

Natural Resource Conflict: An Appraisal of Rumuekpe Oil and Gas Conflict

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the oil and gas conflict in the Rumuekpe community in Emohua Local Government Area, Rivers State. The objective was to interrogate the relationship between oil and gas and conflict and its impact on Rumuekpe community. Frustration and Aggression theory and Resource Curse thesis were used as the theoretical frameworks. Methodologically, the study relied on qualitative data obtained from Key Informant Interviews (KIIs), and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and supplemented the information by secondary data. The study found that the destruction of lives and property was a major consequence of natural resource conflict in Rumuekpe. The study also found that the conflict in Rumuekpe community was caused by the failure of oil companies and the government to respond to the developmental needs of the people. It also found that the divide-and-rule tactics of oil companies were what fuelled conflict in the community. The study concluded that oil-bearing communities will continue to lack meaningful development, provided oil companies continue their divide-and-rule tactics. It therefore recommended the strict enforcement and implementation of the Host Community Development Trust (HCDT) under the new Petroleum Industry Act (PIA) between oil companies and communities as this will translate into sustainable development. It also recommended that community members should use dialogue in the resolution of disputes rather than resorting to violence.

KEYWORDS: *Oil & Gas, Exploitation, Rumuekpe Community and Conflict*

Introduction

Man, in a socio-physical environment, lives in a continuous process of dependence and interdependence, which often produces contradictions and conflicts. Conflict, which is an active disagreement between people with opposing opinions or principles, is inevitable in human society. It is present when two or more parties perceive that their interests are incompatible, express hostile attitudes, or pursue their interests through actions that damage

the other parties. These parties may be individuals, small or large groups, and countries (Oтите, 2001).

Evidence has shown that conflict over natural resources is the most pronounced in developing countries, especially in Nigeria. It has been shown that the causes and driving forces behind natural resource conflicts are diverse, complex and often interlinked, including global economic growth, exploding consumption, poor governance, poverty, and unequal access to resources and power. The different interpretations of nature-culture and the role of humans in the ecological system are often at the centre of the conflict. Natural resource conflicts range from armed conflicts to conflicts of interest between stakeholders. Conflict is the motor of transformation and is either positive or negative. It can be creatively transformed to ensure equity, progress and harmony; or destructively transformed to engender acute insecurity (Chigbo, 2011).

Nigeria has earned a reputation in resource conflicts, ranging from the series of hostilities in the oil-rich Niger Delta Region to frequent violent clashes between farmers and herders over natural resources such as land, forest and fodder in the Northern part of the country (Maiangwa & Ahmadu, 2017). These natural resource-induced conflicts, in no small measure, threaten the development of the Nigerian State.

The Niger Delta region is one of the areas where resource conflict has been a recurrent phenomenon. The quest to determine, manage and control resources, its natural resource crude oil has been a source of great controversy and conflict. Ibiba (2016) oil-related violence in the Niger Delta began in the 1970s as community protests against Transnational Oil Companies (TOCs). The agitations were initially peaceful, but became violent in the early 1990s, as clashes erupted between protesting communities and security forces, particularly the anti-riot police (the mobile police unit of the Nigerian police force) and soldiers.

In Rivers State, which is one of the oil-producing States in the Niger Delta region, certain oil-producing communities have been involved in resource conflict. An instance is Rumuekpe community, in Emohua Local Government Area. This informed the reason why the Rumuekpe community was chosen in this study. The community is rich in oil and gas which attracted oil companies to the area. Rumuekpe is made up of eight smaller communities namely; Omegwa, Ovelle–Oduoha, Mgbodo, Mgbuhie and Omoviri, Ovelle, Imogu and Ekwutche. Rumuekpe community have been the main source of Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC) Eastern operations in Rivers State, hosting the biggest manifold in the Eastern Division, a booster station vital for communication in the swamps of Niger Delta, and a flow station processing 10,000 to 15,000 barrel of oil per day (Chigbo, 2011). Rumuekpe hosts the biggest manifold of Shell Petroleum Development Company’s Eastern Division, with a flow station processing between 10,000 and 15,000 barrels of oil per day. Rumuekpe also hosts crisscrossing oil and gas pipelines through which 100,000 barrels of oil flow every day, amounting to 10% of Shell’s daily production in the country. Total, Elf, and NPDR (Niger Delta Petroleum Resources) also operate in Rumuekpe.

