

**THE ROLE OF TRADITIONAL INSTITUTIONS IN PROMOTING PEACE AND  
SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN SOUTH – SOUTH GEO POLITICAL ZONE  
OF NIGERIA**

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## **Abstract**

This study focused on the role of traditional institutions in promoting peace and sustainable development in South – South Geo Political Zone of Nigeria. Stratified proportional random sampling technique was used to select one thousand four hundred and sixty - six (1466) respondents from nine communities in Delta, Bayelsa and Rivers State constituted the sample used for the study. A questionnaire was developed by the researcher and used for the collection of data. The analysis was done using frequency count, simple percentages and chi - square. The results revealed that the respondents were of the views that traditional council of chiefs are expected to maintain law and order in their various communities and help to settle disputes among families and community members while age grade system could promote peace and sustainable development if they are part of decision making body in the community. The benefits of traditional institutions are to restore peace, develop the zone and create employment and youth empowerment through skill acquisition. Based on the findings, it was recommended that traditional institutions should be strengthened and used as a means of conflict management and peace building and there should be periodic meeting among all stakeholders to interact and share ideas on how the zone can attain peace, progress and sustainable development. To ensure sustainable development, community people should be involved in initiating, planning and execution of community development projects.

**Key Words:** Traditional Institutions, Peace, Sustainable development, Promoting and South-South Geo political zone.

## **INTRODUCTION**

The peace of the zone has been threatened by violent protests pervading the South-South Geo political zone undertaken by youth associations of various ethnic groups and clans (Obari, 1998, Oyitso, 2013). The South - South agitations and violent protests confronting oil companies and the Federal Government daily pertain to issues central to national unity, stability, economic well being, resource control and government performance. Okonmah (2001) notes that the grievances of the South – South Geo political zone have involved three closely interrelated, but analytical issues. First, that all laws relating to oil exploration and land ownership be abrogated. Second, the issue of natural resource control and self-determination and third, that appropriate institutional and financial arrangements be put in place by the government and the oil multinational companies to compensate the oil producing communities for the developmental and environmental problems associated with oil exploration and exploitations. The multinational oil corporations operating in the South – South Geo political zone have dominated the zone for decades with activities of exploration and exploitation, which have left the zone underdeveloped while the oil explorations have left behind a trail of socio-human devastation in terms of ecological destruction, environmental

pollution, social, economic and cultural dislocations (Akanji & Oyitso, 2012). According to Kareem (2000), the attendant poverty, unemployment and deplorable living conditions have led to anger, frustration, hostility and violence which are seen as appropriate responses to the neglect of the companies' social responsibility to its host communities.

Communities in the zone strongly feel they have not had a fair share of oil revenue from the Nigerian government following over 50 years of oil production from their land; considering their poor standard of living. In contrast with people in other rural areas of Nigeria, many still lack basic amenities such as electricity, potable water, accessible roads, sewage treatment facilities and health clinics and with limited opportunities for employment prospect (Oyitso, 2013). Compounding this ecological devastation is the political marginalization of the people as well as the denial of fundamental human rights, including land rights. The debate over appropriate strategy for managing problems in oil producing areas of Nigeria is as fierce today as it was over 50 years ago. This has been the aftermath of the Willink's Commission report of 1958. The Willink's commission was set up by the colonial government to recommend the best strategies for the development of the zone (Akaruese, 1998). The Commission turned in its report and recommended specifically that the zone deserves developmental attention and should therefore, be made a special area to be developed directly by the Federal Government. Following the Willink's "Minorities' Commission" report of 1958, the Niger Delta Development Board (NDDDB) was established in 1959 through constitutional provision made by the Nigeria Order in Council, constitutional amendment, No. 2, of 1959. The major tasks of NDDDB included advising the government of the federation and the Midwestern and Eastern Nigeria with regard to physical development of the zone. Aside from politics of limited interest after colonial rule, the initiative failed because of lack of sustained mission and chronic underfunding.

