

COMMUNITY RELATIONS STRATEGIES AND CONFLICT MANAGEMENT: A LOOK AT SHELL B.P. COMPANY'S ANTECEDENTS IN OGONI-LAND, NIGERIA AMIDST RENEWED CALL FOR OIL PRODUCTION

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Abstract

Community relations processes are cardinal to the success of oil companies' operations. It must be carefully and collectively selected to ensure successful engagement and dialogue with host communities. Using questionnaire and in-depth interviews, the study revealed that Shell Company's failure to select appropriate community relations strategies lead to the hostile relationship with the Ogoni people who felt exploited believing that the company could not do enough to leverage them from extreme poverty, economic hardship and environmental pollution occasioned by their activities. The study suggests appropriate community relations strategies that can be used to address needs of the host communities.

Keywords: *Communication, organization, community relations, conflict, conflict management, Oil production, Ogoni-land*

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1. INTRODUCTION

Communication is often implicated as the leading cause of most organisational conflict situations. This is because every organisation is required to communicate with its internal and external stakeholders and as a consequence, conflict will most likely arise where there are no seeming understanding among parties. Though, good communication flows have enormous benefits to an organisations; as most organisational successes depends on their mode, efficiency and efficacy of communication, it also has the tendency of encouraging the development of divergent views among stakeholders, hence conflict is in most cases inevitable. This type of communication contextualises and gives further insight into conflict through its ability to translate emotions into conflict behaviours which creates a platform for future conflicts (Nwagbara & Brown, 2014; Putnam, 2006).

Nwagbara and Brown (2014), Given the tempestuous nature of corporate-community relations in Nigeria, conflict becomes a very serious concern. Notable among organisational conflicts in Nigeria is that between oil and gas companies and their host communities, which in most cases arises due to poor or ineffective communication and community relations. Hence, Nigeria is habitually known for controversy and conflict as a consequence of mode of relations and communication

amongst oil companies and wider stakeholders (Nwagbara & Brown, 2014). This is because the host communities believe that oil companies are not taking them along but rather exploit them, extract their oil, destroy their natural habitat and often fail to adequately compensate them (Amodu, 2012). This situation as observed by Idemudia (2007) added that this poor community relations responsible for the persistent incidence of kidnapped oil-workers, blockage of oil facilities, oil pipeline vandals and human rights violations which adversely affect corporate reputations and impact negatively on both government revenue and corporate profit.

Increasingly, members of the oil producing communities located in the Niger-Delta region of the country have often times lamented their non involvement on matters and policies affecting them. They had long desired to be fully involved in the activities of the oil industry especially the processes leading to oil explorations and production which has results in environmental pollution, biodiversity depletion, social destabilization, underdevelopment of host communities, global warming and associated elevated flood risk of their region (Emoyan, *et al.*, 2008).

The host communities have expected for oil companies to engage in meaningful community relations to avail them with adequate information on their operations and how they can benefit there from. This echoes the earlier submission of Friend (1996) that a neighbour who lives entirely behind closed doors becomes the subject of speculation, rumour and at worst, fear, founded on lack of understanding and trust. As such, there is a need for good community relations among oil companies which will in turn helps to create mutual understanding and relationship amongst members of the community they operate. As observed by Johnston (2010), organizations are increasingly using community engagement strategies to incorporate representative community opinions into good decision-making. Bruning, McGrew and Cooper (2006); Cho and Moya (2016) noted that most corporate organizations incorporate good community relations by way of sponsoring events and empowerment programs for community members to help create good and favorable impressions about their organization as well as place the community and its members at the center of the process.

As observed by Henry (2009), the major cause of conflicts with host community is the sharing of limited resources. Conflict usually arises when the resources are not evenly distributed among interested parties. It is the prime responsibility of management an oil company, for instance, to ensure that the available scarce resources are utilised properly for the benefit of the organisation's stakeholders (both internal and external).

Since the advent of crude oil exploration over four decades ago, the Niger-Delta region has remain the bread winner of the nation crude oil being the main foreign exchange earner and major revenue generating point for the nation, as a whole. Despite this, the region reportedly remains the sick man of the nation and least developed constituency of the country in physical and socio-economic terms (The Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization (UNPO), 2018).

Conflicts in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria, particularly the Ogoni-land, according to Yakubu (2017), started due to the activities of oil companies especially its abuse on the environment which resulted in grave damage on the farming land,

aquatic and marine life that sustained the communities. The environment is being devastated and degraded, atmosphere polluted, water sources contaminated, trees poisoned, flora and fauna. More worrisome is the fact that the corporate social responsibility and the operating standards of oil companies and other businesses in the region are far below internationally acceptable standards (UNPO, 2018; Donovan, 2018). As result oil companies have been unable to return to exploration and production in the said Ogoni-land (Lindén & Pålsson, 2013).

A report by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) (2011) also confirmed the devastating pollution on the environmental assessment of Ogoni-land. The central finding of the report is to effect that pollution from incidents that span 40 years of Shell Company's operation in Ogoni-land is far more pervasive than has previously been acknowledged. It recommended a total clean up of the region with collaborative efforts of the oil and gas industry and communities to restore polluted environments to put an end to all forms of ongoing oil contamination in the region.

Since organizational conflict itself is inevitable, hence, Willis (2012) had advice that organisations like oil companies should adopt an attitude of mutuality to the external stakeholder environment. In this, they must readily put in place internal mechanism to resolve same when it occurs. This study therefore considers the public perception of community relations strategies used by Shell Company before, during and after the conflict with their Ogoni people. It considers the application of community relations strategies as tool for the creation and maintenance of mutual relationships among host communities as well as the application of these strategies in resolving the long standing inharmonious relationship.

