

An Evaluation of the Community Relations of Oil Companies in the Flood Ravaged Oil Producing Communities in Delta State

Harvey G.O. Igben, Ph.D

Department of Mass Communication, Delta State University, Abraka

Gloria Timiyan

Department of Mass Communication, Delta State University, Abraka

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ABSTRACT: *This study evaluates community relations of oil producing companies in flood ravaged host communities in Delta State. The study adopted the stakeholder theory of corporate social responsibility. Responses obtained from 174 critical stakeholders among the flood victims of the host communities using questionnaire and interview data collection methods were evaluated. Findings indicate that relief materials were not provided for the flood victims even when it is evident that the community is a host community to an oil producing company. This suggests that the oil company has not put community relations to proper use in dealing with stakeholders which has consequently led to serious crisis leading to public protest by members of the host community. The study concludes that if oil companies are able to make effective use of their community relations there will be no conflict between the oil companies and their host communities. The study therefore recommends that oil companies should recognize community relations as important if they want to enjoy a peaceful and conducive working relationship with their host communities.*

KEYWORDS: host communities, flood, stakeholders, conflicts, community relations, oil companies

INTRODUCTION

Before now multinational companies detached themselves from their host communities which was largely as a result of the terms of their social contracts that was not properly understood (Nwogu 2021). That notwithstanding, corporate organisations tend to be affected by merely operating in the society in as much as business is concerned. Stakeholders inclusive of their publics as well as the communities which they carry out their operations can either affect the reputations of the

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organisations either positively or negatively (Gariga and Mele, 2014). Idemudia, (2008) noted that conflict is inevitable as far as human interactions is concerned. However, research have shown that the conflicts between organisations and their stakeholders is caused by certain factors, according to Igben,(2008) endless and shift in the demands of the communities, requests that are at times impossible to fulfil and government neglect which is perceived to be the responsibility of the tax paying companies are some of the reasons that make conflicts between the oil companies and the stakeholders to be persistent. According to Forstater et al (2007) multinational companies(MNCS) should put into considerations the impacts of their operations and all their activities on their stakeholders. Organisations have come to recognize that stakeholders have a lot of influential and critical roles to play in areas such as knowledge, innovations in products, processes and strategy, reputation, relationships and license to operate, if the organisation intends for their business to grow successfully. In the 21st century most organisations are gradually moving away from paying detailed attention to fiscal and regulatory laws to more involvement with community relations activities in their operating communities (Nwogu, 2021).

Sateesh and Hiremath, (2012) believed that communities in developing countries have more power and conscious involvement on their destinies than probably never before. This implies more scrutiny and more expectations of MNCs operations. Host communities would like oil companies to address their concerns and help to fill the gaps that they face in their less developed context. It is not only an aspiration but also a real claim for MNCs to engage with these concerns in order to build a meaningful relation with communities that adds value to companies (e.g. social licence to operate, long life projects, etc) and also to communities, helping them to bridge the development gaps. Cho and Moya (2016) noted that in order to help create good and favorable impressions about their organization most corporate organizations incorporate good community relations by way of sponsoring events and empowerment programmes for community members and its members at the center of the process.

The Niger Delta region of Nigeria contributes 50% of the country's gross domestic product and 95% of foreign exchange through oil from the region (Ndu & Agbonifoh, 2014). Despite its contribution to the nation's wealth, host communities in the region remains the most neglected among other communities. The people are faced with abject poverty and also maintains its position as the least developed regions compared to other regions that produces mineral resources that contribute little or nothing to the nation's economy. Amodu (2012) argued that, host communities are not compensated enough compared to how much they are being exploited with little or no appropriate development in the communities for members of the communities to benefit from. Oil companies on their own part have not relented in trying to abate the situation in their host communities by engaging community relations programmes like CSR activities for developmental and community relations purposes (Dang, Dang, & Danladi, 2014). However, Nwoke, (2016) believes that despite the efforts of the oil companies to meet the demands of its stakeholders, host communities in the Niger Delta still maintain their claims that the CSR activities through

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community relations programmes have not been able to create desirable outcomes in terms of community development and human satisfaction.