The South- South Geo political zone crisis has become a source of concern to local and international observers including non-governmental organizations (NGOs). As a result, many of these NGOs have initiated programmes and peace forum towards addressing the lingering crisis in the zone. One of such NGOS is the Niger Delta Environmental Survey (NDES) funded by an oil firm, in partnership with local community initiated, developed and designed an open-uni model programme aimed at providing good network for the institution and capacity building for youths in the area (Ogboi, 2003). Other NGOS like the Environmental Rights Action/Friends of the Earth (ERAFE), Nigeria and Pro-Natura International communities to the activities of the oil companies and the federal government in

the zone and articulating clearly what the problems are and how they can be resolved. The NGO has equally organised a peace conference in the zone with the aim of bringing a vision of unity, creating an understanding that there are alternative solutions to development through learning sustainable practices, energizing economic activities and initiating a youth green team as well as addressing women issues and helping to create a micro-finance programme to start up businesses especially for local women. (Oyitso, 2013).

Apart from these NGOs initiatives, successive governments have set up various strategies to ameliorate the developmental gap in these oil producing states which include the establishment of interventionist agency known as the Presidential Task Force popularly known as 1.5 per-cent committee replaced the NDDB in 1980. It was put in place by the civilian administration of President Shehu Shagari. The task force could not achieve much because of lack of fund and it was used as an avenue of official profligacy and politicised its activities (Chokor & Obadan, 2006).

The formation of the Oil Mineral Producing Area Development Commission (OMPADEC) which had its headquarters in Port Harcourt, Rivers State was set up by decree No 23 of 1992 and inaugurated on 19th of October, 1992. The aim of setting up this Commission was to rehabilitate, carry out infrastructural and manpower development, offer environmental protection, and pollution services. It was also considered a veritable instrument for propagating peace and understanding between oil companies and the communities in which they operate. Its goal was to foster peace and development by genuinely satisfying the needs and aspirations of the people. However, inadequate funding, lack of master plan, official profligacy and undue politicisation made it unable to change the lives of the people.

The setting aside of 13 % of net contributions of proceed of oil as the Derivation Fund to develop the oil producing areas. The 13% derivation that is considered inadequate compensation for the zone have not guaranteed development and alleviation of mass poverty. It is also worthy of note that there is no legislation in oil producing states regulating the spending of the 13% from the federation account on special projects to develop the oil producing communities. (Akanji, & Oyitso, 2012). Infact the governors of the oil producing states spend the 13% derivation arbitrarily and not on developing the zone.

The Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) was established in 1999 by former President Olusegun Obasanjo to deal urgently with the developmental needs of the

zone and bring sustainable prosperity and peace to the area. The mission statement, vision and strategy of the commission include: to facilitate the rapid, even sustainable development of the zone that is economically prosperous, socially stable and ecologically peaceful, to offer lasting solution to the socio-economic difficulties of the zone; preparation of a comprehensive master plan on the development of the zone; and implementation of development projects that will affect peoples' lives positively and which will become part of the master plan. (NDDC Bulletin, 2003).

The expectation is that the setting up of the NDDC will bring development to the zone thereby addressing the basic human needs of identity, freedom, well-being and survival and significantly contributes towards the realization of sustainable peace and development in the zone (Akanji & Oyitso, 2011). However, the impact of the Commission have not been felt in the zone especially in the rural areas and this has further worsened the crisis situation. The Niger Delta Peace forum was initiated by late President Umar Musa Yar'dua in 2007 comprising the governors of oil producing communities, oil companies operating in the zone and all other stake-holders to chart a new course to address the lingering crisis in order to bring peace and development to the zone. In the same vein, the Ministry of the Niger Delta was created to further address the problem of the zone and also an amnesty programme was created by the federal government in June, 2009 where militants are required to surrender their weapons and in return received presidential pardon, education, training and access to rehabilitation programme. All these are aimed at bringing peace to the zone.

