

RE-ENGINEERING THE COMMUNITY RELATIONS STRATEGIES OF THE UPSTREAM OIL INDUSTRY FOR OPTIMAL RESULT IN HOST COMMUNITIES IN RIVERS STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The culture of love and hate relationship between the upstream oil industry and its host communities in Nigeria especially in Rivers State calls for public concern and investigation because of its negative effects on the socio-economic lives of both the former and the latter. Thus, this study aimed to re-engineer the community relations strategies of the upstream oil industry in its host communities in Rivers State. The study is hinged on attribution theory and the iron law of responsibility theory because of their relevance to this work. The paper adopted mixed research design: descriptive and survey research design using questionnaire as its research instrument for data gathering. The study sampled one hundred persons using the census sampling technique. Consequently, the study found that the upstream oil industry in Rivers State is adopting the divide-and- rule and seasonal community relations strategies. The study also found that the public expects the community relations strategies of the upstream oil industry to stimulate a sustainable symbiotic relationship with its host communities and diminishes hostility in its operation in the oil bearing communities in Rivers State. The study also found that the needed community relations strategies for stimulating a sustainable harmonious relationship between the upstream oil industry and its host communities in the state under study are the proactive and community-people-participatory community relations strategies rather than the seasonal, divide-and-rule, gunboat-diplomacy, laissez faire, reactive and militarization community relations strategies which the multinationals are adopting currently. To this end, the following recommendations are made among others: the upstream oil industry especially Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC), Agip Oil Company Limited and Total Exploration and Production Company Limited should rejig and re-engineer their community relations policies and strategies to give room for the adoption of proactive and community-people-participatory community relations strategies. The formulators and handlers of community relations policies and strategies of the upstream oil industry should also see the adoption and application of the ten commandments of corporate social responsibility as an indispensable community relations tool and recipe for building a sustainable symbiotic relationship with its host communities in Nigeria generally.

Keywords: Re-engineering, Community Relations Strategies, Upstream Oil Industry, Public Relations, Host Communities

INTRODUCTION

Community relations is a lifeblood that keeps organizations healthy and alive in their host communities. Effective community relations is a tonic for creating a symbiotic relationship between corporate organizations and their immediate constituents. It is akin to a biological cord that ties a mother and baby together in the womb. It builds and sustains the relationship between corporate organizations and their host communities for mutual benefit. It is a meeting point between organizations and their immediate neighbours. Its importance in the socio-economic development of organizations and their host communities can only be imagined. It is a catalyst for building a sustainable and symbiotic relationship between organizations and the communities where they are located.

Hendrix and Hayes (2007) observe that one of the most important publics an organization has is its host community, the home of its office and operations. Maintaining good relations with the community usually entails management and employees becoming involved in and contributing to local organizations and activities.

Seitel (2011) discussing the concept of community relations notes that in 21st century, most organizations, companies, hospitals, sports team, schools, etc understand they have an obligation to their host communities including supporting nonprofit organizations. This goodwill in public relations is called community relations.

For an organization to coexist peacefully in its community of operation, three skills in particular are required according to Seitel (2011). They are:

- i. Determining what the community knows and thinks about the organization.
- ii. Informing the community of the organization's point of view.
- iii. Negotiating or mediating between the organization and the community and its constituents should here be a significant discrepancy.

Alikor (2014) opines that community relations is a branch of public relations that aims at creating sustainable and symbiotic relationship between an organization and its host community. Alikor further posits that community relations is a deliberate and sustained efforts of an organization aimed at creating goodwill and mutual understanding between an organization and its host community in order to have a crisis-free operation. But how has the upstream oil industry fared in the practice of community relations in Nigeria especially in Rivers State? This is the rationale behind this study.

Statement of the Problem

From the time of environmentalists Ken Sarowiwa and Kimse Okoko in the Niger Delta, Nigeria, the struggle between the upstream oil industry and their host communities especially in Rivers State over the poor welfare of the oil bearing communities occasioned by lack of favourable community relations strategies and corporate social responsibility projects and programmes until today, the agitations for better community relations policies and strategies from the multinational oil companies have been on the rising trend. There is hardly any week without the media reportage of a host community picketing the operational base of an oil company.

No doubts, the public believes that business exists to meet the needs of the society but beyond the production of goods and service delivery which leads to profitability for investors or stockholders, a responsible organization is expected to add value to the life of its host communities through effective community relations policies with the intention to grow and sustain a symbiotic relationship with its immediate constituents. For many indigenes of the oil bearing communities, the upstream oil companies can be better described as intruders, invaders and neo colonialists who are in the Niger Delta to explore and exploit the God-given resources of the host communities without concomitant community relations projects and programmes and corporate social responsibility hence leading to violent agitations, picketing of the oil companies, vandalism of companies oil installations, stealing of crude oil, hostage taking of companies staff, declaration of incommunicado against the companies among other social vices. On the other hand, the oil companies have argued that they have done much for their host communities in terms of provision of social amenities and capacity building programmes. This argument for and against the upstream oil companies perhaps has motivated the multinational oil companies to now see the host communities as the Oliver Twist of the Niger Delta. But are the host communities actually the Oliver Twist? The position of the upstream oil industry and its host communities are the concerns of this study.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of this study is to re-engineer the community relations strategies of the upstream oil industry for optimal result in host communities in Rivers State.

Objectives of the Study

1. To identify the community relations strategies adopted by the upstream oil industry in dealing with its host communities in Rivers State.
2. To ascertain the public expectation of the community relations strategies of the upstream oil industry in relating with its host communities in Rivers State.
3. To determine the level to which the community relations strategies of the upstream oil industry have helped in creating a symbiotic relationship with its host communities in Rivers State.
4. To figure out the genres of community relations strategies that can stimulate a harmonious relationship between the upstream oil industry and its host communities in Rivers State.

