CONFLICT RESOLUTION AND CRISIS PREPAREDNESS

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1. BACKGROUND/INTRODUCTION

Conflicts leading to crises are normal features of every human society or organisation. Thus, conflict resolution and crisis preparedness are complementary dimensions of effective organisational governance, community relations and sustainable development. Conflict resolution refers to processes through which disagreements, competing interests and grievances are identified, managed and transformed through negotiation, mediation, dialogue and other peaceful mechanisms. Crisis preparedness, conversely, concerns the development of institutional capacities to anticipate, prevent, respond to and recover from disruptive events. Contemporary crisis-management scholarship emphasises that organisations should move from reactive responses towards systematic risk identification, preparedness, stakeholder coordination and organisational learning (Pearson & Mitroff, 1993).

Effective preparedness requires clear leadership responsibilities, contingency planning, early-warning mechanisms, communication systems, trained personnel and coordinated stakeholder responses. Boin & 't Hart (2003) conceptualise crisis management as encompassing prevention, preparedness, response and reconstruction, while Boin & 't Hart (2010) emphasise that effective emergency management requires appropriate organisational structures, resources and coordination mechanisms. Importantly, conflict and crisis management should involve communities and other stakeholders because local participation improves risk identification, legitimacy, communication and resilience. The Sendai Framework similarly emphasises understanding risk, strengthening risk governance, investing in resilience and enhancing preparedness for effective response and recovery (UNDRR, 2015). Thus, integrating conflict prevention, dialogue, early warning, preparedness, response and organisational learning enables institutions and communities to reduce vulnerabilities, manage disputes constructively and strengthen resilience.

2. PURPOSE OF THIS TRAINING

This training is intended to:

- Strengthen institutional capacity by establishing robust organisational structures, policies, systems, procedures and mechanisms that enable the Trust to perform its statutory responsibilities efficiently.
- Improve governance and accountability through transparent decision-making, effective oversight, stakeholder participation, ethical leadership and clearly defined roles and responsibilities.
- Enhance financial capacity by strengthening budgeting, financial planning, resource mobilisation, expenditure control, auditing and transparent financial reporting.
- Improve administrative efficiency through effective human-resource management, record keeping, procurement, coordination and internal communication.
- Strengthen operational capacity for effective programme planning, implementation, monitoring, evaluation and reporting.

- Promote stakeholder and community engagement to ensure interventions reflect identified community priorities.
- Enhance sustainable development outcomes by improving the Trust's ability to deliver inclusive, responsive, measurable and sustainable interventions that improve livelihoods and wellbeing across host communities.

3. OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this presentation are, to:

(i) Identify sources of community conflicts
(ii) Develop mediation and negotiation techniques
(iii) Develop grievance redress mechanisms, and
(iv) Discuss crisis management and emergency response planning

4. SOURCES OF COMMUNITY CONFLICTS IN THE CONTEXT OF EMHCDT

Within the context of EMHCDT, community conflict should be understood as arising not merely from disagreement among individuals, but from deeper struggles over resources, representation, environmental impacts, benefits, power and trust surrounding development interventions in host communities. In extractive and resource-bearing communities, conflict often emerges where community expectations, corporate interests, government policies and traditional institutions intersect. Studies of Nigeria's Niger Delta demonstrate that such conflicts are usually multidimensional, combining economic deprivation, political exclusion, environmental grievances and weaknesses in institutional governance (Obi, 2010; Ibaba, 2005).

***Inequitable distribution of benefits and resources*.**

One major source of community conflict is the perception that development benefits, employment opportunities, contracts, scholarships, compensation and infrastructure are distributed unfairly. Where some families, villages, youth groups or traditional institutions receive greater benefits than others, perceptions of relative deprivation can develop. Resource-rich communities may become particularly aggrieved when substantial wealth is extracted from their locality while poverty, unemployment and inadequate public services remain prevalent. Ibaba (2005) identifies material deprivation and exclusion from oil wealth as central factors underlying oil-company–community conflicts in the Niger Delta.

***Environmental degradation and loss of livelihoods*.**

Pollution, land degradation, destruction of farmland, water contamination, gas flaring, erosion and other ecological impacts can generate serious disputes between communities and companies. Such environmental pressures become especially conflictual where people depend directly upon land, forests and water for farming, fishing and other livelihoods. Udoh (2020) demonstrates that environmental degradation associated with oil production intensified

longstanding grievances and competition over increasingly scarce productive resources in the Niger Delta.

Land acquisition, compensation and ownership disputes.

Development activities frequently require land for installations, roads, pipelines, facilities and related infrastructure. Conflict may arise over who legitimately owns the land, who should negotiate on behalf of landowners and how compensation should be calculated. Historical evidence from Nigeria demonstrates that legal and institutional arrangements favouring extractive operators contributed to socio-ecological displacement and community resistance (Umejesi & Akpan, 2013).

***Leadership and representation struggles*.**

Another important source of conflict is disagreement over who legitimately represents a host community. Traditional rulers, Community Development Associations, youth leaders, women's groups, land-owning families and political actors may compete for recognition and influence. Such struggles become particularly intense where community representation determines access to contracts, development funds or decision-making positions. Mai-Bornu (2019) shows that leadership, organisational structures and competing narratives substantially shape the character of resource-related conflict.

***Exclusion from decision-making*.**

Conflict develops when communities believe that projects, budgets or development priorities have been imposed upon them without meaningful consultation. Participation that is merely symbolic can deepen resentment rather than generate legitimacy. Community members therefore need opportunities to influence needs assessments, project selection, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. Exclusion from political and economic decision-making, particularly when combined with unequal resource distribution, has been associated with greater risks of violent conflict in resource-producing regions.

