

Mass Media Management of the Inter-Ethnic Conflict In Warri Delta State, Nigeria: An Evaluative Study

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Acknowledgement

The Author acknowledges the support provided by the management and staff of Delta Broadcasting Service (DBS), Warri, Delta State, Nigeria.

Abstract

This paper critically evaluates the activities of Delta Broadcasting Service (DBS) Warri in trying to prevent, resolve and transform the inter-ethnic conflicts in Warri in 2003. Using content analysis and structured individual interviews with two (2) policy and decision makers, four (4) producers and programme staff purposively sampled from the Delta Broadcasting Service (DBS) Warri, data was collected (with the aid of a checklist) on variables such as; (i) the role of the state government in the resolution and transformation of the conflict (ii) the level of conflict prevention preparedness in DBS (iii) the role of DBS in the resolution of the conflict (iv) how the media covered the conflict (v) the plans in place to build peace and prevent future conflict and (vi) the factors acting as constraints to the effectiveness of the media in the prevention, resolution and transformation of the conflict. Findings show that the role of the media (DBS) in the prevention, resolution and transformation of the conflict has been minimal and underplayed. There was no organizational capacity for conflict prevention and resolution. DBS was not able to objectively manage the conflict due to the gate keeping function of its owners and inadequate fiscal, human and technical capacity of the media organization, to design, produce and transmit programmes. In order to strengthen the conflict management capacity of the media establishment, there is need for (i) greater involvement and commitment of media executives to conflict management (ii) policy support to a proactive and transformational approach to mass media programming and (iii) institutionalization and organizational transformation, that includes the formation of strategic alliances between the media and NGOs, the private sector and relevant government agencies, to facilitate funding, research, capacity building, infrastructural development and information exchange.

1.0 Introduction

Warri in Delta State, Nigeria, though a relatively homogenous settlement in terms of its geography, has a multi-linguistic, multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multicultural population. Even though the city is often referred to as an oil city, a majority of the people in the area have not been assimilated into the mainstream of national socioeconomic development. While a majority of the people have been assimilated in needs, aspirations and capabilities, through formal and informal education, they are nonetheless denied a significant share of the attainments and dividends of the oil wealth. Such shortcomings, Deutsch (1979:34) observes, have been the major causes of social, economic and political conflicts among the various groups in the area. Deutsch further observed that assimilation may be possible through a deliberate and imaginative government policy of social communication that is conflict preventive and conflict mitigative, yet responsive to popular needs, opinions, norms and socio-economic realities in the pluralistic society. The process of political and socioeconomic development of the area comprising multi-linguistic groupings has often been counteracted and eventually inhibited by their tendency to increasing pre-occupation with their own ethnic and parochial interests and this has served as a self limitation on the growth and development of the area, through a decline in the attention, resources and responsiveness available for coping with the implicit needs and explicit messages of the marginalized units or group in the society to be mobilized and assimilated (Imoh, 1991:99).

Against this background, Huntington (1968:425), cited in Leys (1996:12) describes the African society as praetorian, highly segmented and amoral, in which case, no political leaders in the area are accepted as legitimate by all within the polity. Therefore, none are accepted as arbiters. There is also no agreement among the conflicting group on legitimate and authoritative methods of resolving conflicts. Each ethnic, group aggregates to skin or be skinned, to gain what it can for itself from the "fixed pie" of material benefits. This problem is further aggravated by poverty and limited literacy with their attendant conflicting interests and effects on political and economic stability. The perception of scarcity, resulting from poverty and underdevelopment has led to competition and mistrust between the ethnic groups, with each segment being mutually exclusive and exists only for its own advantage. This pattern of horizontal and vertical segmentation in the society has made it difficult for the mass media to play a positive role in the management of conflicts wherever they may occur at

the inter-group, inter-communal, political and religious levels.

