Empowering Women through Peace Education: A Pathway to Grassroot Conflict Prevention in Oil-producing Communities of the Niger Delta, Nigeria

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Abstract

The empowerment of women and education for peaceful purposes remain critical for sustainable peace and community resilience in conflict-prone areas and states with abundant natural resources. This paper examines *how peace education empowers women as agents of grassroots conflict prevention in oil-producing communities of the Niger Delta, Nigeria.* Qualitative data and secondary sources, including journal papers, policy reports and other publications on peacebuilding initiatives in communities were utilised. Peace education promotes women's understanding of nonviolence, mediation and social justice, thereby enabling them to challenge exclusionary practices and mitigate resource-related tensions. Intractable gender inequality, limited institutional support, and inadequate integration of peace curricula in local education systems undermine progress. It is obvious that mainstreaming gender-sensitive peace education into community development initiatives can strengthen social cohesion, foster participatory governance, and advance long-term stability in the Niger Delta. The paper suggests a framework that engages

the collaboration among government, civil society organisations, and institutions of learning so as to institutionalize peace education as a strategic pathway for women's empowerment and grassroots conflict prevention.

Keywords: Peace Education, Women Empowerment, Grassroot Conflict Prevention, Niger Delta, Oil-producing Communities, Gender and Peacebuilding, Community Development

Introduction

"A mother understands what a child does not say." (Jewish proverb)

Women's empowerment through education has become one of the most important pathways to inclusive and sustainable peace in this era of peace and development debates. Across the globe, there is increasing evidence that women's participation in peacebuilding not only strengthens social cohesion but also enables equitable governance and long-term stability (UN Women, 2015; Paffenholz, 2018). The problem limiting women in achieving their socio-economic goals is the structure of patriarchy, which excludes them from the decision-making process. This exclusion ignores the impact and role of women in addressing some societal challenges, including conflicts and economic problems. Peace education, a transformative learning process that prepares people with the knowledge, skills and values needed to bring peace, human rights and social justice, can be a useful facilitator of empowering women and averting grassroots conflicts in the Niger Delta.

Peace education is seen as the main strategy for containing structural violence to promote the culture of peace in different parts of the world (Reardon, 1988; UNESCO, 2014). It extends beyond classroom instruction to include community-based learning and civic engagement that foster empathy, tolerance and nonviolent communication (Harris & Morrison, 2013). In post-conflict or conflict-prone regions, peace education plays a dual role: it strengthens social capital while empowering marginalized groups, especially women, to participate in dialogue and local governance (Bajaj & Hantzopoulos, 2016). Studies from other resource-based conflict contexts, such as Sudan and Colombia, suggest that, when women gain access to peace education, they become active stakeholders in conflict

prevention, resource management and social reconstruction (Anderlini, 2007; True, 2013). This global experience provides a compelling justification for situating peace education as a key pillar of women's empowerment and grassroots peacebuilding in the Niger Delta.

The Niger Delta region, characterized by environmental degradation, youth restiveness and weak governance, presents a complex context where gender inequality intersects with economic and ecological insecurity (Ibeanu, 2008; Obi, 2014). The region's oil-dependent economy has contributed to extensive environmental damage and social dislocation, leading to persistent grievances over resource control, compensation and inclusion in development decisions (Watts, 2004). Women bear disproportionate burdens of these conflicts, losing livelihoods tied to the environment, enduring gender-based violence and being excluded from peace processes (Iwilade, 2017). Despite their marginalization, Niger Delta women have demonstrated resilience through grassroots peace initiatives, such as women's marches, mediation committees and advocacy for clean environments (Aghedo, 2013). However, these efforts often remain informal and unsupported by institutional frameworks or educational programmes that could strengthen their peacebuilding capacity. Women environmental defenders face systematic violence for challenging extractive industries, with most cases featuring multinational large-scale extractive companies supported by governments violently targeting women defenders with impunity (Tran et al., 2020). Violence of this nature ranges from delegitimizing campaigns to direct physical violence, as part of wider disciplinary mechanisms designed to neutralize political opposition (Deonandan et al., 2019; Tran et al., 2020). Women employ adaptive economic strategies to negotiate constraints imposed by extractive industries. Despite gendered exclusion from formal extractive spaces, women use their own knowledge and practices to diversify livelihoods and negotiate emerging constraints over resource access and use (Toumbourou et al., 2020).

