

An Assessment of Conflict Management Strategies Adopted by SPDC in Its Community Relations with Indigenes of Kula Clan in Aturu-Toru L.G.A., Rivers State

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Abstract- The study sought to assess the conflict management strategies adopted by Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC) in Kula Clan Aturu-turu L.G.A., Rivers State. It was motivated by the recurrence of conflict and state government frequent intervention in conflict management in the relationship between SPDC and Kula Clan. The study raised five research questions and tested one hypothesis. Survey design was adopted while purposive, quota and accidental sampling techniques were used to conduct the study. Structured questionnaire and interview schedule were used to access field data. The analysis was based on 35% copies of the questionnaire retrieved from a sample of 381 respondents. This figure represents a 94% return rate. Data was quantitatively analyzed on tables using simple percentage and the weighted mean score (WMS) based on a five point likert scale while the hypothesis was tested with the Pearson Product Moment Correction Analysis. Explanation building technology was adopted to analyze qualitative data. The study ascertained a correlation between SPDC's conflict management strategies and sustenance of good relationship with Kula Clan. It was found out that Kula Clan people awareness level of SPDC's conflict management strategies was insignificant and that they did not participate with SPDC in conflict management in their communities. It was also found out that the people of Kula Clan wanted SPDC to dialogue with them through town hall meetings and their council of chiefs instead of the Cluster Development Board and Community Trust Committees. Another important discovery the study made was its preference for indigenous oil companies to operate in their locality as a result of its distrust of SPDC. The study recommends that the people of Kula Clan should endeavor to obtain and study the GMOUs to acquaint themselves with the conditions of their relationship with the company. It also recommended that SPDC should ensure the participation of the people of Kula Clan in corporate

activities and community development projects concerning their communities.

INTRODUCTION

In their business endeavours corporate organizations can affect or be affected by groups in the larger society including the host communities that are regarded as their environment, publics or stakeholders (Gariga and Mele, 2014, Steiner and Steiner, 1988, Jeflains and Yardin, 1998). Cutlip, Center and Brown (1994) refer to no other than these groups when they noted that "All business in a democratic country begins with public permission and exist by public approval" (P.436). Conflicts occur between communities and an organization over host communities unmet demands and often disrupts social stability the organization require to operate effectively. The unproductiveness of most conflict requires corporate bodies to commit much time and finance towards identifying monitoring and promoting public interest for the purpose of reducing the incidence of conflict. Consequently, any organization that is able to prevent conflict with its host community from assuming crises proportion is said to have succeeded in putting its community relations in proper preparative.

Driving this assumption home, this study focuses on the relationship between SPDC and its host communities in Kula Clan which is volatile and unstable. In an effort to stem the tide of violence that has marred its negative relationship with its host communities within the study area, SPDC introduced the Global Memorandum of understanding (GMOU) that will state the terms of their relationship. A GMOU is an agreement between SPDC and a group

(or cluster) of several communities. Clusters are based on local government or clan/historical affinity as advised by the relevant state government. The GMOU brings communities together with representatives of state and local governments, SPDC and non-profit organizations such as development NGO's in a decision making communities called the Cluster Development Board (C.D.B). Under the terms of the GMOU's, the communities decide the development they want while SPDC on behalf of its joint venture partners provides secure funding for five years ensuring that the community have stable and reliable finances as they undertake the implementation of community development plans and projects. The GMOU's or agreements represents an important shift in approach placing emphasis on more transparent and accountable processes, regular communication with the grassroots, sustainability and conflict prevention.