Research Questions

1. What community relations strategies are adopted by the upstream oil industry in relating with its host communities in Rivers State?
2. What are the public expectations of community relations strategies of the upstream oil industry in relating with its host communities in Rivers State?
3. To what level have community relations strategies of the upstream oil industry have helped in creating symbiotic relationship with its host communities in Rivers State?
4. What genres of community relations strategies that can stimulate a harmonious relationship between the upstream oil industry and its host communities in Rivers State?

Scope of the Study

Content wise, the work is restricted to re-engineering the community relations strategies of the upstream oil industry operating in Rivers State between 2020 to 2022. To allow for an in-depth study of the phenomenon geographically, the work is narrowed down to cover the executive members of the Community Development Committees (CDCs) of five oil producing communities and their youth bodies, and three upstream oil companies in Rivers State. The choice of this group of persons is based on the fact that they are the link between the oil companies and their host communities. The oil producing communities are Idu-Ekpeye community in Ahoada West Local Government Area, Rumuekpe community in Emohua Local Government Area, Kpor community in Gokana Local Government Area, Aluu community in Ikwerre Local Government Area and Okuraagu community in Etche Local Government Area, all in Rivers State whereas the oil producing companies are Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC), Agip Oil Company and Total Exploration and Production Company. The rationale behind the choice of these communities and the oil companies is predicated on the perennial host community-induced criticisms, crises and the name-calling between the upstream oil companies and their host communities in the state under study.

Theoretical Framework

This study is hinged on two theories namely the "Attribution Theory and Iron Law of Responsibility Theory" because of their relevance to this study. Attribution theory was propounded by Heider in 1958. The theory is concerned with how individuals interpret events and how this relates to their thinking and behaviour.

Attribution theory assumes that people try to determine why people do what they do. A person seeking to understand why another person did something may attribute one or more causes to that behaviour. According to Heider, a person can make two attributions: internal attribution and external attribution. Internal attribution is concerned with the inference that a person is behaving in certain way because of something about the person, such as attitude, character of personality.

In contrast, external attribution deals with the interference that a person is behaving a certain way because of something about the situation he or she is in. The core assumption of

attribution theory is that people behave the way they do because of the situation they have found themselves. If the situation they find themselves is not acceptable, they tend to demonstrate it through their actions and inactions towards the person or organization they feel is the cause of their problem or misfortune. This accounts for the sticky relationship between the upstream oil companies and their host communities in Rivers State. Most oil bearing communities attribute their socio-economic quagmire to the oil exploration and production companies. This also is the reason for the invocation of the iron law of responsibility against the multinational oil companies in the state under study.

The iron law of responsibility theory was propounded by a German-born Italian sociologist, Robert Michels in 1911. He popularized the theory in his book titled "Political Parties." The theory holds that if an institution or organization fails to handle its mandate with a sense of social responsibility, the public will have no option than to take back such mandate or power bestowed on such entity with brute force to liberate themselves from shackles of poverty and misgovernance or mismanagement of human, material, financial and information resources. For business establishment, the iron law of responsibility theory emphasizes that if business organization does not use its socio-economic power responsibly, society will take away that power from the organization or business entity (Kreitner, 1995). This is because most business organizations contend that the business of a business is to maximize profit for investors or stockholders and not to be socially responsible to the society. This is the position of the classical economic model.

However, the proponents of socio-economic model disagree with the classical economic model, saying that business organization has a responsibility above and beyond making a profit for stockholders or investors but to improve the general quality of life by being socially responsible to the society.

From the foregoing, it can be seen that the reason why host communities have joined issues with corporate organizations especially with the upstream oil sector is sequel to lack of corporate social responsibility on the side of the organization.

Conceptual Review

Overview of Community Relations

This is a genre of public relations that strives to create a sustainable symbiotic relationship between an organization and its host community. This relationship must be anchored on goodwill and mutual understanding between the organization and its host community with a view of achieving organizational goals without host community induced-conflicts. Community relations policies can be proactive, reactive, seasonal, gunboat-diplomacy or militarization in nature.

Corporate organization has its immediate corporate constituent or landlord that has given its land for the operation of the organization. Such landlord is the natural owner of the land where corporate organization or non-profit organization is located hence it plays host to such organization and in the event of industrial hazard or pollution, the landlord becomes a major sufferer of the quagmire (Alikor, 2014).

Therefore, any organization that worth its value and respects its corporate image must court the friendship of the host community to avoid conflict and have a hostility-free operation in its area of operation. The absence of this kind of friendship and relationship has created unwanted conflict or crisis between many organizations and their host communities hence disrupting the socio-economic activities in the society.

To avoid this kind of avoid host community-induced conflict, corporate organizations must create a deliberate policy to court the friendship of their host communities to have a hostility-free operation. This is because hostility is counter-productive to the operation of corporate organizations. It hinders the socio-economic activities of organizations and retards their actualization of set out objectives.

It is against this background, every organization that values its image and reputation must strive to have a symbiotic relationship with its landlord or host communities. This genre of relationship enhances corporate organizations to achieve their predetermined goals. For oil exploration and producing companies, community relations helps them in exploring and production of the “black gold” without hostility.

This explains the fact that most of the socio-economic problems bedeviling host communities in Rivers State are caused by the actions and inactions of corporate organizations and their host communities. These problems on many occasions have resulted to violent conflicts hence impeding the socio-economic development in Nigerian nation.

Therefore, this negative narrative must be re-scripted in the relationship between host communities and the organizations they play host to in order to stimulate socio-economic development of Nigerian state. Corporate organizations must see their host communities as critical stakeholders in their operations to avoid anti-development elements and attitude from the host community.

