

# An Evaluation of Community Relations Impact in Managing Environmental Related Crisis in the Niger Delta

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## Abstract

The paper is aimed at evaluating relations impact in managing the environmental crisis emanating from the activities of the companies operation in the region. Data are sourced from both primary and secondary. The primary source is from oral interviews and observations, while the secondary source is from the literatures and the analysis is qualitative. The paper explains and evaluates the relationship between community relation or the corporate social responsibilities of the companies operating in the region and its impact on the environment. It observes that though there are community relations at communities were companies are operating, there is no relationship between community relations and the corporate responsibility and environment management in the Niger Delta Region.

**Keywords:** community relations, environment, crisis and Niger Delta

## 1. Introduction

The quest for industrialization and sustained development in Nigeria and the attendant improvement in the quality of life of the populace has taken its toll on the environment (Aina, 1998). The effect of different industrial sector activity on the environment varies enormously but it is an incontrovertible statement that damage is being done to the environment worldwide. Environment concerns rarely formed an integral part of development plans, particularly in third world countries like Nigeria, the realization that sustainable development can be achieved through interdependence between the economic growth and environmental quality has compelled some government to now regard the environment as a valued and an integral part of economic growth. Subsequently, environmental problems are now at the forefront of international and domestic as well as local government's agenda.

However, environmental issues and policies are rarely enforced in some third world countries. The inability of government to implement stringent environmental regulations is compounded by the fact that goals of most corporate organizations are purely economics. Little attention is devoted to their social responsibilities. How organizations achieve their goals are issues of great social importance but organizations are more concerned about the element in their environment that are necessary to their success and less about the social and ethical implications to their actions (Koomiz and Welhrich: 1988).

There is now growing interest on environmental issues, but organizational researchers and scholars rarely discuss environmental issues and corporate social responsibilities. Issues of discourse have always been ethnics, organizational structures and processes, the impact of the environment on organization, etc. There

Is a dearth of literature on the impact of corporate activities on the Niger Delta viewed against the community relation impact in managing environmental related crisis in the region.

## 2. Situation Analysis in the Niger Delta Region

Oloibiri, Bayelsa State was where it all began. That was in 1955, crude oil exploration in commercial quantity took off immediately. This breathed life into the town and hope was raised that the good time had come. The exploration of oil in other parts of the Niger Delta followed suit. At first the people were unaware of what impact this new discovery was going to have on their lives and major occupation as farmers. Still they looked forward to a good time.

Retrospectively, today is a great day, not in your lives but also in the history of the Niger Delta. Perhaps it will be the heavens down, but because we are going to demonstrate to the world what and how we feel about oppression... Remember your 70-years-old grandmother who still farms before she eats, remember also your poverty stricken people, remember too, petroleum which is being pumped out daily from your veins and then fight for your freedom. With these electrifying words, 27 years-old Adaka Boro, general officer commanding the Niger Delta Volunteer Service DVS declared an independent Niger Delta Peoples Republic NDPR, February 23, 1966, 40 days after the historic January 15, 1966 coup- it was 3pm and the three divisions of the dislodging the Federal police and taking Yenagoa at 12 midnight. It was code named "operation Zero". It marked the beginning of the "12 day revolution during which Boro, an ex-police inspector, former president of students'

Union Government of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka and a fresh graduate of Chemistry, called the attention of the world to the fact that the inhabitants of the Niger Delta were feeling very uncomfortable with their fate in Nigeria.

That was the beginning of the struggle for the fight against environmental degradation, resource control and self determination occasioned by neglect of the region by Blue chip companies. Then Ken Saro-Wiwa, poet and novelist took the gauntlet even though the struggle under him was founded on the principles of non-violence and equality. The struggle was predicted on the fact that Nigeria had not delivered on the expedition of the Ogoni, into too like the Ijaw were very protective of the identity.

The British administration had forced the Ogoni into the administrative division of Opobo in 1968, which they protested. In 1947, they were placed under the river Province and in 1951, they were induced in the Eastern Region, where they say; we suffered utter neglect. The Ijaw and Ogoni have one more thing in common-oil. While oil was struck first in Ijaw territory of Oloibiri in 1956. It was also found in commercial quantity in Ogoni territory of k. Dere known as Bomu oil field, 1958. In all, the Ogoni have seven rich oil fields, which have contributed an estimated unofficial \$40 billion to the national revenue. Despite this contribution Ogoni nationals regrets that they had no representation at the national level, no job opportunities in the Federal, State public and private institutions and

Social or economic project of the federal government, even as crude oil flows from their land into waiting oil tankers for export.