In Rivers States Four Clusters were created namely: Degama 3, Akuku Toru, IA and Etche 1. In 2014, SPDC Signed a GMOU for the Kula cluster which has not been implemented due to intra-community conflicts. As at 2015, there were a total of 11 court cases involving different groups with SPDC further deteriorating cordial relationship between SPDC and its host communities in Kula thereby making not impossible for the oil giant to implementation development projects in the study area (Igo Welu, SPDC General Manager, External Relations). He reiterated that despite these challenges SPDC set aside N600 Million for a year period beginning 2014 for development initiatives at Kula and its satellite communities of Belema, Offonama and Boro. SPDC's inability to implement development initiatives in Kula Clan led to discontent and fueled crisis within the study area. On 11th August 2017, Kula indigenes made up of youths, woman and children stormed SPDC facilities in their communities and shut down Belema Flow Station and Gas Plant. This crisis situation in the host community has been on a steady increase and despite Rivers State Government mediation efforts, it has shown little signs of abating. There is need for peace to be restored in the host community by SPDC, government and all relevant stakeholders.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

- 1) SPDC and Kula Clan have a Global Memorandum of Understanding (GMOU) that regulates their relationship yet on August 2, 2017 Belema and Offonama communities in Kula Clan shut down and laid siege at Belema flow station operated by the shell Petroleum Development Company of Nigeria over allegations of neglect of communities in Kula Clan, Aturu-Toru L.G.A. of Rivers State by destroying their lands, causing poverty and instigating conflict among the people in the last 40 years (Vanguard News, August 12, 2017).
- 2) A petition by the host community led by His Royal Majesty, King Bourdillon Ekwe to the Federal Government not to renew the operational licence of SPDC, operator of OML 25 in the study area but to transfer it to an indigenous oil firm, Belema Oil Company (Ogoriba-led PANDEF delegation, A pan Niger Delta Forum on a verification exercise mandated by the Federal Government.
- 3) Tony (2017) quotes then spokesman of SPDC, Joseph Obari "the Rivers State Government is leading discussions with Kula communities to end the blockage of the company's project site at OML 25 in the study area". There are many other similar instances of conflict in the clan to date.
- 4) Series of conflicts between SPDC and Kula communities. Rivers State Government initiated a mediation process for the resolution of the disagreements in the community which resulted to the creation of the Kula Project Implementation and Monitoring Committee in 2012.
- 5) In the light of recurrent conflicts and Rivers State Government repeated conflict management between SPDC and Kula communities, the concern of this study could be stated thus: To what extent have SPDC's conflict management strategies been applied to positively influence its relationship with Kula clan?

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The aim of this study is to evaluate the conflict management strategies of SPDC adopted in its community relations practice to sustain good relationship with Kula clan.

The specific objectives are to:

- 1) Determine Kula indigenes awareness level of SPDC's conflict management strategies considering repeated protests and occupation of the company's facilities to express grievances.
- 2) Identify causes of conflict between SPDC and its host communities in Kula Clan.
- 3) Assess the level of participation of Kula communities in conflict management with SPDC.
- 4) Ascertain conflict management strategies of SPDC acceptable to host communities in Kula Clan.
- 5) Determine factors militating against the conflict management strategies of SPDC in Kula Clan.

RESEARCH QUESTION

- 1) To what extent are Kula indigenes aware of SPDC's conflict management strategies in Kula Clan?
- 2) What are the causes of conflict between SPDC and communities in Kula Clan?
- 3) What is the level of participation of Kula people in conflict management with SPDC in Kula Clan?
- 4) What are the conflict management strategies of SPDC acceptable to Kula communities?
- 5) What are the factors militating against SPDC's conflict management strategies in Kula Clan?

RESEARCH HYPOTHESIS

There is significant relationship between SPDC's conflict management strategies and the sustenance of good relationship with Kula communities.

IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY

- 1) The study will enable SPDC to fashion out better ways of relating with its host communities thereby increasing turnover.
- 2) The study will benefit Kula communities by fostering its relationship with SPDC as the identification and adoption of appropriate conflict management strategies will engender cooperation between SPDC and Kula Clan such that community development projects/programmes can thenceforth be cooperatively planned and executed without misguided interferences.

OPERATIONAL DEFINITION OF TERM

Community relations strategies: Well thought out techniques or action plans executed by SPDC in the host communities to enhance its relationship with Kula clan including the formulation and implementation of corporate policies as well as welfare projects.