That is why effective community relations becomes imperative and sacrosanct, to the overall survival of corporate organizations in Nigeria. According to Center and Jackson (2007), a neighbourhood, town, city or state is obviously a human community. Like organizations, they require positive interrelations among all members in order to function smoothly and efficiently because organizations would have difficulty operating effectively in communities that are disrupted by crisis. It is necessary for them to accept the responsibility of corporate citizenship hence mutual respect and relationship must be engendered by positive public relations actions (Center & Jackson, 2007).

Target Goals of Community Relations

Igben (2007) and Seitel (2011) opine that community relations policies of organizations are expected to achieve the following goals:

1. To foster a symbiotic relationship between a corporate organization and its host community.
2. To achieve a peaceful working environment for a corporate organization.
3. To inform the host community about the modus operandi of a corporate organization's community relations policy, their products, services and management.
4. To build a mutual trust between a corporate organization and its host community.
5. To prevent man-made-crisis in corporate organization's community of operation.
6. To facilitate a hitch-free operation for a corporate organization.
7. To create an atmosphere that will trigger profit-making for companies and public acceptability for non-profit making organizations.
8. To find out the impression of host community about the operation of a corporate organization.
9. To modify a negative idiosyncrasy emanating from host community to prevent conflict.
10. To reinforce an acceptable attitude from the host community for mutual benefit between a corporate organization and host community.
11. To motivate a desired behaviour or attitude that will aid a corporate organization to achieve its predetermined goals effectively and efficiently.
12. To attract customers and consumers for higher patronage of a corporate organization's merchandise.
13. To develop paradigms for crisis prevention and management in corporate organization among others.

Concept of Host Communities

These are the communities accommodating the upstream oil companies such as the oil exploration and exploitation companies including the pipeline oil transportation and refining

companies. The host communities are the natural owners of the land the oil exploration and production companies are occupying in Rivers State and other parts of the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. The host communities are one of the key publics of the upstream oil companies. The publics in the host communities are: visible and invisible publics.

The visible public is the group of people that can be easily seen and relate with in the communities by the oil companies. Some of these groups are the elite, the youths group, the women group, the chiefs, the special group, the students group, the local media, etc. The groups mentioned are domiciled or live in the communities where the companies operate from. In contrast to visible publics, we have the invisible groups that are made of people that are not living in the communities but are indigenes of the communities. Some of these groups are the spirit beings like the ancestors, the gods, the goddesses, the dead and other invisible beings as Africans believe.

Invisible public also include indigenes of host communities living in diaspora whose presence are not easily felt by the companies operating in their localities but sometimes their opinions are sought by their brothers and sisters back home.

Target Goals of Host Community

Center and Jackson (2007) and Hendrix and Hayes (2007) are in consensus that host communities expect corporate organizations to impact on them on the following ways:

1. Improve their standard of living socio-economically and environmentally
2. Embark on proactive community relations policy and corporate social responsibility projects and programmes
3. Protection of the environment: land, river, sea, stream and air-space by the oil and gas exploration and exploitation companies
4. Remediation of polluted environment especially farm-land by the oil companies
5. Provision of employment opportunities for indigenes of host community
6. Respect for the culture and tradition of the host community
7. Development of host community via human capacity building and infrastructural development
8. Sustainability of relative peace in host communities
9. Expectation of mutual relationship between host community and corporate organization
10. Encouragement of community policing rather than the militarization of the operational base of the company

Host Communities and their Importance to the Operations of Corporate Organizations

Host communities are indispensable partners and neighbours of corporate organizations hence must be cared for by organizations to have a meaningful and mutual relationship with them if the organizations desire to have a conflict-free operation in their place of work. Therefore, organization must court the friendship of the host communities to enhance their productivity, human capital and profit generation. Thus, it is convenient to say that host communities are sacrosanct to the operations of corporate organizations especially the oil and gas industry. Some of the ways in which the host communities are unavoidable in the life of any corporate organization according to Ekwelie (2006) and Nkwocha (2017) are:

1. They serve as the microcosm or miniature of the larger society.
2. They are the natural owners of the land where the corporate organization operates.
3. They sometimes serve a community-police to the lives and property of a corporate organization.
4. They provide skilled and unskilled labour to a corporate organization they relate with.
5. They serve as a parameter for assessing the corporate citizenship of a corporate organization.
6. They provide female-folk to male-folk which helps in reducing their stress after work in a way of having a leisure time.

7. They provide affordable hospitality to the organization's staff.
8. They serve as a watchdog on the activities of an organization.
9. They provide religious grounds for organization's personnel to worship their God, gods, goddesses, ancestors, etc..
10. They are major sufferers of organization's operational hazards in terms of air and environmental pollution e.g. Ogoni vs. SPDC, Egi vs. Total E& P Company Limited.
11. They provide recreational centers for the company staff to reduce burden.
12. They are promoters of corporate identity of the organization it plays host to.
13. They mediate and arbitrate in conflicts between organization and an element in the host community.

Classification of Community Relations Strategies

Community relations strategies are classified according to their usage and effects on corporate organizations and their immediate constituents hence the following strategies exist:

Proactive Community Relations Strategies

This is a type of community relations policy that is made from the inception of the organization to carry its host community along in the scheme of things of the organization through closer collaboration in order to identify the developmental needs of the community and galvanized efforts towards addressing the needs without any form of agitation, conflict or litigation by the host community.

This class of community relations prevents conflict in organization's area of operation and sets the tone for symbiotic relationship between the organization and its host community. Proactive community relations is diametrical to reactive or fire-brigade community relations. Proactive community relations is the best genre of community relations especially if its programmes and projects are people-participatory or people-centric.

