Community Relations Strategy for Curbing Conflicts between Multi-National Oil Companies and Host Communities in Delta State

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ABSTRACT: *The study examined the Influence of Community Relations Strategy in Curbing Conflicts between Multinational Oil Companies and Host Communities in Delta State. The issues of high expectations by host communities from companies in their environment have often been the cause of conflict between organizations and their host communities. As conflicts emerge, there is a need to develop strategies to curb them in order to maintain societal stability. In line with this, a sample of four hundred (400) respondents was randomly selected from the different geographical blocs in the three Senatorial Districts of Delta State. The method of data analysis involved the use of descriptive statistical tools. Findings show that the residents of the host communities in Delta State have a negative perception of the community relations strategies adopted by multinational oil companies in their operational areas. The study concluded that provision of health facilities, scholarships, and partnering with host communities in stage managed events and activities as part of community relations strategies are not effective in resolving conflicts between multinational oil companies and host communities in Delta State. The study recommended that multinational oil companies should rethink their current community relations strategies in their host communities to focus on consultation with and in the interest of the host communities, rather than imposing their community relations strategies on the people.*

KEYWORDS: influence, community relations strategy, conflicts, multinational oil companies and host communities.

INTRODUCTION

An important area in public relations that has attracted the attention of scholars is community relations. This is true because maintaining peaceful interaction and coexistence with members of a community where an organization is situated is essential for the success and survival of that organisation. An organisation that is in constant conflict with its host community will find it difficult to survive. Iheriohanma, (2008) noted that an organization's job performance and activities will improve if there is a good communication and cordial relationship between that organization and its host communities. This is why organisations invest heavily in community relations by way of developing social corporate responsibility, to give back to their host community. Conflict as agreed by experts is inevitable in society because humans differ significantly in ideologies, orientation and interests. Where there is human affair there is bound to be conflicts. According to Nnebedum (2014), conflict is an expression and manifestation of hostility, unfriendliness, and antagonism. It is a divergence of opinion between two or more people in an organisation regarding something that was or was not done or when opposing views are strongly held in a work environment (Ulo, 2011). On his part, Omoike (2014) cited in Mbah, Oluka, and Alio, (2021) sees conflict as that which happens between two or more people or groups with incompatible goals in an organization. It may be referred to as a situation where there are conflicting or disagreeing interests between an organization and their host communities or when the interest of an organization is not compatible with its host community.

It is no news that there is often conflict between oil and gas companies and their host communities in Nigeria, particularly in the Niger Delta region which in most cases arises from poor or ineffective community relations. Kenan (2013) opines that having multiple conflicts within an organization or between an organization and its host community is dangerous and does not foster a reputable image and goodwill for the organization as well as its host community. That is why organisations consider it a matter of top priority to manage conflict to the best of their abilities instead of allowing it to escalate. Kalu, (2018) also maintained that an organization that can avert conflict with its host community from assuming an alarming proportion is said to have succeeded in putting its community relations in proper perspective. Henry (2009), observed that one major cause of conflicts between an organization and its host community is the sharing of limited resources. Nwagbara and Brown (2014) noted that with the tempestuous nature of business activities in Nigeria, conflict is a very serious concern, particularly among corporate organizations, particularly between oil and gas companies and their host communities, which in most cases is due to poor or ineffective communication and community relations. As was inferred in the proceeding

discourse, conflict is unavoidable, but whenever it arises, there is a need for it to be managed or quenched immediately and effectively to reap its full benefits before degenerating into destructive conflict.

From the foregoing, there is an undeniable need for a community relations strategy, which extensively describes all efforts and programmes put in place by an organization to foster or promote a suitable business environment or harmony between an organization and their host communities. It also refers to the different initiatives used by organizations, companies and or businesses (i.e. oil and gas companies in the Niger Delta) to partner with or contribute to the environment/ community where they operate. Nworgu and Odenigbo (2021) argued that the community relations strategy Nigerian Breweries Plc employed was excellent as it was successful in engaging the community members and stakeholders from the host community. However, the study by Amodu (2012), revealed that most of the conflicts between oil companies and host communities had serious implications for both parties because the community relations strategies that oil companies adopted were not adequate in preventing and resolving conflicts in the Niger Delta. The oil industry in Nigeria can only succeed in its relations with host communities if the needs and expectations of the major stakeholders are adequately and effectively addressed through a partnership approach to development and conflict resolution (Idemudia and Ite, 2006).

