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Towards Community Engagement in Nigeria's Oil and Gas Sector

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Introduction

MNCs are established not solely for profit they are to work to promote the peace and wellbeing of the society through various growth activities Studies have established that there is also the need for Host communities to reciprocate good gestures of well-behaved MNCs and to respect the basic rights of their business to exist as an economic entity as well as a corporate citizen within society [1-4]. Hence, the agitation for reciprocity and mutual respect of values and interests between business and stakeholders of the business have spurred debates and the need for continuous conversations in business climes. Where however, there is conflict between the values held by MNCs and the Host communities, it can result in breakdown of relations and mutual respect [5]. The implication of this is that, when actions and decisions are not in line with the values and interest of the society or vice versa, it may result into loss of credibility and trust, degenerating to further negative consequences such as boycotts, protests, and legal actions [4]. It is therefore crucial that MNCs are continuously up to date with the values, needs, norms, and politics of the Host communities in which they operate, to make informed decisions in the process, operations and relationship building as these obligation lies more on them.

The purpose of this research is to contribute to existing knowledge on how MNCs can effectively reduce conflict via the existing framework of SDGs goals of Community engagement. We assess past strategies (CSR) used by MNCs to engage Host communities in Nigeria's Niger Delta region, how effective it has been, the setbacks and suggest ways to increase peace using the apparatus of community engagement.

The study presents two sections. The first assesses past impact of MNCs' commitment in the Nigeria's Niger-delta region towards CSR activities and the effectiveness to these Host communities. Conversely, the assessment of CSR activities by MNCs to Host communities in Nigeria's Niger-Delta crude oil producing regions are no longer consistent with present realities and have not achieve absolute success particularly in the quest of the business of Peace and in the region [6,7]. This thus brings us to the second session, which seeks to discuss how MNCs can key into SDG goals of community engagement for better impact and in strengthening the SDGs agenda in the region.

MNCs and Conflicts in Host Communities

Multinational corporations (MNCs) are large corporations investing in one or several sectors of a country with the aim of expansion, developmental perpetuity and profit making [8]. In the process, they act as medium of economic growth and development, peacebuilding, humanitarian assistance and contributing to health, welfare, constructions, educational development, technology transfer, economic trade performance boost and other tangible and invisible social responsibility [9]. They play a vital role in assisting developing countries grow in employment rate, particularly in their host communities [10]. MNCs operate business activities in several countries and continents, generating at least 25% of their revenues outside their home countries. They possess advanced technologies and technical efficiency which evolve continuously offering innovation which serves as channel of industrial change [1]. MNCs create a mutually beneficial relationship within the country by generating employment opportunities, improving market access, introducing competition, and transferring new technology. MNCs are powerful global actors due to their international advantage from establishing operations, affiliates, and/or subsidiaries outside of their home country. Not only do MNCs serve as a major source of FDI for those locations outside of their home country, but they have also benefited from and fostered globalization through access to new markets, new technology, and new sources of capital and labour [11].

These understanding of MNCs can however be distorted, in a situation where some are linked to activities which creates conflict of interest [2]. For instance, engaging in political and other forms of diversionary activities inimical in the long run to their set target per time [12]. This can also prevail where MNCs process of stakeholders' engagement is distorted while carrying along all a sundry, making MNCs to be complicit in being partisan tools particularly by the Government and Stakeholders, to gain access to the resources and controls in the conflict affected areas. Literature suggests some MNCs being complicit in arming rebel groups against government forces and vice versa [13]. while some MNCs derive the advantage of cheap, low-cost labour, weak tax regulations, racketeering and gaining competitive advantage by being long-term dominant player in the resource market, thereby securing even untapped resources [5,14].

There is need for MNCs to continuously seek ways of addressing allegations and in some cases, actual perpetuation in activities which connotes risks to peace, cognisant to impact on day-to

day activities and in the long run, stability [15]. Economies of scale is one of such effort [16]. Two or more MNCs create cordial agreement to intentionally ensure there is derivation of benefits of operating in the same environment and no MNCs promotes instability in any form. For instance, the creation of Global internet forum to counter Terrorism whereby Internet giants: Facebook, Microsoft, WhatsApp, Google, X(Twitter) collaborated and set in place mechanism which made it difficult for Extremist groups to assess and use these platforms to promote terror and its recruiting. This was achieved with the involvement of Government of some nations via United Nations [17].