Reactive/Fire-brigade Community Relations Strategies

This type of community relations is reactive in nature. Reactive community relations programmes or projects come as a result of intense, aggressive or violent agitation by the host community. In reactive community relations, organizations are reluctant and indifferent to the yearnings and aspirations of their host communities until there is a strong agitation for initiation and execution of development programmes, employment opportunities generation, capacity building programmes and other socio-economic needs of the people in the host communities.

This type of community relations is often called fire-brigade community relations because of the way and manner in which it is used in the areas of operations of corporate organizations. This fire-brigade approach of community relations is alleged to have caused the militancy in the Niger Delta hitherto. It is not a better approach in maintaining relationship between corporate organizations and their host communities.

Defensive and Militarization Community Relations Strategies

Defensive community relations can also be called militarization community relations. This is a community relations approach in which corporate organizations prefer to connect with the security agents such as the Army, Navy, Air Force, Police, State Security Service, etc rather than connecting with the host communities with the aim of intimidating them at the behest of the corporate organizations in order to have a hitch free operation.

In Defensive community relations, corporate organizations guard against negative actions from their host communities by the deployment of security personnel as their watch-dogs in order to forestall the entry of host communities' representatives into the companies premises for a complaint, protest or picketing of the company. This kind of community relations is presently adopted by most multinational oil companies operating in the Niger Delta and it is crisis induced.

In this CR approach, the security agents are combat ready to use their arsenal against the host communities.

Laissez-Faire Community Relations Strategies

In this type of community relations, organizations do not have a clear defined community relations policy that can serve as a tonic or recipe for building sustainable mutual understanding and goodwill with their host communities. In this system, organizations demonstrate a laissez-faire approach in relating with their neighbours or host communities. This is a type of community relations where there is a high level of lackadaisical attitude towards initiating community relations programmes or corporate social responsibility programmes in the host communities. This presupposes that organizations are not interested in the welfare of their host communities or embarking on projects or programmes that would bring value addition to the lives of the people in their areas of operations. Corporate organizations here do not respect the doctrine of Corporate Social Responsibility as a key community relations tool in winning and sustaining favourable public perception in their areas of operations but sometimes embark on infinitesimal project without the input of the host communities. Thus, the so-called project is devoid of people participatory. In some situations, projects carried out, are hardly liked by the host communities. This type of community relations policy is ineffective and does not have the needed impetus to create a sustainable symbiotic relationship between corporate organizations and their host communities, neither does it have the capacity to strengthen relationship that is going comatose in an organization's area of operation. Corporate organizations that adopt this type of community relations approach are often interested in maintaining the existing status quo with their host communities and undermine communities' socio-economic welfare including good corporate citizenship.

Gunboat-Diplomacy Community Relations Strategies

This is a genre of community relations in which corporate organizations use the threat of force by rolling out military arsenal to threaten their neighbours or host communities especially when the communities make incessant requests for community development programmes or projects. In reaction to the requests, corporate organizations seek ways to instill fears into the people by the deployment of aggressive and combatant looking soldiers, armed police men and other security agents without putting triggers to action. Here, threatening of the community indigenes is the target or goal of the activity. The gunboat-diplomacy community relations is akin to militarization community relations but distinct in operations. In militarization community relations, the approach is full militarization of the communities hence waiting for the slightest opportunity to send the triggers to work. For this community relations genre, threatening of the communities is not the target but full military action. In this relationship, the organization seeks to connect with military officers rather than meeting the yearnings and aspirations of their host communities. Also, in militarization community relations approach, weapons are used against the communities in order to arrest, torture, intimidate, detain, assault or chase out the perceived enemies of the organizations out of their communities. Sometimes, the military action results to outright killing of indigenes of host communities in order to put under control emergency situation bedeviling the organization. Indeed, militarization and gunboat diplomacy community relations make organizations to lose the virtues of good corporate citizenship. This is against the position of Thompson et al (2004, p. 231) when they posit that strong enforcement of a corporate code of ethics by itself is not sufficient to make a company good corporate citizen. They argue that business leaders who want their companies to be regarded as exemplary corporate citizens must not only see that their companies operate ethically but also display a "social conscience" in decisions that affect stakeholders especially the communities in which they operate, employees and the society at large. For an organization to avoid the pitfalls of scandal and disgrace, it should consistently display the intent to conduct its business in a socially acceptable manner. The chief

executive and those around him must be openly and unequivocally committed to ethical conduct and socially redeeming business principles and values (p. 320).

Divide and Rule Community Relations Strategies

This is a type of community relations in which an organization deliberately chooses to relate with few personalities in the community where it operates at the expense of the community for convenience and selfish interest rather than connecting with the entire community or its representatives like Community Development Committee (CDC), Community Town Council (CTC), Elite Group, etc. This genre of community relations empowers the so-called selected persons economically at the expense of the community. In this process, few contracts are given to the few to empower them and sometimes, their children and wards are awarded scholarship to study both at secondary school and tertiary education levels while other indigenes of the community are neglected.

This kind of community relations approach breeds violence in the organization's area of operation. Divide and rule community relations is a crisis prone approach. It may also lead to militarization or imposing of a police state in a community. For example, the Benisede's crisis in Delta State in recent past, started after angry youths insisted that it was time for Shell Petroleum Development Company to honour a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) reached between the community and the oil firm. Shell claimed that the incessant crises in the area affected their operations and had hampered the relief the company was committed to providing its host communities (National Interest Newspaper Editorial, February 5, 2006, p. 14).

However, the community's indigenes alleged that Shell Petroleum Development Company has adopted "divide and rule strategy" in relating with the community. The youths believed that the company is not alive to their Corporate Social Responsibility hence, the reason for the crisis.

