Corporate Social Responsibility: A Study of Factors influencing Host Community Perception and Expectations of Oil Companies in the Niger Delta, Nigeria.

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Abstract
This article examines factors influencing host community perceptions and expectations of oil companies' CSR practices in the Niger Delta. A qualitative approach was used by employing interviews and focus groups technique to arrive at the findings. An overview of the concept of CSR, CSR practices in the Niger Delta, host communities understanding and interpretation of their relationship with oil companies, and factors influencing host communities' perceptions and expectations of oil companies CSR practices are presented. The findings show that the socio-cultural values that host communities employ to interpret their relationship with oil companies operating in their domains, as well as host companies previous experiences in their interface with oil companies, oil companies' CSR strategies for community engagement, the behaviour and affluence displayed by staff of oil the companies, and the age group of the respondents influenced host communities perceptions and expectations of oil companies' CSR practices in the Niger Delta.

Keywords: *Corporate Social Responsibility, Host Community Perceptions, Host Community Expectations, Corporate-community Relations, Community Development, Sustainable Development, Niger Delta.*

I. Introduction

Host Community perceptions and expectations of effective corporate practiceis often responsible for community attitude towards business corporations (Idemudia and Ite, 2006). In the oil-rich region of Nigeria, there are a number of factors that influence the perception and expectations of host communities toward the oil companies and the government (Frynas, 2005; Idemudia & Ite, 2006; Ite, 2004). The growing global demand of crude oil points to the strategic importance of the Niger Delta. The incessant corporate-community conflict in the region has had negative impact on the price of crude oil in the international market and has imposed substantial costs on the Nigerian government, oil companies and the host communities (Idemudia, 2007; Omeje, 2006; (Ikelegbe, 2006; Ogula, 2012).The unendingaggression toward the oil companies operating in the region indicates that previous CSR practices left gaps that require further examination of the factors influencing host community perception and expectations of CSR in the Niger Delta (Idemudia & Ite, 2006; Ite, 2004; Ogula, 2012). As business continues to grow, there is an increasing need for the business to align its interests in relations to CSR objectives with other stakeholders in order to minimize the risks and liabilities inherent in its operations (Porter and Kramer, 2006). An understanding of the factors influencing host community perceptions and expectations of oil companies' CSR practices will help oil companies operating in the region to integrate these factors into CSR policies and strategies. Hence, this paper examines the factors influencing host community perceptions and expectations of CSR practices of the oil companies operating in the Niger Delta.

II. The Concept of Corporate Social Responsibility

In the contemporary business world, businesses are voluntarily involved in the social and environmental concerns of their activities, as well as their interactions with business stakeholders. The notion of corporate social responsibility (CSR) requires the company to incorporate social and environmental issues in business operations. The World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD) defines Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) as "the continuing commitment by business to behave ethically and contribute to economic development while improving the quality of life of the workforce and their families as well as of the local community and society at large" (WBCSD, 1999).The discourse of Corporate Social Responsibilityis basically hinged on two opposing theoretical positions framed around maximizing business bottom-lineor promoting the social and economic wellbeing of society.

The sternest opponent of the notion that business corporations have a social responsibility to serve community**,** national and regional goals is Nobel Prize winning Economist Professor Milton Friedman**.** Milton Friedman (1962)**,** in a New York Times magazine titled **'**The Social Responsibility of Business is to increase its profits'**,** came up with a radical and conservative view of CSR**.** According to Friedman, business corporations may only have a social responsibility if the going concern is an individual proprietorship and that it is more accurate to say the individual proprietor has a social responsibility to the society and not the business itself. He argued that corporate managers are employees of corporations, and their responsibility is to maximise returns to their stockholders. It is not the duty of corporate managers to impose their social or ethical views on shareholders and at the expense of the legitimate right to profit maximization but to uphold to the end their employment contract, which requires that they operate within the rules of the free marketplace with the primary aim of using resources of the corporations to earn the maximum possible profit for corporate shareholders. He argued that CSR is a subversive doctrine and that (Friedman, 1970)**.** He further argued that in effect the quest of profit maximization in a free and competitive market in the long run will yield the common good. His view is that, CSR undermines the very essence of our free society and that the acceptance by corporate managers of CSR as a concept other than to make more profit for stockholders is a subversion of the primary purpose of business.