A variety of scholars have studied the community relations programmes of oil companies in the Niger Delta region with different evaluation approaches and perspectives. Omeoga, (2020) evaluated the success of corporate social responsibility initiatives of multinational corporations in the Niger Delta region. Also Adewole (2018) carried out a study on CSR in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria focusing on the CSR activities of Shell Petroleum Development Company of Nigeria while evaluating the CSR success from the perspective of effective stakeholders' engagement, where the author considered to be indispensable for any meaningful and sustainable CSR practices. Furthermore, Paleowei, Aduba, and Aloni (2014) also evaluated community relations impact in managing environmental related crisis in the Niger Delta from the activities of the companies operating in the region. However, despite the claims of the companies and potential positive outcomes of stakeholder engagement, research has indicated that the contemporary community relations practices of oil companies are not capable of bringing sustainable development in the Niger Delta host communities (Nwoke,2017). On the contrary Ukam, (2020) maintained that it will take only the intervention of government to bring an end to the lingering issues between host communities and oil companies.

Uduji, Okolo-Obasi, & Asongu, (2020) pointed out that 95% of Nigeria's revenue is achieved from the sale of crude oil produced from 18 multinational corporations operating in the Niger Delta region. Despite the huge success achieved oil companies in enriching themselves and the nations which the pay task and other revenues to through their exploration activities, people in the Gbaramatu axes of Niger Delta still are faced with hunger and poverty as a result of the constant pollution on the water due to the negligence of the MNCs operating in the region and illegal bunkery activities that has become a source of livelihood due to the untold hardship caused by the presence of oil in the region. Something that is supposed to be a God given blessing has now become the cause of their everyday pain and suffering. The aquatic lives in the region have all migrated due to oil spill in the region yet, none among the 18 multinational companies take it as a responsibility to clean the water from the oil pollution and save the people the stress and inconvenience of surviving from the purchase of foreign fish and farm products from other regions. Research have shown that host communities have continually complained about the underdevelopment on their communities despite having rich oil companies operating in the communities. According to Nwogu, (2021), in recent times the relationship between host communities and oil companies is defined by a forty-one, where the host communities are having high expectations from oil companies operating in the communities and the oil companies on the other than sees the host communities as over demanding and never satisfied irrespective of the numerous community relations practices carried out in the region. The foregoing reasons accounted for the need to carry out more research on community relations by oil companies in their host communities with respect to the perception of host communities on the attitude of oil company's involvement when it comes to aiding host communities to combats an unforeseen

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disaster which is neither caused by the activities of the oil companies nor that of the host communities through community relations. This is the gap this study tends to fill. To achieve this the study identified a natural disaster in form of flood affecting the people of the oil community in Delta State, Nigeria for impact evaluations.

The main objective of the paper is to evaluate the involvement of oil companies operating in the riverine areas through community relations in rescuing their host community from unforeseen natural disasters like that of the flood that invaded the community recently. The objectives this study therefore is to:

1. to evaluate the community relations of oil exploration company in reaching out to the flood victims
2. to evaluate the trust, the people of the oil communities have on oil companies whenever they are faced with life threatening situation and beyond them to ability to stop.
3. to evaluate the control mutuality and community relations of oil exploration company and
4. to evaluate sterling exploration company commitment satisfaction and community relations.

Research questions

1. what community relations has oil exploration companies embarked on towards leveraging the flood victims of the host communities
2. does the people of host communities have trust in oil exploration companies in cases of emergency
3. is the community relations of sterling exploration companies enough to meet the needs of the host communities?
4. is oil exploration company committed to satisfying the people of their host communities through its community relations

LITERATURE REVIEW

A Community is a social organism made up of 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 (Paleowei, Aduba and Aloni, 2014).

Oil companies and community relations in Nigeria is particular to the oil-producing areas in Nigeria, which is the Niger Delta region. In Delta State, Warri precisely oil was discovered in 1997. This discovery of oil brought about a boom in the economy as oil companies sprang up in several communities. Where oil exploration takes place this was accompanied by several issues

