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Leadership Tussles and Development Challenges of Oil Rich Communities of Southern IJAW LGA, Bayelsate State, Nigeria

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Abstract: *Struggles into leadership positions have become violent in recent years in many SILGA communities. The paper examined factors responsible for such actions in the oil rich communities. A total of 418 respondents were interviewed in 10 oil rich communities and the Likert type 4-point scale was used to analyse the data. The study found oil company operations in the area ranges from exploration, exploitation, storage and transportation. The positions for which elections are most in contention are Chairmen and Secretaries of CDC and Youth Council, and Revenue Committee. The perceived gains for holding such positions include award of contracts, honorarium, bribes, etc. The study area is largely rich in oil production and people want lead their communities at all means with a view to getting some personal gains. The struggles had negative implications on the development of the area, recommended zoning offices, reduction of honorarium, increase in age and educational qualifications of aspirants and forbid leaders from holding discussions with oil firms without a formal mandate.*

Keywords: *Oil Rich Communities, Leadership Tussles.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Leadership exists when two or more persons regularly meet and interact with a view to have common goals. Thus, a leader could be one who influences the views and aspirations of others or simply recognized as such (Ekpenyong, 1993). In this wise, leadership is sacrifice through collaboration within others intended to attaining desired goal(s). It is for the above reason that George Terry (1961) sees leadership as the activity of influencing people to strive willing for group goals.

Community leadership on the other hand are collective efforts directed at transforming the social world around us through collaboration, followership, initiation and generation of new realities for the benefit of the community (Weick, 1984). Since community leadership is service and sacrifice oriented for the good of the people, such personalities could easily be selected, appointed or recognized as such. This is often not the case with many oil rich communities in Southern Ijaw Local Government Area (SILGA), many of which has continued to witness violent crises and so unable to have acceptable leadership or one not without much fight.

SILGA is the hub of the oil infrastructure in Nigeria as almost all the major oil MNCs have their facilities here. It is home to the Diebu Creek and Nun River oil fields owned by SPDC, Pirigbene oil field owned by Agip, Igbomatoru, Ogboinbiri, Gbaraun, Koluama, Olugbobiri. etc. through which oil and gas are exploited and transported through pipelines to Bonny NLG and Oil Tank farms at Brass, Bonny, etc. and transit to the outside world, from offshore platforms near Koluama, Foropa, Ekeni and Ezetu, etc.

The dream of hosting oil fields in their communities certainly may not have included crises ridden towns and villages, but one with abundant social amenities and faster rate of development. Yet, they continue to witness disputes amongst their citizens, especially over leadership tussles. Some of such disputes have resulted in many becoming internally displaced persons (IDPs) in neighbouring communities and emigration to other locations for safety.

A. Statement of the Problem

When oil was first discovered in commercial quantity at the remote community of Otabagi in Oloibiri clan in the present day Bayelsa State in Nigeria in 1958, the people had a sigh of relief that the much talked about development infrastructure and better lifestyles have finally come their way. This position was not different from other oil producing communities, particularly with the arrival of the exploratory agencies, and later mining and exploitation of oil.

The general belief was that these communities will witness peace and development. This expectation was short-lived as many of such communities were either out rightly neglected in terms of development infrastructure and/or entangled in chains of leadership crises, fratricidal wars and abject poverty. These latent implications of oil exploration and exploitation were hardly imagined then by the people.



Community leadership centres on collective efforts at building social change. It is about bringing better human and community advancement and abandoning the age old beliefs and structures inimical to change through carefully thought-out plans and implementation of same by the citizenry (Hickman, 2009). It is creative and generative in the sense that new ideas based on their identified challenges, needs and solutions intended to bring about new realities through collaboration with members and non-members (Couto et al, 2002). Thus, community leadership is sacrifice and initiative for better lifestyles for the people, through finding practical solutions to identified problems. Community leadership is service rendered to a community or group to advance the course of the people. However, in recent times many communities find it difficult to peacefully select or appoint leaders to oversee the affairs of their communities. Many of such communities have been embroiled in leadership tussles thereby retarding the development process. Some oil rich communities in SILGA have been in the turmoil for years due to fights for leadership positions. The paper seeks to find out the underlying reasons for such sustained problems of selecting leaders, and the offices most sought after that leads to crises, and the perceived benefits of such office holders. The leadership crises in oil bearing communities in Southern Ijaw LGA have not been properly situated by scholars. Finally, solutions to this menace would be proffered - the causes of these crises, the major actors, offices most sought after that lead to crises, and how these can be reduced is the hallmark of this paper.

B. Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this paper is to examine the effects of leadership crisis on the development of the oil rich community, with the specific objectives, being:

1. To identify the nature of oil operations in the area.
2. To find out why oil rich communities have almost always been embroiled in leadership crises.
3. To determine the offices over which most of the contentions have been centred on.
4. To unveil the perceived gains of such office holders.
5. To evaluate the effects of the tussles on the development of the oil rich communities in Southern Ijaw LGA.

C. Research Questions

1. What is the nature of oil company operations in the area?
2. What factors could be responsible for the high rate of tussles for leadership amongst the people?
3. What are the main offices often in great contention in oil rich communities?
4. What are the foreseeable pecuniary gains associated with such community offices?
5. What are the side-effects of the many tussles for power in the oil rich communities?

D. Research Locale

Southern Ijaw Local Government Area (SILGA) was created out of the then Yenagoa LGA in 1991 in from the old Rivers State with Oporoma as its headquarters. SILGA lies between latitude. It is not only the largest of the 8 LGAs that comprise Bayelsa State, it is also believed to be the largest LGA south of Nigeria, with an area of 2,682 km² and occupies a land mass of 32.2% of the present Bayelsa State. It is subdivided into 8 RDAs (Rural Development Areas) – sub-governmental units - out of 30 in the state. SILGA shares boundaries with all the other seven LGAs in the state. It is bounded on the north by Yenagoa LGA, on the south by Brass LGA and the Atlantic Ocean, and on the west by Ekeremor, on the north-west by Sagbama and Kolokuma LGAs, and on the east by Ogbia and Nembe LGAs. It has a population of 319,413 at the 2006 census. SILGA is made up of seven Izon clans of Apoi, Bassan, Bomo, Ogboin, Oporoma, Olodiama and Tarakiri. It is also the largest producer of oil and gas in the country, but paradoxically, the least developed – no motorable roads, no functional hospitals, no potable water supply and largely accessible only through water transportation. It is host to many transnational business enterprises which own several oil wells and flow stations. Agip own two oil fields at Pirigbene and Ogoinbiri, while Shell has Diebu Creek and Nun-River oil fields *Ogboinbiri*, while Agip own *Pirigbene and Koluama flow stations*. *Texaco-Chevron* operates several oil wells and flow stations in off-shore operations. The people are majorly into fishing and some level of farming and lumbering occupations.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Leadership has remained a contested term with many definitions, perceptions and meanings (Grint, 2005). This makes it often difficult to explain leadership to the understanding and acceptance of people of diverse backgrounds. It is the process of influencing and often enlisting the cooperation of others to achieve one's set objectives (Wikipedia; Ojukwu, 2013). It is a way of dictating the direction and attention of people or sway others to behave in a way desired by the leader with a view to contribute towards achieving an objective which the leader considers crucial and necessary. Leadership is an ability to lead. Leadership is a group product and exists only when there are followers and tasks. Espoused reasons why people struggle to hold offices in oil rich communities' centre on the need to impress on the oil giants to provide facilities for the communities. Such aspirants vouch that they would ensure such oil firms provide amenities and employment opportunities thereby ensure enhanced livelihood (The South Commission, 1993).

Leadership require leaders' possesses intelligence, courage, humaneness, trustworthy and discipline. Tis notwithstanding, reliance on these qualities alone could be disastrous. This is because overreliance on intelligence could result in followers rebelling against him; humaneness to the extreme could bring about weakness and non-effectiveness, trust could result in following too much emphasis on courage; over dependence on discipline or sternness could breed cruelty. All virtues may be deployed at the appropriate degree to achieve target (Izu, 2003). Also, the leadership style adopted must be in tandem with the situation on ground.

Community leadership is exercised for the interest of specified a community (Anderson, 2001). The task is usually for the general well-being and improvement of the community, particularly improved lifestyles or living conditions of the people. Such personalities may not necessarily wait for other persons to solve the problem (Grosset, 1970).