Statement of the Problem

Emoyan, et al. (2008), averred that members of the oil-producing communities especially those in the Niger Delta region have often grieved and quarreled about their non-involvement in the process of formulating policies that affect them directly. They had desired and demanded to be fully involved in the activities of the oil company specifically the processes leading to oil explorations and production which has resulted in environmental pollution, biodiversity depletion, social destabilization, underdevelopment of host communities, global warming and associated elevated flood risk of their region. Similarly, Ngwu, Egbai, Nyiam and Emeng (2020) stated that host communities have anticipated that oil companies should employ or be involved in meaningful community relations to provide them with sufficient information on their operations and how they can benefit from them. As such, there is a need for good community relations among oil companies which will in turn help to create mutual understanding and relationship amongst members of the community they operate. Consequently, Johnston (2010) observed that organizations are now progressively using community engagement strategies to incorporate representative community opinions into good decision-making. Similarly, extant literature such as Bruning, McGrew and

Cooper (2006); and Cho and Moya (2016) have demonstrated that most contemporary corporate organizations incorporate good community relations by way of sponsoring events and empowerment programmes 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. However, a paucity of studies exists on the influence as well as the effectiveness of these corporate organizations' community relations strategy in mitigating the conflict between multinational oil and gas companies and their host communities in all senatorial districts of Delta State.

Research Objectives

Generally, the objective of this study is to examine the influence of community relations strategy in curbing conflict in selected oil-producing communities in Delta State.

The specific objectives of this study are to;
1. Find out the perception of residents of host communities in Delta State towards the community relations strategies adopted by multinational oil companies.
2. Examine the effectiveness of the community relations strategy of multinational oil companies in resolving conflicts between them and host communities in Delta State.

Research Questions
To achieve its fundamental objectives, the study was guided with the following research questions:

1. What is the perception of residents of host communities in Delta State towards the adopted community relation strategies of multinational oil companies?
2. How effective are the community relations strategies of multinational oil companies in resolving conflicts between them and their host communities in Delta State?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Interpersonal conflicts in community relations and conflict resolution can be managed through a variety of strategies. Follett (1926-1940) proposed three main strategies: dominance, compromise, and integration, as well as alternative dispute resolution and suppression strategies for organizations Blake and Mouton (1964) cited in Tabitha & Florence (2019), also categorize strategies based on the level of concern for individuals and production. They suggested that

interpersonal conflicts can be managed through five strategies including: forcing, compromising, withdrawing, problem-solving, and smoothing (Tabitha & Florence, 2019). These strategies can be useful in different situations, depending on the specific needs and goals of the parties involved in the conflict." Explicitly and according to Tabitha and Florence (2019), a two-dimensional framework for managing conflict can be based on the assertiveness and cooperation of the parties involved. They identified five strategies for managing conflict which include: competing, compromising, collaborating, accommodating, and alternative dispute resolution. Rahim (2014), (cited in Tabitha and Florence, 2019) proposed a similar framework, with five strategies for managing interpersonal conflict: dominating, obliging, integrating, compromising, and avoiding. Both scholars agreed that compromise is a useful strategy for managing conflict. In contemporary studies, administrators have frequently applied the strategies proposed by Thomas and Rahim (Daly et al., 2010). Olonade et al. (2021) argue that effective strategies for managing organizational conflict include collaboration, competition, bargaining, alternative dispute resolution, and compromising. A collaboration strategy aims to meet the needs of all parties involved, particularly when they have shared goals. A competition strategy involves trying to achieve one's own goals, potentially at the expense of others. In an organization, individuals and groups may compete for limited resources, power, and recognition. Issa (2009) noted that when individuals become very competitive, their use of power can be curtailed through external means such as laws or social norms. The bargaining strategy involves reaching a contractual agreement between management and employees to resolve a legal matter (Fajana and Shadare, 2012).