The postulation of the stakeholder concept marks a landmark in the CSR discourse as it serves a clear departure of Friedman's position (there is one and only one social responsibility of business – use its resources and engage in activities designed to increase its profit so long as it stay within the rules of the game). Stakeholder theory is an interdisciplinary theory that emanated from four major academic fields - politics, economics, sociology and management practices (Mainardes et al., 2011). The term stakeholder came to prominence out of the ground-breaking work at Stanford Research Institute (SRI). The notion of stakeholder was first presented by the Stanford Research Institute (SRI) in a report on planning given to a group of businesses in 1963 (Slinger, 1999). The notion of stakeholder was described in the report in terms of intuition reasoning, creative judgment as well as participation of people in business relationship (Slinger, 1999). The report indicated that business managers needed to comprehend the interests of the various stakeholders - shareholders, customers, employees, suppliers, financiers, business creditors, society etc., so as to develop business objectives that they would readily support (Freeman and McVea, 2005). The Stanford Research Institute defined stakeholders as **"**those groups without whose support the organisation would cease to exist**"** (cited in Freeman, 1984:13), such as government, customers, employeesetc**.** The definition implies that long-term success of any organisation is hinge on the support the group accords the organisation. SRI maintained that to achieve organisational goal management should be keen with all its stakeholders (Freeman and McVea, 2005).

Freeman (1984) fashioned the notion of stakeholder into a framework for strategic management in the 1980s. Freeman (1984) argued that current theories of business are not in consonant with changes in the business atmosphere in the 1980s, and called for a new conceptual framework. The notion of stakeholder approach to business was made popular as a result of the failure of traditional frameworks to address the swift changes in the business environment, particularly with regards to nonmarket environment (Freeman and McVea, 2005). Freeman (1984) further contend that when it becomes evidence that theories or frameworks no longer offer cogent solutions to the myriad of challenges cause by the non-market environment, it becomes essential to jettison these theories or frameworks and look in the direction of a new concepts that can resolve the prevailing intricacies in the market and non-market environment. Freeman (1984) therefore extended the concept of strategic management beyond the bounds of its traditional economic and profit maximisation, which gave shareholders of business pre-eminence, by defining stakeholders as "any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of organisation's objectives" (Freeman, 1984:46). This definition of Freeman (1984) suggests that any individual or group can positively or negatively affect the success or failure of an organisation and vice versa. He pointed out that changes in the non-market environment were largely prompted by the rise of new groups, concerns, and events, that the traditional management framework could not effectively managed. According to Ansoff (2007), most of the changes in the business environment were prompted by the negative impacts of business undertakings on society. The attention of the society was drawn into business because of the negative impacts of the profit maximization conditions of free enterprise, such as monopolistic practices, environmental pollution, inflation, fluctuations in economic activities, incomplete financial and brand disclosures, supply of low quality good, and manipulation of consumer via artificial obsolescence (Ansoff, 2007). The consequence of these outcomes increased the agitation for businesses to be more socially responsible. Ansoff (2007) noted that these concerns have opened opportunities for new commercial activities, imposed new social expectations and challenges of survival on businesses.

The stakeholder approach requires businesses to identify with those individuals and groups that can affect their overall objectives, as well as understand how the achievement of the business' goals affect other individual or groups and devices strategies to take into cognizance the interests of such group in the decision-

making process. Therefore, the stakeholder approach offers businesses with a framework that enable businesses to take a macro assessment of their stakeholder environment so as to minimize strategic uncertainties. The stakeholder approach is proposed to allow business enterprises identify nonmarket and constituents in the business environment whose actions activated changes in their market environment. Thus, the stakeholder approach facilitates business enterprises' understanding of their undertakings and the resultant effects of such undertakings, and the actions of other individuals or groups and their effects on the business (Freeman, 1984). Stakeholder approach to management expects businesses to develop knowledge in the understanding of how stakeholders groups emanate the major issues as stake, as well as the degree to which nonmarket stakeholders are willing to go with a view to enabling or preventing the business from achieving its set goals and objectives Freeman, (1984). Stakeholder approach acknowledges that businesses can no longer operate in isolation, their success and survival is depended on their relationship with other constituents' groups

