

# FROM INSURGENTS TO ENTREPRENEURS: BETWEEN STABILITY AND SUSTAINABLE PEACE IN NIGERIA'S OIL REGION

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This article examines the relationship between entrepreneurship and sustainable peace in Nigeria's oil region and asks whether entrepreneurship can directly and tangibly contribute to sustainable peace. The study is based on an explanatory mixed methods design in which I administered a standardized questionnaire to former insurgents. This produced a statistical description of the respondents' opinions concerning entrepreneurship and peace to generate themes for context-sensitive qualitative interviews with purposefully selected participants. The qualitative and quantitative data provided a broad overview of participants' perceptions of the impact of entrepreneurship programs undertaken by the Nigerian government to facilitate the economic reintegration of former insurgents as a strategy of post-conflict peacebuilding. The empirical evidence shows that entrepreneurial solutions have produced mixed results; they are integral to post-conflict stabilization without necessarily contributing to sustainable peace. The article explores the various meanings and approaches to entrepreneurship, and how it is a central plank of post-conflict peacebuilding in Nigeria's oil region.

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PEACE RESEARCH

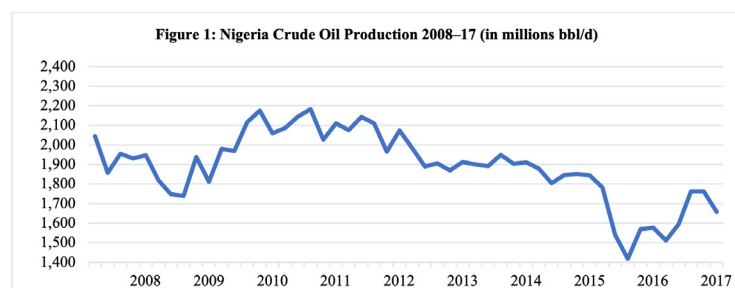
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## INTRODUCTION

Oil extraction in Nigeria has produced unprecedented prosperity for multinational corporations but caused large-scale environmental destruction in local communities across the Niger Delta region, whose inhabitants are exposed to poverty, unemployment, food insecurity, and health insecurity, and who struggle to access clean drinking water.<sup>1</sup> Such contradiction has been the cause of a protracted armed insurgency targeting the nation's oil industry.<sup>2</sup> The insurgency claimed over 1,000 lives in 2008, and kidnapping activities were prevalent in the oil region between 2008 and 2009. At the peak of the insurgency, Nigeria was losing approximately one million barrels of crude oil per day as of May 2008, and about US\$58 million daily to lost production as of May 2009. Between 2003 and 2008 the Nigerian government lost \$92 billion in oil revenue from insurgent activities.<sup>3</sup> By the third quarter of 2008, oil output had dropped to 1.7 million barrels per day (see Fig. 1) as a result of escalating insurgent activities in the oil region.<sup>4</sup> The cumulative effect of surging oil prices in the international market and cuts in oil production because of the insurgency forced the Nigerian government to grant amnesty to the insurgents on 25 June 2009. Amnesty provided the environment for implementing disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) activities designed to secure and stabilize the post-conflict oil region, such as weapons recovery and destruction, psychological rehabilitation, and capacity building. While this approach to peacebuilding was successful in bringing stability to the oil region, threats of renewed insurgency began to build up in 2015 in response to President Buhari's plans to terminate the DDR program. These tensions escalated to a full-blown insurgency in 2016, when the Niger Delta Avengers began hostilities toward oil infrastructure, causing a huge decline in Nigeria's oil output (see Fig. 1).



Source: Prepared by the author, based on OPEC Crude Oil Production Data for Nigeria from 2008–17.

