

Civil Society and Conflict Management in Ibeno Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

The oil producing communities in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria have faced various degrees of environmental issues. The careless nature of oil exploration and exploitation have brought hardship to the people in the area including health problems, poisoning of drinking waters, depletion of fish populations, destruction of the natural flora and fauna on which the people depends. The residents of these communities often exhibit displeasure over the activities of the oil producing companies in the area resulting in agitations and conflict. The civil society is expected to play a major role in mediating between the agitating communities and oil producing firms. Guided by the assumptions of Donald Black's Social Control Theory and Kenneth W. Thomas & Raph H. Kilmann's model of conflict management, this study adopted descriptive survey research design method. Primary data were collected through the use of questionnaire, focused group discussion and in-depth interviews. Sample size was 399 determined using Taro Yamane's sample size formula. Data collected were descriptively analyzed using simple percentages, charts and discourse analysis. It was found that, residents of the oil producing communities in Ibeno Local Government Area are negatively affected by the oil exploration and exploitation activities from the ExxonMobil leading to agitations and confrontations. Also, civil societies have done little or nothing in resolving the lingering conflicts between the ExxonMobil and the host communities. It is therefore, recommended among others that the civil society organizations must rise to the challenge of mediating between the ExxonMobil and the host communities in order to minimize conflict and thereby enhancing development in the area.

KEYWORDS: Civil Society, Conflict Management, Oil Producing Communities, ExxonMobil

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I. INTRODUCTION

Oil producing communities in the Niger Delta Region in general and Akwa Ibom State in particular had over the years metamorphosed into theatres of conflict. This situation has led to a decline in the rate of economic progress. Conflict in Africa is not a static phenomenon; it constantly changes in response to shifts in the global geo-strategic environment and local conditions [1]. Conflict is as old as the family institution and exists in many spheres of life and it can be a serious problem if it has to do with economic lifeline. It could create chaotic conditions that make it nearly impossible for people to relate or live together peacefully [2]. There is a consensus among scholars on the inevitability of conflict in relations among human beings [3, 4, 5, 6, 7].

Scholars of peace and conflict studies have recognized the significant contributions of civil society organizations, non-governmental organizations, development agencies, international financial institutions, and the United Nations systems, in the specific areas of conflict resolution, development, politics, social, economic reforms, peacekeeping, mediation, early warning, prevention, peace building, and state building [8]. Some schools of thought extol conflict as an essential creative element in human relations, the means to change, and the means by which some social values of welfare, security, justice and opportunities for personal development can be achieved. In the light of this, conflict has destructive as well as a constructive dimension. In other word, conflict has both positive and negative effect and if carefully handled, it can lead to social and economic progress. According to Nnoli [9], such failures resulting from the insensitivity of the stakeholders to adopt arrangement and procedures to resolve every known conflict situation have kept it in perpetuation in society.

The Niger Delta region of Nigeria has nearly 200 Oil fields with Wells, over 400 oil productions and storage facilities scattered within its swamps and creeks. These are operated by multinational firms such as Shell, Mobil, Chevron, Agip and Texaco, in joint ventures with the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) [10]. As the Niger Delta became the prime basis of exploration and production of crude oil, the careless search for oil and gas by multinational oil companies brought untold hardship to the people. In Nigeria, 70 percent of her revenue is accrued from the petroleum sector. It is obvious that Government efforts and oil producing companies is still geared towards expanding its revenue flow from the sector, while inhabitants of the area suffer greatly. Many years of oil and gas production with frequent occurrence of crude oil and petroleum product spillage have left the people of the Niger Delta disposed to their farmlands, water resources with attending health challenges.

The attitude and actions of ExxonMobil in Ibeno communities and the activities and approach of government have attracted the attention of civil societies and other interest groups to be serious about ways of arresting the situation. These communities are under bondage due to environmental and socio-economic degradation. Among the communities affected in Ibeno are Inua Eyet Ikot, Usuikim, Ukpenekang, Mkpanak, Iwuochang, Opolum, Atabrikang, Ntafre, and Ene Awa villages. Several scholars have highlighted the continuing conflict between oil companies and the host communities in their socio-economic relations.

The people of Ibeno have witnessed environmental challenges resulting from gas flaring, deforestation, oil spillage and environmental degradation, because of oil exploration and exploitation leading to confrontations between the people of Ibeno and ExxonMobil, one the hand and Nigeria government on the other. These have resulted in the destruction of properties and extra judicial individual killings. These crimes are therefore committed in reaction to protest against the activities of ExxonMobil and the reaction of the federal government to any known agitations. Oil production in Ibeno has several environmental and human consequences for the people inhabiting the areas around which oil production and also extraction takes place. Oil spills have endangered aquatic life as well as the entire ecosystem, topography and surface vegetation. The contamination of water bodies by oil spillage has also led to the contamination of fisheries, freshwater and other aquatic animals. This has therefore destroyed the fishing occupation which is of great importance to the economic life of the people, rendering the water and food unfit for human consumption.

Atubi *et al.* [11] observed that human health is affected by oil spillage and that 85 percent of residents in the oil producing areas suffered a combination of symptoms of oil acne (a special skin eruption due to exposure to oil), cancer and decreased fertility. Beyond this, these residents of the oil producing communities have lost the potential outputs which are derivable from unpolluted land and water. There is a continuous health hazards resulting from increase in hydrocarbons in the water and air, increase in mortality and morbidity rates, moral decadence and loss of societal values with a grave consequence to the people. Consequently, socio-economic problems such as high level of poverty, hazardous environment, unemployment, high crime rate and violent conflicts are the predictable characteristics. This then, call for interventionary measures such as activities of civil society.

