

Mobilization Strategies for Effective Community Relations between Bitumen Companies and Stakeholders in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT This paper examines the mobilization strategies for effective community relations among mineral producing companies and the stakeholders in their areas of operation especially in the South-Western Geopolitical Zone of Nigeria. The subject comprised 200 participants who were randomly selected and were tested using t-test statistical analysis at 0.05 alpha test. The result of the study showed that no significance difference existed between informal and formal communication strategies as means of reaching the largest stakeholders. ($t\text{-cal} = 7547.452$; $Df = 0.05$), there is also no significant difference between the perception of both the youths and adults on the strategies of mobilizing the inhabitants of bitumen producing communities. ($t\text{-cal} = 5837.561$; $Df = 0.05$), while the male and female respondents agreed that infrastructural development, socio-political and economic consideration, and environmental management were indicators for effective community relations in the zone. ($t\text{-cal} = 7337.405$; $Df = 0.05$). It was therefore recommended that bitumen company's corporate social responsibility policy should be put in place to complement government efforts at developing the areas for harmonious working relations.

INTRODUCTION

Tar sand or bituminous sands have been known to occur in Nigeria since the beginning of the 20th century. It ranks among the five largest deposits in the World. The bitumen belt stretches across the four coastal states of Edo, Ondo, Ogun and Lagos.

Experts have indicated that bitumen with its industrial base have the capacity to yield income higher than what is currently being realized from the petroleum industry. The consequent development of the bitumen sectors can, through export earnings, fetch Nigeria over six times the total revenue presently accruing from petroleum development (Nwosu 2000).

Statement of the Problem

The large deposit of bitumen in Nigeria properly positioned would make an impact on the global economy. Its attendant effects on the local economy cannot be over-emphasised. These informed the long-standing clamour for the exploration of the large bitumen in Nigeria. Counter balancing this is a growing marginalization of some critical issues that will impact on the peaceful operation of the bitumen industry, especially the aspect of effective community relations.

The estimate probable reserve of bitumen and heavy oil in the Nigeria bitumen belt of 120 x 4.3 km is put at 10.16 billion barrels. Unfortunately, Nigeria spends seventy two billion naira (N72 billion) annually on importation of bitumen for road construction.

Meanwhile, the question of the principle of true federalism as it relates to the ecological consequences of bitumen exploitation, the emergent fear of alienation of the people in the bitumen belt is the whole argument of fiscal federalism and resources control, and the sustainable development of the bitumen belt stand to be addressed. This is further aggravated by lack of understanding and misconceptions on the part of the various stakeholders in bitumen development project, bearing in mind the fact that, the bitumen deposits are somehow associated with crude petroleum fields. Hence the fear of irrationalities, paradoxes, contradictions, conflicts and crises that have virtually paralysed the crude oil sub-sector in Nigeria (Osuntokun 2000).

Events in the Niger-Delta crude oil belt have shown that ineffective mobilization strategies between all stakeholders viz. government (Federal, state and local), host communities, the multinational companies and opinion moulders is the major factor that engender disharmony among them. The bitumen belt may not be an exception,

except the factors that cause dissatisfaction are model so as to lead to improved community relations among the stakeholders.

It is against the forgoing that this study is designed to provide answers to the following research questions

1. What are the systems of relations that can foster the establishment and sustenance of mutual understanding among all the stakeholders of bitumen industry?
2. What are the integrated environmental management plans, that can be employed during exploration and exploitation of bitumen, that would not wreak ecological problems on the social life of inhabitants of the bitumen belt in Nigeria.
3. What are the factors that can enhance the socio-economic development of the communities to operate and function progressively?
4. What are the sustainable infrastructural development programmes that can facilitate peaceful operation of the bitumen industry?
5. What are the factors that can engender the full mobilization and popular participation of inhabitant of the communities in the full expansion of the bitumen industry?

Objectives of the Study

The general objective is aimed at identifying mobilization strategies that will enhance effective community relations between bitumen companies and stakeholders in Nigeria for socio-economic development. However the specific objectives include among other things to:

Specific Objectives

1. Identify the forms of communication systems that can foster the establishment and sustenance of mutual understanding among all the stakeholders of bitumen industry in Nigeria;
2. Identify the environmental planning and management system and other mitigational measures that can be introduced to cushion the effects of exploitation of bitumen among the host communities.
3. Find out the agents of mobilization that can help in sustaining good relations among the stakeholders in the bitumen producing belt.
4. Ascertain the psycho-socio predictors of communities participation in bitumen development projects.

Hypotheses

1. There is no significant difference between communication systems adopted and effective community relations among bitumen companies and stakeholders.
2. There is no significant difference between the perception of adults and youths on mobilization of inhabitants of bitumen belt.
3. There will be no significant difference between respondents perception of infrastructural development, socio-political economic consideration and environmental management as mobilization strategy for effective community relations.

