



**YOUTH EMPOWERMENT**  
*for*  
**SUSTAINABLE  
DEVELOPMENT**

Edited by

Godwin E. Akpan  
Christopher N. Ekong



**Youth, conflict and sustainable development**

*Gabriel S. Umoh*

**First Published 2006**

***All Right Reserved:***

No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieved system or transmitted in any form or by any means' Electronic, Mechanical, photocopy, recording or otherwise without the written permission of the Author and Publishers.

ISBN: 978-8097-51-0

Published by:

***Minder International Publishers***

A subsidiary of:

***Robertminder International Limited***

2 Ibiam Street, Uyo

Akwa Ibom State

E-mail: robertminder@yahoo.com

GSM: 0802 343 9761

**1. Introduction**

The ultimate intention of human activities or endeavours is to attain improvements in the current situation, be it in the production of goods and services or the provision of humanitarian services aimed, ultimately, at enhancing well being. Whether these activities are performed by private individuals/households, corporate and public concerns or humanitarian agencies, members of such outfits are expected to play their role with a view to achieving the organizational goal. If the entity is a household, the father, mother and children (and relatives, as in extended family) are expected to be actively involved. If it is a corporation, then the workers or employees and employers should be expected to play their role accordingly. Same assumption can also be made for communities and nations. In the case of a community and nation, the youths, and elders men and women are expected to contribute their quota to the good of the system.

Although improvement in a system, particularly of a community or nation, has been described in different terms, the summation of these terms has given rise to an all-encompassing phrase, sustainable development. As desirable as sustainable development is, its attainment by communities and nations, in particular, has been eroded by conflicts, particularly violent conflicts. Recent literature reveals that the major players in virtually all conflict areas are the youths. Therefore, the intent in this paper is to x-ray the nexus between youth, conflict and sustainable development. Attempt is also made to answer such questions as: Why are youths involved in conflict? How do conflicts impact on development? What are the panaceas to youth affinity with conflict? The discourse is presented in sections. The section that follows presents the basic concepts of the paper. Section III discusses youths and conflict while section iv treats conflict and sustainable development. The fifth and final section suggests measures for effective youth participation in development.



## 2. Basic Concepts

**Youth:** Youth is defined as childhood, adolescence, formative years infancy, early life or early stages. Thus, individuals up to the age of thirty years are often regarded as youths in many countries. They are mainly made up of boys and girls many of whom are either schooling, unemployed or new in employment

**Conflict:** According to Chaplin (1979), conflict is the simultaneous occurrence of two or more mutually antagonistic impulses and motives. Himes (1980), looking at conflict in behavioural terms, defines it as a purposeful struggle between collective actors who use power to defeat or remove opponents to gain status, power, resources and other scale values. This view is shared by Ekong (1988) and Wilson and Hanna (1990). Ekong sees conflict as that form of social interaction in which actors seek to obtain scarce reward by eliminating or weakening other contenders. Wilson and Hanna in the same vein, describe conflict as a struggle involving opposing ideas, value and or limited resources.

Three elements stand out from the various views of conflict. First, two or more individuals are involved (actors). Second, there are causes (triggers) of conflict. Third and lastly, there is an outcome of conflict. Simpson (2003) provides a framework for analyzing conflict, which also shows its effects. The framework classifies the causes of conflict into five (5) classes, viz:

**Political and Governance:** National, State and Local Government elections, political appointments *tazares* (self-succession). This has been one of the common causes of conflict in most developing countries. In Nigeria, this particular cause of conflict seems to have had large followership in the youths.

**Economic:** This may have to do with competition for land, resources, employment preferment; distribution of state benefits and compensation, energy crisis, tax increases, labour disputes, etc.

**Ethno-Religious:** Religious intolerance, e.g., Muslim-Christian rivalries arising from perceived or image disrespect and claims of spiritual superiority between the two religions' believers.

**Social-Cultural (Ethnicity):**

**Cultural (Ethnicity):** Appointment of traditional leaders including causes of succession and enthronement/dethronement. African Development Bank (ADB) (2001) admits that factors that trigger conflicts are complex, but one of the root causes is often found in the inability to respect social reciprocities: political inequality, inter group intolerance, and the lack of inclusiveness in associational membership. In the same vein, OAU's summary analysis of the causes of civil wars in Africa identified at least six of them:

Ethnicity;  
Power-sharing;  
Inter-clan and other factional rivalries;  
Destabilization by mercenaries;  
Human rights violations, and  
Geopolitics and the Cold War.