The role of civil society organizations in conflict management in the oil producing communities has been significant, especially in ensuring some level of relative peace in the area. Bukari and Guroh [12] have argued that a number of civil society organizations have made efforts at mediating to end conflicts through peace building process and conflict resolution mechanism. Parties in conflict often see civil society organizations as neutral and trustworthy compared to the government [13]. Bombande [14] also added that civil societies have the unique role to accompany communities at various levels to build trust through dialogue because in many situations, governments and politicians are not trusted by the communities.

This trust might be the reason why civil society organizations have advantage over state institutions in achieving success in resolution of conflicts. Crawford [15] posits that using civil society organizations and local Non-governmental organizations in mediation are usually the best solution to effective conflict resolution. In the light of this, we feel that a thorough investigation of the role of civil society in conflict resolutions, management and peace building could reveal more about the civil society originations.

II. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The main aim of this study was to investigate the role played by civil societies in conflict management in Ibeno Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State. The following are specific objectives;

- i. to investigate how oil exploration and exploitation activities by ExxonMobil affects residents of the oil producing communities in Ibeno Local Government Area;
- ii. to investigate the role played by civil society organizations in the management of conflicts between the affected oil producing communities and ExxonMobil in Ibeno Local Government Area; and to know the needs of residents of the oil producing communities.

III. CONCEPTUALIZATION

Civil Society Organizations

As a concept, civil society organizations (CSOs) rose to prominence globally during the 1990s. This was in part as a result of agendas articulated by international NGOs working on development. In recent years, there has been a rapid expansion in civil society organizations to accommodate issues in conflict. The significance of civil society in general has been recognized by the United Nations in recent reports and resolutions [16].

Civil society has a multidimensional definition, especially, when discussing it as a global development. Every society has its own distinct forms of social organizations, cultural and political traditions, as well as contemporary state and economic structures- all of which is central to the development of civil society and shapes its specific features.

Against this background, civil society comprises groups or organizations working in the interest of the citizens but operating outside of the governmental bureaucracy. Organizations and institutions that make up civil society include labour unions, non-profit organizations, Churches, and other service agencies that provide an important service to society but generally ask for very little in return. These groups represent the ordinary citizens contributing to the overall well-being of their community.

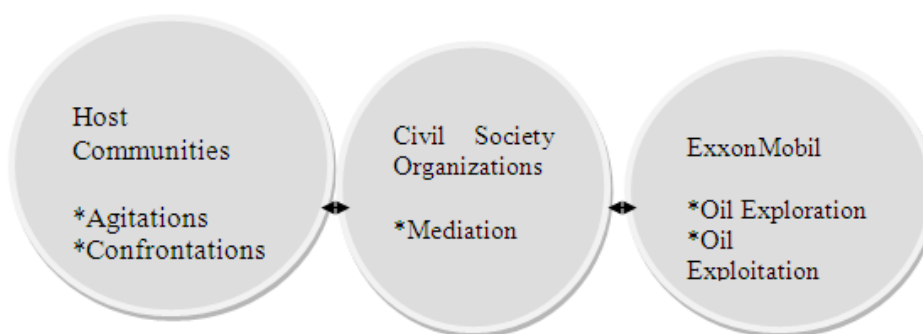


Figure 1: Civil Society Driven Model of Conflict Management in Oil producing Communities

❖ Conflict Management

Conflict is an inevitable feature of human life and social change. It emerges in response to unmet needs and involves the attempt to satisfy them (Barnes, 2006). Most broadly understood, conflict occurs when two or more “parties” (individual or groups) have believed they have incompatible goals and this perception of incompatibility shapes their attitudes and behaviours towards each other. Many people think of conflict as negative. But conflict typically emerges from real issues and divergent interests, thus revealing underlying problems that needs to be addressed.

Conflict management is the practice of being able to identify and handle conflicts sensibly, fairly and efficiently. It is the process of limiting the negative aspects of conflict while increasing the positive aspects of conflict. The aim of conflict management is to enhance peaceful coexistence and mutual understanding. As defined by Black [17], “conflict management is the handling of grievances...” This definition is adopted for this study due to its simplicity and relative applicability.

❖ Oil and Gas Extraction

Oil and gas extraction is the exploration and production of petroleum and natural gas from wells. Oil and gas exploration encompasses the processes and methods involved in locating potential sites for oil and gas drilling and extraction. Early oil and gas explorers relied upon surface signs like natural oil seeps, but developments in science and technology have made oil and gas exploration more efficient. Oil and gas production are among the main culprits of air pollution – one of the world’s biggest killers according to the United Nations. When fossil fuels are burned by power plants, automobiles and industrial facilities, they generate toxic gases. Breathing this air can trigger respiratory problems such as asthma, cardiovascular diseases, developmental issues and even cancer [18].

The health risks from oil and gas extraction are not limited to air pollution. The drilling method of “fracking” is known for contaminating drinking water sources with chemicals that lead to cancer, birth defects and liver damage. The controversial method injects a mixture of water and chemicals into rock formations to release oil and gas. As a result, it generates huge volumes of wastewater with dangerous chemicals that can leak to ponds, lagoons and underground aquifers. Scientists have found that the bright glow hurts pollinators such as bees. These insects have a very important job of moving pollen around to generate new fruits and plants. But

luminosity disrupts their sleep, feeding and reproductive cycles, leading to the dwindling of plants such as the cabbage thistle. Oil and gas extraction is a menace to wildlife. Loud noises, human movement and vehicle traffic from drilling operations can disrupt avian species' communication, breeding and nesting. The infrastructure built for energy development can also get in the way. Power lines, well pads, fences, and roads fragment habitats for many species. Oil and gas drilling has serious consequences for our wild lands and communities. Drilling projects operate around the clock, disrupting wildlife, water sources, human health, recreation and other aspects of public lands that were set aside and held in trust for the oil producing communities [18].