A community leader is one widely believed to represent the interest of the community in matters affecting them (Wikipedia). However, many oil bearing communities have tales of complaints that compensatory funds to communities were misspent, misappropriated or diverted by such persons who turn themselves to agitators and negotiators for oil compensation ostensibly on behalf of the people but without the knowledge and approval of the people. Many struggle to be in community leadership position to use the opportunity to bargain for contracts or simply accept a token as bribe for themselves instead of the pursuing the felt needs of the community (Ololajulo, 2000).

Over the years intra and inter communal crises have become household words, needing no explanation due to their regular occurrence. Conflicts occur in all human societies. Conflicts could take several forms; however, its existence affirms the existence of opposing views. Conflicts could take the form of violent acts, disagreements, wars, opposition, clashes, etc. between and among individuals, organizations or communities due to differences in thoughts, interests, attitudes, understanding, perceptions, etc. It could be physical or verbal abuses, loss of peace and harmony, etc. (Ojukwu, 2013).

Conflicts are inherent and ubiquitous, thus occurring here and there and never ending. Conflicts arise from the pursuit of interests that are antagonistic to each other with intentions, goals and strategies. Thus, venturing into contestable public offices with perceived intentions of accessing better bargaining power and resources become sufficient fertile grounds for disagreements and conflicts on who is inherently capable and proper to hold such office(s) (Oтите, 2001).

Contesting for community offices are struggles for power to take decisions on behalf of the people. A conflict situation is created when a person or group plans to overcome the interests of others (Onigu & Albert, 2001). Over the years struggles for positions in oil rich communities offices have accentuated conflicts within and amongst communities which hitherto experienced peace and tranquillity. Tussles are rekindled as struggles in oil bearing communities because people want to be in charge of receiving payments, distributors of oil compensations as benefits of oil exploration impacts to the people (Okunola & Ademola, 2011).

Increase in conflicts and agitations for compensation in oil producing communities arose from differentials in oil compensation categories which deepen oil politics and conflicts from the prebendal roles of the elites and traditional rulers. The struggles for offices ensues because people support various candidates and can do anything for their preferred candidates to win based on primordial considerations, and perceived benefits of being carried along in the scheme of things (Joseph,1987).

III. METHODOLOGY

The cross-sectional survey design was chosen for this study because it serves our purpose appropriately. A purpose-made questionnaire was administered to leadership of chosen communities, and other residents knowledgeable in the crises bedeviling their communities. The instrument was designed to capture the demographic variables of the respondents, knowledge of oil company operations in the area, leadership selection processes and offices most contested for as well as their opinions on why certain personalities put themselves forward for elective/appointive offices in their communities and its implications.

The population of study consists of all residents of oil bearing communities in Southern Ijaw LGA. The sample size comprises of 500 respondents from ten oil bearing communities – 50 per community. A total of 452 questionnaires were retrieved, however some 34 of them were discarded resulting from rough handling by respondents, incorrectly or only partly completed, and leaving us with 418 questionnaires for analysis. The time frame for the study was between March and May, 2023. The cross tabulation statistical tool was used to analyse the demographic variables while the mean was adopted for the substantive questions Likert-type scale. The mean determined the strength of variables. The mean responses were computed on a four-point scale, thus: $4+3+2+1 \div 4 = 2.50$. Means scores ranging from 2.50 and above was accepted, scores less than this were rejected.

Table 1: Demographic Details of Respondents

S. No	Variables	Freq.	%
1.	Age		
	18-25 Years	194	46.41
	26-35 Years	103	24.64
	36-45 Years	78	18.66
	46 Years and Beyond	43	10.29
2.	Sex		
	Male	239	57.18
	Female	179	42.82
3.	Marital Status		
	Single	238	56.94
	Married	120	28.71
	Divorced / Separated	37	8.85
	Widowed	23	5.50
4.	Highest Level of Educational Attainment		
	Primary	54	12.92
	Secondary	266	63.64
	Tertiary	98	23.44
5.	Social Status in Community		
	Chief	31	7.42
	CDC Chairman	29	6.97
	CDC Member	73	17.46
	Title Holder	19	0.45
	Opinion Leader	51	12.20
	Other Citizens	215	51.44