The Nigerian Scenario

In Nigeria's Niger Delta region, there are over 123 flaring sites, and Nigeria has been regarded as one of the highest emitters of greenhouse gases in Africa [6]. Aside this, there is prevailing oil spills, remarkably making the region one of the most polluted crude oil regions globally. Cases of oil spills in EU is estimated at 10 in Europe in 40 years, a time range which 9343 cases oil spills has recorded in the Niger-delta region [16].

The environmental degradation, gas flaring, dredging, oil spillage, Eco life loss in the region. The disconnect which has also resulted in the emergence of arms struggle and activism abject poverty amid the bountiful oil wealth. This suggests that there has been a long-standing detachment and subsequent agitations between the MNCs, the government and the Host communities. For instance, 'the Ogoni 9' which was conveyed by Ken Saro-wiwa (late) drew global attention to the plight and environmental decay in the region in the 90s. The agitation met silencing by the then Head of State, General Sani Abacha (late) and the subsequent death by hanging in 1995. This resulted in worldwide attention, sanctions being placed in Nigeria and beams on the activities of MNCs exploring crude oil in the region, Which Shell accounts for over 50 percent of exploration. It was discovered however, despite the CSR activities in billions of dollars' worth, Ogoni people encompassing the Niger Deltans lacked access to basics as electricity and piped drinking water, good road networks and adequate health care [13]. The frustration of seeing virtually no responses after the incidence of the Ogoni 9 brought further agitations and the emergence of the Movement for the emancipation of Ogoni people [14].

Aside the Ogoni 9, another prominent group is the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND). This group's emergence in 2006 was also borne out of further deprivations, disconnect and environmental degradation the region has suffered over the years. MEND's declared objective was to secure a greater share of oil revenues for the people of southern Nigeria. MEND cited the "theft" of oil, oil spills without clean up, environmental exploitations amongst others as their cause for agitations and eventual arms struggle. However, it had no institutional organ to formalize this political grievance and their ownership claims. To fund themselves, MEND obtained substantial volumes of oil through pipeline bunkering and hijacking. It kidnapped or extorted oil workers. The crude oil was refined and sold locally and to border countries like Cameroon, Chad. The rebel activities of MEND resulted in Nigerian government and international oil companies proscribing them as an organized crime racket and terrorist organization. Be that as it may, MEND has perpetuated itself in existence by paying off Nigerian officials to receive export permits. This willingness to collude with elements of the Nigerian government and oil companies made it easier for MEND to smuggle [14]. However, MENDs relevance resulting from these activities and stakeholders' engagements has been recognised by successive government interested in their inclusiveness in

the region's activities. This has resulted in their involvement in pipelines safeguarding in recent times [9]. These roles and others however have questioned and discredited the groups' preliminary objectives which is ending environmental exploitations, degradations, and unsuccessful activities of NOCs [18].

In addressing ongoing oil spillage in the region, the environmental issue that has been generated, particularly oil spillage has been traced to the NOCs and the emergence of illegal activities by the host communities, suggesting some oil spillage are as a result of activities such as pipeline bunkering and local refining resulting in flaring of dangerous gases [6,18]. This has further compounded the heavy contamination and pollution which has been ongoing for the past five decades.

Initiatives have been put forward to address these issues. For instance, the August 2017 $1 billion clean up and restoration programme launched by the Nigerian government following the report of the UN in 2011 which indicted the MNCs in the environmental degradation of the Ogoni region [2]. The will power and lack of proper engagement of MNCs has not encouraged the launch of this initiative till date.