Ekong (2013) emphasized the importance of addressing attitudinal and behavioural elements, outcomes and emotional needs, as well as interpersonal and interdepartmental requirements in effective conflict management. Ekong (2013) further argued that there are four steps involved in institutionalizing interaction, information, skills, values, and situations in conflict management: The first step is to bring in a consultant. The second step is provision of information, third, promotion of attitudinal change through data feedback, team training, sensitivity, and T-Group training or Grid development, and making structural changes to relationships between departments, organization and receiving communities and or stakeholders to facilitate integrative interactions and conflict resolution. Hence, Abubakar and Mohamad, (2017) consider community relations as a strategic function of an organization that involves reaching out to various stakeholders, particularly host communities, to foster understanding. It is also a technique for monitoring the concerns of host communities and building rapport to earn their long-term support. As an organizational internal mechanism, community relations aims to reduce risks that may confront companies, such as host community activism, boycotts of the company's products, or

negative media coverage. Companies use community relations strategies to promote mutual benefit with their stakeholders, particularly host communities, and employ various programmes globally to improve their relationship with host communities and enhance understanding and support" (Abubakar and Mohamad, 2017). Managing relationships that benefit both the company and the host community is the foundation of contemporary community relations

Effective communication is a key strategy for resolving conflicts between oil companies and their host communities. Conflict in an organization according to Argenti (2016) can be complex, but it can be seen as a major disaster that can be caused by natural events, human error, or intentional actions. This conflict can lead to tangible destruction, such as the loss of lives or assets, or intangible destruction, such as the loss of an organization's credibility or other damage to its reputation. In the oil and gas industry, effective communication strategies and frameworks are necessary to promote harmony and foster mutual relationships among stakeholders to create a peaceful and sustainable working environment for both the companies and the community. This type of communication is essential for achieving national development. In his analysis, Ogbuoshi, (2011) noted that negotiation is the simplest and the most effective community relations strategy used in resolving community conflicts. It consists basically of discussions between both parties in dispute and their allies to reconcile divergent opinions or views or at least, understand the differing positions of the stakeholders. The parties involved decide amongst themselves how best to resolve their difference… although, it involves discussions, arguments and counterarguments, targeted towards resolving the conflict (Onyejiuwa, 2016). Ricklin and Kushner (2013) state that an effective community relations programme should include a strong outreach strategy that educates host communities about the benefits of a project to gain public support. This means involving them in the planning process in meaningful ways and establishing effective channels of communication. Lack of involvement of youth and community members can lead to public opposition and project failure (Norman, 2012). Though, lack of patriotism and selflessness can be a challenge to to the success of such involvement.

Crude oil exploration and production in Nigeria has been on for five decades in the Niger Delta region. The same region, which contains the oil that has made Nigeria and oil companies wealthy, is greatly underdeveloped compared to the rest of the country. This paradox is exemplified by the depth of poverty that exists amid plenty in the Niger Delta (UNPO, 2018). The activities of the oil companies have caused serious environmental and health hazards in the region, including damage to farmlands, water, and aquatic animals, which are the main sources of livelihood for the people. One notable example of environmental abuse and conflict in the Niger Delta is the case of the Ogoni community in River State, as alleged by the Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People

(MOSOP) and the late human rights activist, Ken Saro-Wiwa. The Ogoni people claimed that the activities of oil companies in their region had caused the devastation and degradation of their communities, polluted their atmosphere, contaminated their water sources, and poisoned their trees, leading to the virtual disappearance of their flora and fauna. This led to the arrest and execution of nine prominent members of the Ogoni community by Nigerian military forces, believed to have been incited by Shell (Donovan, 2018; UNPO, 2018). Amnesty International (2017) reported that the execution of some Ogoni activists was the result of a brutal campaign by Nigeria's military to silence the protests of MOSOP, led by activist Ken Saro-Wiwa, one of the Ogoni people executed. MOSOP believed that others had grown wealthy from the oil extracted from their land, while pollution from oil spills and gas flaring had turned the Ogoni region into an ecological disaster. In response, MOSOP declared in January 1993 that Shell was no longer welcome to operate on 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 resulting conflict. These damaged relations between Shell and Ogoniland. The company was accused of paying the Nigerian police and military to shoot at protestors.