The age distribution of our respondents shows 194 (46.41%) as aged between 18-25 years, 103 (24.64%) aged 26-35 years, 78 (18.66%) aged age 36-45 years, while 43(10.29%) are 46 years and beyond. The sex of respondents is 239 (57.18%) male and 179 (42.82%) female. Also, the marital status of respondents indicates 238 (56.94%) as single, 120 (28.71) as married, 37 (8.85%) are either divorced or separated, with only 23 (5.50%) claim to be widowed. The table also show the highest level of educational attainment of respondents, with 54 (12.92%) as primary school graduates, 266 (63.64%) as secondary level education graduates, while 98 (23.44%) are graduates of tertiary institutions.

Table 2: Nature of Oil Company Operations

S. No	Variables	Freq.	%
1.	Oil Pipelines	352	84.21
2.	Flow Stations	36	8.61
3.	Manifolds	29	6.94
4.	Oil Wells	311	74.40
5.	Seismic/Explorative Operations	402	96.18
6.	Oil Terminals	49	11.72

The area of operations of oil companies in Southern Ijaw LGA covers all the major areas of oil exploration, exploitation, storage and transportation. These range from seismic/exploration, oil wells, pipelines, flow stations, manifolds, and oil terminals.

Table 3: Factors Responsible for Struggles in Community Offices

S. No	Variables	SA (4)	A (3)	SD (2)	D (1)	Total	Mean (X)	Decision
1.	Desire to be in the mainstream of community affairs	188	133	59	38	1307	3.13	Accepted
		752	399	118	38			
2.	Desire to represent my quarter (compound) in the community	43	45	153	177	790	1.89	Rejected
		172	135	306	177	790		
3.	Desire to be part of the decision	147	498	55	50	1246	2.98	Accepted

	making/implementation bodies	588	498	110	50			
4.	Desire to have some benefits through contacts with companies officials/ communities	138	143	79	58	1137	2.86	Accepted
		552	429	158	52			
5.	Sees self as the most competent/qualified to speak for the community	119	157	105	37	837	2.00	Rejected
		476	471	210	37			

Table 3 sought to find out the factors that make for the high rate of tussles and sometimes conflict in seeking for public offices in the oil rich communities. The table shows that desire to be in the mainstream of community affairs (3.13), desire to be part of the decision-making/implementation bodies (2.98), and desire to get some benefits though contacts with company officials and other communities (2.86), were accepted, since the mean was above 2.50. On the other hand, two items: (1) need to represent my segment of the community (1.89), and seeing self as the most competent/qualified to speak for the community (2.00) were rejected, since mean was below 2.50.

Table 4: Main Community Offices often in Contention

S. No	Variables	Freq.	%
1.	Paramount Ruler (Amananawei)	111	26.56
2.	Deputy Paramount Ruler	88	21.05
3.	CDC Chairman	379	90.67
4.	CDC Secretary	255	84.93
5.	Youth President	230	55.02
6.	Youth Secretary	150	35.89
7.	Revenue Committee Chairman/Member	318	76.08
8.	Treasurer	138	33.01

From the table, the offices most often in contention are CDC chairman, followed by CDC Secretary and chairman/members of revenue committee. Others are Youth President and Secretary. The Paramount Ruler and Deputy are less in contention because occupants stay for a relatively long period, unlike the earlier offices selected annually or bi-annually depending on the constitution of the respective community.

Table 5: Pecuniary Gains Associated with Community Offices Holders

S. No	Variables	SA (4)	A (3)	SD (2)	D (1)	Total	Mean (X)	Decision
1.	Award of contracts from oil companies	217	112	63	26	1356	3.24	Accepted
		868	336	126	26			
2.	Desire to represent my quarter (compound) in the community	89	137	118	74	1077	2.57	Accepted
		356	411	236	74			
3.	Desire to be part of the decision making/implementation bodies	77	163	96	82	1071	2.56	Accepted
		308	489	192	82			
4.	Desire to have some benefits through contacts with companies officials/ communities	102	153	67	96	1097	2.86	Accepted
		408	459	134	96			
5.	Sees self as the most competent/qualified to speak for the community	96	122	116	84	1066	2.55	Accepted
		384	366	232	84			

All items in Table 5 were accepted. This is an indication that the tussles have relationship with perceived pecuniary gains associated with holding such community offices rather than service for the benefit of the community.