Whatever the cause(s) of conflict are, six stages of conflict development can be identified. Each of these stages easily lends itself to appropriate actor or actors including the youths. These stages are:

**Formative or early warning stage.** This is the first stage in conflict cycle. At this stage, there emerges a problem and issue of concern, and thus, the community members start complaining. Things hitherto taken for granted now become serious issues. The behaviour and attitude of the people change. There is disobedience and care-free attitude. Nocturnal meetings commence.

**Escalating stage:** This is the second stage in the conflict cycle. At this stage; the effects of the nocturnal meetings has started to manifest. People begin to take sides and positions. Communication could stop and perception becomes distorted and leaders begin to make inflammatory public statements.

**Overt conflict or violent crisis:** At this stage, there is direct confrontation and violence. Breakdown of law and order sets in and services are disrupted.

**De-escalating stage:** At this stage, conflict has gradually begun to ease, this could be because of external intervention or suppression of the conflict through use of force. Often, a lot of damage would have been done before the de-escalating stage.

**Improvement stage:** Here, efforts are made towards attaining peace.



**Transformation stage:** This is a desirable stage in a particular conflict situation. At this stage, all causes of conflict have been attended to, and actors in conflict reconciled. This is often a desirable but difficult stage to achieve.

### Types of Conflict

**Latent Conflict:** Potential sources of conflict which could emerge as violent conflict.

**Open Conflict:** On going challenges and disputes; actual, violent conflict.

**Sustainable Development:** The term “development” has evolved over time with human thinking and advancement in understanding. Early development thinkers assumed that the content of development is economic, *i.e.*, usually, to increase national output and wealth, often by industrialization. This idea expanded to encompass not only economic issues but development in the social, political and cultural spheres. However, the current thinking in development circles considers issues beyond the present, but the future, and the sustainability of the development process. Environmental degradation, human capital development, etc. have found their way into the development literature. Thus, sustainable development is considered as improvement in the totality of societies' conditions without compromising the chances of the future generations enjoying similar conditions. It involves the simultaneous pursuit of economic prosperity, environmental quality and social equity. It requires the adoption of policies and principles that create social renaissance and an enabling environment for growth and development

### 3. Why Are the Youths Involved in Conflict?

Recent literature associates the youths with conflict and violent conflict. The questions are: Are the youths naturally inclined to conflict or are they victims of circumstance? Several social and economic theories attempt to explain human behaviour in this direction. For instance, the conflict-loving posture of youths in most developing countries can be explained from orthodox development economics. The orthodox development economics assumes a liberal state characterized by unselfish regard for or devotion to the welfare of its citizens. This assumption made development economists come up with the rational actor model of politics. This sees government as

composed of public spirited, knowledgeable and role oriented politicians, clear and united in their objectives, choosing those policies, which will achieve optimal results for the national interest (Killicks, 1976). This assumption can be seen in the functions of government as taught in Social Studies and Civic Education. The assumptions, which have been imbibed by most citizens of developing countries, and encouraged by the pretence of the leaders, have tended to generate conflicts between the citizens and government when such expectations are not met. If government controls the resources of the state as in many developing countries, then the citizens are wont to vent their spleen on those in authority.

The case of Nigerian Niger Delta region which has been in conflict for decades seems to prove the orthodox development economists right. Many reports on conflict in the Delta Region point to a strong disapproval of the existing system of resource control in the country. Resource control is born out of a deep feeling of marginalisation and unjust treatment in spite of the huge petroleum wealth that Nigeria has taken from the region. Rechler's (2002) findings from his conflict impact assessment in the Niger Delta further corroborates this theory and the reasons given for conflict in many societies. The study identifies several reasons for conflict in the region, namely,

- Dissatisfaction with the present political transaction and the desirability of democracy.
- A strong disapproval of the existing system of resource control and the wish for more equitable control.
- Widespread poverty and the demand for rapid and sustainable development process.
- A feeling of disrespect of the people's culture.
- Minority within a minority frustration.
- Environmental degradation.
- A disintegrative moral political climate.
- Absence of a good functioning security system.

