

*Full Length Research Paper*

# **Effective Resolution Strategies for Environmental-oriented/Resource control-centred Conflicts in the Niger Delta area of Nigeria.**

**Amukali<sup>1\*</sup> O and Faajir<sup>2</sup> A**

<sup>1</sup>Department of Geography and Environmental Management, Faculty of Social Sciences, Niger Delta University, Wilberforce Island, Bayelsa State, Nigeria. Tel.: +2348136152810. E-mail: amukaliogo@yahoo.com

<sup>2</sup>Department of Business Management, College of Social and Management Sciences, University of Mkar, Mkar, Near Gboko, Benue State, Nigeria. Tel.: +2348036802718. E-mail: avanengefg@yahoo.com

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**Conflicts have always been part of man's existence, though the case of the Niger Delta is so unique in the sense that the region's stability affects Nigeria's revenue base, livelihood of the people within the community level as well as productivity of the oil companies. Efforts have always been made to ensure peace but all to no avail owing to adoption of conventional strategies that are biased, one-sided, coercive and adversarial. Thus, this study tried to evaluate the prevalence, effects, assess various strategies as well as the effectiveness of the conventional strategies currently been used for resolving conflicts in the region. The conventional strategies were found to be grossly ineffective and non-sustainable. The study therefore suggested the adoption of better strategies that could be all-inclusive as an alternative strategy for effective resolution of conflicts within the Niger Delta region.**

**Key Words:** Resolution Strategies, Environmental-oriented conflicts, Niger Delta.

## **INTRODUCTION**

The Niger Delta region of Nigeria enjoys a lot of popularity in global politics, thus eliciting interests in many. The region is one of the world's largest wetlands with comparable ecosystems as the Sunderbans in Bangladesh, Malaysia and India (Osagie et al, 2009). Not only is the region endowed with oil and gas deposits, it also has sufficient flora and fauna which help serve as sources of food, firewood, game, traditional medicine recipes and even lumbering (Amukali, 2012). The region is inhabited by over Seven Million Nigerians from 20 ethnic groups in about 800 communities (Ibaba, 2005).

According to Amodu (2012), oil exploration actually started between 1908 and 1914 in Nigeria but World War I and II led to abandonment of initial exploration activities. But, by late 1955, Shell-BP made a find in the tertiary Agbada formation at Oloibiri, from where the first oil cargo from Nigeria was exported in 1958 at the initial rate of 5,100 barrels per day. Today, exact figures of crude oil export for Nigeria are hard to come by but some

authorities quote more than 152 million barrels per year (Ibid, 2012). Tapping into the oil reserves requires the construction of rigs, industrial facilities and power plants; it also involves prospecting, exploring and drilling of crude mineral oil, thus all these result in the degradation and the destruction of life-supporting ecological systems and natural resources (Asakitikpi & Oyelaran, 1999). Gas flare sites burn constantly releasing persistent chemical substances into the environment, badly managed crude or refined oil-carrying pipelines leak petrochemicals into the environment (Amukali, 2012), crops absorb persistent toxic chemicals into their systems that when eaten, humans and animals could be affected, just as poisonous lead and other substances are released into the water cycle (Ofehe, 2008) or food chain (Amukali, 2012), respectively.

According to Akpoibibo (2001), the environment is in crisis globally and the Niger Delta situation is such a pathetic one due to the degree of devastation done to it

and the complexity of the crisis. The United Nations Environmental programme Report of June 1999 made a proposition that a growing trend in international conflicts appears to be linked to the deteriorating environmental conditions and resources. The Report went further to state that from empirical evidence across all categories, it appears that the vast majority of environmentally-related conflicts occur in developing regions.

According to Africa Masterweb (2007), the degree of the violence in the Niger Delta has become endemic, characterized by 33 cases of kidnapping recorded between January 2006 and February 2007, with over 200 victims being mostly expatriate oil workers. Also, Nwankwo and Ezeobi (2008) as quoted in Amodu (2012), there were also about 12,700 cases of vandalism particularly of oil pipelines and installations recorded in Nigeria between 2000 and 2007, with most of them occurring in the Niger Delta. In addition, over N150.5 billion in revenue was lost in eight years by the Nigerian government to crisis in the Niger Delta (Nwankwo and Ezeobi, 2008). Kidnap and killing in some cases of staffs of security outfits like the police, navy and the army as well as personnels of oil companies operating within the area had been a recurrent decimal.

### **Brief history of Conflicts in the Niger Delta**

Various definitions of conflicts exist. Coser (1956) defined conflict as a struggle over values or claims to status, power, and scarce resources, in which the aims of the opponents are to neutralize, injure, or eliminate their rivals. Zartman (1991) defined conflict as an unavoidable concomitant of choices and decisions and an expression of the basic fact of human interdependence while Adler and Rodman (1990) defined conflict as an expressed struggle between two interdependent parties who perceive incompatibility goals, scarce resources and interference from other party in achieving their goals. Conflicts refers to contradictions arising from differences in the interests, ideas, ideologies, orientations and precipitous tendencies of the people concerned (Okoh, 2005).

Conflicts arise when individuals or groups in a defined environment pursue divergent goals, interests and ambitions (Otite, 2001), just as when there is a change in the social environment, for instance, the discovery of new resources from development in the physical environment, a fertile ground is created (Amodu, 2012). Conflicts like most other phenomena in life have its merits and demerits. Thus, Amodu (2012) argued that conflict should not be perceived as being only a negative, dysfunctional or disjunctive process, and a communication breakdown, as some scholars tend to suggest.