Apart from the oil installations, the community’s terrain consists of farmland, forest and swamps. The surrounding environment is highly polluted because of oil spills dating back to the 1990s and regular gas flares. Unfortunately, the oil deposit rather than being a blessing to the community remains a curse because of the poor management, control and uneven distribution of oil benefits in the community that does not translate into socio-economic development in the community. Between 2004 – 2009, Rumuekpe community experienced a violent conflict that turned the community into a ghost community. The conflict led to the

destruction of lives and properties and stunted socio-economic development in the community. However, the nature of the Rumuekpe conflict was not like that of the Ogonis led by Ken Saro Wiwa or the Ijaw youth following the Kiama declaration, because it was mainly an intra-communal conflict over natural resources. The conflict was, however, exacerbated or aggravated by the divide-and-rule tactics by Shell.

The adverse effects of the conflict cannot be overemphasised on the environmental and socio-economic development of Rumuekpe community. During the crisis, the community was deserted, and lives and properties were also destroyed. Evidence has shown that the community also lacks basic infrastructural development after the crisis and some of the youths that were expected to embark on meaningful socio-economic activities engage in bunkering and illegal oil refining despite its negative effects on the environment and health of community members and Rivers State residents in general.

Statement of the Problem

The Niger Delta region is one of the areas where resource conflict has been a recurrent phenomenon. Since 1956, when oil was discovered in commercial quantity in Oloibiri in present-day Bayelsa State, hydrocarbon resources have been the engines of Nigeria's economy, as oil provides 95% of Nigeria's foreign exchange earnings and 80% of the government's budgetary revenues (Davis, 2010). However, the discovery of oil, which was expected to improve the lot of the communities where it is sourced, has become a curse rather than a blessing because of oil exploration activities and its attendant hazards, such as air and water pollution (NNPC, 2013). For instance, Wilson (2012) has it that the oil and gas deposits and installations in Rumuekpe have become a curse, rather than a blessing to Rumuekpe community. The operations of the oil multinationals generated several challenges to the socio-economic development of the Rumuekpe community.

The unnecessary interference of the oil multinationals and other State agencies the community leadership politics and their deprivation activities prompted the youths to rise for agitation against the operations of the multinationals. The 2005-2009 Rumuekpe crisis was borne out of a multi-layer struggle over power, resources, and access to handouts from oil companies. Leadership struggles between local community leaders and the youth were rife, and the short-term handouts given by oil companies exacerbated the wealth differences within the community, particularly between local leaders and largely unemployed youth.

A lot of scholars have conducted studies on natural resource conflict. Nillesen and Bulte (2014) conducted a study on natural resources and violent conflict. They observed that theoretical literature on natural resources and violent conflict is rich and ambiguous, and the empirical literature is equally multifaceted.

The study of Ikelegbe (2005) examines the economy of conflict in the resource conflicts in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. It was found that a conflict economy comprising an intensive and violent struggle for resource opportunities, inter and intra-communal/ethnic conflicts over resources and the theft and trading in refined and crude oil has blossomed since the 1990s. Nwokolo, (2013) study uses the oil-producing communities in Nigeria, with a particular focus on Delta state. It seeks to explore the extent to which the presence of oil fuels violent conflicts in these communities. Onosode (2003) examined the oil and gas exploitation-induced conflicts in the Niger Delta region, the effects of these activities on the environment and livelihood of the host communities and the sharing of benefits from the oil companies. The findings of the research suggest that the future of the oil-producing communities will be affected by both the

character of modifications introduced in revenue sharing and the management and implementation of the proportion allotted to derivation for the producing areas over the years. Apart from Wilson (2012), all the scholars failed to focus on Rumuekpe community in Emohua Local Government area but carry out study and examine resource conflict in the Niger Delta holistically. Thus, it becomes difficult to differentiate one conflict from another. A recognition of the uniqueness of each community and each conflict, as the case may be, appears to be lacking in the available literature. Therefore, the present research is posed to appraise oil and gas conflict with a particular focus on Rumuekpe community in Emohua Local government area in Rivers State.