Several studies have been carried out by scholars on community relations strategy and conflict management and resolution based on their perspectives and understanding. For example, DeVos, (2016) conducted a study to examine a land conflict involving a proposed palm oil plantation in a Malay community in West Kalimantan, Indonesia. Functional analysis of property relations was used to understand how the community's responses to the plantation were influenced by their values and beliefs about the land. Data for this analysis were collected through ethnographic methods, including observations and interviews with community members. The results of the study showed that the community valued multiple functions of the land, including food security, income security over generations, flexibility in times of crisis, and the ability to maintain their autonomy and identity as farmers. One factor that contributed to the conflict was the belief that the conversion of diverse agricultural land and forest into a monoculture plantation run by a company would negatively impact livelihoods, lifestyles, and the community's sense of identity. Overall, this case study highlights the importance of considering the multiple functions and values of land in the context of large-scale development projects. It also illustrates the potential for conflict when such projects are proposed in communities with strong attachments to their land.

Chibuike, Samuel, Ogah and Udenta, (2022) study aims to examine the prevalence and management of conflicts within the Nigeria Customs Service (NCS). A descriptive survey was conducted using a self-administered questionnaire distributed to a sample of 430 NCS employees. The research questions focused on factors contributing to conflicts and the effects of conflict on

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productivity, as well as the effectiveness of various conflict management strategies. The results showed that the mean score for conflict management measures used in the NCS was 2.4, below the established decision rule of 2.5. This suggests that current conflict management practices in the NCS are not effective. To improve productivity, the study recommends the implementation of both centralized and decentralized conflict management mechanisms, as well as providing in-service workshops on conflict and conflict management techniques for NCS employees. Further research is needed to determine the most effective strategies for addressing conflicts within the NCS."

Similarly, Okemini and Uzorka (2020) conducted a study on the effectiveness of community relations strategies in managing crises in Nigeria's Niger Delta. The objective of the study was to assess the effectiveness of the community relations strategies used by oil companies in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria in managing crises and improving relations with host communities. Both quantitative (survey) and qualitative (key informant interviews and focus group discussions) data were collected from the community relations units of selected oil companies (Shell, Chevron, and Agip) and residents of Omoku and Obrikom communities in Rivers State and Eruemukohwarien, Tisun, and Kolokolo communities in Delta State. Survey respondents were selected randomly, while interview and focus group participants were selected purposively. The study found that conflicts between oil companies and host communities in the Niger Delta have serious implications for both parties and that the current community relations strategies used by these companies are not effective in preventing or resolving these conflicts. This is due to a disconnect between the strategies that the companies believe are preferred by the host communities and the actual preferences of those communities.

Olukayode (2015) examined the relationship between workplace conflict management and organizational performance in a Nigerian manufacturing firm. The study was carried out on 250 respondents selected using stratified random sampling and analyzed data using descriptive and inferential statistics, including Spearman correlation analysis and regression analysis. The results showed that integrative conflict management strategies, such as accommodation, collective bargaining, and compromise, had a significant positive relationship with organizational performance, while non-integrative strategies like domination, competition, and avoidance had a negative effect. The regression analysis also revealed that the collective bargaining strategy had the strongest positive correlation with organizational performance. The study found that conflicts in the workplace can arise due to a variety of factors, including economic and goal incompatibility, and that management and union conflicts of interest are particularly common.