III.   Methods
The study is a qualitative study combining both primary and secondary data collection methods. Primary data were collected through questionnaire survey, guided interview, focus group, and documentary evidence in four host communities. These data instruments were employed for them to complement each other to achieve complementary integration. Data for this article were collected in the host communities of two indigenous oil companies - Nestoil Plc and Moni Pulo Nigeria Limited, in Bayelsa States and Akwa Ibom States, respectively within the Niger Delta Region, Nigeria. Work concentrated on four host communities in the two States. These four host communities were Otuma-Ama and Fikoru-Ama, host communities of Nestoil Plc and Effiat, and Udesi, host communities of Moni Pulo Nigeria Limited. The host communities were selected using the criteria as host communities as well as proximity with oil exploratory activities. Those interviewed composed of key informants identified during the questionnaire survey, youth leaders, women, and politicians, chiefs that have useful information due to their previous interface with oil companies or their privilege positions in the selected host communities. The researcher held Eight (8) Focus group discussions in the host communities along gender lines. The reason for the separation was to avoid male domination as is the case in most African traditions.

IV.   Corporate Social Responsibility in the Niger Delta
The advent of CSR programmes in Nigeria go back to the 1960s and 1970s, when the first set of multinational oil companies started oil exploration and production in the Niger Delta. The Royal/Dutch Shell company, operating under the Shell Petroleum Development Company of Nigeria, began commercial production of oil in the Niger Delta in 1958 (Ukeje, 2004). SPDC enjoyed sole monopoly of oil exploration and production for a period of time, before other multinational oil corporations were granted oil prospecting licenses in onshore and offshore fields in Nigeria. They include Mobil Exploration of Nigeria Incorporated (MENI) in 1955 (now Mobil Producing Nigeria Unlimited (MPN), Texaco Overseas Nigeria Petroleum Company Unlimited in 1961, Amoseas in 1961, Gulf Oil Company in 1961 (now Chevron), Societe Afracaine des Petroles (SAFRAP) in 1962 (which later became Elf Nigeria Limited in 1974), Tennessee Nigeria Limited (Tenneco) in 1962, Azienda Generale Italiana Petroli (AGIP) in 1962, ENI in 1964, Phillips Oil Company in 1964 and Pan Ocean Oil Corporation in 1972 (Ite, Aniefiok E., *etal*. 2013). The entry of these new companies increased activities in diverse sectors of the oil industry – ranging from exploration, seismic activities, test drilling, development drilling, as well as constructions of flow stations, oil pipelines, terminals, platforms and jetties across the country. In the past decades, oil companies have adopted various CSR initiatives. Some of the CSR initiatives adopted include schools, healthcare facilities, rural water projects, scholarship awards, cash donations, agricultural programmes, and road constructions, and other philanthropic gestures. Host communities continuous aggression towards the oil companies suggests that these measures were inadequate over the long term. First, the CSR strategyemployed by oil companies seem to be predicated on the primacy of business objectives and focused on fulfilling only the most minimal ethical obligations. The thrust of this strategy is the notion that the economic goals of business are not compatible with the developmental goals of the host communities. As such, CSR practices seldom vary from legal compliance and providing the "moral minimum" (DesJardins, 2006). Dependence on this narrowly defined business focus approach hindered the oil companies from taking proactive steps in the formulation and implementation of CSR initiatives. In total, notwithstandingthe gargantuan sum invested in community development programmes, CSR practices in the oil-rich region were perceived by the host communities and observers as mere attempts to act in a manner that seems to be socially responsible or actions taken only to protect the companies' reputations (Ite, 2004, Ogula, 2012). Second, the integration of community development programmes in CSR strategy in the region did not occur until the mid-1990s. This suggests that early efforts at community development programmes were defensive (Ite, 2004). The oil companies integrated CSR practices into corporate strategies as a result of growingaggression against the oil companies.