Divide and rule community relations approach is alleged to be the cause of the Ogoni crisis in 1993 which led to the mob action against the famous "Ogoni 7" by a faction of Ogoni youths. The youths were alleged to have labeled the seven personalities as 'vultures or vampires', who had been used by Shell Petroleum Development Company to continue to explore and exploit oil in Ogoni land in spite of the growing poverty and environmental problem in the land.

Publics of Community Relations

There are diverse publics which a community relations experts have to relate with in order to stimulate effective relationship with the host communities. Jefkins (1998; Hendrix & Haye, 2007; Center & Jackson, 2007; Seitel, 2007; Igben, 2007; Nkwocha, 2017) are in consensus that the following are the key publics community relations managers or officers are likely to relate with:

Chieftaincy Institution

Members of this institution are the custodians of community's land and culture. So, they are key publics of community relations. They comprise traditional rulers, chiefs, title holders and other members of the council. These persons are major stakeholders in the community. Therefore, must be communicated with by a Community Relations Officer.

Members of Community Development Committee

These are chosen or elected indigenes of a community saddled with the responsibilities of initiating and executing of community development projects. They liaise with corporate organizations, government and development agencies in terms of community development projects and programmes. In some communities, CDC is called Town Council with the same mandate of conceptualizing and implementation of people-participatory projects in the community. So, a Community Relations Officer must relate with this group so as to carry the host community along in his scheme of things to avoid community relations induced crisis

The Elite Group

This consists of the highly educated personalities in the community whose opinions count. They are influential in the community. They can make or mar the activities of the organization through positive opinions or negative perception about the organization. So, they must be consulted by a Community Relations Officer as the occasion demands. Some of them may be commissioners, former commissioners, permanent secretaries, former permanent secretaries, judges, retired judges, lectures, medical doctors, lawyers, engineers, business barons, journalists, etc. Therefore, cannot be relegated to the background on issues of community development. These persons know the effect of oil exploration and production on communities and their people. They equally know when an oil company is engaging on white-washing and green-washing activities. So, their friendship by community relations personnel is valuable.

Youth Bodies

The importance of youth groups in community relations can not be overemphasized because their actions or inactions can make or mar the corporate existence of an organization within the community. They have the energy and population to mount protest against an organization, perceived to be indifferent to their yearnings and aspirations. They can even instigate violent agitation in the organization's area of operations when their demands are not met. So, they are indispensable in community relations policies and programmes of any organization. The activities of ex-militants in the Niger Delta against multinational oil companies is a typical example of what the youths can do against corporate organizations.

Media Establishments

Community Relations Officers also have the task of creating a sustainable, cordial and fruitful relationship with media outfits operating within their companies' areas of operations. The media outfits may be local, regional or national in structure and operation but their negative media reportage against the organizations may be damaging to the corporate image of the organizations. Thus, their friendship is usually sought by corporate organizations because they are major watchdogs in the communities.

Religious Organizations

Religious organizations often serve as conflict management and resolution centres in the time of crisis between organizations and their host communities. Therefore, the friendship of religious leaders is germane in building a symbiotic relationship between organizations and their neighbours or host communities in contemporary society. This presupposes that religious leaders can serve as catalyst for conflict resolution between corporate organizations and their host communities in the time of hostility.

Women Groups

Women are so important that cannot be neglected in community relations programmes of any organization because they are major stimulants for peace and conflict in any community. They can directly or indirectly influence any man irrespective of his position in the community or larger society. Currently women are now used by community leaders to picket corporate organizations that fail to implement Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) and even protest against government that is indifferent to fulfilling its social contract reached with the citizenry.

It is in view of this, that organizations must establish a sustainable cordial relationship with women groups in their host communities through plethora of community relations tools like provision of women development centre, women capacity building centre, micro business support programme, provision of high yielding seedlings, provision of health facilities, etc to trigger beneficial relationship between the former and the latter.

Ten Commandments of Corporate Social Responsibility as Community Relations Tool:

1. Thou shall take corrective action before it is required.
2. Thou shall work with affected constituents to resolve mutual problems.
3. Thou shall work to establish industry wide standards and self-regulation.
4. Thou shall publicly admit your mistakes.
5. Thou shall get involved in appropriate social programmes.
6. Thou shall help correct environmental problems.
7. Thou shall monitor the changing social environment.
8. Thou shall establish and enforce a corporate code of conduct.
9. Thou shall take needed public standards on social issues.
10. Thou shall strive to make profit an ongoing basis (Alexander & Matthews, 1984; Kreitner, 1995, p. 136).

But to what level has the upstream oil industry in Rivers State fared in the adherence to the above mentioned Corporate Social Responsibility's Ten Commandments in dealing with its host communities in Rivers State? This is another concern of this work.

Concept of the Upstream Oil Sector

The oil and gas industry comprises two parts: upstream and downstream oil sector. The upstream oil sector deals with oil exploration and production process of the industry e.g. Agip Oil Company, Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC), Total Exploration & Production (E&P) Company Limited, etc. These companies are also involved in pipeline transportation to the processing and refining points. However, the downstream oil sector includes companies which deal with refining, processing of crude oil and gas products, their distribution and marketing of the petroleum products and vehicular distribution of petroleum products in our contemporary society.

Abridged Historical Perspective of Community Relations Policy in Niger Delta

Historically, multinational oil and gas companies operating in the Niger Delta popularized community relations in Nigeria in the late 1980s and early 90s to eliminate host community induced crisis in their communities of operations (Nkwocha, 2017).

Nkwocha further observes that before now host communities were relegated while their environment, homes, waterways, farmlands, airspace and means of livelihood (fishing and farming) were destroyed through oil and gas exploration, production and distribution activities by the upstream oil sector.