The problem of the zone persists till date in spite of the various intervention agencies and programmes put in place by government and NGOs to address the problem. The question is how peace can be maintained in the zone in the face of these crisis and agitations. Against this backdrop, within the community, there are institutions that have been used to govern the affairs of the people like the traditional rulers, council of chiefs and age grade. The traditional rulers are the custodian of traditional norms of their community, as a result, they command respect and influence from their subjects. Members of the community hold these traditional leaders in high esteem. They are used as organs of peace in the oil producing communities within the zone (Oyitso, Akanji & Orobator, 2013). Hence, there is need to integrate them into the peace-building process in the community. Therefore, the study focuses on the role of traditional institutions in promoting peace and sustainable development in the South - South Geo Political zone.

## **Statement of the Problem**

Efforts of stakeholders in organising peace programmes and seminars and the various economic measures like the formation of OMPADEC, NDDC and the establishment of the Ministry of Niger Delta by the past administration to address skill needs of the people and formulating and coordinating policies for the development of the zone have not succeeded in bringing the desired peace and development. In spite of these efforts, inter and intra communal conflicts, youth restiveness, hostage taking of oil workers and pipeline vandalism still pervade the zone (Oyitso & Orobator, 2014). The implication is that there cannot be any meaningful development in the midst of wars. It is assumed that the existing structures and approaches used by government and the execution of community development projects in oil producing communities by oil companies will foster peace. However, the crises still pervade the zone. What then can be done to bring the desired peace and development to the zone? Many studies have been carried out in the zone on the crisis, underdevelopment and impact of oil exploration on the economic life of the people, impact of NDDC programmes on oil producing communities and the relationship of NDDC programme and facilities on the development of the zone and also empowerment programmes and perceived reduction of youth restiveness in the zone and transformation strategies for peace-building, but the role of traditional institutions on peace and sustainable development have not been adequately addressed. The study therefore investigated the role of traditional institutions like traditional council of chiefs and age grade systems in fostering peace and sustainable development in the zone.

## **Purpose of the Study**

The main purpose of the study is to

4. Find out the role of traditional Institutions (such as traditional council of chiefs) in promoting peace and sustainable development in the zone.
5. Ascertain the role of age grade system in promoting peace and sustainable development in the zone
6. Determine the benefits derived from the usage of traditional Institutions in promoting peace and development in the zone.

## **Research Questions**

Therefore, the following research questions were raised to guide the study.

1. What are the roles of traditional Institutions (such as traditional council of chiefs) in promoting peace and sustainable development in the zone?
2. What are the role of age grade system in promoting peace and sustainable development in the zone?

3. What are the benefits derived from the usage of traditional Institutions in promoting peace and sustainable development in the zone?

## **Literature Review**

### **Traditional Council of Chiefs and Peace-Building**

The traditional rulers are seen as the custodians of our culture. This must be one of the reasons why they remain and are still relevant. According to Ikimi (2001), the administration of justice was in the hands of the council of elders. The elders in council settle disputes, try offenders against the laws of the land and mete out punishment as due. Ikimi further states that traditional rulers hold court and settle dispute between their chiefs and, when inter-communal conflicts breaks out, they and the institutions they control are involved in seeking a solution. Africans use council of elders, king's court, people's (open) assemblies, etc. for disputes settlement and justice dispensation (Nwolise, 2005). Onoge (1993) from his study of Nigeria, confirms that before the arrival of the colonial forces, and the amalgamation of 1914, social conflicts were monitored, prevented, managed and resolved through established mechanisms generally accepted by the communities and this include traditional institutions such as traditional rulers, council of elders, age sets, chiefs, ancestral cults, religious beliefs and local deities. Individual and group attitude and behaviours were also controlled using these mechanisms. The guiding principles and values guiding conflicts resolution include impartiality, fairness, accommodation, reciprocity, moderation, compromise and genuine reconciliation.