Conflict: A situation in which the development expectations of host communities and the direction of Shell Petroleum Development Company's community relations efforts cannot be harmonized thereby resulting in disagreements.

Conflict management strategies: All actions of SPDC intended to control disagreements and encourage mutual understanding with Kula communities.

Host Communities: Refers to Opu-Kula, Boro, Nangwo-ama, Kango-ama, Kilama/Diaba/Offo, Isoma, belama, Injeje, Onwuangaye, Ibiame(Agudama), Tubo, Ariame, Obiame that are host to the SPDC oil and gas plants in Rivers State,

Host community expectations: Areas of lack relating to the wellbeing of host communities which are beyond the communities management and requires eternal intervention.

Issue: situation in a relationship that has the potential of producing unacceptable circumstances if not controlled.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Framework

This work is based on the Normative Stakeholder Theory and The Situational Theory.

The Normative Stakeholder Theory

The normative stakeholder theory was propounded by Freeman in 1984 in his book entitled: Strategic management: a stakeholder approach. It espouses that every organization has a variety of publics that have rights which it must respect and protect simultaneously. The theory highlights the need for corporate bodies to be responsible to all publics including the host community whose enforcement of rights or reactions to rights infringement always results in conflict. It thus provides a framework within which the organization's relationship with its publics could be examined by bringing to the awareness of the organization the existence of various groups in its environment to which it must be equitably and simultaneously responsible.

The Situational Theory

The situational theory was propounded by Grunig and Hunt in 1984. It suggests that publics are not stable in disposition. The theory explains and predicts why some publics are active and others passive. It identifies what publics attracts the attention of the organization more than the other at any particular time and why. By providing information on the characteristics of publics which organizations must take note, the theory gives insight on how communities that have remained passive for decades can become active publics and accentuate the need for organizations to beforehand cordially relate with such community to forestall problems.

Conceptual Review

The notion of conflicts: In the organizational context, conflicts manifest as an expression of dissatisfaction or disagreement with an interaction process, product or service (Michael and Gerald, 1998). Conflicts arising from environmental and cultural factors are often the result of frustration occasioned by social pressure and the individual's failure to match aspirations with attainable successes in relation to available opportunities in the environment (Wilson, 1997).

Conflict and Communication: Communication provides the context in which issues are analyzed and allows the expression of divergent perspectives. Through communication, deeper insight is gained into individual perceptions and emotions are translated into conflict behaviors Putnam (2006). However, when faced with conflict (good) communication is always the right thing to do to resolve it (Kotter 1990).

The concept of community relations: Corporate community relations refers to the various method by which a socially responsible organization establishes and sustains reciprocally beneficial relationship with the community with or in 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 desired by the host community for mutual benefits (Seitel, 1987, Idemudia, and Ite 2006, Googins, 1999).

Issues in the oil company and host community relations: The 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 (Ntido, 2013, Enamaku, 2006).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Survey research design was adopted in this study. It allowed the student to study a large population respondents in its natural setting, through a sample.

Population of the study: The population of this study was projected at 13,018 (NP, 1991).

Sample size and sampling procedure: A sample size of 381 respondents was used in this study. Purposive, quota and accidental sampling techniques were adopted.

Description of the Measuring Instrument: The questionnaire and interview schedule were the data gathering instruments of the study. The questions in the questionnaire were close ended and administered to management staff of SPDC and selected individuals from Kula communities respectively. The instruments were pilot-tested and the Spearman's Rank Correlation CO-efficient Formula was used to determine the reliability level which stood at 0.87 correlation coefficient.

Method of data analysis: Descriptive statistical analysis and explanation building technique were adopted in this study. Data was analyzed on tables using simple percentage and the Weighted Mean score (WMS) based on a five-point Likert Scale. The criterion mean score was pegged at 3.0 and the hypothesis was tested with Pearson Moment Correlation statistical instrument.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Research Question 1: To what extent are Kula indigenes aware of SPDC's conflict management strategies?