Third, CSR programmes were not designed to deal with immediate economic, environmental and social concerns. For instance, Shell Petroleum Development Company's construction of schools and healthcare facilities were given as one-off offers to the host communities instead of as sustainable community development programmes (Ite, 2004). Although, the oil companies have given reasons for the slow progress to the costs of implementing alternative CSR policies, unending gas flaring suggests a lack of seriousness in addressing environmental concern in the region (The Economist, 2008). Fourth, the uncoordinated strategic approach to the implementation of CSR programmes had given rise to uneven distribution of projects that had little impact on the host communities in the region (Idemudia & Ite, 2006). The huge outlays expended on CSR programmes have had no impact on the socio-economic development of the region. The lack of comprehensive emergency response plan to deal with oil spills in the region explains this point. The oil companies have also made little effort to extend CSR programmes to the least developed and most ecologically devastated communities in the region (Evuleocha, 2005). CSR practice in the oil industry has evolved in the recent past into a corporate strategy (Idemudia & Ite, 2006; Idemudia, 2007; SPDC, 2005). The change in strategy is shown in SPDC's shift in CSR policy from Community Development (CD) to Sustainable Community Development (SCD)(SPDC, 2004). SCD was adopted as a new strategy to improve corporate-community relations in the Niger Delta (SPDC, 2004, 2005). SPDC's new approach emphasized strategic partnerships with the government, international development agencies, and the host communities. To demonstrate commitment to SCD, SPDC in partnership with NNPC allocates large sums of money annually to build roads, water, healthcare, education and other programs. Other oil companies, such as Chevron, Texaco, and Exxon-Mobil have embraced the use of Global Memorandum of Understanding (GMOUs) to provide community development so as to ensureharmonious and secure operating environment (Amnesty International, 2005, Ogula, 2012).

V. Host Communities Understanding and Interpretation of their Relationship with Oil Companies

An understanding of the different socio-cultural values with which host communities interpret their relationships with oil companies is essential. This section identifies the different socio-cultural values employed by the host communities to make sense of their relationship with oil companies. These classes were identified via an amalgamation of a critical examination of focus group discussions and interview notes, as well as how participants in the above mentioned sessions (interview and focus group discussions) described themselves vis-a-vis oil companies. These socio-cultural values are by no means exhaustive to understand and interpret host communitiesrelationship with oil companies. Nevertheless, the argument of the socio-cultural values here is restricted to just three classes in that these seem to be a general view across the survey communities.

5.1: Landlord-Tenant (Host Community-Oil Company) Relationship

One general expression used by members of the host communities with regards to their relationship with oil companies during focus group discussions and interviews was that they referred to themselves as the 'landlord' and the oil companies as their 'tenants'. This position seems central in their relationship with oil companies. Respondents in the host communities perceived crude oil and the land upon which oil companies' facilities are situated as part of their belongings. Therefore, perceives oil companies as their tenants and believe that as expected of all tenants, oil companies would ultimately leave when they are no longer satisfied with the rented property. This classification has two closely related implications for corporate-community relations. The first implication is that, as landlord, they determine how the rented properties are used, in this scenario, how oil companies should carry out their trades. The second implication is that, the landlord expects the tenant to meet his (landlord) expectation; or else, the tenant is ejected. That is to say, whereas the landlord has rights as long as the tenant continues to get the desired satisfaction from its properties, the rights and responsibilities of the tenants are determined by the landlord as long as the tenant remains in the property. Respondents of the host communities surveyed did not express this landlord-tenant nexus in any legalistic sense. Instead, it was an implied notion of how community members perceive as the natural order. For instance, when a community leader, Chief Samson of Abuloma town was interrogated that Nestoil might be apprehensive that even if they meet all the developmental expectations of your community, more will still be expected of them. Chief Samson declared that**:**

"You are right; we will not stop demanding so long as Nestoil is here in our land. If they (Nestoil) do not want us to demand from them, then they should leave our land. The only thing that will stop us from placing demand on them is when they are no longer in our property"(Samson, 15 June 2016).