❖ **Oil Spillage**

Oil spills involve the release of dangerous hydrocarbons such as benzene and polynuclear aromatic hydrocarbons into the soil and water sources [19]. Olisah [20] and Akpofure [21] have agreed that oil spillage is caused by pipeline vandalism; leakages from corroded pipes and valves; the process of oil drilling; oil bunkering and smuggling and many others. It affects vast stretches of land and waterways thus polluting not only crops but also aquatic life and sources of water for domestic uses. As the spill occurs, it spreads into farmlands and water bodies. The toxic crude seeps into the grounds and is taken up by the roots of plants. Bush fire occasioned by leakages from oil installations and pipeline explosions caused by bunkering activities destroyed plants and burns the organic matter content of the soil. All these have bearing on agriculture, water supply and the ecosystem or biodiversity in the Niger Delta Region [22].

❖ **Gas Flaring**

Gas flaring introduces toxic pollutants such as sulfur dioxide into the atmosphere, which can lead to environmental problems such as acid rain, as well as the generation of greenhouse gases which contribute to global climate change [23, 24]. When the burning of natural gas occurs in close proximity to wildlife or inhabited areas, the effects raise potential environmental and health concerns. Bankoff [25] posit that gas flaring involves the release of dangerous hydrocarbon mostly methane and others which include sulphurous oxides and the oxides of nitrogen into the atmosphere. Attah [26] gas flaring restricts plant growth and sacked farmers and fishermen from their economic wellbeing. Gas flaring and its physical properties have devastating consequences on the oil producing communities. The ongoing practice of gas flaring, in which the natural gas associated with petroleum extraction is burned off in the atmosphere rather than being removed by alternative means such as subterranean re-injection or confinement to storage tanks for eventual sale, is particularly controversial. Gas flaring is often performed for economic reasons, as alternative disposal methods are more costly than the immediate elimination of the gas, which is a less profitable and potentially hazardous by product of the industry.

❖ **Effluent and Waste Discharge**

Water produced during petroleum production often contain chemicals, oil and sometimes, naturally occurring radioactive materials which could harm the environment [27]. Effluent waters from crude oil and gas companies, refineries and petrochemical industries contain quantities of oil, organic components and heavy metals such as chromium, copper, iron, zinc, manganese lead, mercury, and cadmium at concentrations beyond tolerable limits. The discharge of untreated and fairly treated waste into ecosystem brings about structural, chemical and biological changes which affect the biota [28]. Nkwocha and Okoye [29, 30]. Nkwocha *et al.* [31] added that activities of oil producing industries including waste discharges caused severe ecological and human disaster which contributes greatly to environmental degradation, and pollution problems of various magnitudes. A study by Reddy *et al.* [32] has shown that hydrocarbon may remain buried in sediment for up to 30 years without major degradation. Continued discharge of improperly treated effluent may further compound the environmental problem of the area. Heavy metals are some of the most toxic, persistent, and widespread contaminants in aquatic systems [32] and their impact in various components of the ecosystem, particularly fishes, is a well-documented phenomenon [33, 34, 35]. An easy resolution of the problem entails proper treatment and monitoring of effluent to ensure compliance before release into the environment.

IV. THE STUDY AREA

Ibeno is one of the 31 Local Government Areas in Akwa Ibom State with Headquarters at Ukpenekang. It was created on the 4th of December, 1996 from the old Uquo-Ibeno Local Government Area. There are 25 villages that make up Ibeno Local Government Area. The 2018 population projection shows that Ibeno Local Government Area has a population of 111,784 (NPC, 2018) with a land mass of 288km². The local government area is bounded by Eastern Obolo, Onna, Esit Eket, and Eket Local Government Areas and also by the Atlantic Ocean. It is a wetland with coastal sand and underground rocks of sedimentary origin with great crude oil reservoir surrounded by swampy mangrove vegetation. Ibeno Local Government Area is rich in crude oil and

has the presence of ExxonMobil. Towns and villages that make up Ibeno LGA include Okposo, Atabrikang, Ukpenekang, Iwuochang, Mkpanak, Ntafre, and Opolum.

The major spoken language in Ibeno LGA is the Ibeno dialect of the Efik-Ibibio language while the widely practiced religion in the area is Christianity. Popular festivals held in Ibeno LGA include the Usoro Ekpo festival while notable landmarks in the area include the Ibeno beach and Resort. The people of this area choose December 26th of every year as Ibeno cultural day. Ibeno beach is one of the popular tourist centres in the state. The prime occupation of Ibeno people is fishing. Other economic enterprises engaged in by the people include making of fishing nets, canoes and engaging in trade. Mining is also a popular enterprise undertaken by the dwellers of Ibeno Local Government Area with crops such as oil palm, cashew, and rubber grown in the area.

V. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study was guided by the assumptions of Donald Black's social control theory developed in 1990 and Kenneth W. Thomas and Raph H. Kilmann's Model of Conflict Management developed in 1974. These theories provided a robust foundation for the explanation of processes involved in managing conflicts in the oil producing communities. The established complexities of conflicts in the oil producing communities require a combination of approaches. Black's social control theory and Thomas-Kilmann's Model are contemporary versions of the two dimensional modes of conflict management [36].

Black's theory proposed the conditions that predict the use of one of five forms of social control (self-help, avoidance, negotiation, settlement, and toleration) in the relationship between individuals, groups and organizations.