This could have bearings in earlier insinuation by Folarin (1998) that conflict is not necessarily a bad thing; rather, it can be both functional and dysfunctional. This is

justified by saying that hardly can there be development without some level, form or measure of conflict.

Several scholars believe in the inevitability of conflicts in relations among human beings (Moore 1987, Okoh and Ewhariemen 2001 and Weeks 1992). Some even extol conflict as 'an essential creative element in human relations "the means to change" and the means by which some social values of welfare, security, justice, opportunities for personal development can be achieved' (Burton, 1987). Conflict as a phenomenon occurs in variegated forms; intra-personal and inter-personal levels as well as manifesting in the group level, local, state, national or assume international dimension (Ogu-Raphael, 2009). The struggle for relevance in the Niger Delta dates back to the pre-colonial era. The Niger Delta struggle predates the discovery of crude oil in 1957 (Ikalama, 2006).

In pre-colonial Niger Delta, the same resource-propelled conflict we are experiencing today also manifested then (Naagbanton, 2005). This position was supported by Ukpabi (1987) when he stated that the Royal Chatter which was granted to the National African Company on 10th July 1886 and which empowered the company to govern the Niger area, in which it already had extensive trading interests, was the results of the efforts made by Sir Goldie, to create those conditions which would enable it to exploit the economic resources in the region to its best advantage. Ukpabi (1987) further stated that the British traded palm oil with the indigenous Niger Delta people and a military force was established through the approval of the British Government by the company to protect their interests through the use of force of arms and the excesses of the British merchants. Naagbanton (2005) further stated that that in itself engendered a major conflict between Brass people in the present day Bayelsa state and the former.

According to Ukpabi (1987), around 1871, the frost relationship between the British company and the local inhabitants deteriorated and the local people used the same guns that were supplied to them by their European business allies to attack the English merchants, and the situation later resulted in a bloody conflict. Ibid (1987) further stated that the company dabbled into local politics, exploited inter town rivalries and allied itself with one group while fighting another indigenous group. A major conflict blew from the way and manner the company ran its business in the region and on 12th November, 1886, an expeditionary force led by one Commandant Vetch set out, to wipe out local villagers who had complained about their practice in the Niger delta and burnt down their villages (Naagbanton, 2005).

In addition, Ibid (2005) further stated that in December 1886, some British soldiers attacked Agberi, Mbiama and proceeded to Patani where they repeated the attacks on the local people, they also attacked and looted Obe I October 1887 as well as several villages in the Warri creeks in November 1887. Thus, it could be rightly stated

that violent conflicts in the Niger Delta predates the discovery and exploitation of crude oil resources.

According to Alao (2005), during the colonial era, virtually all the resources of the colonized people were controlled by the colonial state. The last quarter of the 19th Century was characterized by aggressive European imperialistic economic philosophy of free trade and this led to the evolution of several conflicts between the Niger Delta people and the Europeans on the coasts of the region because of the communities' determination to maintain their middlemen status (Amodu, 2012).

However, Ikalama (2006) explained that in 1914 after the amalgamation of the northern and the southern protectorates, southern Nigeria was administered on the basis of provinces while Amodu (2012) stated that for colonial administrative convenience, the western Ijaws were in the Delta province and the eastern Ijaws were in Owerri and Calabar provinces. This division was not acceptable to the Ijaws of the Niger Delta who began to make requests for the creation of a separate province for themselves and this eventually led to the establishment of the People's League in 1942 which later metamorphosed into a full-fledged association that spearheaded the struggle and their efforts paid off in 1947 when the Rivers province was created.

Niger Delta Congress was founded by Young Harold Dappa-Briggs to fight for their disadvantaged people of the Niger Delta who were later described as 'poor, backward and neglected region' in the London Conference of the minorities and the report of the Willinks Commission in 1958 (Akpobibibo, 2001). According to Naagbanton (2005), oil production in commercial quantity started precisely in 1956 in the tiny poverty-stricken Oloibiri village in the Ogbia clan of Bayelsa state and this was followed by discoveries of oil deposits and explorations continued in quick succession in Bomu, Bodo West in Ogoni and other places in the Niger Delta.

The exploration and exploitation was carried out with little or no regard for the environment and the socio-cultural well-being of the host communities in the Niger Delta. This led to manifold agitations that later metamorphosed into violent struggles. For instance, Amodu (2012) reported that in February 23, 1966, Isaac Adaka Boro, in a bid to protest the injustices against the Niger Delta people, led one hundred and fifty one comrades to Tontouban, in the present Bayelsa state. That was after he left school at University of Nigeria, Nsukka where he was formerly studying Chemistry in 1964 as a student leader and activist without completing his course, went ahead to form the Niger Delta People's Volunteer Service to free his Ijaw people in the Niger Delta area (Naagbanton, 2005).

He went ahead to declare the Niger Delta People's Republic with himself as the Head of State and he seized all Shell's facilities in Ijaw land and humiliated the Nigerian Police before a combined team of the Nigerian military, Police and other security operatives within 12

days defeated him and his comrades, captured, tried and convicted him by the then Ironsi Junta (Naagbanton, 2005). Today, that rebellion in Nigerian political history is known as 'the 12th day revolution' (Watts, 2009). In addition, Amodu (2012) opined that Boro was succeeded, in the struggle for self determination and resource control, by the then Ken Saro Wiwa and the Ogoni people.

