of natural resources-related conflicts. For example, it has been stated that doubling per capita income roughly halves the risk of a civil war while, each additional percentage point of growth reduces the risk by about one percentage point (Bannon and Collier, 2003). Here in the Niger Delta region (in general) and the Ogoni and Andoni areas (in particular), creating a situation of social security whereby every person and especially the unemployed is entitled to a minimum stipend would make it easier to monitor almost every individual and reduce conflict once people are sure about their survival. Therefore, the state and federal governments should do everything to adopt economic policies and institutions that can stimulate growth and reduce poverty, improve governance and transparency, and reduce to reasonable degree natural resources-related grievances, and very importantly diversification of the economy.

### **Specific roadmaps to sustainable resource exploitation and conflict prevention:**

- 1. Co-Management:** What is considered illegal method of resource exploitation in one community might be lawful in the neighbouring community. Thus, boundary communities should evolve inter-community resource rules through negotiation, and

concurrent enforcement regime. For example, fishing with beach seines is permitted in some littoral communities but considered illegal in others.

- 2. Mangrove Protected Areas:** Communities should declare certain mangroves, particularly, boundary mangrove swamps, as protected areas. The latter option has the additional advantage of preventing inter-communal conflicts associated with ownership and uncontrollable exploitation. Essential fisheries areas such as nursery grounds also need to be closed as a means of allowing time for recovery. A case in point begging for such closing is the bloody cockle (koo) bed at the Dor Nwezor tidal flats of Bodo Creek. The shellfish is, grossly, overfished such that only many years of closure may lead to its recovery.
- 3.** Communities should report recalcitrant practisers of illegal fishing to the police. If such unscrupulous fisherfolk(s) is/are caught in the act by another community, the culprit should be handed over to the police unbeaten so as not to warrant misinterpretation, and result to inter-communal discord.

## **Conclusion**

If the natural resources shared by Ogoni and Andoni communities are sustainably exploited and co-managed henceforth, then livelihoods of the rural populations would be assured and resource-related conflicts will be a thing of the past, or at least, would be reduced drastically within the area.

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