This article focuses on the relationship between entrepreneurship and peace in Nigeria's oil region. Several studies have explored the causes and consequences of Nigeria's oil insurgency, as well as the prospects for peace.<sup>5</sup> Others have examined the shortcomings of the peacebuilding program, pointing out the implications of the government's use of amnesty and DDR to buy peace from insurgents.<sup>6</sup> What is least emphasized in the literature is that growing unemployment in the Niger Delta and its connection to insecurity has made entrepreneurship a critical component of post-conflict peacebuilding. Although the role that business plays in peacebuilding has been well documented, much of the discussion tends to view business within the context of corporations,<sup>7</sup> overlooking the role of local enterprises. Within the context of Nigeria's DDR program, the peacebuilding literature tends to minimize the role that peacebuilding plays in transforming insurgents into local entrepreneurs and the implications for the stability of the oil region. This article makes the case that the pursuit of sustainable peace demands a sincere effort to raise the opportunity cost of insurgency through implementing entrepreneurial programs that address the economic inequities that were the key motivation for violence, while also helping the ex-insurgents to become invested in their local communities. The concern, however, is that the government's approach to counterinsurgency using entrepreneurship proceeds from a materialistic conception of peacebuilding that marginalizes the voices and lived experiences of key stakeholders, such as the ex-insurgents.

The starting point of this argument is the understanding that Nigeria's peacebuilding program is conceived as a top-down intervention, where entrepreneurship is imposed as a solution to decades of structural injustices, undermining the agency of the ex-insurgents, whose expectations and aspirations are incompatible with those of the peacebuilders. It is the tensions between the government's conception of peacebuilding and the expectations of the ex-insurgents about realities in their local communities that inhibit the sustainability of entrepreneurial solutions to post-conflict peacebuilding. Thus, the use of entrepreneurial solutions as a strategy for peace produces mixed results. While entrepreneurship remains integral to post-conflict stabilization, it does not necessarily translate to sustainable peace. For the most part, the government's peacebuilding program fails to address critical concerns about environmental insecurities prevailing in the oil region, without which sustainable peace cannot be achieved.

## THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The end of the Cold War revived ethno-nationalistic conflicts in Africa and gave rise to neoliberal approaches to post-war reconstruction and peacebuilding. Proponents of neoliberal peacebuilding advocate the use of private-sector assistance to facilitate the reintegration of ex-insurgents in post-conflict societies.<sup>8</sup> They argue that post-conflict peacebuilding interventions should focus explicitly on providing economic incentives for effective ex-insurgent reintegration.<sup>9</sup> The “neoliberal school” thus conceives of DDR as a set of technocratic activities for reintegrating ex-insurgents and gives less priority to addressing the political causes of conflict.<sup>10</sup> The contradictory effects of neoliberal peacebuilding arise from its tendency to privilege the market<sup>11</sup> and, in so doing, accord less attention to the internal dynamics of armed groups, their underlying interests, and how variations in internal structures may have different outcomes for different groups.<sup>12</sup> Given the interrelationship between economic development and conflict, how development fits within the definitional ambits of peacebuilding deserves analytical attention.

Roger Mac Ginty and Andrew Williams have made a profound theoretical contribution to contemporary debates on the relationship between conflict and development that suggests economic development interventions implemented in the context of post-war reconstruction can and do produce unintended consequences that can sustain a conflict.<sup>13</sup> Economic development will be meaningless in situations where conflict-affected populations live in extreme vulnerability. Thus, the theoretical connection between entrepreneurship and peacebuilding stems from the argument that poverty reduction can be a means of achieving sustainable peace.<sup>14</sup> While this argument underlines the relationship between economic development and peacebuilding,<sup>15</sup> it also buttresses the findings of studies that show entrepreneurship can contribute to peacebuilding through investment in poverty reduction initiatives that can reduce the intensity of a conflict.<sup>16</sup> Sustainable peace is then possible once a post-conflict society experiences stability.<sup>17</sup> The implication is that without meaningful progress toward sustainable peacebuilding, violence is likely to resume in a post-conflict society<sup>18</sup>.