## Theoretical Framework

### Conflict Theory

According to Wallace and Wolf (2006), the conflict theory evolved as a major alternative to the functionalist approach to analyzing a society's general structure. But, contrary to functionalist's view of the existence of interdependence and unity in the society, conflict theorists view the society as an arena where groups contend for power (Amodu, 2012). Basically, conflict theory according to Amodu (2012) posits that in a society or an organization, each individual participates and/or groups struggle to maximize certain benefits and this inevitably contributes to social change. Also, Akpobibibo (2001) stated that conflict is usually the playing out of human needs and fears in a society.

Naagbanton (2005) posited that in pre-colonial Niger Delta, the same resource-propelled conflict we are experiencing today also manifested then. Saiyou (2006) posited that the initial reaction of the Niger Delta communities to the discovery of oil in their territory was that of joy and anticipation of development. But, conflicts arose when lots of negativities surrounded oil-related activities along the line. Thus, it is clear that the conflict theory would be very useful for analyzing and identifying the origin, sources as well as nature of environmental-oriented conflicts in the Niger Delta region.

### Situational Theory

It was proposed in 1984 by Baskin *et al* (1997) and this situational theory states that a public can be defined or characterized according to the degree of its awareness of the problems confronting it and the extent to which it seeks a solution to it (Amodu, 2012). Ibid (2012) further stated that the theory aims at helping to understand the different component parts of a community and how organizations relate with them at different times. The adoption of the situational theory for this study is because it would be helpful in assessing active publics. Already, Amodu (2012) identified the Niger Delta communities as constituting active publics. Evidence of which could be seen in their recognition of their having problems and which they resolve to solve by taking their destinies in their own hands (Akpobibibo, 2001).

## Stakeholder's Theory

According to Amodu (2012), the concept of "stakeholders" was first used in 1963 in an internal memorandum at the Stanford Research Institute and the word was used to denote groups whose support the organization needs so as to remain in existence. The stakeholder theory states that a corporation has stakeholders who are generally the groups and individuals that benefit from or are harmed by the corporation's actions (Amodu, 2012). Thus, individuals and groups who are dependent, directly or indirectly with the corporation are identified by the theory.

Dougherty (1992) and Ray (1999) identified and classified four groups of publics that make up a stakeholder; enabling publics, functional publics, normative publics and the diffused publics. Amodu (2012) opined that the stakeholder theory also provides a robust approach to corporate responsibility, unlike the shareholder theory, that parochially considers only the shareholders as worthy of attention. He further stated that this helps oil companies in the Niger Delta to realize that by creating values for their host communities, they are also creating values for the shareholders. This could be buttressed by the fact that negligence of their corporate social responsibilities to the host communities generally results in conflicts that end up reducing outputs. Thus, in this present study, the stakeholder's theory would help oil companies in giving the needed attention to their host communities to prevent futuristic avoidable conflicts from occurring.

Several efforts have been aimed at reducing the level of conflicts within the study area. Tentatively, scanty data exists as to the nature, prevalence, impact and effectiveness of conventional conflict resolution strategies being used within the study area. Thus, the present study examined the current resolution strategies being used in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria for environmental-oriented conflicts. The nature, prevalence, impact as well as effectiveness of current resolution strategies were examined.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

### Study Design

Data sources were through three different data parametric sources; Key Informant Interview, Focus group Discussion and Use of Questionnaire while the secondary data were generated from already documented reports in magazines, journals, newspapers, company reports, and the likes. In addition, qualitative and quantitative research methods were employed in generating the primary data sets. This was because of the nature of the data sets expected to be generated. While qualitative research methods were needed to

generate and assess the quality of information that was got from key informant interviewers and focus group discussion, the quantitative research method was used to generate and assess those of the survey methods using questionnaire as an instrument.

### Study Population

This study focused on the activities of the multinational Oil companies in Ndokwa East and Ndokwa West and Ukwuani Local Government Areas of Delta State, Nigeria from host communities like Okpai, Kwale, Obodo Ugwa and Ebodei. As a result, the Corporate Affairs Unit of the Oil company in the host communities, The Leadership of the Community, Office of the Ministry of Environment of Government in the Delta State, Law Enforcement Agents as well as Researchers concerned with Conflict Resolution were all sampled in this study. Volunteers among the listed group of respondents were sampled and their opinions on the issue at hand critically evaluated with an eye on establishing the effectiveness of strategies employed, the strengths and weaknesses as well a search for the most appropriate resolution strategies to be adopted.

### Sample Size

A total of 360 respondents were sampled in his work. Respondents were from the Corporate Affairs Unit of the Oil Companies, Leadership of the Communities, Officials of the Ministry of Environment, Law Enforcement Agents, Youth Groups in the Community, Every other member of the community. In addition, the opinions of 24 respondents were also sought to form basis for the qualitative part of the work. This gives a total of 384 respondents.

### Sampling Techniques and Analysis

Owing to the attributes and nature of the samples to be sampled, the following sampling techniques were also used. These are;

**Simple Random Sampling:** These were used to select the communities to be studied. In this wise, all the clans and communities would be written on pieces of paper, rolled up and put into container and the sampled required, randomly selected from that container without replacement.

**Systemic Random Sampling:** This is similar in some ways to simple random sampling but that it saves more time, resources and efforts. This was used to select the individual respondents where in each of the communities, a starting point would be randomly selected and the respondents chosen according to a selected sampling interval.