Youth unemployment and economic marginalisation.

Young people frequently constitute a major stakeholder group in host communities. Unemployment, limited livelihood opportunities and perceptions that outsiders receive jobs or contracts can generate frustration, protest and mobilisation. These grievances may be exploited by local political entrepreneurs or militant groups. Accordingly, youth engagement, skills development and transparent employment policies should form major components of EMHCDT conflict prevention.

Inter-community and intra-community rivalry.

Conflict may arise between neighbouring settlements over boundaries, recognition as host communities, entitlement to compensation or location of development projects. Within communities, disputes can also develop between clans, families, generations or interest groups.

Resource-related conflicts therefore cannot automatically be understood as conflicts between companies and communities alone; they frequently involve competing interests within communities themselves (Obi, 2014).

***Lack of transparency and accountability*.**

Suspicion concerning financial allocations, contract awards, compensation payments and project implementation can undermine community trust. Poor disclosure creates opportunities for rumours, allegations of corruption and elite capture. Conversely, evidence suggests that stronger local governance can moderate resource-related conflict by improving compensation mechanisms and reducing negative externalities (Sexton, 2020).

***Unrealistic expectations and communication failures*.**

Communities may expect EMHCDT institutions or operating companies to provide employment, roads, schools, healthcare, electricity and other services ordinarily associated with government responsibilities. Where such expectations are inadequately managed, delays or unmet promises can become sources of grievance. Inconsistent communication, misinformation and failure to provide timely explanations can therefore transform manageable disagreements into serious disputes.

***Historical grievances and declining institutional trust*.**

Current conflicts are often rooted in earlier experiences of marginalisation, failed promises, displacement or environmental harm. Historical distrust can cause communities to interpret even new interventions through the lens of previous injustices. Nigerian evidence shows that contemporary resource conflicts are historically embedded and cannot adequately be explained simply by present-day resource competition (Umejesi & Akpan, 2013; Obi, 2014).

Consequently, effective EMHCDT conflict management requires equitable benefit distribution, participatory decision-making, environmental responsibility, transparent governance, credible grievance mechanisms, inclusive representation and sustained community dialogue. Conflict prevention should therefore address structural causes rather than responding only after disputes have escalated.

5. MEDIATION AND NEGOTIATION TECHNIQUES IN EMHDCT MANAGEMENT

In the context of EMHCDT management, mediation and negotiation are important mechanisms for managing disputes involving host communities, trustees, companies, traditional institutions, youth and women's groups, government agencies and other stakeholders. Because community conflicts commonly involve competing interests over development projects, employment, contracts, compensation, environmental concerns, leadership and benefit distribution, adversarial approaches alone may worsen relationships. Mediation and negotiation should therefore emphasise dialogue, participation, fairness, trust-building and sustainable agreements. Mediation scholarship particularly stresses structured communication, impartial facilitation and

party ownership of solutions (Boulle, 2005), while conflict-transformation approaches emphasise repairing relationships in addition to resolving immediate disagreements (Lederach, 1995). These are important:

Interest-Based or Principled Negotiation

A particularly useful technique is interest-based negotiation, associated with Fisher, Ury and Patton (1991). Rather than bargaining over fixed positions—such as "we want ten contracts" versus "only five contracts are available"—parties identify the underlying needs, interests and concerns behind their demands. These could include unemployment, perceptions of exclusion, equitable participation or livelihood security. The major principles are to separate people from the problem, focus on interests rather than positions, generate several options for mutual gain and use objective criteria for deciding among alternatives. Interest-based approaches can move parties from confrontation towards joint problem-solving.

Active Listening

Mediators and EMHCDT officials should use active listening, involving careful attention to each party's concerns, summarising what has been said, asking clarifying questions and acknowledging emotions without necessarily agreeing with every claim. Listening is especially important where communities feel historically neglected or marginalised. Effective listening communicates respect and can reveal interests hidden beneath confrontational positions. Boulle (2005) identifies communication and facilitation skills as central components of effective mediation.

Reframing

Reframing involves restating hostile, accusatory or positional statements in neutral and problem-solving language. For example: "The Trust has completely abandoned our community"

may be reframed as: "The community is concerned about the level and distribution of development interventions." Reframing reduces emotionally charged language without dismissing the substance of grievances. It shifts discussion from blame towards identifying problems that can be jointly addressed.

Stakeholder Mapping and Inclusive Representation

Before mediation begins, EMHCDTs should determine who has an interest in the dispute and who must participate in resolving it. Stakeholders may include traditional rulers, affected families, youth organisations, women's groups, Community Development Associations, persons with disabilities, contractors, companies and government agencies. Multi-stakeholder disputes are more likely to produce legitimate outcomes when relevant parties have meaningful opportunities to participate. Consensus-building scholarship consequently emphasises representation of affected interests as an important component of durable public agreements (Susskind, McKearnan & Thomas-Larmer, 1999).

Joint Problem-Solving

The mediator should encourage parties to define the conflict as a shared problem requiring a shared solution, rather than a battle between winners and losers. For instance, conflict over employment quotas might be reframed as: “How can employment opportunities be distributed transparently and fairly among qualified members of affected communities?” Parties can then generate alternative solutions together. Consensus-building processes can generate agreements that command stronger stakeholder support because participants have contributed to shaping them.