Institute for Peace and Conflict Resolution (IPCR) (2002) reports that there is a widespread depression among the youths in most developing countries. However, it would seem that the youths are not inherently violent but driven into conflict by patriotic zeal and natural instinct for survival and self-preservation. Whether the immediate cause of conflict is political, cultural or religious, it is plausible to reason that each ultimately should have some economic undertone. IPCR (2002) attributes youth involvement in conflict in Nigeria to economic situation



and corruption. It reports that the alarming rate of unemployment gives the youth away as willing tools ready to be used for negative actions, including thuggery. The large number of unemployed youths therefore readily provides hands for the perpetrators of violence.

Radical student politic has also been a part of the youth involvement in violence. Countries with incessant closure of schools have witnessed high level of youth's involvement in violence. Long periods of forced vacations, which students have to endure, due to strike actions by staff or demonstrations by students, has forced students into a number of violent acts armed robbery, hired assassins and political thuggery. IPRC (2002) submits that "the breeding ground for this category of conflict amenable social group are the secret cults in various campuses to whom the use of guns and other small arms is second nature".

**4. The Cost of Conflict: Theoretical and empirical evidence.**

A comprehensive analysis of violent conflicts reveals different types of cost of conflict. These include:

**Humanitarian:** People killed and maimed, deterioration of health facilities, number of refugees. Gaigals and Leonhard (2001) report that in Rwanda alone, an estimated 80,000 people were killed in the 1994 genocide; 1.5 million people were internally displaced and a further 800,000 made refugees. In Nigeria numerous inter and intra-communal conflicts, religious conflicts as well as citizen-law enforcement agents conflicts have led to the death displacement of hundreds of thousand of persons.

**Economic:** Destruction of infrastructure, property, markets, reduction of trade, investments, tourism; restriction on fishing activities or farms, high cost of living and under development constitute the economic cost of conflict. For instance, the Carnegie Commission on Preventing Deadly Conflict, in its estimate of the costs of the seven major wars in the 1990s to the international community, reports that in addition to \$199 billion cost, conflict-related humanitarian emergencies shift funds from long-term development assistance into relief.

**Social:** The social relations could disintegrate, mixed marriages could become impossible; communication breakdown, breakdown of inter-commercial relationships and ceremonies.

enemies exploit the situation for their benefits, unstable government, population decrease, breakdown of law and order, poor administration.

**Culture:** Not only cultural treasurers (buildings, sculptures, etc) but also living cultures and traditions could suffer or disappear.

**Psychological:** The frustration level goes up, people suffer psychological wounds or traumas, suspicion, fear, rumours, hatred between communities and anxiety, prejudice for another.

**Spiritual:** Hope turns into despair; a meaningful life becomes senseless.

We can take the discussion of the nexus between conflict and development further. From the narratives so far, it maybe hypothesized that conflict is inversely related to the degree of economic advancement of a society. The effect of conflict on development can further be described through the dynamics of consequences on acquisition of human capital. The impact of increased violent conflict may be large since it is likely to lead to a decline in acquisition of human capital. This can be demonstrated thus:

If a child (youth) is involved in conflict or caught in conflict situation for a long time, it is likely that the child will remain uneducated and have low productivity as an adult. The generational model proposed by Basu (1999) throws further light on this. In a model of overlapping generations, each person lives for two periods, first as a child and then as an adult, and at the start of the second period gives birth to a child. As child (youth), a person can go to school (i.e., acquire human capital), or be prevented from doing so due to conflict. If full time involvement in conflict is denoted by 1, and a child is involved by a fraction, e, of the time, then the amount of human capital, h, acquired by the child (assuming schools are allowed to run at all) is:

$$1 - e = h \dots\dots\dots (1)$$

The productivity of an adult labour is a function of the amount of human capital acquired as a child. Assuming L is the number of labour units produced by adults, then

$$L_t = L(h^{\phi} - 1), L_{\phi} > 0, L^2 < 0 \dots\dots\dots (2)$$

This implies that if a child is involved more in conflict, his productivity as an adult falls. If the fallen productivities of individual adults in a conflict society are added together, then the negative consequences of conflict can obviously manifest in the national economy.

