Community relations strategies of Oil companies for conflict management in host communities in Delta State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT: *The study investigated the community relations (CR) Strategies of oil companies for conflict management in the host communities in Delta State. The study was designed to explore how participatory approach to dispute resolution will support the process of conflict management in the oil producing host communities in the riverine areas of Delta State. With a survey of 300 respondents, it was established that participatory approach to dispute resolution has significant influence on conflict management in the host communities in the riverine areas of Delta State. The study therefore recommended that strategic alliance should be strengthened and encouraged for effective collaboration to curb violence and conflicts between the oil companies and their host communities in the riverine areas of Delta State.*

KEY WORDS: strategies, crisis, community relations, conflict, host communities

INTRODUCTION

Frequent occurrence of conflict between oil companies and host communities has been described to have detrimental effect on the reputation, image and promotion of goodwill of the oil companies in their host communities (Kenan,2013). The occurrence of the conflict is often believed to originate from the perceived difference, misunderstanding and misconceptions arising from interaction between the oil companies and their host communities. Conflict as a natural phenomenon cannot be isolated from the course of interactions between individuals or organisations and respective publics.

Most multinational companies are often involved in one form of conflict or the other with their host communities especially in the oil producing communities in the riverine areas of Delta State, Nigeria. According to Kalu, (2018), conflicts between multinational companies and host communities can be managed if organisations can invest most of their time and resources towards identifying, monitoring and promoting public interest in their area of operation. This suggests that organisations are able to

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prevent conflict with its host community from escalating to more serious dimension if they are public oriented in their community relations strategies and tactics.

However the persistence of conflicts between several oil companies and their host communities has raised serious concerns among researchers with special interest in community relations (CR) strategies and conflict management in host communities especially in the oil producing areas.

The research attention that Ukam ivi (2020), Olalekan (2013) and Amodu (2014) have given to the question of community relations conflicts among oil companies and their host communities has significantly inspired so much academic debate in this area of specialty in a quest to seek resolution to conflicts between oil companies and their host communities. Though they all focused their attention on how community relations strategies can be used to curb conflicts between multinational companies (MNC) and their host communities the question of how these strategies are applied have hardly received adequate research attention . This is the gap that this study intends to fill. Therefore, this present study seeks to examine community relations strategy of oil companies for conflict management in the riverine area of Delta State with specific reference to the community relations strategies of oil companies for managing host related conflicts. The specific objective of the study is to examine the effect of community relations strategies of oil companies for conflict management in their host communities.

This study relied on survey research method built on descriptive research design.Descriptive research was used to obtain information concerning the current status of the phenomenon and to describe what exists with respect to variables or conditions in a situation(Shields& Rangarajan, 2013). The characteristics used to describe the situation or population is usually some kind of categorical scheme also known as descriptive categories. According to Check and Schutt (2012) survey research is the collection of information from a sample of individuals through their responses to questions. The survey method was adopted because it supports the collection of data for the purpose of describing and interpreting prevailing conditions on the practices, beliefs, attitude and ongoing processes.

The target study population was Ogulagha Kingdom with population of 20000 distributed across six autonomous communities in the riverine area of Delta State(National Population Commission, 2016). Ogulagha Kingdom an oil producing community in the Burutu LGA of Delta State, Nigeria is located 33.3 miles from Warri whose main occupation is fishing, hunting and farming. With a sample size of 385 respondents based on Taro Yamane's Table, the copies of the questionnaire were admnistered on the six autonomous communities through simple random sampling techniques as indicated below:

1	Ogulagha community	129	33.%
2	Obotobo community 1	46	12%
3	Obotobo community 2	46	12%
4	Sokebolou community	64	17%

5	Yokiri community	50	13%
6	Ogbuguru community	50	13%
Total		385	100%

The use of simple random sample was to permit equal chance of being included in the sample for all study elements.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Multinational corporations are mostly concerned about profit making, productivity, competitiveness and creativity. Meanwhile, Conflicts are anti-production, they have the capacity to restrain production capacity which in turn lowers the profitability of corporations (Paleowei, Aduba and Aloni, 2014). Conflict emerges between organizations and their host communities when one party begins to perceive that its interests are not protected. Most likely, conflict between multinational companies and their host communities occurs when host communities believe that their interests are threatened or their expectations are cut short by the activities of organisations that are operating in the region. According to George (2016) there are four major causes of conflict which includes lack of information, lack of resources, personal relationship and incompetent management. Often times these four factors are the major cause of conflicts between SPDC with their host communities in Delta State. In their opinion Nwachukwu and Usiemure, (2013) explained that the nature of relations between multinational oil companies and host communities being the main actors in the Nigerian oil industry, is critical to the socioeconomic well-being of Nigeria.