Literature Review

Goddey (2013) centred his study on the politics of youth violence and its impact on Rumuekpe community development, within the period of 2004 – 2010. He noted that Rumuekpe is one of the oil-producing communities in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria, noted for their peaceful coexistence and friendly relationship with their guests and neighbours. The study found that the inability of the community youth leadership to ensure the accountability of their government and operate an all-inclusive government, and insincerity in activities of the oil companies operating in Rumuekpe to effectively enforce community development programme caused conflict in the community.

Nillesen and Bulte (2014) conducted a study on natural resources and violent conflict. They observed that theoretical literature on natural resources and violent conflict is rich and ambiguous, and the empirical literature is equally multifaceted. Theory predicts that resource booms or discoveries may attenuate or accentuate the risk of conflict, depending on various factors. The authors also asserted that the relationship between natural resource wealth and the onset or duration of conflict remains a much-debated topic in economics.

Gbenemene and Eric (2019) conducted a study on the current crisis in Ogoni particularly in Kpor and Bomu communities in Gokana LGA over the sharing of oil compensation money. ‘Communal violence relating to oil compensation is becoming rampant in many communities in the Niger Delta, particularly in Ogoni land’. The findings of the research infer that the lack of trust of community leaders especially the royal fathers over oil compensation money by Shell was a major cause of the conflict in Kpor community and recommended the provision of employment for the youth and challenging of oil compensation money towards community development project rather than sharing among community members.

Ehizuelen (2021) conducted a study on the role of women in conflict management in Rumuekpe community in Rivers State. According to the study, women and children were adversely affected during the Rumuekpe conflict. The study concluded that there is a necessity for the development, designing and reconstruction of the legal policy regime that represents the conflict of interest of men and women separately in creating purposeful synergy to effectively deliver results in the process of conflict management in Rumuekpe.

From the review of available literature, it is evident that scholars have written a lot on natural resources and conflict. However, gaps remain on the issue of oil and gas conflict in Rumuekpe in relation to its effects on socio-economic development. It is this gap in the existing literature that this study is designed to fill.

Theoretical Framework

This study is guided by the Frustration –Aggression theory and Resource Curse theory. In 1939, Dollard, Doob, Miller, Mowrer, and Sears published a monograph on aggression in which they presented what has come to be known as the frustration-aggression hypothesis. The theory was further developed by Miller (1941), Berkowitz (1969), and Gurr (1970). They posited that the occurrence of aggressive behaviour always presupposes the existence of frustration while the existence of frustration always leads to some form of aggression. Frustration, in this context, was specified as the thwarting of a goal response, and a goal response, in turn, was taken to mean the reinforcing final operation in an ongoing behaviour sequence. At times, however, the term ‘frustration’ is used to refer not only to the process of blocking a person’s attainment of a goal but also to the reaction to such blocking. Consequently, ‘being frustrated’ means both that one’s access to goals is being thwarted by another party (or possibly by particular circumstances) and that one’s reaction to this thwarting is one of annoyance, which might translate to outright violent or conflictual behaviour.

According to Atkinson and Atkinson (1975), the frustration-aggression theory presupposes that a continuing or unresolved motivational conflict is a source of frustration. Thus, when a person’s progress toward a desired goal is blocked, delayed, or otherwise interfered with, he or she encounters frustration.

The conflict in Rumuekpe community, in particular, can also be explained using the frustration-aggression theory. This is because it relates to the issue of exploitation and exploration, without due or adequate compensation to the host communities. Indeed, the exploration and exploitation of oil, which was expected to improve the lot of the community, has created poverty and underdevelopment. This feeling of deprivation has caused many frustrated community youths to turn to violence especially when they suspected that there is unequal distribution and management of the benefits accruable from the oil deposits in the community. Given the violent nature of conflict in Rumuekpe community, it is essential to identify and understand the interaction between the causes, dynamics and impact, especially to intervene effectively (Haider, 2014). There is a growing reality that most conflicts witnessed in different parts of the world are grafted into the interaction between access to resources. The conflict potential of an economy (system of redistribution) is crucial in understanding the important effects it could have on the emergence of open conflict. The system of redistribution within and amongst groups is essential to creating solidarity links between them, and its breakdown is likely to trigger the eruption of violent conflict. Added to that, the perception of unhealthy competition for scarce resources could be a trigger too.