2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The coming of oil and gas companies in Nigeria has witnessed unprecedented conflicts in the areas of oil extraction, distribution and politics. These conflicts are largely traced to poor communication patterns among relevant stakeholders in the sector, particularly the avoidable conflicts between oil companies and their host communities. This is as host communities have constantly accused the oil companies of not putting their views into consideration during corporate communication process and also not living up to their billings in terms of corporate social responsibility (CSR) (Nwagbara & Brown, 2014).

The importance of peaceful coexistence and workable relationship between the oil companies and their host communities cannot be over emphasised, given the country's excessive dependence on oil, the success or failure of oil operations in the Niger-Delta region impacts directly on the country's economic growth and national development. As such, a continuous inharmonious relationship between the oil companies and the host communities remains a big to the country's economy and development (The Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization (UNPO), 2018).

As observed by Idemudia and Ite (2006), most corporate-community relations (CCR) strategies adopted by oil companies has failed to reduce the incidence of violent conflict between the host communities and oil companies in the Niger Delta, Nigeria due to the failure to seek, understand and integrate community perceptions into CSR

policies and practices. This is often because of the absence of an enabling environment due to government failure. Shell Company, one of the major oil companies operating in the Ogoniland at the time had severe and unresolved misunderstanding with the host communities leading to execution of prominent members and forefront agitators who hails from Ogoni-Land like the famous Ken Saro-Wiwa by the then Nigerian government.

The Implication of the conflict between Shell and Ogoni host communities are too far reaching to be ignored, especially as there are calls to resume operation in Ogoni-land. These underscore the importance of this study, which is geared towards the assessment of the public's perception of the application of community relations strategies by Shell management before, during and after the conflict periods in Ogoni land. In other words, what is the perception of the public on the application of community relations strategies by Shell management before, during and after the conflict periods in Ogoni land?

3. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The over aim of this study is to examine the public perception of Community Relations Strategy used by Shell to interact and resolve impasse with their host communities in Ogoni precisely. The specific objectives therefore are to:

1. Determine the public perception of the relationship between Shell and the Ogoni people;
2. Find out if Shell Company utilised Community Relations strategies before and during the Conflict with Ogoni people;
3. Find out whether poor community relations pattern was responsible for the prolonged conflict between Shell Company and the Ogoni people;
4. ascertain if Shell Company do integrate community perceptions in the planning, development and implementation of community relations strategies before and during conflict with the Ogoni People;
5. To find out the preferable community relations strategies suitable to manage conflict between oil companies and their host communities.

4. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following research questions were formulated to guide this study:

1. What is the public perception of the relationship between Shell and the Ogoni people?
2. To what extent has Shell Company utilised Community Relations strategies before and during the Conflict with Ogoni people?
3. To what extent was poor community relations pattern responsible for the prolonged conflict between Shell Company and the Ogoni People?

4. To what extent does Shell Company integrate community perceptions in the planning, development and implementation of community relations strategies before and during conflict with the Ogoni People?
5. What are the most preferable community relations strategies suitable to manage conflicts between oil companies and their host communities?

5. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

i. Dialogic Theory

The Dialogic theory of public relations was propounded by Kent and Taylor (1998, 2002) to encourage relationship building between an organization and its publics. Although it started with relationship building through the application of the internet or Web, but its principles have been applied in other areas. The authors describe dialogic communication as a process and a product, to provide a procedural means whereby an organization and its publics can communicate interactively with each other (Kent and Taylor, 1998).

Kent and Taylor indicate that relationships between publics and organizations can be created, adapted and changed through the dialogic engagement process. As such organizations should be willing to interact with the public in honest and ethical ways in order to create effective organization-public communication channels (Kent, Taylor, & White, 2003). This way, they explain that engagement can be described as an ideograph, being “concrete, vague and evanescent all at the same time” (Taylor and Kent, 2014, p. 385). To this day engagement is described as commitment, something that makes people interested or holds their attention, and as interaction (Taylor & Kent, 2014).

Taylor and Kent (2014) introduced and argue for a dialogic approach to engagement between organization and its public, where the engagement process will be seen as an essential feature of dialogue. To them, “Engagement is part of dialogue and through engagement, organizations and publics can make decisions that create social capital. Engagement is both an orientation that influences interactions and the approach that guides the process of interactions among groups” (Taylor & Kent, 2014: 384). Kent (2008) noted that dialogue will be refined by research, extended by further theorizing, and validated when organizations see how the value of incorporating a dialogic orientation into their relationships with publics. As such, when these three scenarios align, the promise of dialogic public relations will be fulfilled.

ii. Image Restoration Theory (IRT)

Benoit (1995) established the image repair theory (IRT) which assumes that image is an asset that a person or an organization attempts to protect during a conflict. When the person or the organization is attacked, the accused should draft messages to repair its image. Benoit further introduced 5 general and 14 specific response strategies the accused could harness during a conflict. General categories include deny, evading responsibility, reducing offensiveness, corrective action, and mortification (Benoit, 1995).

The reputation of a company is vital both for their self-esteem and because reputation influences how others will treat them (Benoit, 2008). The image of Shell Company had been serially damaged as a result of the conflict with Ogoni people, hence the people hold a very bad impression of the company. This emphasises the role of the image restoration theory. The theory outlines strategies that can be employed to restore image in an event where reputation has been damaged. Image restoration theory can be applied as an approach for understanding personal or organizational conflict situations. Two components must be present in a given attack to the image of an individual or organization: the accused is held responsible for an action, and the act is considered offensive.