Multinational have come to terms with the importance of having a well-planned community relations programme which have the ability to help oil companies to become recognised as good community citizens especially in Delta State which is a major oil producing state in the federation. When a company demonstrates interest in the socioeconomic well-being of its host community, such a company enjoys long-term benefits such as community support, loyalty and the fostering of goodwill. This is the case between oil companies and host communities in Delta State. Over the years oil companies have brought lots of developmental changes to their host communities by ensuring that host communities have access to uninterrupted power supply, portable drinking waters, link roads, schools, constructions of markets and town halls. In return, they enjoy the support and loyalty from host communities who rendered selfless services by protecting oil facilities from trespassers both within and outside the community.

However, host communities in the Delta State region are still faced with the challenge of environmental hazards especially dirty rivers and lakes, which have made fish and other aquatic bodies to migrate from the region, disappearing forests and species of animals due to exploration activities. Consequently host communities are left with no dependable source of livelihood. According to Yakubu (2017) this development has

stimulated series of conflict between oil companies and their host communities especially communities in Delta State. Theses conflict normally surfaces in form of protest by blocking the companies entrance gates, strike by contract staff from the communities who feels cheated for not making them full time staff of the organisation and are not well paid. Ukam (2020) maintained that the conflict between oil companies and host communities often lingers because of ineffective community relations of the oil companies. In other words the mere provision of social amenities for host community members without elevating the indigenes of the the communities from poverty does not eliminate outbreak of conflict. Subi and Amodu (2014) believe that effective community relations will be effective if the management of multinational companies can acknowledge the many approaches its organization can impact on the local community especially Delta State and the extent of reciprocal dependence, it will help to establish social balance. When an organisation practices good community relations, it assists such organization to secure its needs from the community while meeting up with the expectations of the community. As a public relations function community relations shapes company's actions to be socially, culturally and environmentally responsive to the people and places that may be affected by the operations of the firm. In practice, community relations attempts to solve real and perceived community issues, impact and rules in order to increase communication, improve understanding and create stronger relationship with stakeholders. In order to achieve this function, Yakubu, (2017) suggests that community relations can be established and maintained effectively through sustainable goals, programmes and achievements that are community oriented. Yakubu further contends that aggressively carrying out a public relations programme through variety of ways for people to become involved in programmes of the community and to express interest on issues concerning their welfare. Yakubu believes that anticipating and providing information needed by the community in a timely, comprehensible and appropriate manner stimulates effective conflict management among stakeholders. Yakubu concludes that in the face of controversial issues conflict can be effectively managed when the community is presented with the information needed to understand those issues. Anedo (2012) argues that community relations strategies significantly support the ability of parties to interact peacefully. This is important for effective communication in the process of conflict management.

It has been suggested that part of the strategies available to oil companies for resolving conflicts with host communities is to understand the drivers of cultural harmony of the host communities. Studies indicate that there are different methods or strategies individuals, organisations, managers or even employees can adopt to resolve conflict in their everyday endeavors, such can be noted as community relation strategies. However, the adoption of a given strategy is mainly influenced by the complexity of the problem as well as the capacity variation of the people in conflict. However, in cause of the conflict between oil companies in Burutu LGA and host community is mainly concerned with marginalization and non-inclusiveness of community members in the operations and policies of oil companies operating in the region. In 2017, Ogulagha kindom youths petitioned Shell Petroleum Development Company before an

arbitrary court in the national house of assembly Abuja, over allegations of marginalization; by employing few indigenes as contract staff and not full staff, none inclusiveness of indigenes on SPDC policies. Other times, members of host communities took to protesting, blocking of and destruction of oil facilities in the region as a show of their displeasure about the activities of the oil companies operating in the region. Most often in the event of host communities' protest, some criminally minded indigenes do seize the opportunity to carryout criminal activities such as kidnapping of workers, pipeline vandalism, theft and illegal oil bunkery.   Onah (2010) explains that the adverse effect of conflict to affected organisations is the waste of precious time and resources. Continuous conflict between oil companies and host communities in the oil producing areas has made most of the oil companies to pack up all their operations while hiding behind sub-contractors to continue with their operations in the region.

Some of the oil companies tend to reason that since they fulfil their legal obligation to the government of Nigeria, they owe the host communities nothing but charity. According to Ntido (2013) the oil companies argue that having met all their financial obligations to the Federal Government, they have no further obligation whatsoever to the host communities. Contrary to their claims, the host communities insist that if not by obligation, in the spirit of good neighborliness, oil companies must plough back some of the immense wealth they make from the host communities environment, for the promotion of their wellbeing. However, if these two stakeholders must have a mutually beneficial relationship there is the great need for an effective community relations practice.