Another theory that is relevant and suitable in explaining the conflict in Rumuekpe community is the resource curse thesis that was first used by Richard Auty in 1993 and Tijani (2018) to describe how countries that are rich in natural resources were unable to use that wealth to boost their economies and how, counter-intuitively, these countries had lower economic growth than the countries without an abundance of natural resources. The resource curse argument posits that there exists a negative relationship between endowment with natural resources and social and economic development (Duruigbo, 2005), which consequently leads to an unusually high rate of poverty, poor health care, child mortality and poor educational performance (Karl, 2007).

The resource curse thesis is relevant to Rumuekpe community because the community is blessed with oil and gas and hosted major oil multinationals namely Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC), Total and Elf. Again, the community is the main source of

SPDC Eastern operations in Rivers State, hosting the biggest manifold in Eastern Division, a booster station vital for communication in the swamps of Niger Delta, and a flow station processing 10,000 to 15,000 barrels of oil per day (Chigbo, 2011). With the strategic importance of Rumuekpe to both the oil multinationals and the Nigerian State, one expects Rumuekpe community to be an epitome of socio-economic development because of the expected benefits from the oil proceeds from the community. On the contrary, oil and gas deposits and installations have become a source of underdevelopment in Rumuekpe community (Wilson, 2012). The operations of oil multinationals have generated several challenges to the socio-economic development of Rumuekpe community.

Methodology

This study is purely a qualitative research design. Our main sources of data were Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). A total of twelve (12) persons were engaged in FGD with participants selected from the paramount ruler, chiefs, Community Development Committee (CDC), youth leaders, People with Disabilities (PwDs), and women leaders while eight (8) KIIs interviews were also conducted among the key community stakeholders in each of the 8 communities that were purposively selected based on their experience and knowledge of the issue being investigated. The data collected from both FGD and KIIs were supplemented by secondary data obtained from available data in the form of written works, textbooks, magazines, daily/weekly or quarterly newspapers, journals, archived materials, and online databases like JSTOR, Google Scholar, and ProQuest among others. The idea was to give a balanced representation of the issue under study

Data Presentation and Analysis

Genesis of Conflict in Rumuekpe Community

Rumuekpe community is noted for their peaceful co-existence among themselves and strangers therein. Their peaceful disposition attracted many oil companies and the establishment of numerous oil installations in the area. The youths were law-abiding and committed to the course of the oil multinationals and the Nigerian State, until recently, when the oil multinationals and Nigerian state started interfering in the politics of the youth leadership of the community as an approach to destabilize the community leadership. Their intention was aimed at giving the oil multinationals and the Nigerians State the opportunity to exploit and take away the oil resources of the community without any interference.

Rumuekpe community serves as a convergence point for oil and gas pipelines and other installations that crisscross the Niger Delta region, with approximately 100,000 barrels of oil flowing through the Rumuekpe oil facilities per day (Smith, 2012). The community is the main artery of Shell's Eastern Operations in Rivers State and is known as a 'three-in-one'; hosts the biggest manifold in the Eastern division, a booster station vital for communicating in the swamps, and a flow station. processing up to 10 to 15,000 barrels of oil per day. The economic importance of the community also attracted the community to conflict because oil-producing communities are always vulnerable to conflict.

Suddenly, the community was thrown into destructive violence due to the inability of the community youth leadership to ensure the accountability of their government to operate an all-inclusive government and insincerity in the activities of the oil companies operating in the community to effectively enforce community development. The realities of the activities of the

oil multinationals and aggrieved youths of Rumuekpe community are laudable in the youth violence that dislocated the development paradigms in Rumuekpe community.

Causes of Conflict in Rumuekpe Community.

The crisis that turned Rumuekpe community into a ghost community occurred between June 5 and November 14, 2009 was caused by several factors such as the inability of the community youth leadership to ensure the accountability of their government and operate all-inclusive government, and insincerity in activities of the oil companies operating in Rumuekpe to effectively enforce community development programme in Rumuekpe. The unsatisfactory activities of the youth leadership resulted in agitation by some factions of the youths for a change of the youth leadership. The aggrieved youths were left with no option than to embark on intensive agitation for a change of youth leadership, and community development by oil multinationals.