In African societies therefore, each person, family head and community or kingdom leaders were held responsible for maintenance of peace. Any breach of peace by an individual is punished either through rituals, (deities), legal (use of authority) and moral sanctions (public disgrace). According to Nwolise (2005), the essence of conflict resolution and dispute settlement in traditional African societies is to remove the root causes of the conflict, reconcile the conflicting parties genuinely, preserve and ensure enduring peace in the society, restore peace, remove fear, restore social harmony and make everybody involved in the resolved conflict happy and be at peace with each other again, this requires getting at the truth and promote good governance, law and order, security of lives and property,

collective well being and happiness of the people. Also, the functions of leadership as enunciated by Akingbade (2001) include ensuring peace and unity in the community, rapid development of the community, settle disputes among subjects, provide assistance to the people when in distress, liaise with government and community and allocation of land.

The overall aim of leadership is the protection of the interest of people with the government and maintenance of peace, law and order in the community. That is why Tamuno (1983) states that indigenous authorities are responsible for maintaining law and order in their communities (Akanji & Oyitso, 2011, Oyitso, Akanji & Orobator, 2014).

### **The Age Grade System and Peace-Building**

**The age grade system** according to Oduaran (1994) provides the base from which a virile village committee could grow. The importance of the village committee has been clearly recognised by Anyanwu (1982) who reason that it must be the starting point from which new ideas and drive take their origin and at the point which initiative must be stimulated. Beattie (1972) is of the view that members of an age grade set are bound together by a network of reciprocal rights and obligations and they generally maintain close and friendly contact throughout their lives. The age-set defend the tribe from attack and provide for the establishment of effective co-operating social groups. That is why Onaiyekan is of the opinion that age - grade system regulates all activities of the tribe. Beattie (1972) sums up the social importance of age-set system under four broad headings; first, they provide a means of establishing corporate groups whose members, while they are in the warrior grades may form a powerful standing army. Second, they provide for the formal transition of individuals from one clearly marked social status to another. The third important function of an age set is to provide for the organised exercise of at least some political authority and lastly, an age-set provides means of establishing social contact, even some sense of tribal unity and cohesion over a wide range than would otherwise be possible.

Further, the functions of age groups in Afashio and other communities according to Imhabekhai (2009) include political organisation and administration, communal labour, security and defence, discipline and social control, fund raising for community development projects and promoting oneness and unity. According to him, age groups serve as the main personnel for community security and put on rotational basis to keep watch over the



community at night especially to prevent stealing of personal effects and live-stock. Age groups serve as instrument for effecting discipline and social control in the community. Age group also perform the functions of promoting oneness and unity. People who belong to the same group have strong bond of oneness and unity among each other. They rally round their members during burial ceremonies and other social function. Age group equally help in raising fund for community development projects in the community. Levies are imposed on age groups according to the age and strength of membership composition and perceived ability to pay by each group (Akanji & Oyitso, 2011).

It can therefore be concluded that age-grade system especially the youth body act as pressure group in the community, help to enforce resolution that are reached by the council of elders, settle minor disputes and communal clashes amongst various communities. That may be why Ikimi (2001) notes that age grade continues to play a great role in the community.

### **Methodology**

The descriptive survey research design was adopted for this study. The population for this study consists of the inhabitants of the nine selected communities of the South – South Geo – Political Zone. Stratified proportional random sampling technique was used to select one thousand four hundred and sixty – six (1466) respondents from three (3) local government areas in each of Delta, Bayelsa, and Rivers state. The instrument used for the study was titled Traditional Institutions Peace and Sustainable Development Questionnaire (TIPSDQ). The content validity of the instrument was determined by experts in educational programme evaluation in the Faculty of Education, University of Benin. The reliability was determined through a test-retest method. A small sample size of 30 respondents was used in the test. They were tested with the research instrument, that is the questionnaire and their responses were rated and scored. After a period of two weeks, the sample was re-administered to the same group. Subsequently, the scores of both tests were used as a means of computing the reliability coefficient and 0.75 co-efficient was obtained. The data collected was analyzed using the inferential statistics of frequency counts, simple percentages and chi square.