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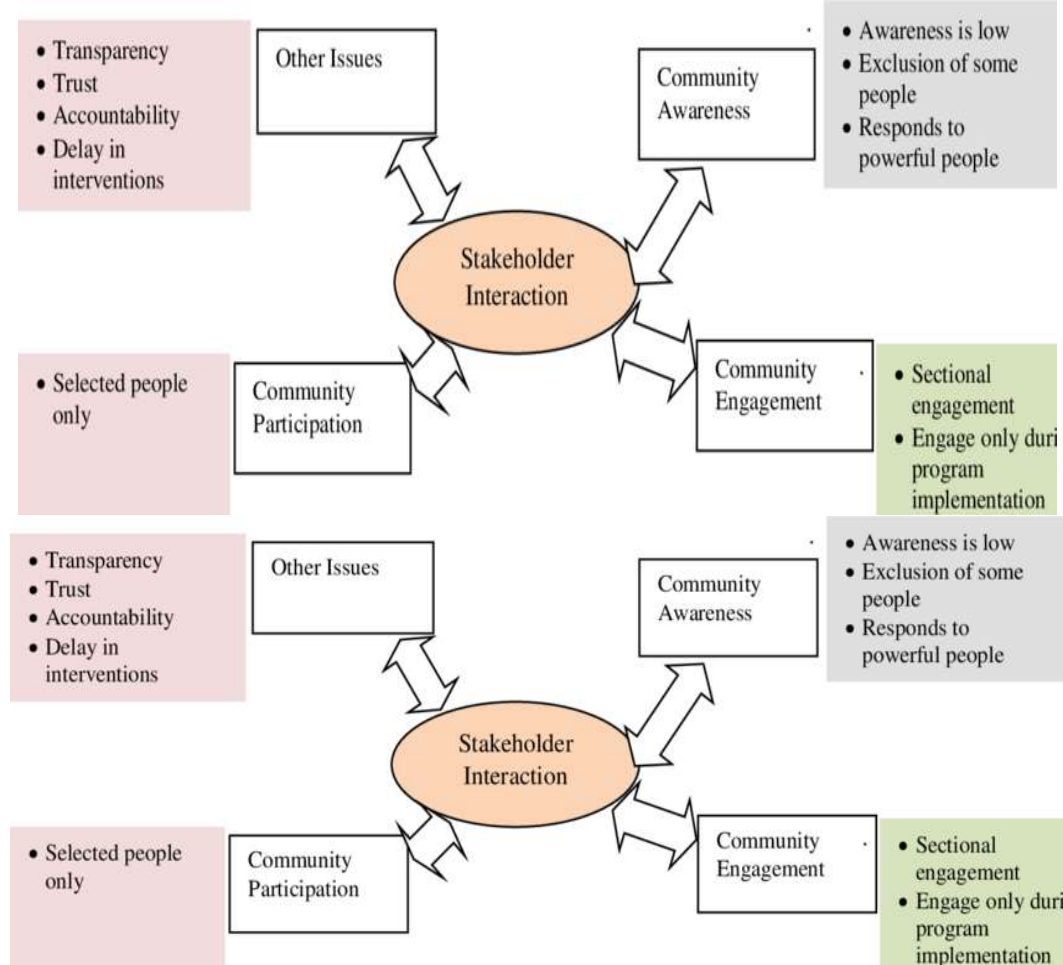
between the oil companies and host communities. Conflict, protests, corruption among leaders in these communities, greed, neglect of these oil-producing regions these among other issues in the Niger Delta lead to series of conflict between oil companies and host communities. Accordingly, the need to settle these conflicts or better still bring them to a minimal level, hence community relations was introduced as a concept to create a conducive and beneficial co-existing relationship between the two conflicting parties (Ojabo, 2014). According to ICOMOS, ICTC, (2002) host community generally refers to all of the people who inhabit a defined geographical entity. According to (ICOMOS, ICTC, 2002) Members of the host community have responsibilities that include governing the place and regarded as those who have or continue to define its particular cultural identity, lifestyle, and diversity. They contribute to the conservation of its heritage and interact with visitors. Conversely, oil companies refer to multinational companies who are into the business of oil exploration operations in regions where the presence of oil have been identified. In other words, the relationship between oil companies is that of give and take relationship if there must be a cordial and conducive working relationship between the parties.