Oil spillage, for instance, destroyed both waters and farmlands, and made life miserable for the 'ruralites' in the oil and gas producing communities. Gas flaring and acid rains had their own health hazards including black and white soot (Don Pedro (2006; Nkwocha, 2017).

Sadly enough, the host communities never benefited enough from these oil and gas exploration and production companies since the discovery of crude oil in Oloibiri in Niger Delta region of Nigeria in 1956 till date. Poverty and poor standard of living still ravaged the host communities till today (Nkwocha, 2017).

Most of the indigenes of the host communities are still leaving in mould houses without zinc on the roof, no good water to drink, no good health facility, no good road, no electricity, etc. This situation has given rise to diverse agitations by the host communities of the multinational oil and gas exploration and exploitation companies. The resultant effect of this condition of the host communities is the present cat and dog relationships between the former and the latter,

It is against this background, that the late Ken Saro-Wiwa, Kimso Okoko and other environmentalists began to agitate for an improved life for the host communities in the Niger Delta. These agitations triggered the multinational oil and gas production companies to establish Community Relations Units or Desks to handle host communities yearnings and aspirations between 1980s and 90s (Nkwocha, 2017).

But how far has the establishment of the community relations units of these companies addressed the socio-economic goals of the oil and gas producing communities? Why the incessant picketing of oil and gas companies, hostage- taking against the companies staff, molestation of companies staff, blocking of companies premises, kidnapping of companies staff, vandalization of oil pipelines, withdrawing of community policing and other illicit actions against the companies if the community relations policies of these companies have been effective? This is the thrust and the rationale behind this study.

Triggers of Community Relations induced Conflicts in the Upstream Oil Sector

Igben (2007) identifies the following as some of the causes of conflicts or crises in the oil exploration and production companies in the Niger Delta:

- i. Lack of employment opportunity for the teeming youths of Niger Delta especially the host community
- ii. Lack of proactive community relations policy by corporate organizations especially the oil and gas production companies
- iii. Lack of implementation of labour law in terms of employment of junior staff
- iv. Introduction of neo-colonialism by multinational oil companies in host communities
- v. Adoption of divide-and-rule community relations model by corporate organizations especially the multinational oil exploration and production companies
- vi. Lack of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programmes and projects in companies' communities of operations
- vii. Incessant pollution of the environment by oil exploration and production companies
- viii. Deforestation of host communities' bio-diversity reserve or forest in favour of oil exploration and exploitation by the upstream oil sector
- ix. Lack local content contract policy by corporate organizations
- x. Lack of economic support for micro businesses in host communities Nkwocha (2017) sees the following as the triggers of conflicts between the upstream oil sector and its host communities in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria:
 - i) Degradation and pollution of farm land, river, sea and stream
 - ii) Intensive community agitations and youth restiveness
 - iii) Agitation for resource control by oil producing communities and states iv) Issue of militancy in the Niger Delta
 - v) Health/Safety/Environmental issues in the oil bearing communities
 - vi) Alleged neglect of host communities by the oil companies
 - vii) Oil theft by indigenes of host communities and their allied
 - viii) Lack of corporate social responsibility programmes and projects

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a mixed research design: descriptive and survey. These methods allow the researcher to gather both quantitative and qualitative data. The population of this study consists of the members of the executive council of the Community Development Committees (CDCs) of five oil producing communities in Rivers State which include Rumuekpe community, Idu Ekpeye community, Kpor community, Aluu community and Okuroagu community all in Rivers State. The sample size for this study is the entire one hundred persons that make up the five Community Development Committtees (CDCs) of the five oil producing communities purposively chosen. The sampling technique adopted in this is study is consensus sampling technique using CDCs Membership Registers as the sampling frame. This study used questionnaire as its research instrument to elicit response from the respondents. One hundred copies of questionnaire were administered to the respondents but ninety-six copies were retrieved, upon this, the actual data presentation and analysis were carried out.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Research Question 1: What community relations strategies are adopted by the upstream oil industry in relating with its host communities in Rivers State?

Table 4.1: Community Relations Strategies of the Upstream Oil Industry in Rivers State

Options	Frequency Response	Percentage (%)
Gunboat-Diplomacy/ Militarization Community Relations Strategies	30	31
Divide and Rule/ Seasonal Community Relations strategies	32	33
Proactive/Community-People-Participatory Community Relations Strategies	18	18
Reactive/Fire Brigade Community Relations Strategies	16	18
Total	96	100

Source: 2022 Field Survey

The above table shows that 31% of the respondents opined that the upstream oil industry in Rivers State are adopting the “gunboat-diplomacy and militarization community relations strategies” in dealing with its host communities in Rivers State whereas 33% of the respondents averred that the upstream oil industry operating in Rivers State is adopting the “divide-and-rule and seasonal community relations strategies” in dealing with its host communities in the state under study. In the same vein, 18% of the respondents submitted that the upstream oil sector in Rivers State is adopting “proactive and community-people- participatory community relations strategies” in dealing with its host communities in Rivers State. Similarly, another 18% of the respondents said the upstream oil industry is adopting “ reactive and fire-brigade community relations strategies” in dealing with its host communities in Rivers State. Sequel to the overall result of the data analysis here, the respondents that subscribed to “divide-and-rule and seasonal community relations strategies ” polled the highest respondents (32) and percentage (33%) hence has answered the research question one (1) of this study.

Research Question 2: What is the public expectation of community relations strategies of the upstream oil industry in its host communities in Rivers State?

