

PERCEPTION OF OROMEREZIMGBU COMMUNITY OF NIGER DELTA DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION'S COMMUNITY RELATIONS PRACTICES IN RIVERS STATE

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Abstract

This study examined public perception of NDDC'S community relations practices in Oromerezimgbu community in Rivers State. The objective was to identify how NDDC relates with the communities in the Niger Delta and ascertain the workability of the strategies used. The questionnaire and interview schedule were the instruments for data collection. The survey method was used in distributing the questionnaire to Oromerezimgbu community members while interview was conducted on select management staff of NDDC. Findings show that community relations practices of NDDC are based on the proactive and reactive approaches. This finding is based on the response from the interview with the key management staff. Finding also reveals that NDDC's community relations practices have not been as effective as it should be in addressing the needs of the people in Oromerezimgbu community as evident in conflicts that exist between the commission and the host communities. Based on above findings, the study therefore, recommended among other things that: For NDDC to effectively bridge the gap in communication which exists between the commission and the host, an enlightenment campaign should be organized periodically to keep the people informed of its activities. Also, NDDC's community relations programmes, especially the capacity intensive projects, should be evenly distributed among the various communities in the state to avoid conflict.

Keywords: Community Relations, Organization, Practices, NDDC, Corporate Community

Introduction

Every organization operates in an organic society. While the organization's policies affect the society, the society's actions and inactions affect the organization such that there is a ripple effect of both the organization and society's policies. To achieve a balance, every organization strives to maintain goodwill in the eyes of its external and internal publics whose interdependent activities are linked to the success of the organization. Whether as an individual, group, company, or government establishment, a positive disposition to its publics is sacrosanct. Any organization that is bent on avoiding disaster adapts a sustained harmonious relationship with its internal and external publics as it forms the working environment on which the organization revolves. It is worthy of note that the public of an organization can be individual, group, organization, agency or

government that has either direct or indirect relationship with the organization. They share symbiotic relationship with each other. An organization's public is also referred to as stakeholders. Maintaining good relationship with the public is necessary for any organization to achieve its vision, mission, aims and objectives.

One of the key facets of an organization's external publics is its host community. The host community is the community where the daily activities of the organization are carried out. Reaching a mutual understanding where both the organization and the host community come to a synergy is community relations' task. It involves analyzing, explaining, presenting, communicating and identifying with the host community and its expectations on a mutual ground by the organization and community representatives. Over

the years, dealing with the expectations of the host communities has been a tough nut to crack for several organizations. Every organization strives to maintain a viable ground for operation and this is done through good public and community relations activities. A breakdown in communication between a community and the organization influences the organization mostly negatively. To forestall such occurrence, it is of grave value for an organization to avoid negative reputation and perception. To do this, the organization must as a matter of necessity, understand its obligations to the community and how to relate with it, as Seitel (1992) maintained "Community Relations is the policy and practice of an organization to analyze the community, understand its make-up and expectations and communicate the organization's story in an uninterrupted and understandable way." (p. 438). On this basis, the community Relations Policy of an organization can be practiced in two distinctive ways: Expressively and Instrumentally. Expressively when an organization promotes itself and shows its goodwill towards the community, and instrumentally, when the organization actually contributes in making the community a better place to reside and do business.

For a peaceful co-existence between an organization and its host community, Sietel (op cit) identified steps:

- a. Determining what the community knows and thinks about the organization by informing the community of the organizations view point.
- b. Informing the community of the organization's point of view by creating an atmosphere to accommodate other local business in advancing the economic and socialwelfare of the community through joint participated community relations programmes.
- c. Negotiating or mediating between the organization and its constituents should there be a significant discrepancy (p.442).

It is on the above premises that this study is set out to appraise the community relations practices

of the Niger Delta Development Commission, (NDDC), in Oromerezimbu, Rivers state.

Statement of the Problem

The Niger Delta area strikes a chord in the heart of Nigerians whenever it is mention. This chord is greatly dependent on several factors and who is involved. To the journalists, it is an area plagued with several developmental challenges; to the politician, it is an area that must be held on to for political gains especially for its economical relevance to the country; to the clergy, the crime rate in the area is sickening; to the multinational companies, the people are very hostile but they must continue to operate there because of the economic benefits derivable from there and so on. Research suggest that youths of the Niger Delta area are considerably volatile and plagued with development challenges and has critical dimensions of restive inclinations that have nonetheless neglected them to the finches rebels, (CENYED, 2017). The Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) as an agency was created to cater for the development challenges of the area. Its Corporate Headquarters is situated in Oromerezimbu community in Rivers state. Oromerezimbu as its host community is also a beneficiary of its activities. In recent times, a strange relationship has been observed between the commission and her host community. This has resulted to incessant demonstration and at some point temporary closures of the commission's headquarter in the state. The commission has been accused of negligence to the host community.

The commission cannot achieve set objectives within a hostile, love-hate riddled environment which serves as a test case for the commission's ability to deliver on its mandate. Probing its community relations practices in the area of development became necessary in this regard. Therefore, this study was to determine how the residents of Oromerezimbu community perceive NDDC as a commission in their community relation practices in the area of project signing and implementation.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study are to:

- i. Find out how the residents of Oromerezimbu community perceive NDDC's Community Relations practices in Rivers State
- ii. Identify the approach the Community Relations practices of NDDC are based on.
- iii. Ascertain how the community relations practices of NDDC are implemented in Oromerezimbu community
- iv. Ascertain if there are crisis confronting NDDC in the host community in Rivers state.

