

# The Mass Media in Peace Building and Conflict Management in the Niger Delta

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## Introduction

The Niger Delta region has become a volatile conflict area in Nigeria since oil was discovered in commercial quantities in the region in 1956 by Shell D'Arcy. However, much attention was not given to the conflict in the area until when it took a violent dimension. In recent times, the number of violent crimes and crises as direct consequence of the conflict in the Niger Delta has reverberated causing a setback to the growth and development of the region with varying implications on the Nigerian economy as a whole.

Many reasons account for the conflicts in the embattled region which have degenerated into violent crisis. In broad terms, ethnic tensions and hostilities based on perceived marginalization and neglect with regard to infrastructural development accounts for the persistent crisis in the region. Also, increased poverty, rising wave of unemployment, collapse of local economy, resilience of civil society, vanishing traditional authority; and the concentration of oil reserves in the hands of the federal government as Ekeocha (2001) notes are some of the key causes of the crises in the Niger Delta region. Conversely, our focus is not on the causes but how the mass media can be positively utilized to bring about social change and peace in the region.

Although successive governments have persistently evolved policies and strategies directed at finding solutions to the crisis in the Niger Delta, little attention has been focused on the need to use the mass media as a tool for effective crisis management. The mass media have only been recognized as a partner in the process. Regrettably, cases abound where beneficiaries of such crisis like the one

in the Niger Delta manipulate mass media content to exploit public sentiments and cause disaffection in already fragile situations, thus making it impossible for strategies devised to control the crisis to work out. This often leads to escalation of such crisis in other areas as well as prolong on-going conflicts.

It is the position of this article that the mass media are potent tools to be utilized in turning around the situation in the Niger Delta. This is predicated on the fact that professional media are central components of stable pluralistic societies. They act as the guardians and defenders of public interest, revealing abuses, wrong doings, and potential crisis issues, while at the same time, defending rights of members of the society and projecting those values that could unify and strengthen the fabric of societal foundations.

In this regard, this article maintains that societies that are less vulnerable to conflicts have well-grounded mass media that are community-oriented. Thus, they are able to prevent and resolve conflict, through the automatic functions of disseminating information, furthering awareness and knowledge, and promoting participatory and transparent governance, which help to address perceived grievances.

Though mass media influence during conflict periods and crisis situations has long been recognized, it is only in recent times that attention has been given to their role in the resolution of crisis in Nigeria. Yet, the mass media in most instances are used to make appeals without addressing the issues that led to such crisis. This disposition simply recognizes the mass media as purveyors of information without reference to the impact of such information on the audience. It is our opinion however, that the mass media can be utilized to positively impact on conflicts, particularly in the Niger Delta situation, both through their functions to communicate information as well as address issues and events in an objective, reliable, and accurate manner. This is

because as Underwood (2003, p. 5) notes:

*Media underpins development and democratization and as vital elements of conflict resolution and peace building... an independent media is the foundation of a democracy and more often than not the only guarantee for transparency and good governance on conflict management and post conflict development efforts.*

This aptly analyzes the prospects of using the Nigerian mass media to manage the Niger Delta crisis by bringing about social change and building sustainable peace and development.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This discourse is anchored on the agenda-setting and gate-keeping functions of the mass media. The concepts are expected to explain the mode of operation of the Nigerian mass media in the context of social change and peace building. This is against the backdrop that the mass media are double-edged swords. They can be useful instruments of social change, peace building and conflict resolution when the information they disseminate correctly represents diverse views and respects human dignity and rights. However, there is another aspect of the media. The mass media can be frightful weapons of violence when their contents are influenced to propagate messages of intolerance or disinformation to manipulate public sentiment. It is only an independent mass media that enables society to make well-informed choices by giving equal opportunity to diverse views that can reduce conflict, enhance social change, build peace and foster human security, which are precursors of stability and sustainable growth and development.

The Agenda-Setting theory implies that the mass media in their daily functioning influence public discourse by pre-determining what issues should be regarded as important at a given point in time in the society. Folarin (1998) points out that agenda-setting theory does not ascribe to the media, the power to determine what people within a society think, but it does ascribe to the media, the power to determine what people think about. This they do by the quantity or frequency of reports on an issue; prominence given to the reports through headlines, pictures and layout or timing; the degree of conflict generated in the reports; and the cumulative media-specific effects overtime. Sufficing these conclusions, Odukamaiya (2004) cites McCombs and Shaw (1974) as stating that media emphasis on an event influences the audience to see the event as important.