Although the role of entrepreneurship has mostly been associated with the

activities of self-employed individuals,<sup>19</sup> scholarly efforts to interrogate the effectiveness of entrepreneurship for local peace and development have led to theoretical developments on the connection between business and peace to improve the lives of vulnerable populations in post-conflict societies.<sup>20</sup> The evidence, which derives from interviews with stakeholders, highlights the role that business plays in peacebuilding for local economic development.<sup>21</sup> What is worth pointing out is that peacebuilding initiatives that are driven by business “can also do more harm than good,”<sup>22</sup> as some studies have shown.<sup>23</sup> The theoretical position presented here illustrates a peculiar feature of Nigeria’s peacebuilding program, because it shows how suffering and violence generate demand for peace and how entrepreneurship has emerged as a means to the end of effective peacebuilding.

Although the analysis in this article employs a critical lens to examine the complexity of Nigeria’s peacebuilding program, it also invokes a political economy argument that captures the unjust economic realities that manifest in conflict settings.<sup>24</sup> At the same time, it considers the “distribution of power and wealth between groups and the processes that create, sustain, and transform these relationships over time.”<sup>25</sup> As Jan Selby points out, political economy issues have been known to be of crucial importance to the functioning of peace processes.<sup>26</sup> The concerns for peace processes extend beyond problems such as criminality, poverty, and natural resources, commonly identified by post-conflict peacebuilders, to problems that are disparate and divergent in their economic and social impact in terms of the distribution of benefits and harms, including questions about who is being marginalized in the process.<sup>27</sup> In the Niger Delta, the exclusion of some ex-insurgents from the economic opportunities that peacebuilding provides has become the motivation for a relapse into insurgency at repeated intervals.<sup>28</sup> This theoretical background provides the analytical standpoint for interrogating whether entrepreneurship can lead to sustainable peace in Nigeria’s oil region.

## DATA AND METHODS

This study used a sequential mixed methods design to collect and analyze qualitative and quantitative data in two phases. This method allows the researcher to use findings from quantitative interviews as a basis for collecting qualitative data.<sup>29</sup> Collection and analysis of quantitative data constituted

the first phase of this study, followed by qualitative data collection and analysis in the second phase.<sup>30</sup> The target population for this study included ex-insurgents and non-insurgents from Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, and Rivers States. There are 30,000 registered participants in Nigeria's DDR program consisting of ex-insurgents from the nine states of the Niger Delta. Of the 30,000 registered participants, 456 (1.5%) are from Akwa Ibom, 11,280 (38%) from Bayelsa, and 7,073 (23%) from Rivers. Together, these three states make up 18,768 (62.5%) of the total number of registered delegates in the DDR program. All of the survey participants who identified as ex-insurgents were drawn from this sampling frame.

I administered a total of 396 questionnaires to ex-insurgents and non-insurgents in the quantitative phase, representing 2 percent of the total registered participants in the DDR database from Akwa Ibom, Rivers, and Bayelsa States. Responses were received from all 396 participants, broken down into an 84.8 percent response rate from ex-insurgents and 15.2 percent from non-insurgents. The non-insurgents were individuals who did not directly participate in the insurgency but had experienced the activities of insurgent groups in their local communities. They included youth from the oil region studying in local universities under the Presidential Amnesty Scholarship. While they did not participate in the insurgency, they had first-hand knowledge of entrepreneurship activities undertaken by ex-insurgents and their impact on post-conflict peacebuilding. The quantitative results provided a statistical description of the respondents' opinions concerning entrepreneurship and peace to generate themes for context-sensitive interviews with selected participants in Rivers, Akwa Ibom, and Bayelsa States. As a sequential mixed methods design, greater weight was given to the qualitative data, while the quantitative data complemented the qualitative findings.<sup>31</sup>

In the qualitative phase, I conducted forty-five semi-structured interviews with purposefully selected participants representing ex-insurgents and non-insurgents. I interviewed two categories of participants: primary informants who were directly involved in the peacebuilding program, such as the ex-insurgents and peacebuilders; and secondary informants who did not play a direct role in the peacebuilding program but remained significant actors in the peace process, such as community leaders and oil workers. The interviews provided an opportunity to work directly with participants in collecting qualitative data, and to probe or ask follow-up questions where more