According to Emoyan, (2018) community relations is a function that evaluates public attitudes, shapes the policies of the organization in the public interest and produces a programmes of action to earn community understanding and respect. Consequently, corporate community relations refer to the various method by which a socially responsible organization establishes and sustains reciprocally beneficial relationship with the community with which it does business. It is about orchestrating interactions with the community to secure the friendship of the people by evolving, determining the direction and actual implementation of programmes and projects the host community desired for mutual benefits (Idemudia and Ite 2006). According to Chicago police department (2016), community relations can be established and maintained effectively by:

- 1 Volunteerism: organize a volunteer day for a team at a local charity. While profit making is not the goal, it is important to provide networking opportunities and show concern for the community. Make sure pictures from a fund raiser hosted is posted as this has the potentials for building brand trust among community members.
- 2 PR outreach: making the company's stories available to local media and oversee their presence on site for fund raising events or check presentations. This assists to spotlight the company and send a direct message of credibility to the community.
- 3 Investing in host community: This involves making donations for local projects of the community to show good will from the company.

The Niger Delta communities are undeveloped and the people blame this on both the oil companies and the government. The community relations perspective of the company community conflicts is also examined. Considering how valuable the communities are to the oil companies, they cannot afford not to maintain a mutual relationship with them, or they will continue to encounter threats, not only to their operations, but also to the lives of their staff. Therefore, this study aims at examining the community relations strategies used by oil companies in managing the conflicts in the Niger Delta (Ojabo 2014).

It is essential to have an understanding of the underlying causes of conflict in the Niger Delta to be better positioned to offer practical solutions. It must be said at the outset that the causes are primarily multi-faceted and intertwined (Ojabo,2014). Consequently, some of the most common causes of conflict between oil companies and host communities in the Niger Delta region include: marginalization, lack of employment of indigenes of host communities, inadequate communication, destruction of companies' properties through pipeline vandalism, bunkery, theft, feeling of entitlement by host communities, lack of representation by host communities etc. These reasons put together have helped to create a particular perception; mostly negative perception of host communities towards oil companies operating from the communities. The diagram below gives a general insight of the perception of host communities towards oil producing companies



Amodu, (2012) averred that host communities believe that despite what oil companies gain by carrying out their business in the host communities host communities are not compensated enough compared to the oil related profits they make by operating in the region. Furthermore, (Khan and

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Lund-Thomsen, (2011) opine that communities expect that oil companies develop operations as a responsible business being in terms of environmental and social behavior while doubling as a committed neighbour that engage with them in a long term relation. However, because of the negligence of MNCs towards the expectations of their host communities, they now begin to doubt whether oil companies really have the intention of bringing development to the host communities or that they intend to improve the conditions of those who are also intended beneficiaries – local enterprises, workers and communities in social, economic and environmental terms.

According to Anyanwu, (2012) environmental concerns, the operations of the oil companies are responsible for environmental degradation which has led to the gradual environmental degradation with pollution of waters, destruction of aquaculture, vegetation and agricultural land during oil operations with no concerted and effective effort by the oil companies to control environmental problems associated with the industry. From the interview granted by one of the youth leaders of the host community, despite the untold hardship melted on the people as a result of the pollutions coming from the operations of the oil exploration company, the management of the company have bluntantly refused to compensate the community by employing indigenes of the community neither have they invested in the educational system of the community by building of schools for the community children, neither has the company even invested into the health sector. On daily basis the people of the host community are faced with serious health issues while others die as a result of the pollutions from of gas flaring and other operation. These and many other reasons have led the youth of patani to embark on protest yet their efforts yielded no fruit because just like an hunter aiming at his target prey, the oil company has paid deaf hears to their pains and cry for help.

The perception of oil companies towards its host community is laden with resentment and sense of being a regular target of injustice and unfair treatment. The oil companies on the other hand, 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 for the promotion of their wellbeing (Ntido, 2013, Enamaku, 2006). In their opinion, the management of oil companies often see the host communities as greedy and over demanding; that they come up with unending demands. Most times it is the numerous groups in the community that come for settlement; settlement for operating in the rivers settlement for loading. The sole aim of every organization is to make profit, how will this company make its profit if it continues to meet too numerous demands of host community members? Says an anonymous company representative.

