Project Title: "Amnesties for Peace in the Niger Delta: a critical assessment of whether forgiving crimes of the past contributes to lasting peace"

Security Protocol

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Introduction

Despite the Amnesty Programme in the Niger Delta region, which has reduced considerably the occurrence of large scale violence across the region, conflicts and violence still occur in many localities and communities. Even then some militant groups only suspended their violent activities following the Amnesty Programme and can resort to violence at anytime they feel the Amnesty programme has failed to meet their expectations while others are not quite happy because they have not benefitted from the programme. This suggests that the implementation of the project must be conscious of the possible eruption of violence in any part of the region which can constitute risks to project team members and other project participants. Not only are the usual problems that confront researchers intensified when fear and insecurity add to local people's tendency to mistrust strangers asking questions; environments such as the communities in the Niger Delta region marked by high levels of criminal, political, and/or daily social violence require researchers to be constantly alert to threats to their own physical safety, and to the ways in which their research can imperil their subjects and collaborators. If the execution of the project is to be successful and for project staff to stay safe while carrying out field work without jeopardizing the safety of their informants and collaborators, the project must develop a very clear understanding of the research environment and employ techniques for avoiding danger. It is against this background that the research project has put in place a security protocol to ensure the safety of the project participants and its successful completion. The key elements of the security protocol to be used in this study are outlined in the remaining parts of this document.

Composition of Team Members

Every aspect of information collection in the Niger Delta region is sensitive. All members of the information gathering team may encounter a range of safety and ethical issues throughout the process. It is important, therefore, that all team members, regardless of position or role(s), be carefully selected, trained and supported. The selection process and criteria for information collection by team members have taken into consideration factors such as the members' age, sex, ethnic origin and language skills. All the Project Team members are from the Niger Delta region by birth and present residence. They are indeed well known in most parts of the region because all of them have carried out action research in different parts of Niger Delta region during the last 20 to 30 years. This is an important mitigating factor to possible security risks because the key stakeholders in the region including those prone to violence are ready to interact and work amicably with members of the project team. Moreover, all the project team members appreciate the environmental and social challenges confronting Niger Delta region and are capable of responding to them when the need arises. The project team

is used to working in the difficult environment of the Niger Delta and have made provision for special transport to such locations. Furthermore, mitigation is assured by the fact that the collaborating institutions have at least five experts relevant to the implementation of this project in their staff who are also from the Niger Delta region. Any of them can be called upon to take charge in case a member of the team is not able to continue with the assignment.

Composition of Project Staff and Field Research Assistants

As in the case with Project Team Members, the project staff and research assistants that will be appointed to work on the project will be recruited from Niger Delta communities. Factors likely to have an impact on security issues should also be taken into account when deciding on the composition of the support staff, for example, whether support staff members should be drawn from the same community as the one in which the activity will take place. These considerations apply to all support staff, including drivers and other support staff. Again the fact that the field staff that will interact with the key stakeholders in the region are also from the region will enhance the cooperation of the stakeholders as they will see them as part of their community members who understand and share their challenges on various issues affecting the Niger Delta region. This fact will facilitate the adaptation of the project staff and field staff to some of the security risks prevalent in the project localities. Safety and security considerations apply not just to participants, but extend to all those involved in the data collection activity, including the members of the information collection team and the wider community. All members of the information collection team should understand, and be sensitive to the political, socio-cultural, security and economic factors that may affect the safety and security of those involved in the data collection process. They should take particular account of the nature of the emergency, any human rights and humanitarian concerns, as well as the prevailing formal and informal legal environment.

Planning in advance of any possible security risk

In general, researchers need to anticipate danger and prepare responses to it before they arrive in the field. This project recognises a moral commitment to informants and assistants to ensure the research does not bring them harm. The research imagines potentially dangerous situations and develops responses before encountering them. Thus the project's advance planning has been designed to prepare researchers and their assistants to assess potential dangers and empower them to retreat when a threat is perceived. Some components of the advance planning put in place include: (i) arranging exit strategies in case of danger; (ii) establishing code words to alert others to danger, and (iii) maintaining communications with those outside the field site who can monitor one's safety. These aspects of the advance planning will be carried out during the training of field staff.

Community Mobilisation

One safety strategy put in place in this project relates to arranging for trusted people to introduce Team Members and field staff to the field sites/communities. This entails "scoping out" research locations in advance, to anticipate safety issues such as ease of entry and to avoid wandering aimlessly down unfamiliar communities. It is in this context that the mobilisation of key stakeholders in communities of the Niger Delta region will be carried out before the commencement of the field surveys. During the mobilization exercise of the project, systematic efforts will be made by the project team and project staff to seek the support of the participants and beneficiaries through consultations with key stakeholders in the Niger Delta region including policy and decision makers as well as the local leaders in different parts of the region such as traditional leaders, community development leaders, men, women and youth groups in terms of their expected role in ensuring that peace prevails during the implementation of the project so that the benefits of the action can be realised. Further consultations and interactions will be carried out with security agencies including the army, navy and the police that are based in different parts of the region so that they can be on the alert in case of any security threat to project team members and support staff. The intensity of the consultations will be higher in notable conflict prone localities of the region where field data collection and other activities will take place. The participation of some of the key stakeholders in the project will further solidify the assurance of the people to maintain peace and protection to project staff.