Caucusing or Separate Meetings

Where emotions are high or negotiations have reached an impasse, mediators may hold private caucuses with individual parties. Caucusing allows parties to express sensitive concerns, reassess unrealistic demands and explore possible compromises without losing face publicly. However, mediators must manage confidentiality carefully and avoid creating perceptions of favouritism. Caucusing should ultimately help parties return to constructive joint dialogue (Boulle, 2005).

Use of Trusted Community Mediators

EMHCDT conflicts may sometimes benefit from respected traditional rulers, religious leaders, elders, professionals or other trusted intermediaries. Lederach's work demonstrates that effective mediation does not always require an outsider completely detached from the parties. In some cultural contexts, an “insider-partial” mediator who possesses established relationships and enjoys the confidence of disputants can be particularly effective (Wehr & Lederach, 1991). This approach is especially relevant in communities where customary conflict-resolution institutions retain considerable legitimacy.

Consensus Building

Where several communities or stakeholder groups are involved, **consensus-building techniques** are preferable to simple majority voting. Voting can create permanent winners and losers, whereas consensus processes attempt to produce arrangements that address the principal interests of all significant stakeholders. Susskind, McKearnan & Thomas-Larmer (1999) argue that consensus building can improve both the legitimacy and implementation of negotiated agreements because stakeholders are more likely to support outcomes they participated in producing.

Objective Criteria and Evidence-Based Negotiation

Negotiations should rely on transparent and independently verifiable criteria rather than personal influence. Questions involving compensation, employment, procurement or project allocation could therefore utilise: population and needs assessments; environmental-impact data; existing agreements; professional valuations; applicable legislation and regulations; and

clearly published eligibility criteria. Objective standards reduce perceptions of favouritism and make negotiated outcomes easier to defend.

BATNA and Alternative Assessment

Parties should understand their Best Alternative to a Negotiated Agreement **(BATNA)**. The concept encourages negotiators to evaluate what will happen if negotiations fail (Fisher, Ury & Patton, 1991). For EMHCDT stakeholders, alternatives might include further internal grievance procedures, regulatory intervention, arbitration or litigation. Knowing alternatives helps prevent both coercive settlements and unrealistic demands.

Restorative Dialogue and Relationship Repair

Not every EMHCDT dispute should end merely with financial settlement. Conflicts involving broken promises, environmental damage, disrespect, leadership rivalry or historical mistrust may require restorative dialogue. Parties should be allowed to explain harms suffered, acknowledge responsibilities and determine how relationships can be repaired. Lederach (1995) argues that sustainable conflict transformation requires attention to relationships and social structures underlying disputes rather than concentrating solely on immediate manifestations of conflict.

Option Generation and Package Agreements

Instead of discussing only one demand at a time, negotiators can create multiple options or packages. For example, a dispute over employment might be addressed through a combination of direct employment, apprenticeships, scholarships, local procurement and vocational training. Such packages enlarge the bargaining space and allow trade-offs across different stakeholder interests.

Face-Saving and Respectful Communication

Negotiators should avoid humiliation, threats and public accusations. Traditional leaders, youth representatives, company officials and trustees may find it difficult to compromise if doing so publicly appears to signify defeat. Mediators should therefore design agreements in ways that enable all parties to explain the outcome positively to their constituencies. This is especially important in community settings where dignity, status and reputation influence conflict behaviour.

Written Agreements, Monitoring and Follow-Up

Mediation should conclude with a **clear written agreement** specifying: Issue, Commitment, Responsible Party, Resources, Timeline, Monitoring Indicator, Reporting Mechanism and Review Date. Implementation monitoring is essential because unfulfilled agreements can become new sources of conflict. Consensus-building research also recognises commitments to implementation and continuing relationships as important indicators of successful dispute resolution (Innes, 1999).

These techniques can be integrated into a structured pathway in an EMHCDT Conflict-Management System.:

→Early Dialogue
→ Stakeholder Mapping
→ Interest Identification
→ Negotiation
→ Mediation
→ Consensus Building
→ Written Agreement
→ Implementation Monitoring
→ Relationship Repair
→ Institutional Learning.

The central principle is that EMHCDT mediation should not merely terminate disputes; it should address grievances, restore trust, protect relationships and improve future community-development governance. Combining principled negotiation, culturally legitimate mediation and consensus building makes conflict management more participatory, transparent and sustainable.

7. CREDIBLE GRIEVANCE MECHANISMS IN THE CONTEXT OF EMHCDT

Conflict resolution and credible grievance mechanisms are central to the effective functioning of the EMHCDT because host-community development takes place within an environment characterised by competing interests, expectations, historical grievances and contestations over representation, benefits and development priorities. Nigeria's petroleum-producing communities have historically experienced conflicts associated with environmental degradation, perceived marginalisation, inadequate development, inequitable benefit-sharing and weak company-community relations (Idemudia & Ite, 2006; Watts, 2004). The establishment of Host Communities Development Trusts under the Petroleum Industry Act (PIA) 2021 therefore represents an attempt to institutionalise community development, participation and peaceful relations between petroleum operators and their host communities. Recent scholarship nevertheless warns that HCDTs themselves may become arenas of conflict unless participation, accountability and dispute-resolution arrangements are deliberately strengthened (Obiri et al., 2026).