The stakeholder theory was considered appropriate for this study. 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. The concept "Stakeholder" was first used in 2003 in an internal memorandum at the Stanford Research Institute. According to its first usage, stakeholders are groups whose support the organization needs so as to remain in existence. The

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concept was developed into a theory and championed by Edward Freeman in the 1980s (Freeman & Reed, 2014). Freeman & Reed (2013) later write on the comparison between stockholder and stakeholder, and Freeman (2014) provides more details on the theory. The rights of these parties can either be violated or respected by the corporation (Hartman, 2015). The stakeholder theory identifies the groups and individuals relative to a corporation. It also describes as well as recommends methods by which the interests of each party can be catered for by the management of the corporation (Freeman & Reed, 2013). The stakeholder theory is one of the classical theories in public relations.

Consequent on the arguments in favour of the stakeholder theory and its application in studies such as the one presented above, the theory has been adopted for this work. The stakeholder theory is considered appropriate for this study because of its managerial nature. It alerts the corporation to the existence of an array of parties that it is responsible to. In the context of this study, this theory helps oil companies in the host communities to become aware of the fact that there are several individuals and groups that are affected by their actions. Prominent among these parties are the host communities. The host communities are considered to be among the most important stakeholders of the oil companies, because they are physically connected to the companies. Stephens, Malone & Bailey (2015) explained that one of the effective ways to describe the behaviour of organizations is to adequately take into consideration the nature of their relationship with their stakeholders. This implies the stakeholder theory will enable help to describe the behaviour of Shell, Chevron and Agip after evaluating the nature of their relationship with their host communities in the host communities. A cordial or not cordial relationship with the host communities' communities will, therefore, give us a picture of how well or badly the selected oil companies have behaved. Stephens, Malone & Bailey (2015) further observe that the management of an organization may consider one stakeholder to be inconsequential one day, and the next day realizes that the same stakeholder demands its total attention. Mitchell, Agel & Wood (2017) sees it as stakeholder salience, which they suggest can shift from time to time.

Survey method was adopted because it is concerned with the collection of data for the purpose of describing and interpreting existing conditions prevailing on the practices, beliefs, attitude and ongoing processes (Egbule, 2001).

The study used public opinion survey, case study design to assess the opinion of 174 flood victims of the host communities

examined their impressions about the involvement of the oil exploration companies towards providing relief materials and other basic amenities to flood victims in their host communities during the flood crises between October –November 2022. The population for the study consisted of all indigenes of the host communities. The total number of sampled respondents in the host communities was 200 but 174 of them completed and returned their questionnaire. According to Ikechukwu (1996) cited in Okorodudu (2013) that a sample should be representative of population

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from which it is drawn and be sufficiently large for valid inferences to be made from the sample data of the population. Those interviewed were those who are above 18 years but not more than 40 years of age, educated up secondary school level. It included members of the community who are enlighten about the subject matter and can provide useful information in course of the study which is the closest community affected by the ravaging flood. 200 copies of the questionnaire were distributed to the participants of the host communities during flood crisis period. The interview session was conducted with critical stakeholders, including the youth leaders, before, during and after the flood crisis period. The data were computed using special packages for social sciences research (SPSS). Results were presented in figures, using simple percentage.

The study used both primary and secondary data. The instrument for the data collection is a structured questionnaire for the primary data while other documents with useful information were collected for the secondary data collection. This is because it is an instrument for gathering, collecting and analyzing data in order to answer some specific questions which will be convenient for the researcher. It consists of close ended items for respondents to choose their responses from the answers provided.

Data analysis

Data collected for the study was analyzed using percentage, mean scores and frequencies for research question. Five research questions were answered.

In each Likert items, the percentage responses to each category are shown. The mean score of each item are computed on each scaling item by multiplying the frequency of response under each category with nominal values of the response, and dividing the sum of the values obtained under each category with the number of the respondents who gave response. Thus:

$$\bar{x} = \frac{\sum fx}{N}$$

Where

F = Frequency of response to each response category

X = The score (weight) of each response category

N = The total number of response in each questionnaire

E = Sum of scores.

Table 1: Oil companies send relief materials to host community during the flood

Respondents Opinion	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Yes	10	5.7%
No	164	94.3%
TOTAL	174	100%

Source: Field work 2022.

Table1 shows that 164 respondents representing 94.3% believe that the oil companies did not send relief materials to the flood victims of of their host communities since they were displaced by the flood. Ten respondents representing 5.7% maintained that the oil companies sent relief materials to their host communities.