An implied assumption that reinforces this classification is that oil companies are expected to respond to the demand of host communities in that they benefit from the resources of the host community. This position is in consonant with conventional CSR thinking which contends that business enterprises are an appendage of the society and benefits from the resources of society, as such, are supposed to contribute to resolving societal problems.

5.2: Oil Companies as Good Partners to Host Community

Members of host communities as well perceive oil companies as partners to do business with to achieve the objectives of the host community. Though, this was a view mainly couch by senior staff of local government councils, chiefs, and opinion leaders in host communities during interviews. The reason for this is that, corporate-community relation is viewed as a medium for the development of such partnership between oil companies and host communities. This standpoint is how a senior official of Nembe Local Government Council defines oil companies-host communities' nexus. For instance, Mr Igbagara, Senior Principal Administrative Officer to Nembe Local government Council, declared that:

"As far as we are concerned, we perceived all oil companies - be it indigenous or multinational as developmental partners" (Igbagara, 15 July 2016).In a similar vein, Mr Tuaipre Bozy maintained that:

"Oil companies are very essential to community development; that is if we work together. They are our partners in progress, but the only issue is that they are avoiding having any dealings with my community" (Bozy, 15 July 2016).

The implication of this class is that there is readiness on the part of community members to work in harmony with oil companies. This class implies that members of host communities are cognizance of the possible advantages that would emanate from oil companies' involvement in the development of host communities in the Niger Delta.

5.3: Oil Companies as Good Neighbors to Host Community

The idea of neighborhood of corporate-community relations emanates mainly from the proximity of oil companies to host communities as well as how long oil companies have operated in the host communities. Host communities members perceive oil companies as part of them. Some members of host communities even perceived oil companies as part of their family. In a way, good neighborliness is perceived as a way of measuring oil companies' CSR performance as well as a framework that is expected to guide indigenous oil companies' operations and practices. According to Chief Samson, a prominent traditional Chief during interview asserted that:

"Oil companies operate here, and their employees reside with us as a part of our community. Therefore, we are not expected to tell them the right thing to do, they ought to without being told see our problems as their own problems" (Samson, 6 June 2016).

The implication of this class is that members of host community anticipate oil companies to intuitively put into cognizance community problems in their everyday decision-making processes and give pre-eminence to concerns of the community devoid of community pressure. The inability of oil companies to accord community primacy has led to disillusionment among communities, hence the prevalent of negative perceptions. Furthermore, the consequence of this class is that CSR programmes carried out by oil companies as a result of pressure from community weakens the respect and value accorded to them as such CSR initiatives are perceived as secured by the community effort rather than a voluntary attempt by oil companies' to do good to the community. For example, Effiong James, a resident of Effiat asserted during interview that:

"We protested and fought for oil companies to give us something, we made concerted effort, if we did not persevere with our efforts, oil companies operating here will never give us anything. I can say without fear of contradiction, it is our pressure that is yielding result with the construction of classroom block for our school here, not because Moni-Pulo cares about us"(James, 14 June 2016).

The consequence of this declaration is that oil companiesare unable to obtain full benefit from its CSR initiatives in host communities because their CSR initiatives are viewed as an ordinary response to community pressure. Another consequence is that this class as well offers an insight into why dealing with negative injunction duties by oil companies, which is of paramount concern to host communities, would be helpful for oil companies in an attempt to securing social license to operate.

VI.   Factors Influencing Host Communities' Perceptions and Expectations of Oil Companies

There are five key factors that influence and shape host community perceptions and expectations oil companies. First, the different socio-cultural values with which host communities' understand and interpret their relationship with oil companies underpin their viewpoints as well as shape their perceptions and expectations of oil companies. For instance, the landlord-tenant class as earlier pointed out implies that host communities view CSR contribution of oil companies as a show of gratitude for the tenancy of land from which crude oil is extracted as well as an acknowledgement of host communities as a legitimate stakeholder in their operations.