MNCs and CSR

The disparity between oil multinationals' environmental management policies and practices in developed and developing countries creates concern [6]. Apart from effective clean-up, some organisations, especially in developed countries, have used the concept of corporate social responsibility (CSR) to address the socio-economic problems related to their business activities [15]. Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) can be traced to Article 23 in the 1948 United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which called for the right of employment, favourable working conditions, equal pay for equal work and the right to join trade unions [5]. It is a strategy that MNCs use to improve their Host communities. It can include donating money or products to nonprofits or employees, volunteering. Although CSR can be used in an altruistic manner, it is also a strategy for maintaining or improving a company's reputation. The extent to which companies use CSR initiatives and other environmental management policies to address environmental and socio-economic problems associated with their business depends on several factors [6]. MNCs often adopts corporate social responsibility (CSR) approaches to build long-term acceptance and cordial relationships with local communities, resolve disputes, and create social license [2]. In some cases, however, there may be a disconnect between host communities and MNCs resulting in conflicts and has brought about the emergence of activism, unequal distribution of wealth, economic stagnation, informal oil markets, crimes such as kidnappings agitations, arms struggle and other non-negotiable issues. This establishes the argument that unfavourable outcomes result when power disconnects are wide and inapplicable approach to impacting stakeholders, particularly, host communities are adopted by corporations [9].

Existing MNCs have persistently invested in CSR for decades [2]. Ample evidence however reveals impact is not translating to meeting their stated goals evident by continuous agitations and penury state of the oil producing regions.

It is posited that the impact of institutional CSR is often supported by host Governments especially at local levels, which water down the impact, re-negotiating what CSR ought to be downwards for personal political interests [6]. For instance, Shell BP has been involved in various CSR initiatives in Nigeria, such as providing

health care, education, infrastructure, and microcredit to the local communities affected by its oil operations However, these CSR activities have faced several criticisms as some quarters adjudge them as insincere, insufficient, and largely partisan and eventually became the source of conflicts in the region. It has also been faulted as not addressing the environmental degradation facing the region. Some MNCs have also been accused of being used by Government both at the federal, state, and local level to divert funds in revenue sharing and would rather 'settle' than pay royalties, pacify some locals to keep gaining access to resources. Record of long-standing CSR activities of some MNCs such as Shell's BP are obvious, however. It could only be improved upon and better channelled.

The Business of Community Engagement
The characteristics of the Stakeholder community engagement is that business systems and structures are clearly global and closely linked than it was in the past decades. More importantly, the post covid era has further made business fundamentally more global, with the extensive spread of internet technology. Community engagement has made absolute wellbeing as important as relative well-being, making people and planet inclusive in business as important as profit making. Host community engagements defines how a company should operate in such a manner as to ensure the Host community have a sense of inclusion and benefit from any feedback programmes laid out by the MNCs operations [15]. It may be detrimental for any MNC to evade or not put into consideration frameworks for community engagement [19]. To establish balance in nature, the rule of give and take is very essential [12]. posit that humans have stepped out of this natural rule by taking so much and giving little or nothing in return. This has distorted peace and resulted in various dimensions of conflicts [13].

In practice, community engagement is a blend of science and art. The science comes from sociology, political science, cultural anthropology. Organizational development, psychology, social work, and other disciplines, and organizing concepts are drawn from the literature on community participation, community mobilization, constituency building, community psychology, and cultural influences. The art comes from the Human angle of emotional intelligence of understanding, skills, and sensitivity used to apply and adapt the science in ways that fit the community of interest and the purposes of specific engagement effort [20].

Community engagement includes factors as accountability systems being in place to facilitate report of environmental activities geared towards pollution prevention, sustainability, compliance to international ethics, standard operating procedures in operations, safety and risk mitigations frameworks, maintenance [1]. It is a concept that is rooted in the responsibility one owes another and O'D [21]. Community engagement recognizes that, for effective change, there must the intuition for the need for change by the Stakeholders, and this is achievable through the medium of enlightenment via group education.

Furthermore, meaningful community engagement extends beyond physical involvement to include generation of ideas, contributions to decision making, and sharing of responsibility. Among the factors that motivate locals to participate are wanting to play an active role in bettering their own lives, fulfilling social or religious obligations, feeling a need for a sense of collaboration, and wanting cash or in-kind rewards. Whatever people's motivations, obtaining meaningful community participation and having a successful, sustained initiative require that engagement leaders saddled with the task, respect, listen to, and learn from community members.