Integrating peace education into women's empowerment strategies in the Niger Delta can therefore be transformative. Peace education can cultivate critical consciousness, enhance negotiation and leadership skills, and foster collective problem-solving among women at the community level (Reardon & Snauwaert, 2015). Through knowledge of rights, environmental stewardship and nonviolent

communication, women can engage effectively in conflict prevention and reconciliation processes. Moreover, peace education aligns with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially SDG 4 (Quality Education), SDG 5 (Gender Equality) and SDG 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions), which emphasize inclusive education and gender equality as prerequisites for sustainable peace (UNESCO, 2016).

In Nigeria, policy recognition of the intersection of gender, education and peace remains limited, despite commitments under the National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security (Federal Ministry of Women Affairs, 2017). While there are isolated peace clubs, civic education initiatives, and non-governmental organisation (NGO)-led programmes in some Niger Delta communities, these efforts often lack coordination, sustainability and curricular integration.

Besides, mainstream education itself barely incorporates gender-sensitive peace education into the curricula for primary, secondary and tertiary schools in a way that addresses the gap in values and attitude-shaping towards peaceful coexistence (Akinwale, 2010). Filling this gap means transforming education as a tool of prevention and change, one that enables women and communities to possess the capacities necessary to successfully resolve disputes peacefully and ensure environmental justice.

This paper contends that empowering women through peace education is vital to achieving sustainable peace and community conflict prevention in Niger Delta oil-producing communities. This paper employs scholarly literature, NGO and UN agency reports, and policy reports to explore how peace education can promote the agency, leadership and participation of women in local governance. It also addresses how peace education bridges the awareness-action gap by empowering women with knowledge to change structural inequalities and allow environmental and resource conflict mediation.

The general purpose of the paper is to critically consider peace education as an intervention strategy for empowering women and preventing conflict in the Niger Delta. More specifically, it tries to: (1) examine the intersection of women's empowerment, peace education and grassroots peacebuilding; (2) determine how

education interventions can reconstitute gender relations in conflict zones; and (3) map out policy directions for integrating peace education into local and national development plans. Through its emphasis on peace education as a change agent, the paper contributes to the broader discourse on education, gender and peacebuilding by making context-based contributions to knowledge on how inclusive learning can be used to increase community resilience and build sustainable peace in Nigeria's petroleum-rich but troubled region.

Statement of the Problem

Despite the growing recognition of women's potential as peacebuilders, their peacebuilding role at the grassroots level is underdeveloped and devalued in the Niger Delta. The Niger Delta's oil-related violence, environmental degradation and socio-economic injustices have also disproportionately affected women, restricting their participation in peace processes and decision-making. Although there are a number of empowerment programmes, none has employed peace education as an intervention strategy to empower women with the necessary knowledge, skills and confidence to negotiate conflict and speak for justice. Past research on peacebuilding in the Niger Delta primarily focused on militancy, governance and economic development without much emphasis on the empowering role of peace education in enhancing women's agency. This gap highlights the need to research how peace education can make women effective agents of conflict prevention and community resilience and contribute to sustainable peace and inclusive development in oil communities.

Objectives of the Study

The aim of this study is to investigate how peace education can serve as a transformative pathway for empowering women and promoting grassroots conflict prevention in oil-producing communities of the Niger Delta. Specifically, the study seeks to:

examine the extent to which peace education enhances women's awareness, confidence and capacity to participate in local peacebuilding and conflict prevention initiatives; analyze the relationship between women's empowerment through peace education and the promotion of social cohesion, justice and dialogue in oil-impacted communities;

assess existing community-based and institutional efforts that integrate peace education into women's development programmes, identifying successes and limitations; and propose a strategic framework for strengthening women's roles in grassroots peacebuilding through inclusive, gender-sensitive peace education policies and practices tailored to the Niger Delta context.

Methodology

A qualitative approach that relied on secondary sources to examine how peace education can empower women for grassroots conflict prevention in the Niger Delta was adopted. Data were drawn from different materials, such as academic journals, policy reports, NGO publications, media reports, and government reports on women's empowerment, peacebuilding and environmental justice in oil-producing communities. Thematic analysis was applied for identifying patterns and relationships between peace education, gender empowerment, and community resilience. Emphasis was on evidence from documented interventions and programmes that integrate peace education into women's development and into conflict prevention programmes. The analysis offered a critical exploration of the role of peace education in transforming women from silent victims to agents of peace and sustainable development in the Niger Delta.

Theoretical Framework

The paper adopted two aligned theories–Feminist Peace Theory and Human Security Theory –that offer strong background for understanding the empowering potential of peace education among women in conflict-affected, oil-producing communities of the Niger Delta.