Through this process, the mass media could be used either way to affect crisis situations. By projecting and emphasizing the ways by which the issues at stake could be resolved using dialogue, the mass media would be setting the pace for the path to peace. They would also be able to propagate the framework put in place for sustainable peace as well as educate the populace on the kind of behaviour that would enhance mutual trust amongst all groups. On the other hand, the mass media could actually be the obstacle to any effort made to restore peace in a crisis ridden area due to manipulative dissemination of information. Once the people no longer trust a particular medium based on proofs that it propagates inaccurate, subjective and false information so as to undermine the interest of a particular group or cause disaffection; there is no way such a medium can contribute to resolving the crisis. Rather, such a medium would end up raising sentiments that would create apathy and dissent over and towards certain groups and individuals.

The agenda the mass media set at every given point are also influenced by what they stand for with regard to their responsibility to the public. Under this precept,

professionalism comes into play through moral and ethical imperatives. Also, what constitutes political interest for media owners, their sponsors and the economic interests of the stations and individual journalists also influence the way the mass media perceive reality in crisis situations. Therefore, whether positive or negative, the mass media have the potentials of influencing conflict and crisis situations based on their agenda setting function.

Gate-keeping is one of the concepts and functions of journalism. The implication of the gate keeping concept on information dissemination is based on the perception of the individual journalist and the editor(s). That is, before audience members are exposed to mass media content, the individual journalist has done considerable selections as to what is important enough to report and to reject. Citing White (1964), Altinkaya (2003) explains that the newspaper editor in his position as gate keeper sees to it (though he may never be consciously aware of it) that the community shall hear as a fact only those events which newsmen believe to be true.

This implies that much of what we know about our society stems from our daily exposure to the mass media; and the reality of our everyday experience is partly an experience of a made-up world, invented and influenced by media gatekeepers. That is, what constitutes reality, truth, fairness and objectivity for the gatekeepers is what is usually handed to media audience. The implication is that mass media audience members are vulnerable to manipulative tendencies of unprofessional media which may be acting under the disguise of gate keeping acting to the whims of some influential groups.

Although gate keeping is regarded as voluntary self-censorship, performed by the media as Folarin (1998) rightly observes, it amounts to screening of the information to suppress others. However, gate keeping can be used effectively by media organizations to advance the cause of peace, because gate keeping in its objective sense does not

imply accepting or rejecting information. It is often carried out during processing to modify, shape and display the information in a manner that could promote peace, unity and acceptable behaviour.

Nevertheless, timing, ownership pattern, management policy, size of the media, perceived needs and preferences of the audience, the editor's perception of reality, influence of advertisers, competition as well as legal considerations, professional ethics and community standards as McQuail (2007) notes are important factors that exert enormous influence over gate keeping. The crux of the matter, however is that through their agenda-setting and gate-keeping concepts, the mass media can be effectively utilized to create the enabling environment for social change, peace building and development in the Niger Delta region. This, they can do by setting the platform for purposeful dialogue and effective communication that would help address the grievances of the Niger Delta region through reconciliatory programmes and strategies to advance its development.

### **Mass Media and Conflict: Analysis and Definitions**

Information is an indispensable factor in the management of human affairs. Whatever may be the perception of people, it remains a vital function of human existence. It is in this regard that communication is the major pre-occupation of humanity. However, as vital as it is, it has inherent dangers that could stir conflict and violence. For information to be useful, its flow must be managed according to socially responsible and desirable goals of society. No society however advanced or composed can live in unity, peace and abiding faith in its progress and development unless people therein receive positive and affirmative information about what goes on within and beyond their immediate surroundings. Information received by one person concerning another, shapes for the receiving party an impression about the other person. This impression

depending on the source of information, its credibility and character overtime, may however be shaped to reflect kindness or cruelty, courage or cowardice, exactitude or perversion.

To ensure that information dissemination within society takes a responsible turn, the mass media have come to be reckoned as an influential institution within society. This power is readily recognized and rooted in the agenda-setting function of the mass media. In other that the media be effectively utilized and assisted to effectively address conflict, it is essential that the root causes, patterns of violence, and current dynamics are clearly understood. This process as Lund (2003) notes requires a detailed and specialized approach upon which assessments of thematic issues should ideally be based. Moreover, conflict should be considered as a circular rather than linear phenomena, with the various stages of pre, mid and post conflict overlapping one another, without any necessary preset course. In this regard, a conflict may theoretically pass from the overt-conflict stage to either the pre-conflict or post-conflict stages and so forth.