Quantitative evidence of conflicts on the countries, where they occur, is



grave and varied. Ali (2001) estimates the cost of conflicts by looking at the economic performance of 15 African countries in conflict. Using real per capita GDP rates as performance indicator, the author found that countries in war/conflict always under-perform in relation to the rest of the continent (Table 1). For instance, 9 of the 15 countries in conflict recorded real per capita income less than that in 1973.

**Table 1: The real cost of conflict in Africa (in 1985 PPP)**

Country	1973 per capita GDP	Actual 1999 per capita GDP	No Civil War 1999 per capita	Per Capita Cost of Conflict
Angola	1203	472	963	491
Benin	1142	1077	1271	194
Burundi	447	412	489	77
Chad	717	381	545	164
Comoros	747	439	572	133
Congo, D. R.	688	171	343	172
Congo Rep.	1715	2001	2233	231
Guinea	574	792	814	22
G. Bissau	857	818	836	18
Lesotho	64	1156	1180	24
Liberia	NA	NA	NA	NA
Mozambique	1681	837	1619	782
Rwanda	621	1093	1133	40
S. T & P	NA	NA	NA	NA
Sierra Leone	1182	479	676	197
Somalia	778	862	1045	183
Sudan	763	831	1409	578
Uganda	634	723	1368	645
<b>Average</b>	<b>900</b>	<b>784</b>	<b>1031</b>	<b>247</b>

Source: ADB, 2001; NA = Not available

Conflicts, particularly armed conflicts are closely linked to the unwillingness or inability of social groups and their leaders to transcend the boundaries of religion, ethnicity and race.

Collier and Hoeffler (2000) report that during civil wars, GDP adjusts to mirror the deterioration of the economic environment and "the effects are on the growth rate of GDP, not just the level". A study by Elbadawi and Sambanis, (2000) found that a year-long civil war

reduces the annual growth rate of per capita GDP by 0.22% points. In the same vein, Imai and Weinstein (2000) found that civil wars shrink high-value added sectors and enhance low value added sectors in Uganda. But this is exactly the opposite of what countries need to structurally transform an economy and enable sustainable growth and development. The full impact of conflict can be gleaned from IPEP (2000) report on Rwanda (Box 1)

### Box 1: The Impact of War on Children: The case of Rwanda

*Children in Rwandan society traditionally occupied a central and key position. The child was seen as the hope and future of the family. According to custom in Rwanda, children were supposed to enjoy love, care, and the protection of the family and the community. The genocide turned these values completely upside down. The following is a brief account of how the genocide afflicted Rwandan children.*

- § *UNECF reports that a very large number of children were killed during the genocide. Maternity clinics, orphanages, children's homes, and schools were all systematically targeted. An additional 100,000 children were separated from their families. Not all the orphans or separated children were Tutsi, although no exact ethnic breakdown is available.*
- § *When hundreds of thousands of Hutu fled into Zaire and Tanzania, thousand of children were abandoned along the route, whether lost in the shuffle or deliberately left behind. All over the country people were put into the position of looking after relatives' or other peoples' children, while the camps for the displaced were filled with children living on their own.*
- § *By late 1995, only 12,000 children in Rwanda and 11,700 in eastern Zaire had been reunified with their families. In the same period, over 12,000 children were crowded into 56 centres that had been turned into temporary orphanages, whole more than 300,000 children had been taken in by families. Even now many children still have not been reunified with their families.*
- § *A study of 3030 children, found that virtually all of them witnessed some kind of violence during the genocide. More than two-thirds had actually seen someone being injured or killed, and 79 percent had experienced death in their immediate families. Twenty percent witnessed rape and sexual abuse,*



*almost all had seen dead bodies, and more than half had watched people being milled with machetes and beaten with sticks. Children killed other children, forced or encouraged by adults. Almost half of surviving children witnessed killing by other children.*

§ *Almost all of the children interviewed had believed that they themselves would die during the war and 16 percent reported that they had hidden under dead bodies to survive. The majority of the children continue to have intrusive images, thoughts, and feelings despite attempts to remove the events from their memories. They also suffer continuing physical reactions, such as trembling, sweating, or increased heart rates. About 20 percent of Rwandan children are still traumatized.*

§ *Five years after the genocide, somewhere between 45,000 and 60,000 households were still headed by children under 18, with some 300,000 children living in such households. According to recent estimates, 90 percent of these households were headed by girls with no regular source of income. They were the legacy of the genocide and the subsequent mass migrations of people into neighbouring nations and back again.*