According to Mitroff, Pearson &Pauchant, (2012) Conflict management is a process in which an organisation or a company engages with its environment in a bid to make an impact across its many stakeholders to affect a reasonable proportion of its complex stakeholders. Also Preble, (2019) explains the process of managing conflict to look like a strategic planning process. Starting the process with an initiation of a planning process which is then followed by an organization and environmental analysis (risk assessment) and subsequently the development of plans for prevention, back-up and recovery. Documentation implementation and periodic reviews of the process is the next step to be followed. Such a process is not dissimilar to a process involving goal setting, analysis and selection and implementation of strategy. Sometimes management and strategic conflict management complement each other, usually when this happens the former enhances the organization's 'defensive capability' against conflict, whilst the latter augments 'offensive capabilities' in respect of the competitive environment. According to Paleowei, Aduba and Aloni, (2014) like every other organisations, multinational corporations are mostly concerned about profit making, productivity, competitiveness and creativity. Meanwhile, conflicts are anti-production which have the capacity to slowdown or hinder production thereby reducing the profitability of the corporations. This is a very clear case of oil companies operating at the Forcados terminal inOgulagha community. Each time an issue surfaces between the oil companies and the community operations will be stopped and workers will be stopped from going to work as a result of protest by community members. To manage the

situation, the management of the affected company calls for a consultation meeting with the leadership of the host community. The meeting provides for both parties to have a heart to heart, face to face talk in order to explore ways on how the issues between them can be resolved. According to Nwangbara & Brown (2014) lack of proper communication is the leading cause of the conflicts between oil companies and host communities. When a company fails to involve effective communication with its stake-holders conflict is bound to occur.

Causes of conflict between oil companies and host communities
According to George (2016) there are four major causes of conflict between oil companies and host communities and they includes lack of information, lack of resources, personal relationship and incompetent management. Often times these four factors are the major causes of conflicts between oil companies and their host communities in the oil producing areas of Delta State. In their opinion Nwachukwu and Usiemure, (2013) explained that the nature of relations between multinational oil companies and host communities as the main actors in the Nigerian oil industry, is crucial to the socio-economic well-being of Nigeria. Multinational have come to terms with the importance of having a well-planned community relations programme which have the capacity to help oil companies to become recognised as good community citizens especially in Delta State which is a major oil producing state in the federation. When a company demonstrates interest in the socioeconomic well-being of its host community, such a company enjoys long-term benefits such as community support, loyalty and the fostering of goodwill. This is the case between oil companies and host communities in Delta State. Over the years oil companies have brought lots of developmental changes to their host communities by ensuring that host communities ensure uninterrupted power supply, have portable drinking waters, linking roads, schools, constructions of markets and townhalls. And in return, they gained the support and loyalty from host communities who rendered selfless services by protecting oil facilities from trespassers both within and outside the community. However, host communities in the Delta State region still complain of polluted water which has made fish and other aquatic bodies to migrate from the region, disappearing forests and species of animals due to exploration activities thereby livings community member with no source of livelihood.

Conflict management according to Mitroff, Pearson &Pauchant, (2012) is a process in which an organisation or a company engages with its environment in a bid to make an impact across its many stakelddders and affecting a reasonable proportion of its complex stakeholders. Also Preble (2019) characterizes the conflict management process in a manner which resembles that of a strategic planning process. Beginning with an initiation of a planning process followed by an organization and environmental analysis (risk assessment) and subsequently the development of plans for prevention, back-up and recovery. The next step involves documentation, implementation and periodic reviews. Such a process is not dissimilar to a process involving goal setting, analysis and selection and implementation of strategy. Where management and strategic management conflict complement each other, is that the former enhances the

organization's 'defensive capability' against conflict, whilst the latter augments 'offensive capabilities' in respect of the competitive environment.

Similarly, Richardson (2018) offers a further rationale for conflict management and strategy to share a common purpose, as conflict 'are incidents which threaten the strategic goals of organisations'. Moreover, it is argued that an organisation's strategies should deliberately set out to avoid conflict by adopting a long-term, stakeholder driven process of collaboration. Furthermore Fink, (2016) analyzed that conflict management has developed into a socio-technical (often organization-wide) approach to conflict management. In both theory and practice, conflict management draws upon both conflict management and Disaster Recovery Planning approaches. These alternatives differ in the emphasis they place upon the three basic stages of a crisis: pre-crisis, trans-crisis and post-crisis. The disaster recovery planning approach (with its information technology focus) emphasizes recovery over prevention (since the causes of crisis are perceived to be beyond the control of individuals and organizations.

As a result Perrow, (2014) stated that Disaster Recovery Planning has traditionally been oriented towards information technology failures and natural disasters. In contrast, the conflict management approach is more akin to conflict management, positing that a crisis incubates during a pre-crisis period/phase, awaiting a triggering event to transform the latent crisis into an active one. Indeed, given that organisations' systems are both complex and coupled with some conflict management theorists have described accidents as being 'normal'.