The Feminist Peace Theory, as conceptualized by Sara Ruddick (1989) and Carol Cohn (2013), puts emphasis on the fact that enduring peace cannot be achieved without reversing gender inequalities and considering women as protagonists in conflict transformation. The theory is against conventional, masculine-dominated peacebuilding approaches based on an outdated ideology that tends to overlook women's agency and experiences. Within the Niger Delta context, this theory explains how peace education can dismantle patriarchal structures, promote inclusivity and empower women with knowledge, confidence and abilities to

contribute meaningfully to decision-making and reconciliation efforts at the community level. Women gain the agency through peace education to challenge cultural norms perpetuating violence and exclusion.

Complementing this is the Human Security Theory, as conceptualised by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 1994). It broadens the scope of security from militarized concerns to include economic, environmental and social dimensions of well-being. This framework situates peace education as a strategic tool for empowering women to protect their communities from threats such as environmental degradation, economic marginalization and gender violence, all prevalent in oil-producing areas. A combination of these two theories places peace education as a protective and transformative factor, transformative in advancing gender equality and social justice and protective in increasing human security through empowerment of people. Together, these theories indicate that peace and development in the Niger Delta are reciprocally inclusive of women's education, engagement and empowerment, and form the intellectual compass for studying how peace education generates grassroots conflict prevention and community sustainability.

Literature Review

Empowering Women through Peace Education: Pathway to Grassroots Conflict Prevention in Oil-Producing Communities of the Niger Delta

The relationship between peace education, women's empowerment and grassroots conflict prevention has attracted growing academic attention, particularly within societies affected by resource-induced conflicts. The Niger Delta region of Nigeria, marked by oil exploitation, environmental degradation and social inequalities, provides a compelling case for examining how women, often the most affected by conflict, can become critical agents of peace through education and empowerment. This literature review discusses existing studies under four major themes: (1) peace education as a transformative tool, (2) women's empowerment and participation in peacebuilding, (3) gender dimensions of conflict in oil-producing communities, and (4) integrating feminist perspectives into grassroots peace education.

Peace Education as a Transformative Tool

Peace education is identified as the only means of promoting nonviolence, tolerance and coexistence among fragmented societies. According to Harris and Morrison (2013), it encourages dialogue, empathy and critical thinking skills required to resolve conflicts without tension or argument. In the Niger Delta region, peace education is not only at the school level but also through non-formal community training, civic education and information campaigns to foster a culture of peace among women and youth (Ikelegbe, 2013).

Empirical evidence shows that participation in formal peace education courses leads to more effective mechanisms of conflict resolution and increased cohesion within communities (Danesh, 2011). The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2014) notes that peace education must be context-dependent in relation to addressing local problems such as access to resources, environmental degradation and gender inequality. Thus, peace education in the Niger Delta is not merely a pedagogic approach but also an instrument for changing attitude and invoking local agency in prevention.

Women's Participation in Peace Building and Empowerment

Peacebuilding has experienced the increased role for women following international policies and notable is the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000), which emphasises the need for women to be actively involved in issues of peace and security. Scholars such as Anderlini (2007) and Puechguirbal (2010) argue that there can never be sustainable peace without the inclusion of women's voices within decision-making. Empowerment of women through education has also been emphasised in the Niger Delta region as a means of preventing social exclusion and resilience strengthening at community levels (Eke, 2019).

It is also noteworthy that patriarchy and economic exclusion tend to limit women's participation in peacebuilding sectors. As Akinola (2018) submits, women's roles end up being supporting roles rather than strategic leadership. Peace education is, in such instances, a capacity-building measure that equips women with negotiation, advocacy and leadership skills that enable them to challenge structural inequalities and meaningfully participate in conflict resolution.

Gender Dimensions of Conflict in Oil-producing Communities

The Niger Delta's conflicts are complex, rooted in environmental degradation, economic injustice and political exclusion (Ibeanu, 2008; Obi, 2010). Women, rely on natural resources to live and address their human needs problems caused by oil pollution and displacement. Studies by UNEP (2011) and Amnesty International (2018) highlight how environmental insecurity has deepened poverty and gender-based vulnerability in the region.

Gendered analyses of conflict (Okpara, 2021) revealed that, while men often dominate militant and protest movements, women experience the indirect impacts through loss of livelihoods, sexual violence and psychosocial trauma. These same women also become peacebuilders, mobilizing at grassroots levels through faith-based networks, women's cooperatives and advocacy groups. Such efforts demonstrate the untapped potential of women as peace educators and change agents within their communities.