1.1 THE INTER-ETHNIC CONFLICT IN WARRI

The recurrent ethnic conflicts in Warri among the Urhobos, Ijaws and Itsekiris since the early 1990s is due to incompatibilities, varying from material resources, positional goods and power, involving what Imobighe et al (2002:67) identified as:

- i. Dispute over ownership of Warri land among the Urhobos, Itsekiris and Ijaws.
- ii. Suzerainty of the Olu of Warri, the Traditional Leader of the Itsekiris.
- iii. Dispute over the legitimacy of claim by non-Itsekiri ethnic groups to separate local government councils in Warri metropolis, and the conflict of 2003 was among the three ethnic groups (Urhobos, Itsekiris and Ijaws) it led to the destruction of lives and properties in Warri and left behind some scars that continue to ignite hostilities among the groups. Quite recently, in June – July 2013 there was a communal conflict in Warri North Local Government Area of Delta State with several lives lost and property destroyed.
- iv. The Conflict over royalties from mineral resources and mutual claims of marginalization arising from either demographic factors or hegemonic control and utilization of political apparatuses to advance parochial goals to the detriment of other communities and groups

These recurrent conflicts among the various ethnic groups in Warri have generated both local and international attention because of the political, economic and social implications.

1.2 The Delta Broadcasting Service (DBS), Warri

The Delta Broadcasting Services (DBS) consisting of Radio Delta and Delta Rainbow Television, is a state owned electronic media establishment that is located in Warri. The Radio station has been in existence before the Delta state was created in 1992, but the television station was established after the state was created. These radio and television stations because of their combined visual and auditory effects and reach, can play a positive role in conflict prevention, resolution, transformation and management. During the crisis in Warri, the role of the mass media can be described as supportive but passive, unspecified and ad-hoc and this limited their effectiveness in presenting, resolving and transforming the conflict.

There is need therefore, to evaluate the factors that influenced the role of the mass media such as, the policy and organizational preparedness of the organization, changes put in place to prevent resolve and transform the conflict and the programmes and messages designed and disseminated to manage the conflict.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

Even though, Nigeria has a long colonial history, it did not enjoy the benefit of a solid mass communication foundation, that is capable of serving as an engine force for the formation of a truly independent, self reliant, peaceful and viable nation state. The role of the mass media under colonialism was dictated by colonial politics, economics and religion. In post independent Nigeria and the Niger Delta in particular, the role of the mass media is dictated by the local politics, the kind of government and the pattern of ownership and programmes. Against this background, Gamble (1996:334) observes that:

Whenever the state has monopoly on communication as well as the control of resources and police/army, the mass media may not be able to objectively manage conflicts because of the inherent biases and gate keeping role of the owners.

Delta Broadcasting Service (DBS) is a state owned media and is therefore limited in both capacity, funding and content because of the gate keeping functions of the government.

1.4 Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is to examine the role played by Delta Broadcasting Service, Warri, in the prevention, resolution and transformation of the Inter-ethnic conflict in Warri in 2003. The specific objectives are to;

- i. Examine the role played by the state government in the resolution and transformation of the conflict.
- ii. Examine the level of conflict prevention preparedness in DBS as a media outfit.
- iii. Identify the plans and programmes put in place by DBS to build peace and prevent future conflicts.
- iv. Examine the role played by DBS in the resolution of the conflict, through programmes and coverage and,
- v. Identify the constraints limiting the effectiveness of the media (DBS) in the prevention, resolution and transformation of the conflict.

1.5 Research Questions

- i. What role did the State Government play in the Resolution and Transformation of the conflict?
- ii. What is the level of conflict prevention preparedness in DBS?
- iii. What is the pattern and level of coverage of the conflict by DBS?
- iv. What role did DBS play in the resolution of the conflict?
- v. What policies and programmes have been put in place to build peace and prevent conflict?

- vi. What are the constraints to the effectiveness of DBS in preventing, resolving and transforming the conflict?

2.0 Theoretical Framework

Social scientists and communication experts Burgoon and Ruffner (1978:498). Imobighe (1999:83), have identified some approaches and strategies for managing conflicts in a pluralistic society.