The inevitability of conflict in society has been approached from two perspectives by scholars – the optimists and liberals. There also seems to be a consensus among scholars with regard to these two perspectives. The optimists as Burton (1987) notes extol conflicts as an essential creative element in human relations, which serves as the means to change, and the means by which the values of welfare, security, justice and opportunities for personal development can be achieved. To this group, conflict is a continuum that should be allowed to flourish in society. The liberal perspective, however, points out the fact that violent conflicts could degenerate to crisis and threatens peace in society. They contend that whether conflict plays a negative or positive role in society, the destructive dimensions of violent conflict cannot be overruled. They state that it is the way conflict is managed that can affect society negatively or

positively which is dependent on how well the cause of the conflict have been understood.

Nnoli (1998) also looks upon conflict as the contradictions arising from differences in the interests, ideas, ideologies, orientations and precipitous tendencies of the people concerned. These contradictions, he explains are inherent at all levels of social and economic interactions. Conflict is therefore a pervasive phenomenon in human relationship, which is the basic unit of understanding social existence.

Whatever the perspective or perception of conflict, its resolution helps to push society towards enhanced humanity. While social scientists agree that conflicts are inevitable in human affairs and if carefully managed can lead to social and economic progress; conflicts may linger and explode into violence, may become undesirable, and develop into a menace. Violent conflicts can therefore be seen as the consequence of the inability or failure to accommodate and resolve contradictions in society through arrangements and procedures that eliminate their negative effects and maximize their positive effects. This, as Nnoli (1998) observes is the case of the Niger Delta conflict where such failures result from the inability of the conflicting units to accept the arrangements and procedures that have been adopted to resolve the conflict.

As a basic definition, the media are the several channels used in an organized fashion to communicate and disseminate information to the public. The media by our conceptualization are not limited to the mass media but also alternative media, which should fit into the following criteria:

- The media are issue-driven and actively supports like-minded initiatives,
- Alternative approaches to societal activity are promoted in contrast to existing commercial interests and socio-economic hierarchies,
- The editorial focus is based on new perspectives,



providing different interpretations of issues and events,

- The consumers are often niche groups,
- Profit maximization is not a key consideration,
- Outlets have relatively horizontal working and pay structures.

Although news and information are most often the basis for media and conflict activities, entertainment programmes ranging from chat-shows to soap operas are also important media. In this regard, it is our contention that all forms of media if based upon responsible, accurate and balanced standards, can communicate diversity and understanding to promote peace.

### **Interrelationship between Media and Conflict**

In violent conflicts such as the ones in the Niger Delta region, truth and justice often confront a culture of denial on facts and proofs of crimes and violence against the people and on responsibility for them by the actors. In closing ranks against truth and justice, grievances are never addressed, wrong-doings never accepted and forgiveness never granted. This intensifies, prolongs, aggravates or leads to the escalation and extension of violence. It is from this perspective that Fanon (1968) once wrote that when humans realized that certain impediments limit their opportunity of realizing their potentials, they tend to act. To act in order to remove obstacles that stand in their way, which can be justified by violence.

The above position can explain the reasons for the continuing violence in the Niger Delta. Nevertheless, it is our view that mass media use also affects the Niger Delta crisis. To buttress our point, we shall look at the effects of media on conflict and the effects of conflicts on the media. This will enable us clearly comprehend what needs to be done.

### *Effects of Media on Conflict*

The effect of the media on conflict can be viewed in terms of the negative repercussions that inadvertent or overt propagandistic or one-sided reporting may have in terms of fuelling tensions and provoking conflict. Conversely, the media may potentially have a positive impact if based upon basic professional standards combined with diverse access to information, reasonable financial resources and adherence to ethical codes. Such media can contribute to societal reconciliation, alter misperceptions and broaden understanding of the causes and consequences of conflict.

### *Effects of Conflict on Media*

The negative effects of violent conflict on media are well known. We shall however dwell on the erosion of media credibility. Although an explosion in the number of media is often seen during conflict, the majority of these has limited resources and serves purely propaganda purposes of one side or another. In this regard, they generally do not survive long after the conflict subsides, although the resultant degradation to the media environment often has a lasting impact after the conflict. The erosion of media environments by conflict also undermines the economic viability of the society.