Research Questions

This study seeks to answer the following questions

- i. How do the residents of Oromerezimbu community perceive NDDC's Community Relations practices?
- ii. What approach are the Community Relations practices of NDDC based on in the development of Oromerezimbu?
- iii. How are the community relations practices of NDDC implemented in Oromerezimbu?
- iv. What are the crisis confronting NDDC in its host community in Rivers state?

Theoretical Framework

This paper is centered on two theoretical foundations namely; Symmetry theory and the social relations theory.

Symmetry Theory

Symmetry theory developed by Newcomb in (1953) is concerned with how communication flows from one person to another or between groups of people. According to him, communication performs the essential function of enabling two individuals to maintain simultaneous orientation to each other and towards objects of external environment. The theorist assumes that communication is likely to occur under conditions of uncertainty and disequilibrium, and that human beings are likely to find more communication activities, under the conditions.

The model which takes a triangular form indicates point object 'X' in their common environment. So when both individuals are oriented to each other, and also the third person, communication is then conceived. According to the theory, communication leads to more interpersonal similarities, even when there is a disagreement between the groups; there may be likely attempts to resolve whatever conflict may exist between them, because there is a pull towards symmetry. The level of the pull depends on the level of perception revolved and the relevance of the relationship to the group. As the pull increases, there is likelihood that the groups involved will communicate more on issues of common interest. The effect of the communication will tend to restore balance, which is postulated as the 'normal state' of any relationship.

Social Relations Theory

Social Relations theory was propounded by Melvin Dc Fleur in the year 1970. Its basic proposition is that members of the same society interact, with each other and as a result, the interactions and relationship among them determine how they react to messages about the society or media content. In other words, members of a given society co-create and generate meanings by the way they relate and inter-relate among themselves. According to Anaeto, Onabanjo and Osifeso (2008), the social relations theory is anchored on the findings that the way people react to communication content in the society and their action upon it is modified by the informal relationships with friends, social groups and other stakeholders in the society. This means that the various social structures in the society, determines to a very large extent, the way and manner people relate and what meaning should be. These meanings are enforced and reinforced by the members of the society according to the details cum dictates of the collective ideology of the various social structure and strata they belong to. It is based on the assumption that people can be grouped into broad collectiveness on the basis of shared orientation and characteristic. The theory postulates that people who belong to the same

group will select identical information content and react to it in a fairly uniform manner. It argues that demographic variables such as age, sex, race, income, education, occupation and place of residence can singly or in combination determine messages most appropriate for the group. In a community, the components of the external publics such as community leadership group, civil/cultural group, students, local merchants, have very crucial role to play in determining the community's perception, opinion and attitude toward the organization. This means that an organization must know the various group formations within its host community, understand their existence, history and mode of operations in order to work toward establishing mutual relationship with each other.

For an organization to create and maintain mutual understanding in the mind of its publics, it needs to attend more favorably to the attitudes and opinions of the various communities. This in turn will determine the organization's reputation. Reputation is of uttermost priority to every organization, no matter how large or small, its reputation is a key driver for its survival and success. The organization's publics, be it Customers, suppliers, employers, investors, journalists and regulators, all have a powerful impact on its reputation. They all have an opinion about the organizations they come into contact with — whether good or bad, right or wrong. These perceptions drive their decisions about whether they want to work with, partner and/or support these organizations. In today's competitive world, reputation can be a company's biggest asset; the thing that makes one to stand out from the crowd and give a competitive edge. It is the reputation an organization acquires over the years that determines how their publics perceive them and deal with them. Reputation is a function of the standing relationship between an organization and its publics within a period of time. This theory relates to the study to the extent that the NDDC as an organization cannot afford to be at par with the host community, Oromerezimbu. There must be communication between the

Commission and its publics for it to thrive. No organization operates in isolation from its environment.

Conceptual Framework Public Relations

There have been multiple researches in the realms of Public Relations and perception. So many literatures abound on what Public Relations should indeed represent. Public Relations has often been confused with other terms like publicity, propaganda, advertising, among others, which are at best, tools of public relations. Public Relations is not advertising or publicity or propaganda but effective public relations can help manage an organization's reputation by communicating and building good relationship with all organization's stakeholders using these tools (Ezirim, Opara, Oyerika, Aseigbu, and Harcourt, 2006). Advertising is a message paid for by an identifiable sponsor to induce sales; publicity is information that is distributed to the public through media that is no longer controlled by the source of the information. Publicity is the act of distributing information to a large number of people.

