

# Public Relations And Management Of Community Conflicts In The Niger-delta: Towards Theorizing Sustainable Model For The Gbaramatu Conflicts

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## ABSTRACT

It is no news that the conflicts between oil companies and their host communities in the Niger-Delta are unending. Despite several efforts by the multinational oil companies to resolve and manage their conflicts with their host communities, there seems to be no hope in sight. The need to find lasting solution to the crises necessitated this study which is on Public Relations and Management of Community Conflicts in the Niger-Delta: Towards Theorizing Sustainable Model for the Gbaramatu Conflicts. The study anchored on the theory of issues management and adopted secondary sources for collecting data which were critically analysed. Findings show that a hybrid public relations model called 'asymmetrical-symmetrical' model is capable of achieving sustainable resolution of the conflicts between Chevron Nigeria Limited and Gbaramatu kingdom. The paper therefore recommended that Chevron Nigeria Limited should adopt the asymmetrical-symmetrical public relations model that is dyadic and will lead to effective management of the conflicts between CNL and Gbaramatu kingdom. Also, the paper recommended that people of Gbaramatu kingdom should adopt peaceful means of resolving their conflicts with Chevron Nigeria Limited.

**Keywords:** Conflict; Niger-Delta; Public Relations; Public Relations Models; Sustainable Public Relations Models

## 1.0 Introduction

Public relations engenders mutual understanding between an organization and its various publics. This is why Norman (2002) is of the view that public relations establishes and maintains mutual understanding between an organization and its public with the intention of communicating the organization's views and objectives while at the same time correcting public reactions. Jefkins (2003) corroborated Normans's view when he opined that public relations consists of all forms of planned communication between an organization and its publics for the purpose of achieving specific objectives. In the same vein, Nwosu (2011) argues that public relations is winning friends, keeping them and influencing them as well as others. From the above perspectives of public relations, it is clear that public relations is the creation and maintenance of goodwill and mutual understanding between an organization and its public (Iyadi and Okolie, 2017). Public relation is a necessity if an organization wants to survive and have good rapport with its various stakeholders who are its publics.

Conflict as a concept is known to be with humanity. Conflict also known as crisis, friction, tension is the product of the differences inherent in humans. Nnebedum (2014) aver that conflict is an expression of hostility, negative attitudes, antagonism, aggression, rivalry and mis-understanding. Nnebedum (2014) furthermore posits that conflict is as a result of the inability of two or more values, perspectives and opinions to align or agree. Hale et al., (2005), cited in Ugwwoh and Okonkwo (2018) argue that conflict is an incident or event with consequences, which pose significant threat to the strategic objectives of an organization. These consequences include downsizing, corporate lawsuits, negative media coverage, government probes, insurgency, political crisis, quality problems, product recalls, boycotts, and strikes. Crisis if not properly managed can degenerate to more dire consequences to an organization and its publics.

Conflicts in Nigeria's Niger-Delta region which has reservoirs of oil and gas resources are recurring decimals. The conflicts have led to shutdown of production, arrests, litigation and death among others. Nkwocha (2010) aptly captured the consequences of the crisis between oil firms in Nigeria's Niger-Delta and their host communities when he contend that over the years, major oil companies in Nigeria's Niger – Delta have been

facing one crisis or the other with their host communities, often leading to militancy, kidnapping of oil workers, vandalization of facilities, killings and shutting down of facilities. Gbaramatu kingdom in Warri South-West Local Government Area of Delta State, is one of the host communities to Chevron Nigeria Limited (CNL),

The dissatisfaction of the activities of CNL by the people of Gbaramatu kingdom in Warri South-West Local Government Area of Delta State has resulted in frequent conflicts with the oil giant. This dissatisfaction has also led to protests, vandalization of oil facilities, shutting down of oil production, kidnapping of the company's staff and forming militant group through the setting up of Camp 5 in Okerenkoko, Gbaramatu kingdom. The people of Gbaramatu kingdom see CNL as agent of the Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN) who forcefully collect their God-given resources. The crises have brought countless conflicts between CNL and the people of Gbaramatu. It appears that the recurring crisis between CNL and Gbaramatu kingdom may possibly be as a result of the absence of sustainable public relations strategy to manage the conflicts. This absence of sustainable public relations strategy between CNL and Gbaramatu kingdom is the gap which this paper seeks to fill. Therefore, the study will proffer sustainable public relations strategy to end the recurring conflicts between Chevron Nigeria Limited (CNL) and people of Gbaramatu kingdom in Warri South-West Local Government Area of Delta State.