These include:

- (i) Research/recognizing the type of conflict and the level at which it is operating.
- (ii) Use of effective communication to convey messages, that are non-judgmental, accurate, salient and actionable.
- (iii) Re-establishment of mutual trust through honest desire for reconciliation.
- (iv) Effective persuasion to change behaviours, attitudes and beliefs that will promote the conflict.
- (v) Bargaining and negotiation – involving a credible neutral central third party expert to arbitrate and ensure free flow of communication between parties.
- (vi) Leveling: which allows parties to admit that they are wrong, thus quickening the pace of resolution of the conflict.

The mass media, because of its glamour, attractiveness and believability, in addition to its visual and audio qualities can inform, educate, and provide the platform for interaction, discussion, and engagement among conflicting groups.

2.1 The Mass Media and Conflict Management: A Conceptual Framework

The mass media have the power to extend our eyes and ears to almost indefinite distances and to multiply our voices and written words as far as we can find listeners and readers. The electronic media, including radio and television watch the horizon for us by telling us what our leaders and experts think, by conducting discussion of public issues and helping us to interpret what is seen on the horizon and decide what to do about it. More over, the print media including newspapers, magazines, films, etc help us to interpret what we see on our windows and act as teaching aids. Gamble (1996:334), notes that these organs of mass communication, especially radio and television can play both a positive and or negative role in conflict situations. They should therefore be used with a high sense of responsibility, objectivity and ethics. In many conflict situations, many media establishments through their news and programmes are quick to view one position as correct or true while condemning and misperceiving the other groups' position or grievances. In a pluralistic society such as Nigeria, it is not possible to predict the effect of mass communication on the conflicting parties, because the mass media often develop group encoding, but there is only individual decoding of messages.

Gamble notes, however, that we can predict the effect of mass communication only in terms of the interaction of the message with the situation, personality and group. Therefore, the role of the mass media during a conflict is first of all to control the message, secondly, structure the situation by controlling power and resources and thirdly, control the groups behaviour by making it attractive for them to toe the line of compromise rather than confrontation. In order to do this, the mass media must know a great deal about the situation, the personalities involved in the conflict and the group relationships where the mass media message are to be acted upon. For media messages and programmes to be effective in preventing, resolving and transforming conflicts and promoting intergenerational peace, their content must motivate the opponents to come to agreement, by using a variety of informative, interactive and persuasive techniques and paying attention to the salient issues that are desirable.

2.2 Mass Media Approaches to Conflict Management

Because of the multi-dimensional nature of conflicts, no single approach or strategy is sufficient; a combination of approaches and strategies might have to be used for the mass media to be effective. Imobighe (1998:83), Obor (2004:103) and Wilson (1997:60), have suggested four major strategies for conflict resolution using the mass media. These include (i) the integrated conflict management system. (ii) the problem solving approach (iii) the village square paradigm and (iv) the synergistic strategy.

The Integrated Conflict Management System is a comprehensive approach to conflict abatement and settlement, but also extended to conflict prevention, peace promotion and consolidation components, because it seeks to eliminate the conditions that create an environment for conflict.

The Problem Solving Approach Is a comprehensive and analytical approach that identifies the interests, perceptions, fears and concerns of all parties to the conflict and explores mutually beneficial ways to resolve them. This approach, Obor observes, provides the basis not only for seeking solutions to conflicts but also for sustaining a durable post conflict harmonious relationship between the parties involved.

Village Square Paradigm As the name suggests, the mass media like the traditional village square, should provide opportunity for all interest groups or aggrieved parties to sit together and express their minds on issues of contention by providing and guaranteeing every individual or groups easy access to mass media facilities and

have their views, operations and concerns represented in news and programmes in which the conflict is discussed. As Wilson (1997:60) rightly observed; “access to and frank discussion in the media by all parties in a conflict can be a kind of catharsis, purgation or emotional release in an attempt by society to maintain a relatively stable and well integrated structure”.

To ensure fairness and objectivity, an arbitrator in the village square, that is, persons who are neutral to the conflict are selected by the mass media to participate in news and programmes related to the conflict. This agenda setting approach of the mass media helps to drive the parties in conflict to a point of reconciliation (Obor, 2004:103).

The Synergistic Strategy involves the use of the mass media to create and disseminate messages that engender trust, respect and understanding. Media messages and programmes to be effective, in resolving and transforming conflicts must be less judgmental, less antagonistic, less partisan, less legalistic and less suspicious. That way, conflicting parties look up to the media and perceive it as an impartial arbiter.