### **Findings and Discussion**

#### **Table 1: Role of Age-Grade System in promoting Peace and sustainable development**

Items	Age Grade Association and Peace Building				Total	X <sup>2</sup> Crit	X <sup>2</sup> Cal	D F	P
	SD	D	A	SA					
Age grade association as part of decision making body will restore peace in the zone	214 (14.6%)	181 (12.4%)	688 (46.9%)	383 (26.1%)	1466 (100.0%)	16.9	167.667	.9	.000
By engaging the leaders of the age grade associations in regular dialogue in the community will make them see the need to maintain peace in the zone	157 (10.7%)	179 (12.2%)	868 (59.1%)	262 (17.9%)	1466 (100.0%)				
The empowerment of youths in skill acquisition will reduce youth restiveness in the area, thereby bringing peace to the zone	168 (11.5%)	155 (10.6%)	605 (41.2%)	538 (36.7%)	1466 (100.0%)				
The intervention of the age grade association in infrastructural development of the zone will foster peace coexistence by parties involved	217 (14.8%)	151 (10.3%)	688 (46.9%)	410 (28.0%)	1466 (100.0%)				
Total	756 (12.9%)	666 (11.4%)	2849 (48.5%)	1593 (27.2%)	5876 (100.0%)				

The Table above shows that X<sup>2</sup> calculated value 167.667 and the X<sup>2</sup> critical value =16.9 at df =.9 at 0.05 level of significance. It was observed that X<sup>2</sup> calculated was greater than X<sup>2</sup> critical. Therefore, age grade system will promote peace and sustainable development

in the zone. Also, majority of the respondents, 73% indicated that making age grade system as part of decision making body will restore peace in the zone, 77% are of the opinion that engaging leaders of these associations in regular dialogue in the community will make them see the need to maintain peace in the zone, 74.8% agreed that intervention of age grade system in infrastructural development in the region will foster peaceful co-existence of parties in the community while 71% are of the opinion that youth empowerment in skill acquisition will reduce youth restiveness in the area, thereby bringing peace to the zone. From the major highlights, it can be concluded that age grade association could promote peace and sustainable in the zone.

**Table 2: The role of Traditional Council of Chiefs in promoting Peace and Sustainable development in the zone**

Item	Traditional Council of Chiefs				Total	X <sup>2</sup> crit	X <sup>2</sup> cal	Df	Sig. P
	D	SD	A	SA					
Intervention of traditional council of chiefs in the settlement of land disputes will foster peace in the zone	31 (2.2%)	68 (4.7%)	765 (52.1%)	602 (41.0%)	1466 (100.0%)	28.9	398.916	18	.000
The settlement of communal clashes in the community by the traditional councils of chiefs will enhance peace-building in the zone	62 (4.3%)	146 (10.0%)	838 (57.1%)	420 (28.6%)	1466 (100.0%)				

The intervention of traditional council of chiefs in resolving conflicts between communities and government will foster peace in the zone	90 (6.2%)	160 (11.0%)	632 (43.1%)	584 (39.8%)	1466 (100.0%)				
The intervention of traditional council of chiefs in the resolution of conflict between communities and oil companies will ensure peace and development in the zone	118 (8.1%)	163 (11.2%)	608 (41.4%)	577 (39.3%)	1466 (100.0%)				

Resolution of conflicts between communities by traditional council of chiefs will ensure peaceful coexistence among communities thereby leading to peace and development in the zone	89 (6.1%)	117 (8.0%)	731 (49.8%)	529 (36.1%)	1466 (14.3%)				
The intervention of traditional council of chiefs in resolution of conflicts between elders and youths in the communities will ensure in peace in the area	105 (7.2%)	137 (9.4%)	671 (49.7%)	553 (37.7%)	1466 (100.0%)				