An absence of mutual respect and co-learning can result in a loss of interest, trust, resources, and most importantly, effectiveness.

Community members and organizations are more likely to participate if they perceive the benefits of participation outweigh the effort required. The potential benefits of participation for community members, academics, and health professionals include opportunities for networking, access to information and resources, personal recognition, learning, a sense of helping to solve community problems, improved relationships among stakeholders, increased capacity for problem solving, and contact with hard-to-reach populations. However, participation also involves costs such as the time and energy required to build relationships and other infrastructure, and the lessening of control over initiatives. This is known as the "social exchange" perspective, which provides insight into motivations for participation by using the framework of benefits and costs to help explain who participates and why.

Culture in Community Engagement
Communities are not uniform entities; they consist of heterogeneous groups with distinct histories, social structures, value systems, and cultural perspectives. Understanding the cultural dynamics of specific groups and institutions to build relationships, identify ways to effectively collaborate, and build respect and trust. This is an ongoing effort for all involved in the community engagement process. In other words, communities are not homogeneous, but rather are composed of diverse groups with different backgrounds, social structures, value systems, and cultural understandings of the world.

Culture influences people's perceptions. Therefore, understanding the cultural dynamics of specific groups and institutions is crucial for building relationships, identifying ways to effectively collaborate, and building respect and trust.

To establish relationships, identify effective collaboration methods, and foster respect and trust, researchers and practitioners must comprehend the cultural dynamics of specific groups and institutions. This is a continuous effort for all parties involved in the community engagement process. To achieve successful collaboration with a community, it is crucial that MNCs understand the point of view of locals, members of the communities, religious institutions, traditional practices, community associations, public works i.e electricity, health and water supply agencies. Key to developing such cognisance is recognizing culture and how it shapes their beliefs and perspectives.

Reporting Sustainability Performance
There should be structure for reporting sustainability performance and outcomes [22]. Aside these, indices used should be reviewed and monitored such that all stakeholders are carried along in the periodic review. There should be disclosure of information on environmental activities and practices and all indices of replenishment i.e environmental, social and governance practices (ESG) practices [17]. ESG practices can be published by MNCs via publishing periodic report of activities of their engagement with Stakeholders [23]. These promotes transparency while improving MNCs image and reputation. There are indices for measuring impact.

Some MNCs have already taken on the sustainability quest via forming global partnerships across sectors [19]. Engie is among these, whose 10-year project has brought the first Solar village in Bangladesh. This they achieved via multi-stakeholder partnerships. Engie has achieved the mission of bringing sustainable solar

energy to the locals (SDG7). On evaluation, it has extended to positive impact on student school performance (SDG4) and further contribute to employment (SDG 8) and poverty reduction (SDG1). Source: 5 ways multinationals can have a greater impact on the SDGs | World Economic Forum (weforum.org)

Case Study: Shell GMoU CSR Model for Niger-Delta Host Communities

The purpose for this Research is to add to existing knowledge as to why there has been conflicts between MNCs and Host communities in the Nigeria's Niger-delta region; and seek to establish the extent of impact of CSR over the years in the region. By studies embarked on in the literature, there is yet the need for peace and sustainable development in the region. This brought about the question how the concept of Community engagement can be adopted by MNCs in line with the SDG Goals of sustainable development to create a balance in relationship between the MNCs and all Stakeholders, particularly the Host communities in terms of inclusion, mutual benefit and sustainability. In this session, we presents a case study, describing the assessment of a past CSR framework executed in the Nigeria's Niger delta region by Shell BP, known as the Global Memorandum of Understanding (GMoU) Model. This assessment of this CSR framework, further presented insight to relational concerns between the MNCs and the Host communities, their successes and setbacks. The session then sought to assess the relationship between these three MNCs and Host communities.