The violence started as a leadership tussle between Friday Edu and Solomon Obio, both dead, over the control of the locations of the oil companies in the community and thus, the relationship with the oil companies and the payments therefrom. Hitherto, Solomon had the monopoly both over the ones located in his family land and those on other people's property. This led to the first crisis that resulted in the destruction of people's houses but no life was involved. It was at this stage that the Rumuekpe Youth Congress was formed under the leadership of Friday Edu. It was the youth body that he used to mobilize against Solomon Obio who had monopolized leadership in the community and acquired a lot due to the wealth he made from the control of oil companies' locations. With the victory, Solomon released control of the location on the family land to Friday Edu. This marked the beginning of Friday's relationship with the oil companies.

Again, the divide and rule of the oil multinationals led to supremacy battles among the armed gangs in order to be in control of payment and contracts. They pitched battles over access to oil contracts and payment which Shell distributed to whichever gang controlled access to its oil infrastructure. Other factors that contributed to the crisis included youth restiveness as a result of unemployment, lack of basic infrastructure, failure of oil multinationals to adhere to agreed Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), environmental pollution from the extractive activities that adversely affected farmland and water without commensurate compensation, lack of basic amenities such as potable water, electricity, health centre, schools and increasing cult activities as a result of supremacy contest to control oil companies contract and protection of oil installations.

Consequences and impact of Conflict in Rumuekpe community.

The consequences and impact of Rumuekpe community conflict were determined based on the analysed responses from the KIIs and FGDs. The impacts are; the destruction of lives and properties, internal displacement, mutual distrust, lack of social amenities, and an anti-investment environment among others.

Evidence has shown that between 2005 and 2008, the town Rumuekpe was torn apart by a destructive crisis. It was estimated that over 60 people including women and children were killed during the conflict. All the interviewees also confirmed that properties of inestimable value such as houses, churches and schools were razed down during the crisis.

According to one of the interviewees, thousands of the inhabitants of the eight (8) villages in Rumuekpe community have been displaced, and homes, schools and churches destroyed in the

fighting. Another interviewee, Lucky Ajor, stated that he and his family members have been displaced since the crisis. 'I was affected, my family and other families were also affected. The eight communities that made up Rumuekpe were destroyed. Buildings, economic activities and livestock were not spared. The crisis affected me personally because my own family relocated to Port Harcourt. Right from 2005, it was a burden catering for my mother. My father also died because of Rumuekpe crisis. Things that he was surviving on were destroyed. During the crisis, children, adults and pregnant women were killed. The total number of people who died during the crisis was uncountable. Some died because of hunger, frustrations, hopelessness leading to high blood pressure, rape, humiliation etc. Neighbouring communities became a haven for Rumuekpe. Sometimes, burying dead ones became a problem. We paid in Port Harcourt cemetery to bury them. It was just recently that we started taking people home and life is returning gradually.

Another key informant interviewee, many people died from the crisis, many were shut, and some of my blood relations also died. It was just like a battle. They used sophisticated weapons which I do not know where they acquired them from. Some of those sophisticated weapons are still in the community up till now. All the interviewees remarked the community still lacks major social amenities such as potable water, power supply, internal roads, schools, markets and health centre. The lack of the above-mentioned points are adversely affecting the development of Rumuekpe community. One of the interviewees worried that there is no investment in the community. People can only invest in an environment that is safe and secure. Rather than investing in the community, the majority of the indigenes are investing in neighbouring communities and Port Harcourt. Again, Rumuekpe conflict led to rural-urban migration. An implication of this was that most community members were reluctant to live in the community. As a way out, they prefer and are living in neighbouring communities and Port Harcourt.

In the same vein, during the FGD, respondents stated that conflict over natural resources in Rumuekpe Community stunted development to a very large extent. Up till now, the community is not developed. Indeed, despite the numerous oil and gas resources in Rumuekpe community the people still lack the basic needs of life. Rumuekpe people still drink from oil-polluted rivers due to the absence of alternative water sources, the villages that made up Rumuekpe have no good roads, particularly during the rainy season and farmland is often destroyed as a result of oil spills without adequate compensation.