This study was hinged on the dialogic and dialectical theory. The dialogical dialectical theory of relationship was propounded by Leslie Baxter and her colleagues. Their work explores the complex ways in which persons in relationships use communication to manage the naturally opposing forces that impinge on their relationship at any point in time (Littlejohn & Foss, 2008). The idea of relationship as a dialogical and dialectical process is based largely on the work of Mikhail Bakhtin. His theory is a crossover theory in the area of traditions of communication because it contributes to both the socio-cultural and critical perspectives. Bakhtin began his ideas with the motion of everyday reality which he called the prosaic; which is simply the ordinary taken-for-granted familiar activities and world. These complex and big issues are further classified as centripetal and centrifugal forces. Centripetal forces seek to impose order on the apparent chaos of life and issues, while centrifugal forces disrupt this order. To Bakhtin, social life is like the centripetal and the centrifugal forces. Just when one thinks that things are in order, you find out that they are not. In our society, individuals, cultures, languages and others construct an integrated whole where there are so many things operating against a sense of order. Dialectical tensions are seen easily in our society. However, dialogue is coming together with diverse voices in a conversation. Dialogue is a mutual way of resolving contradictions. It is a known fact that multinational oil companies and their host communities are always on dialectical parts. These dialectics can better be managed through dialogue which Bakhtin considers as a panacea to conflict resolution and divergent views. Dialogical/Dialectical Theory of Relationship is a sociological perspective that explains how dialogue can be used to resolve conflicts among opposing voices and forces. According to theory, society is a place of interaction between centripetal and centrifugal forces, that is, a place where individuals and groups are always at loggerheads. Just when one thinks a conflict is resolved, there it is, not yet fully resolved. That is why dialogue becomes germane in conflict resolution among parties. The dialogic resolution of conflicts could be through community relations strategies implemented by oil companies in their host communities.

The cross-sectional research design was adopted for the study. The population of the study comprised all residents of Gbaramatu Kingdom located in Warri South-West Local Government Area in Delta South which has a population of 155,154; all residents of Otu-Jeremi community in Ughelli South Local Government Area in Delta Central which has a population of 213,576; all residents of Ebedei community in Ukwani Local Government Area in Delta North with population of 163,100 (Delta State Government, 2022). This gives a combined population size of 531,830 from which the sample size was derived. It is from this figure that the sample size of 400 was determined using the Taro Yamane formula (McCain, 2016). This study utilised the simple random

sampling technique. This sampling technique was applied through a multi-stage procedure. The selection process is shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Sample Selection

Selected Kingdom/Clan/Community	Population of Selected Kingdom/Community	The number of Copies of the Questionnaire Distributed
Gbaramatu	155,154	117
Otu-Jeremi	213,576	161
Ebedei	163,100	122
Total	531,830	400

Source: Authors

The researchers designed a 4-point Likert scale structured questionnaire and used it to collect data from the respondents on the subject matter of the study. The questionnaire contained Sections A and B. Section A contained items to elicit the demographic data of respondents such as gender, age and marital status, among others. Section B contained the thematic issues section with questions concerning the main concepts and variables measured in the study. To determine the validity of the research instruments, the initial draft of the instrument was subjected to face validity and content validity by two experts in the field of Measurement and Evaluation. The reliability test utilised was the test-re-test reliability and it yielded a reliability coefficient of ≥ 0.88 which implied excellent reliability. The quantitative data gathered through the structured questionnaire were analysed using descriptive statistical tools like frequency distribution tables and simple percentages.

Table 2: Community Relations Strategies Adopted by Oil Companies Better Lives of Members of the Host Community

Response	Frequency	Percentage(%)
Strongly Agree	53	14.7%
Agree	79	21.9%
Neutral/No Response	30	08.4%
Disagree	121	33.6%
Strongly Disagree	77	21.4%
Total	360	100%

Source: Field Work, 2023

On whether the community relations strategies adopted by the oil companies have improved the lives of their hosts, Table 2 indicated that 121 respondents representing 33.6% agreed with the

statement; 77 respondents representing 21.4% strongly agreed with the statement; 79 respondents representing 21.9% agreed with the statement; while 53 respondents representing 14.7% strongly agreed with the statement; the least 30 respondents representing 8.4% are neutral to the statement. This means that on the aggregate, the majority of the respondents 198 (55%) both disagreed and strongly disagreed that the community relations strategies adopted by the oil companies have made better the lives of people of their host communities. In other words, they disagreed that the community relations strategies adopted by the oil companies have made better their lives as host communities.