Shell in 2010, undertook the Global Memorandum of Understanding (GMoU) Model which is a variant from Chevron system of reaching out to its Host communities, involving Stakeholders such as Civil societies groups, local government, and development agencies. Shell interfaced with locals in conjunction with wider selection of stakeholders: The Civil societies in particular to play the role of mediation between them and the locals in the heat of the conflict that existed. Shell requested for developmental projects it can provide funding and technical assistance on behalf of, for a fixed term of five (5) years, having NGOs as observers and articulators the locals' needs while it lasts; after which the GMoU would be renewed. Thus, Shell signed the memoranda of understanding together with these partners. Government at state and local levels were also carried along in the understanding to facilitate if any, need for further mediation in agreements. All these stakeholders were referred as Cluster Development Board (CDB).
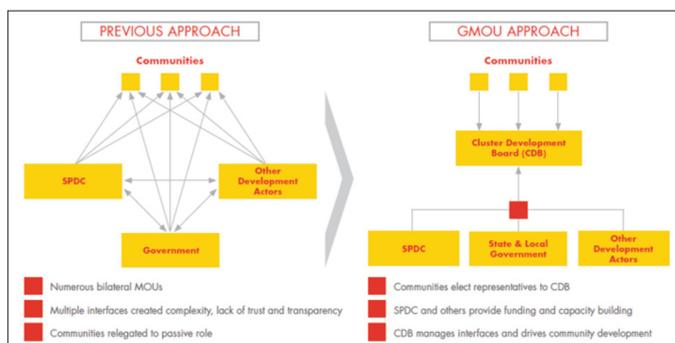
However, based on feedback by the GMoU interface committee, the interest of the Locals was not still reflected in the projects. It was discovered that, projects that are one-off: Townhalls, Classrooms, Boreholes etc were preferred. Furthermore, the expectation included a continuous cash handout which was not sustainable; which an attempt by Shell BP eventually resulted in further ill-feelings between communities and accusations of bias by Locals. This acquisition of bias encountered in the GMoU

project was in allocation of the development funds. There were ill- feelings by communities clustered, for instance, where a community insisted it was marginalised by the number and size of infrastructure and funds compared to others they are grouped with. This resulted in subtle disputes, depicting SPDC as agent of further conflict than peace and development in these instances. Some communities alleged they were not impacted adequately in their cluster group as their land hosted less pipelines or oil wells than their neighbours. Another problem was the Locals perceiving the process of inclusion as a form of political appointments. Thus, the Representatives expected monetary incentives and preferences for the task. These representatives commenced the demand monies from contractors of the development projects at every stage. The resistance and refusal to this resulted to threats and eventually the menace of kidnappings of the expatriates in the region which has become an insurgency beyond the region, spreading to some other region such as the north-east, northwest in marginally different variants and perpetrators.

Why should MNCs in Nigeria's Niger-Delta Wholistically Adopt Community Engagement?

The GMoU case study has brought to fore, the gap of giving-back as important and key for survival of MNCs in the Niger-delta region. However, the peculiarity of the locals requires a continual sense of ownership and inclusion. Also, the demand for cash handout depicts the need by MNCs to set setup systems that would legitimately provide access to these by the indigenes; to the grassroot in such a manner that this subtle culture of the people would be sustained by what they could also give back to the environment under a structure which would cut across. This study suggests going beyond Development projects to Human capacity, skills and talent acquisitions, Environmental development project which have regard for the global challenge of climate change that affects the region. This is suggested, being such that would be continuously engaging and also have capacity for sustained income generating capacity. In International Business (IB), to set up an effective community engagement framework, what should be is that MNCs consults stakeholders widely i.e the ethical actions being adopted by an MNC ought to be determined by all players, carrying this out with due diligence in order to determine most impactful and sustainable [2]. This can however be obstructed when subtle forms of political distortions play-out between MNCs and the Stakeholders, particularly host communities and the Government [18]. Thus, when considering Community engagement where the morals or ethics of the decision may be brought into question, more consultations from literature may be expedient [16]. Inclusiveness of Stakeholders and impact disconnects should be reviewed via feedbacks from structured and informal channels i.e problem narratives should be continuously re-stated, re-structured and inclusive of locals in the communities. Above all, it should be revenue generating and sustainabl [6]. This is community engagement [24-36].

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