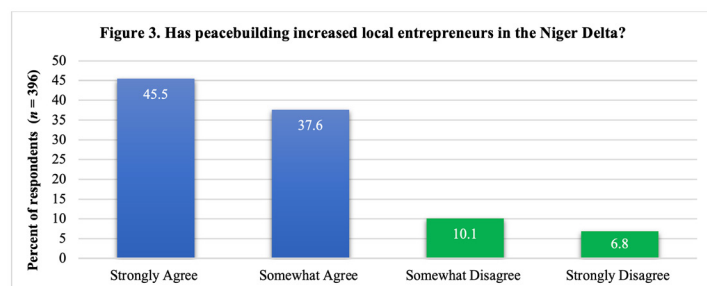
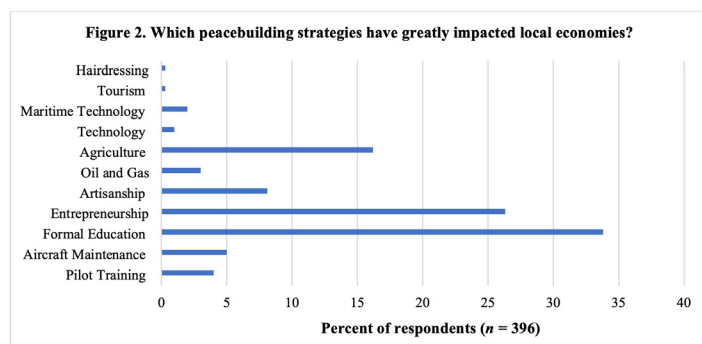
in-depth information was needed. The qualitative research questions were designed to elicit participants' opinions about the impact of entrepreneurship as a peacebuilding strategy in the oil region, as reflected in their personal experiences. The ex-insurgents I interviewed derived their experience from participating in various phases of the peacebuilding program, which made them an invaluable source of information. Some ex-insurgents are more than happy to share their stories, as they are usually not consulted by researchers because of their location in remote communities. As a result, their experiences and voices have been marginalized in discussions about the peacebuilding program. This study considered the importance of local context by putting the voices and experiences of former insurgents at the centre of the research. Séverine Autesserre has highlighted the importance of seeking out voiceless actors who may have in-depth knowledge of the peacebuilding program but are usually not consulted by researchers.<sup>32</sup> Throughout the interviews, key informants spoke on conditions of anonymity, and I used pseudonyms to protect their identities.

## THE OUTCOME OF NIGERIA'S PEACEBUILDING PROGRAM

Until lately, much of the research on peacebuilding has tended to marginalize a range of entrepreneurship initiatives implemented by the Nigerian government to facilitate the reintegration of ex-insurgents.<sup>33</sup> Analysts have mostly focused on the impact of peacebuilding on human capital development.<sup>34</sup> Thousands of ex-insurgents have benefitted from the Presidential Amnesty Scholarship to pursue higher education, including a variety of vocational training programs locally and overseas. Research by Augustine Ikelegbe and Nathaniel Umukoro shows that the Nigerian government awarded scholarships to 2,500 ex-insurgents to pursue tertiary education while 13,000 received vocational training in local and foreign training centres in 2014.<sup>35</sup> Given the emphasis on human capital development, the activities of thousands of ex-insurgents who have received entrepreneurship training and start-up capital to create small enterprises as a reintegration strategy and their perception of peacebuilding are rarely reported. Nevertheless, the peacebuilding program has seen the growth of entrepreneurs in the Niger Delta selling electronic merchandise, building materials, clothing, and consumer products, or operating small-scale fish farms, poultry farms, restaurants, block moulding factories, cassava factories,

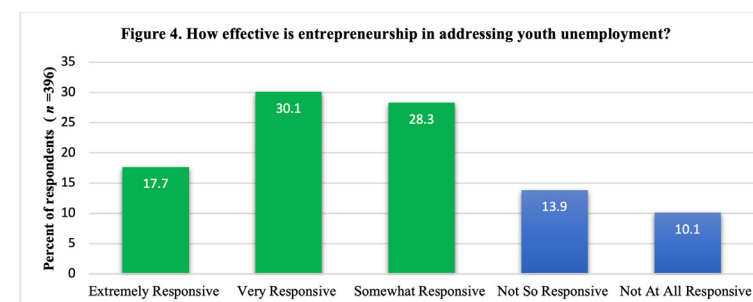
and fruit processing factories.