Table 4.1: Respondents’ level of awareness of provisions in the Global Memorandum of understanding (GMOU)

Awareness brackets	Levels of awareness	Number of respondent	%
0.001 – 1.49	Very little	197	55
1.50 - 2.49	Little	93	26
2.50 - 3.49	Moderate	41	11
3.50 - 4.49	Great	20	6
4.50 - 5.00	Very great	8	2
Total		359	100

Research question 2: What are the causes of conflict between SPDC and communities Kula Clan?

Table 4.2 Causes of conflict between SPDC and Kula clan

Nature of responses	SA (5)	A (4)	U (3)	D (2)	SD (1)	Total	N	WMS	Decision
SPDC’s failure To provide social Services in your Community Can cause conflict.	560	792	63	34	11	1461	359	4.0	Accepted
	(31%)	(55%)	(6%)	(5%)	(3%)				
In the relationship Between SPDC And your community: SPDC respects the views of your community.	0	360	33	156	180	729	2.0	Rejected	
	(0%)	(25%)	(3%)	(22%)	(50%)				

Table 4.3: Respondents’ perception of the relationship between SPDC’s interactions with their communities and Kula peoples’ attitude towards the company.

Nature of responses	SA (5)	A (4)	U (3)	D (2)	SD (1)	Total	N	WMS	Decision
SPDCs handling of Issues concerning It’s affairs and your community does Not affect your attitude towards the company	55	84	54	576	21	790	359	2.2	Rejected
	(3%)	(6%)	(5%)	(80%)	(6%)				

Research Question 3: What is the level of participation of Kula people in conflict management with SPDC?

Table 4.4: Respondents opinion of SPDC’s most used communication channel in Kula

Channels	SA (5)	A (4)	U (3)	D (2)	SD (1)	Total	N	WMS	Decision
Community Trust Committees	455	668	45	98	38	1394	359	3.6	Accepted
	(25%)	(47%)	(4%)	(13%)	(10%)				
Cluster Development Board	139	208	60	444	39	881	2.4	Rejected	
	(7%)	(15%)	(3%)	(62%)	(11%)				
Community Relations Officer	105	100	69	488	46	808	2.2	Rejected	
	(6%)	(7%)	(6%)	(68%)	(13%)				
Community Development Communities	175	320	90	380	24	989	2.7	Rejected	
	(10%)	(22%)	(8%)	(53%)	(7%)				
Council of Chiefs	55	356	33	422	37	903	2.5	Rejected	
	(3%)	(23%)	(3%)	(59%)	(10%)				
Youth Groups	35	224	42	506	29	836	2.3	Rejected	
	(2%)	(16%)	(4%)	(70%)	(3%)				

Table 4.5: Respondents opinion of SPDC’s most used conflict management strategy in Kula Clan.

Nature of responses	SA (5)	A (4)	U (3)	D (2)	SD (1)	Total	N	WMS	Decision
Government Intervention	535	544	63	136	27	1305	359	3.6	Accepted
	(30%)	(38%)	(6%)	(19%)	(7%)				
Invitation of Law Enforcement agents	500	788	54	80	4	1426	3.9	Accepted	
	(28%)	(55%)	(5%)	(11%)	(1%)				
Dialogue With the Community	90	368	66	314	70	908	2.5	Accepted	
	(5%)	(26%)	(6%)	(44%)	(19%)				
Seek redress In court of law	95	184	84	390	71	824	2.2	Accepted	
	(5%)	(13%)	(8%)	(54%)	(20%)				

Table 4.6: Respondents perception of Kula people’s involvement in the planning and execution of SPDC’s community relations programmes in Kula Clan.

Nature of responses	SA (5)	A (4)	U (3)	D (2)	SD (1)	Total	N	WMS	Decision
Your community Always take part in the planning and execution of SPDC’s community relations programmes	55	84	54	576	21	790	359	2.2	Rejected
	(3%)	(6%)	(5%)	(80%)	(6%)				

Research Question 4: What are the conflict management strategies of SPDC acceptable to Kula communities?