According to Osereme and Osemeka (2015) a union leader PHCN once said the best way to manage conflict is to prevent crises. In other words instead of allowing a dispute to escalate, the disputing parties must do everything within their power to prevent any misunderstanding that may lead to conflict between them. It is absolutely necessary to adopt a positive approach to prevent organizational conflict. This is because conflict is inevitable and the forces causing conflict emanate both from inside and outside the organisations. Therefore, since conflict is unavoidable, organizations should endeavour to manage or reduce them to the benefit of the organization. According to Omisor, (2014) there are several managerial strategies used in managing conflict and essentially, they are directed at its cause. These include:

1) controlling the contest: To minimize conflict that arise out of organizational design and layout strategies, management must formulate sound procedural strategies to institutionalize and channel conflicts. If conflicts are inevitable and normal in organizational life then proper procedures must be established.
2) controlling the issue in dispute: This attempt here is to issue in an attempt to resolve the dispute. This involves separating issues into their smallest components and dealing with them separately in attempt to make it easier to resolve major disputes. Fractioning conflict issues help to avoid stalemate by making it possible for one party to concede on one issue without feeling it has lost the contest.

3) controlling the relationship directly: Management directly intervenes in the dispute by physically separating the unit involved on holding direct negotiations between the units or .individual or formally requiring intense interaction.
4) altering the Individual Involved: Because altering the individual personality is much more difficult than altering his position in the organization, it may be feasible to swap the individuals in dispute.
5) develop a common set of goal: Much of the conflict between groups in any social organization arises because the subsystems have different goals.

Most managers are rewarded through pay increases, promotions etc to the extent that they accomplish the goals and the objectives of their particular subsystem is concerned about making itself look good and is also concerned about working with other subsystems towards common goals and objectives. An approach known as the "the organizational confrontation meeting" is developed by Beckhard to encourage organizational subsystems to work towards establishing and striving for common goals.

Turner (2014) cited that an acceptance of the normality of accidents leads to a further, inevitable, that a remedy or solution is infinitely preferable. Although clear distinctions may not easily be drawn, conflict management tends to be business-centric which may include the organization, customers, suppliers,whilst crisis management tends to be sociocentric (government, public bodies, host community, etc). Each has associated techniques for the risk analysis and planning, although, increasingly, the terms 'continuity management' and 'crisis management' are becoming interchangeable. The vulnerability of individuals or organizations does not automatically change with such realizations—knowing that one is vulnerable does not make one more or less vulnerable.Ledingham (2018) identifies five developments believed to have informed the emersion of the relational perspective as a paradigm for conflict management. He enumerates the five developments as:

1 the recognition of the need for the field of public relations to focus on relationship rather than the organization, the publics or the communication process.
2 the re-conceptualization of a management function requiring strategic planning and evaluation.
3 the construction of models for organization-stakeholder relationship which includes antecedents, maintenance processes and consequences.
4 the distillation of relationship attributes from the literature of interpersonal relationship and allied disciplines.
5 the development of organization-stakeholder relationship scales that would enable the measurement of relationship quality.

Fadipe (2010) believes that conflict may be seen as a result of a dynamic relationship between interested parties, struggling to gain control of valuable resources. Otite (2011), states that conflict arises when persons or groups in a defined community seek divergent interests, goals and ambitions. When there is a change in the social environment, for instance, the discovery of new resources from development in the

physical environment, a fertile ground for conflict is created. The ensuing conflict usually involves groups who are interested in using the new resources to achieve their goals. He further explain conflict as a conscious act in which personal or group contact and communication are involved.

Conflict therefore is a process of incompatible behaviours. It may involve the interference or obstruction by one or group of persons, or in some ways which make another action less likely to be effective. Conflict is also a social problem in which two or more individuals, parties, families, communities, or districts state arguments with each other. Conflict is unavoidable and persistent life of the organization (Fisher, 2013). Conflict is inevitable when there is a human factor involved. Conflict in the context of social life such as social disagreement, conflicts of interests, and quarrels between people, groups, or organizations without appropriate arrangement or management, conflicts in these social circumstances may cause stress and tensions among individuals. Conflict is unavoidable because people change over time, and with change, it creates disturbance (Boss, 2012). Conflict management has increasingly received attention in the organizational conflict literature since past two decades due to the swings in attitudes toward conflict within firms and its external stakeholders such as owners/shareholders/investors, managers/board of directors, employees, customers, host communities, government, suppliers, distributors, competitors etc.

Schramm (2012) sees conflict as a level of disagreement about issues perceived to be important by at least one of the parties involved. Occasionally, conflict was viewed as something harmful but now changed to a view that realizes conflict as a reality of organizational life. The term "conflict" has become a significant instrument in the development of organizations when it is cautiously managed.

Azamosa (2014) maintains that communal conflict comprises the total range of attitudes and behaviour that is in opposition between communities and the working people. However, there are several sources of organizational conflicts as categorize by Jones & George (2013) with each category having its unique characteristics. Conflict management can therefore be seen as "making progress." As part of improving the situation, progress can include such ideas as reaching consensus, developing mutual gains, and learning, resolving a dispute, achieving agreement, and laying a foundation for future negotiations.