The most effective conflict-resolution strategy is one that prevents avoidable disputes from becoming crises. EMHCDT should therefore institutionalise conflict prevention and early warning rather than relying primarily on intervention after disputes have escalated. A preventive approach should involve: continuous stakeholder consultation; transparent disclosure of decisions and available resources; participatory needs assessment; clear project-selection criteria; equitable representation of communities; monitoring of community sentiments; and early identification of rumours and misinformation. Others are: periodic engagement with traditional rulers, youths and

women; conflict-sensitive project planning; and accessible channels through which emerging concerns can be reported. This is particularly important because disputes in petroleum communities frequently have cumulative roots. What appears to be a disagreement over a project or contract may actually be connected to earlier perceptions of exclusion, injustice or marginalisation. Many things are required for an effective grievance management system:

(a) Establish an EMHCDT Conflict Early-Warning System

EMHCDT should develop a simple Community Conflict Early-Warning and Response System (CEWRS). Community relations officers, advisory committee members, traditional institutions and designated community focal persons can serve as sources of early-warning information.

Indicators requiring attention may include: rumours, increasing complaints, petitions, withdrawal from meetings, inflammatory statements, leadership disputes, demonstrations, threats, obstruction of projects and violence. Each stage should trigger a proportionate response. Minor misunderstandings may require clarification; recurring grievances may require facilitated dialogue; serious disputes may require mediation; and disputes involving rights or statutory obligations may require arbitration or regulatory/legal intervention. This approach moves EMHCDT from reactive crisis management to preventive conflict governance.

(b) Establish a Credible Grievance Redress Mechanism

A Grievance Redress Mechanism (GRM) is a formal process through which affected persons or groups can raise concerns about decisions, activities or impacts and receive timely, fair and transparent responses.

For EMHCDT, the GRM should cover grievances relating to: project selection and location; allocation of community benefits; employment and empowerment opportunities; procurement and contracting; representation within Trust structures; environmental and livelihood impacts; and financial accountability. Others include: discrimination or exclusion; conduct of contractors; delays or abandonment of projects; and relationships among host communities, the Trust and the settlor. A credible mechanism is particularly important because scholars examining the PIA have identified ambiguities and potential gaps surrounding the handling of host-community disputes (Adewumi et al., 2023).

(c) Core principles of a credible EMHCDT grievance mechanism

A grievance mechanism will only command confidence where communities perceive it as legitimate. EMHCDT should therefore ensure that its GRM embodies the following principles:

Accessibility: Every member of the host communities should know where and how complaints can be submitted.

Transparency: Procedures, timelines and responsible officers should be clearly communicated.

Impartiality: Complaints should be considered objectively, irrespective of the status or influence of the complainant.

Confidentiality: Sensitive cases should be handled in ways that protect complainants from intimidation or retaliation.

Inclusiveness: Women, youths, vulnerable groups, persons with disabilities and marginalised households must have equal access.

Timeliness: Complaints should be acknowledged and resolved within predetermined timelines.

Documentation: Every grievance should be registered and tracked from submission to closure.

Right of appeal: Dissatisfied parties should have access to higher levels of review.

Non-retaliation: No person should suffer disadvantage because they raised a legitimate grievance.

(d) A proposed EMHCDT grievance-resolution pathway

A practical system can operate through the following progression (see Figure 1):

→Grievance received
→ Registration
→ Acknowledgement
→ Screening and Classification
→ Investigation
→ Dialogue/Negotiation
→ Mediation
→ Resolution Agreement
→ Implementation
→ Feedback to Complainant
→ Monitoring
→ Closure.

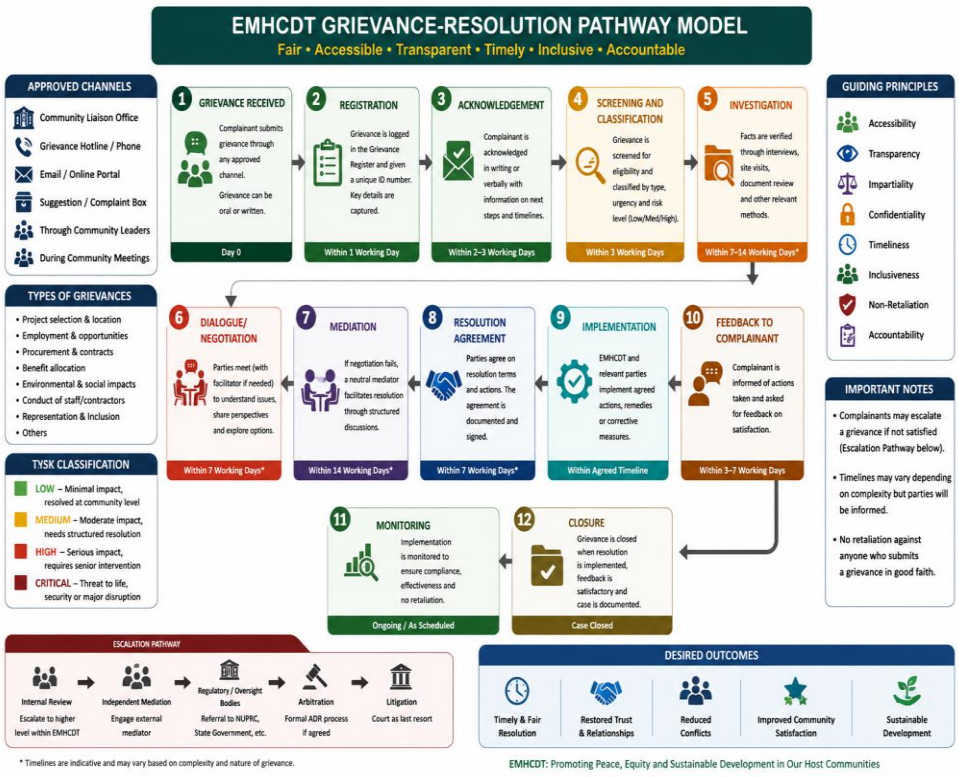


Figure 1: EMHCDT Grievance-Resolution Pathway Model

Where internal mechanisms fail, and external system can be put in place that includes the following pathways:
→Internal Mediation
→ Customary/Community Mediation
→ Independent Mediation
→ Arbitration/Regulatory Intervention
→ Litigation as a last resort (Figure 2).