Table 6: Effects of the Struggles on the Development of the Communities

S. No	Variables	SA (4)	A (3)	SD (2)	D (1)	Total	Mean (X)	Decision
1.	Lack of development activities	149	133	66	70	1197	2.86	Accepted
		596	399	132	70			
2.	Sectional representation	179	112	51	76	1230	2.94	Accepted
		716	336	102	76			
3.	Crises/Hostilities	233	102	41	42	1362	3.26	Accepted
		932	306	82	42			
4.	Emergence of unpopular leaders	183	133	72	30	1305	3.12	Accepted
		732	399	144	30			

5.	Outburst of factions	123	128	83	84	1126	2.55	Accepted
		492	384	166	84			

The struggles for leadership position in the communities often lead to conflicts and feuds. Such conflicts often leads to absence of development projects, sectional representation, unending crises and hostilities, emergence of unpopular leaders and outburst of factions and conflicts. Therefore all items were accepted since all were above the acceptable mean of 2.50.

Table 7: Ways of Reducing the Unholy Struggles and Bringing about Development

S. No	Variables	SA (4)	A (3)	SD (2)	D (1)	Total	Mean (X)	Decision
1.	Zone offices to sections of the community	131	147	111	29	1206	2.89	Accepted
		524	441	222	29			
2.	Zones should first screen candidates prior to elections	89	139	118	198	1207	2.88	Accepted
		356	417	236	198			
3.	Reduce honorarium for community office holders	133	121	118	46	1168	2.79	Accepted
		532	363	236	46			
4.	Ban community office holders from holding meetings with oil firms without resolutions of the community's general congress	112	108		66	1102	2.79	Accepted
		448	324	264	66			
5.	Increase age limit and qualification/experience for the positions	133	133	87	65	1170	2.80	Accepted
		532	399	174	65			

Table 7 above shows that all five items were accepted as they were all within the acceptable mean of 2.50. Zoning offices, screening candidates at respective quarters, and increasing the age and educational qualifications/experience would reduce the number of qualified candidates to be voted for. Reducing honorarium/benefits and banning meetings with oil firms without resolutions in a general meeting directing such action would put paid to illegal/unethical dealings with oil firm officials.

IV. DECISION

Oil company operations in the area range from exploration, exploitation, storage and transportation. This indicates the high concentration of oil companies and activities in SILGA. High rate of conflicts and tussles over community leadership positions arises from the desire by many to be in the mainstream of community affairs with a view to get contracts through constant contact with company officials and not necessarily for the interest of the general community. The offices often in contention are CDC Chairman and Secretary, Youth President and Secretary, and Revenue Committee Chairman and members. Treasurer position is not much in contention as monies are hardly kept in his custody. The pecuniary gains seem to be the main reasons for many to contest such offices because of the believe that with such offices, they could gain oil contracts, given transportation allowances to attend meetings with company officials, bribes, etc.

The high rate of struggles for community offices have negatively affected many communities with lack of development activities, constant hostilities and crises, emergence of unpopular leaders and outburst of factions in communities. Conflicts, tussles and underdevelopment of such communities will be reduced when offices are zoned for a period, and each zone subject its candidates to screening and only the best is put forward. Reduction of honorarium/benefits due to office holders would make such positions less lucrative and competitive. Only resolutions reached by the community will stand as mandate to represent them in dealings with oil firms. Increasing the age limit, educational qualification, and experience will reduce the number of candidates for elective offices and hence less frictions.

V. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conflicts and struggles for power exist in all human societies because people always want to take advantage of available opportunities. Contest for community offices in oil rich communities are expressions of their will to be at the corridors of power, with a view to get some personal benefits. Elections to community offices become tough and violet as everybody wants to lead at all means. Such tussles may be curtailed through zoning, reduction of honorarium/benefits, and increase in age, educational qualification/experience, and ensuring that resolutions remain the only mandate to negotiate with officials of oil companies.

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