Accordingly, the Image restoration theory made two fundamental assumptions:

- i. Communication is a goal directed activity: Communicators may have multiple goals that are not collectively compatible, but people try to achieve goals that are most important to them at the time, with reasonable cost.
- ii. Maintaining a favourable reputation is a key goal of communication. Because face, image, or reputation is valued as important, individuals or organizations are motivated to take action when it is compromised.

Perception is fundamental to image restoration, as the accused actor will not engage in a defensive strategy unless the perception exists that he is at fault. The actor who committed the wrongful act must decide on the strategy of best course based on their specific situation. Factors such as credibility, audience perceptions, and the degree of offensiveness of the act must be taken into account (Benoit, 2008; 2015).

6. LITERATURE REVIEW

Conflict is as old as mankind and unavoidable in virtually every society due to some obvious societal forces that influence and fuel conflicts. It is a perceived or real incompatibility of goals, values, expectations, processes, or outcomes between two or more interdependent individuals or groups (Martins & Nakayama, 2005). *Cambridge English Dictionary* see Conflict as a situation in which there are opposing demands or ideas and a choice have to be made between them.

According to Argenti (2016), explaining conflict in an organisation is a bit more complicated. However, it can be seen as a major catastrophe that may occur either naturally or as a result of human error, intervention or even malicious intent. It most time includes tangible devastation, such as the destruction of lives or assets, or intangible devastation, such as the loss of an organisation's credibility or other reputational damage. The latter outcomes may be the results of management's response to tangible devastation or the result of human error.

Effective communication strategies and frameworks are important ingredients needed in the oil and gas industry to foster industrial harmony and ensure mutual relationships among relevant stakeholders which in turn helps to penetrate the "realm of understanding" (Fill, 2006, p.42). This kind of communication is crucial in creating a peaceful and sustainable working environment for the companies on the one hand, and the community other, with the sole aim of achieving national development.

Ricklin and Kushner (2013) pointed out that an effective community relations programme includes a robust outreach strategy targeted at educating the host communities on the merits of a project in order to garner public support. This means involving them in the comprehensive planning process and meaningful ways. As such, lack of youth and community members' involvement raise public opposition and project failure (Norman, 2012).

Crude oil exploration and production in Nigeria started over four decades ago in the Niger-Delta region. The same region, which harbours the oil that has made Nigeria and oil companies rich, is grossly under-developed relatively to the rest of the country which is indeed a paradox as poverty thrives in the midst of plenty (UNPO, 2018).

The activities of the oil companies resulted in serious environmental and health hazards on their farm lands, water and aquatic animals which are the major source of livelihood of the people. Prominent among these environmental abuses and conflicts in the Niger-Delta is the practical case of Ogoni community of River State, whose case was spearheaded by the Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP), and the late human rights activist, Ken Saro-Wiwa, who pointed out that communities in the region have been devastated and degraded, their atmosphere polluted, water sources contaminated, trees are being poisoned, flora, fauna have virtually disappeared as a result of the activities of oil companies in the area. This led to the arrest and subsequent execution of 9 prominent members of Ogoni origin by the Nigerian military forces believed to be incited by Shell Company (Donovan, 2018; UNPO, 2018).

Amnesty International (2017) observed that the execution of some Ogoni activists were culmination of a brutal campaign by Nigeria's military to silence the protests of the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP) led by author and front line activist Ken Saro-Wiwa one of the Ogoni indigenes executed. MOSOP were of the view that others had grown rich on the oil that was pumped from under their soil, while pollution from oil spills and gas flaring had led to the complete degradation of the Ogoni environment, turning their homeland into an ecological disaster. As such, in January 1993, MOSOP declared that Shell was no longer welcome to operate in their land. Willis (2013) noted that Shell's perceived and real partnership with the military government was directly responsible for the civil, political and economic rights violations of the Ogoni and the conflicts afterwards. This ruined the relations between Shell and Ogoniland. The company was accused of paying the Nigerian police and military to shoot at protestors.

Ineffective community relations between the Shell Company and the host communities was implicated as the causes of the prolonged conflict. According to Subi and Amodu (2014,) effective community relations can only be achieved when:

the management of an organization recognizes the many ways its organization can impact on the local community and the extent of reciprocal dependence, it will help to establish social balance. The practice of good community relations assists the organization in securing its needs from the community while it also provides what the community expects. Also, it helps to secure the

company's investments, increase sales of products, the value of stocks, and improves the general operating climate of business.

Since conflict itself is inevitable, oil companies must readily put in place mechanism for conflict management. These require action in the following critical areas: Conflict prevention, conflict assessment, conflict handling and conflict termination. The aim of conflict management is to be well prepared for conflict, ensure a rapid and adequate response to the conflict, maintaining clear lines of reporting and communication in the event of conflict and agreeing to the rules for conflict termination. As such, it is the prime responsibility of management to put in place appropriate strategies on how to minimize conflicts (Argenti, 2007). As contended by Idemudia and Ite (2006), the Nigerian oil industry can only succeed in their relations with host communities only if, and when, the needs and aspirations of the major stakeholders are addressed through a tri-sector partnership approach to development and conflict resolution.