There are two sides to a conflict, one is destructive and the other has a problem-solving base where those involved are willing to resolve personality differences, to hear others' views and to be candid to each other, to be supportive and helpful whereas the former defeats cooperation. Albert (2011) stated that there are two conflicts which are productive and destructive conflicts. However, "Conflict is said to be positive when it is carefully discussed by the parties and reached amicable terms for settlement". Carefully managed conflict induces a positive community relation while poorly managed conflict heats up the environment to bring about 'disagreement of the entire group and polarization, reduced productivity on job performance, physical and psychological effect, emotional distress and inability to rest, interference with problem

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activities, resulting into antagonistic position, malice and increased hostility' (Akanji, 2015). Through conflict management, peaceful atmosphere is created for promoting opportunities directed towards non-violent, reconciliation or basic clashing interest. An integral body of research on conflict has indicated that conflict is not stationary and that it can be seen as a dynamic procedure. Conflict cannot be recognized as particular phenomena which begins and is perceived and felt at once.

Conflict may already be in existence in an organization but parties may fail to perceive it, or feel it. Perhaps this is due to fear of the existence of conflict or, people prefer to maintain peace and continue to assert that there is no conflict. This conflict will gradually move through various numbers of stages until a time when people or groups will no longer reject its presence. The number and range of potential sources of conflict suggested by scholars are substantive, but most of these were theoretical conceptualizations with difficult empirical research a rarity (Amans, 2013). Greenberg & Baron (2017) note that research into communal conflict tended to focus on the organizational causes of conflict. Recent attention has however, focused on the possibility that in some cases, costly organizational conflicts stem as much, or perhaps more, from interpersonal factors. Conflict in the work setting often stems from relations between individuals and from personal characteristics as well as from underlying structural organization based-factors (Greenberg & Baron, 2017).

Intermediate views suggest variations of avoidance, give-and -take negotiation, collaboration, and problem solving. Blake & Mouton (2013) presented five general techniques for resolving conflict withdrawing, smoothing, forcing, compromising, and collaborating/confronting/problem solving (also referred to as negotiating). Dewey (2018), stated that organizations must analyze the problem and chose the right mode for managing conflict within their organizations in order to create a climate conducive to achieving a constructive outcome.

In an organizational context, relationship continuity has evolved into a process that identifies an organization's exposure to internal and external threats and synthesises hard and soft assets to provide effective prevention and recovery. Essential to the success relationship continuity among SPDC in host communities is a thorough understanding of the wide range of threats (internal and external) and recognition that an effective response will be determined by employees' behavior (Dzurgba, 2016).

In developing a conception for conflict management to be regarded as having a strategic role we asked whether firms had strategically oriented relationship continuity in place and, if so, what form this would take in terms of organization, planning and culture. The study offers a synthesis of both concepts and practice to highlight how and why SPDC in host communities should adopt, integrate and enhance systems to preserve value, whilst other organizational resources concentrate on the creation of value through competitive advantages. In so doing we have seen the possibility of a role for relationship continuity that can be more integrated with the more conventional strategic activities of a firm.

Concept of Community Relations and community relations strategies

Community relations s a public relations function is aimed at shaping a company's actions to be socially, culturally and environmentally responsive to the people and places that may be affected by the development. Community relations practices attempt to solve real and perceived community concerns, impact and rules in other to increase communication, improv understanding and create stronger relationship with stake holders. According to Norman R. So-derberg in his book public relations for the entrepreneur and the growing business, small business can become involved in their communities in a number of ways such as

a) Taking active interest in community problems
b) Sponsoring youth activities
c) Participating in local government activities.
d) Joining business and service groups.
e) Purchasing materials and supplies from local companies.
f) Encouraging community education and culture.
g) Making offices or other facilities available to community organizations.
h) Supporting local charity drives and taking part in civic activities

Also Emoyan,(2008) stated that community relations is a function that evaluates public attitudes, shapes the policies of the organization in the public interest and produces a program of action to earn community understanding and respect. Furthermore Yakubul, (2017) suggested that community relations can be established and maintained effectively by

1. Keeping the goals, programs achievements and needs of the public and community.
2. Aggressively carrying out a public relations program.
3. Providing a variety of ways for people to become involved in the schools and programs of the community and to express interest in and concern for the schools, programs clients.
4. Anticipating and providing information needed by the community in a timely, comprehensible and appropriate manner.
5. Facing controversial issues and presenting the community with the information needed to understand those issues.

Similarly, Chicago police department (2016) states that community relations can be established and maintained effectively by effectively applying the following strategies;

1   Volunteerism: organize a volunteer day for your team at a local charity. While you won't make profit, it will offer networking opportunities and show the community you care. Make sure you post pictures from a fund raiser you hosted or your team's volunteer day. This will build brand trust among community members.