According to Ezirim et al., (2006), Publicity can be favourable or unfavourable, voluntary or involuntary, spontaneous or planned. Publicity is gained when an organization is considered newsworthy. It is mostly about dissemination of information. The major difference from advertising is that it is not paid for but prayed for. Publicity differs from public relations because public relations are about building mutual understanding and goodwill. On the other hand, propaganda according to Ezirim et al., (2006) means to poison the minds of the people for or against something, it involves channeling information that will trigger behavior to certain paths as predetermined by the source. Propaganda messages can be true or false but publicity must be true. While propaganda is mostly false, publicity is like free advertising, a form of securing editorial space. Advertising is certainly a bought space to share information and induce sales. While these can be used as public relations practitioner, it is not public relations itself. Ezirim et al., (2006), defines Public Relations as:

“deliberately, planned and sustained effort by an organization to build and maintain good relations and mutual understanding between it and its various publics, most especially those which directly and indirectly affect its operations or activities, through good publicity on a continuous and continuing basis” (p. 23).

Public Relations is all about reputation building; the result of what you do, what you say and what others say about you. This is the foundation upon which every organization builds its objectives, because an organization's success or failure is largely dependent on the relationship it establishes and maintains with its publics whether external or internal. Therefore, organizations as a matter of necessity have an interest in Public Relations because the ability to maintain a positive public image is critical to achieving corporate objectives. Developing a Public Relations strategy is instrumental to influencing the public image of an organization. A good strategy can help build rapport with customers, employees and the general public.

The goal would be for the organization to have name, recognition and good reputation in the community, (Nkwocha, 2016).

Public relations is therefore the collective social identity of an organization within a given society measured by the members of the society in terms of the organization's actions and inactions in relation to the cherished aspirations and expectations of the members of such society on what should be and the social realities of the environment.

Community Relations

An organization does not operate in a vacuum. The people that live within its geographical configuration are essential to its operation and indeed success. As a result, successful organizations continuously establish and maintain good corporate relations with its host community and other relevant stakeholders. Akpan (1983)

sees community relations as an offshoot of public relations practices that recognizes and focuses on the community as the social public interest or entity that is indispensable to continuous favourable relationship between it and an organization. Community Relations then acts as a guide in the ethical, social and moral behaviour of a corporation.

Community Relations Benefits

Corporate Community Relations efforts performed in the community and highlighted on corporate web pages benefit both the organization and its stakeholders. Altman (1998) believes the corporate citizenship paints many positive images and meaning that can benefit an organization. These include image of a corporation acting ethically, being socially responsible and proactively furthering the interests of the community and stakeholders. Fomburn, et al., (2000) suggest that a citizenship portfolio helps integrate companies into the social environment of local communities by developing bonds between the company, its employees and the local citizens. In addition, a citizenship portfolio helps a company build reputational capital, enhancing its ability to negotiate more attractive contracts with suppliers and government.

Reputational capital, often a by-product of Community Relations activities, is the market value of the company in excess of its liquidation value and its intellectual capital. It is the residual value of a company, such as its image and reputation (Fomburn, Gardberg & Bennett, 2000). Highlighting corporate citizenship efforts on web pages and actively working to better society can benefit corporation by increasing reputational capital and creating a more positive and socially responsible image of an organization.

Good organization-community relations breeds trust worthiness. An organization that is able to maintain positive community relations gains trust from the community. When trust is built, confidence level increases and the communication become more dialogic as both parties openly discuss issues that would have led to crisis. Mutual understanding that forestalls crisis is

another. When there is a positive relationship between the community and the organization, there is a call and reciprocation to issues, related ideas are dropped at the table and areas of divergence are dissected for greater performance.

Maintaining Positive Reputation/Perception

The contextualization of Public relations in this research connotes a reputation and perception perspective. Grunig, (2011) states that public relations is more dominated by relationship perspective rather than reputation perspective because reputations are largely products of management behavior and the quality of organization-public relationships. Consequently, sustaining and building relationships will improve on organisation's reputation. It is this that prompted the Chartered Institute of Public Relations (2010) to include reputation in its definition of public relations. It stated that public relations is about reputation — the result of what you do, what you say, and what others say about you. Public relations practice is the discipline which takes into cognizance and guides the reputation with the aim of gaining understanding and support as well as influence behaviours, opinions and perception. It is the planned and sustained effort to ensure appropriate reputation, perception and goodwill between the organizations and its publics. The publics can be shareholders, investors, vendors, customers and host community and so on.

To further buttress these points, Cornelissen, (2011) maintained that the inclusive aim of public relations is to establish and maintain favourable reputation with strategic public. This definition of public relations sees reputation as an end rather than a process. Most scholars in Public relations profession has been moved by this definition to argue that public relations as a discipline and profession is moving from 'mutual understanding' to a reputation and relationship perspective (L'Etang, 2004; Campbell et al., 2006).

Fombrun who established and edited 'Corporate Reputation Review' and initiated the reputation institute, defines reputation as "the sum of the

organizational images held by stakeholders and is based on a set of beliefs about an organization's ability and willingness to satisfy' the interest of various key stakeholders" (Fombrun, 1996, p. 43). Some scholars see reputation as asset (Value), assessment (judgment) or awareness (perceptions, knowledge and emotions). For example, Fombrun, (2001) uses the term 'economic asset', Wartrick, (2002) uses the phrase 'the aggregation of a single stakeholder's evaluation' and Ferguson, et al. (2009) uses 'perceptions'.

