



Research Paper

Peace Building and Crime Reduction in Rivers State, Nigeria. A Study of Rivers State Operation Sting Security Outfit

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Abstract

The research examines Rivers State Government Operation security outfit; a peace building instrument to reduce the lingering crime problem in the state. The study was predicated on the negative effect of insecurity on the state economy. To effectively achieve the purpose of this work, research objectives and questions were proposed to guide the work. The study used both primary and secondary sources of data to collect information. The data so collected was analyzed through the use Pie Chart and Simple Percentages. From the analysis, it was revealed among other findings, that the programme can reduce crime but the lack of initial special training of security personnel is a major problem, Based on this, the work recommended. That Rivers state government should design an intensive special training and retraining of the Operation Sting Personnel.

Key words: Peace building, Crime reduction and Operation Sting.

I. INTRODUCTION

Originally conceived in the context of post conflict recovery efforts to promote reconciliation and reconstruction, the term peace building has more recently taken on a broader meaning. It may include providing humanitarian relief, protecting human rights, ensuring security, establishing non violent modes of resolving conflicts, fostering reconciliation, providing trauma healing services, repatriating refugees and resettling internally displaced persons, supporting broad-based education, and aiding in economic reconstruction. As such, it also includes conflict prevention in the sense of preventing recurrence of violence, as well as conflict management and postconflict recovery. In a larger sense, peacebuilding involves a transformation towards more manageable, peaceful relationships and governance structures the long-term process of addressing root causes and effects, reconciling differences normalizing relations, and building institutions that can manage conflict without resort to violence (United States Institute of Peace, 2019). In the context of post conflict reconstruction, peace-building is rather the continuum of strategy, processes and activities aimed at sustaining peace over the long-term with a clear focus on reducing chances for the relapse into conflict. It is useful to see peace-building as a broader policy framework that strengthens the synergy among the related efforts of conflict prevention, peacemaking, peace keeping, recovery and development as part of a collective and sustained effort to build lasting peace.

According to the school of conflict Analysis and Resolution at George Mason University (2019) Peace building is a term used within the international development community to describe the processes and activities involved in resolving violent conflict and establishing a sustainable peace. It is an Over arching concept that includes conflict transformation restorative justice, trauma healing, reconciliation, development and leadership underlain by spirituality and religion, It is similar in meaning to conflict resolution but highlights the difficult reality that the end of a conflict does not automatically lead to peaceful, stable social or economic development.

Levels of global violent conflict are at 25-year peak: 402 violent conflicts persist around the world and lines of warfare are bleeding more and more from the battle-field into the domestic space. Fragility, conflict and violence are each distinct concept but are intertwined in many of the world's hotspots. Countries experiencing extremely high level of violence are not necessarily considered to be in active conflict. For example, the countries that rank highest for rates of violence death include El Salvador, Venezuela and Honduras including Nigeria. These countries suffer from high political and social instability and gang violence even though they are not considered active conflict zones like Afghanistan and Syria. However, violence in these areas underlie U.S. domestic and national security issues, including gangs and narco-trafficking.

The peace building field has shown immense commitment to understanding preventing and mitigating the impact of violent conflict but has struggled to aggregate evidence across efforts to analyze, understand, and advocate for what works to reduce violence. These efforts have large implications for understanding contributing factors towards fragility and violent conflict in addition to violence or crime reduction. With violence becoming both more pervasive and more diffuse, the peace building field must take stock of how it is measuring violence and what the existing evidence indicates about the field's impact to extract lessons learned and inform more effective future programming.

The peace building field has historically taken a long-term, whole-of-society approach to violence or crime reduction. This approach involves conducting conflict assessments to understand contextual drivers of violence, engaging with a broad range of actors to ensure inclusivity and focusing programming to build sustainable peace rather than simply ending immediate threats. This process has contributed to a more nuanced understanding of violence and conflict but has not driven innovative techniques for measuring violence or crime, a problem which is worsened by the added complexity of trying to measure successful prevention of future violence (crime) occurrences.

The peace building field has articulated theories of change (TOC) reflective of the shifting conflict and violence landscape that have the potential to correlate reduced levels of violence to peace building programming, but in many instances, they are not supported by significant evidence (Alliance for peace building, 2015).