According to Amodu (2012), most of the conflicts between oil companies and host communities had serious implications for the two parties. This is because the community relations strategies adopted most oil companies were not adequate in preventing and resolving conflicts in the Niger Delta. Hence, there was a lacuna and disparity between the perceived strategies the oil companies believed host communities could preferred for conflict resolution and the ones actually preferred by those communities. As such, arriving at the most preferred method will be can only be achieved through effective engagement and dialogue with the host communities. Kent and Taylor (2014) in explaining this kind of engagement noted that it was part of dialogue through which an organization and its publics can make decisions that is capable of creating beneficial social capital. Engagement is both an orientation that influences interactions and the approach that guides the process of interactions among groups. Through rewarding engagements comes dialogue; a communicative give and take process of open and negotiated discussion. It is considered one of the most ethical forms of communication with a central means of separating truth from falsehood. Dialogue was found to be effective at guiding most mediated relationships (Kent & Taylor, 1998, 2002). Taylor and Kent (2014) identified five different types of engagements in public relations: social media, employee, CSR, civic and dialogic. The Public relations practitioners in the organizations have critical role to play in bringing about effective dialogue by establishing means for a successful dialogic communication to take place (Kent & Taylor, 2002).

7. METHODOLOGY

This study adopted the ‘Ex-post Facto’ research design. This social research method according to Simon and Goes (2013) is ideal when is not possible or acceptable to manipulate the characteristics of human participants. It is also appropriate and effective in studying events after they have occurred (Isangedighi, *et al.*, 2006). Hence, the conflict between Shell and Ogoni people had long occurred; almost two decades now. The population of this study is the entire Ogoni Kingdom. According to UNEP (2011) cited Linden and Palsson (2013), Ogoniland is situated immediately east of Port Harcourt and consists of four local government areas (LGAs): Eleme, Tai, Gokana, and Khana with a total population of eight hundred and thirty thousand (830, 000). A sample of two hundred (200) was randomly selected in the four (4) local government areas that make up the Ogoni-land.

Two instruments were employed for data collection. One of it is the questionnaire, which as pointed out in Abawi (2013), was invented by Sir Francis Galton and it is often used to collect data using a series of questions and other prompts for the purpose of gathering information from respondents. Accordingly a structured questionnaire was administered to 200 hundred respondents out of which 180 copies were correctly filled and returned successfully for data analysis. The second instrument used was in-depth interviewing is a qualitative research method that involves conducting intensive individual interviews with a small number of respondents to explore their perspectives on a particular idea, program, or situation. This instrument is most appropriate for situations in which a researcher wants to ask open-ended questions that elicit depth of information from relatively few people (Guion, Diehl & Debra McDonald, 2011; Boyce & Neale, 2006). Two in-depth interviews were conducted to get the perspective of Shell company and the community leaders. Data from the questionnaire were analyzed using descriptive statistical method and presented using frequency distribution and simple percentages while data from the in-depth interview were analyzed using *explanation building method*.

8. RESULTS

Table 1: Distribution of respondents by gender, age and educational qualifications

Responses/Options	Number of Respondents	Percentage
1.1 Gender		
Male	125	69%
Female	55	31%
Total	180	100%
1.2 age		
20 – 35	55	31
36 – 50	87	48
51 – 60	24	13
61 and above	14	8
Total	180	100

1.3 Educational Qualification		
SSCE	92	51.1
HND	58	32.2
M.Sc	20	11.1
Ph.D	10	5.6
Total	180	100

Source: Fieldwork (2019).

Table 2: Frequency Analysis of Responses on Nature of Relationship with Shell

Responses/Options	Number of Respondents	Percentage
2.1 Respondents opinion of level of relationship between Shell and their community:		
Cordial	66	37 %
Neutral	30	17 %
Not cordial	84	47%
Total	180	100 %
2.2 Shell's Channels for relating with community:		
Elders	50	28%
Royal fathers	80	44%
All of the above	32	18 %
None of the above	18	10 %
Total	180	100%
2.3 Respondents' opinion about the frequency of Shell's communication with them		
Often	40	22 %
Very often	50	28 %
Once in a while	87	48%
Never	3	2
Total	180	100%
2.4 On whether Shells' contributes to community development through community relations:		
Yes	10	6 %
Sometimes	80	44 %
No	90	50 %
Total	180	100%

2.5 On whether Shell consult them before embarking on development projects:

No	47	26 %
Yes	29	16%
Once in a while	83	46%
Very often	21	12%
Total	180	100%

Source: Fieldwork (2019).

Table 3: Responses on Nature of Ogoni Communities' Conflict with Shell

Responses/Options	Number of Respondents	Percentage
3.1 Respondents Awareness of between Conflict Shell and their community:		
Yes	125	84%
No	55	16%
Undecided	0	0%
Total	180	100 %
3.2 On whether the Conflict has been resolved:		
Yes	55	16%
No	155	84%
Undecided	0	0 %
Total	180	100%
3.3 Respondent opinion on the better means of resolving the conflict:		
Elders	30	17
Youths	20	11
Government intervention	70	39
Consultant	60	33
Total	180	100%
3.4 On whether they have tried reaching out to Shell:		
Yes	10	6
No	170	94
Undecided	0	0 %
Total	180	100%

3.5 Respondents opinion on the positive influence of Shell on their communities:

Strongly agree	7	4
Agree	13	7
Undecided	20	11
Disagree	60	33
Strongly disagree	80	45
Total	180	100%

Source: Fieldwork (2019).