**Purposive Sampling Technique:** This was used to study and gather information from participants like key

informant interview and focus group discussants. Because this technique is purposive in nature, it relies heavily on the ability of the researcher to spot individuals who would be better equipped and informed enough to provide the needed information, it helped in generating useful data which would help in complementing those generated from the surveys. Finally, results obtained were analysed using simple percentages.

## RESULTS

### Gender Distribution of Respondents

In all the sampled areas, males dominated the study by constituting majority of the respondents. It was seen that Kwale had 61.33% males against 38.67% females, 63.81% males and 36.19% females in Okpai, 53.33% males and 46.67% in Ebedei as well as 72.00% males and 28.00% females in Obodo Ugwa, respectively. Thus, it could be deduced that educational level of participants may have influenced the gender imbalance noticed in this study and this could imply gender sensitivity of the findings.

The most active members of such communities in Kwale, Okpai and Obodo Ugwa as far as community matters are those that fell within age bracket of 36 – 50 years and Ebedei's is 20 – 35 years. However, the least numbers of respondents in all sampled areas were those who fell within age range of 61 and above years with 14.66%, 7.62%, 11.11% and 6.67% for Kwale, Okpai, Ebedei and Obodo Ugwa respectively. This could be attributable to ability and readiness of respondents to express themselves with respect to issues under discourse more than the aged counterparts.

### Distribution of respondents by community

The highest number of respondents was from Okpai and this consisted of 35% of total number of respondents who participated. Kwale and Obodo Ugwa both had 25% while the least number of respondents, consisting of 15.00% were from Ebedei community. The variations in the numbers of respondents were due to readiness and availability of qualitative respondents who could efficiently give useful information on the subject matter.

### Respondent's Awareness of the presence of Oil Companies within their Community/ies.

100.00% of all the respondents sampled in all four communities (Kwale, Okpai, Ebedei and Obodo Ugwa) agreed that they were aware of the operational presence of Oil companies within their vicinities. This shows that the sampled population is a very active one and the activities of Oil companies within the communities hadn't gone unnoticed.

### Respondent's Knowledge of Years of Operational Presence of the Oil Companies in their Communities

It was found that 45.33% of the respondents in Kwale opined that the oil companies operating within the communities had been existing between 21 – 30 years while 22.67% acknowledged the presence of Oil companies that have been existing within the vicinity for over 30 years. In addition, 21.33% and 10.67% were of the opinion that Oil companies have been there between 0 – 10 years and 11 – 20 years respectively. Also, 82.86% of the respondents in Okpai believed that Oil companies have been operating for over 30 years within the community. In Ebedei, 93.34% of the respondents agreed that Oil company has been operating within 0 – 10 years while 56% in Obodo Ugwa also agreed to knowledge of an Oil company 0 – 10 years, within the community, too. Divergence of opinions in the different years and in different communities could be due to the presence of exploration, production as well as servicing Oil companies within the vicinities of the host communities. It could then be concluded that all communities have witnessed the presence of Oil companies in one way or the other.

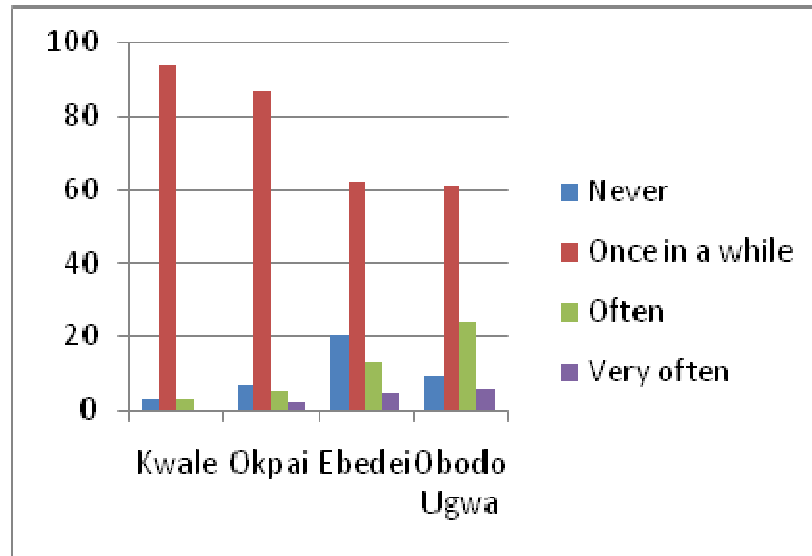
### Respondent's Knowledge of Existing Relationship Between the Oil Company and the Host Community

Majority of the respondents from Kwale with 78.66% and Okpai with 94.29% opined that the relationship between the resident oil companies and their host communities has not been cordial. This implies a high prevalence rate of environmental-oriented conflicts within Kwale and Okpai. On the other hand, 57.78% of respondents in Ebedei opined that the relationship between Ebedei and the resident oil company is cordial and 31.11% believe the relationship is neutral while at Obodo Ugwa, majority of the respondents, consisting of 61.33% believed that the relationship is neutral.

Cordiality signifies relative absence of conflicts; neutrality portrays a tensed and fragile situation while situations that are not cordial signify recognizable conflict. The operational presence of Oil companies in both Kwale and Okpai for over 20 years as compared to Ebedei and Obodo Ugwa could partly be responsible for the existing relationship found in the host communities.