The perspective or starting point for crime reduction is people, places, or situations already known for criminal activity. This can be a group of offenders who have racked up a long record of assaults and robbery. It might be a residential neighborhood that has been plagued by breakings. It could be a situation such as out-of-control house parties where the peace is disrupted and underage drinking and sexual exploitation may take place. Crime reduction starts with assessing the current problem and developing strategies to decrease the amount of criminal activity, or Minimize the harm it causes. The definition of crime reduction is the attempt to reduce victimization and to deter crime and criminals. It is applied specifically to efforts made by the police and/or citizens to reduce crime, enforce the law, and maintain criminal justice. Simply stated, an individual, by avoiding areas that are well known for high criminal activity is reducing their chances for victimization, and in turn, is taking an active role in crime reduction. Crime reduction unlike crime prevention which is more likely to focus on the outright elimination of crime by preventing opportunities and conditions that enable crime to occur, a crime reduction strategy is likely to place greater emphasis on measures to contain and reduce existing crime problems. This could be likened to taking a risk-management approach based on an acceptance that it is not possible to eliminate all opportunities and conditions that facilitate crime. A crime reduction measure may have a shorter timeframe than a prevention measure because its goals may be less ambitious and intervention more sharply defined. It might, therefore, be useful to think of crime reduction and crime prevention as terms that describe INTERIM and FINAL outcomes.

Considering the upsurge in anti-social behaviour or criminal activities across the state such as kidnapping, deadly cult wars, armed robbery, election violence, chieftaincy war, pipeline vandalism and bunkering, illegal oil refining, sea piracy and communal skirmishes as well as drug abuse and their negative economic consequences on the economy. The Executive Governor of Rivers State, Chief (Barr.) Ezenwo Nyesom Wike, on the 26th of July, 2019 launched a security outfit in the state codenamed OPERATION STING to address the problem of insecurity in the state. This security outfit that comprises both civil and armed forces personnel, with state of the art equipment, especially for communication and intelligence gathering as well as tracker to combat all forms of criminality across the 23 local government areas of the state.

Operational Aim and Objectives of Operation Sting

The aim of the security outfit code named operation sting of the Rivers State Government is to tackle criminal elements and reduce crime and criminality in all parts of the state.

The outfit is to effectively tackle both the sources and drivers of insecurity in their diverse criminal manifestations and operations and nib them in their buds or rout and root them out of existence.

To enhance communication among the security operatives and overcoming the current wide gaps in intelligence gathering.

To provide comprehensive security cover for our state.

To achieve quick, timely and effective response to emergency or distress situations and or during ongoing criminal activities in or around our neighbourhood.

To increase citizens awareness and make the public to be more alive to the dangers of insecurity and their responsibility to be part of the present crusade to stamp out the menace of insecurity from the state.

Statement of the problem

In contemporary day Nigeria, especially for the past two decades there has been steady, rise in anti-social activities such as gangsterism, organized crime, armed robbery, widespread in hydra-headed monster called cultism and kidnapping, oil thieves, white collar thieves, banditry, communal skirmishes or conflicts religious crises, Boko Haram, separatists farmer-herder clashes popularly called herdsmen, election violence (political thugs) among others. These precipitates trickled down to Rivers State. Rivers state has being in the news in recent years with particular reference to violent crimes and other antisocial behaviours. Election violence, supremacy wars among various cult groups, illegal oil refining, kidnapping and the most recent is the serial killing in hotels. However, the Government of Rivers State responded swiftly to these menace by partnering with the security agencies (police, civil defense, army, navy and air force) and equipping them through logistic support and modern telecommunication gadgets to improve their capability to fight crimes. It also set up peace building efforts through special amnesty programmes for repentant cultists across the state. Military strength and forceful security approaches alone can never make us safe in the longterm because they are designed to stop immediate threats rather than address the underlying causes of these threats.

Rivers state government in expanding the peacebuilding strategy role out amnesty programme for repentant cultists, kidnapers, armed gangs, robbers murderers in May 2017 through the office of the special adviser to the executive governor of Rivers State on amnesty for cultists and kidnapers is that they are gunning for protection in the fight against cultism and criminality. You cannot have a perfect society. Criminality is part of the society and there is no society that is free from crime. The aim of any government should be to reduce crime (Abah, 2017). The best way the government of Rivers State can reduce the level of criminality in the state is to show that they can fight criminality by displaying their panophy of smoking guns, indeed, not words. Talk less and wield the big stick. The absence of the will to fight criminality breeds more crime in Rivers state especially with the level of self entitlement by youths, most of whom lack competence for anything but subordinate all responsibilities to government. Various youth groups have become nimble footed. Brazen, gun-running, the serving of Molotov cocktails during elections, the displacement and prevention of women from going to farm by denizens with guns in Khana, Emohua, Ikwerre, Etche, Ogba / Egbema / Ndonin / Ahoada West and East, Abua/Odua and many others, prevented agricultural production leading to scarcity of garri and other produce are cases in point. Inter-communal conflicts such as one between Lewe and Bomu in Gokana Local Government Area for over three years now and others doted across the state are not also left out.