The effects of the media on conflict and conflict on media as Ekeocha (2001) notes are dependent on the context in which the interaction takes place. Such contextual factors dictate the role and scope of the media to influence the root causes, patterns of violence and current as well as future dynamics of conflict. In this regard, we believe it is more helpful to consider these factors in terms of considerations to be made which include; the policy and environment, networking and association, homogenous or heterogeneous media communities; and the media skills and resources. We shall discuss content consideration in the next subheading.

## **Mass media Use and Content Manipulation in Nigeria**

Although much emphasis on mass media use has been placed on the uses and gratifications perspective, which is based on needs gratification of the audience, mass media use in the context of our discourse implies the chain of activities that inform media content. To enable us have a clear perception of this perspective, we shall analyze the market and manipulative models of mass media content selection criteria.

The market model as captured by Oso (2004) means that market forces ensure freedom, which guarantees that the mass media select what will be in public interest. This model which is a contribution to the social responsibility perspective sees the role of professional journalists and media outfits as operating in consonance with public taste.

The manipulative model, which is also, likened to the propagandistic conspiracy theory, on the other hand holds that journalists are seen to be acting in the behest of the media owners and other powerful interest groups (government officials, oil thieves, and militant groups).

According to the manipulative model, the “powerful” are able to fix the premise of discourse, decide what the public is allowed to see, hear, read and think about, and thus suggests that in conflict-developing and/or crisis situations, it is freedom of expression and the impartiality of the media that are often the initial victims. This implies that when assessing the mutual impact of media and conflict, there are a number of “content” issues to be considered. These relate to the substance of the media products being published and or broadcast.

In weak democracies, where media independence is not sufficiently ensured as Howard (2002) points out, both state and non-state entities and interest groups succeed in making the media a tool for nationalistic and xenophobic propaganda through content manipulation. Howard asserts

that in such instances, the media are derailed of their conflict management and resolution values; and have created a convenient occasion for the authorities to crack down on the media to distort information and conceal complicity.

The media that through its contents promote conflict prevention and resolution are those which at the minimum, based upon core professional standards and practices. In this manner, the practice of advanced journalism, investigative reporting and so forth, can have an even greater impact on facilitating conflict resolution and prevention.

In contrast to this, media content that operates in accordance with the manipulative model, which provokes conflicts can be roughly divided into two broad groups: that which is intended to stir emotions based upon an imagined need to take pre-emptive actions; and that which swells opposition to conflict based upon an image of historical enmity and inevitability of recurring conflict (Howard, 2002).

If the surrounding environment is conducive for the provocation or spread of conflict; both types can fuel violence whether they are deliberate hate speech or indecent reporting due to low professional standards. In the Niger Delta, beneficiaries of the crisis are taking advantage of the volatile and loose media environment to exploit the media to their advantage to solidify their influence at the expense of public interest, peace, stability and development. Consequently, much of what comes to the public as media content on the Niger Delta crisis is predicated on the pre-emptive action and historical enmity and conflict inevitability concepts propelled through manipulative forces.

***Preemptive action:*** Media content under this concept serves to engender an unsubstantiated belief that pre-emptive action is required for self defense. Such perceptions as noted by Moore (1987) are often based on lack of information and

understanding of the intentions and circumstances of the other and a focus on myths and stereotypes, perceived inequalities and injustices, and previous tensions between communities. This also presents a picture of what is happening in the Niger Delta region. The role of the media in providing balanced and objective information is therefore essential. Sadly, however, content manipulation despite its adverse effects has persisted in Nigeria particularly in crisis situation where sensationalism thrives. This phenomenon has led to the creation of an image of the enemy as mass (everyone within a particular group is viewed as a collective enemy) rather than individuals with different orientations and interests. This serves to make the resort to violence less personal and therefore easier to justify.

***Historical enmity and conflict inevitability:*** Although closely linked to the pre-emptive action or model, of equal concern is when media content creates an image that the outbreak of conflict or return to conflict is unavoidable. This undermines the collective will of communities to resist the path to conflict, which may be sought only by a small minority (Howard, 2002). The establishment of such self-fulfilling prophecies is usually achieved through portraying conflict as a pattern or ongoing historical process thereby promoting violence as a normal or acceptable manner in which to pursue grievance or right perceived wrongs. This also applies to the Niger Delta crisis which many see as a struggle for liberation from socio-political and economic marginalization, neglect and exploitation. Some media outfits, mainstream, alternative or traditional/non-conventional in Nigeria are contemptuous of this portrayal which seems to be a justification of the spate of violence in the region.