Reputation is therefore believed to be the outcome of the overall organization's activities (Hutton, et al, (2001). Similarly, Fombrun and Van Riel (1997, 2004) posit that reputations constitute subjective collective assessments the public do about the organization, and an intellectual picture drawn in the minds of publics about the organization, and an intellectual picture drawn in the minds of publics about the organization's past behaviour and related attributes (Grunig & Hung, 2002; Yang & Grunig, 2005). Other scholars define reputation as a collective representation of a socially shared impression (Bromley, 2002) that refers to people's opinion different stakeholders (Doorley & Garcia, 2011). Thus corporate reputation is an overall evaluation of corporate images that shows whether stakeholders see the business as positive or negative over a long time and it is founded on organization's ability and willingness to satisfy the interest of different key stakeholder.

There is debate as to whether organizational reputation can be truly managed (Hutton, 2001). Public relations scholars argue that reputation cannot be managed directly but can be managed through building and maintaining relationships (Grunig & Hung, 2002; Yang, 2007; Yang & Grunug, 2005). According to Fombrun (1996), quality relationships are vital precursors to acquire favourable, positive and durable reputations. As a result, managers need to invest heavily in building and maintaining good relationships with key publics. Similarly, Yang (2007) argues that a favourable organizational reputation is attained through quality organization-public relationships.

Van Woerkum and Van Lieshout (2007) maintain that a favourable reputation is a reputation that is positive, well developed and strong; and thus are durable and not easily changed. In addition, Dowling (2004) upholds that favourable reputation builds confidence and trust whereas poor reputation does not. Furthermore, a favourable reputation is helpful in crisis, when stakeholders are uncertain about what or whom to trust (Fombrun & Van Riel, 1997). On the other hand, a favourable reputation can, according to Roberts and Dowling (2002), induce rigidity, lack of willingness to change and reluctance to adapt.

Furthermore, Van Woerkum and Van Lieshout (2007) believe that reputation management is about monitoring, creating enough credits to overcome the crisis and handling the crisis in a communicatively adequate way. In addition, relationships with stakeholders enable organisations to influence stakeholder perceptions and feelings about the organization (Adeosun & Ganiyu, 2013). In this research, reputation or perception management is about the ways in which NDDC can build and maintain positive organization-community relationships through strategic communication to generate people's perceptions of trustworthiness and reliability based on past actions of an organization that describes its ability to satisfy the interest of various key stakeholders. Thus, increasingly, Scholars acknowledge reputation management as the driving force in public relations (Watson & Kitchen, 2010; Hutton et al., 2001).

Empirical Review

Ntuk, (2010), in his work on Community Relations of ALSCON Ltd, Ikot-Abasi submitted to the Department of Communication Arts, University of Uyo, did an Opinion Survey, which was to discourse the strategies used by ALSCON in implementing her community relations policies. The Objectives of the study were:

- i. To find out the communication relations policies and objectives of ALSCON
- ii. To examining how these policies and objectives are organised and implemented.

- iii. To ascertain the communication relations programme of ALSCON and other effectiveness in the community
- iv. To determine the communication relations strategies employed by ALSCON in the implementation of community relations goals.
- v. To examine the host community's reaction to the implementation of community relations programs of ALSCON
- vi. To determine the effectiveness or otherwise of ALSCON's community relations strategies in promoting harmonious relationship with Ikot-Abasi community.

The research revealed that the company adopted the listen, looks and learns approach with no development strategy. They responded to expressions of need by the community and from these expressions, the company selected projects based on the resources available to them. This shows a flaw in its community relations strategy since this approach continuously ensured that there was conflict between the company and the host communities before any need of the community was met. On how the objectives, policies and implement were organized, the study showed that ALSCON depended on the expression of interest by the community to implement programmes according to the resources allocated to them. As a result of the company's approach, 77% of respondents were not satisfied with its community relations strategies. This could be seen in the response to the effectiveness of ALSCON's community relations programmes in Ikot-Abasi Community. The ineffectiveness of its community relations strategies was also revealed in the answer to research question three in which 62.20% of respondents indicated that the company had poor human relations in Ikot-Abasi. Also in answering the question on the reaction of the community to the company's community relations programme implementations, 77% of respondents viewed the company as a bad neighbour but responses on whether ALSCON community relations' strategy had helped in creating harmonious relations with-

Ikot-Abasi Community, 66.7% of respondents said crisis had not erupted yet and the study concluded that this may not be a sign of satisfaction with the company but as a result of the peaceful nature of the people of Ikot-Abasi.

It is therefore recommended that effective community relations strategy was important in maintaining good relationship between an organization and the host community and, in some communities; a little effort was needed to achieve this. There was therefore, the need for the company to review her approach to avert any crisis in the future because creating a harmonious atmosphere for the company to thrive requires the effort of both ALSCON and the community.

While Ntuk (2010) study was on ALSCON, this study will carry out an appraisal of public relations practices of NDDC in Port Harcourt, Rivers state. This study goes the extra mile of checking the implementation of these practices unlike Ntuk (2010) that sort the reactions of the residents of Ikot-Abasi in Akwa Ibom state.

Offong, (2009) did a study on public perception of the image of the pioneer newspaper. The study which was submitted to the department of Community Arts, University of Uyo, also applied the opinion survey methodology.