Literature Review

The successful implementation and sustenance of any community development project require the integration of elements such as citizen participation, mobilization and community leaders (Oduaran 1994). As a matter of fact, it has been argued that development programmes fail because people have not been effectively engaged in needs and resource assessment as well as in project implementation (United Nations 1978; Ogolo 1996; Etteng 1998). Most development projects according to Oduaran (1994) is centred around people, and this is why one of the most persistent concerns of development scholars is about ways people may be mobilized for given programmes, or the resolution of problems that impinge on development.

Mobilization patterns in traditional Nigerian communities that pre-dated the modern ones was guided by some factors, among which are community structure, ethno-linguistic factor, issue specific and leadership (Oduaran 1994). The extent to which grassroots programmes are supported by community members nowadays depends in the first place on community structure. Community structure, according to Ross (1970) quoted by (Oduaran 1994) refers to the internal social organization of communities and the organized relationships among members of the community. This structure is often used interchangeably in researches, noted (Bridgehead and Sofranko 1975 cited by Oduaran 1994), with community attributes, composition, characteristics, properties and at times community resources. Ignoring these essentials leads to either non-achievement or under-achievement or even immo-

bilization in grassroots programmes. For mobilization to be successful certain conditions have to be established. Oduaran (1994) listed three factors. First, the minimum level of socio-economic satisfaction for example food, employment, understanding, basic education and so on must be adequately provided. Secondly, a guarantee of government support where the community's efforts are inadequate or are even not forthcoming, and thirdly, the legitimization of the plan for community improvement all have to be secured. Apart from this, working more intensively through such institutions as the traditional and religious leaders, clubs and societies, co-operatives, labour unions, student bodies among others might be worth trying out.

Communication and Community Relations

Apart from the use of community structure, the modern community developer has to rely on the blending of both the traditional and the modern media of communication for purposes of mobilization (Oduaran 1994). Osuala (1996) has done an elaborate description of these media. She opined that mass mobilization is bound to be more effective if it adopts traditional method to which the masses are used to, with which they are familiar and are therefore culturally relevant. The role of communication in enhancing community relations cannot be over-emphasised. Vital (1979) cited by (Ogolo 1996) reported that if development programme must succeed, the complexity and intricacy of the programme must be conveyed to the people. Effective communication is an essential tool for the establishment and maintenance of good social and working relationship in the community (Braithwaite 1988) and in the words of Moemeka (1990) the purpose of communication may not just be the mere sake of information exchange, but to educate with a view to raising the aspirations of the people in the right direction, generating among them the willingness to improve on their conditions, motivating them for group action and guiding and directing their activities to successful ends. The effectiveness of the communication process depends on the performance and nature of the various components of the communication process. The nature of the message is important in this wise, yet the acceptance of the message by the audience depends on its economic, social and cultural compatibility with them (Olowu

1987). To enhance effective communication the channel or medium being used must be suitable to the receivers. It should be appropriate for the kind of message being passed and more importantly incorporate the traditional method of communication of the receivers (Okuma 1990). Moemeka (1990) opined that any communication message which completely ignores the values that underline the context in which the people communicate cannot produce the attitude and behaviour changes necessary for community development. Due to the socio-economic deficiencies of the rural dwellers, the multi-media approach of communication is most suitable. Apart from the suitability of the various elements, the situation of the economy has its own effect on the communication process, in the same vein the receivers must have the where withal and the necessary inputs for them to comply with the directives of the communication exercise (Ajana 2001).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Sample Size and Sampling Procedure

The survey research design was adopted for the study. The sample for the investigations were two hundred community leaders. In drawing the sample, the bitumen belt was divided into four zones among the number of states that constituted the belt. The random sampling technique was used to select the following numbers of community leaders and opinion moulders from each state. Ondo state being the state with the largest deposits one hundred (100), Ogun state forty (40), Edo state thirty (30) and Lagos state thirty (30). They were served with a validated structured questionnaire.

Data was collected using a structured questionnaire which was drawn on a 4 point rating scale of, strongly agree (SA), agree (A), Disagree (D) and Strongly disagree (SD).

The questionnaire was divided into two parts. Part one covered the demographic data of the respondents, while the part two was made up five sections directed towards eliciting the respondents perceptions about the variables that will enhance community relations in the bitumen belt. The variables are communication system, environmental planning and management systems, political and socio-economic framework, sustainable infrastructural development and mobilization of inhabitants.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In analyzing the data the t-test statistical tool was used.

Hypothesis 1

t-test analysis on difference between communication systems adopted and effective community relation among bitumen companies and stakeholders.

The table 1 shows that there is no significant difference between informal communication and formal communication system as a means of reaching the target audiences.

The result above is in line with the opinion of scholars that combination of different channels of communication be used to impact ideas and information (Borenave 1977). Okuma (1995) also suggested that, 'emphasis has to be placed on traditional forms of communication through interpersonal channels, which should then be complemented with appropriate technological media. In another study, Nwachukwu (1997) noted that communication planners have come to acknowledge that a marriage of the different communication channels; the mass media and non-mass media are most effective for information dissemination. Osuala (1995) thus stressed that, mass media create knowledge and awareness while interpersonal channels influence and persuade the participants in the actual adoption of new

ideas and practices. Experience from the Niger-Delta petroleum enclave shows that the reliance on the mass media in sending messages to the inhabitants has been counterproductive and has not been achieving results in enhancing community relations among stakeholders. As such, for effective community relations between bitumen companies and stakeholders in Nigeria, there is need to adopt the multimedia and multi-strategic approaches.