2   PR outreach: share the company's stories with local media and coordinate their presence on site for fund raising events or check presentations. This helps to

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       spotlight your company and send a direct message of credibility to the community.

3   investing in your community: make donations for local projects of the community to show good will from your company.

According to Anedo (2012), community relation strategies is a major goal and the ability of parties to interact harmoniously is an important component of communication competence in conflict management. However, MNCs should understand the cultural harmony of the host communities by having an understanding that community relations begets progress. Accordingly, Chen, (2012) sees harmony as the process whereby parties in dispute make a pursuit of equilibrium and the sustenance of hierarchical relationships by being honest and sincere to themselves. Generally speaking, there is obvious need to integrate the conflict and harmony frameworks for a full understanding behavior of host communities. An understanding of harmony culture will give new light of conflict behaviors in diverse cultures. In recent times according to Brucellaria, (2017), scholars now pay more attention the relationship building feature of public relations that is why organisations give credence to the relevance of maintaining a good relationship with its various publics especially the community where such an organisation is domiciled, by engaging community relations practices to build its relationship with its relevant stakeholders.

To achieve this sole goal Kenan (2013) explains the importance of communication as necessary process for efficient manner community relations practice. This is because every business consist of two types of communication that is external communication which is channeled to the key players in the community and the internal or organizational communication which is channeled to employees of the organisation. The essence of these kinds of communication is to tackle the inevitable conflicts that may arise within and outside the organisation. Still on the relevance of effective community relations practice for organisations, Rahim (2011) made more emphasis on the types of organizational conflicts which could either be inter group or inter personal conflicts, with Interpersonal conflict occurring between two persons with differing interest but are co-habiting, that is a company and its host community. While analyzing conflict between MNCs and host communities Ntido, (2013) cited that oil companies argue that having met all their financial obligations to the Federal Government, they have no obligation whatsoever to the host communities. Contrarily, the host communities insist that if not by obligation, in the spirit of good neighborliness, oil companies must plough back some of the immense wealth they make from the host communities environment, for the promotion of their wellbeing. However, if these two stakeholders must have a mutually beneficial relationship there is the great need for an effective community relations practice.

Studies indicate that there are different methods or strategies individuals, organisations, managers or even employees can adopt to resolve conflict in their everyday endeavour, such can be noted as community relation strategies. However, the adoption of a given strategy is mainly influenced by the complexity of the problem as well as the capacity variation of the people in conflict. According to Thakore (2013) there are two basic

issues people consider before opting for a particular community relation strategy. First is achieving one's personal goals which is usually driven by the fact that every individual has a goal that conflicts with another person's goal which may be of high importance to him, or it may be of little importance to him. Secondly, the desire to keep a good relationship with the other person may also influence the approach one may want to adopt in handling conflict situations. A well planned community relations strategy is to everyone's benefit, no matter the company's size. Good community relations are key to the success of a business. The goals of community relations strategies are:

1) promote safe communities by reducing crime particularly violence.
2) build and foster a true collaborative partnership through positive engagement and public trust between a company and the community
3) engage in comprehensive problem solving solving with the community to reduce crime particularly violence.

To achieve these goals the company will:

1) implement strategies at the beat, district and area level of combat emerging and chronic crime issues and neighborhood disorder.
2) ensure unified and effective implementation of the community relations strategy by relentless follow up.
3) approach all interactions with the public as opportunities to enhance the perception of law enforcement and build upon public trust.

Based on these views, the following are some Community Relations Strategies for conflict management as Folarin (2008) adopted:

Compromising Strategies: This strategy is characterized with negotiation and a high degree of flexibility. According to Burnside (2008) the adoption of compromising approach creates an atmosphere of win – lose outcome among the parties in conflict. It refers to the appeasement that takes place where one party in dispute is willing to let the other party have their way. This is so because it is expected that for parties in conflict to arrive at an agreeable resolution, each party must give up something such that there is no clear winner or loser. Most times people do this because they value relationships over the issue in context or because one party cannot contend with the other party.

Forcing Strategies: This approach to conflict resolution is characterized with a win-lose outcome. Accordingly, Thakore (2013) iterates that this technique is associated with a situation in which one party in conflict attempts to gain complete control of everything under contention without minding the interest of the other party. In view of this definition, we may say that such situation can only prevail where the second party does not have what may be required to effectively prosecute the context with their opponents thereby making them vulnerable to imminent failure. However, a situation where this type of absolute dominance prevails, the implication is that it will create an atmosphere of industrial disharmony through continuous sabotage of one another's efforts thereby putting the fate of the organization on the cross fire. Again, with the manifestation of

these outcomes, it may be argued that the adoption of forcing style to managing conflict should be discouraged in the organization because of its autocratic undertones; which instead of resolving the conflict only ends up creating more room for further dysfunctional situation.