In 1974, Thomas Kenneth and Kilmann Raph introduced their Thomas-Kilmann's model. This model explains strategic intentions that could be organised around the matrix of two factors (assertiveness and cooperativeness), which jointly produce five conflict management styles (Avoidance, Accommodation, Competition, Compromise and Collaboration) [36, 37, 17, 38]. Assertiveness flows from concerns for self-interest, while cooperativeness is driven by concerns for the other party or the relationship [38]. This assumption has opened up the stage for a discourse on conflict management strategies in the oil producing communities where self-interest remains paramount among the elite class. The conditions under which each of Black's Conflict management styles is likely to occur differ [39].

The above mentioned dichotomy implies that, self-help or avoidance may be preferred in some situations, while negotiation or settlement would be required in others, especially, if toleration is not possible. In this regard, the existing strategies adopted by the civil societies in conflict management mostly in the oil producing communities can be located within the framework of Black's social control theory and Thomas-Kilmann's model of conflict management.

VI. METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted in selected oil producing communities in Ibeno Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State that are seriously affected with the activities of oil exploration and exploitation. Descriptive survey research design method was employed. Multistage sampling technique involving simple random, cluster and purposive sampling techniques were adopted. Sample size of 399 was determined using Taro Yamane's (1967) sample size formula and respondents were drawn from nine (9) selected villages out of the 25 villages in Ibeno Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State using. The nine (9) sampled villages are Inua Eyet Ikot, Usuikim, Ukpenekang, Mkpanak, Iwuochang, Opolum, Atabrikang, Ntafre, and Ene Awa villages.

Data were collected from both primary and secondary sources. Primary data were collected using structured questionnaire distributed to all the respondents. Also, Focused group discussion (FGD) and in-depth interview (IDI) were primary instruments used to elicit information from community leaders, opinion leaders, youth leaders, women leaders and officials of ExxonMobil in Ibeno Local Government Area. Data gathered from focused group discussion (FGD) and in-depth interview (IDI) were to corroborate the questionnaire responses. Data collected from questionnaire were presented using charts, frequency counts and simple percentages while qualitative data gathered through FGD and IDI were analyzed using thematic analysis method. Secondary data were also useful in the study.

VII. RESULT AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Data Presentation and Analysis

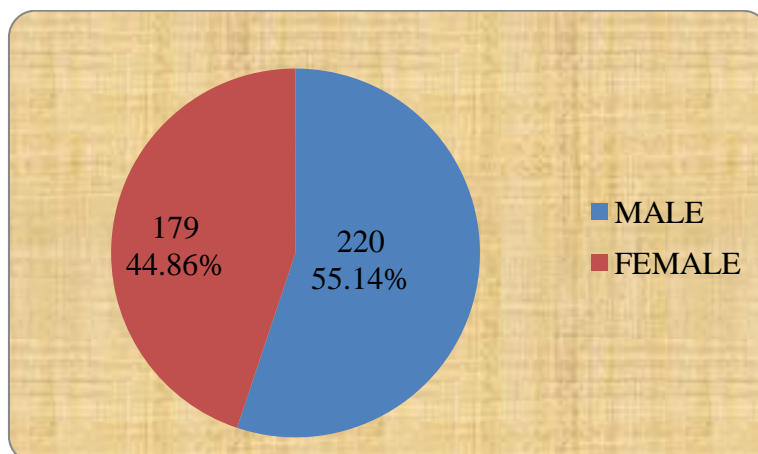


Figure 2: Pie Chart showing percentage distribution of respondents by sex

The pie chart in Figure 2 indicates the sex distribution of respondents. Male respondents are 220 (55.14%) while female respondents are 179 (44.86%). It therefore means that majority of respondents in the study location are male.

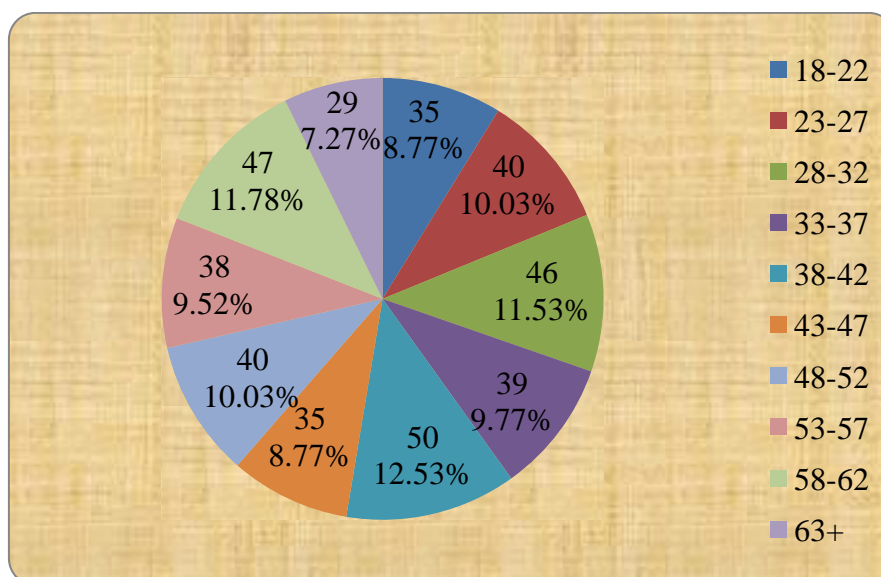


Figure 3: Pie chart showing percentage distribution of respondents by age brackets

Pie chart in Figure 3 shows the distribution of respondents according to age brackets. Results show that 35 (8.77%) respondents are between the age bracket of 18-22 years; 40 (10.03%) respondents are between the age bracket of 23-27 years; 46 (11.53%) respondents are between the age bracket of 28-32 years; 39 (9.77%) respondents are between the age bracket of 33-37 years; 50 (12.53%) respondents are between the age bracket of 38-42 years; 35 (8.77%) respondents are between the age bracket of 43-47 years; 40 (10.03%) respondents are between the age bracket of 53-57 years; 38 (9.52%) respondents are between the age bracket of 58-62 years; 47 (11.78%) respondents are between the age bracket of 58-62 years while 29 (7.27%) respondents are 63 years and above. It implies that majority respondents in the study location are between the age brackets of 38-42 years representing 12.53%.