Table 4: Responses on Nature of Communication and Resolution of conflict:

Responses/Options	Number of Respondents	Percentage
4.1 On whether Shell effectively communicate when relating with them:		
Strongly agree	2	1
Agree	6	3
Undecided	16	9
Disagree	74	41
Strongly disagree	82	46
Total	180	100 %
4.2 On whether respondents were satisfied with the way shell settles its conflict with them:		
Strongly agree	10	5
Agree	7	4
Undecided	1	1
Disagree	42	23
Strongly disagree	120	67
Total	180	100%
4.3: On whether shell was ready to negotiate during conflict:		
Strongly agree	95	53
Agree	40	22
Undecided	10	6
Disagree	20	11

Strongly disagree	15	8
Total	180	100%
4.4 On whether Shell do not keep their promises made to them:		
Strongly agree	90	50
Agree	60	33.33
Undecided	5	2.78
Disagree	15	8.33
Strongly disagree	10	5.56
Total	180	100%

Source: Fieldwork (2019).

8.1 IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW REPORTS FROM THE THEN SHELL COMPANY PUBLIC RELATIONS OFFICER AND A COMMUNITY LEADER FROM OGONI

i. Opinion on the relationship that once existed between Shell and Ogoni people

The interviewees were the then Public Relations Consultant for Shell Company and a Community Leader from Ogoni people. According to the consultant, the relationship that once existed before the said conflict was very cordial, same as with every other host community where Shell Company had it operation at the time. Shell being one of the highest producers of oil in Nigeria at the time, was relating with over three hundred (300) host communities and the Ogoni communities contributed just 4% of Shell total production. As such, to have existed over forty (40) years in Ogoni, it is believed there was existing cordial relationship until 1993.

But the Community leader insisted that Shell's community relations was not that cordial. It was lopsided which was why the agitation from the community members and group was at a very high extent.

ii. On what actually led to the 1993 Conflict

The PR consultant explained that Shell production at the time was divided into two areas: the Eastern and Western Operations. The western operation did not have a terminal to export oil as such oil was directed to that of the East, where they had a functional terminal. The pipeline used for this export is called the trans-Niger pipeline, which goes from Warri (in Delta State) to Bonny (River State). Subsequently, when the Shell Company finally built a terminal in the west, they had to stop using the eastern terminal and eventually block the valves resulting to residual oil in the pipes and the company thought it wise to remove these pipes so as to also remove the residual oil. To achieve this, they employed the services of Wilbros Company; a private company affiliated with Shell then.

Wilbros commenced the work, beginning from Bonny but when they got to Ogoni community, they were barricaded by community members who demanded to be employed also in doing the work otherwise they wouldn't allow them enter their

community to do anything. So, the glamour for employment by the indigenous members of the community actually led to some form of conflict. There was also a fire incident that happened at the time, Shell had sent what was called a 'Fire Tendant' which was fire fighting equipment, unfortunately members of the Ogoni community seized that fire equipment and never returned it till date. It became obvious that the Ogoni area was no longer safe for work as workers were being intimidated and threatened. Shell Company considered stopping work for the safety of their workers and that was what led to the end of production in Ogoni-Land.

The community leader explained that Shell Company did not do well in the aspect of corporate social responsibility. While there were so many unemployed youths and redundant farmers who no longer have what to do as a result of oil spillage that damaged their farm lands, water and vegetation, the company still refused to incorporate them on their daily activities so that they also can have what to do. This led to the disruption of Shell activities by angry protesting community youths.

iii. On why Ogoni people attributed the killing of their frontal Activists including Ken Saro-wiwa to Shell incitement

According to the PR consultant, Ken Saro-wiwa was actually not cause of the Ogoni and Shell conflict. Ken Saro-wiwa rather had a purely political agenda. From the then Ogoni Bill of Rights (a political document where the people of Ogoni were asking for self proclamation). From the bill, one can deduce that the Ogoni people were seeking for something close to succession because the said document even had their own Anthem and a lot of other things which clearly reveals their agenda for a self Independence. Ken Saro-wiwa usually visits Shell company then, which gave him several opportunity to meet and interact with him countless of times. As such, he never had any direct quarrel with Shell Company but only wanted an independent State for his people since they had Shell already operating in their soil. Their chief aim then was to have total control over the affairs of the Ogoni-land especially after he saw the rate of sufferings their people are into despite having oil then.

Frantically speaking, Shell Company had nothing to do with the death of Ken Saro-wiwa as rumoured by the Ogoni people. The company even made attempt to rescue him from the proposed execution at the time through a letter transmitted to the then Nigerian government just before he was hanged; pleading on his behalf that he should be spared. It is worthy of note here that the said letter was delivered by the Managing Director of Shell Company to the then Head of State, unfortunately, it was not heeded to.

The community leader on his part maintained that Shell company was being implicated in the arrest and subsequent execution of Ken Saro-wiwa. To him, Ken was a great voice and a front line agitator for his people. He was seen as a clog in the wheel for shell's operations hence he was arrested along with the irate youths and killed.

iv. On the allegation by Ogoni people that Shell Company did not involve them in community development which was what's Ken Saro-wiwa was fighting for before he was unjustly killed by the Nigerian Government

According to the Consultant, interestingly, the over three hundred (300) host communities earlier mentioned where Shell company was undergoing exploration

and production activities was in the Niger-Delta and they were not expected to give preferential to the Ogoni people at the expense of others. If at all they were to consider that, it would have been Nembe where they have the highest number of exploration activities. In Nembe they had Nembe 1 - 4 flow stations operating in Nembe territory alone while in the Ogoni community they had just 4% of the total Shell oil production so they had no reason to treat the Ogoni people with some level of difference, as such, they were relating with them just like every other community.

But situation where the Ogoni people claimed that there was no community relations or that Shell was not relating with them or not doing anything for them is not true. For instance, a certain man who was in charge of the then farm called 'Demonstration Farm' was an Ogoni man. This farm was directly sponsored by Shell and farmers in the Ogoni land were often invited to learn how best they can cultivate whatever type of farming; ranging from Fishery to piggery to other types of livestock and even plants.