Women took centre stage in numerous high-profile protests and occupations of oil facilities across the region. In various Delta communities, such as Ugbovodo and Gbaramutie, women and children invaded and occupied Chevron's tank farm and terminal in Escravos, as well as Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation/Chevron flow stations in Niger Delta swamps, demanding justice in resource management and control (Oladele et al., 2015). Notable protests included Itsekiri women''s peaceful occupation of a Chevron-Texaco airstrip at Escravos export terminal for ten days, Ijaw women's occupation of the Chevron Abiteye flow station in Gbaramatu and Egbema Kingdom, and coordinated marches by women from Ijaw, Urohobo and Itsekiri ethnic groups on Shell Petroleum Development Company and Chevron Nigeria Limited facilities in Warri to demand improved socio-economic conditions and services (Folami_1, 2016). In support roles, women provided essential services to militant groups, including caring for wounds, ferrying weapons and cooking for militants, as revealed by female ex-militants (Folami_1, 2016).

However, when women did participate directly in insurgency activities, they often viewed their roles as contradicting traditional gender expectations, with the majority framing their participation as antithetical to their gender identity (Oriola,

2016). Despite their active involvement in oil-related conflicts, women faced severe underrepresentation in formal post-conflict processes. Only 133 women (0.6%) participated in Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) programmes compared to 26,000 men (99.4%), largely due to institutionalized norms that limited DDR benefits to ex-combatants (Folami, 2016). Women's exclusion from formal conflict resolution processes reflects deeply entrenched gender role expectations that confine them to domestic spheres. Despite women's significant involvement in various forms of conflict, including activism and peacebuilding activities, they are made to believe that their rightful gender role is in the home as housewives, mothers and caregivers, while men carry on with important societal roles of conflict resolution and peacebuilding (Ogege, 2010). This gendered division of labour in conflict resolution processes effectively silences women in determining solutions to conflicts that disproportionately affect them.

Integrating Feminist Perspectives into Grassroots Peace Education

The Feminist Peace Theory provides a critical lens for understanding how peace education can be restructured to empower women in conflict-prone societies. Scholars such as Ruddick (1989) and Cohn (2013) argue that peacebuilding must reflect care ethics, inclusivity and relational power rather than dominance and militarism. Applied to the Niger Delta, feminist peace education foregrounds the lived experiences of women, encouraging participatory dialogue that transforms both personal consciousness and community structures (Porter, 2016).

Moreover, feminist-informed peace education integrates human rights education (Bajaj, 2011), emphasizing equality, justice and accountability. Such approaches enable women to articulate grievances, demand institutional responsiveness, and cultivate solidarity networks. As Sriram (2018) notes, peace processes that incorporate gender perspectives are more likely to produce enduring outcomes because they address root causes rather than symptoms of conflict.

The reviewed literature indicates that empowering women through peace education enhances community resilience, strengthens social justice, and contributes to long-term conflict prevention. However, gaps remain regarding how peace education can be systematically integrated into local curricula and

community programmes in oil-producing areas. Few studies explicitly connect women's educational empowerment to environmental peacebuilding and human security in the Niger Delta. This study bridges that gap by exploring peace education not merely as knowledge dissemination but as a transformative framework for empowering women to lead grassroots peace efforts, advocate environmental justice, and foster inclusive development in the Niger Delta.

Peace Education and the Empowerment of Women in Local Peacebuilding and Conflict Prevention

Peace education plays a transformative role in advancing women's consciousness, self-esteem and capacity for peacebuilding and conflict prevention, particularly in structurally-unequal and chronically-violent states such as Nigeria's Niger Delta. Human rights, justice and participation principles that inform peace education endow women with the capacity, knowledge and incentives to reorganize exclusionary social arrangements and become active agents of sustainable peace. Here, education is more of a process of enabling rather than imparting information, a means through which self-knowledge, agency and collective capability are enabled among women at the local level.

Empowering Awareness through Knowledge and Critical Comprehension

One of the most critical goals of peace education is to heighten the awareness of women regarding structural, as opposed to direct forms of violence that touch their lives. In the view of Galtung (1990), structural violence refers to social and institutionalized inequalities that enhance specific groups systematically. In the Niger Delta, women's restricted access to education, economic empowerment and political choices perpetuates dependency and marginalization cycles. Peace education works by fostering critical consciousness, which Freire (1970) refers to as conscientization, enabling women to study the root causes of conflict and inequality, including environmental degradation, state abandonment and gender-based discrimination.

Through participatory learning frameworks, community dialogue and workshops, women gain increased sensitization to their responsibilities and duties in providing peace. This sensitization is tangible; it turns into actual knowledge of governance, environmental justice and human security. As observed by Albert

(2011), women who attend peace training and civic education in the Niger Delta become more assertive in articulating grievances and resolving disputes in their societies. Hence, peace education bridges personal experience and collective social action, transforming awareness into empowerment.