The objectives were to:

- i. Determine the kind of opinion the consuming publics have about the pioneer newspaper.
- ii. Identify what affluences the consuming public in forming their 'Opinions'.
- iii. Evaluate the image profile of the Pioneer newspaper as against what was obtainable two or three years ago.
- iv. examine the transformational process which result in changes in the image of 'Pioneer' newspaper
- v. Determine the different image held by different publics.

From the study, it was gathered that Uyo residents rated the image of the 'Pioneer' newspaper average and this was informed by the newspaper's pro-government stand, which was

reflected in its attempts to serve government's interest rather than the interest of the general public. The study also revealed that there were different images held by the public about 'The Pioneer' newspaper. It also revealed that there were factors which led to the change in the perception of the paper. In response to the kind of opinion the consuming public had about the corporation, the study revealed 69% of respondents, considered the performance level of Akwa Ibom Newspaper corporation as average based on the perception that Pioneer Newspaper which is a publication of the corporation exists only to serve government purpose and a result, it is seen as the government propaganda tool. This formed the reason for the Newspaper's negative image among the readership as indicated by 49% respondents which showed that the pro-government stand was what influenced the consuming public in forming their opinion. Findings also revealed that recent change in aesthetic quality of the Newspaper and the introduction of modern printing technology made the difference in the change of public image of pioneer Newspaper pre-2007 and post 2007 which indicates that a change in an organizations attitude, approach and ways of doing things can affect its public image either positively or negatively.

Okon, (1997), in his work on "Corporate image and Universities: A study of the public perception of University of Uyo by Uyo Resident", submitted to the department of communication arts, university of Uyo. Opinion survey was used in the study of assess the public perception of the corporate image of the University of Uyo. The Objectives were to:

- i. Ascertain the level of understanding between the University and Uyo residents in terms of their community relations effort.
- ii. Determine whether Uyo residents see the University as a place for academic excellence or a place for prostitution, secret cult activities, examination malpractices, poor staff attitude to work, etc.

- iii. Determine what influences Uyo residents in forming their opinions about the University.
- iv. Find out if the University authority through its various administrative policies has been able to motivate and control both its staff and students, in achieving its set objectives.
- v. Determine the effective method the University has employed in bringing to light its objectives to the public.

Responding to the question on the level of understanding between the University and Uyo residents in terms of their community relations efforts, 66% of the respondents admitted that they knew a lot about the activities of the Universities which included what they read, listened and watched on the mass media about the institution. The finding revealed that the University community relations efforts to its immediate surrounding were unimpressive and not encouraging, and as a result; the university had not been able to create much impact with its programmes. 74% of the respondents saw the University as a place for prostitution, secret cult activities, examination malpractices and other social vices.

This revealed that the public perception of University of Uyo was very poor, with the corporate image of the institution falling below the standard of a University. 62% of the respondents held that despite being seen as a place of prostitution, secret cult activities, examination malpractices and other social vices, most students were seen excelling in their educational endeavours, which project the University as having a good reputation for learning and imparting knowledge. 84% said that the University had not been able to effectively create rules and regulations to reduce or curb the vices smearing the image of the institution. The findings above depict the weakness and inability of the University authority to steer the institution in the right direction. 90% of the respondents suggested that university should establish a more functional public relations department. This proved how ineffective the institution's Public Relations Department had been, having not been taking

time to embark on any form of community relations effort, which is a way of projecting a favourable public image of an establishment. The above study highlights issues on the public perception of University of Uyo's corporate image, which bears relevance to the subject matter and objectives of this research work. The difference is that; the former study examined the perception of only students while the present study looked at a broader category of the society; the community which include both students and non-students.

Mohammed, (2014) in separate study examined organization-public relationships practices in University setting using the survey method of research. The study population was all registered University Utara Malaysia (UUM) students out of which a sample of two hundred students was selected as sample for the study. Using the responses from the questionnaire, the study found that effective public relations practices makes organizations more effective and views relationship management in an even more potent role to meet corporate value enhancing objectives. In doing that the organizations need/must re-examine their OPR practices from public perceptions about how it reflect its relationships management quality and become a competitive advantage in itself. The difference here is that the previous study treated student vs. management relationship which is internal relationship while the present study treats the relationship between an organization and its external public (particularly the host community).

It is based on the findings of the above empirical works that this study probed the community relations efforts of the NDDC in Oromerezimbu community of Rivers State with a view to seeking ways to improve the business environment of the commission.

Research Methodology

The research design adopted for this study was the survey method. Survey research method focused on the representative sample derived from the entire population of the study. It was considered appropriate considering the nature of

the study which entails gathering information from a large population. Interview was used to elicit responses from critical persons especially management staff of the commission to gain more insights to data that cannot be gathered using the questionnaire. To this end, the main source of data collection was opinion survey using the questionnaire and interview as research instruments. The population of this study comprised 8 management staff of the Corporate Affairs unit of NDDC and respondents from Oromerezimbu community of Rivers State numbering about 2000 (Source, the Chairman, Oromerezimbu Community Development Committee (CDC), Comrade Lucky Wonodi). The NDDC staffs chosen were interviewed while questionnaire sets were distributed to community members to ascertain their views on the

community relations practices of NDDC. This constituted the population for the study. The sample size for the study was 400 residents from Oromerezimbu and 2 staff (one male and a female) members of NDDC making a total of 402 respondents. The purposive sampling technique was used to select the respondent for the interview while the systematic random sampling technique was used to get data from the residents of Oromerezimbu community of Rivers State.