The movement for the survival of Ogoni people, **MOSOP** under the leadership of Ken Saro-wiwa has among as its aims and objectives are three definitive ones; to promote and sustain the struggle against all forms of injustice; to create and sustain the identity of the Ogoni people as a separate and distinct nation (within Nigeria) with a right To self determination and to the control of their resources and their environment, and to ensure that the Ogoni people obtain their rights within the Nigerian State.

The relationship between the Ogoni and Shell which was exploring the oilfields in this land worsened and the federal government arrested Saro-wiwa and seven other Ogoni activists. They were hurriedly tried, condemned to death and hanged on November 10, 1995, an act which has been widely described as jungle murder. Consequently, the Ogoni sacked shell from their land for about 12years now. Ogoni oil has been under lock and key as all reconciliation efforts failed as they prefer another oil company to shell.

However, the arrest of Asari Dokubo in august 2005, in violation of a ceasefire agreement, led to the rise of the movement for the emancipation of the Niger Delta (**MEND**) and other militant groups, hostage-taking entered the arsenal of the militants as a bargain chip and later as a source of revenue. Today, the Niger Delta is still on the boil. The worsening situation as a result of increased neglect and degradation of the environment is largely the cause of the boil in the region. The flaring of associated gas in Nigeria's Niger Delta region since the twilight of British colonial rule has been a great challenge to environmentalists who have been passionate about the harmful effect on the people residing in the region.

Unfortunately, the seeming grand conspiracy between the culpable multinational and indigenous oil companies and successive administrations in the country suggests a total nonchalance to the concern of putting an end to this criminal act. Environmental Rights Action ERA, a nongovernmental organization said gas flaring had been illegal in Nigeria since 1984, but they are just carrying on as if nobody is being impacted.

ERA describes flaring of associated gas in the region as "a human rights environmental and economic monstrosity" stressing that "nowhere else in the world have communities been subjected to it on such a scale". Shell petroleum development company SPDC, the largest oil producer in the country, Exxon

Mobile, Chevron/Texaco, Agip and total/Fina/Elf in joint ventures with Nigeria National Petroleum Corporation NNPC, have been fingered as the worst offenders. Available statistics show that over 2.5billion cubic feet of crude associated gas is

flared in Nigeria every day. This figure represents 40 percent of all Africa's natural gas consumption in 2002. In economic terms, it translates into a loss of \$2.5billion.

When in most parts of the world the flaring of associated gas is being gradually phased out, in Nigeria, however, the practice has continued to flourish. As at November 23, 2004 the World Bank said, Nigeria currently flares 75 percent of the gas it produces; making it perhaps the number one flares in the world. This has made it the focus of the global gas flaring reduction initiative prompted by the World Bank. Chris Elvidge, a research scientist with the national oceanic and atmospheric administration who tracks gas flaring all over the globe, however, rates Nigeria second. He says Nigeria is second to Russia. The gas flares in Nigeria are in the Niger delta and offshore. Fifty to 100 percent of these gas flares produces very large halos of light ball of light and it's because the flares have no shielding around them. That is what has been making life unbearable for people living in these environments.

Indeed, gas flaring had been at great cost for the country, a July 2003 report on Nigeria by the United States Energy Information Administration noted that flaring "has not only meant that a pot entail energy source- and source of revenue- has gone up in smoke, but it is also a major pollution for air and acid rain". Another problem

gas flaring possesses is the release of large amount of methane, which has very high global warming potentials. The methane is accompanied by another major house gas carbon dioxide.

In spite of the devastating effect of gas flaring on the environment and the economic losses, the Nigerian government has continued to pay lip service to ending it. Giving a deadline to gas flaring in Nigeria has become a ridiculous game of time shifting. First, the deadline was set at 2004, then 2007 and now 2008. Inevitably, the latest deadline is no longer feasible.

The major oil companies still prefer to flare gas because it is cheaper to flare than to separate commercially viable associated gas from the oil. Therefore, the associated gas found with oil is often burned off in order to increase crude production. Environmentalist, however believe that it has gone on due to lack of political will by the Nigeria government to stop it.

### 3. The Interdependence among the environment, organization and sustainable development

By environment one means the total surroundings of external conditions within which an organization or committee of organizations exists. In general sense environment embraces anything that is external to humans in their immediate or remote surroundings that they interact with or that impinge on their welfare. The word environment includes complex element of cultural landscape such as settlements, roads and farms etc that are made by man as well as the natural elements such as lakes, mountains, climates and weather (Ajayi and Adesina 2005).