Developing Confidence and Leadership Capacity

In addition to awareness, peace education also empowers women by boosting their confidence, which is a crucial, yet often overlooked, component of empowerment. Confidence is attained when women realize that they possess both the knowledge and the right to be involved in decision-making. Participatory methods that enhance dialogue, negotiation and thinking, building the ability to communicate and lead, are common in peace education programmes aimed at conflict prevention.

In cultures which were once controlled by patriarchal influences, the majority of women initially consider leadership a man's profession. However, through exposure to peace education, such a conviction is reconditioned in support of women's roles as peacebuilders and mediators. For instance, in peacebuilding efforts in communities led by the Niger Delta Women for Peace Network (NDWPN), women peace education trainees have become leaders in negotiating conflicts between young people and oil companies through dialogue rather than confrontation (Iwilade, 2018). These experiences give confidence and good models to young women, and stress further that not only is it possible but also necessary for women to be involved in government and peace-making.

Furthermore, confidence gained by peace education is one aspect of what Nussbaum (2000) calls "capability expansion", the ability to make and exercise choices. With confidence to speak out in public forums, speak to local leaders, or become members of advocacy networks, women's social worth increases. Psychological empowerment is complemented by structural empowerment, creating a ripple effect of greater legitimacy for women's voices in peacebuilding.
Capacity building for Active Engagement and Prevention of Conflict

Peace education builds not only knowledge and self-confidence but also active peacebuilding and conflict-prevention skills. Through participatory learning,

women acquire the analysis, negotiation and mediation skills that allow them to intervene constructively in community conflicts. This is consistent with the human security orientation (UNDP, 1994), which stresses people-oriented approaches, empowering individuals to address insecurities in their immediate surroundings. Communication training, peaceful conflict resolution and environmental activism give women the capacity to engage various stakeholders, including traditional leaders, local governments, business corporations and youth organizations. In the Niger Delta, where conflicts usually centre on resource competition, pollution and marginalization, women with peace and environmental rights training have mobilized successful advocacy campaigns and awareness initiatives, calling for accountability and promoting dialogue. Such competencies are fortified when peace education is established within community institutions such as schools, religious organizations and women's groups.

In addition, peace education develops capacity on the women's side to conceptualize and sustain local peacebuilding. For instance, activities implemented by the Foundation for Partnership Initiatives in the Niger Delta (PIND) showed that peacebuilding-trained women are more likely to create community peace committees, mediate intergroup conflicts, and prevent youth militancy (PIND, 2021). Such interventions are a sign of the sustainability of peace education outcomes: what is learned is translated into institutionalized community practices, contributing to stability in the long run.

Challenges and Implications

Despite its potential, however, the efficacy of peace education in empowering women is circumvented by contextual challenges. Structural constraints, such as the absence of funding for education, opposition to women's leadership in sociocultural settings and weak policy support, limit the scope and effectiveness of peace education programmes. Further, when programmes are externally driven rather than locally owned, they lack sustainability.

These challenges highlight the need for context-adapted models of peace education that respond to local realities. Incorporating peace and human rights education into formal and non-formal learning systems can offer arenas for continuity and inter-generational transfer. In addition, UN-NGO-local

government collaborations can enhance women's participation in the design, planning and evaluation of peace programmes.

Generally, peace education enhances women's awareness level, confidence and peacebuilding potential through an education that is active and change-oriented, rather than passive aid receipt. It empowers them with critical consciousness, communication and moral courage to challenge injustice and engage in community transformation. With the increasing voice of women, local peace efforts become more inclusive, resilient and sustainable. In the case of the Niger Delta, where peace remains fragile and uncertain, investing in gender-responsive peace education is not merely a development imperative but also a moral and strategic imperative for building an equitable and secure society.

Empowering Women through Peace Education, Social Cohesion, Justice and Dialogue in Oil-impacted Communities

Peace education, as articulated by Reardon (1988), is an intentional process of cultivating knowledge, skills and attitudes that promote peace and nonviolence at personal, community and structural levels. When applied to women's empowerment, it transcends the mere acquisition of literacy or vocational skills; it nurtures critical thinking, empathy and civic responsibility. In oil-impacted communities of the Niger Delta, peace education has provided women with platforms to understand the root causes of conflict, such as environmental injustice, marginalization and economic deprivation, and to reframe their roles from victims to agents of change (Brock-Utne, 2000).

With peace education, women can acquire competencies that enable them to confront gender hierarchies and engage effectively in local governance. The empowerment fosters collective agency, what Sen (1999) describes as the capacity of individuals to pursue goals that improve not only their own well-being but also that of their communities. When women are empowered intellectually and socially, they become mediators, educators and advocates for peace, catalyzing broader social transformation rooted in justice and dialogue.