2.3 Preventing the Conflict: Dealing with Structural and Root Causes

The term conflict prevention has been defined by Mwanasali (2005:190) as any action undertaken with the express intent to anticipate a conflict or forestall the possibility of its escalation into generalized and uncontrolled violence within groups or at the level of society. The term is generally defined at two different but related levels, to include actions to address structural or underlying factors, the root causes of the conflict and actions or operational means to curb an ongoing conflict or halt its escalation into deadly violence.

Mwanasali (2004:191) citing Gardner (2002:15) has identified four key variables as lying at the “root” of conflict”. These include; inequality, insecurity, incentives and perceptions. Inequalities may contribute to the generation of conflicts because of the grievances arising from exclusion from and grave differential access to critical resources, whether political or economic. Incentives and disincentives can also play a role in mobilizing grievances, setting off or fuelling a crisis or bringing it to an end, in this very case, oil has been a major root cause of conflict in the area. The proliferation of small arms and light weapons, especially among the youth constitute a serious source of insecurity in the society and contributes to making the environment a violent one. Finally, peoples’ perceptions, beliefs and fears, with the usual dose of irrationality are also a potent detonator of conflicts. Such fears and perceptions often lead to inter-ethnic conflict.

Mwanasali (2004:195), described structural causes as conditions that underlie a conflict situation at any given time and prompting and mobilizing causes that act as catalyst by precipitating the crisis or the conflict situation. These include, triggering and aggravating factors to a conflict, such as lack of institutional capacity, relative economic deprivation and a climate of mistrust and mutual suspicion, as the case was among the Urhobos, Itsekiris and Ijaws in Warri.

The mass media in performing its surveillance function can highlight these issues that act as triggers of conflict, bring them up for public discourse and mobilize social groups and the private sector to support government programmes targeting the youth and the poor.

The Proactive Approach

The philosophy behind the proactive approach is that it is better for the mass media to become interested in preventing conflicts rather than reporting them after they have blossomed. Gamble (1996:245) has listed certain actions that are part of the proactive approach to prevention. These include the following:

- i. Providing avenues for debate and consensus building through interactive programmes that have in-built feedback mechanism and
- ii. Establishing an early warning system to detect potential conflict generating issues in the area, using environmental surveillance and other information gathering techniques.

By providing avenues for debate and discussion, the people have avenues to air their grievance in the open. The early warning system on the other hand enables the organization to detect potential conflict generating issues.

Environmental Monitoring

An analysis of early signals of impending conflict should combine early warning indicators, which are those characteristics or trends that appear indicative of an impending conflict.

Nwanasali lists these early warning indicators as:

- i. **Political Factors:** The internal, political dynamics, the political actors, institutions, processes and issues; level of popular participation in (and exclusion from) the decision making processes, institutions and issues related to elections, citizenry and identity.
- ii. **Economic Indicators:** The cost of living, inflation rate, unemployment, scarcities and food security, opportunity for access to critical resources.
- iii. **Personal Security:** Law and order, civil military relations, the proliferation of small arms and light weapons.
- iv. **Military Buildup and Expenditures:** Official discourse on national or group security, proliferation of militia and paramilitary forces.

- v. **Social Indicators:** Demographic make up, population changes and movements, population density.
- vi. **Environmental Indicators:** Water, security, natural catastrophies, epidemics and pandemics.

The continuous monitoring of these indicators enables the mass media to feel the pulse of the society. Such information collected, collated and analyzed informs policy changes and programme strategy that helps in removing whatever root causes or structural causes that may predispose a conflict. This requires research on audience propensities, predisposition, perceptions, needs, aspirations, expectations, opinions and fears against the backdrop of the conflicting and complimentary effects of the political, socio-economic, cultural and environmental conditions of the people. The media can develop programmes that bring feedback to government policies and programmes that ensure collective discussion and classification of issues that concern the people.