According to Ikporukpo (2001) environment is the totality of human surroundings, hence human environment is derived from physical environment. Human environment is regarded as human construct created by man in their struggle for survival and resistance on earth crust at times called inhabited environment. This is usually classified based on certain criteria, such as population size, economic activities and special characteristics. The relationship between physical and human environment is a modification of physical environment. This is done through primary, secondary, tertiary and quaternary productions activities. Since man operates on the earth surface he needs to be reckoned with (Ajayi and Adesina, 2005). Environmental degradation is largely caused by man's activities and it can also be a consequence of man's hazard. The result is that the natural processes of ecosystem are altered and possibly damaged irreparably. When the environment becomes degraded, all forms of life are threatened (Fairnloye, 2006).

Also, Osibanjo (1998) refers to the environment as "man's immediate surrounding's (that is, water, air, land, including associated living and non-living resources) which provides life support system for mankind". These definitions imply that the environment provides the natural resources on which national economics are built and sustained.

For conceptual analysis, the ethnical, social, political, technological, legal, etc environments can be distinguished. The social environment consists of attitude, desires, expectations, degrees of intelligence and education, beliefs and customs of people in a society or group. The political and legal environment, which can be subsumed under the social environment, includes sets of generally accepted and practiced standards of personal conduct (Koontz and Weihrich, 1998).

The sustainability of the environment has been stressed to be of utmost importance in achieving sustainable development. McCarthy (1992) defines sustainable development as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs". He explains further that sustainable development "that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs". He explains further that sustainable development "implies radically new economic policies for the state and a change in habits for the individuals. It certainly means abandoning the pursuit of simple self-interest.

The Brundtland report (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987), commissioned by the United Nations to examine long-term environmental strategies, likewise argue that economic development and environmental protection could be made compatible, but that this world requires radical change in economic practices throughout the world (Welford and Strachan, 2005). Welford (1993) contends that sustainable development involves three closely connected issues and associated conditions:

- **Environment:** The environmental stock must not be treated as a free good but must rather be protected, which implies minimal use of non-renewable resources and minimal emission of pollutants.
- **Equity:** Recent discourses on gender and development have revealed that gender disparities in economic opportunities, education, health service, nutrition etc, greatly contribute to poverty in developing nations. Gender equity is significant to achieving sustainable development.
- **Futurity:** Futurity implies that society, business organizations and individuals must not operate under competitive pressures to achieve short-term goals which endanger long-term environmental protection and intergenerational development rather, business policy needs to be proactive and not reactive such that intergenerational considerations and long-term environmental protection are observed.

The Brundtland report concludes that these three conditions are not being met as non-renewable resources are

being depleted. In Nigeria for instance, Shell Petroleum Development Corporation (SPDC) extracts about 12,000 barrels of crude oil per day. Sustainable development poses a challenge to industry to produce higher levels of output using lower levels of input and output and generating less waste. In the context of the system theory, the flow of inputs and outputs is the basic start point which describes an organization. Organization takes resources (input- human and natural resources) from the larger system (environment), processes these resources and returns them in changed form (output). Thus, organizations are open systems, which receive inputs or energy from their environment, convert these resources into their environment, as shown in figure 1. However, organizations must not merely produce products and services to satisfy their numerous clients, they must also produce actions that will ensure protection of the environment. As argued by the functionalist and structural – functionalist (Auguste Comte, Helbert Spence, Talcott Parsons etc) from whom the system theory originates from; any organ (industry) of the body (society) must contribute towards the maintenance of the organism (Haralambos and Holbora, 2004). Like most organization theories, the systems theory does not indicate how activities of business firms can impact negatively on the environment or what strategies can be adopted to curb environmental degradation. This the authors have done by indicating potential negative on the environment that may result from organization's activity. Wastes that may be generate and the need to incorporate environmental management strategies in their feedback of information and results are equally incorporated into the model in figure 1. This will make organizations environmentally conscious and bring organization strategies in line with environmental sustainability.

#### **4. Environmental Degradation in Nigeria**

Environmental degradation means to make the environment worse in quality or to pollute it. Pollution as “any introduction by man, directly or indirectly, of substances, or energy into the environment resulting in deleterious effect of such a nature as to endanger human health, harm living resources, ecosystem and material property and impair amenities or interfere with other legitimate uses of the environment (Ajayi and Adesina, 2005; Slack, 2006). Sources of pollution are numerous, but most are human related. There are also instances where pollutions are caused by an act of God. However, such acts mostly occur as a cumulative effect of human action.