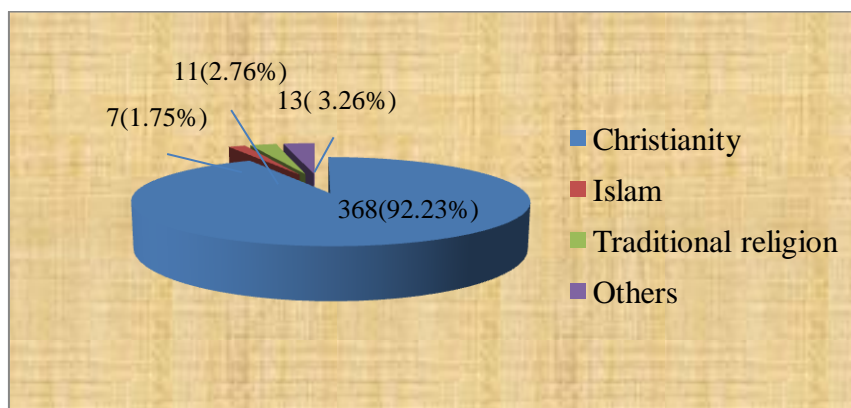


Figure 4: Pie chart showing percentage distribution of respondents by religious affiliation

Pie chart in Figure 4 reveals the percentage distribution of respondents by religious affiliation. Christians are 368 (92.23%); Muslims are 7 (1.75%); worshippers of African Traditional Religion are 11 (2.76%) while 13 (3.26%) are adherents of other religious affiliations that were not mentioned. Majority of respondents are Christians.

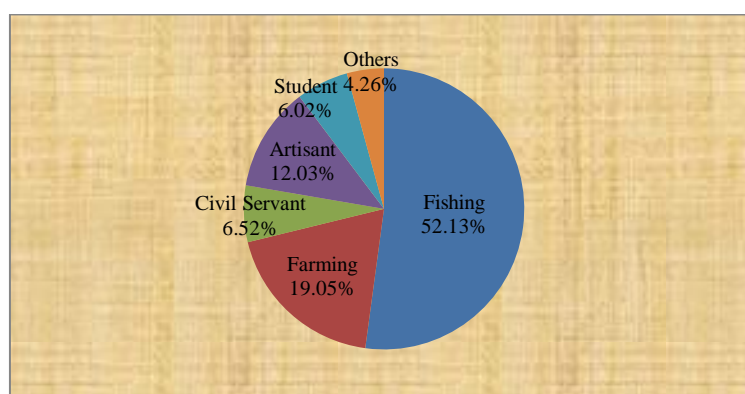


Figure 5: Pie Chart showing percentage distribution of respondents by occupation

Pie chart in Figure 5 indicates the various occupations of respondents. Those who are into fishing are 208 (52.13%) respondents; more than half of the population, 76 (19.05%) respondents are farmers; 26 (6.52%) respondents are working in the civil service; 48 (12.03%) respondents artisans; 24 (6.02%) respondents are students currently studying in various institutions of learning; while 17 (4.26%) respondents are those whose occupations were not listed. Majority of the respondents in the study location are fishermen.

Table 1: Percentage distribution of respondents by marital status

Marital Status	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Single	140	35.09
Married	131	32.83
Widowed	55	13.78
Divorced	13	3.26
Cohabitation	60	15.04
Total	399	100.00

Source: Field data, 2021

Table 1 shows the percentage distribution of respondents by marital status. Single respondents are 140 (35.09%); 131 (32.82%) respondents are married; 55 (13.78%) respondents are widowed; 13 (3.26%) respondents have been divorced while 60 (15.04%) are still practicing cohabitation method of marriage. Majority of respondents in the study area are up to age of getting married but they are still single. Reasons could be lack of job which is a barrier for youths to get married at the right time.

Research Question One

Do the oil exploration and exploitation activities of ExxonMobil have any negative impact on the on the host communities?

Table 2: Negative impact of oil exploration and exploitation activities of ExxonMobil on the host communities

Statement	Responses	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Oil exploration and exploitation activities by ExxonMobil have a negative impact on the residents of the host communities.	Agreed	360	90.23
	Disagreed	31	7.77
	No Response	8	2.01
Total	399	100	

Source: Field data, 2021

Table 2 shows the responses on the negative impact of oil exploration and exploitation activities of ExxonMobil on the host communities. Results show that majority of 360 (90.23%) respondents agreed that oil exploration and exploitation activities by the oil multinationals have affected the residents of the host communities negatively; 31 (7.77%) respondents disagreed to this popular opinion while 8 (2.01%) respondents did not choose any of the options. This implies that majority of respondents 90.23% have unanimously agreed that oil exploration and exploitation activities by ExxonMobil have affected the social and economic lives of the residents of the oil producing communities resulting in conflicting situations.