All the interviewees agreed that the level of poverty is so high in the community and the lack of employment opportunities has pushed some youth to engage in illegal oil refining and bunkering activities. Despite the State governor's ban on oil bunkering and the efforts of the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC) Commandant, Michael Ogar and his team to combat illegal oil refining in the area, the youth continue the activity in Rumuekpe community. Unfortunately, the activity led to an explosion in the community that claimed more than the lives of 12 persons as confirmed by the police command in the State on March 3, 2023. The incident was condemnable due to the defiant behaviours of those engaging in artisanal refining in the community.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of the study showed that the violence in Rumuekpe community was caused by the failure of the oil companies operating in the community and the government to invest and respond to the developmental needs of the community. Despite the oil deposit and extractive

activities of Shell in the community, they drink from oil-polluted rivers due to the absence of alternative water source, no good road, particularly during the rainy season, no functional electricity, poor health facilities, numerous unemployed youths, insecurity in the communities, visible dilapidated school buildings and destroyed ecosystem. The community crisis further led to the absence of investors, rural-urban migration, negligence by the government and a hostile investment environment. During and after the Rumuekpe crisis, schools were shut down for a long with children out of school, their education, skills acquisition and the development of their various capacities were hindered. The oil and gas conflict stunted development to a great extent in Rumekpe community. One of the key informant interviewees stated that:

“The crisis affected my education then because I was in Senior Secondary School (SSS) 3. We went to write our examination in a nearby community called Elele. There was no functional school in our community then. Fortunately, I have graduated from the University of Port Harcourt now but most of my schoolmates dropped out. The majority were in the community then doing nothing because they didn’t have the privilege of going back to school. Some of them did not write the West African Examination Council (WAEC) examination. I was fortunate to be among those who went to a nearby community to write. As a result, some went to learn trade or menial jobs while few others that don’t have any relatives outside the community decided to stay back without any hope of survival”

Again, the consequences of the violent conflict ranged from disruption of children’s education because of insecurity and displacement and the inability to cater for the children as a result of disruption of economic activities, to exposure to trauma and diseases. The internal displacement caused by the violent conflict has resulted in the loss of livelihood in the form of physical, financial, human, social and economic assets.

The finding further revealed that the failure of the community to resort to dialogue in the resolution of disputes led to the conflict. The youth rather than resulting in dialogue used violence to overthrow the ‘Old government’ to gain access to oil benefits in the community. The destruction of lives and properties retarded the growth and development of Rumuekpe community. The major development challenges in Rumuekpe are environmental degradation, unemployment, poverty and inequality.

Moreover, the finding showed that the failure of oil companies and the government to implement and enforce policies and laws that will regulate the operations of oil companies in a way that will not affect the lives, livelihoods and environment of the host community contributed to the conflict experienced in the community. Failure to respond to oil spills when occurred and the inability of the oil companies to pay compensation and conduct an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) aggravated the conflict.

The study further found that the failure of Shell to organize skill acquisition, empowerment programmes and employment opportunities led to conflict in the community. Some of the youths that already surrendered their arms later engaged in criminal activities such as oil bunkering and illegal oil refining in the community as a means of survival.

In addition, unequal distribution of oil wealth and benefits from oil companies was another finding of the study. For example, Shell only engaged the most powerful group in the contract and protection of pipelines in the community. This engagement strategy is fuelling conflict and promoting unhealthy rivalry among the youths and cult groups in the community.

More importantly, the study found that oil companies divide and rule tactics in the community is causing conflict, division, hatred and insecurity and at the same time affecting the development of the community. This manifested when the oil company interfered by ensuring that the wrong persons were engaged to represent the community and those who were loyal to them. The study found that the government and oil companies operating in Rumuekpe did not demonstrate any political will to develop Rumuekpe, instead, they are paying attention only to the protection of their oil facilities. The oil deposits in the community did not translate to the socio-economic development of the community. Evidence has shown that the State government and the oil companies operating the community did not make significant efforts to develop the community. There were no major basic infrastructures such as portable water, internal roads, schools, functional health centres and markets among others. Unfortunately, the failure of the community youths and the desperation to be relevant in society pushed some of them to engage in criminal gangs, and cult groups and to embark on oil bunkering and illegal oil refining in the community as a way of survival.