It should be noted however, that no matter the cause, violence affects and impacts on the lives of vulnerable groups in conflict situations such as children, the disabled,

physically challenged, women, youths and the aged and it cannot in any way be justified. For instance, one of the factors that led to the proliferation of militant groups in the Niger Delta is government's recognition and willingness to negotiate with them. This implies that once you take to arms and your impact is felt, you would be recognized as a stakeholder. Through its agenda setting and gate keeping, the Nigerian media (mainstream, alternative, traditional/non-conventional) should help set the path to social change and peace building.

### **Implications for Social Change and Peace Building**

The need for social change and peace building as a framework for resolution of the Niger Delta crisis is quite compelling and urgent. This is because despite the resort to violence by youths of the Niger Delta region as a means of registering their grievances against the Federal Government, oil companies and interest groups, it has failed to solve the region's problems. Rather there has been increased violence, insecurity, poverty, environmental degradation and infrastructural decay. Although the activities of militant groups has drawn world attention to the humanitarian situation in Nigeria particularly in the region, the negative impact of the conflict is being felt more by the region's people than any part of the country and the groups that the grievances are targeted at.

Through the agenda setting and gate keeping concepts of the media particularly in conflict affected areas like the Niger Delta, the media can be used to initiate and facilitate social change and peace building by harnessing the media's potential to communicate and relate information in a style specifically oriented towards social change and peaceful resolution of conflict. Using this approach, the media thus becomes a facilitator of conflict reduction, rather than a professional observer. Content transformation rather than manipulation as advocated here through this framework

aims to assist the media tackle those economic, social, political, ethnic, and religious issues considered too sensitive to address during periods of conflict. This is because not tackling those issues means that the root causes of the conflict are not addressed and the status quo theoretically persists with the associated fear that conflict may re-emerge and the media may be vulnerable to harassment, intimidation and attack by warring parties.

If this approach is used, however, the challenge lies in ensuring that the media are not manipulated to promote pre-set agenda or simply disseminate information in place of professional journalism. This will help protect the media against intimidation, harassment, and attacks. In consequence, it will enhance social change and promote peace building. Preventing the media from being used by agent provocateurs acting to promote their selfish interests and what they stand to gain from the conflict is important because vulnerable populations in conflict ridden areas such as the Niger Delta region need accurate and timely information in order to function and survive in the new conditions created by conflict. However, it is during conflict that information often becomes confused both in terms of knowledge about what assistance can be sought, as well as what is happening in the conflict due to content manipulation by influence groups. This significantly fuels tensions as other forms of unreliable and conflicting information flow becomes prevalent, including rumour and gossip, as well as inflammatory information.

As noted by the DFID framework, social changes, which enable people in conflict affected areas to see the long-term effects of conflict and adapt to measures to resolve conflicts through dialogue, can be enhanced by supporting the creation of an independent media. The independent media environment enables plural choice and diversity to be added to the media landscape and information access is also enhanced for the public, particularly in isolated areas. The

framework emphasizes that in this regard, where the sole media might be aligned to a political, religious, ethnic or economic interest, creating sustainable plurality provides more voices and points of views, which in turn, lessens the potential influence of groups that might intend to use the media to manipulate and exploit public sentiments (DFID, 2000).

The media do not act alone in society as noted by Small (2001), but forms a part of the larger community. In this context, Small explains that while the media are key stakeholders in peace building, interaction between the media and other society actors, whether they be academic, civil rights groups or NGOs is important for the development of a broad understanding of key dynamics and issues, as well as being able to reflect diversity on peace building activities.

Lund (1999) also notes that peace within a society that is ridden with conflicts that have taken a violent dimension can be achieved using four models: peacemaking, peace enforcement, and peace building. According to him, peacemaking implies using mediation and negotiations to make peace. Peace keeping on the other hand implies deploying troops and other security operatives to deter violence in a conflict area. Peace enforcement involves the use of military might and force to restore peace between belligerent parties who do not consent to peace making and keeping. The fourth concept - peace building implies the effort made to strengthen the prospects for internal peace and decrease the likelihood of violent conflict.

We subscribe to the fourth concept due to the implications of the other three on sustainable peace. Through peace making, influential parties in the conflict impact on the mediating parties by influencing the negotiations more to their advantage. Peace achieved through this process remains fragile and might become elusive at any provocation. Peace keeping also impinges on human rights, thus suppressing the key issues at stake which



may re-emerge given the right environment. Peace enforcement, though used as a last resort has more demeaning implications ranging from destruction of property and loss of lives. It is therefore our belief that the media when protected against content manipulation have high potential for enhanced social change and peace building, which are crucial to conflict resolution.