2.4 Mass Media Role in Preventing a Conflict

When a conflict develops, one of the first variables affecting the outcome, is whether the participants attitude is cooperative or competitive, productive or destructive. The role of the mass media, Gamble (1996:246) suggests, is to transform the conflict from a competitive to a cooperative one and from a destructive to a productive one, by reducing the likelihood that their comments will elicit anger, defensive and belligerent emotions from the groups and using a cooperative problem solving communication approach. This approach makes participants satisfied with procedures and outcomes, making them believe that no one loses, everyone wins. This way, there is mutual understanding and respect among the feuding groups. The mass media should express their ideas and feelings on the conflict constructively, without resorting to attacks, insults, or negative evaluation of the groups. The media should focus on the issues, the situation and not personalities and be willing to listen and react to what the people are saying as legitimate. Finally, the media should define the conflict, its nature, causes and consequences on the groups and national development, without over-intellectualizing the conflict, but suggesting possible ways that the conflict can be resolved to the acceptance and benefit of all concerned. On no account should the media through its news, discussions and programmes blame anybody or force any group to accept their way of seeing things. Gamble further suggests that the mass media should give accurate, unbiased and comprehensive reporting that gives all parties equal opportunity to explain their point of view and assumptions through feedback mechanisms, discussion programmes, documentaries and interactions that provide opportunity for role reversal, so that those in conflict can understand one another. Above all, the media should avoid misconceptions, misperceptions, and inaccurate, sketchy and disruptive communication; instead build bridges of cooperation without any form of demonstrated hesitancy or subjectivity.

As Adeyanju (2004:69) suggests, the media in order to prevent the escalation of the conflict, should aim at communication convergence effect rather than divergent effect by adopting the ethos, pathos and logos strategy; grounded on the principles of synergistic and empathetic communication.

Ethos refers to personal credibility, neutrality and integrity of the mass media so that they can win the trust of the parties in the conflict.

Pathos refers to the perception of the mass media of the perception of the feuding parties.

This perception should be real so that they can identify the legitimate interests, feelings and problems of the people as they see them.

Logos on the other hand, requires that the content of messages disseminated by the mass media are logical, unbiased and non-judgmental. The media cannot achieve any real success by destroying the position held by any group but rather act as a processor, facilitator and mediator. By abiding by the ethos, logos and pathos of reporting, the mass media can hope to prevent the escalation of the conflict.

2.5 Mass Media Coverage of Conflict

Conflicts usually provide newsworthy materials for the mass media. Adeyanju (2004:69) however warns that modern mass media and television in particular, due to its visual and auditory impact on the audiences, can play both a positive and or negative role in conflict management. There is need therefore for a high sense of social responsibility when handling religious, political, inter-ethnic, inter-communal, conflicts and civil disorders, because of the extreme reactions that on the spot coverage of conflicts attracts from the public. In conflict situations, the audience expects the whole truth, including updates on the conflict and how it affects them. Obor (2005:103) however warns that telling the truth in news reports about ethnic or religious crises, especially the number of deaths, if it is high, extent of destruction and how the carnage was carried out, might be dysfunctional. This is because, it can trigger retaliatory reactions from the aggrieved segments of the society or those sympathetic to the victims.

Obor further warns that live coverage of conflicts or civil disorders by television can spur participation and inflame the riots even at the extent of transforming them into a sort of show, in which case, the mass media assumes the role of a participant in the riots rather than a mere observer, thereby influencing the outcome of the real event.

Hickey (1970:63) accuses the mass media of inflaming and exacerbating conflicts. He argues that the presence of television cameras frequently transmits a potentially violent situation into an actual violent one and

that mischief makers often show their most troublesome selves at the sight of television crew. He further warns that television pictures of looting, wanton destruction and mayhem create a contagion which causes riots to feed upon themselves.

On the positive side, some have argued that the presence of the mass media on the scene is obtrusive, because an awareness on the part of the participants that the whole world is watching may well have positive rather than negative results.