§ *There has been precious little help for the children taking on this role. Communities unable to decide whether to treat them as adults or children, have tended to leave them to fend for themselves. Inevitably, these children become vulnerable to many problems: they are abused sexually and used as slave laborers; their land is stolen by adults and they often wind up forsaking their education.*

Source: IPEP (2000)

## 5. Youth, Conflict and Sustainable Development: The way forward.

It is obvious that conflict and development are inversely related. The youths have been identified to be a major player in the conflict arena. However, it is also recognized that the youths are extremely essential for sustainable development. For instance, African Preparatory Conference for the World Summit on Sustainable Development (2001) states: "We recognize that participation by young people in

sustainable development is the foundation of the success of this strategy to combat poverty for the future of Africa". The report recognizes that young people make up half the population of Africa, but regrets that education, training, health protection, professional employment, communication, etc, are insufficient in this category of dynamic actors.

The dictum, "idle hand is a devil workshop" holds true for youth in violent conflict. Unemployed and frustrated youths could be ready instrument for conflict. Therefore, the path to sustainable development seems to be that which will reduce conflict. The starting point, however, is to address those issues that trigger conflict in the first instance economic, social, cultural, psychological, political and religious. The youths can be made to be more useful in the sustainable development crusade by:

- Strengthening their skills;
- Provision of gainful employment to them;
- Strengthening societal moral values and;
- Above all, elimination of corruption.

These are capable of bringing out the patriotic zeal and divine nature in the youths for sustainable development of the society.

## References

- African Development Bank (ADB). 2001. *Fostering Good Governance in Africa*. African Development Report. Oxford: ADB/Oxford University Press.
- Ali, A. G. A. 2001. *African Children and African Development: A duration of development framework*. New York: UNICEF.
- Basu, K. 1999. Child labour: Causes, consequences and cure with remarks on international labour standard. *Journal of Economic Literature*. XXXVII: 1088 1119.
- Chaplin, J. P. 1979. *Dictionary of Psychology*. New York: Del Publishers, p. 109.
- Collier, P. 1999. The Economic consequences of civil war. *Oxford Economic Papers*. 51: 168 188.
- Collier, P. and C. Hoeffler. 2000. On the incidence of civil war in Africa.

- World Bank ([http // www. world bank. org \(research/conflict/papers/incidence 1.pdf\)](http://www.worldbank.org/research/conflict/papers/incidence1.pdf))
- Elbadawi, I and N Sambanis. 2000. How much war will we see? Estimating the incidence of civil war in 161 countries. [http://www.worldbank.org \(research/conflict/ papers/incidence /incidence 2. pdf\).](http://www.worldbank.org/research/conflict/papers/incidence/incidence2.pdf)
- Ekong, E. E. 1988. *An Introduction to Rural Sociology*. Uyo: Dove Educational Publishes.
- Gaigals, C and M. Leonhard (2001) *Conflict Sensitive Approaches to Development. A Review of Practice*. International Alert, Safe-world and IDRC, and Canada.
- International Panel of Eminent Personalities. (IPEP) 2000. International Panel of Eminent Personalities to Investigate the 1994 Genocide in Rwanda and Surrounding Events. Background of the Eminent Personalities and the Secretariat, 7<sup>th</sup> July.
- Institution for Peace and Conflict Resolution (IPCR). 2003. *Strategic Conflict Assessment: Consolidated and Zonal Reports*. IPCR, Abuja, p. 316.
- Himes, J. 1980. *Conflict and Conflict Management*. Athens: University of Georgia Press.
- Imai, K and J. Weinstein. 2000. Measuring the economic impact of civil war. *C.D Working Paper 51*. Harvard University, Centre for International Development, Cambridge.
- Kilick, T. 1976. The possibilities of development planning. *Oxford Economic Papers*. 28 (2): 161 184.
- Rechler, Luc. 2002. Initial Conflict Impact Assessment (1-CIAS). European Union Micro Project Program, p. 46.
- Simpson, S. 2004. Draft Community Sensitive Approaches to Project Development Draft Report. MPP6 EU-FGN, p. 64.
- Wilson, G.L and M. S. Hanna. 1990. *Groups in Context: Leadership and participation in small groups*. New York: McGraw-Hill. p. 225.