Table 3: Community Relations Strategies adopted by Oil Companies bring Development to Host Community

Response	Frequency	Percentage(%)
Strongly Agree	22	6.1%
Agree	69	19.2%
Neutral/No Response	46	12.8%
Disagree	130	36.1%
Strongly Disagree	93	25.8%
Total	360	100%

Source: Field Work, 2023

On whether the community relations strategies adopted by the oil companies have brought development to the host community, Table 3 indicated that 130 respondents representing 36.1% who are the majority disagreed with the statement; 93 respondents representing 25.8% strongly disagreed with the statement; 69 respondents representing 19.2% agreed with the statement; 46 respondents representing 12.8% were neutral on the statement; while the least 22 respondents representing 6.1% strongly agreed with the statement. This means that on the aggregate, the majority of the respondents 223 (61.9%) again both disagreed and strongly disagreed that the community relations strategies adopted by the oil companies have brought development to their communities.

Table 4: Community Relations Strategies adopted by Oil Companies are favourable to Host Community

Response	Frequency	Percentage(%)
Strongly Agree	37	10.3%
Agree	66	18.3%
Neutral/No Response	55	15.3%
Disagree	106	29.4%
Strongly Disagree	96	26.7%
Total	360	100%

Source: Field Work, 2023

On whether the community relations strategies adopted by the oil companies are favourable to the host community, Table 4 revealed that 106 respondents 29.4% disagreed with the statement; another 96 respondents representing 26.7% strongly disagreed with the statement; 66 respondents representing 18.3% agreed with the statement; 55 respondents representing 15.3% were neutral on the statement while the least 37 respondents representing 10.3% strongly agreed with the statement. This implies that on the aggregate, the majority of the respondents 202 (56.1%) both disagreed and strongly disagreed that the community relations strategies adopted by the oil companies have brought development to their communities.

Table 5: Community Relations Strategies adopted by Oil Companies prevent Youths of Host Community from having Conflicts with Oil Companies

Response	Frequency	Percentage(%)
Strongly Agree	48	13.3%
Agree	34	9.4%
Neutral/No Response	20	5.6%
Disagree	136	37.8%
Strongly Disagree	122	33.9%
Total	360	100%

Source: Field Work, 2023

Table 5 showed that 136 respondents representing 37.8% disagreed that the community relations strategies adopted by the oil companies prevent youths from having conflicts with the oil companies. 122 respondents representing 33.9% strongly disagreed with the statement; 48 respondents representing 13.3% strongly agreed with the statement; 34 respondents representing 9.4% agreed with the statement; while the least 20 respondents representing 5.6% were neutral on the statement. This suggests that on the aggregate, the majority of the respondents 288 (71.7%)

both disagreed and strongly disagreed that the community relations strategies adopted by the oil companies have prevented youths from having conflicts with oil companies in their communities.

Table 6: Community Relations Strategies Adopted by Oil Companies Makes Women in my Community not to have Issues with Oil Companies

Response	Frequency	Percentage(%)
Strongly Agree	35	9.7%
Agree	55	15.3%
Neutral/No Response	49	13.6%
Disagree	134	37.2%
Strongly Disagree	87	24.2%
Total	360	100%

Source: Field Work, 2023

On whether the community relations strategies adopted by the oil companies make women in the host community not to have issues with the oil companies. Table 6 shows that 134 respondents representing 37.2% disagreed with the statement; another 87 respondents representing 24.2% strongly disagreed with the statement; 55 respondents representing 15.3% agreed with the statement; 49 respondents representing 13.6% were neutral; while the least 35 respondents representing 9.7% strongly agreed with the statement. This infers that on the aggregate, the majority of the respondents 221 (61.4%) both disagreed and strongly disagreed that the community relations strategies adopted by the oil companies made women in the host communities not have issues with the oil companies.

Table 7: Community Relations Strategies Adopted by Oil Companies Make Elders in my Community not to have Conflicts with Oil Companies

Response	Frequency	Percentage(%)
Strongly Agree	55	15.3%
Agree	48	13.3%
Neutral/No Response	43	11.9%
Disagree	74	20.6%
Strongly Disagree	140	38.9%
Total	360	100%

Source: Field Work, 2023

Table 7 reveals that 140 respondents representing 38.9% strongly disagreed that the community relations strategies adopted by the oil companies made elders in the host communities not to have conflicts with the oil companies. 74 respondents representing 20.6% disagreed with the statement.