Social Responsibility of the Mass Media during Coverage of Conflicts

There is need for mass media institutions to exhibit a high level of social responsibility and professionalism whenever they cover conflicts because of the possible effects of their messages Oboh (2004:104) citing McQuail (1987:117) highlights these principles of social responsibility that should guide reporters. These include the following:

- i. Acceptance of social responsibility and fulfillment of certain obligations to society, the nation and humanity.
- ii. High level of professionalism and standards of information based on truth, accuracy, objectivity, balance and universalism.
- iii. In accepting the obligations of social responsibility and commitment to truth, the activities of the mass media should operate within the framework of law and ethical considerations.
- iv. Avoid disseminating or transmitting any information that might lead to crime, disorder, violence or conflict, or put minority groups in bad light.
- v. Recognize the plurality and multiplicity in society and reflect this diversity of the society, giving access to various points of view and right to reply, and acknowledging the existence of various ethnic, religious, cultural and political sensitivities of individuals and groups.
- vi. Mass media personnel are accountable first to society, then their employers and the market, and not the other way round.
- vii. Mass media should be tactical in handling political, religious and ethnic conflicts by their deliberate use of leads which sooth the heat contained in the body of the story.
- viii. Convey soberly and untheatrically, the full sense of a public disorder and be sensitive to the effect of words upon an anxious audience, in which case, the choice of words is important.
- ix. Censor and carefully edit inciting parts of visual accomplishments of stories selected for news broadcasts. Put embargo on the use of inflammatory statements by partners in conflicts to forestall a situation where the mass media system is used to further magnify the conflict and overheat the polity.
- x. Have a policy of restraint and equal opportunity and equal coverage and fairness to all parties.

3.0 Methodology

Two (2) policy and decision makers, 4 producers and 3 programme staff were purposively selected and interveived with the aid of a structured checklist on key variables which include; media ownership and control, policy, human resource mobilization, organizational modification, research, institutionalization and programming. With the aid of the checklist, relevant data were collected on these variables using individual interviews with the staff and an analysis of the content of programmes aired during the conflict to the general public.

4.0 Results

4.1 Role played by the State Government in the Resolution and Transformation of the Conflict.

At the beginning of the crisis, the State Government set up a Ministry of Inter-ethnic Relations and Conflict Management, and it was the Commissioner of Inter-ethnic Relations and Conflict Management who got the media (DBS) involved. Initially, the media created programmes that will facilitate information dissemination, exchange and dialogue, first between government and the public, and secondly among the parties or groups involved in the conflict. Such programmes, include the monthly Executive Phone-in programme on radio and television, featuring the Governor and the People. People were able to talk to the Governor on various issues relating to the conflict and how it affects them. The government also initiated various stakeholder meetings and consultations involving traditional leaders, community leaders, religious leaders, youth leaders, market women and civil society organizations, to get behind government in finding solutions to the conflict.

4.2 Level of Conflict Prevention Preparedness in DBS

According to the Assistant General Manager, (News and Current Affairs), there was no conflict preparedness and response plan of action in place. As a result, there were no programmes in place to educate the people and prevent the conflict. According to him *“the area is like a time bomb waiting to explode. The area is also highly militarized and any alarm will send the wrong signals to government, the people and the private (oil) sector”*.

4.3 Pattern of Media Coverage of the Conflict

At the onset of the conflict, there was radio and television coverage in the form of news, commentaries and documentaries to highlight the issues. According to the General Manager “there was fairness and objectivity, with no attempt to play one group against the other or over dramatise the situation”.

4.4 Role played by DBS in the Resolution of the Conflict

The organization, reported the conflict in several ways.

- i. Created a programme called “**Spotlight**” – a documentary highlighting the main issues in the conflict, the consequences of the conflict and the need for peace, in order for development to take place.
- ii. Involved experts – by inviting people of various professional backgrounds to talk and give insight and expert opinions and views on the issues surrounding the conflict.
- iii. Created a programme “focus” a discussion programme comprising experts or opinion leaders or molders from the various groups who live in the community, (the Ibos, Hausas and Yorubas). These groups who have formed migrant communities in the area have helped to appeal to contending groups to see reason.