To corroborate the questionnaire responses, P1 (43 years) during FGD said; It is a pity that the oil multinational company called ExxonMobil has destroyed our farmlands, fishing business and other maritime activities which remain our only source of livelihood and above all caused serious threat to the survival of the people and the environment. Often times, we are witnessing to large quantity of oil floating all over the sea during fishing and our nets will be pinched by the tick volume of oil. We have suffered a lot from the activities of oil firms; there is no society that would be happy seeing this kind of exploitation. Few years ago, the youths in Ibeno Local Government Area out of provocation decided to block the main entrance of the ExxonMobil's Quo Iboe Terminal (QIT), due to unfulfilled promises of the company to the oil producing communities over their activities. We shut down the operations of the company over insistently repetitive oil spills and unfulfilled promises made to the communities. We vowed not to leave their main gate until the company carries out proper remediation on the environment and also fulfill some of the promises made during previous oil spills. In fact, that was the youths' decision. This is a total abuse of human as well as environmental rights (FGD held on 15th January, 2021).

In addition, P3 (34 years) during FGD said;

We have made several calls, appeals and petitions to bring the attention of the management of this ExxonMobil to address the issue of oil spillage from its facility. Though, the company some years back has made efforts to repair some pipelines suspected to have destroyed by the Niger Delta Avengers (NDA), the spills have been a recurring decimal in our communities. We the indigenes of these communities are not happy over the continued oil spills that ravage our lands and other environmental hazards that threatened our common existence. We must resist this dangerous exploitation at all cost... (FGD held on 15th January, 2021).

Yet, P6 (46 years) during FGD said;

Let Mobil tell us what to do now that we don't have what to feed on, our land is polluted, all the fishes killed" she narrated how large deposits of crude oil was found on the sea surface and shoreline as well as dead fishes killed as a result of oil spill (FGD held on 15th January, 2021).

Another participant, P9 (29 years) during FGD said;

Pollution of water through oil spills is diminishing the capacity of fishermen to make a good catch. The demand we are making is that there should be no expansion of existing oil fields. We believe that the best solution is to stop the pollution of the waters. If not, the whole world will hear us... (FGD held on 15th January, 2021).

Also, P10 (32 years), fisherman during FGD said;

Look at my fishing net; it is soaked all over with crude oil due to oil spillage. As I speak with you, I have very little quantity of fish to go home with. Mobil uses helicopter to spray harmful chemicals on the sea to wash away spilled oil but such chemicals are harmful to the fishes in the sea... As fishermen, we have been taking to the street on a peaceful demonstration demanding compensation from the oil producing company operating in Ibeno, but nothing came out of it. We are suffering in our land... People should come to our rescue (FGD held on 15th January, 2021).

Still, P4 (54 years), a stakeholder in Fishermen Association of Nigeria during focus group discussion said:

A large quantity of fish consumed in Akwa Ibom State and other states in the country are produced by Nigerian fishermen. Oil spillage has affected aquatic life and our fishing business is seriously hampered by the activities of oil multinational companies. This same issue is not peculiar to Ibeno but the entire Niger Delta region is facing the same problem. My fear is that if this awkward situation persists without the government intervention to bring oil spillage to an end, youths might take laws into their hands. One of our major problems as fishermen is the pollution of our waters. Pollution from activities of oil companies has caused a lot of problems to this section of agriculture. For instance, the type of fish we normally catch before are no more. In this part of the country, the common fish we have is Bonga fish and sardine, but now you cannot find them in the waters anymore. Because of pollution, they migrated to other countries. That is why today so many fishermen appear to be jobless and idle because there is no fish for them to catch. We are not happy... (FGD in Iwuokpom community held on 15th January, 2021).



Figure 6: Dead fishes caused by oil spillage in Ibeno river



Figure 7: Oil spillage affecting Ibeno River

Results show the negative impact of oil exploration and exploitation in Ibeno Local Government Area. The oil exploration and exploitation activities by the oil multinationals operating in the study location have a negative effect on water causing unavailability of safe drinking water and as well destroy fishes in the river which is the main source of income for residents. It also affects available farmlands causing poor farm yields, hunger and high cost of living. Its air pollution affects the health condition of the residents and environment. Other impacts are seen in cracked buildings and corroded zinc. Findings revealed that at most times, youths of the affected communities in Ibeno Local Government Area had expressed dissatisfaction over multiple oil spillages in their communities posing a great danger to their source of livelihood which is fishing. They have experienced negligence, marginalization and lack of compensation which have generated conflicts with the multinational oil companies operating in their communities.

It is the inability of the ExxonMobil to satisfy the demands of the host communities who are directly affected by their oil exploration and exploitation activities and conscious negligence of their corporate social responsibility in these communities coupled with non-payment of compensation to owners of farmlands

destroyed and sea foods killed by these activities that have culminated to the reason the community people become antagonistic with the operation of the oil multinationals which often times result to loss of lives, destruction of property and obstructing the operation of ExxonMobil through blocking of their entrance gates with traditional injunctions. This experience by residents of the affected communities is similar to what is happening in other coastal communities in the Niger Delta region. More findings show that ExxonMobil has never paid any compensation for oil spills or even to allow the process to be completed for the payment of compensation, instead, the operators ran around to a pay token as palliative.

Respondents expressed their concern that for over ten (10) times, Ibeno communities have recorded an unfortunate incidence that have washed away farmlands, destroyed aquatic lives and disrupted other maritime activities and above all caused serious threat to the survival of the people and the future of the environment. Findings also revealed that sometimes in 2012, stakeholders of the affected communities filed a suit against the Exxon Mobil demanding the oil multinational to accept full responsibility of the damages caused by its activities in the area. These findings are supported by Chijioke, Ebong and Henry [40]. It is also supported by Moller [4, 42, 43]. They agreed that social unrest and pervasive youth restiveness in the oil producing communities is the result of soil degradation, environmental pollution, water contamination, inequality in resource allocation and deliberate under-development spanning over three decades. The grim picture of injustice has been aggravated by the role of multinational companies whose primary aim is to exploit resources of host communities at the detriment of the people's health and their environment.