Consequently, various efforts have been made through joint military task force, inspectors general of police special task force, anti cultism unit of the Nigeria police force traditional institution, state government, religious bodies and other nongovernmental organizations in peacebuilding. The Nigerian Army launched operation crocodile smile 4 in Niger Delta states in which Rivers state is part of by October ending, 2019.

Against the background of increasing wave of crime and an unending peace building processes that this research is undertaken. The intent here is to evaluate how this operation sting as a peace building strategy like others can bring about a reduction in crime wave in Rivers state and to profer solutions (panacea) that will help to strengthen the programme.

Research Questions

- i. Does weaknesses in the policy exist that can make the programme fail as peace-building institution?
- ii Are there panacea that will help reduce insecurity through operation sting activities?

II. METHODOLOGY

This research work adopted a descriptive research design. A stratified simple random sampling technique was used to select one hundred (100) respondents drawn from members of public and personnel of the Rivers State Operation Sting. Fifty (50) from civil population and another fifty (50) from personnel of the security outfit. In so doing, discreet numbers were allocated to each element in the sample frame and all were placed in a basket. With eyes closed, we randomly picked one hundred (100) respondents (one at a time) to form a sample size. We also used pie chart and research questions in the analysis of the results.

This research utilized both primary and secondary sources of data collected. The primary source of data included the use of self designed questionnaires while the secondary sources of data were derived from relevant textbooks, journals, magazines, newspapers and unpublished seminar papers.

III. LITERATURE REVIEW

Peace building is as old as human race. As the human population increases over time, there is also corresponding increase in competition for space and scarce resources. The outcomes of some of these competitions are unhealthy rivalry, conflicts and wars; yes they are now seen as part of the human society. However, frantic efforts have been put in place to address some of these unhealthy rivalries, conflicts and wars

at the local, national and international levels. Such herculean tasks are in themselves enormous challenges when attempting to bring warring factions to a round table to negotiate their peaceful co-existence.

Based on the above submission, Buore (2017) noted that peace building and community policing is one of the thematic areas that offers a fresh overview of the challenges in advance societies and peace building in weak nations, demonstrating how going beyond traditional models of police work can provide solutions in troubled communities. She further stated that peace building is a process of strengthening a society's capacity to manage conflict through non-violent means. Alliance for peace building (2019) opined that the peace building field has historically taken a long –term, whole-of-society approach to violence reduction. This approach involves conducting conflict assessments to understand contextual drivers of violence, engaging with a broad range of actors to ensure inclusivity, and focusing programme to build sustainable peace, rather than simply ending immediate threats. Coning (2013) noted that successful peace building activities create an environment supportive of self-sustaining, durable peace; reconcile opponents; prevent conflict from restarting; integrate civil society; create rule of law mechanisms, and address underlying structural and societal issues. He further asserted that researchers and practitioners also increasingly find that peace building is most effective and durable when it relies upon local conceptions of peace and the underlying dynamics which foster or enable conflict.

Although many peace building's aim overlap with those of peacemaking, peacekeeping and conflict, it is a distinct idea. Peacekeeping involves stopping an ongoing conflict, whereas peace building happens before a conflict starts or once it ends. Peacekeeping prevents the resumption of fighting following a conflict; it does not address the underlying causes of violence or work to create societal change, as peace building does. Peacekeeping also differs from peace building in that it only occurs after conflict ends, not include some components of peace building such as state building and socioeconomic development. Peace building at the United Nation (2012) observed that in 2007, the UN secretary-general's policy committee defined peace building as follows: "peace building involves a range of measures targeted to reduce the risk of lapsing or relapsing into conflict by strengthening national capacities at all levels for conflict management, and to lay the foundations for sustainable peace and sustainable development. Peace building strategies must therefore be coherent and tailored to specific needs of the country or state concerned, based on National ownership, and should comprise a carefully prioritized, sequenced, and therefore relatively narrow set of activities aimed at achieving the above objective.