4.6 Plans and strategies put in place to build Peace and Prevent Future Conflicts

Some officers were selected from the various departments; News and Current Affairs, Programmes, Marketing and Management and trained on conflict; its causes, prevention, resolution and management, to give them basic knowledge and skills on how to manage and report conflicts effectively. But there is no permanent modification in the organizational structure of DBS such as the creation of a conflict management section or desk with officers assigned specifically to the beat. In that case, those trained did not function as conflict reporters. perse. But there were daily television commentaries focusing on the need to sustain the peace, so that people can live together in harmony, and ensure that oil companies are given the conducive environment to operate in the region, since the Nigerian economy depends on oil exploration and exports to sustain itself. Programmes such as radio feedback, “focus”, “sport-light”, “keep the peace” and the Executive Phone-in programmes ensured that issues that will stimulate ethnic disharmony are brought into the open and discussed.

The radio and television channels were used to air documentaries, social stories and commentaries with messages that highlight the root causes of the conflict, such as poverty, unemployment, perception of scarcity of resources, clamour for resource control, development of the riverine areas, job access, porous seaways, armsflow and circulation etc.

In its determination to promote the free flow of information about government actions and efforts in resolving the conflict and sustaining the peace, DBS created indigenous programmes in Urhobo, Ijaw, Ibo, Itsekiri and Isoko, the major ethnic groups in the area. In addition to news in local languages, there are also ethnic half hour discussion programmes in Urhobo, Okpe, Isoko, Itsekiri, Ijaw etc. These ethnic programmes focus on key issues of concern to the groups. These issues are discussed for people to see, hear and participate in. This way, potential conflict issues are brought into the open and discussed before they snowball into conflict. These indigenous programmes provide opportunity for groups to state their positions and get issues clarified as rumour mongers are everywhere.

4.7 Constraints to the effectiveness of the DBS in preventing, resolving and transforming the conflict

The following were identified by the media personnel interviewed as constraints to their effectiveness in the management of the inter-ethnic conflict in Warri and other similar conflicts.

- (i) **Government Ownership of the Media:** Because government owns the organization, they are duty bound to support the government point of view. Secondly, they are not proactive in the sense that they cannot report early warning signs. Any attempt to report events as they are might put government in bad light and send the wrong signals.
- (ii) **Lack of Research:** As one manager in DBS puts it, “there is no research unit in DBS and information on conflicts are scanty and outdated. Without adequate research, we cannot hope to understand the background to the conflict and the desired outcomes. But we are moving in that direction”.
- (iii) **Lack of Political Commitment and Funding Arrangement:** The response of the media (DBS) to conflict is ad-hoc and reactionary as there is no funding arrangement so far and no personnel with adequate transport and communication support to enable the media deal with conflicts before, during and after their occurrence. Those trained in conflict management so far, lack the resources to design and transmit programmes to the different groups.
- (iv) **Inaccessibility of Some Rural Areas:** Because of the riverine nature of some communities, access to conflict areas has been a problem. Trying to cover the communities, interview group leaders of parties in conflict and bring images to the people is difficult.
- (v) **Perception of the Role of the Mass Media:** The media may be perceived as pro-government in power and consequently lose public trust and confidence in its ability to be fair, objective and non-partisan.

- (vi) **Inadequate Training of Staff:** Most journalists did not study conflict at school. Some staff were trained on conflict management but there has been no plan to retrain other staff since the crisis was resolved. There is over-dependence on external support and initiatives, as there are no internal arrangements to train and retrain staff on conflict management and reporting.

4.8 Discussion of Findings

The study has revealed that there is the absence of a mass media strategy for the prevention, resolution and management of conflicts. Although conflicts are ubiquitous and perennial in the Niger Delta, media executives may not perceive conflicts as a threat, and develop programmes in support of government efforts. Even though DBS Warri, is a government owned media organization, it did not allocate slots and airtime for the transmission of messages or programmes concerning conflict management until the crisis exploded. Obviously the role of the mass media in the management of the conflict is ad-hoc passive and reactionary. The personnel selected and trained on conflict management with outside support, are powerless and do not make editorial decisions. Those trained are often moved to other beats. As a result, mass media programmes during the conflict were limited to news, that are short-lived. There is not enough time for the curious audience to comprehend and internalize messages. The flow of information between the Ministry of Inter-Ethnic Relations and the Ministry of Information, the mass media and the public was inconsistent. The information that finally gets to the public may not be the truth as perceived by the participants to the conflict, owing to the gate keeping function of the media owners. The lack of information or data base for conflict analysis and intervention planning was the bane of the mass media. Research on audience predisposition and propensities for conflict is valuable when anticipating, resolving or managing conflicts. The capacity of the media institution to undertake audience research, environmental surveillance, panel studies, opinion surveys and ethnographic studies was not strengthened in this direction. As a result, there was inadequate feedback mechanism between and among the key parties to the conflict.