Table 4.7: Conflict management strategies of SPDC acceptable to Kula clan.

Nature of responses	SA (5)	A (4)	U (3)	D (2)	SD (1)	Total	N	WMS	Decision
Seek redress in courts of law	43	228	63	342	101	779	359	2.1	Rejected
	(3%)	(16%)	(5%)	(48%)	(28%)				
Government intervention	230	156	57	360	75	878	2.4	Rejected	
	(13%)	(11%)	(5%)	(50%)	(21%)				
Dialogue with the community	685	732	33	56	0	1527	4.2	Rejected	
	(38%)	(51%)	(3%)	(8%)	(0%)				
Invitation of law enforcement Agent	105	116	75	368	100	762	2.1	Rejected	
	(6%)	(8%)	(7%)	(51%)	(28%)				

Table 4.8: Kula people’s preferred channel of communication with SPDC during conflict.

Communication Channels	SA (5)	A (4)	U (3)	D (2)	SD (1)	Total	N	WMS	Decision
Community Trust committee	180	172	45	452	39	888	359	2.4	Rejected
	(10%)	(12%)	(4%)	(63%)	(11%)				
Cluster Development board	155	188	54	484	21	902	2.5	Rejected	
	(9%)	(13%)	(5%)	(67%)	(6%)				
Community Relations officers	60	80	81	482	39	762	2.1	Rejected	
	(3%)	(6%)	(7%)	(67%)	(16%)				
Community Development Committee	180	304	72	388	29	973	2.7	Rejected	
	(10%)	(21%)	(7%)	(54%)	(8%)				
Traditional Council of Chiefs	445	840	31	62	12	1410	3.9	Accepted	
	(25%)	(58%)	(5%)	(9%)	(3%)				
Youth Groups	105	188	57	496	24	870	2.4	Rejected	
	(6%)	(13%)	(5%)	(69%)	(7%)				

Research Question 5: What are the factors militating against SPDC’s conflict management strategy in Kula Clan?

Table 4.9: Assessment of Kula people’s confidence in community leaderships

Nature of responses	SA (5)	A (4)	U (3)	D (2)	SD (1)	Total	N	WMS	Decision
You have confidence in the leadership that deals with SPDC on Behalf of your community.	130 (7%)	196 (14%)	34 (5%)	436 (61%)	48 (13%)	844	359	2.3	Rejected

Table 4.10: Respondents’ perception SPDC’s extent of consultation with Kula Clan people before taking decisions

Nature of responses	SA (5)	A (4)	U (3)	D (2)	SD (1)	Total	N	WMS	Decision
SPDC does not Consult anybody.	105 (6%)	244 (17%)	66 (5%)	201 (56%)	54 (15%)	871	359	2.4	Rejected
SPDC Consults a Few persons	250 (14%)	1020 (71%)	57 (5%)	50 (7%)	10 (3%)	1387		3.8	Accepted
SPDC Consults All relevant parties	35 (2%)	144 (10%)	63 (6%)	334 (74%)	28 (8%)	804		2.2	Rejected

Table 4.11: Respondents’ perception SPDC’s sincerity in implementing agreement in Kula Clan

Nature of responses	SA (5)	A (4)	U (3)	D (2)	SD (1)	Total	N	WMS	Decision
SPDC is Sincere in Implementing agreements in your community	90 (5%)	140 (10%)	51 (5%)	442 (61%)	68 (19%)	791	359	2.2	Rejected

Pearson’s Product Moment Correlation analysis of relationship between SPDC’s conflict management strategies and sustenance of good relationship in Kula.

Hypothesis:

- The hypothesis was tested in the null form that is, “there is no significant relationship between SPDC’s conflict management strategies and sustenance of good relationship with Kula communities.
- The result of the calculation was ‘r’ = - 0.0667 indicating that the null hypothesis was rejected at 0.0667 significance level. This result implied that the alternative to the null hypothesis was accepted.