### How the Oil Companies relate with the community

Respondents in Kwale, Ebedei and Obodo Ugwa have had the resident Oil companies relating with them through a combination of various avenues like Royal fathers, elders, family heads as well as youths in the community. On the other hand, respondents from Okpai believed that the resident Oil companies in their community prefer relating with the community through direct contact with Royal fathers. This could be because,



**Figure 1:** showing how often Oil Companies related with the Community.

of the four communities sampled, only Okpai has had a well defined and recognizable Traditional leadership (kingship) in place.

#### **How often the Oil Companies relate with the Community**

From figure 1 above, it could be deduced that respondents in all the communities believed that all the Oil companies within their vicinities only related with them once in a while. This shows that the majority of the respondents are not aware of often or very often contacts with the community. The only exception here is in Okpai where the opinion of the Traditional Leader could not be sampled and according to table 1 below, the Oil companies related more with his office.

#### **Oil Companies' commitment to Community Development**

Respondents from Kwale and Okpai believed that the resident oil companies within their communities have shown appreciable commitment to developing their communities while respondents in Ebodei and Obodo Ugwa seem to not appreciate the commitment of the resident Oil companies towards developing their communities.

#### **Oil Companies' Consultation with host Communities**

Overwhelming majority of the respondents amounting to 53.33%, 77.14%, 40.00% and 69.34% in Kwale, Okpai, Ebodei as well as Obodo Ugwa all agreed that, relatively, the resident Oil companies do not consult with majority of

the people in the communities before embarking on any community development project as part of their social corporate responsibility.

#### **Existence of Conflicts between Oil Companies and the Communities**

Overwhelming majority of the respondents in Kwale and Okpai representing 90.67% and 98.10% unanimously agreed that there were conflicts between the host communities and the resident Oil companies. Also, majority of the respondents in Ebodei and Obodo Ugwa amounting to 51.11% and 54.67% agreed that there were conflicting situations between their communities and the Oil companies while 48.89% and 45.33% were of the view that there were no conflicting situations between their communities and the resident Oil companies.

#### **Respondent's Knowledge of the Existence of Inter-Community Conflicts between or among host Communities**

100.00% of the respondents in Kwale opined that there have been inter-community conflicts between Kwale and its neighbouring communities. In the same vein, majority of the respondents amounting to 96.16%, 84.44% and 97.33% in Okpai, Ebodei and Obodo Ugwa all agreed to the existence of inter-community conflicts.

#### **Respondent's Knowledge of the Existence of Intra-Community Conflicts within host Communities**

It was observed that 98.67% in Kwale, 98.10% in Okpai, 93.33% in Ebodei and 97.33% in Obodo Ugwa all agreed

that their communities have all witnessed one type of intra-community conflict or the other. The conflicts reflected here were those that related to environmental or resource control issues.

#### **Respondent's Knowledge of How often Environmental Conflicts Occur within the Communities**

Majority of the respondents believed that environmental conflicts rarely occurred in Kwale and Ebodei (52.00% and 77.78%) while it was found that such conflicts were very often in Okpai and often in Obodo Ugwa communities, respectively. Conflicts referred to here could include inter-community, intra-community, Oil company-community as well as government-community conflicts.

#### **Respondent's Knowledge of People most affected during Conflicts within host Communities**

Everyone in the communities, Kwale and Okpai with 65.33% and 93.33% were affected by the conflicts where as youths were most affected in Ebodei and Obodo Ugwa with 71.11% and 42.67% respectively. Even though, majority of the youths in Obodo Ugwa were most affected by conflicts, it was further found that a fair share (41.33%) also proves that everybody was equally affected. Both Ebodei and Obodo Ugwa could be witnessing conflicts that youths are the most active players in, thus the most effects on them.

#### **Quantifying the effects of Environmental Conflicts within the Communities**

Overwhelming majority (92.00% and 91.11%) believed that environmental-oriented conflicts has had devastating effects on Kwale and Ebodei communities but very devastating in both Okpai and Obodo Ugwa (70.48% and 54.67%), respectively. The effects were collectively on anything that stands in the interest of the host communities. It could include but not limited to loss of lives, properties and the likes.

#### **Means employed by Communities to resolve Conflicts**

Majority of the respondents in Kwale (45.34%) acclaimed that the community tends to organize meetings between Oil Company and youths. The use of Consultants and others were the least modes of resolution of environmental conflicts within the area. On the other hand, 45.71%, 46.67% and 1.33% representing values for Okpai, Ebodei and Obodo Ugwa communities were evident of the fact that the three communities utilize meetings between elders and the communities as means of resolving conflicts.

#### **Effectiveness of strategies currently being used to resolve Conflicts**

By strategies that are currently being used to resolve environmental-oriented conflicts, is meant various conventional ways that involve organizing meetings between the contending party and Royal fathers, elders, family heads as well as youths. These methods do not involve seeking the commitment and approval of majority of the people that make up such communities. It was found that the conventional conflict resolution methods have not been effective in all four sampled communities.

This is because, 49.33% in Kwale, 63.81% in Okpai, 62.22% in Ebodei as well as 69.34% in Obodo Ugwa all proved the ineffectiveness of the use of conventional methods of conflict resolution in the sampled communities.