Data collected in the course of this study are presented and analyzed in tables with frequencies calculated using simple percentage. The interview questions were analyzed and discussed in paraphrase using Explanation Building Technique by Yeri (1984) based on the answers to the questions raised.

Data Presentation/Analysis

Below are the results gotten from the questionnaire distributed and retrieved

Table 1: NDDC Relates Well with Oromerezimbu People

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	283	70.7
No	117	29.3
Total	400	100

The above result shows that despite the fact that NDDC relate with Oromerezimbu community, some residents can barely feel the impact of the relationship as the result shows almost an equal

response in both directions. 70.7% of the respondents confirmed the presence of a functional relationship.

Table 2: Presence of NDDC projects in Oromerezimbu

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	269	67.3
No	131	32.7
Total	400	100

The table above shows that there are NDDC projects in Oromerezimbu with 67.3% of response in the affirmative with few respondents

denying having knowledge of any NDDC project in the community.

Table 3: Projects by NDDC in Oromerezimbu

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Road Construction	120	30

Water Project	35	8.8
Electricity Project	15	3.7
Education	50	12.5
Medical Care	80	20
Employment	24	6
All of the above	76	19
None of the above	0	0
Total	400	100

Table 3 above indicates that road construction is the highest project carried out by NDDC in Oromerezimbu community with a 30% attestation

rate. However, the table shows that NDDC also carry out other projects such as water supply, medical care, employment, education, etc.

Table 4: Presence of Major Crisis between NDDC and Oromerezimbu

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	310	77.5
No	80	20
Can't Tell	10	2.5
Total	400	100

The table above indicates that NDDC has had some major confrontations with Oromerezimbu

community with 77.5% of respondents attesting to that.

Table 5: Causes of Crisis

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Negligence	81	20.3
Location of Project	173	43.2
Inadequate Consultation	43	10.8
All of the above	95	23.7
None of the above	8	2
Others	0	0
Total	400	100

Although a number of respondents affirmed that all the listed causes were responsible for the crisis that occurred between Oromerezimbu community and NDDC, 43.2% of respondents said

it was largely due to the location of projects in the community which might not have favoured a segment of the community.

Table 6: NDDC is Effective in Oromerezimbu Community

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	185	46.2
No	215	53.8
Total	400	100

Majority of the respondents on table 6 affirmed that the relationship between Oromerezimbu and NDDC is not as effective as it should be. The

difference was however not much between those that affirmed and those who disagreed about the effectiveness of the relationship.

Table 7: NDDC's Involvement of Community members During Projects

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	254	63.5
No	142	35.5
Can't Tell	4	1
Total	400	100

The result from table 7 above shows that 63.5% of respondents affirmed that community members

were usually involved in NDDC projects within the community.

Table 8: NDDC has helped in Developing Oromerezimbu

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	206	51.5
No	191	47.7
Can't Tell	3	0.8
Total	400	100

Table 8 shows that majority of the respondents agreed that NDDC has helped in the development of Oromerezimbu community.

Table 9: Rating of NDDC in Oromerezimbu

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Excellent	167	41.7
Very Good	4	1
Good	17	4.3
Fair	6	1.5
Poor	206	51.5
Total	400	100

From the table, 51.5% of the respondents rated the presence of NDDC in Oromerezimbu as poor. This implies that a good number of

respondents have not felt the impact of NDDC's presence in the community.

Table 10: Opinion on NDDC Presence

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Friendly	170	42.5
Unfriendly	205	51.3
Neutral	25	6.2
Total	400	100

It can be said from the above table that the residents of Oromerezimbu community see the

activities and presence of NDDC as unfriendly with 51.3% of respondents attesting to this.

Table 11: Areas of Dissatisfaction

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Employment	211	52.8
Road Construction	60	15
Pipe-borne Water	43	10.7
Electricity	17	4.3
Scholarship	28	7
Medical Care	30	7.5
All of the above	11	2.7
None of the above	0	0
Total	400	100

Respondents were majorly dissatisfied with the employment rate of NDDC for community members with 52.8% response rate.

Analysis of Interview Data

This section contained Five (5) open-ended questions which were prepared for the Corporate communication staff in the Corporate Affairs Units of NDDC.

The Director, Community and Rural Development Dr Solomon, O. Ita who was interviewed on behalf of the head, Corporate Affairs Unit Dr. Obitoye Abosede and other staff responsible for relating with communities gave the following responses after confirming that NDDC have a community relations department.

Question 1: Do you have community relations practices/programme in Oromerezimbu Community- Your host community?

Answer: NDDC is not just an organization established by the law of the Federation of Nigeria to tackle the problems arising from oil exploration in Niger Delta but also it is a corporate citizen who believes in establishing and maintaining good and mutually beneficial relationship with their host community. Since NDDC's Corporate Headquarters is in Oromerezimbu community of Rivers State, there are practices and programmes put in place to enable a hostility free work environment.

Question 2: What are these programmes?