(e) The Advanced (External) EMHCDT Grievance-Resolution Pathway (Escalated) Model

The EMHCDT external Grievance-Resolution Pathway Model (EGRPM) can be structured as a five-level graduated system in which disputes are resolved at the lowest appropriate level and escalated only when earlier mechanisms fail.

Level	Resolution Mechanism	Key Actors	Core Process	Expected Outcome
1	Internal Mediation	EMHCDT management, grievance officer/committee, complainant	Complaint registration → assessment → dialogue → negotiation	Early settlement, clarification and corrective action

Level	Resolution Mechanism	Key Actors	Core Process	Expected Outcome
2	**Customary/Community Mediation**	Traditional rulers, community leaders, elders, women/youth representatives	Community dialogue → customary mediation → consensus building	Socially legitimate settlement and restored relationships
3	**Independent Mediation**	Neutral professional mediator/ADR expert	Independent assessment → facilitated dialogue → negotiated agreement	Impartial settlement where trust in internal mechanisms is insufficient
4	**Arbitration / Regulatory Intervention**	Arbitrator, NUPRC and other competent authorities	Formal referral → evidence review → arbitration/regulatory determination	Authoritative and enforceable determination
5	**Litigation – Last Resort**	Courts, legal representatives and disputing parties	Judicial proceedings	Binding legal determination

Figure 2: EMHCDT External Conflict-Resolution Model

Four key things are critical for this to effectively work:

(a) Operational flow

GRIEVANCE RECEIVED
↓
Register → Acknowledge → Screen → Classify Risk → Investigate
↓

LEVEL 1: INTERNAL MEDIATION

Can EMHCDT resolve the grievance fairly and satisfactorily?
→ YES: Agreement → Implement Remedy → Monitor → Feedback → Close
→ NO: Escalate ↓

LEVEL 2: CUSTOMARY/COMMUNITY MEDIATION

Can legitimate community institutions facilitate an acceptable settlement?
→ YES: Document Agreement → Implement → Monitor → Reconciliation → Close
→ NO: Escalate ↓

LEVEL 3: INDEPENDENT MEDIATION

Can a neutral third party facilitate mutually acceptable resolution?
→ YES: Settlement Agreement → Implementation → Compliance Monitoring → Close
→ NO: Escalate ↓

LEVEL 4: ARBITRATION / REGULATORY INTERVENTION

Does the dispute require authoritative determination or regulatory action?
→ YES: Determination/Directive → Implementation → Compliance Monitoring → Close
→ Unresolved/Legally contested: Escalate ↓

LEVEL 5: LITIGATION

Court Determination → Compliance → Post-Dispute Relationship Repair

(b) Relationship levels within the model

The pathway can simultaneously be understood through three levels of relationships:

Relationship Level I – Internal/Relational:
EMHCDT ↔ Individual/Group/Community. The emphasis is on dialogue, responsiveness and early settlement.

Relationship Level II – Community/Collaborative:
EMHCDT ↔ Community institutions ↔ Independent mediator. The emphasis shifts toward legitimacy, neutrality, consensus and restoration of relationships.

Relationship Level III – Formal/Authoritative:
EMHCDT ↔ Regulatory/ADR institutions ↔ Courts. Here, voluntary settlement progressively gives way to formal determination, enforceability and legal remedies.

(c) Guiding principle

The model should operate according to the principle: "Resolve early, locally, fairly and collaboratively; escalate only when necessary." Accordingly, escalation should not be automatic. At **every level**, parties should retain an opportunity to return to dialogue or mediation where legally appropriate. This reflects restorative justice thinking, which emphasises repairing harm and relationships (Braithwaite, 2002), while customary mediation can provide culturally legitimate mechanisms for petroleum host-community disputes (Obidimma & Umohatah, 2024).

(d) Recommended safeguards

Across all five levels, EMHCDT should maintain accessibility, impartiality, confidentiality, non-retaliation, documentation, defined timelines, inclusiveness, right of review, transparency and protection of vulnerable complainants. A central Grievance Register should track each case from receipt through escalation and closure.

The complete EMHCDT model can therefore be summarised as: Grievance → Internal Mediation → Customary/Community Mediation → Independent Mediation → Arbitration/Regulatory Intervention → Litigation (Last Resort) → Compliance → Relationship Repair → Institutional Learning. This creates a resolution pyramid in which the broad base represents the large number of grievances expected to be resolved through internal dialogue, while progressively fewer cases move upward toward regulatory or judicial determination. This graduated process reflects the principle that disputes should ordinarily be addressed at the lowest competent and legitimate level, while ensuring that serious cases can be escalated appropriately.

8. **CRISIS MANAGEMENT AND EMERGENCY RESPONSE PLANNING IN THE CONTEXT OF EMHCDT**

Crisis management and emergency response planning should be treated as a core component of EMHCDT governance, rather than as an occasional reaction to unexpected events. Host communities in petroleum-producing areas may face oil spills, fires, explosions, pipeline vandalism, communal violence, environmental contamination, flooding, displacement, protests, infrastructure failure and other emergencies. A credible EMHCDT crisis-management system should therefore combine risk identification, prevention, preparedness, early warning, coordinated response, recovery, relationship repair and institutional learning.