Research Question Two

Do civil society organizations play any role in the management of conflict in Ibeno Local Government Area?

Table 3: Civil Society Organizations and their role in the management of conflict in the oil producing communities in Ibeno Local Government Area

Statement	Responses	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Civil society organizations have played a significant role in the management of conflict related to oil exploration and exploitation activities by the oil multinationals in Ibeno Local Government Area.	Agreed	102	25.56
	Disagreed	284	71.18
	No Response	13	3.26
Total		399	100

Source: Field data, 2021

Table 3 shows the opinions of respondents concerning the role played by civil society organizations in the management of conflicts in the oil producing communities in Ibeno Local Government Area. Results show that 102 (25.56%) respondents agreed that civil societies have played a significant role in the management of conflict between the oil producing communities and oil multinationals operating in Ibeno Local Government Area. Also, majority of 284 (71.18%) respondents disagreed to this opinion while 13 (3.26%) respondents did not choose any option. It therefore means that majority of respondents have not seen nor felt the impact of civil society organizations in their various communities owing to continuous exploration and exploitation activities by the oil multinationals.

To corroborate the questionnaire responses, P24 (44 years), fisherman, during in-depth interview said: For the first time, a seminar was organized in Ibeno by the Health of Mother Earth Foundation (HOMEF) in collaboration with Rosa Luxembung Foundation, West Africa, for fishermen drawn from Mbo, Ibeno, Oron, Mkpatt Enin, Ikot Abasi, Eastern Obolo, Oruk Anam Local Government Areas of the state, on the 10th day of July, 2018 for a fishnet community dialogue (IDI held on 23rd January, 2021).

Another participant, P4 (51 years), a community leader during FGD said:

Personally, I appreciate all the civil society organizations both within and outside for their role as regards to the challenges we are facing with the activities of oil companies. These concern organizations have tried but we need them to do more. I could recalled when Peace Point Action (PPA) urged Mobil to commence immediate environmental cleanup in affected communities and also pay full compensation to the community members in all the spills recorded within the area so far. We are yet see any meaningful changes as regards to our agitations. We will continue to fight against any form of exploitation in our land. We are the host communities but few people are benefitting at the expense of others because they are closed to the corridors of powers with little peanuts given to them by the multinational companies (FGD held on 23rd January, 2021).

Yet, another participant, P3 (47 years), opinion leader during in-depth interview said:

Let me state categorically that it is unfortunate we do not feel the impact of any civil society organization in this part of the Niger Delta. We are struggling alone. Ibeno as a whole has over the years been

subjected to environmental hazards from the activities of ExxonMobil. We have written to National Oil Spill Detection Response Agency, Department of Petroleum Resources and other governmental agencies as regard to what we are facing in our communities... The present government has not given us any palliative, let alone coming around our communities to see what we are facing here. Our community leaders and politicians are not fare to us and they lack transparency. In fact, they are the cause of where we find ourselves right now (IDI held on 23th January, 2021).

Results show that, indeed, many residents of the affected communities have not felt the impact of the civil society organisations in terms of conflict mediation between the host communities and the ExxonMobil. It is quite true that civil society organisations supposed to coordinate the aggrieved communities in a way and play mediating role in resolving unending conflicts between the oil producing communities and the oil multinationals operating in the area. This does not suggest that civil societies have neglected the agitations of Ibeno residents; they are sometimes coordinated the aggrieved communities and as well intimate the oil multinationals on the community demands for peaceful coexistence. Civil Society Organizations have a greater role to play in resolving conflicts between the oil multinationals and the oil producing communities. The fact is that residents of the oil producing communities have been marginalized and their natural environment is seriously in a disadvantaged condition. The issue of oil spillage and other environmental hazards cause by oil multinationals without meaningful community development and financial compensations to the host communities brought about agitations that often times result to lose of lives and property. This finding is supported by Omobhude and Chen [44].

Furthermore, in May 2018, Spaces for Change (S4C), a non-profit, human rights organization working to infuse human rights into social and economic decision-making processes in Nigeria, held series of consultative meetings with the political and traditional leaders of Akwa Ibom State, especially those from the oil producing communities to sensitize them on the provisions of the latest oil reform statute, the Petroleum Host and Impacted Communities Development Bill 2018. At these meetings, S4C highlighted the implication of the draft legislation for community development as well as the future relations between communities and oil companies operating in their localities. For instance, Ibeno local government hosts the Qua Iboe terminal operated by ExxonMobil. The company holds 40% interest in the field production mix with the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) having the remaining 60%. Exxon Mobil's oil production currently averages 400kbd, held in about 9 crude oil storage tanks with a total capacity of 4.5 million barrels, loading at about 50,000 barrels per hour [45].

Research Question Three

What does the residents of the affected communities want for peaceful coexistence with the ExxonMobil?