Answer: The commission runs an open door policy where various communities in the state

approach the commission with their needs. Also, because of NDDC's involvement in the communities, some of these needs are known by the commission and it seeks to meet these needs which include scholarship, medical care, building of schools, construction of roads and Jetties, provision of pipe born water, and sponsorship of cultural/traditional festivals. Also, a quota of her employment in the corporate headquarters of the commission is reserved for the indigenes of the various communities in the state. In the awards of contracts also, the indigenes of the state especially those from the host community are given consideration above others especially when such project fall within the commission's corporate social responsibility/community Relations programme.

Question 3: How do you implement them?

Answer: These projects are rotated among the different local government areas in the State. The projects are selected based on community needs and request after which there is a physical extermination to know if it is feasible. The next stage involves the consideration of the budget and fund available for Community Relation projects. If all the requirements are met the project is then executed.

Question 4: Do you consult your host community before embarking on any project in their community?

Answer: The community is usually consulted through town hall meetings. There is also the stakeholder's forum where needs of the host community and other communities in the state

are discussed. After these discussions, submissions are made to the commission; some projects are selected for execution as part of the community Relations programmes while the large part falls under the commission's mandate.

Question 5: Are they part of your policy or are the projects implemented at random?

Answer: There are well laid down plans for the commission relations practice which drives its programmes in Rivers State. This is done not just to maintain a mutual relationship with the host but also to set standard for multinational oil companies operating in the state with whom the commission works with in developing the Niger Delta Region.

Question 6: Do you think your host is satisfied with your community relations practices?

Answer: There may still be areas of dissatisfaction in the host community and among other communities in Rivers State. This is as a result of the Unique nature of the commission's Community Relations programme in the state which is not limited to a particular community but spread among the 23 local government area of the State. A community is chosen from each local government area as a beneficiary of this programme. When such a programme is going on in a particular community, others will be agitating for theirs and since the commission can only attend to one community at a time, it is seen as negligence by others. There is also the dissatisfaction that comes from the quality of project done in the community but that is as a result of NDDC's budget, the commission cannot afford to do capital intensive projects in all the communities. NDDC tries as much as possible to do such projects at least one in every local government area under the community relations programme. The delays in waiting, is the major sources of dissatisfaction and not that the commission is doing nothing.

Question 7: What do you intend to achieve with your community relations programmes/practices?

Answer: Our objective among others is to enhance the standard of living and curb youth restiveness among the youths. But most importantly, is to have a good relationship with the

people so that the commission can go about her business without hindrance.

Question 8: What do you consider as hindrance to your community relations practices programmes?

Answer: Finance is a major hindrance. This is as a result of failure of all the financiers of the commission as stated in Part V of Niger Delta Development Act 2000 No. 6 as enacted by the National Assembly of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. Another challenge is that of deciding which project deserves urgent attention at a given time because there are so many of such projects. This decision causes trouble among the communities and slows down the rate at which projects are completed. There is also the difficulty in getting the people to differentiate the commission's community relations programmes from its core mandate.

Question 9: How do you intend to overcome them?

Answer: The commission is putting measures in place to address these issues. The management he said intend among others to organize more town hall meetings to address the problem of determining which project is of greater importance at a given time. The commission is also allowing greater participation by community members and also greater representation for the local government areas at the state level. On the issue of differentiating between a Community Relations Programmes and NDDC's core mandate, the commission has embarked on enlightenment programme to sensitize people of any Community Relations project before and after their implementation. Funding he says, still remains a major challenge but maintain that the commission is doing the best it can.

Question 10: How would you rate your organizations community Relations practice/programmes in your host Communities?

Answer: The commission is not perfect but it is getting better by the day.

Discussion of Findings

The findings from this study were presented in tables 1-11 and in the scheduled interview. The analysis here is to answer the research questions asked using the responses from the instrument.

Thus, the research sought to answer the following questions.

Research Question 1

What are some of the Community Relations practices of NDDC in the development of Oromerezimbu?

Findings from the interview revealed that NDDC's community relations practices are based on the proactive and reactive approach in which different communities in Rivers State approach the commission with their needs. There is also the town hall meetings during which needs are discussed between the communities and the commission and agreements are reached based on the importance or urgency of the needs.

The proactive approach stems from the fact that NDDC by virtue of her mandate, which is to develop the Niger Delta region among which Oromerezimbu community one is aware of the needs of the various communities in the state and its host community. It therefore selects needs across the local government areas of the state and carries out projects in line with the needs. This is contrary to the position of Etuk (2010), which state that applying only the reactive approach is not enough in maintaining a mutual relationship between an organization and its host communities. Both the proactive and reactive approaches are required but this does not necessarily translate to good community relations practice as efforts must be made to regularly review these approaches for a hostile-free business environment.

Responses from the questionnaire shows that NDDC carry out programmes such as road construction, water projects, electricity, education oriented projects, medical care and employment of community members as part of its community relations practices. 67.3% of respondents from table 2 confirmed that the presence of NDDC is being felt in Oromerezimbu with road construction being the major project carried out by NDDC in the community.

Research Question 2

To what extent has NDDC's community relations practices enhanced development in Oromerezimbu community?