This approach is consistent with the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030, which places emphasis on understanding disaster risk, strengthening risk governance, investing in resilience and enhancing preparedness for effective response and recovery. It also aligns with Nigeria's National Disaster Management Framework, which stresses risk assessment, contingency planning, early-warning systems, capacity building and community-based disaster preparedness.

Institutionalise Comprehensive Risk and Vulnerability Assessment

The starting point should be a systematic Community Crisis and Emergency Risk Assessment. Each EMHCDT should identify the hazards that may affect its constituent communities, their likelihood, possible consequences, vulnerable groups and existing response capacities. Risk assessment should cover technological hazards such as oil spills, pipeline rupture, gas leakage, explosions and industrial accidents, as well as social and environmental risks including communal conflicts, kidnapping, flooding, erosion, disease outbreaks and displacement. The Sendai Framework stresses that disaster management should be grounded in knowledge of hazards, exposure, vulnerability and coping capacity.

Nigeria's National Disaster Management Framework similarly recommends Vulnerability and Capacity Analysis and risk mapping for identifying communities at risk and determining available coping capacities. For EMHCDTs, such assessment should therefore produce a continuously updated community risk register and hazard map.

Establish an EMHCDT Crisis Management Structure

Every EMHCDT should establish a clearly defined Crisis Management and Emergency Response Committee. Membership should include representatives of the Board of Trustees, Management Committee, Advisory Committee, settlor/operator, traditional institutions, youth and women's groups, health services, security agencies and relevant emergency-management institutions. Roles should be established before emergencies occur. Responsibilities should cover incident command, evacuation, security, medical assistance, logistics, communication, relief coordination, environmental response and documentation. This is particularly important because effective emergency management depends upon inter-organisational coordination rather than isolated institutional responses (Comfort, 2007). Nigeria's disaster-management architecture also emphasises coordinated responsibilities across federal, state, local and community institutions.

Develop Community-Based Early-Warning Systems

Crisis planning should incorporate mechanisms capable of detecting emerging threats before they escalate. Early-warning indicators may include pipeline leakage reports, rising communal tensions, mobilisation of protesting groups, suspicious activities around installations, extreme-weather forecasts, disease outbreaks or deterioration in relations between communities and operators. Community focal persons should be trained to collect and transmit information rapidly. Traditional rulers, youth groups, women's associations, community development organisations and local security structures can function as important information networks. The National Disaster Management Framework expressly recognises the importance of community-based early-warning systems, while the Sendai Framework advocates people-centred approaches to preparedness.

Prepare Hazard-Specific Contingency Plans

A generic emergency plan alone is inadequate. EMHCDTs should develop scenario-specific contingency plans addressing major foreseeable crises, for example: Oil spill → Fire/explosion → Pipeline vandalism → Flooding → Violent community protest → Communal conflict → Mass casualty incident → Displacement → Disease outbreak. Each contingency plan should specify the trigger for activation, responsible persons, emergency contacts, evacuation procedures, assembly points, medical facilities, transportation arrangements, communication protocols and recovery responsibilities. Alexander (2015) argues that effective emergency planning should connect identified risks directly with operational procedures and clearly assigned responsibilities.

Adopt an Incident Command and Coordination System

During serious crises, uncertainty over who is in charge can worsen losses. EMHCDTs should therefore use a simplified **Incident Command System**, identifying an Incident Coordinator and functional leads for operations, planning, logistics, security, health and public communication. This structure should interface directly with the settlor, NEMA, relevant State Emergency Management Agency, local government authorities, security agencies, health authorities and

environmental regulators. NEMA's framework specifically emphasises Emergency Operations Centres and structured operational coordination.

Build Inclusive Community Preparedness

Community members should not be regarded merely as victims awaiting assistance. They should become active participants in preparedness and response. EMHCDTs should establish and train Community Emergency Response Volunteers in basic first aid, evacuation, fire safety, emergency communication, crowd management and identification of vulnerable persons. Preparedness must deliberately include women, young people, older persons, persons with disabilities and other vulnerable groups. The Sendai Framework stresses inclusive participation and recognises that disaster-risk reduction requires an all-of-society approach. Contemporary UNDRR strategy similarly emphasises locally led disaster-risk reduction and the participation of vulnerable populations.

Establish Crisis Communication Protocols

Poor communication can transform an emergency into a legitimacy crisis. Rumours concerning deaths, compensation, pollution or company responsibility can generate hostility and conflict. The EMHCDT should therefore designate authorised spokespersons and establish communication channels such as telephone hotlines, community radio, SMS alerts, social media platforms, traditional leadership networks and town-hall briefings. Communication should be rapid, accurate, transparent, culturally sensitive and consistent. Crisis communication scholarship emphasises that timely and credible information is crucial for maintaining public trust during emergencies (Coombs, 2015).

Provide Emergency Resources and Financial Arrangements

Planning without resources is ineffective. EMHCDTs should identify emergency funding arrangements and maintain inventories of necessary response resources, including first-aid materials, emergency transportation, protective equipment, communication devices, temporary shelters and evacuation support. Where the crisis exceeds Trust capacity, pre-agreed mechanisms should facilitate rapid escalation to the settlor and public emergency-management institutions. This should be incorporated into wider HCDT governance and development planning. NUPRC currently treats Host Community Development Trust administration, community projects, sustainability monitoring, grievance resolution and community collaboration as interconnected elements of upstream petroleum governance.