I had first-hand experience with several ex-insurgents who owned small businesses courtesy of the peacebuilding program. Among the respondents I surveyed, 26.3 percent indicated that after education, entrepreneurship has had the greatest impact on the local economy (see Fig. 2). This result is based on the operationalization of DDR by measuring the degree to which reintegration strategies such as education and entrepreneurship have been successful in reducing the risk of violence in the oil region. As the descriptive statistics show, the most impactful reintegration activities are education, entrepreneurship, and agriculture. Many ex-insurgents who could not pursue higher education received reintegration support in the form of financial assistance to establish small businesses following the successful completion of entrepreneurship training. Those who chose agriculture as an entrepreneurial vocation received the training and assistance needed to establish small-scale poultry farms that are benefiting the local economy. The quantitative result is significant, as 83.1 percent of the respondents agreed that the peacebuilding program has increased the number of entrepreneurs in the Niger Delta (Fig. 3).



It was important to understand the degree to which entrepreneurship has increased employment opportunities for ex-insurgents in the oil region. As such, respondents were asked to indicate whether entrepreneurship is a catalyst for employment. A total of 76.1 percent of the respondents indicated that entrepreneurship has been successful in addressing unemployment (see Fig. 4). Although the degree of effectiveness in dealing with unemployment varies, in general, a majority of respondents held positive views of the peacebuilding program's impact on entrepreneurship development in the oil region. They agreed that the transformation of ex-insurgents into entrepreneurs was an important way of evaluating the positive impact of the peacebuilding program. Because unemployment and poverty have been some of the triggers of insurgency, encouraging entrepreneurship was considered praiseworthy a basis for measuring the effectiveness of the peacebuilding program.

Several ex-insurgents whom I interacted with were optimistic about the capacity of the peacebuilding program to transform the lives of the ex-insurgents through entrepreneurship. Some believed reintegration activities that focus on entrepreneurship training and empowerment have helped to alleviate the suffering of former insurgents, enabling their transformation into peaceful citizens. Evidence from Liberia shows that ex-combatants who completed a course of reintegration training as part of DDR had more success reintegrating into civilian life.<sup>36</sup> The entrepreneurship training exposes the participants to a range of small business ideas. The conclusion drawn from the statistical analysis is that entrepreneurship development is undeniably a successful peacebuilding strategy in the Niger Delta.



Recently, there was an emphasis on using agriculture to drive entrepreneurship in Nigeria, which saw the rise of entrepreneurship training in cassava farming, fish farming, and poultry farming as part of the peacebuilding

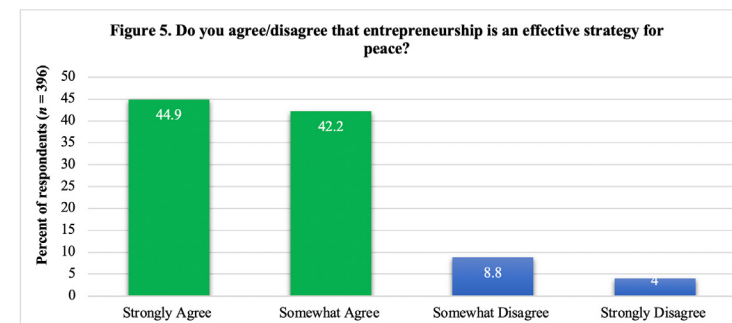
program in the oil region. As part of the training requirements, participants had the opportunity to register small businesses, after which the government supported them with the finance, merchandise, equipment, and agricultural facilities needed to establish their enterprise. Through this approach, many ex-insurgents have been empowered with electronic merchandise or truck-loads of cement to launch retail enterprises, while others have benefitted from starting a fish farm or a poultry farm. Many ex-insurgents have taken advantage of the federal government's presidential initiative to encourage commercial agriculture through funding to support small-scale farming, eventually becoming entrepreneurs who not only provide for their families but are also making a positive contribution to the socio-economic well-being of their communities.

## ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND POST-CONFLICT PEACEBUILDING

Research has shown that “the challenge of rebuilding post-conflict societies is to nurture and create the social, economic and political space within which local actors can identify, develop, and employ the resources required to build a peaceful, just, and prosperous society.”<sup>37</sup> Although the connection between economic development and peace is often difficult to establish, researchers have begun to unravel the critical role that economic opportunities play in conflict prevention and sustainable peacebuilding.<sup>38</sup> The undeniable fact is that peace and development are interconnected.<sup>39</sup> Other studies have equally highlighted the importance of economic opportunities in preventing the outbreak of conflict as well as fostering peaceful societies.<sup>40</sup> Sean Byrne, for example, has undertaken an extensive study of the peacebuilding process in Northern Ireland which shows that sustainable conflict resolution requires economic empowerment.<sup>41</sup> Although written in the context of external economic aid, there are lessons, particularly regarding the role of economic empowerment, which is the hallmark of Nigeria's peacebuilding program.

In Nigeria, post-conflict peacebuilding processes driven by entrepreneurship that enable former insurgents to reintegrate into the local economy have demonstrated their capacity to contribute to positive transformations in the oil region.<sup>42</sup> The context of transformation refers primarily to the ways that peacebuilding allows ex-insurgents to transform their relationships with their communities from negative to positive through participation in

economic activities. It is not surprising that 87.1 percent of the respondents agreed that entrepreneurship has been an effective means of post-conflict peacebuilding in Nigeria's oil region (see Fig. 5). This evidence indicates that entrepreneurship can contribute toward the development of a strong private sector in a post-conflict society, and this can tangibly contribute to peacebuilding.



While in the field I had firsthand experience with ex-insurgents who have built successful enterprises from participating in the peacebuilding program and are conducting themselves responsibly as peace ambassadors in their various communities. An example is an anonymous ex-insurgent from Rivers State who operates a thriving poultry farm that generates revenue daily through supplying eggs and chickens to the hospitality industry in Port Harcourt city. He narrated how becoming an entrepreneur enabled him to overcome poverty, and expressed his unwillingness to participate in violence and criminal activities, choosing instead to focus on growing his business and leading an exemplary life.<sup>43</sup> This ex-insurgent transformed his life through entrepreneurship and became a peace ambassador and role model for other youths in his community. This example illustrates the impact of entrepreneurship in post-conflict peacebuilding. The opportunity to become local entrepreneurs has enabled former insurgents to not only reintegrate socially into civilian society but also to participate fully in local economic development. The achievement of economic independence through entrepreneurship can bring stability to a post-conflict society by combatting unemployment and poverty, thereby addressing the underlying causes of violence and criminality. Since most conflicts are rooted in rural poverty,<sup>44</sup> business opportunities that focus on lifting rural populations out of poverty can contribute to peacebuilding.<sup>45</sup> The fact remains that business

provides motivation to address the drivers of conflict and thus contribute to peacebuilding through economic development.<sup>46</sup> Therefore, the importance of entrepreneurship cannot be underestimated, as investing in economic development can incentivize in a highly distorted economic environment.<sup>47</sup>

Examples abound of ex-insurgents driving the entrepreneurial ecosystem in local communities across the oil region. These instances show that the peacebuilding program has liberated thousands of former insurgents from unemployment by diverting their attention from criminality and violence while encouraging them to become peaceful and productive citizens through access to entrepreneurship opportunities. A young woman from Bayelsa State who was studying on the Presidential Amnesty Scholarship at Ritman University in Akwa Ibom described her experience in the wake of the insurgency. She had first-hand experience of the criminal activities of local insurgents who perpetrated atrocities in her community, including raping women and robbing people at gunpoint. Despite her negative encounter with insurgents, she acknowledged the positive impact of entrepreneurship on peacebuilding in the oil region when she stated,