Promoting Social Cohesion through Inclusive Participation

Social cohesion, defined by Jeannotte (2000) as the strength of relationships and sense of solidarity among members of a society, depends on inclusive participation and equitable access to opportunities. In oil-impacted communities, decades of neglect and environmental destruction have eroded trust among community members, between communities and oil companies, and between citizens and the state. Women's empowerment through peace education helps rebuild this trust by promoting inclusive decision-making and nurturing a shared sense of purpose.

Women's groups trained in peace and human rights education often become focal points for reconciliation efforts. Their participatory approach to community issues encourages collaboration across ethnic, age and class divides. For example, peace education initiatives in Delta and Bayelsa States have enabled women to mediate youth restiveness and inter-community disputes by facilitating dialogues rooted in empathy and mutual respect (Iwilade, 2018). Such interventions demonstrate that empowered women, when equipped with peacebuilding skills, can serve as bridges between conflicting groups, fostering cohesion through dialogue rather than confrontation.

Furthermore, peace education helps women recognize the interconnectedness of environmental, social and gender justice. Through the initiation of environmental restoration activities, advocacy for equitable resource distribution and peace campaigns, women strengthen communal ties and collective accountability. This process nurtures a sense of shared destiny and mutual dependence, which are essential for social cohesion in fragile and conflict-prone contexts.

Advancing Justice through Awareness and Advocacy

One of the pillars of education for peace is justice, and it remains a critical driver of sustainable peace in oil-impacted regions. Oil exploration and exploitation, which affect environment, with the manifestation of socio-economic exclusion, led to intractable grievances that can only be resolved through collaboration and understanding, rather than a cosmetic approach. Peace education lifts voices previously disenfranchised from the means of justice, enabling them to speak up for neighbourhood concerns and advocate equitable policy.

Peace scholars, such as Sara Ruddick (1989) and Carol Cohn (2013), emphasize the significance of feminist frameworks, which concentrate on women's moral imaginations centred on care, relational thinking and social justice. Peace education employs these abilities to empower women in order to challenge the injustices embedded within systems of governance, corporate behaviour and social norms. By training in rights awareness and lobbying, women are empowered to become active citizens of community forums, town hall meetings, and policy consultation processes for environmental responsibility and fair sharing of resources.

Women in some of the Niger Delta societies used the skills learned through peace education programmes to negotiate with oil companies and governmental authorities over oil spillage, compensation and infrastructure abandonment. Their advocacy, often grounded in the language of justice and human security, has pressured stakeholders to adopt more transparent and inclusive practices (Okoro & Ogege, 2020). Hence, peace education contributes to justice not only by raising awareness but by empowering women to act as moral agents capable of transforming unjust structures.

Institutionalizing Dialogue as a Culture of Peace

Dialogue is both a process and a product of peace education. It is through dialogue that communities get healed of conflict, negotiate differences, and envision shared futures. Women's empowerment through peace education enhances their capacity to initiate and sustain dialogues that bridge divides and de-escalate tensions in oil-impacted communities.

Peace education emphasizes communication skills, empathy and active listening, all essential for effective dialogue. When women lead dialogue processes, they often infuse them with inclusivity and patience, qualities that promote reconciliation. For example, community peace committees led by women in Rivers and Akwa Ibom States successfully used dialogue to prevent youth protests from escalating into violence, ensuring that grievances were addressed through nonviolent negotiation (PIND, 2021). Such practices institutionalize dialogue as a cornerstone of community governance and conflict management.

Additionally, peace education fosters intergenerational dialogue, enabling older women to mentor younger ones in conflict resolution and leadership. This transmission of peace values strengthens community resilience and embeds a culture of dialogue that transcends immediate crises. From this, women's empowerment through peace education contributes not only to conflict resolution but also to the long-term cultivation of peace-oriented social norms.

The empowerment of women through peace education is integral to promoting social cohesion, justice and dialogue in oil-impacted communities. Promotion of women's knowledge, confidence and leadership would make peace education transform them into active agents of change who rebuild trust, advocate fairness, and sustain dialogue across societal divides. In the Niger Delta, where conflict is deeply rooted in structural inequities, such empowerment is both a moral necessity and a strategic approach to sustainable peace. As women gain the capacity to foster justice and unity, peace education becomes not merely a pedagogical exercise but also a powerful engine of social transformation and reconciliation.

Assessment of Community-based and Institutional Efforts Integrating Peace Education into Women's Development Programmes in the Niger Delta

Efforts to integrate peace education into women's development programmes in the Niger Delta are heterogeneous, operating across grassroots initiatives, NGOs, and, more recently, some institutional platforms. Collectively, these efforts have produced important local gains in awareness, mediation capacity and community mobilisation. However, they remain piecemeal, under-resourced and unevenly institutionalised. The following assessment summarises key successes and persistent limitations.