#### **Effectiveness of Oil Companies' Commitment towards Corporate Social Responsibility to the Community**

Both Kwale (45.33%) and Okpai (48.57%) were of the opinion that the commitment of the resident Oil companies towards meeting their corporate social responsibilities were considered ineffective while Ebodei (48.89%) and Obodo Ugwa (61.34%) agreed to their satisfaction of the Oil companies' commitments with regards to their corporate social responsibilities towards their host communities.

#### **Your Satisfaction of Oil Companies' ability to resolve Conflicts**

56.00% and 25.33% disagreed and strongly disagreed towards accepting their satisfaction on the ability of resident Oil companies' ability to resolve conflicts in Kwale. This was trend was maintained in Okpai (54.29% disagreeing and 29.52% strongly disagreeing) while 42.67% strongly disagreed and 32.00% disagreed to the ability of the resident Oil companies to resolve environmentally-oriented conflicts in Obodo Ugwa. But, reverse was the case in Ebodei where 46.67% were undecided and 40.00% are satisfied with the ability of resident Oil companies to resolve environmentally-centred conflicts.

#### **Tendency of Oil Companies to keep their promises and agreements with host Communities**

Majority of the respondents in Kwale (37.33%) and Okpai (39.05%) opined that resident Oil companies don't always keep their promises and agreements with their host communities while on the contrary, majority in Ebodei (40.00%) but in Obodo Ugwa, 37.33% agreed and disagreed that the Oil companies do keep their promises and agreements with their host communities.

## DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

### Prevalence of Environmental-oriented Conflicts within the Study Area

Conflict types were Community-Oil company, Inter-Community, Intra-Community as well as Community-Government conflicts, respectively. In Kwale, majority, consisting of about 52.00% were of the opinion that though conflicts with environmental connotations existed within the communities, that it actually rarely occurred. Though, 30.67% opined that conflicts with environmental or resource control signatures is often within the area while the remaining 17.33% believe such conflicts is very often.

### During the Focus Group discussion a youth from Kwale said;

We have always conducted ourselves so well in this community and this has made it possible that the rate of crisis in this community and with the Oil companies have been very low, at least when compared with some other communities. If not, a lot of things had happened that would have led to serious crisis. We have made special efforts to always settle crisis within the community, with the Oil companies and even with our neighbours. I can say that the major challenge we have here is that managing ourselves in such a way that bad eggs do not truncate our peaceful lifestyles.

However, in Okpai, while majority were of the view that environmental-oriented and/or resource-centred conflicts were very often, lesser number believed it was often and least number of respondents believed that conflicts of such nature occurred rarely. This clearly shows that conflicts of this nature were very prominent, here.

### A well educated elder, during the Focus Group discussion session opined said that;

*"The Oil companies have seriously contributed to the high prevalence rate of conflicts in this community because our fathers lived peacefully with minimal domestic issues at their disposal to attend to. They solved issues pertaining to the community collectively until the Oil companies came and introduced this divide and rule method of relationship with the community and when things went out of hands and the community could no longer take their excesses, crisis erupted and this brought government into the circle. And, unfortunately, government had always taken sides with the oil companies. Settling our problems with our neighbours has not been much of a problem as compared to settling problems within us. Settling our differences amongst us is our greatest problem now".* Intra-community conflicts within the community has assumed a critical dimension of concern in Okpai. Thus, of all the types of conflicts

identified in this study and within the community, intra-community conflicts originating from environmental or resource concerns is the most dominant issue in Okpai.

However, at Ebodei, it was seen that there was low prevalence of environmental-oriented or conflicts originating from resource control as 77.78% opined that conflicts of this nature rarely occurred, 17.78% agreed that it was often while 4.45% opined that it was very often. A community elder in one of the communities that make up Ebodei said that though man would always have quarrels and that for Ebodei community, that he would say that for now, Ebodei had not been unfortunate to have witnessed the type of conflicts that most other communities that harbor Oil companies have witnessed. When asked, why?, he said it could partly be due to the fact that Ebodei people are peace-loving and secondly, the Oil company within Ebodei just started operation.

He further said, the major reason for the peaceful coexistence is because of the peace-loving nature because the Oil companies have not really done the wishes of the people, yet we are still bearing with them. For instance, we have many youths who are qualified to work there, yet they brought many of their staffs from other places outside the community.

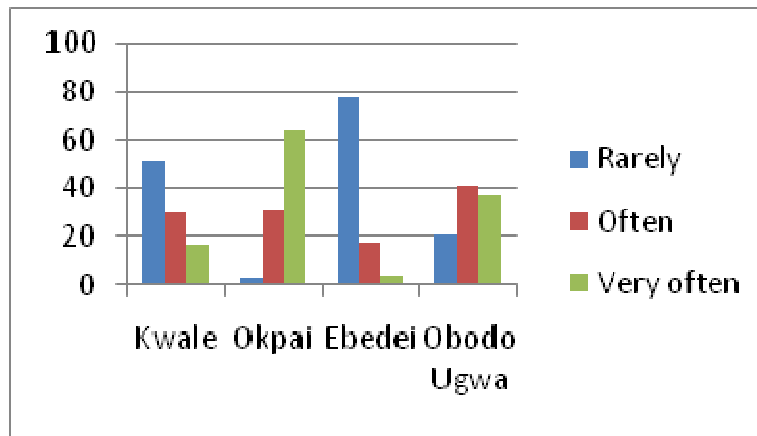
But at Obodo Ugwa community, 41.33% and 37.34% agreed that conflicts of this nature often and very often occurred. This is an indication of high prevalence rate of environmental-oriented and/or resource control-centred conflicts within the community.