However, 55 respondents representing 15.3% strongly agreed with the statement. 48 respondents representing 13.3% agreed with the statement; while the least 43 respondents representing 11.9% were neutral on the statement. This suggests that on the aggregate, majority of the respondents 214 (59.5%) both strongly disagreed and disagreed that the community relations strategies adopted by the oil companies made elders in the host communities not to have conflicts with the oil companies.

Discussion of Findings

Research Question (RQ) 1: What is the perception of residents of host communities in Delta State towards the adopted community relation strategies of multinational oil companies?

The answer to research question 1 is provided in Tables 2 to 4. Table 2 revealed that the aggregate majority of the respondents 198 (55%) disagreed and strongly disagreed that the community relations strategies adopted by the oil companies have made better the lives of people of their host communities. Also, table 3 indicated that the aggregate majority of the respondents 223 (61.9%) both disagreed and strongly disagreed that the community relations strategies adopted by the oil companies have brought development to their communities. Again, Table 4 shows that the aggregate majority of the respondents 202 (56.1%) disagreed and strongly disagreed that the community relations strategies adopted by the oil companies have brought development to their communities. The above suggests that residents of host communities in Delta State have a negative perception towards the community relations strategies adopted by multinational oil companies in their areas. This finding is in line with the finding of de Vos, R. E. (2016) whose study found that people of the Malay community (who are farmers) in Indonesia had negative perceptions about the activities of the palm oil companies situated in their communities.

Research Question (RQ) 2: How effective are the community relations strategies of multinational oil companies in resolving conflicts between them and their host communities in Delta State?

The answer to research question 2 is provided in Tables 5 to 7. Table 5 shows that the aggregate majority of the respondents 160 (44.4%) agreed and strongly agreed that building health facilities has helped to resolve conflicts between host communities and oil companies. This is a little above those who disagreed and strongly disagreed with the statement. Again, Table 6 revealed that the aggregate majority of the respondents 173 (48%) both disagreed and strongly disagreed that the provision of scholarships to students of host communities at all levels has helped to resolve conflict between host communities and oil companies. Lastly, Table 7 indicated that the aggregate majority

of the respondents 164 (45.5%) strongly agreed and agreed that partnering with the host community in organised events and activities has helped to resolve the conflict between the host community and oil companies. The above suggests that building health facilities, providing scholarships to students at all levels and partnering with host communities in organised events and activities are not that effective in resolving conflicts between host communities and oil companies in Delta State. This outcome is in line with the finding of Okemini and Uzorka (2020) who revealed in their study that the current community relations strategies by Shell, Chevron and Agip are not effective in resolving conflicts between the oil companies and their host communities of Omoku and Obrikom in Rivers State as well as Eruemukohwarien, Tisun, and Kolokolo communities in Delta State.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study examined the influence of community relations strategy in curbing conflicts between multinational oil companies and their host communities in Delta State. The need to reduce to the barest minimum issues of conflicts between oil companies and their host communities necessitated this study. It has been revealed that residents of host communities in Delta State, the majority of which are males have a negative perception of the community relations strategies adopted by multinational oil companies in their areas. Just building health facilities, providing scholarships to students at all levels, and partnering with host communities in organized events and activities which represent part of community relations strategies are not effective enough in resolving conflicts between host communities and oil companies in Delta State. Merely engaging in the above community relations strategies cannot curb conflicts between host communities and oil companies in Delta State. Curbing conflicts between multinational oil companies and host communities requires strict consultation with host communities and carrying them along by the multinational oil companies. Pollution of the host communities' environments, non-provision of employment to employable persons, as well as nonchalant attitude of oil companies towards the welfare of members of host communities, are factors fueling conflicts between oil companies and host communities in Delta State. Based on the findings of this study, it was recommended that:

1. Multinational oil companies should rethink their current community relations strategies in their host communities. Their community relations strategies should be in consultation with and in the interest of the host communities, rather than imposing their community relations strategies on the people.

2. Multinational oil companies should discontinue those actions that fuel conflicts between them and their host communities. Rather, they should engage in activities that promote the welfare of their host communities.

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