Conclusion

The study concludes that the extractive activities of the oil companies operating in Rumuekpe community have a significant relationship with conflict and development. The oil companies' activities affect the lives, livelihoods and environment of the host community adversely. Again, the oil and gas deposit that was supposed to be a blessing to the community became a curse due to poor management, unfair distribution and control of the oil benefits. Evidence has shown that in the case of Rumuekpe community, conflict in the area has been quite destructive. Despite the fact that Rumuekpe is host to 3 oil multinational companies (Shell, Total E&P and AGIP) and a local oil company – Niger Delta Petroleum Resources (NDPR), there are no developmental projects in the community before and after the crisis. The community is still drinking from polluted rivers, has no functional primary health centre, no good road, no electricity, and no modern schools, community youths were not employed by the oil companies coupled with unequal distribution of oil wealth and oil company payments. All the above and other reasons led to the conflict and violence that destroyed Rumuekpe, which was at its peak between 2005 and 2009. Rather than the oil companies protecting lives and properties of their host community during the crisis, they deployed security officers to protect their facilities in the community.

The case of Rumuekpe, therefore, is that of a community whose developmental trajectory, rapacious oil conglomerates had truncated. The intra-communal crisis caused by leadership struggle and distrust from 2005 to 2010, rendered the community a ghost town as houses and properties were burnt down, many killed, and others fled. The only visible thing left untouched in the area then, were bushes and shrines. They were lucky to have hospitable neighbours who accommodated them. After a while, there was transient peace and the community members started returning to the villages from their refugee camps to resume normal life, but with nothing on the ground. At the moment, relative peace has returned in the community and the re-building process began.

Recommendations

Oil companies operating in Rumuekpe and the government are encouraged to invest massively in the community by providing basic social infrastructure (amenities) such as health centres, potable water, electricity, schools, markets etc. This can be achieved through effective monitoring and implementation of the Host Community Development Trust (HCDC) under the new Petroleum Industry Act (PIA) between the community and oil companies. The oil companies should also establish and maintain good working relationships with community members with less interference or imposition on their local community affairs.

It is recommended that the community should resort to dialogue in the resolution of disputes rather than resorting to violence. This is based on our finding that the destruction of lives and property was a major consequence of the oil and gas conflict experienced in Rumuekpe community.

Since oil exploration and exploitation were identified as a major cause of conflict in Rumuekpe community, there is a need to implement and enforce policies that will regulate the operations of oil companies in a way that it will not affect the lives, livelihoods and environment of the host community. Routine Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) and post-EIA with the use of modern technological tools should be conducted by expert officials. Whenever a spill occurs, adequate compensation must be paid in addition to clean-up and remediation according to best practices.

There is a need for oil companies operating in the target oil-producing community to organize skill acquisition and empowerment programmes that are well packaged to ensure that the youths benefit especially through employment opportunities and scholarship in order to reduce conflict and criminal activities in the communities.

There is a need for equitable distribution of oil wealth and benefits from oil companies. This will reduce conflict and unhealthy rivalry among the youths and cult groups. In this regard, the oil companies have a big role to play in ensuring that contracts, rental payments and scholarships are provided to the right community representatives.

Oil companies should also stop their divide-and-rule tactics that are causing conflict, division, hatred and insecurity. Again, effective monitoring and implementation of the new Petroleum Industry Act (PIA) will regulate the operation of oil multinational companies and reduce community–oil companies conflict.

The study also recommended that the government and oil companies operating in Rumuekpe should show clear political will to develop the Rumuekpe people and communities, rather than showing attention to only the development and protection of oil facilities. It was also recommended that the SPDC and other oil companies operating in Rumuekpe should stay away from the politics of the Rumuekpe community and its youth leadership.

Finally, a blueprint for rebuilding the community will be worked out. This is to facilitate the return of normalcy in the community. This is based on the finding of the study that conflict over natural resources in Rumuekpe has stunted its development to a very large extent.

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