Second is the issue of experiences, dissimilarities in host communities experiences had shaped community perceptions and expectations. This is more obvious with regards to dissimilarities that were observed among the survey communities. This dissimilarity was shown in how the survey communities trust oil companies in recognition of reciprocal responsibility as well as how they view the equality of responsibility

among stakeholders in relation to community development. Host communities' experiences – either positive or negative appear to stimulate analogous reactions and perceptions among members of host communities.

The third factor that influences the perceptions and expectations of host communities is the CSR strategy used by oil companies and the performance of their CSR initiatives as seen by members of host communities. The variations in the extent of community trust for Nestoil and Moni Pulo in their host communities substantiate this view. The ability of Nestoil to seek more community involvement in their activities as well as the use of existing local cultural attributes in CSR initiativesappears to have been the reason members of host communities perceived and speak of Nestoil more favourably than members of the host communities of Moni Pulo Limited. This is in spite of the facts that, one can argue that Moni Pulo has made more investment in terms of community development than Nestoil. Additionally, CSR performance with regards to how satisfactory oil companies address the negative externalities associated with their operations seem to shape considerably how oil producing communities see oil companies and access their general impact. For instance, whereas majority of respondents in Effiat were more prone to declare that Moni Pulo has made considerable attempt with regards to providing basic social amenities for the host community, they often access Moni Pulo's general performance as poor owing to Moni Pulo's inability to deal with its negative externalities.

The fourth factor that influences the perceptions and expectations of host communities is the conduct and attitude of staff of oil companies. During the fieldwork, the evidence gathered indicates that host community perception of oil companies' community relations officers influenced how members of host communities perceived the oil company. For instance, majority of respondents in Udesi and Effiat ascribed the poor situation of corporate-community relations between Moni Pulo and their host communities to the behaviour of the Community Relations Manager of Moni Pulo. Members of the communities interviewed were unanimous in their views that the Community Relations Manager is not only unfriendly but difficult to reach and is always protective of Moni Pulo's interests at the expense of communities' needs and expectations despite the fact that the manager is from the Niger Delta Region. They also declared that before the appointment of the new Community Relations Manager, host communities had direct contact with Moni Pulo, and Moni Pulo was involved in some charitable ventures in host communities and usually put together end of year events for their host communities. But, all that has changed since the appointment of the new Community Relations Manager. Nonetheless, Mr Kingsley Oboh, the Supervisory Councilor of Oil and Gas Matters Mbo LGA, declared that:

"Whereas I agree that we used to have easy access to Moni Pulo and Moni Pulo no doubt was involved in organizing a number of notable community events, the company's adjustment is as a result of Moni Pulo policies with the fall of oil price and not just because of the Community Relations Manager as portrayed by members of host communities"(Oboh, 20 June 2016).

The fifth factor that shapes host communities' perception and expectations is age groups. Whereas majority of elders in host communities who are usually members of the traditional council appear to have a positive disposition of oil companies, the youths on the other hand often hold a contrary opinion. The reason for this is that oil companies such as Moni Pulo prefers to directly deal with leaders of host communities like traditional rulers, chiefs and political bigwigs and not community youths. Hence, majority of the youths in the host communities surveyed felt relegated and very suspicious of oil companies and those members of the community that oil companies held in high esteem.

VII. Conclusion

Evidence from the study indicated that the host communities are disillusioned with oil companies and the oil industry in general because they viewed oil production as doing more harm than the desired good to the environment. These negative perceptions and expectations of the host community were seen to be influenced by the socio-cultural values that host communities employ to interpret their relationship with oil companies operating in their domains, as well as host companies previous experiences in dealing with oil companies, oil companies' CSR strategies for community engagement, the behaviour and affluence displayed by staff of oil the companies,and the age group of the respondents. The findings of the study suggest that there is serious clash of interests between host communities and oil companies with regards to CSR issues, which explains why, in spite of substantial investment in social programmes by oil companies, corporate-community relations still remain largely volatile in the oil-rich region.

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