Table 2: Host communities trust that the oil companies will come to their aid in the nearest future during flood

Respondents Opinion	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Yes	28	16%
No	146	84%
TOTAL	174	100%

Source: Field work 2022

Table 2 above indicates that 146 respondents representing 84% maintained that they have no trust that the oil companies will help them in the future during flood. Twenty-eight respondents representing 16% have trust that the oil companies will come to their aid in the future during flood.

Table 3: Host communities' perception of oil companies' influence on host communities

Respondents Opinion	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Positive	56	32%
Negative	118	68%
TOTAL	174	100%

Source: Field work 2022.

Table 3 shows that 118(68%) of the respondents have negative perception of the influence of the oil companies on the host communities. Fifty-six respondents representing 32% have positive perception about the influence of the oil companies on the host communities.

Table 4: Nature of Relationship between oil companies and the host communities

Respondents Opinion	Frequency	Percentage
Cordial	38	22%
Neutral	49	28%
Not cordial	87	50%
Total	174	100%

Source:Fieldwork2022

Table 4 indicates that 87(50%) of the respondents believe that the relationship between the oil companies and the host communities was not cordial. Forty- nine respondents representing 28% were neutral on the nature of relationship that exists between the oil companies and the host the communities.

Table 4. Response rate of oil companies to host communities' call for help

Respondents Opinion	Frequency	Percentage
Timely	20	12%
Not timely	68	39%
Barely responds	86	49%
Total	174	100%

Source: Field work 2022.

The table above shows that 86 respondents representing 49% believe that oil companies barely respond to the call of host communities for help. Sixty-eight respondents representing 39% maintain that oil companies' response is not timely while 20(12%) saw the response as timely.

DISCUSSIONS OF FINDINGS

The findings of this study support stakeholder theory, this is on the premise that multinational companies require legitimacy or social approval from the host communities to operate peacefully within or on the shores of the host communities. This is because companies are inseparable from the host communities on whose premises they carry out their operations. The operations of multinational corporations in host communities are on the basis of a social contract because their growth and survival are dependent on legitimacy conferred on them by the communities (Frynas & Yamahaki, 2016).

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The findings of this study is in conformity with the findings of Chukwuemeka(2020) whose findings suggests that host communities have a very negative perceptions of oil companies and their operations. This observation is made from the responses of the communities while the researcher was seeking and processing information concerning the companies and their operations in the communities. The findings above agrees with the findings of Oderaetal, (2018)who believes that this negative perception of host communities of oil companies is based on the poor communication pattern of oil companies with their host communities. Also, Idemudia(2007) rightly observed that poor communication flow between host communities and oil companies creates a large magnitude of misconception and misinformation between oil companies and their host communities .

CONCLUSION/RECOMMENDATION

An evaluation of the community relations of oil companies in their host communities from the perspective of the flood affected communities provides insight on the creation of mutually beneficial relationship between the oil companies and host communities on the bases of effective community relations programmes. The perceptions of host communities towards oil companies operation in their regions is more negative than positive as a result of the oil companies' failure to meet up with their social responsibility commitment to their host communities. For the purpose of peaceful coexistence such negative impression of host communities on oil companies is not healthy. Oil companies must understand the fact that host communities are the most outstanding stakeholders that they have and the perception of these stakeholders is very important to business. The relationship between oil companies and their host is a give and take relationship that is why is important that oil companies put the stakeholders' opinion into consideration by constructing stakeholder's engagement programmes for host communities and provide a reasonable proportion of the needs and demands of host communities by ensuring successful implementation of community relations programmes that will meet the expectations of stakeholders who are major beneficiaries. The study provided a significant contribution to address the gap in studies on community relations beyond the activities of oil companies and stimulate interest in researches focusing on community relations practices in the under developed host communities. There are a number of ways through which oil companies can get involved in improving the living standard of the members of host communities and also get a positive perceptions of the companies. To get a positive perception of their host communities, oil companies need to put to proper use their community relations activities by paying attention to urgent calls for help and equally giving a helping hand especially in cases such as the flood ravaging many communities; by provision of relief materials such clothes, foodstuff, medicals etc to affected host communities. If oil companies should get more involved in improving the lives of the members of host, it will help to influence a positive perception of host communities. The study therefore recommends that oil companies should update their community relations practice and get actively involved in the development of the lives their host communities as this will foster a good and healthy relationship between firms and host communities.

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