The intervention of traditional council of chiefs in the payment of land compensation to affected communities will ensure harmonious relationship in the zone	229 (15.6%)	172 (11.8%)	589 (40.1%)	476 (32.4%)	1466 (100.0%)				
Total	724 (100.0%)	963 (100.0%)	4834 (100.0%)	3741 (100.0%)	10283 (100.0%)				

The distribution on Table 2 shows the relationship of traditional council of chiefs and peace-building because  $X^2$  calculated value of 398.916 and the  $X^2$  critical value = 28.9 as df = 15 at 0.05 level of significance. It was observed that  $X^2$  calculated was greater than  $X^2$  critical. Therefore, there is a significant relationship between traditional council of chiefs, peace and sustainable development. The major highlights of the distribution reveals that majority of the respondents (93.1%) believe the intervention of traditional council of chiefs in the settlement of land disputes will foster peace in the zone (85.7%) agreed that the settlement of communal clashes in the community will promote peace and sustainable development in the zone, 80.1% are of the opinion that resolution of conflicts between communities and oil companies will ensure peace and development in the zone while 85.9% believe resolution of conflicts between communities will ensure peaceful co-existence among communities, thereby, leading to peace and development of the zone.

Also, 97.1% are of the opinion that resolution of conflicts between elders and youths in the communities will ensure peace in the area, 82.9% stated that resolution of conflicts between communities and government will foster peace in the zone while 72.6% agreed that payment of compensation to affected communities will ensure peaceful co-existence and harmonious relationship in the zone. In conclusion therefore, the findings of the study

reveal that traditional council of chiefs are expected to maintain law and order in their various communities, help to settle disputes among families and community members.

**Table 3: Benefits of Traditional Institutions in promoting peace and sustainable development in the zone**

Items	Community-based Institutions/Cultural Practices and Peace-Building				Total	X <sup>2</sup> crit	X <sup>2</sup> cal	Df	Sig. P
	D	SD	A	SA					
Restore peace to the zone	164 (11.2%)	97 (6.7%)	628 (42.8%)	577 (39.3%)	1466 (100%)	25.0	167.61	15	.000
Develop the zone	172 (11.8%)	166 (11.4%)	596 (40.6%)	532 (36.3%)	1466 (100%)				
Create employment	169 (11.6%)	273 (18.6%)	469 (32.0%)	555 (37.8%)	1466 (100%)				
Allow active participation in decision making	229 (15.6%)	161 (11.0%)	593 (40.4%)	483 (32.9%)	1466 (100%)				
Ensure cordial coexistence between the oil producing communities by oil companies	171 (11.7%)	201 (13.7%)	553 (37.7%)	541 (36.9%)	1466 (100%)				
Empower the youth by acquiring skills	217 (14.8%)	227 (15.5%)	477 (32.5%)	545 (37.1%)	1466 (100%)				
Total	1122 (12.8%)	1125 (12.8%)	3316 (37.7%)	3236 (36.7%)	8814 (100%)				



The Table above shows  $X^2$  calculated value of 167.61 and  $X^2$  critical value = 25.0 at df .15 at 0.05 level of significance. It was observed that  $X^2$  calculated of 167.61 was greater than  $X^2$  critical value of 25.0. It was therefore concluded that great benefits can be derived from the usage of traditional institutions in bringing desirable peace and development to the zone. Also, the distribution on Table 3 indicates the benefits of traditional institutions in promoting peace and sustainable development in the zone. The major highlights is that most of the respondents 82% agreed that traditional institutions would restore peace in the zone, 76.9% develop the zone, 69.8% create employment, 73.3% allow active participation in decision making, 74.6% ensure cordial coexistence between the oil producing communities and 70% empower the youth through acquisition of skills. From these major highlights, it could be inferred that there are positive benefits derived from traditional institutions in promoting peace and sustainable development in the zone include to restore peace, develop the zone, create employment, active community participation in decision making, cordial coexistence between the oil producing communities and the oil companies and youth empowerment through skill acquisition.