Conduct Training, Simulations and Drills

Emergency plans must be tested. EMHCDTs should undertake periodic tabletop exercises, evacuation drills and multi-agency simulations involving communities, operators and emergency agencies. Exercises reveal communication failures, unrealistic assumptions and gaps in personnel or equipment before an actual crisis occurs. Perry and Lindell (2003) emphasise that effective

preparedness depends upon planning as an ongoing process involving training, exercises, evaluation and revision rather than the mere production of written documents.

Integrate Conflict Management into Emergency Response

In host communities, technical emergencies frequently produce social disputes. An oil spill, for example, may subsequently generate disputes over responsibility, compensation, environmental remediation and exclusion from decision-making. The emergency-response framework should therefore incorporate grievance handling, mediation and community dialogue. The Nigerian Upstream Petroleum Host Communities Development Regulations expressly provide a grievance and conflict-resolution framework for HCDT-related disputes. Thus, crisis management should address both the physical emergency and its social consequences.

Plan for Recovery, Relationship Repair and "Build Back Better"

Crisis management should continue after immediate danger has passed. Recovery should address damaged livelihoods, infrastructure, psychosocial effects, environmental remediation, displaced populations and damaged community relationships. The Sendai Framework specifically encourages (3Bs) recovery processes that "Build Back Better", meaning that reconstruction should reduce future vulnerability rather than merely restore pre-crisis conditions. For EMHCDTs, recovery should therefore include community consultations, environmental restoration, compensation where justified, livelihood recovery, reconciliation processes and renewed development planning.

Institutionalise After-Action Review and Learning

Every major incident should be followed by an independent After-Action Review asking: What happened? → Why did it happen? → What worked? → What failed? → What should change? Lessons should be incorporated into risk registers, training programmes, emergency procedures, budgets and Host Community Development Plans. This transforms crisis management into an organisational-learning process and reduces repetition of previous failures.

9. INSTITUTIONALISING CRISIS PREPAREDNESS IN THE CONTEXT OF EMHCDT

Crisis preparedness within the EMHCDT should be institutionalised as a permanent governance and community-relations function rather than treated as an *ad hoc* response to emergencies. Crisis-management scholarship emphasises preparedness, early detection, containment, recovery and organisational learning as essential dimensions of institutional resilience (Pearson & Mitroff, 1993; Boin & 't Hart, 2010). For EMHCDT, this requires integrating crisis preparedness into its governance structures, development planning, operational procedures and stakeholder-engagement framework.

First, EMHCDT should establish a Crisis Management and Emergency Response Framework, clearly defining responsibilities of the Board of Trustees, Management Committee, Advisory Committee, community representatives and relevant external agencies. A multidisciplinary Crisis

Management Team (CMT) should maintain a risk register covering community conflicts, protests, environmental incidents, project disruptions, security threats, misinformation and natural hazards. Risk assessment should be complemented by community-based early-warning indicators and clearly defined escalation thresholds.

Second, the Trust should develop Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), communication protocols, emergency contact systems, business-continuity arrangements and contingency plans. Periodic simulations, tabletop exercises and scenario-based training should test institutional readiness. The Sendai Framework stresses that effective preparedness requires strengthened risk governance, investment in resilience and enhanced capacities for response and recovery (UNDRR, 2015).

Third, crisis preparedness should be participatory and community-centred. Traditional leaders, women, youths, vulnerable groups, security agencies, health institutions, emergency-management authorities and the settlor should participate in preparedness planning. Community participation strengthens local knowledge, trust and resilience (Norris et al., 2008).

Finally, every crisis should generate institutional learning through post-incident reviews, documentation and corrective action. The **EMHCDT Crisis Preparedness and Management Cycle** should consist of the following:

1. Risk Identification

EMHCDT should systematically identify potential threats capable of disrupting its operations, projects or community relationships. These may include leadership disputes, inter-community tensions, protests, environmental incidents, project failures, security threats, misinformation and natural hazards. Risk identification should involve stakeholder consultations, community intelligence, historical analysis, vulnerability assessment and maintenance of an updated risk register.

2. Early Warning

Early warning involves continuously monitoring indicators that suggest emerging conflict or crisis. EMHCDT should establish community-based information networks involving traditional leaders, youths, women, community representatives and designated officers. Increasing complaints, rumours, petitions, threats, protests or project obstruction should trigger appropriate interventions before tensions develop into serious crises or violence.

3. Prevention

Prevention involves addressing identified risks before they generate harmful consequences. EMHCDT should use stakeholder dialogue, transparent decision-making, equitable benefit distribution, grievance resolution, mediation and community engagement to address underlying tensions. Preventive action should prioritise removing structural causes of disputes rather than merely suppressing their visible manifestations or responding after escalation.

4. Preparedness

Preparedness requires developing institutional capacities to manage crises that cannot be completely prevented. EMHCDT should establish contingency plans, Standard Operating Procedures, emergency communication systems, defined responsibilities and crisis-management teams. Regular training, simulations and stakeholder exercises should ensure that personnel and communities understand their responsibilities and can respond quickly when emergencies occur.

5. Response

Response encompasses immediate actions taken when a crisis occurs to protect people, relationships, assets and development programmes. EMHCDT should activate its crisis-management structure, assess the situation, communicate accurate information, coordinate relevant stakeholders and mobilise necessary resources. Responses should remain proportionate, conflict-sensitive, rights-respecting and directed towards preventing further escalation or harm.