The PR consultant went further to state that he had personal relationship with four staff of Shell that comes from Ogoni and was also opportune to go with the group that went to commission classrooms blocks, roads, hospital and other health related projects at the time in different parts of Ogoniland. Shell did quite number of things for the Ogoni people, it's just that the perception of the people of Ogoni and the entire Niger Delta have about Shell was very negative.

During Gen. Sani Abacha's rule as the Head of State, some youths were taken from the Niger-Delta for a one million match at Abuja, when they got there the ones that had never travelled before saw flyovers, they look under it and saw that there was no river underneath so they kept wondering why a bridge should be built where there was no water or river under, meanwhile in their place there were rivers all around yet no bridge was been built over it, so that night immediately they got back home they went and started destroying a lot of oil facilities saying Abuja that do not produce oil is building bridges then we here that has the oil don't have bridges and the agitation started. This gave them the impression that the Federal Government of Nigeria was not distributing the wealth evenly. So it was not a Shell issue but a government problem but since the government at the time was not accessible they ventilated their annoyance on Shell which they see. In response to these agitations, the subsequent government set up the Niger-Delta Development Commission (NDDC) to oversee development projects in the 9 oil producing states in the South-South Nigeria.

However, the community leader insisted that, though there were community relations by Shell, it was inadequate and minimal as compared to what the company was making out of their resources, hence the fierce opposition by the Ogoni people.

v. On the Ogoni people believe that what was given to them was not commensurable to what Shell gets from them

The consultant explain that it is a perception all over the Niger-Delta region where oil was produced, that was responsible for the growing agitations which led to the formation of groups like the MOSSOP, MESIER and the rest. There were different groups that were agitating that the government is taking their resources and developing other areas of the country and leaving them unattended to.

This agitation was not limited to the Ogoni people alone. It was the entire Niger Delta that shared this perception. They claim they don't see the dividends of producing oil and they blame the government squarely because in a scale of 100% the Federal Government takes 55% equity participation of the joint venture that Shell operate, they still could collect tax and royalties dues, petroleum profit tax and other taxes from Shell. So one may ask, who was then supposed to do all the development?

The answer is not far-fetched, because the government gets more of the proceed from the production as such the people are getting it all wrong or perhaps they don't understand or those who understood just wanted to ferment trouble. Any issue they had then should have been directed to their Councilors, Local Government Chairmen, State Commissioners, etc. instead of venting it on the innocent Company.

vi. On the strategies adopted or Employed by Shell to Curb the Conflict with Ogoni People

The PR expert explained that Shell as a company still made use of those same old strategies they used before with the people. They organised meetings with community leaders, opinion leaders, traditional heads and Youth leaders from the area. The company also conducted empowerment programme for youths and women. They awarded scholarships to deserving students and kept talking with them through various platforms like the people's parliament and various forums. The people were divided into clusters and from time to time each cluster is invited to discuss with Shell, and there, they were told of the benefits of allowing Shell operate peacefully in their land. Those communities that allowed Shell Company unhindered access to operate were given peace awards.

There was a pathetic situation that happened at the time where Shell organised a workshop for the Ogoni youths in areas like welding, carpentry, automobiles repairs and so on, and after the training the youths were given starter packs to start their own business but instead of using it they sold them out to Igbo boys who were waiting to receive it from them. They squandered the money given to them and come back again to say Shell has not done anything for them.

The community leader enumerated several failed projects initiated by Shell and the environmental hazards and degradation as well as oil spillage occasioned by Shell Company's oil exploration and production activities, one can see clearly that shell's contribution is never commensurate to the suffering of the people. To him, their life and welfare was of no consequence to Shell, as their people were dying of hungry and other various diseases as a result.

vii. On whether there were new strategies employed by Shell when it was noticed that the Community Relations Strategy was not yielding the desired result

Though started with what was termed community assistance but the later adopted community development. This was a different approach and the last lap to what they did was sustainable development. In the sustainable development strategy, Shell provided the Ogoni community with water and generator sets to pump the water which was for the benefit of the entire community.

However, it was observed that if Shell does not provide diesel for the generators, the community would leave it like that despite the importance of the water to them. So they progressed to sustainable community development, here the company now provided a solar system that just needed cleaning of the surface of the panel so it can have a direct contact with sunlight which would help in the pumping of water.

Another Strategy employed was the Government Memorandum of Understanding (GMOU). Here the Ogoni people were on the driving seat as they decided what they actually wanted, all Shell does is to provide the money and advice to guide them.

The community leader lamented the abandonment of ongoing projects by shell, like the water project, no light or diesel in the generator to pump and supply water to members of the community. Most of their projects were not sustainable and did not address the actual needs of the people.

viii. On the UNEP Report on Ogoni and the Recommendation for a total clean-up

The PR consultant narrated what actually happened that led to the oil spillage. Firstly, when Shell equipment (Fire Tendant) which was meant to fight a fire incident was seized by the Ogoni people and the increasing misunderstanding among them, Shell workers had to move in a hurry because their life and operations were no longer safe. Ideally, when one is leaving a drilling pit it is expected that a carefully shut down by done at the wells especially if one is to abandon a place for a long period of time and it is expected that the to fix a non return valve on it to avoid oil spilling out during blast from other pipelines, unfortunately, the worker in charge could not shut down the well so while operations were taking place in offshore the oil still moved to these pits and caused a spill.