Because of the merchantilistic approach to programming, the mass media's profit-motive overrides its social responsibility function in such a way that there are inadequate programmes that encourage a two-way communication between the people and the government, and between the mass media and the people. Creative programmes that are community oriented and designed to bring community reactions and perceptions are inadequate, not integrated and do not have a multi-sectoral approach. The technical and financial requirements needed to support mass media involvement in conflict prevention; resolution and management are lacking or inadequate.

5.0 Conclusion

Conflicts have the potential for being devastative, if not managed properly. Conflicts also have the potential for ushering in progress and development if well managed. The role of the mass media in the management of conflicts therefore, is to transform the conflict from a destructive to a constructive approach, from a confrontational to a collaborative orientation and from a win-lose to a win-win situation. The Delta Broadcasting Services Warri, was involved in the management of the conflict in Warri, by the State Government. However, their participation was minimal and limited to news, documentaries, discussion programmes, news commentaries, interactive phone-in programme, etc. Their level of participation in preventive programmes was low compared to those programmes designed to resolve and transform the crisis and keep the peace. There is still need for greater institutionalization of conflict management in the mass media to enhance funding, training, research, infrastructural development and field operations. In order to coordinate the efforts of the mass media, there is need for an interdisciplinary and multisectoral approach to conflict at the local, state and national levels. The media, especially those that are government owned may not be effective in conflict management because they are modeled on essentially static administration, where workers are engaged on routine public service, and they are conditioned to fulfill the wishes of government, while playing down on the needs, perception, fears and expectations of the pluralistic society (Isoba 1986:69). Unless the structure of the ownership of the media changes, they will continue to be a mouthpiece of the ruling class or those with the political clout. This way they are not properly utilized for projecting the ideas and reactions of the masses or parties to a conflict.

5.1 Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following strategies have been suggested as ways of strengthening the capacity of the mass media to manage inter-ethnic or communal conflicts in the area.

- (i) Involvement and commitment of media executives to conflict prevention, resolution and management, so that they can design, develop and transmit appropriate messages.
- (ii) Advocacy for policy support and commitment to a proactive and transformational approach to mass media programming.
- (iii) Institutionalization, which includes, funding arrangements, annual allocation to conflict management, basic infrastructure and organizational modification, such as setting up a conflict

- management team or desk, assigning staff, training and retraining them on conflict management and mass communication and providing them with adequate equipment and transport support. Institutionalization also involves, building of an interdisciplinary and multi-sectoral constituency by involving professional groups, Non-governmental Organizations, community leaders, the private sector, labour and the academic sector in programming. It requires the integration of mass media programmes so that all groups in society have opportunity to learn about conflicts, their causes, consequences and ways of living harmoniously in a pluralistic society. Above all, it requires the involvement of the mass media in research, policy formulation and monitoring of agreements and promises made by government, politicians, groups and private sector institutions operating in the area.
- (iv) For effectiveness and support, the media should form a strategic alliance, with donor agencies, NGOs, the private sector and related government ministries to facilitate funding of research, procurement of equipment, training, information exchange and sponsorship of some media programmes and activities. This is because, the financial and technical requirements for an effective mass media support to conflict management efforts are beyond the capacity of the mass media.
 - (v) There should be a mass media advisory committee on conflict management at the local, state and national levels, to advise government, coordinate the activities of the mass media and set standards for the mass media, and
 - (vi) The mass media should establish regular feedback mechanisms and put programmes in place to create a two way communication between government and the people.

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