### Thus, a community leader in Obodo Ugwa had this to say;

*"Much of the problems in this community are with our neighbour. Oil is a spirit. It always go and settle along boundaries to cause problems. In our own case, it settled at our boundary with Emu. Even the boundary between Igbe and Emu is still causing problems because of Oil. So, the major issue is, who actually owns the Oil? Who would the Oil companies recognize when it is at the boundary? We can't allow our ancestral heritage to be taken just like that. This had been the major problem here and it has caused the spilling of many people's blood since Oil was discovered here".*

In conclusion, it could be said that there is a high prevalence rate of environmental-oriented and/or resource control-centred conflicts within Kwale, Okpai and Obodo Ugwa communities unlike Ebodei where it was found to be very low. Also, the nature of the conflict varies from one community to the other. While Kwale, Okpai and Ebodei witnessed more of intra-community oriented conflicts to contend with, Obodo Ugwa predominantly witnesses inter-community conflicts within its domain.





**Figure 2:** showing how often Conflicts happen within the study area.

### Effects of Environmental-oriented Conflicts on Concerned Parties within the Study Area

From the findings of this study, it could be said that people from different communities had different types of experiences as far as the effects of conflicts within these communities are concerned. The trend generally noticed showed that in Kwale, Okpai and Obodo Ugwa, that women, children, youths as well as elders suffered the effects of conflicts much massively to very detrimental levels while in Ebodei, youths were at the top of the table as the most vulnerable and affected people in the course of the eruption of conflicts of this nature.

Results generated from this study further goes to show that the effects of environmental-oriented conflicts were very devastating in Okpai and Obodo Ugwa while it was devastating in Kwale and Ebodei. Thus, the quantification of impacts of the conflicts within these sampled areas can never be under-emphasized. In addition, Focus Group and Key Informant discussions conducted showed that the effects of the conflicts manifested in the following ways. These are;

**Loss of lives:** Most of the conflicts within the area involved loss of lives. This is inevitable because most of the conflicts involved the use of arms and ammunition either for provocative or in self defense.

#### A community leader in Obodo Ugwa Said;

*“Since the time the Oil well was discovered in this community, problems have happened that had made people to be killed. Each time the oil company attempted to come and work here, problems always spring up between us and Emu and this would make the oil company to abandon the work. Later, again, they would come and the same thing would still happen. On each occasion, lives had always been lost. For instance, during the last crisis, both sides did not only loose lives in the*

*fight; lives were also lost by both sides to soldiers who came to settle the problem”.*

Another man in Kwale also was of the view that conflicts between them and Beneku involved loss of lives. Thus, it could be said that conflicts within the study are in particular and Niger Delta region in general, involved loss of lives.

**Loss of Properties:** People’s personal belongings have been lost to conflicts within the study area. A youth leader in Okpai community hinted that not too long ago, a serious problem erupted within the community that led to massive vandalism and destruction of properties belonging to some key figures in the community. He further hinted that even the Igwe’s Palace was also torched.

**Pollution:** The land, air, water and forested areas of the communities have also been affected by discharge of pollutants into the environment.

#### Thus, a youth in Okpai had this to say;

*“My father told me that when they were young, that all the lakes and ponds around this area (points to some adjoining water bodies) were very good fishing grounds. But today, all the waters are now polluted. Somebody cannot fish in the waters again. This Agip gas flaring site (points to the gas flare site) has been here since the 1970’s and since then till now, it has never been put off. We don’t know how to measure the pollution but we have heard that it can cause acid rain and can kill. In fact, just go close and you would see how hot the whole region is. See (points to the trees near the gas flare site) all these trees, see how dry they look. Don’t they look as dead? He continued, most of them are dead. It is because of the pollution because if you start going towards Aboh community (a community away from the gas flare site), you see that the trees start to look green again”.*

In addition, Amukali (2012) documented evidence

suggesting possible surface, ground as well as rainwater pollution of samples collected from Okpai and Beneku owing to their having acquired reasonable levels of pollutants emanating from Oil-related activities within the communities.

**Harassments by Law Enforcement Agents:** As soon as conflicts erupt between Oil companies and the host communities, within, between or among host communities, government officials usually send law enforcement agents to go and restore peace and orderliness and prevent the conflicts from escalating beyond control. In doing this, they usually use massive force and coercion to carry out their activities.

**For instance, an elder in Kwale had this to say;**

*“Immediately the oil company started, lots of foreigners were brought to come and work in the site here. Mind you, there were enough and we still have qualified graduates in this community who could work in this site. The only indigenes who were employed were the sons and daughters of the elites in this town and when we tried to call their attention, problem started and the first thing was to bring in enough military people here. The military guys have been harassing us every now and then as if we are touts”.*

**Also, a youth in Okpai said;**

*“The Oil Company here has brought soldiers and mobile policemen to be guiding the whole of the area. Even when there is no problem, they are still here. The security job that we should have been doing has been given to them. If you pass through them and they don't like your face, they would tell you stop, search and harass you. God help you if you have any tattoo on your body. If you put on low-waist, you are on your own. It is bad. It is very bad, here”.*

**Retrogressive Development:** Whenever a conflict springs up, people tend to destroy whatever they feel represents the interest of government, Oil companies or even rivals as long as it would send the anticipated message to the right quarters. Hence, even the community development projects within the communities that have been put in place by government or Oil companies have always been destroyed leading to retrogression in the area in terms of developmental tendencies. A staff of one of the oil companies had this to say: If they (host community) destroying the existing social amenities in place, why should they keep asking us (Agip) to build new ones? So that they would still destroy it? Things don't work that way at all.