Secondly, people now went there, individuals who did not know anything about oil went to loosen and alter connections and this caused fire and the whole place was covered in thick black smoke and this caused soil degradation. When fire started in Ogoni through the well incident, Shell sent some staff there to work on it but were blocked by the Ogoni people who say before they could pass, a certain amount of money must be paid to them, or the company employ them.

Now Shell as a company was always very careful in giving out cash to people because they believe when constantly giving cash like that you encourage others to come demand for their own instead Shell employed security men to stop intending villagers from going to the affected area and they were paid 3000-5000 naira daily. This did not go down well with other communities so the barricaded their own communities asking for the same thing that was given to their brother community so the company could not just continue anymore because of the barricade upon barricade everywhere so access became a challenge.

The worst of it is when it rains, the water could carry the oil and spread to other places so what Shell had to do was to put what is called booms around the affected water to avoid it's spreading but the Ogoni people would go there and remove these booms so that the oil can spread to their own water so they could equally benefit from the compensation. The Directorate of Petroleum mandate is that if there is a spill in

any community and it is found out that it was the inhabitants of the community that caused it then there would be no compensation neither would they benefit in the awarding of the contract to clean up the place.

ix. On whether there is Ongoing Arrangement by Shell to Return to Ogoni-land

Going back requires an environmental audit. They need to check if the facilities that were left behind during the rush is still there and the answer for me is No. The flow stations had been vandalised and so many other things destroyed. While checking the possibility of going back, Shell would have to check the cost of replacing this facilities and since they are operating a joint venture they have to get approval from their senior partners with the cost in lieu decided if going back would be beneficial to them or not. If the answer is No, Shell cannot go back there because that decision rest purely on the shoulders of Nigerian National Petroleum Cooperation (NNPC).

Finally, the UNEP report can only be achieved if the Ogoni people allow Shell to come in for clean up unhindered, stop the violence and remove all barricade and stop the agitation that if Shell wants to come back they must have almost 100% equity participation because that can never happen as that decision rest on the shoulders of the Government not Shell.

9. DISCUSSION

The study looks at the public's perception of community relations strategies by Shell Company during her transaction with the people of Ogoni people. The strength and weaknesses of these strategies were also considered. Findings from the study show that the Ogoni people did not enjoy cordial relationship with Shell Company. Data from the study shows that their working relationship was hampered due to poor community relations which resulted in serious conflict that has lasted over two decades now. This position confirms the submission of Subi and Amodu (2014) that the host community were irk with Shell Company's community relations activities in dealing with environmental degradation issues raised. Although, data from the in-depth interview with the then Shell PR consultant claim that Shell perspective Shell had cordial relationship with the Ogoni people until the conflict started in 1993, which hitherto marred the company's relationship with them. The company rather believes that the people later developed a wrong impression about them which led to a transferred aggression. But the community leader interviewed maintained that Shell Company was not relating adequately with the Ogoni people from the beginning, which was why the community revolted against them when it became unbearable for them. Idemudia and Ite (2006); Amodu (2012) all share similar views of the use inadequate community relations strategies by Shell. They Ogoni people believed that the Nigerian government and the company conspired to rob them of their entitlements. They also observed that the Shell Company could always run to mobilize government support when there were disagreements between them, instead of resolving the concern of the host communities, which further proved the governmental support they enjoyed. This confirm the earlier observation of Palowei, *et al* (2014) that the host communities often accused the oil companies of being insensitive to their plights occasioned by activities of oil companies causing environmental degradation, palpable poverty, lack of basic social amenities and

employment opportunities. As such, the agitation have been Shell's refusal to clean up areas where oil are spilled, delayed the assessment of impacted areas and failure to pay adequate compensation for damaged economic crops and fish ponds.

Data from the survey shows that shell had relied mostly on the communication with royal fathers to the detriment of other sub-set of the communities complaining or lamenting isolation. Majority of the respondents identified communication with royal fathers as Shell prime way of reaching them, followed by elders of the communities. However, the survey reveals that majority of the respondents were of the view that shell only communicates with the people once a while. This negates the principle of good engagement as emphasized by the dialogic theory. Kent and Taylor (2014) had advice that organizations and publics involve in good engagement process that can lead to good decision making and create social capital. Because engagement is both an orientation that influences interactions and the approach that guides the process of interactions among groups.

However, from the in-depth interview report covering Shell's perspective, it is seen that Shell as a company still made use of old strategies they used before with the people before and during the conflict. Accordingly, the company organized meetings with community leaders, opinion & traditional leaders, and youth leaders from the area. The company also conducted empowerment programs for youths and women, while scholarships and other grants were also awarded to students. Although there were allegations that some Ogoni youths who were trained in areas like welding, carpentry, automobiles repairs and so on, after their training sold out the starter packs given by Shell for them to start their own business. Cash given were squandered and later come back for more, denying that they were previously given. This is indeed conflicting. However, the instrumentality of dialogic theory and good engagement would have gone a long way as in establishing means for a successful dialogic communication (Kent & Taylor, 2002).

As observed by Hillstrom and Hillstrom (2002), a comprehensive community relations program is cardinal to virtually all organizations as it help them gain visibility as good community citizens and also goodwill from the community in which it operates. This is important to any organization as the interaction between the organization and the host community is the most significant determinants of whether an organization will continue to grow or become more successful in that community.