Environmental pollution can be classified into domestic and global varieties. The former includes water contamination, air pollution, unsafe disposal of solid and hazardous waste, soil degradation, deforestation, e.c.t. The global variety affects the upper atmosphere causing atmospheric ozone depletion. Domestic environmental pollution may assume global status as a result of its trans-boundary spillover into another country. An example is the dumping of toxic waste in developing countries by developed nations (Oyejide, 1998). This experience was encountered by Nigeria in June 1988 when Italy dumped about 4000 tons of toxic and hazardous waste on the shores of Koko Port in Bendel State, now Delta State (Osibanjo, 1988, Simpson and Fagbohun, 1998, Atsegbua et al, 2004).

Several types of environmental pollution can be distinguished; air and atmospheric pollution, water pollution, marine pollution, land noise pollution (Atseggibun et al; 2004). Whichever way environmental degradation may be categorized, it is glaring that most environmental damage is the resultant effect of industrialization. Industrialization can be economically harmful when guided by less stringent environment protection regulations. It is no longer news that Nigeria is at present beset with environment challenges. For instance, oil pollution is unavoidable phenomenon and a natural consequence of petroleum exploration. In

the area of problems of damage to marine wild life, modification of the ecosystem through species elimination and the delay in biota (fauna and flora) succession; decrease in fishery resources; the loss of aesthetic values of natural beaches etc (Farinloye, 2006).

The magnitude of environmental degradation in the Niger Delta has led to restiveness among the indigenes of the area, particularly among the youths. Vehement protest against the activities of oil prospecting firms, less stringent environmental protection laws and lackadaisical attitude of the government led to the killing of Ken Saro-Wiwa and the Ogoni Nine by the military regime of Late General Sani Abacha.

The killing has however not doused the restiveness in the region as formidable militant groups have emerged in the region. These groups have not only attacked oil installations but have also kidnapped both foreign and indigenous oil staff while demanding ransoms for release (Ezeobi, 2006).

Other disturbing environmental problems in Nigeria major cities include:

- Dust emissions from cement plants
- Wood dust from saw mills
- Fumes and effluent from industries
- Littering of drainage systems and road sides
- By non-degradable household products such as polythene bags, water sachets, plastics containers etc.
- Rural-urban migration which has brought about stress on available infrastructural facilities such as electricity leading to irregular power supply which has compelled both residents and corporate organizations to turn to electricity

generators. Excessive inhalation of fumes from industrial plants and household generators pose danger to human health. In addition, water pollution is a problem due to improper handling of sewage. Portable water is available to 78% of urban dwellers and 49% of rural population (Encyclopedia of Nations, 2006).

- Gas flaring which kills vegetable and suppress the growth of plants.
- In 2001, 26 of Nigeria's mammal species were threatened. Nine types of birds and 16 plants species were also endangered, due to deforestation (Encyclopedia of Nations 2006).

## 5. Community Relations

A Community is a social organism made up all interpretations among the residents and the organization with which they identify. As a social organism, a Community can take pride in its tracks or who is well off or poor. It can be heterogeneous collection of suburban residents drawn together only by a common desire to escape living within a metropolitan era. It is necessary for organizations to live by the Community's ordinance and social norms. Permits must be sought to explain facilities, dig up utilities, and change traffic now or even to operate at all.

Traditionally, employers have tended to regard their relationship with home Community as being extensions of their employer's relations. The idea was that employers who were treated decently would go into the home Communities singing the praises of their employer. In this traditional viewpoint, employers felt that their local tax payments, the occasional loan of a facility for a meeting, and the annual contribution to discharge their Community obligations. Therefore, Community relationship as a public relations function is on institutions planned active and continuing participation within a Community to maintain and enhance its environment to the benefit of both the institution and the Community.

### 5.1 how to develop community relations programmes

Community relations is just about being good or nice to people although this may be one of its results, instead the concept is based on sound commercial participation on

- \* Research
- \* Vision (corporate need for one)
- \* Strategic objective
- \* Measurement and evaluation
- \* Dissemination

### 5.2 Strategic Objective for a Community Programme

Typical objectives for a community programmes are

- To create and develop a positive view of the Company as a socially responsible good corporate citizen among its stakeholders
- To capitalize on this positive perception in terms of employee motivation, recruitment of new personnel, supplier development and community good will
- To support other initiatives aimed at creating an understanding of the company's aims and policies.
- To develop opportunities which encourage employee participation in the community through increased communication initiatives.
- To support the needs of the local community with innovative role model initiatives, which position the company as a centre of excellence for community involvement?
- To brand the program clearly so that it is easily recognized and remembered

### 5.3 Evaluating Community Programmes

Community involvement programmes can be difficult to measure in terms of quantifiable data, however this does not mean that the activities are immeasurable. The following performance indicators can be used as means of measuring the programme's achievements.