Table 4.2: Public Expectation of Community Relations Strategies of the Upstream Oil Industry in Rivers State

Options	Frequency Response	Percentage (%)
Reduction of poverty level in the host communities	20	21
Promotion of socio-economic welfare of the host communities	24	25
Encouragement of proactive community relations projects and programmes in the host communities	20	21
Encouragement of community-people-participatory projects and programmes in the host communities	32	33
Total	96	100

Source: 2022 Field Survey

The table above shows that 21% of the respondents said the public expectation of the community relations strategies role in the host communities is the “reduction of the poverty level in the host communities” while 25% of the respondents opined the “promotion of the socio-economic welfare of the host communities.”

Similarly, 21% of the respondents averred that the expected role community relations strategies in the host communities is the “encouragement of proactive community relations projects and programmes in the host communities” whereas 33% of the respondents submitted that the “encouragement of community-people-participatory projects and programmes in the host communities” is the heartbeat of the external publics in the Rivers State.

From the overall result of the analysis, the respondents that subscribed to the “encouragement of community-people-participatory projects and programmes in the host communities” polled the highest respondents (32) and percentage (33%) hence has answered the research question two (2) of this study.

Research Question 3: What is the level to which community relations strategies of the upstream oil industry have helped in creating a symbiotic relationship with its host communities in Rivers State?

Table 4.3: Community Relations Strategies and Creation of Symbiotic Relationship with Host Communities in Rivers State

Options	Frequency Response	Percentage (%)
Very high	11	12
High	25	26
Low	30	31
Very low	30	31
Total	96	100

Source: 2022 Field Survey

The above result of data analysis shows that 12% of the respondents rated the level of the contributions of community relations strategies role to the creation of symbiotic relationship between the upstream oil industry and its host communities in Rivers State is “very high” while 26% of the respondents opted for ‘high’ option.

In the same vein, 31% of the respondents rated the level of community relations strategies of the upstream oil industry to the creation of symbiotic relation between her and her host communities ‘low’ and 31% of another respondents rated the role of community relations strategies of the upstream oil industry in creation of symbiotic relationship between the former and the latter “very low.”

Sequel to the above result of data analysis, the respondents that subscribed to “low and very low option” polled the highest percentage (31%) each hence has answered the research question 3 of this study.

Research Question 4: What genres of community relations strategies that can stimulate a harmonious relationship between the upstream oil industry and its host communities in Rivers State?

Table 4.4 Genres of Community Relations Strategies that can Trigger Harmonious Relationship between the Upstream Oil Industry and Host Communities in Rivers State

Options	Frequency Response	Percentage (%)
Fire-brigade community relations Strategy		12

	11	
Reactive community relations strategy	25	26
Proactive community relations strategy	30	31
Community-people-participatory community relations strategy	30	31
Total	96	100

Source: 2021 Field Survey

The above result of data analysis shows that 12% of the respondents subscribed to “fire-brigade community relations strategy” as the community relations strategy that can create a harmonious relationship between the upstream oil industry and its host communities in Rivers State while 26% of the respondents suggested “reactive community relations strategy” as the community relations strategy that can create a harmonious relationship between the upstream oil sector and its host communities in Rivers State. In the same vein, 31% of the respondents subscribed to proactive community relations strategy as the genre of strategy that can create the aforementioned relationship between the former and the latter in Rivers State. Similarly, another 31% of the respondents suggested community-people-participatory community relations strategy as the most effective strategy to create the desired harmonious relationship between the upstream oil industry and its host communities in Rivers State. From the foregoing, the respondents that subscribed to “proactive and community-people-participatory community relations strategies” polled the highest respondents (30) and percentage (31%) each hence has answered the research question 4 of this study.

Discussion of Findings

The discussion of findings in this study is based on the results of the data analysis in this work using the four (4) research questions presented earlier as a guide.

Research Question 1: Which community relations strategies are adopted by the upstream oil industry in relating with its host communities in Rivers State? The question is designed to ascertain the genres of community relations strategies that are adopted by the upstream oil industry in Rivers State. The answer to this question is presented on table 4.1 in the data analysis of this study. The result of the data analysis shows that the upstream oil industry in Rivers State is adopting divide-and-rule and seasonal community relations strategies hence the incessant crisis with its host communities. This is because a large number of the indigenes of the host communities often feel neglected, marginalized and excluded by the companies they play host to, having giving them land, stream, river, etc to operate from. This ill-feeling has triggered the adoption of “the iron law of responsibility” by most of the neglected indigenes of the host communities leading to stoppage of the companies work, vandalization of oil pipelines, hostage-taking of oil workers, picketing of the companies, violent agitation of resource control, declaration of incommunicado against the upstream oil companies. All these are targeted to take back the economic power from the upstream oil industry as advocated by the iron law of responsibility which holds that if business organization fails to be fair and socially responsible to the society or use its socio-economic power responsibly, the society will take away that power violently to protect itself against unnecessary economic exploitation. Undoubtedly, this is what is happening between most oil companies and their host communities leading to Israelis and Palestinians kind of relationship.

Research Question 2: What is the public expectation of the community relations strategies of the upstream oil industry in host communities in Rivers State? The question is designed to ascertain the public expectation of the upstream oil industry’s community relations strategies in host communities especially in area of socio-economic development. The answer to this question is provided on table 4.2 of the data analysis of this study. The result of the data analysis shows that the respondents expect the upstream oil industry community relations strategies to encourage the embarking of community-people-participatory projects and programmes in the host communities

in Rivers State rather than imposing them on the host communities which often are disliked by the beneficiaries. This shows that corporate organisations especially oil companies are expected to allow the host communities to propose and execute the kind projects and programmes they feel can add value to their lives. This no doubt, will make the host communities feel a sense of belonging to the community relations projects and programmes and stimulate community-policing of such programmes. This will help to avoid giving the host community water when they need electricity or good road network. Similarly, considering the position of the "Ten Commandments of Corporate Social Responsibility" as propounded by Larry D. Alexander and Williams F. Matthews in *Business and Society Review*, Series 50 (1984, pp.62-66) and popularized by Kreitner (1995), the commandment 2 reads: "Thou shall work with affected constituents to resolve mutual problems."