I could remember how they started this entrepreneurship training program which has given most of our youth opportunities to learn skills, develop themselves, and improve their personalities. I remember people who were previously practising tailoring but are now expert fashion designers. Some were once artisans but are now technicians and experts. So, I think the program has helped the youth to develop their hidden talents.<sup>48</sup>

These remarks are profound and express optimism about the peacebuilding program's transformative capacity, particularly in reducing criminal kidnappings, while helping former insurgents to rebrand their personalities as they reintegrate into civilian society. Her perception of the peacebuilding program is consistent with research that shows that sustained reintegration occurs when ex-insurgents can become productive members of their communities.<sup>49</sup>

An ethnographic study on the reintegration trajectory of ex-insurgents in rural communities across the Niger Delta reveals that those who received start-up capital through the Presidential Amnesty Program to establish small enterprises have been able to sustain their businesses.<sup>50</sup> Macartan Humphreys and Jeremy Weinstein observe that wealth creation was one of

the most significant determinants of post-conflict reintegration in Sierra Leone.<sup>51</sup> The challenge, as some analysts have pointed out, is that many of the entrepreneurial activities that contribute to economic development are undertaken by vulnerable populations working in the informal sector who create small enterprises to meet their basic income needs.<sup>52</sup> Perhaps it would be more effective to integrate ex-insurgents into economic activities that have greater prospects beyond meeting basic needs.

The interview data further reveal the concept of “empowerment” as a predominant vocabulary to express the entrepreneurial processes of reintegrating the ex-insurgents into society and preventing the resumption of hostilities. From the peacebuilders' perspective, empowerment is understood as a process of improving the economic livelihoods of ex-insurgents by engaging them in a variety of commercial activities. It begins with providing training to the ex-insurgents to give them the business skills required to establish small-scale enterprises. In other words, empowerment as conceived by the peacebuilders represents a set of economic reintegration activities that include providing microcredit, business support, and job placement training programs. This approach to peacebuilding has increased the number of ex-insurgents throughout the oil region who own small businesses specializing in electronics, construction materials, groceries, or poultry farming. Empowerment in this context represents a process of strengthening people's “capacity to make choices and to transform those choices into the desired outcomes.”<sup>53</sup> Sustainable peace must be founded on the creation of opportunities that guarantee income for ex-insurgents. This is especially important for those who see improvements in their living conditions as the only vehicle to peace. As one ex-insurgent stated during the interview, “We will not be interested in fomenting trouble if we are guaranteed a source of income to meet our basic needs.”<sup>54</sup> The key lesson is that meeting the economic needs of the ex-insurgents can be beneficial to successful peacebuilding. It suggests that ex-insurgents will have little incentive to resume criminal behavior if their economic needs are met.

At the same time, this economic conception of empowerment is problematic because it conceives of empowerment narrowly as a means to an end. In doing so, it ignores the widely shared perceptions of those ex-insurgents who understand empowerment as a bottom-up approach to peacebuilding derived from people's ability to contribute to peaceful solutions to their problems by utilizing the economic resources within their immediate ecosystem in



culturally appropriate ways. According to Robert Adams, empowerment is “the capacity of individuals, groups, and communities to take control of their circumstances, exercise power and achieve their own goals or maximize the quality of their lives.”<sup>55</sup> In pointing out these contextual challenges, it is worth emphasizing that the peacebuilding program needs to embrace a broader vision that addresses the structural roots of violence, while also engaging in deeper social transformation at all levels of society.

Equally important is to recognize that entrepreneurship does not necessarily guarantee an income. As my previous study has shown, most of the entrepreneurship programs that were designed to empower ex-insurgents did not materialize into success.<sup>56</sup> The resentment that grows among ex-insurgents whose enterprises did not materialize into success eventually creates the condition for instability. Historically, ex-insurgents have shown a propensity to re-arm and resume hostilities against their adversaries.<sup>57</sup> This realization necessitates the implementation of proactive measures to help ex-insurgents in Nigeria’s oil region build capacity for translating entrepreneurship ideas into successful business models.