### **Discussion of Findings**

The findings of the study revealed that the role of age grade system (that is the youth body) in promoting peace and sustainable development include maintenance of peace in the communities in times of election, resolving communal clashes, initiating ideas for the good of the community, interacting with oil companies operating in their zone to train their youth in area of skill acquisition to make them employable and meet with head of council of chiefs during communal clashes and building the youth towards developing sound teachings on peace. Ogbai, (2003) noted that the youth are the strength of any community. They form a large part of labour force and have a high level of productivity. In every nation or community, they are the leaders of tomorrow. In the community, they perform some functions in the political development, community security and defence, social activities and physical project implementation. It must also be noted that these youths are used as political thugs by politicians during electioneering campaigns but when they are integrated into decision making body as Giadom (2009) noted they can be educated on the dangers involved in being used as political thugs and equally teach them on the importance of peaceful co-existence thereby instilling in them the spirit of unity, love and peace in the community.

Furthermore, the findings revealed that the role of traditional council of chief include settlement of land disputes, settlement of communal clashes in the community, resolution of conflicts between communities and oil companies, between communities, elders and youths, communities and government and payment of compensation to affected communities will ensure peaceful co-existence and harmonious relationship in the zone. The findings is in line with the view of Ikimi (2001) who states that traditional council of elders settle disputes between their chiefs and also find solutions to inter communal conflicts when it occurs among communities. Also, the functions of leadership as enunciated by Akingbade (2001) confirm the findings of this study. That is, the traditional leaders ensure peace and unity among the people, rapid development of the community, provide assistance to the people, settle disputes among families, communities, liaise with government and communities, allocation of land, giving of chieftaincy titles and giving of advice and counseling to the people amongst others. Also, Nwolise (2005) stated that in African societies, each person, family head and community or kingdom leader was held responsible for the maintenance of peace in the community.

In addition, the findings revealed that there are positive benefits derived from the usage of traditional institutions in promoting peace and sustainable development in the zone include to restore peace, develop the zone, create employment, active community participation in decision making, cordial coexistence between the oil producing communities and the oil companies and youth empowerment through skill acquisition. The findings support the views of Jegede (2003) and Fawundu (2006) that state that real development can only take place in a peaceful environment. Also, Fawundu (2006) believes that a peace agenda must include education, easy access to justice and a more equitable distribution of resources. In addition, Ghali (1992) opines that peace-building identifies and supports “structures which will tend to consolidate peace and advance a sense of confidence and well being among people. Psychologists believe that equitable distribution of human resources is a necessary step for creating peace, empowerment of individuals and community to challenge and change the world rather than adapt to unjust situations (Freire, 1993, Martin – Baro, 1994).

## Conclusion and Recommendations

The study focused on the role of traditional institutions in promoting peace and sustainable development in South – South Geo – political zone of Nigeria. The data derived from the study revealed that traditional council of elders performs certain functions in community ranging from settlement of disputes, communal clashes and payment of compensation to land owners. The traditional rulers command respect from their subjects because they are custodian of traditions, culture and norms of their people. The people of the zone believed that these traditional institutions are very effective in bringing peace and sustainable development to the zone because these institutions are closer to the people and meet their immediate needs.

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made.

- Traditional institutions should be strengthened and used as a means of conflict management and peace-building in the region.
- Traditional institutions should be enlarged to include all leaders of various groups in the community. These include women, youth, religious leaders and non-governmental organizations.
- Awareness campaign should be organized to educate community members on the importance of maintaining peace in the zone. The people should be taught that development can only thrive in a peaceful environment. In essence, if the people want development, they must maintain peace, law and order in the community.

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