Summary of Findings

- Though Kula people’s awareness level of SPDC’s conflict management strategies was insignificant owing to their failure to utilize and understand the contents of the GMoU and SPDC’s failure to regularly communicate with

them. The situation caused lack of awareness of SPDC’s conflict management strategies in Kula Clan.

- Persistence distrust, lack of transparency and cooperation as well as SPDC’s high-handedness got Kula people into conflicts with SPDC as means of communicating grievances. This action of the people aligns with the suggestions of the situational theory that organizations are known to their publics, to heed only publics that can actively communication their problem to them.
- Kula people did not participate with SPDC in conflict management in their communities.
- Kula people would rather relate with SPDC through their council of chiefs and be engaged in dialogue through town hall meetings instead of community trust committees, cluster development board and government/security agencies if conflict must be managed. This finding corresponds with the result of the hypothesis that “there is correlation between SPDC’s conflict management strategies and sustenance of good relationship with Kula communities”.
- SPDC’s conflict management strategies were constrained by:
 - Kula people’s lack of confidence in their community leaderships.
 - Its failure to adequately consult all parties involved in a conflict before taking decisions and
 - Company officials’ underhand dealings with conniving individuals in the communities.

Summary

- Corporate organizations relate with stakeholders including the host community to promote mutual understanding an reduce the incidence of conflict.
- Corporate organizations initiate community relations strategies that guide their interactions with host communities towards successful conflict management.
- This study set out to assess the conflict management strategies adopted in the community relations practice of SPDC to court the cooperation of Kula communities in its

corporate activities and came up with the findings state above.

CONCLUSION

- In view of the findings, the study concluded that though Kula people knew that a GMoU guided their relationship with SPDC, their awareness level of the provisions in the document was insignificant and that translated to their lack of awareness of SPDC's conflict management strategies and the appropriate steps to take when there is misunderstanding with the company.
- It was also inferred that SPDC's attitude towards Kula communities did not allow the people's participation in the company's activities. This caused lack of cooperation in the relationship and engendered distrust which in turn gave rise to conflict.
- Kula people's lack of confidence in their community leaderships and SPDC's officials, in their dealings with the communities were major constraints on the conflict management strategies of SPDC.
- SPDC's conflict management strategies would be enhanced once Kula people's appreciated channels of communication and strategies for conflict management were adopted and SPDC consult all relevant parties to an issue, make decisions that considerably correspond with their opinion and sincerely implement decision reached.

Recommendations

- Kula people should endeavor to obtain and study the GMoU to acquaint themselves with the conditions of their relationship with SPDC while the company should regularly interact with all relevant sections of the communities to enhance the people's awareness of provisions in the GMoU and make for a relationship without drawbacks.
- SPDC should encourage Kula people's participation by always involving them in its corporate activities concerning their communities to encourage mutual trust and reduce the incidence of conflict.

- SPDC should relate with Kula people through their Council of Chiefs and engage them in dialogue through town hall meetings as their preferred channels of communities and conflict management.
- Community leaderships in Kula as well SPDC's CROs should endeavor to be honest in all their dealings with Kula people in order to redress the lack of trust and confidence of community people about SPDC that largely undermined the companies' conflict management strategies in the clan.

Contribution to knowledge

- The study highlighted the necessity for a supervisory mechanism in organizations' systems to ensure frankness in the execution of corporate responsibilities in the relationship between organizations and their publics owing to the distrustful acts of community leaderships and company officials.
- The study also highlighted gaps in the communication machinery adopted by SPDC in conflict management and identified communication channels preferred by host communities for a productive interaction with corporate organizations.
- The study demonstrated the essence of applying the principles of the Normative Stakeholder theory to enable organization adequately determine the scope of their publics and relates simultaneously an equitably with all of them.
- It also demonstrated that the assumptions of the Situational Theory provides insight on the individuality of various stakeholders and enable organizations to ascertain how to relate differently but rewardingly with each stakeholder.

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