Data from survey also revealed a gap in communication between Shell and the Ogoni communities. This is as majority of the respondents were of the opinion that Shell do not effectively relate or communicate with them as methods of conflict resolution adopted by Shell company were not satisfactory and could not help in reducing the prolonged conflict between Shell and the Ogoni people. Because in most cases Shell could not live up to expectation and could not keep or fulfill already made promises. This confirms the position Idemudia and Ite (2006) that corporate-community relations (CCR) strategies adopted by oil companies had failed to reduce the incidence of violent conflict between the host communities and oil companies in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria due to the failure to seek, understand and integrate community perceptions into CSR policies and practices. This is often because of the absence of an enabling environment. The Corporate image of a Company is a very

important asset that should be guided jealously. Benoit (1995) in his Image Restoration had emphasized that an organization must protect his image during a conflict and must do it best to repair and restore its image through corrective action. The reputation of a company is vital both for their self-esteem and because reputation influences how others will treat them (Benoit, 2008). Shell Company has failed to repair their image in the eyes of the Ogoni people which might also hamper their returns to full operation in the area; according to Benoit (2008), some fear that an image might be improved but not completely restored.

Though Shell had made efforts to create values and impact on the community, those values have not been considered satisfactorily by these host communities. It is observed that both parties differ on the efficacy of strategies used by Shell which further indicates a poor relationship between Shell and their publics. Nwagbara and Brown (2014); Putnam (2006) supported same that poor communication is often implicated to the creation of most conflict situations. When organizations do not communicate as expected, conflict would most likely arise because of the seeming misunderstanding among parties because communication itself has the tendency of encouraging the development of divergent views among stakeholders, hence conflict is inevitable.

A good relationship is built on effective communication. As can be seen in the explanation above, the respondents in the survey were of the opinion that Shell did not communicate effectively with their communities. Not only can this situation complicate existing conflicts, it can also engender fresh ones. Oil companies should endeavour to establish a communication system that will extend to the grassroots. This is necessary because the people at the grassroots are the ones that are actually affected by the challenges in the communities. Kusakabe (2013); Amodu (2012) also shared similar views.

The study finds out that Shell's community relations strategies did not positively influence their host communities; which was why the agitation was so high. There was also the allegation that Shell Company does not adequately consult and engage them in their activities, which explains why most projects introduced by the company were underutilized. Also from the in-depth interview reports, one could see clearly that the agitations by the people to be engaged among the staff working in the area led to some form of the conflict, which further reveals lack of inclusiveness by the oil Company. According to Idemudia and Ite (2006), oil companies had often failed to seek, understand and integrate community perceptions into activities. Nwagbara and Brown (2014) had also observed that Nigeria's habitual controversy and conflict with oil companies is a consequence of poor mode of relations and communication with wider stakeholders as host communities have constantly accused the oil companies of not putting their views into consideration during corporate communication process and also not living up to their billings in terms of corporate social responsibility (CSR).

Finding shows that only government intervention can effectively address the conflict with the people. Also, from the in-depth interview report, Shell feels that since the Nigerian government gets 55% of equity participation of the joint venture maintain with them and still could collect tax, royalties, petroleum profit tax and other taxes from Shell, much is expected of them to addressing the development challenges of the

people. As noted by Idemudia and Ite (2006), the absence of an enabling environment due to government failure is the root cause of most conflict between oil companies with their host communities. From findings in the study, a complete engagement and inclusiveness of members of the host communities by way of frequent communication through town hall meetings, improve employment rate of indigenes of the host communities and adequate execution of development projects by way of corporate social responsibility and government full involvement in creating enabling environment will help ensure company / community co-existence. Emoyan, *et al.* (2008) also share similar views that that community members had always desired to be fully involved in the activities of the oil industry, especially the processes leading to oil exploration and production which has results in environmental pollution, biodiversity depletion, social destabilization, underdevelopment of their land.

10. CONCLUSION

Community relations processes are very cardinal to the success of any organization, oil companies inclusive. As such, efforts must be made to carefully and collectively select strategies that could lead to successful engagement and dialogue with host communities. As failure to select appropriate community relations strategies would lead to unfriendly and inharmonious relationship between organization and her public.

The community relations and corporate social responsibility strategies used by Shell Company were perceived to be grossly inadequate in meeting the demands of their host communities (Ogoni-land). The host communities felt exploited by the Company who they think could not do enough to leverage them from extreme poverty, economic hardship and environmental pollution as well as degradation as a result of oil exploration, exploitation and production activities caused them.

Although Shell claim to have utilized several community relations strategies before and during the Conflict with Ogoni people, this was clearly ineffective. Poor communication and relations with the host communities are mostly responsible for the conflict between them as can be seen in complains of host communities of not being carried along or integrated in oil their activities. It can be seen that most misunderstanding with the youths came as a result of their failure to employ members of the host communities in their operations. It is important for oil companies to consult and incorporate the people in their day to day activities. It is also believed that adequate community relations are essential tools in resolving conflicts and disagreements between organizations and their host communities.

10. RECOMMENDATIONS

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

1. Oil companies should improve in their community relations and corporate social responsibility with the host communities. Scholarships/grants, empowerments, employment opportunities, infrastructural development, etc should be enhanced to improve the lives of the people.

2. Shell should ensure effective communication to enhance the relationship with their host communities. This can be done by employing more communication experts and empowering the community relations unit with the desired funds.
3. The oil companies are should hold regular town hall meetings to know the areas of contention and collectively find solution to resolve conflict areas timely to avoid escalation.
4. The host community should be fully incorporated and involved in the identification, planning, development and implementation of projects sponsored by shell by way of fulfilling their CSR.
5. Government and Shell should dialogue with the host communities to resolve the prolonged conflict the Ogoni people.
6. SPDC Global Memorandum of Understanding strategy should be improved to accommodate grassroots scheme that will help ensure the desired result.

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