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**QUESTION: IN NOT LESS THAN TWO PAGES, WRITE AN ESSAY ON VIOLENT CONFLICT ON THE GEOPOLITICAL ZONE YOU’RE FROM.**

Every individual, group or country has experienced conflict in one way or another. This is because it is human nature for opinions to differ. It is common knowledge that Nigeria is one country that has, still is and will probably still experience a lot of violent conflicts. This is because of the huge percent of diversity in the country. The people differ in religion, language, morals, values, food, culture and even mode of dressing which inevitably leads to clashing opinions on how the country is be ran. However, before going into Nigeria and her numerous reasons for conflicting, a brief explanation of what conflict entails is essential.

Conflict may mean different things to different people. To some people it is the clash of interests while to others it is absence of peace. Conflict is gotten from a Latin word *Confligere,* which means to clash or engage in a fight. It therefore refers to confrontation between individuals or groups; resulting from opposite or incompatible ends or means. The basis of conflict may be personal, racial, political, and international or may be based on class or caste.

Violence on the other hand is seen to be the use of physical force so as to injure, abuse, damage or destroy. The **World Health Organization** defines violence as “the intentional use of force or power -threatened or actual- against oneself, another person or against a group or community, which either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment or deprivation.

The two definitions above show that there is a grave difference between conflict and violence. Conflict is just a clash of interests, kind of like a disagreement while violence is the harming of oneself or someone else or even a group of people. In other words conflict can lead to a positive outcome depending on how it is handled. When opinions clash, one has to give way to another. The education that goes on during this process can be positive. However, violence always leads to a negative outcome no matter how it is handled. Violent conflict, coming together, means causing harm as a result of clashing interest or opinions; the two concepts are therefore related.

Nigeria is made of six geopolitical zones which include: The north-east, north-west and the north central. There is also the south-east, south-west and south-south geopolitical zone. Each zone is made of diverse people, similar only by religion or culture or not similar at all. It does not come as a surprise that they are all faced with conflicting interests. The north-east and north-west are matched with extreme political conflict while the north central deals with ethno religious conflict. The south-west Nigeria has political conflict as its prevailing conflict, the south-east fight for independence and the south-south conflict over resources.

While all zones are matched with different conflicts, one geopolitical zone in Nigeria that has had the worst impact of violent conflict is the South-south geopolitical zone, particularly the Niger Delta which is made up of all six states from the south-south, two states from the south-east (Abia and Imo) and one state from the south-west (Ondo). The Niger Delta is a densely populated region sometimes called the **Oil Rivers** because it was once a major producer of palm oil. The delta is a petroleum-rich region which makes a center for violent conflict for how this resource is to be shared. Therefore what sets the Delta apart is that it produces most of Nigeria’s oil, which is the source of most of the Nigerian government revenue.

Oil was discovered in the Delta in marketable quantities in the 1950s and came to dominate Nigeria’s market economy after the end of the civil war in 1970. On the other hand, crude oil was discovered in1956 in Oloibiri (present day Bayelsa State), few years before Nigeria became independent from the British rule in 1960. At the time of independence, the country was divided along broadly ethnic lines in regional administrations. This has contributed to tensions over allocations of resources – in particular the income generated from the oil industry.

In the Niger Delta, people’s rights are rarely provided for, and frequently violated. Many of those who live in the region experience very poor living standards. The abundance of natural resource wealth from the regions oil and gas reserves, coupled with weak governance has produces ‘resource curse’ (or ‘paradox of plenty’), maintaining this injustice. The combination of natural resource wealth and weak governance enable those in political positions and others in power benefit disproportionately from oil money, and the oil and gas industry to operate below international standards. Many historic oil spills have never been cleaned up and this contributes to severe local health consequences, as well as for local livelihoods: farmlands and fishing waters are poisoned when contaminated by oil.

Increasing environmental damage, in part, led to social and political unrest in the Niger Delta. One of the most prominent activists on environmental issues was Ken Saro-Wiwa, leader of the *Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People* in the early 1990s. He advocated for non-violent resistance to environmental injustice in Ogoniland, an area of the Niger Delta which has suffered from particularly widespread oil spill pollution. Tragically, Ken was hanged by the Nigerian military government, along with eight other activists, in 1995.

Leaders at all levels often lack accountability to the populations they are supposed to serve. Many aspects of government and public services are mismanaged or function ineffectively, and the Niger Delta – and Nigeria as a whole – has seen little benefit or development from its natural resource wealth, principally oil and gas reserves. The democratic system is undermined by political patronage that uses money and violence to achieve and retain power. This is likely to be a major factor in why elections in the Niger Delta have suffered from major fraud and violence. Even between election cycles, the Niger Delta suffers violence (high levels of criminality, and ongoing environmental damage caused by oil spills and gas which is flared or burnt off, as a by-product of oil production) perpetrated by those seeking political power and control over resources.

From 2004, escalating armed and violent conflict between gangs and towards government and oil company security forces increased the levels of militancy in the Niger Delta region. Particularly well known militant groups include ***The Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND),***and ***The Niger Delta Avengers.*** In the wider context of underdevelopment, widespread of oil pollution, a lack of livelihood options, and a largely unresponsive government, militants targeted oil pipelines and kidnapped foreign oil workers for ransom. The movie **“Black November”** was based on these happenings. The movie shows just a fraction of what the Niger Delta citizens went through while fighting for a means of survival.

Militancy affected oil production to the extent that the price of oil rose above USD$100 per barrel for the first time in world history. In 2009, approximately twenty six thousand (26,000) militants agreed to a ceasefire, and the government led an amnesty process that makes payments and offers opportunities to ex-militants, intended to prevent a return to militancy. To this day, the Presidential Amnesty Program is still operating and there is relative stability but this is fragile as the original conditions giving rise to the militancy have not been fully addressed. There is also no concrete exit-plan for this hugely expensive program.

In the face of these challenges, inhabitants of the Niger Delta have few options to seek redress. The justice system, in areas such as claiming compensation for nearby oil spills, is flawed and hard to access. Furthermore, collective action can be met with a disproportionate and intolerant response from the government and other actors, including violence. However, some compensation cases against shell and its subsidiaries have been taken to England, where shell is headquarted, with out-of-court settlements that amount to many times what was actually offered to the impacted communities. Although the legal representation required to take this action is available to very few, it may prove to be an alternative avenue to seek justice where the Nigerian processes are inadequate.

Following all the processes put in place to ensure the stability of the Niger delta one would expect its present state to be peaceful and well headed to a place of development. This is however not the case of the current Niger Delta. A recently published annual report by the Foundation of Partnership Initiatives in the Niger Delta (PIND) is a salutary reminder of violence in the Delta. The report, ***The Niger Delta Annual Conflict Reports,*** shows that there were 416 violent incidents resulting in over one thousand deaths recorded in 2019. In 2018, there had been 351 violent episodes resulting in five hundred and forty six deaths. The onus therefore falls on the Nigerian government to ensure there is a lasting peace and stability system, furthermore they are saddled with the responsibility to ensure the inhabitants of the Delta actually benefit from the exploitation of the land.

*References*

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