In responding to the interview question, Dr Ita said NDDC reserve a quota of her employment in their corporate headquarters for indigenes of the community alongside other developmental programmes carried out by the commission. These to a large extent enhance the development of the community. Corroborating this point are the results on table 7 which shows that 254 (63.5%) respondents confirming that community members are usually involved in NDDC's projects especially those carried out within the community. Also, the results on table 8 show a 51.5% affirmation that NDDC has helped in the development of Oromerezimbu community.

Research Question 3: How do residents of Oromerezimbu Community Perceive NDDC's Community Relations Practices?

People believe mostly in what they see hence their perception is driven by physical work rather than what is said (except in cases where people can't think for themselves). Haven said that, in answering research question 3 the results on table 1 and 9 will be used. The results on table 1 show that 70.7% of respondents perceive the relationship between NDDC and Oromerezimbu as good, indicating that the commission relates well with the community. On the other hand, table 9 results show an average response in the rating of NDDC's community relations programmes with 47% rating it good, 1.5% rating it fair while 51.5% rating it poor. This difference, although not big, is important because it shows that NDDC need to do more to improve on its community relations practices in Oromerezimbu. Okon (1997) reveal a link between an organizations community relations practice and its perception within the community. It is for this reason that Ntuk (2010) recommends that priority be accorded public interest which in this case is the interest of Oromerezimbu community.

Research Question 4: What are the Challenges Confronting NDDC and its Host Communities in River State?

NDDC's community relations practices in Rivers state is effective but have some challenges. This is so because NDDC have been able to reach out to the communities through different programmes although the issue of inconsistency in project implementation can still be noticed. Results on table 11 show that community members are satisfied in some areas of NDDC projects with 52.8% of response indicating dissatisfaction in employment, 15% dissatisfied with road construction, 10.7% dissatisfied with pipe-borne water provision, 4.3% dissatisfied with electricity, 7% dissatisfied with scholarship programmes, 7.5% dissatisfied with medical care while 2.7% was dissatisfied with all the above listed programmes by NDDC. The commission can however not meet all these needs to its logical end as it is only an arm of the federal government with limited funding but should ensure that allocated funds are planned in line with the people's needs. Corroborating this, Okon (1997) posits that although an organization may not be able to meet all the needs of its host communities, an effective and properly planned community relations programme should be directed towards the basic needs of the people. Failure to do this can lead to conflict.

The interview further reveals that there are challenges that NDDC is yet to overcome in its quest to build a good support with her host. The ineffectiveness of NDDC's community relations practices could also be seen in the fact that there has been crisis between the commission and her host as shown in Table 4 in which 310 (77.5%) of respondents were aware of crisis between NDDC and Oromerezimbu community which is an indication of hostility towards NDDC. Table 5 reveals the major causes of this crisis to be location of the project in the community by NDDC and negligence.

The study found the following.

- i. The perception of Oromerezimbu residents about NDDC's community

relations practice in Rivers State is unsatisfactory. The result on table 4.10 indicates that the relationship is unfriendly with 51.3% of respondents attesting to that.

- ii. Community relations practices of NDDC are based on the proactive and reactive approaches. This finding is based on the response from the interview with the key management staff. Who said that on the proactive approach, NDDC by virtue of her involvement in the Niger Delta is aware of the needs of its host community in Rivers State and that project are therefore selected and executed from the commission's perceived needs of the community. On the reactive approach, the commission responds to needs that arise in the community in form of medical care, bad road etc.
- iii. NDDC has contributed to the development of Oromerezimbu community in Rivers State through road construction, employment, medical care, pipe-borne water provision, etc.

Conclusion

NDDC's community relations practices in its host community Oromerezimbu community of Rivers State are based on the proactive and reactive approach in which each party is involved in identifying the needs of the various communities in Rivers State and other NDDC host communities among whom the commission's community relations programme are spread. Projects are selected from these communities and executed under the community relations programmes of the commission. As a result of poor funding of community relations programmes, the NDDC's community relations practice has not been effective in addressing all the needs of the host communities and this has negatively affected the commission's perception in the community. Also NDDC's community relations programmes are misconstrued to be part of its mandate in the Niger Delta which reveals a flaw in information sharing between the commissioner and her host. The method employed by NDDC in community relations

project implementation in the state has also resulted to various degrees of conflict not just between the commission and her host but also among the beneficiaries.

Recommendations

Base on the findings from this study, the following recommendations are put forward for consideration.

- i. In order to ascertain problems of the people and determine their needs and expectations, town hall meetings and stakeholders forum should have more representation of the people and should be carried out at the grassroots level.
- ii. For NDDC to effectively bridge the gap in communication which exists between the commission and the host, an enlightenment campaign should be organized periodically to keep the people informed of its activities. This enlightenment campaign should be designed in a way that the commission's communities Relations programme are clearly distinguished from its core mandate.
- iii. More funds should be allocated and properly used for community relations programmes since it serves as a tool for creating a hostile – free environment for the commission to operate.
- iv. NDDC's community relations programmes, especially the capacity intensive projects, should be evenly distributed among the various communities in the state to avoid conflict.

Suggestion for Further Studies

Due to the limitation of scope in this study, it is suggested that more research should be done using other communities in the Niger Delta since the commission's mandate covers the entire Niger Delta region. Also, it is suggested that the funding of the NDDC should be studied to ascertain the effectiveness of financial allocation to the commission in solving the problems in the Niger Delta.

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