Collaboration Strategies: According to Salami (2009) the adoption of collaboration strategy in the management of conflict situation ranks high on both assertiveness and cooperativeness. On the other hand, Calha (2017) sees collaboration strategy as an affirmative and obliging means of conflict management which usually results in a win-win settlement. Similarly, McShane and Von Glinow (2000) added that collaboration carries the highest level of win/win orientation that brings about information sharing, openness, and clarification of issues at the point of conflict to come up with solution acceptable to both parties. Snell (2002) maintains that collaboration serves to maintain and strengthen work relationships for both parties. This is as it allows people in conflict to subsume their original interest and then work in synergy to achieve a common goal. Consequently, Hotepo, Asokere, Abdul-Azeez and Asokere (2010) contend that effective use of collaborative strategy may result in positive work behavior and attitudes hence; it promotes cooperation and integrity in the workplace that reduces conflicts

Theoretical Framework: Stakeholder theory
The stakeholder theory states that a corporation has stakeholders who are generally the groups and individuals that benefit from or are harmed by the corporation's actions. In a highly complex and unpredictable world, stakeholder theory advocates for a pragmatic, efficient, effective, and moral approach to managing companies. The stakeholder theory tries to define and produce value, combine capitalism with ethics, and discover suitable management strategies. Jeffrey, Edward, and Monica (2015) agree that the stakeholder theory entails, at the very least, addressing stakeholders' interests and well-being. Other stakeholder groups, such as communities, advocacy organizations, environmentalists, the media, or even society as a whole, are usually involved, nevertheless.

A stakeholder represents any group or person that may influence or is influenced by the operations of organization's objectives As the primary unit of analysis and the starting point for stakeholder research, Freeman focused on the interactions between the organization and its stakeholders (Fares, Chung, & Abbasi, 2021). The rights of these parties can either be violated or respected by the corporation (Hartman, 2015). The importance of properly managing stakeholders means that this theory can be put into practice by all businesses and organizations. What an organization chooses to do with its stakeholders will ultimately define how those stakeholders will treat the organization. Stakeholders respond to the treatment that the organization has meted out to them, thus it is constructed accordingly. In other words, stakeholders often have a strong sense of loyalty towards companies that share their values. Even in tense and challenging circumstances, a supportive organization tends to win the support of stakeholders. From the above, it is evident that social responsibility and stakeholder theory are related. Every participant's potential is highlighted. Stakeholder theory also

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tries to advance business objectives while maintaining morality and economics in balance. In other words, a firm should be managed so that the stakeholders profit from it, and directors should be answerable to them. This means that businesses are unable to use stakeholders for their own long-term gain. Instead, the primary goal should be to increase stakeholder profits.

Table 1. Causes of community hostility in the host communities?

S/N	Items	SA	A	UD	D	SD	Mean	Remark
1.	Inadequate compensation	91 (32.6%)	69 (24.7%)	76 (27.2%)	31 (11.1%)	12 (4.3%)	2.30	Accept
2.	Marginalization of host communities	105 (37.6%)	72 (25.8%)	36 (12.9%)	47 (16.8%)	19 (6.8%)	2.29	Accept
3.	Non-involvement of indigenes in decision making process	139 (49.8%)	76 (27.2%)	30 (10.8%)	19 (6.8%)	15 (5.4%)	1.91	Reject
4.	Delay in response to community's distress call	104 (37.3%)	63 (22.6%)	45 (16.1%)	52 (18.6%)	15 (5.4%)	2.32	Accept
5.	Negligence to community's demands	103 (36.9%)	75 (26.9%)	48 (17.2%)	39 (14.0%)	14 (5.0%)	2.23	Accept
6.	Lack of employment	121 (43.4%)	65 (23.3%)	44 (15.8%)	38 (13.6%)	11 (3.9%)	2.11	Accept
7.	Confidence in community leadership	147 (52.7%)	78 (28.0%)	21 (7.5%)	27 (9.7%)	6 (2.2%)	1.81	Reject
8.	No full representation of indigenes in the operation process	135 (48.4%)	41 (14.7%)	35 (12.5%)	54 (19.4%)	14 (5.0%)	2.18	Accept
9.	Inadequate Community relations programmes	100 (35.8%)	55 (19.7%)	64 (22.9%)	30 (10.8%)	30 (10.8%)	2.41	Accept
10.	Refusal to corporate with host communities	126 (45.2%)	64 (22.9%)	26 (9.3%)	40 (14.3%)	23 (8.2%)	2.18	Accept
	TOTAL						21.74	
	GRAND MEAN						2.17	

The table above shows that the mean value obtained from the non-involvement of indigenes in decision making process was 1.91 mean value which is below 2. 0.   Also the mean value got from confidence in community leadership was 1.8 with mean below 2.0.