#### WHY ENTREPRENEURSHIP PRODUCES MIXED RESULTS

There are growing concerns about the sustainability of a peacebuilding program that does not pay enough attention to the agency of ex-insurgents and their visions of peace. This was my observation during the entrepreneurship training held on 16–19 January 2018. The program brought ex-insurgents from Rivers and Bayelsa States to Calabar, the capital of Cross River State, to learn cassava farming. While this event was intended to train the ex-insurgents in commercial cassava production, which can lead to the development of small-scale enterprises in the oil region, there was no consideration for the fact that the participants mostly resided in local communities whose ecosystems have been jeopardized by decades of oil pollution, such that their lands cannot support cassava production.

Poor communities in the oil region are located amidst swamps, rivers, creeks, and mangrove forests, where fishing is the mainstay of the people. Because these communities are located along the coastline, they naturally depend on the environment for their livelihoods. As oil extraction continues to devastate their ecosystem, high concentrations of hydrocarbons from pollution have eroded sustainable sources of livelihood. The long-term

impact of extractive activities on local communities in the oil region includes the loss of fisheries and other aquatic resources, the destruction of farmlands, reduced agricultural productivity, population displacement, and the spread of water-borne diseases, all of which eventually translates to poverty, hunger, and diseases.<sup>58</sup> These challenges cannot be ignored in peacebuilding interventions, and sustainable peace cannot be achieved without a critical focus on these structural challenges.

Therefore, a peacebuilding strategy that conditions the ex-insurgents to merely adapt to the reality of the peacebuilder is less emancipatory because it will inhibit their imagination of what peacebuilding can be. In other words, the imposition of peacebuilding ideas denies the ex-insurgents the opportunity to influence the peace process and its outcomes. This leads to what Paolo Freire described as “self-depreciation,” in which the oppressed acting within a structure eventually adopts the dominant opinions imposed by their oppressors.<sup>59</sup> A peacebuilding program that focuses exclusively on entrepreneurship gives little attention to the fact that environmental conditions in the rural communities where the ex-insurgents live may not support sustainable enterprises founded on agriculture, particularly cassava farming. These unaddressed structural factors lead to a state of “punctuated peace”, whereby the stable post-conflict society eventually relapses into repeated cycles of violence.<sup>60</sup>

#### CONCLUSION

Nigeria’s peacebuilding program provides evidence of the extent to which entrepreneurship can shape peacebuilding efforts by creating the condition for the cessation of hostilities in the post-conflict oil region. The growth of entrepreneurship activities implemented by the Presidential Amnesty Program to reintegrate ex-insurgents into their local communities has liberated many beneficiaries from the burden of poverty and unemployment. Those ex-insurgents who have seen improvements in their socio-economic status have become peaceful and law-abiding citizens.

It is reasonable to conclude that the implementation of entrepreneurship programs has addressed part of the problem. However, greater attention must be accorded to environmental conditions in the oil region because the well-being of local communities is tied to this. Any peace process that ignores environmental threats is less likely to prevent the resurgence of armed



insurgency. The government can change how it engages with ex-insurgents by exploring practical ways of working with them to address grievances, prevent further violence, and achieve sustainable peace. What counts as sustainable peace and what solutions need to be implemented to bring about lasting peace need to be understood from the point of view of the ex-insurgents. In addition, there should be a genuine effort to reform Nigeria's peacebuilding architecture. This will ensure that peacebuilding interventions move beyond palliative measures that see entrepreneurship as a means to address the development challenges in the region, so that residents of communities affected by oil pollution can inhabit an environment where their humanity is respected, their dignity is upheld, and their deepest aspirations can flourish. In other words, peacebuilding interventions must adhere to the implicit knowledge of local conditions and the common experiences that ex-insurgents can bring to the peacebuilding process. Ignoring this means the government is merely seeking to stabilize the post-conflict society to achieve negative peace, without necessarily addressing the root causes of the insurgency and eventually moving toward sustainable peace.

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