6. Recovery

Recovery begins after immediate threats have been contained and focuses on restoring normal community and institutional functioning. EMHCDT should assess losses, restore disrupted projects and services, support affected stakeholders and address outstanding grievances. Recovery planning should incorporate the principle of **"building back better"** by correcting vulnerabilities that contributed to the crisis.

7. Relationship Repair

Crises may damage trust even after their immediate causes have been addressed. EMHCDT should therefore facilitate restorative dialogue, acknowledgement of harm, reconciliation and renewed stakeholder engagement. Relationship repair should involve affected communities and Trust representatives, emphasising dignity, fairness, accountability and mutual understanding to rebuild confidence and strengthen peaceful coexistence.

8. Evaluation

Following every significant crisis, EMHCDT should systematically evaluate the effectiveness of its prevention, preparedness and response mechanisms. Evaluation should examine what happened, why it happened, actions taken, response times, stakeholder experiences, resource utilisation and outcomes. Identified strengths, failures and gaps should inform recommendations for improving future crisis-management arrangements.

9. Institutional Learning

Lessons from crises should be converted into organisational knowledge and improved policies rather than remaining with individual officers or committees. EMHCDT should document experiences, conduct post-incident reviews, revise procedures, share lessons and undertake

corrective actions. Institutional learning enables the Trust to avoid repeated mistakes and progressively strengthen governance and community resilience.

10. Improved Preparedness

Improved preparedness completes and simultaneously renews the crisis-management cycle. Lessons from evaluation and institutional learning should inform revised risk assessments, contingency plans, training programmes, communication protocols and early-warning systems. Consequently, each crisis becomes an opportunity to strengthen EMHCDT's institutional resilience and capacity to anticipate, prevent and manage future emergencies effectively.

CONCLUSION

From the foregoing, four conclusions on conflict resolution and crisis preparedness in the context of EMHCDT can be drawn:

1. Conflict prevention should take precedence over crisis reaction: EMHCDT should adopt a proactive approach that identifies underlying grievances and emerging risks before they escalate. Continuous stakeholder engagement, early-warning mechanisms, transparent decision-making and timely grievance resolution can significantly reduce the likelihood that manageable disagreements develop into major community crises.

2. Credible grievance resolution is essential for trust and legitimacy: An accessible, inclusive, impartial, transparent and accountable grievance mechanism is fundamental to effective community relations. EMHCDT should prioritise dialogue, internal and customary mediation and independent mediation before resorting to arbitration, regulatory intervention or litigation. This strengthens confidence in the Trust and promotes peaceful coexistence.

3. Crisis preparedness must become an institutional responsibility: Preparedness should be embedded within EMHCDT's governance and operational systems through risk registers, early-warning systems, contingency plans, Standard Operating Procedures, crisis-management teams, communication protocols, training and simulation exercises. Preparedness should involve communities, the settlor, regulators, government institutions and relevant emergency and security agencies.

4. Conflict and crises should become opportunities for relationship repair and institutional learning: Successful crisis management should extend beyond restoring normal operations. EMHCDT should undertake post-conflict dialogue, reconciliation, evaluation and after-action reviews to identify lessons and strengthen future systems. The desired progression should therefore be: Conflict Prevention → Early Resolution → Crisis Preparedness → Effective Response → Recovery → Relationship Repair → Institutional Learning → Stronger Community Resilience and Sustainable Development.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Finally, six recommendations on conflict resolution and crisis preparedness in the context of EMHCDT can be made as follows:

1. Institutionalise a Conflict Resolution and Crisis Management Framework: EMHCDT should adopt a formal framework defining responsibilities, procedures, escalation thresholds and response protocols for preventing and managing disputes and crises. A designated Conflict Resolution and Crisis Management Committee should coordinate implementation and report regularly to the Board of Trustees.

2. Establish a Credible Grievance Redress Mechanism (GRM): The Trust should provide accessible, transparent and time-bound channels for receiving, documenting, investigating and resolving grievances. The graduated pathway should be: Internal Mediation → Customary/Community Mediation → Independent Mediation → Arbitration/Regulatory Intervention → Litigation as a Last Resort.

3. Develop Community-Based Early-Warning and Risk-Monitoring Systems: EMHCDT should maintain a dynamic Risk and Conflict Register supported by community focal persons, traditional institutions, youths, women and other stakeholders. Emerging indicators—including rumours, petitions, protests, leadership disputes and project obstruction—should trigger predetermined preventive responses.

4. Strengthen Dialogue, Mediation and Restorative Conflict-Resolution Capacity: Trustees, management personnel, community representatives and traditional leaders should receive periodic training in negotiation, mediation, conflict analysis, crisis communication and restorative engagement. Conflict resolution should seek not merely to settle disputes but also to repair damaged relationships and rebuild trust.

5. Develop and Regularly Test Crisis Preparedness Plans: EMHCDT should establish Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), contingency plans, emergency communication protocols, crisis-response teams and business-continuity arrangements. Periodic tabletop exercises, simulations and scenario-based drills should test preparedness and identify operational gaps before actual emergencies occur.

6. Institutionalise Post-Crisis Evaluation, Learning and Continuous Improvement: Every significant conflict or crisis should be followed by an After-Action Review examining causes, responses, outcomes and lessons learned. Findings should inform revised policies, risk assessments, training and stakeholder-engagement strategies. EMHCDT should therefore institutionalise the cycle: Prevention → Preparedness → Response → Recovery → Relationship Repair → Evaluation → Institutional Learning → Improved Preparedness, thereby strengthening sustainable peace, community trust and institutional resilience.

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