Table 2 Oil companies' community relations strategies (CRSs)

S/N	Items	SA	A	UD	D	SD	Mean	Remark
1.	Scholarship	138 (49.5%)	79 (28.3%)	28 (10.0%)	16 (5.7%)	18 (6.5%)	2.26	Accept
2.	Grassroot Empowerment	97 (34.8%)	62 (22.2%)	81 (29.0%)	28 (10.0%)	11 (3.9%)	1.91	Reject
3.	Grassroot campaign	106 (38.0%)	73 (26.2%)	38 (13.6%)	46 (16.5%)	16 (5.7%)	2.25	Accept
4.	Construction of schools and health centres	108 (38.7%)	58 (20.8%)	49 (17.6%)	59 (21.1%)	5 (1.8%)	2.26	Accept
5.	GMOU	97 (34.8%)	77 (27.6%)	55 (19.7%)	41 (14.7%)	9 (3.2%)	2.24	Accept
6.	Compensation	116 (41.6%)	67 (24.0%)	53 (19.0%)	33 (11.8%)	10 (3.6%)	2.12	Accept
7.	Provision of electricity	149 (53.4%)	89 (31.9%)	12 (4.3%)	27 (9.7%)	2 (.7%)	1.72	Reject
8.	Sponsoring of local events	135 (48.4%)	50 (17.9%)	34 (12.2%)	52 (18.6%)	8 (2.9%)	2.10	Accept
9.	Provison of portable drinking water	110 (39.4%)	58 (20.8%)	60 (21.5%)	27 (9.7%)	24 (8.6%)	2.27	Accept
10.	Construction roads	132 (47.3%)	66 (23.7%)	23 (8.2%)	33 (11.8%)	25 (9.0%)	2.11	Accept
	TOTAL						21.24	
	GRAND MEAN						2.12	

The table above shows that while other strategies were above the benchmark of 2.0 and consequently accepted, commitment to grassroots empowerment mean value obtained was 1.91. Also, the mean value obtained from provision of electricity as community relations strategy was 1.72 which is less than 2.0 mean value benchmark.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The study entails community relations strategy of oil companies in the riverine areas to manage its re-occurring conflict with host communities with special reference to Ogulaha Kingdom. Findings from the studied show that the community relations strategies of the oil companies have been effective and that indigenes of Ogulagha Kingdom have a very good relationship with the management of the oil companies. This is clearly evidenced in the series of developmental projects carried out in the kingdom. The kingdom enjoys 24 hours power supply, linking motorable roads, community town halls, working health facilities as well as good number of primary and secondary schools scholarship schemes. This however contradicts the findings of (Ukam Ivi Ngwu 2020) which states that host communities did not have cordial relationship with the oil companies.

The study also establish that effective communication system is very strategic in the management of conflict between oil companies and their host communities. This also confirms the findings of Nwagbara & Brown,(2014) that poor communication is the leading cause of the conflict with host communities. However the oil companies have not been having a closed communication with the grassroot people, the people believe

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that oil companies are taking more from them without compensating them enough. This is also in conformity with the works of Olalekan (Olalekan,2013).

Lastly the study finds out that when the top leadership of its host communities are trusted with communication meant for the entire host communities they often use it to serve their selfish interest without considering the well being of the ordinary man in the community. Meanwhile it is still this common man in the community that are often mobilized to disrupt the activities of the oil companies. The top leadership of the community often take advantage of the ignorance of the common man in in times of crisis to manipulate the perception of the host communities.

CONCLUSION

As a result of the foregoing, the study concludes that community relations strategies and conflict management is fundamental to organizational profitability and performance. Organizational performance affects the corporate image of a company which in turn influences human and cultural factors, technology, natural resources, economic factors, regulatory measures, markets, management philosophy, organizational and cultural goals, values, beliefs, and norms, organizational climate, motivated behavior and teamwork, structure as well as their environment. Finally, local communities have frequently accused oil companies in the oil and gas (O&G) industry of stripping terrains, polluting community water sources and air, and destroying land resources; thus, the challenges of oil companies in developing country have shifted from communities picketing and protesting their operations to difficulties in managing social leverage to operate in host communities. The major responsibilities of public relations officer in companies are to pursue these duties to curb conflict .

Recommendations

Following the above conclusions, the paper therefore made the under-mentioned recommendations:

1. Companies should make sure they promote a good communication link with their host communities as this will foster beneficial relationship for both parties

2. Community relations officers with the oil companies should inspire top management of oil companies to promote viable policies that will foster community relations on disputes resolution and conflicts management with host communities.

3. Oil companies should be conscientious about community relations strategies because effective community relations practice will help to manage conflict between them and their host communities.

4. Oil companies should always give cognisance to the interest of the host communities and seek to address the interest in best of their abilities if not for any other reason but for the fact that, if they must operate peacefully, host communities must accommodate them whole heartedly.

5. Concern government systems should intervene on community relation strategies on how to assist companies and host communities to curb conflicts.

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