This implies that corporate organizations are expected to work with their immediate constituents in solving their socio-economic problems. Doing it alone negates the idea behind the commandment 2 of the corporate social responsibility which gives credence to community-people-participatory community relations strategy. This also opposes the dictum that holds: "He who pays the piper dictates the tune." This maxim is not befitting in community relations.

Research Question 3: What is the level to which community relations strategies of the upstream oil industry have helped in creating symbiotic relationship with its host communities in Rivers State? This question is designed to appraise the level of the contribution of the community relations strategies of the upstream oil industry in creating a sustainable symbiotic relationship with its host communities in Rivers State. The answer to this question is provided on the table 4.3 of the data analysis of this study. The result of the data analysis shows that the community relations strategies of the upstream oil industry has not done well in creating a sustainable symbiotic relationship with its host communities in Rivers State. This is greatly tied to the genres of community relations strategies that are at work in the oil exploration and production companies such as divide-and-rule community relations strategy, seasonal community strategy, gunboat-diplomacy community relations strategy, militarization community relations strategy, reactive/ fire-brigade community relations strategy rather than people-centred community relations strategies. The aforementioned genres of community relations strategies according to Igben (2007), Center and Jackson (2007) and Nkwocha (2017) can hardly create an atmosphere of peace, security and mutual understanding and goodwill between organizations and their host communities.

Research Question 4: What genres of community relations strategies that can stimulate a harmonious relationship between the upstream oil industry and its host communities in Rivers State? This question is designed to find out the kinds of community relations strategies that have the capacity to generate harmonious relationship between the upstream oil industry and its host communities in Rivers State. The answer to this question is presented on the table 4.4 of the data analysis of this study. The result of the data analysis shows that proactive and community-people-participatory community relations strategies are the core genres community relations strategies that can stimulate harmonious relationship between the upstream oil industry and the host communities in Rivers State.

Public Relations scholars believe that these genres of community relations strategies have the capacity to promote cordial and beneficial relationship between corporate organizations and their immediate constituents especially the host communities and diminish community relations-induced conflict or crisis. This genres of community relations strategies also encourages the use of corporate social responsibility as a tool for building a sustainable win-win relationship between corporate organizations and their host communities (Hendrix and Hayes, 2007; Nkwocha, 2017). Similarly, these community relations strategies: proactive and community-people-participatory strategies support the application of the "Ten Commandments of Corporate Social Responsibility" as a building block for effective community relations practice. Therefore, to avoid the growing cat and dog relationship between the upstream oil sector and their host communities in the state under study, which breeds suspicion, stereotyping, hatred, labeling and name calling, the oil

exploration and production companies are encouraged to adopt proactive and community-people-participatory community relations strategies in relating with their host communities (Seitel. 2007; Hendrix & Hayes, 2007; Centre & Jackson, 2007).

Adherence to the dictates of the Ten Commandments of Corporate Social Responsibility as community relations tool stimulates conducive environment for corporate organizations to operate and maximize profit. This implies that corporate social responsibility is more or less a social investment for profit making organizations because at the long run, it facilitates their chances of profit making for business investors or stockholders. Proactive community relations and community-people-participatory community relations strategies blended with effective corporate social responsibility practice create a win-win relationship between profit making organizations and their host communities, and eliminates bad blood among the two parties (Kreitner,1995).

Summary of Findings

1. This study found that the upstream oil sector is adopting divide-and-rule and seasonal community relations strategies in relating with its host communities in Rivers State.
2. This study found that the public expects the community relations strategies of the upstream oil sector to encourage the adoption of community-people-participatory community relations projects and programmes in the host communities in Rivers State.
3. This study also found that the level of community relations strategies of the upstream oil sector in creating a sustainable symbiotic relationship between the upstream oil sector and its host communities is not encouraging or commendable in Rivers State.
4. This study as well found that the desired community relations strategies for stimulating a sustainable harmonious and cordial relationship between the upstream oil sector and their host communities in Rivers State are proactive and community-people-participatory community relations strategies.

CONCLUSION

Undoubtedly, it can be concluded that effective adoption and practice of proactive and community-people-participatory community relations strategies combined with people-centred corporate social responsibility programmes and projects are the answers to the incessant conflicts between the upstream oil sector and its immediate constituents in Rivers State. These community relations strategies have the capacity according to the result of the data analysis of this study to re-engineer the sticky relationship between most of the upstream oil companies and their host communities in Rivers State. Therefore, there should be a holistic overhaul of the community relations strategies of the upstream oil industry in Rivers State to give room for peace, progress and security of both the upstream oil sector and the host communities in the state under study.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The upstream oil oil should rethink and rejig its community relations strategies to make them preemptive or proactive rather than reactionary in order to optimize the actualization of its target goals.
2. The study advocates for a paradigm shift in community relations strategies of the upstream oil industry in order to make them people-centric and people-driven which ultimately will stimulate a sustainable symbiotic relationship between the former and the latter.
3. The study sees the adoption and application of the ten commandments of corporate social responsibility by the upstream oil industry as indispensable recipe for effective community relations practice in host communities to attract favourable public perception and diminish hostility in the localities of its operation.
4. The upstream oil industry should see proactive community relations and community-people-participatory community relations strategies as catalysts for re-scripting and re-engineering the

negative narrative beclouding its image and reputation in the sight of its immediate constituents and diminish the current growing rife, suspicion, labeling, legal suit, name calling, stereotyping, Ill-feelings and bad blood between the former and the latter in Rivers State.

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