- Publicity activities
- Employee feedback
- Value for money
- Creativity
- Compatible external benchmark
- "Thank you" letters and appreciation
- Measured opinion formed perceptions
- Internal and external communication audit results.

### 5.4 Key Factors to Success of Community Involvement Programmes

There are a number of key factors that determine the success of a programme, the key one of which is the acceptance of the strategy by board directors and senior management. Without their endorsement the programme and individual initiatives will differ from unnecessary scrutiny beyond the status measurement criteria that

should be put in place. Factors that may influence the success of such a programme include:

- Top management support
- Line management understanding and support
- Successful internal and external communication
- Central co-coordinator of activities
- Resources to meet necessary costs
- Employee owned
- Recognition
- Partnership with community organizations
- Modest beginnings
- Monitoring and evaluation.

## 6. Corporate Environmental Management Strategies

Organizations have realized that environmental issues need to be addressed for number of reasons such as consumer pressure, legislation; ethics etc. to ensure adequate environmental management, Welford and Strachan (2005) propose that organizations should design environmental policy which would identify key Performance areas and form a sound basis for setting corporate objectives. The scholars posed ten questions, answers to which will provide the organization the basis of a strategic plan for the environment some of the question include;

- Is the organization meeting its environmental commitment?
- Is concern for the environment integral to each of the organization's operation?
- Do managers and workers see environmental improvement as a goal and in what ways are personnel being encourage to be more involved?
- Are there new product opportunities that the organization could exploit which would have less negative environmental impact?
- What financial and organizational constraints are there that might prevent environmental improvement from taking place?

Moreover, the international Chamber of Commerce (ICC), World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD) and Business Charter for Sustainable Development identified sixteen key principles for environmental management. These includes; corporate priority, Integrated management, process improvement, and Employee education. Others include Prior assessment, Products and services, Customer advice, Facilities and operations, Research, Precautionary approach, Contractors and suppliers, Emergency preparedness, Transfer of technology as well as Contribution to the common effort, Openness to concerns and Compliance and reporting.

## 7. Conclusion

Since the 1990s, there has been recurring instability in the Nigeria Delta especially, which account for 90 percent of crude oil produced in the country and between 70 and 80 percent of the nation's annual revenue (Ezeobi, 2006). This had negatively impacted on Gross Domestic Product and stymied growth in the sector. The disturbance had also led to an increase in unemployment and negated the drive for direct foreign investment, as the country is perceived as insecure. The restive youths and had routinely demanded increased employment of their own by the companies, provision of amenities, monetary compensation for drilling oil in their land, among, other demands. Largely, the natives had been incensed by the failed expectations of wealth and development; that oil would end the squalor, unemployment and deprivation that confront them. They share the same Neighborhoods with the staff of these companies who unlike them, live in splendor. With government which had failed to provide amenities for these communities and drive development, the locals let out their frustration on the companies, who are visible, easier to find, to intimidate and demonize. This is where the need for good effective community relations comes in. Through this, the companies operating in the region will engage their host communities on permanent basis and discharge their corporate social responsibilities.

Effective and efficient environmental management strategies can only be achieved if humans will cultivate practices that will sustain the environment and abstain from that which deplete and degrade it.

Nigerian does have policies on environmental management (e.g. Federal Environmental Protection Agency Act, 1988; the Harmful Waste (special criminal provisions) Act of 1988; the National Policy on the Environment, 1989), etc. Theoretically, the laws appears laudable, but in practice leave little to be desired as the provisions enshrined in the various instruments of intervention are rarely enforced; due to inadequate human resources, inadequate and mismanaged funds, low degree of Public awareness of environmental issues; corruption on the part of enforcement officers, among other.

Environmental studies are part of secondary and tertiary institutions curriculum, which will reduce the level of ignorance about environmental issues. Organizational scholars and researcher should widen their scope of

research by focusing on environmental issues and research institutions are also to be encouraged to incorporate environmental research into their agenda.

Corporate organizations are subsystems of the larger society; they should therefore fulfill their social responsibilities by ensuring that their activities cause minimal harm to humans and the environment in which they operate.

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