Contextualization

In many localities in the Niger Delta as in other parts of Nigeria where researchers work, people are unfamiliar with the idea of a disinterested social science. Any experience they may have at all of social science research is usually in the service of some kind of official enterprise, like social services provision such as health and education. In a context characterized by violence, local people may be especially suspicious of people coming around asking questions and seeking information about the intimate details of their behaviors and beliefs. This pervasive suspicion in itself poses a danger, not only to research, but also to researchers' health and safety. People in violent areas who have no conception of social science research may imagine other, more nefarious purposes for the outsider's presence in their neighborhood and act violently themselves to head these off. In short, with no clear understanding of the context in which strangers are to be perceived, local people can speculate and attribute treacherous motives to unknown persons. Violence begets insecurity and suspicion, which in turn beget further violence, and some of it may be aimed at the person whose activities in the area conform to no recognized category.

It is therefore imperative that the proposed research team members and project staff to contextualize themselves and the research for the people and communities in which they will be working. The local people themselves engage in self-contextualization every time they find themselves in unfamiliar surroundings. Work, study, or social engagements often require them to move through different settings, where they may

encounter suspicion about themselves and their motivations. The project team would pay attention to the localities to be covered in the study and cultivate their own mental maps of safer and more dangerous places. They can then more easily avoid places where they are not well known, or go in the company of locally recognized guides who can provide others with the necessary contextualization. Creating this map can be part of the research itself, as the researcher assembles it in conversations and interactions with local people.

Whether local people are entirely unfamiliar with the amnesty programme and the research project itself or have negative associations with them due to the use of similar techniques by government agents and other actors, the project will strive to clearly and frequently explain the purpose of the study. The people need to be shown how their participation in the research activities contributes to the realization of the project's goals and the contributions it will make to resolving local problems, especially peace building in the Niger Delta region in general and their communities in particular.

Promoting Alertness

In a relatively violent context such as the Niger Delta region, people expect violence at any moment. One technique they employ for avoiding danger is to maintain a state of steady watchfulness. Since project team members and project staff would be present for fairly long periods of time in some communities they can be exposed to the same dangers local residents face. Like them, project team members and support staff would adopt a stance of watchfulness, remaining alert to possible dangers as they appear. Just as the local population may call on neighbours to watch their houses when they have to leave them unattended, team members can employ local field assistants to keep watch over them and their possessions on a daily basis while they are working. We recognize the fact that violent places are by definition unpredictable, and the project team members must continually remind themselves to pay attention to what is going on around them. It is worth noting that this technique of alert watchfulness will not only help keep researchers safe but can contribute to the quality of their research as well.

Working with security agencies in case of security threat

Project team is making arrangements with security agencies based in the localities where field data will be collected to keep them informed of any threat to project team members and field staff. Any serious security alert will be reported to the nearest security agency and personnel including police, army and the navy.

Interviewing

The general atmosphere of suspicion in highly violent areas can have an influence on the interview process, shaping the kinds of questions researchers can ask and the strategies they must adopt in conducting interviews. This may be the case especially in the Niger Delta where violence—its causes and consequences— is the explicit topic of

investigation. Questions about youth violence, for example, may be rebuffed by those who sense an implicit accusation; just asking certain questions can terminate a previously friendly and productive relationship. Inquiries about the state, gangs, or illegal activities may produce similarly negative or even hostile responses. Interviewing in violent or dangerous contexts requires patience. Team members will be reminded take into account the inherent danger of a particular area when designing their research plans. For example, semi-structured interview schedules may be more appropriate than strictly structured guides, as the former allow the questioner more flexibility to shape the questions to the particular interview context. An interviewer may wish to allow the interviewee to broach particularly sensitive issues, so as not to offend the individual with a direct and possibly offensive question. If the research participant appears to become uncomfortable in the course of the interview, or expresses a reluctance to answer certain questions, the interviewer can cut the interview short and propose to return for a follow-up on another occasion.

Such semi-structured techniques undoubtedly require more time than structured interviews, which pose direct questions driven entirely by the academic goals of the project. The researcher may feel impatient, unwilling to use indirect questioning for fear another chance to interview a particular person will not arise. But in violent contexts direct questioning can backfire, alarming the interviewee and resulting in more delays and problems. The interviewer cannot force things that go against the grain of local decorum and common sense. Other structural elements of individual identity that may affect how questions are received include gender and social status with some kinds of people more open to particular types of questions than others. Effective approaches for engaging interview subjects can be gleaned through informal interactions and participant observation, as the researcher learns local norms and then feeds them back into the interview context through an iterative research design. The interview from this perspective is an extension of participant observation, a more formal kind of conversation that occurs in the context of an ongoing relationship between interviewer and interviewee. As in other kinds of relationships, this one will strengthen with time, and the range of issues that can be raised will eventually expand.

When deciding where to conduct a particular interview, it is often best, as is sometimes said, to "let the informant lead." An informant who feels more comfortable in a particular setting will more likely be put at ease there, resulting in a better, more detailed interview. The researcher must again be alert to any danger signals present in a particular setting, however. If possible, he or she can try to visit the site before hand to assess problems that may arise and decide if the situation poses any unusual safety concerns. With some informants (for example, those known to be involved in violent or dangerous activities), choosing a public place for an interview may be in the researcher's best interests, even if it puts the informant somewhat on guard. Interviews with government authorities, police officers, and other public officials will most likely be conducted in a place of the informant's choosing, typically an office or other formal space; residents of poor neighborhoods, in contrast, may be more flexible in determining the location.

Communication with Team Members and Project Staff in the field

Strategies for ensuring the safety and security of the team collecting the information to be put in place include: Furnishing all members of the information collection team with means of communication, and preferably a back-up system in case the original lines of communication are disrupted. There will be provision of secure transportation to and from the research/work site(s), and at the research/work site(s). Providing and circulating daily itineraries (detailing locations, timelines and check-in times) for all team members. Establishing alternative plans to respond to security changes. A staff in CPED office would co-ordinate all communications with project staff on the field during the field survey.

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