Institutional change is necessary and transitions need to be incremental. Another side contends that liberal democracy might be an insufficient or even inappropriate goal for peace building efforts and that the focus must be on a social transformation to develop non-violent mechanisms of conflict resolution regardless of their form. Mac Ginty (2011) noted that many academics argue that peace building is a manifestation of liberal international and therefore imposes western values and practices onto other cultures. He further stated that although peace building does not project all aspects of western culture on to the recipient states, it does transmit some of them, including concepts like NEOLIBERARISM that the West requires recipients of aid to follow more closely than most Western countries do. Barnett et al (2007), however, contended that the promotion of liberalization and democratization may undermine that peace building process if security and stable institutions are not pursued concurrently. Barnett et al (2007) criticizes peace building organizations for undertaking supply driven rather than demand-driven peace building; they provide the peace building services in which their organization specializes with necessarily those that the recipient most need. In addition, he argues that many of their actions are based on organizations precedent rather than empirical analysis of which interventions are and are not effective. "Crime reduction" and "crime prevention" are essentially the same Things- combination of actions designed to eliminate and/or minimize the occurrence of crime and the harm associated with it. There is no empirical basis for the use of one term over the other (Australian Institute of Criminology, 2003).

Data Presentation, Analysis and Discussion

Data presentation and analysis in the research are based on the relevant objectives that were earlier stated. The objectives are measured with simple percentage analysis and pictorially represented by pie chart statistical tool.

Table 1: Whether there are immediate causes of insecurity that informed the formation and launching of operation sting and peace building in Rivers State.

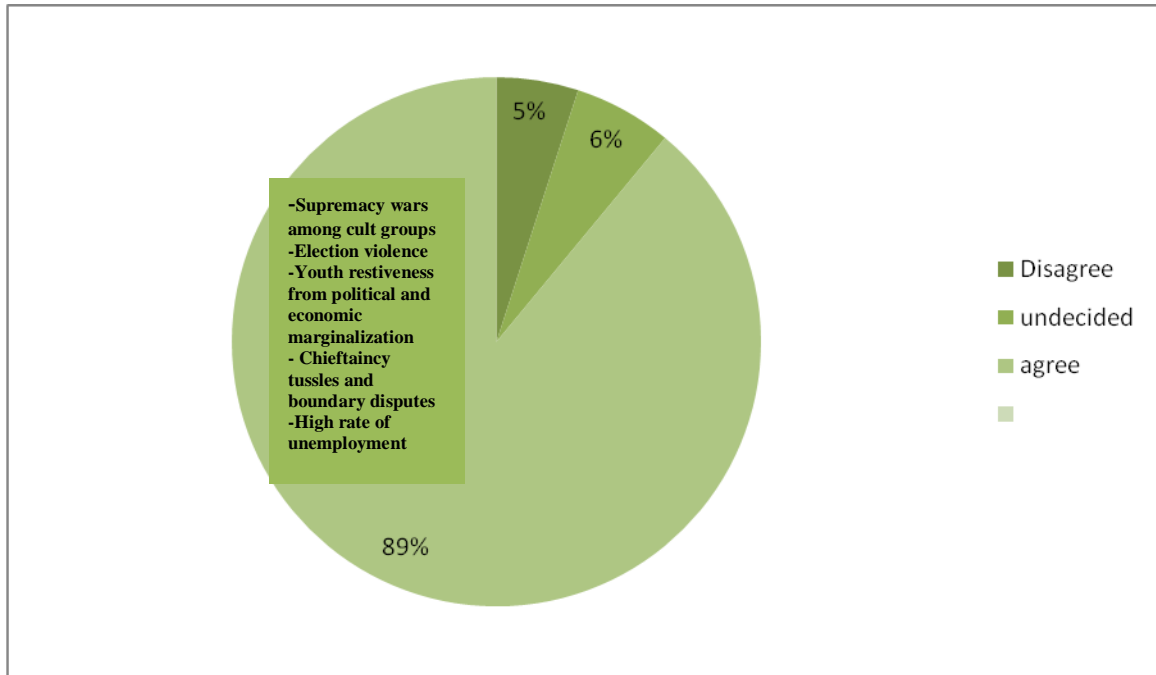


Fig 1: Source: Field Survey November, 2019

The figure 1 above provides the results of the questions put forward (asked) to the respondents. The peace building and crime reduction has a nexus to the activities of operation sting activities in River state. The responses are reflective of thinking of the respondents having varying nature of exposure and understanding of peace building and crime reduction. The 89% respondents ardently believed and agreed that the variables listed in the pie chart above are responsible for the immediate causes of insecurity.