Community-based initiatives: anchoring peace education in local practice

Community-level programmes, run by women's groups, faith-based organisations and local NGOs, are the most visible sites where peace education and women's empowerment intersect. Initiatives such as women's peace committees, grassroots dialogue forums and community workshops have used participatory methods (storytelling, role play and community mapping) to teach conflict analysis, non-violent communication and rights awareness. These efforts

have yielded concrete outcomes: women mediators have successfully de-escalated local disputes, organised collective advocacy around oil spill remediation, and sustained grassroots monitoring networks (Iwilade, 2018; Okoro & Ogege, 2020). The strengths of community programmes lie in their contextual sensitivity, trust capital and ability to mobilise diverse local actors quickly.

However, community programmes face chronic constraints. They often depend on short-term donor funding, which undermines continuity and scale. Training content is sometimes ad hoc, driven by project cycles rather than a coherent curriculum, resulting in variable quality and uneven skill retention. Many community initiatives lack formal channels to translate local gains into policy influence; women's mediation successes frequently stop at the community level without access to institutional redress mechanisms.

NGO-led programmes and capacity development

National and international NGOs have been instrumental in formalising peace education modules for women's empowerment. Organisations like the Foundation for Partnership Initiatives in the Niger Delta (PIND), Stand To End Rape (STER), and local women's rights groups have delivered structured training in negotiation, legal literacy and environmental rights, often linking education to livelihood and psychosocial support (PIND, 2021; STER annual reports). Programmes of NGOs tend to adopt rights-based frameworks and can convene multi-stakeholder platforms—bridging communities, state actors and corporations—which enhances advocacy leverage.

However, NGO efforts can be constrained by a project-oriented mindset: outcomes are measured against short funding cycles and programmes might not be integrated into formal education or government policy. Additionally, capacity building is sometimes male-targeted at senior levels, leaving grassroots women with limited follow-up mentoring. There is also the risk of dependency: when NGOs withdraw, trained groups may lack the institutional resources to sustain activities.

Institutional and formal education attempts

At the institutional level, the incorporation of peace studies and human rights modules into some tertiary curricula (e.g. select Nigerian universities) and the piloting of peace clubs in secondary schools represent positive steps toward formalising peace education (UNESCO guidance; National Policy on Education). Where relationships exist between universities, NGOs and communities, there are promising knowledge transfer opportunities, student outreach projects, community practicum and action research that support women's groups.

Institutionalisation remains weak in the Niger Delta. Peace and human rights education are seldom mandatory in basic or secondary curricula, and teacher training on gender-sensitive pedagogy is minimal. Government commitment, in terms of policy direction and budgetary allocation, for integrating peace education into national curricula is limited (Okoye & Osemene, 2021). Furthermore, bureaucratic silos prevent ministries of education, women affairs and environment from collaborating effectively, undermining multi-sectoral responses to the intertwined problems of environmental injustice and gendered insecurity.

Cross-cutting issues: sustainability, inclusion and legitimacy

Across sectors, effective programmes share common design features: participatory pedagogy, linkage to livelihood or legal support, and deliberate inclusion of marginalized women (elderly, rural and internally displaced). These features increase relevance and legitimacy, enabling women to use peace education for tangible ends, mediation, environmental monitoring and civic engagement.

Key systemic gaps persist. The **digital and resource divide** limits access for rural women to learning resources and networks. Patriarchal norms and elite capture sometimes constrain women's leadership in mixed committees. Monitoring and rigorous impact evaluation are sparse, which leaves questions about long-term behavioural change unanswered. Finally, safety and protection for rights-claimants are inadequate; women who mobilise often face intimidation without guaranteed legal redress or protection.

Implications for scaling and policy integration

To scale impact, community and NGO innovations must be transitioned from project interventions to institutional commitments: (a) develop standardised, context-sensitive PHRE curricula for in-school and out-of-school delivery; (b) invest in teacher and facilitator training with gender-responsive pedagogy; (c) formalise multi-sector platforms that connect women's groups to local government, legal aid and environmental remediation processes; and (d) secure multi-year funding and monitoring systems to ensure sustainability.

Community and institutional efforts in the Niger Delta display clear potential: they empower women, enable mediation, and create pathways for environmental justice. However, their effectiveness is limited by fragility of funding, weak institutionalisation, sociocultural barriers and protection deficits. Closing these gaps requires deliberate policy integration, sustainable resourcing and protective mechanisms that convert localized solidarity into durable institutional change.