Table 4: Frequency distribution of respondents based on community needs

Question	Responses	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Which among these measures do you think the residents of the affected communities in Ibeno LGA need most from the ExxonMobil?	Financial compensation	79	19.80
	Good road network	23	5.76
	Free medical care	26	6.52
	Environmental Cleanup	13	3.26
	Safe drinking Water	50	12.53
	Poverty eradication programmes	56	14.04
	Youth Empowerment	45	11.28
	Scholarship for students	47	11.78
	Employment opportunities	40	10.03
	End to oil spillage and other environmental hazards	20	5.01
Total		399	100

Source: Field data, 2021

Table 4 shows the frequency distribution of respondents based on community needs. Results show that 79 (19.80%) respondents are of the opinion that residents of the oil producing communities are in dare need of financial compensation from the ExxonMobil; 23 (5.76%) respondents said they need good road network; 26 (6.52%) respondents said that affected communities need free medical care; 13 (3.26%) respondents said that they are in need immediate environmental cleanup; 50 (12.53%) respondents said that the affected communities need safe drinking water; 56 (14.04%) respondents said that they need poverty eradication programmes to be initiated in their communities; 45 (11.28%) respondents said that they need youth empowerment; 47 (11.78%) respondents said that they need scholarship for students in the affected communities; 40 (10.03%) respondents said that they need employment opportunities while 20 (5.01%) respondents demanded end to oil spillage and other environmental hazards. This implies that majority of respondents in the study area needs financial

compensation, poverty alleviation programmes, safe drinking water, scholarships for students, youth empowerment, healthcare, etc. At most times, many of these needs are not met which is the reason for conflict.

ExxonMobil official P11 (48 years) during FGD had this to say:

Let me say categorically that the multinational oil company known as ExxonMobil has contributed to the development of the host communities in a number of ways to improve their standard of living. For example, the company has provided the host communities with life changing electricity supply, portable water supply, paved asphalt roads and we have rehabilitated schools and educational facilities (FGD held on 30th January, 2021).

Another participant P12 (40 years) during FGD said:

From my little knowledge, ExxonMobil has provided modern-day clinics. We have given support for area hospitals and bed nets to protect against mosquitoes. The ExxonMobil Foundation has given financial support to two innovative programmes in Nigeria that addresses social issues such as public health and education. Employment opportunities are also given to the people of Akwa Ibom State and most supplies are done by them. What else could we do? (FGD held on 30th January, 2021).

Yet, another participant P18 (37 years) during IDI said:

We have assisted the host communities in diverse ways. Indigenes of the host communities and community groups have been engaged to help provide direction in the development of programmes that will affect them directly. Also, we understand that is vital to the development of communities, which is the reason over the years, our facilities have provided supports for educational pursuits of indigenes of the oil producing communities (IDI held on 30th January, 2021).

To show that residents of the oil producing communities are not satisfied with the provisions made by the ExxonMobil, P23 (28 years) had this to say;

We are maltreated and marginalized by the ExxonMobil. Activities of ExxonMobil have affected our communities negatively. Therefore, we demand for financial compensation for destroying our farmlands, provision of modern healthcare services and facilities, education of our children and employment opportunities to our teaming youths (FGD held on 20th January, 2021).

Another participant P25 (41 years),

We will continue to agitate if our living conditions have not changed. We lack good drinking water and we want ExxonMobil exploring oil in our communities to make immediate provision for safe drinking water, healthcare facilities and pay damages to owners of farmlands destroyed by their careless activities (FGD held on 20th January, 2021).

From the foregoing, issues arising from oil exploitations in the oil producing communities have become unbearable, making the oil multinationals and residents of the oil producing communities to be in unending conflicts. These oil producing communities are still facing these environmental challenges and the sustainable peace building strategy adopted by few civil society organizations are not enough to stop youth confrontations. Above findings are supported by Chijioke, Ebong and Henry [40].

VIII. CONCLUSION

The study investigated the role of civil societies in the management of conflict between the oil multinationals and residents of Ibeno Local Government Area over activities of oil exploration and exploitation. Results show that the recurring incidence of oil spills are usually due to continuous vandalism and corrosion of oil pipelines, which destroy aquatic life and pollute the environment such that agricultural activities become impossible in the affected communities. The long-term effect of these oil spills is usually associated with a reduction in crop yield and death of fishes in the river. Results also show high level of unresolved conflicts between the oil producing communities and the ExxonMobil. Residents of the affected communities are demanding for safe drinking water, employment of indigenes into key offices in the oil company, youth empowerment schemes, poverty eradication programmes, cash compensations for environmental damages including as poisoning of drinking water, depletion of fish populations and destruction of farmlands, health hazards resulting from increase in hydrocarbons in the water and air, corroded zinc and cracked walls on buildings. Results also show lack of transparency among community leaders and politicians in sharing palliatives to residents.

The inability of the oil multinational companies to live to the expectation of the host communities has been the root cause of unending misunderstandings. Violent conflict is therefore the consequence of the inability or failure to accommodate and resolve contradictions in society through arrangement and procedures that eliminate their negative effects and maximize the positive effect. Civil societies have done little or nothing in resolving conflict situations in the oil producing communities, mostly, as it involved the ExxonMobil operating in Ibeno Local Government Area. There is much agitations and confrontations among the residents of the oil producing communities to draw the attention of government and management of ExxonMobil towards their unbearable condition.

IX. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the study findings, the following recommendations are made;

- i. The management of ExxonMobil should be cautious in their approach to oil exploration and exploitation activities for the purpose of sustainable development.
- ii. Civil society organizations should as a matter of urgent importance be fully involved in the management of conflicts between the affected oil producing communities and the ExxonMobil in Ibeno Local Government Area.
- iii. Government and the management of ExxonMobil should collaborate and pay careful attention to the demands of the affected communities. Everything that could generate conflict between ExxonMobil and the host communities should be properly addressed.
- iv. Oil exploitation has increased the rate of environmental degradation and has perpetuated food insecurity as a result of death of fish and crops as well as loss of farm lands and viable rivers for fishing activities leading to loss of livelihood. Therefore, ExxonMobil should have adequate plans that would accommodate the victims and improve their living conditions for peaceful coexistence.
- v. The affected communities should be ready to accept dialogue when any misunderstanding arises.
- vi. Community and youth leaders should be ready to carry all the subjects along and they must exercise high level of transparency to avoid suspicion that could escalate to restiveness.

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