Table 1: Weaknesses in the policy that can make peace building and operation sting programme fail.

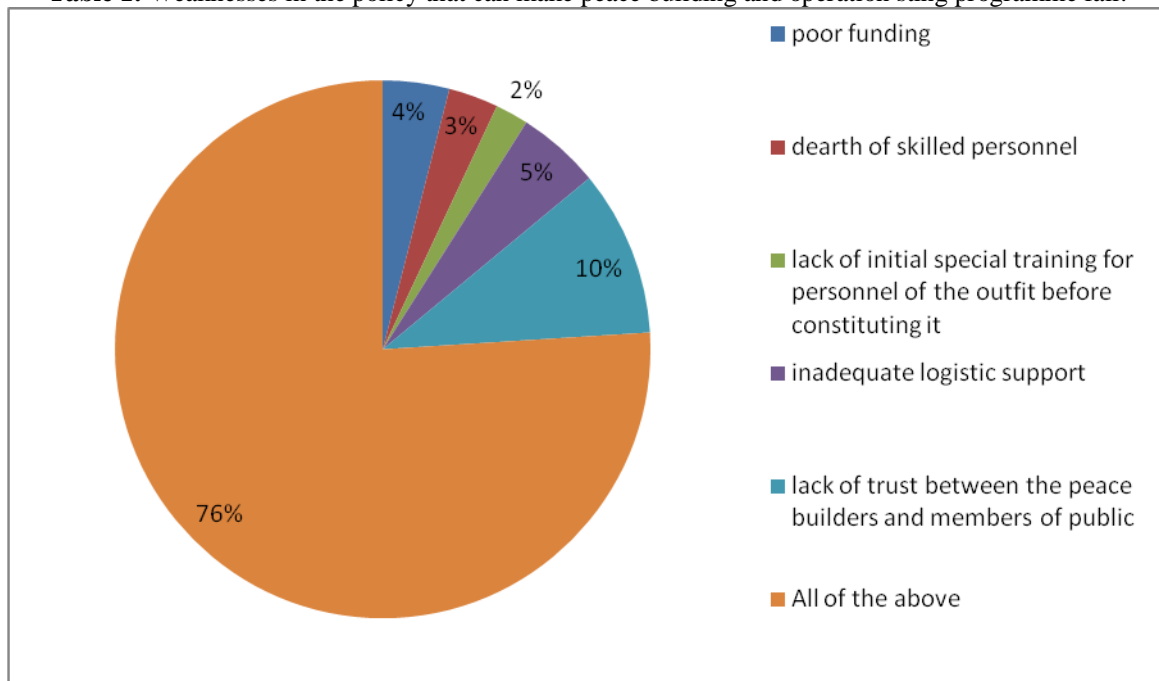


Fig 1 Source: Field Survey, November, 2019

The 2% of respondents from the figure 3 (pie chart) above indicates lack of initial special training for personnel of the operation sting outfit before constituting it, 3% of the respondents point towards dearth of skilled (intelligence) personnel, 4% respondents said poor funding, 5% agreed on inadequate logistic support while 10% of the respondents identified lack of trust between the peace builders and the public. However, 76%

of the total respondents agreed that all the variables listed in the pie chart above are weaknesses in the policy that can make peace building and operation sting programme fail.