Strategic Framework for Strengthening Women's Roles in Grassroots Peacebuilding through Gender-sensitive Peace Education in the Niger Delta

Oil-induced environmental harm, youth restiveness and entrenched gender inequality in the Niger Delta generate recurrent grievances that undermine peace. Evidence from regionally-focused studies shows that women, when empowered through education and organised participation, can act as credible mediators, advocates for environmental justice and custodians of social cohesion (Ikelegbe 2013; PIND 2021). This framework positions gender-sensitive peace education as the catalytic axis that links knowledge, agency and institutional access, thereby converting local capacities into sustained peace outcomes.

Policy and Institutional Anchoring

Adopt a Regional PHRE Policy Toolkit (Peace & Human Rights Education) endorsed by state Ministries of Education, Women Affairs and Environment, with specific directives for Niger Delta states.

Create Women's Peace Education Units within state education and community development departments to coordinate curriculum, outreach and funding.

Curriculum Design and Localization

Develop a modular PHRE curriculum integrating human rights literacy, nonviolent communication, conflict analysis, environmental justice and civic advocacy.

Localize content through community validation workshops so that modules reflect indigenous dispute-resolution practices, local languages and case studies (oil spills and land access).

Capacity building and Pedagogy
Train gender-responsive facilitators (teachers, NGO staff and community leaders) in participatory pedagogy, trauma-informed approaches and adult learning methods.

Institute Women Peace Champions training (leadership, mediation, documentation and legal literacy) to create local cadres that lead community dialogues and monitoring.

Community-School Nexus and Out-of-School Delivery
Institutionalize PHRE in formal schooling (upper primary to secondary) and through community learning circles that specifically target adult women, market groups and faith-based organisations.

Use blended delivery: face-to-face, radio programmes and low-tech SMS/USSD for rural reach.
Linkages to Justice, Environment and Livelihoods
Create formal referral pathways connecting trained women to legal aid, environmental remediation agencies (state environmental protection agencies), and livelihood-support programmes.

Integrate peace education graduates into community environmental monitoring and early-warning committees.

Financing, Partnerships and Sustainability

Mobilise a mixed financing model: state budget line items, donor seed funds, corporate social responsibility (with accountability safeguards), and community cost-sharing.

Establish multi-stakeholder platforms (government, universities, NGOs, oil companies and community representatives) to oversee implementation and ensure legitimacy.

Protection and Risk Management
Implement safety protocols for rights-claimants and peace educators, including anonymous reporting mechanisms, legal protection pathways and psychosocial support.

Build contingency plans to manage backlash, threats, or elite capture.
Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL)
Define measurable indicators and create a participatory MEL system involving women peace champions, local authorities and independent evaluators.

Use mixed methods: qualitative case studies, pre/post knowledge and attitude surveys, and administrative indicators (reports filed, mediation cases resolved).
Risks and Mitigation

Elite capture or tokenism: Mitigate through transparent selection criteria and community oversight committees.

Backlash/security threats: Enforce protection protocols, anonymous reporting and rapid legal aid.

Funding discontinuity: Secure multi-year commitments and diversified financing.
Cultural resistance: Employ long-term community sensitisation and male-ally engagement strategies.

This strategic framework advances a systemic pathway for transforming women's potential into institutionalised peacebuilding capacity in the Niger Delta. By linking locally-validated peace education to legal, environmental and livelihood

systems, and institutionalising financing, protection and MEL, the framework moves beyond project-based interventions towards durable structural change. Its success depends on committed cross-sectoral leadership, sustained funding and meaningful inclusion of the women it seeks to empower.

Concluding Remarks

This paper has addressed the ways in which peace education is a process of transformation for empowering women to prevent conflict and implement social justice within the oil-producing societies of the Niger Delta. The study demonstrates the intersection of peace education that is backed by the recognition of relevance of human rights. It is believed that these values and sensitivity of gender can transform behaviours and promote civic engagement that could enhance community resilience for environmental stability. The necessity for sustainable peace makes women indispensable actors.

Niger Delta women have been result-oriented in the area of peace building. With the understanding offered by peace education, women acquire the skills and knowledge necessary to subvert social norms supporting violence, negotiate for justice, and push for environmental and economic safeguarding. Empowered, they become change agents, not victims of structural violence, and bridge the gap between communities, and the state and corporate actors.

Notable challenges have also been observed. Entrenched patriarchal structures, weak institutional support and weak access to education continue to limit the participation of women in peace processes. Moreover, peace education programmes are available, but these are generally not context-specific and implemented within local governance or schools. Such limitations can be checked to step up leadership contributions of women and enhance peace movements across communities. This initiative can aid nonviolence and discourage confrontation that manifests in intergroup relations. Integrating gender-responsive peace education into policies will guarantee peace in the region.

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