## **Conclusion**

Acknowledging the fact that conflict is argued to be an inevitable phenomenon in human existence, it must be realised that conflict management is a crucial function of society, which the mass media play an active role. However, the influence exercised on the media by interest groups in societies has a high potential of increasing tensions and escalating conflicts. Therefore, it is the position of this paper that the Niger Delta crisis persists despite efforts to resolve it due to the negative use of the mass media and its content manipulation. So have been persistent neglect, suppression, ignorance, and overlooking of some of the key social, economic, political, ethnic and religious issues which are the root causes of the conflict. Rather, inflammatory information has persisted, leading to increased tensions and restiveness. If the conflict in the Niger Delta must be managed and resolved, the collective will and efforts of all the stakeholders in the crisis - government, ethnic groups, oil companies, individuals and civil societies are required to pluralize the media coverage and reportage of the conflict.

Unless this is seen and taken as a collective responsibility, the use of the media to exploit public sentiments through content manipulation as well as misrepresentation and portrayal of falsehood will continue to stir up sentiments and grievances, raise tensions and provoke crises among stakeholders in the region. This will continue to render all efforts, initiatives or frameworks

instituted towards the resolution of the Niger Delta conflict elusive and a wishful thinking.

### **Recommendations for Resolving the Niger Delta Conflict**

A sincere and holistic approach is required for a programme that addresses the role of the media in peace building and conflict resolution in the Niger Delta. The recommendations here therefore range from the broadest level of developing a strong media environment, to the most specific level of utilizing local channels of grassroots communication. Such an approach along with sanctions ensures that individual, traditional and alternative media can be engaged in addressing conflict related issues in a manner unique to the local environment, and the inherent long-term role of the mainstream and alternative media for preventing and resolving conflict can be secured through countering content manipulation and abuse, diversifying information access and dissemination, and providing skills and resources. Thus we recommend: Strengthening the media environment; Developing professional skills and resources; Facilitating information flow access; and Supporting community-based communication.

These recommendations though not exhaustive, are aimed at achieving a long-term reduction in the potential for conflict, based upon the specific circumstances of the Niger Delta conflict. They include specific targeted activities, which seem to build upon other initiatives and frameworks in place.

*Strengthening the media environment:* A secure media environment based on legislation and policies that provide space within which the media can operate as independent entities based on legal, ethical, and self-regulating checks and balances; is important. This is also required to ensure

media ability to perform conflict prevention and resolution roles as an inherent function as well as being a strong basis for preventing the types of content manipulation and abuse of the media that can fuel tensions.

*Developing professional skills and resources:* In developing professional skills and resources, the Nigerian Press Council, National Broadcasting Commission, Nigerian Union of Journalists, Nigerian Guild of Editors and other media based advocacy organizations should engage in networking and associations both within, regionally and internationally. This provides linkages amongst practitioners and media organizations, which enables them to start and facilitate exchange of experiences and skills as well as the promotion of best practices. Such endeavours would help develop professional skills and resources that would enhance improved performance and reinforce confidence among the people in the abilities of the media to uphold professional standards and defend public interest. It may also foster the ability of the media to research, interpret, and communicate about conflict in an objective, reliable, and accurate manner.

*Facilitating information flow and access:* Effective communication is crucial in dispelling rumours, gossips, and falsehood. Effective information flow helps the media to play a constructive role in conflict prevention and resolution. Inadequate, restricted, or poor access to information flow creates room for content manipulation, which permeates dissemination of unreliable information intended to exploit public sentiments in order to gain support or stir up tensions that could lead to violence or its escalation. When information flow and access is facilitated, dialogue and interaction with parties and stakeholders can be enhanced for social change and peace building.

*Supporting community-based communication:* In conflict situations, information is the basis for coordination of all peace building and social change initiatives. While the mainstream and alternative media remain the main sources of information for most communities in Nigeria, locally trusted sources of information and community forum remain sources that cannot be ignored. These are powerful and influential sources that when harnessed can help in complementing and supplementing the working of the mainstream and alternative media as well as supporting them.

It is the position of this article that the media are key stakeholders in the Niger Delta crisis, and unless their potentials for enhanced social change and peace building are harnessed, there can be no meaningful result from current efforts to resolve the Niger Delta crisis. At best, beneficiaries of the crisis in their bid to prolong it would take advantage of content manipulation and derail efforts and initiatives put in place to resolve the Niger Delta conflict.

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