Table 2: Panacea to help reduce insecurity through operation sting

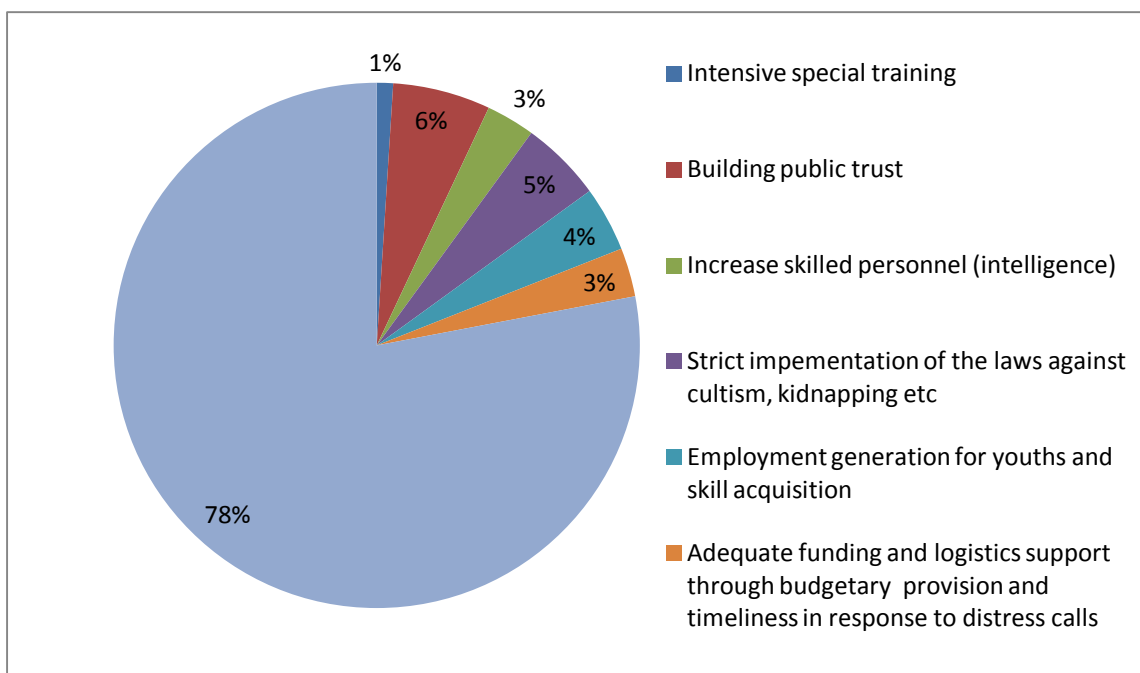


Fig 2 Source: Field Survey, November, 2019.

The figure 3 above shows the outcomes of the questions put forward (asked) to respondents on possible panacea to unending increase in insecurity in Rivers State. Panacea to help reduce insecurity through operation sting, 1% agreed on intensive special training and retraining for the personnel of operation sting, building public trust between operation sting outfit and members of the public (6%), increase skilled (intelligence) personnel (3%), strict implementation of the laws against cultism, kidnapping, armed robbery and other anti social behaviour (5%), employment generation for youths and engagement in skill acquisition programmes (4%), and adequate funding and logistics support through budgetary provision and timeliness in response to distress calls accounted for 3%. However, 78% of the total respondents agreed that all the aforementioned variables are indeed panacea that can help mitigate or bring about reduction in insecurity in Rivers state. Invariably, the majority of the respondents said that if all the aforementioned variables are provided and sustained, reduction in upsurge insecurity in Rivers state is achievable or attainable.

The above findings buttressed the position of Obarisiagbon and Akintoye (2019) which they noted that the government should in addition to creating jobs for the teaming unemployed youths also provide modern and sophisticated weapons for the various law enforcement agents, enhanced packages (life insurance inclusive) as well as training and retraining of men and officers of the force as well as judicial officers should be a constant occurrence.

IV. CONCLUSION

The research through thorough analysis of data revealed that lack of initial special training and retraining for personnel of operation sting, dearth of skilled (intelligence) personnel, poor funding, inadequate logistics support and timeliness in response to distress call and lack of trust between the peacebuilders (operation sting security outfit) and members of public can make the programme fail. The outcome of the research also identified strict implementation of the laws against cultism, kidnappers and armed robbers, building a sustainable public, trust between drivers of peacebuilding process and the public increasing skilled personnel in the area of intelligence gathering, youth employment and engaging same in skill acquisition programmes to arrest the restiveness, adequate funding and incentives through budgetary provision and training and retraining of the personnel of the operation sting. Seventy eight percent (78%) of the respondents strongly advocated for the aforementioned variables as panacea to help cub or reduce insecurity through operation sting activities.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS

From the research findings obtained from the analysis of data collated, we therefore recommend the following:

1. The Rivers State Government should design an intensive special training and retraining of the personnel of operation sting in the areas of anti-terrorism, anti-cultism, anti kidnapping and anti-robbery.
2. The operation sting should be intelligence driven to nib in the bud of the ever challenging and emergent hydra-headed monster called insecurity in Rivers State.
3. The peacebuilding institution should design a mechanism to fully collaborate with members of the public to ensure trust and sustainable partnership in the long run.
4. The government should design a template for employment of teeming unemployed youths across the twenty three (23) local government areas of the state on long term approach.
5. Government should create a special intervention fund adequate enough and timely release of same through budgetary provision.
6. There should be an overhaul in the approach to the instrument of laws regarding cultism, kidnapping, armed robbery and others to allow for strict and fast application and implementation.

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