**Insecurity:** Generally, the tensed atmosphere creates a high sense of insecurity within the communities. Where inter-community or intra-community conflicts are predominant, the fear of reprisal attack is always there.

**Thus a community leader in Obodo Ugwa said;**

*“In this place (Obodo Ugwa), since all these problems started long ago, we don't sleep at all. We hear people sleeping with one eyes open. Hmmm, that is good, because we don't sleep at all. Surprise attack could bring a strong community down. So, we don't give room for surprises and this is why we don't sleep. We make sure that no pin drops on the ground without our knowledge. That is the only way we could survive in an environment like this”.*

**Displacement of People:** Conflicts generally cause displacement of people. And, in most cases, women are the most affected. A youth in Kwale hinted: During the period of that problem between Kwale and Beneku, people were seriously affected that many people, especially women and children had to pack away from their homes to other safer places.

**On the part of the Oil Companies**

Oil companies equally feel the negative impacts of conflicts. Amodu (2012) stated that the perceived effects of crisis on the Oil companies include insecurity and low productivity. Other could include loss of staffs, loss of properties, equipment, entire platforms, lost time injuries, loss money through unnecessary expenses in mobilizing military personnels or police officers and a host of others.

**A staff of one of the Oil servicing companies had this to Say;**

*“The effects of the conflicts are multifaceted. The host community is suffering, the Oil companies are suffering and government is equally suffering. We work with extreme caution, here”.*

**On the part of Government**

Government is not spared in terms of the effects of the conflicts. Government had had its establishments attacked. Social service amenities provided by government are often targets of attacks whenever there are problems between government and the communities. Thus, to protect these amenities, government officials usually send security agents to go to such areas to protect these amenities. Hence, a law enforcement agent who didn't want to be mentioned said:

*Every conflict can affect anybody. The innocent could suffer during conflicts no matter how meticulous one tries to do his/her job. Owing to the ways things happen so fast whenever there is crisis, the chances are that many people stand to be affected. I am not denying that. And, the truth is that, we are also affected. For instance, I have been in this bush for the past two months. I have not seen my twenty three day old child. My wife just gave birth and I have not seen my boy. Can you imagine that?*

*Although, my job here is to secure lives and properties but to do that, I have to secure my life too. We have lost our men to crisis between us and some Niger Deltan communities, though we don't take that from any community".*

## SUMMARY

Upon careful investigations of the issues raised in this study, it has been discovered that: In communities like Okpai and Obodo Ugwa, majority of the respondents opined that there were high prevalence of environmental-oriented and/or resource-centred conflicts within the communities while in Kwale and Ebedei, majority of the respondents agreed that though there were conflicts of this nature existing within their communities, however, they were of the opinion that such rarely occurred.

In addition, while Kwale witnessed more of Oil company-company conflicts than other forms of conflicts, Okpai witnessed more than intra-community conflicts than other forms, before being closely followed by Oil company-community conflicts. It was further found that Ebedei witnessed more prevalence of intra-community conflicts while Obodo Ugwa had witnessed more of inter-community conflicts than other forms of conflicts within the communities.

The quantitative effects and the people most affected by environmental-oriented and/or resource centred conflicts varied from one community to the other within the study area. In Kwale and Ebedei for instance, the effects were found to be devastating with majority of the people in the community severely affected in one way or the other in Kwale whereas mainly youths were more affected in Ebedei than every other category of persons in the community. Whereas, it was discovered that in Okpai and Obodo Ugwa, the effects were quantitatively found to be very devastating, with mainly youths more adversely affected than others in Obodo Ugwa and everybody affected in Okpai.

Strategies used for resolving environmental-oriented and/or resource-centred conflicts in this study focused more on exerting more energies towards a particular group of people within the community. In Kwale, organizing meetings between Oil companies and youths dominated the strategies employed. But in Okpai, Ebedei and Obodo Ugwa, organizing meetings between the Oil companies and the elders of the community were more recognized than every other interventions. These were mainly by host communities.

However, it was also found that respondents were of the opinion that the Oil companies were quick to romancing government than dialoguing with their host communities. Thus, government had more preference for

drafting and mobilizing military personnels to affected areas to help in maintaining law and order, whenever conflicts evolve within the communities.

The conventional strategies were found to be highly biased, one-sided in nature, adversarial in entirety, aggressively-centred,, fault-finding and with a holier-than-thou approach. Thus, its inability to have helped in successfully resolving conflicts of this nature within the Niger Delta area. Majority of the respondents in all the study areas (Kwale, Okpai, Ebedei and Obodo Ugwa) all agreed that the conventional strategies have not proven to be sustainably effective strategies for conflict resolution within the study area.

## CONCLUSION

Evidence from this study have shown that conventional methods and strategies for resolving environmental-oriented and/or resource-centred conflicts have no doubt proven to be ineffective in ensuring peace and stability within the Niger delta region. Instead, it has further increased the communication gap amongst rivalries, increased animosity, led to distrust and predisposed more people within the study area to danger of acts of intimidation, trepidation and criminality. Thus, there is need for search of the better strategies that would help to ensure efficient, effective and sustainable conflict resolution of environmental-oriented and/or resource-centred conflicts within the Niger Delta region.

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