Hypothesis II

T-test analysis on difference between the perception of adults and youths on mobilization of inhabitants of bitumen belt.

The table 2 reveals that there is no significant difference between the perception of adults and youths on mobilization of inhabitants of the bitumen belt.

The unprecedented and traumatic socio-economic depression in Nigeria have startling effects on the people, youths and adults alike.

According to Ajala (1993), this has thrown the population especially the youths into a state of psychological and emotional instability. The adults could to some extent endure this condition but the youths often react to it in manner most bizarre, unconstructive, violent and destructive.

Oduaran (1994) noted that, accordingly the minimum level of socio-economic satisfaction, for example provision of food, employment, basic

Table 1: Difference between communication systems adopted and effective community relations

Variables	N	X	SD	DF	T. cal	Significance	P
Formal communication system	200	6.67	1.16	1.98	- 754	. 452	(N.S)
Informal communication system	200	26.07	2.82				

(P at 0.05; 452>0.05).

Table 2: Difference between the perception of adults and youths on mobilization of inhabitants of Bitumen Belt

Variables	N	X	SD	DF	T. cal	Significance	P
Respondents below 40 yrs	128	36.08	3.41	154.106	- 583	. 561	(N.S)
Respondents 40 yrs and above	72	36.36	3.23				

(P at 0.05; 561 > 0.05)

Table 3: Difference between male and female respondents' perception on infrastructural development, socio-political, economic consideration and environmental management

Variables	N	X	SD	DF	T. cal	Significance	P
Male	140	32.63	3.12	104.727	. 733	. 465	(N.S)
Female	60	33.00	3.35				

(P at 0.05; 465 > 0.05)

education etc are guarantee of government support in the development of the community. However Ajana (2001), stated that both government and companies must have contingency plans for the development of the communities both in rural and urban areas, such action or programme must be determined by the people, in other word, it should be participatory and the action determined by the people (Adeniji 1998). Effort at developing any mineral bearing community should take into consideration the needs of different segment of the society so that such efforts could be all encompassing. If developmental efforts are one sided, the marginalized group may constitute nuisance and sabotage the efforts of the providing agencies, as is the case in the Niger-Delta petroleum enclave in Nigeria.

t-test analysis on difference between male and female respondents, perception on infrastructural development, socio-political, economic consideration and environmental management as mobilization strategies for effective community relations.

The table 3 reveals that there is no significant difference between male and female respondent's perception on infrastructural development, socio-political, economic consideration and environmental management as mobilization strategies for effective community relations.

This results confirms the position of scholars on factors that facilitates mobilization for example Adewumi (2000) stressed the need for the provision of infrastructure as a pre-requisite for industrial development of bitumen and its derivatives. In another study, Ajana (2001) established that development should involve all; the public sector and private sectors alike, and that, in the face of apparent failure on the part of the government, the private sector should come in forcefully. As intervention and centralization had been identified as a bane to development in Nigeria and Africa; Adebayo (2000) In his opinion, centralization has manifested itself in the administration of the allocation, distribution and utilization of human, financial and natural resources, and that state control of natural resources has retarded socio-economic development. The impact of environmental management is highlighted by Osuntokun (1998) who advises that we should always be conscious of our environmental integrity and that governments, and non-governmental organizations (NGO's) should work together for a safe and clean environment so that future

generations can inherit a tolerably and unblemished environment. In the same vein, it is warned, that environmental pollution does not only affect the physical environment, but also has deleterious effect on socio-political life of the people Ajana (2001). He also believed that, the sustainability of the environment will determine the communities sustainability of growth and development. Development in mineral bearing communities to be sustainable must not be gender biased. Given the patriarchal nature of Nigerian society, there may be the tendency to come up with policies that may not consider the female segment of the inhabitants, not minding the negative impacts of mining activities on the female folk. Policies relating to bitumen exploration therefore must take into consideration the needs of both male and female inhabitants of the bitumen region.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A "holistic model of communication is recommended. It should incorporate bottom-up approach type of communication in which two way-vertical and horizontal lines are ensured. It should also foster the merging of the modern and traditional system of communication that should produce something more appropriate, that suits the political, socio-economic and technical capabilities of the local people. It should also employ the use of multi-strategy and multi-channel approaches.

The bitumen companies should establish radio and television stations that have the capacity to cover the bitumen belt to facilitate free flow of information. The bitumen companies should engage specialists who will undertake serious social surveys of its respective host community to develop "perception modification therapeutic system", with a view to ascertaining the level of the community's appreciation, expectation and awareness.

The companies corporate social responsibility policy should be formulated in consultation with the government at various levels so that; it will complement government's efforts in providing social infrastructure.

An effective and potent environmental management policy must be evolved to take care of environmental impact of bitumen exploration and exploitation.

There is the need to review the modus ope-

randi of federalism in the country to accommodate the true principle of federation and decentralization of authority in the federal government's establishment of bitumen belt development commission.

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