### 1.1 Research Objectives:

In line with the above general objectives, the study seeks the following specific objectives:

- i. To determine the causative factors of the recurring conflicts between CNL and people of Gbaramatu kingdom.
- ii. To ascertain the effects of the causative factors of the recurring conflicts between CNL and people of Gbaramatu kingdom.
- iii. To proffer sustainable public relations strategies by proposing sustainable theoretical perspectives to manage the recurring conflicts between CNL and people of Gbaramatu kingdom.

### 1.2 Research Questions:

Arising from the objectives are the following research questions:

- i. What are the causative factors of the recurring conflicts between CNL and people of Gbaramatu kingdom?
- ii. What are the effects of the recurring conflicts between CNL and people of Gbaramatu kingdom?
- iii. Are there sustainable theoretical perspectives to manage the recurring conflicts between CNL and people of Gbaramatu kingdom?

### **1.3 Significance of the Study**

This study will be relevant in several ways. For the oil companies who operate in the Niger-Delta, particularly Chevron Nigeria Limited, the study will propose public relations models that will achieve sustainable conflict prevention and management with its host community. For the host communities, especially people of Gbaramatu kingdom, the paper will provide ways to forge smooth relationship with Chevron Nigeria Limited. Lastly, for academics, the study will add to existing literatures on public relations and conflict management in Nigeria's Niger-Delta.

## **2.0 Literature Review**

### **2.1 Causative Factors of the Recurring Conflicts between CNL and People of Gbaramatu Kingdom**

The recurring conflicts between Chevron Nigeria Limited (CNL), who represents oil companies that operate in the Niger-Delta, and people of Gbaramatu kingdom, who represents host communities in the Niger-Delta region, did not emanate from the blues. Certain causative factors are attributable to the recurring crises. The following have been identified as the causes of the unending conflicts between CNL and people of Gbaramatu kingdom:

#### **2.1.1 Resource Curse**

Resource curse is also known as “oil curse”. Courson (2016) argues that conflict comes as an account that links resources, politics and development. Courson (2016) furthermore contend that an influential body of contemporary scholarship has linked armed conflicts and underdevelopment in countries of the global south to abundance of primary natural resources. This school of thought according to Collier, Hoeffler and Ross, cited in Courson (2016) are of the view that the propensity for (armed) conflict in the global south is the

abundance of resources. They further posit that resource wealth act as a motivation to greedy and/or corrupt actors who violently pursue wealth by funding the conflicts and their armed supporters through capturing, stealing or extorting oil revenues. More recently, the concept has gone beyond a “war economics”. Rather, it has provided explanations for how resource abundance feeds the paradox of plenty and how a dangerous mix of corruption, poverty, conflict and state failure also generate serious threat to global security and development. Nigeria's Niger-Delta is an archetypical oil-state. The region made Nigeria the thirteenth largest producer of oil which produces over 2million barrel per day (bpd), the jewel in the crown of the resource-rich West African Gulf of Guinea. The Niger-Delta has an estimated over 30 billion barrels of oil reserve. One can see the huge resource that exists in the region. Over the long period, the delta has been shaped by successive waves of trans-Atlantic capitalist accumulation and its associated commodity booms and busts. This is associated with the slave trade between the fifteenth and eighteenth century, the palm oil economy of the nineteenth and early twentieth century, and since mid-twentieth century by oil and gas. In the last half century, Nigeria came to depend heavily on oil and gas revenues: it has become a classical rentier (resource – dependent) state with 98 percent of foreign exchange earnings, 80percent of government revenues, and almost half of GDP derived from the petroleum sector. The Niger-Delta has therefore become the poster-child of the resource curse (Courson, 2016).

#### **2.1.2 Colonial Theory**

The second causative factor of the recurring conflicts between CNL and people of Gbaramatu kingdom is what Moruku (2012) termed “colonial theory”. Colonial theory is synonymous with the “colonial logic”. Colonial theory, which is also colonial history, is the history of the economic exploitation, political domination, denial of human rights, even dehumanization, and violent repression of the people of the Niger-Delta represented by Gbaramatu kingdom (Rodney 1972; Toffler, 1980; Dussel and Ibara-Colado, 2006). Colonial theory is of three categories and stages: British colonialism; Internal colonialism; and Corporate colonialism mediated through the state. Osha (2006) in his work of unbundling post-colonialism led credence to the above categorization in order to give salience to the role of supranational oil corporations (oil companies) in the Niger Delta crises.



The colonial theoretical framework emphasizes the impact and influence of classical colonialism on the subsequent socio-political structures and socio-historical relationship in ex-colonies, which fills the theoretical void left by colonial theorists (Osha, 2006). British colonialism in Nigeria and the Niger–Delta was the expression of European grand imperialism in Africa. It was a concerted effort of European capitalists-imperialists countries as evident in the Berlin Conference of 1885, subsequent scramble for, and partition of Africa into spheres of influence, trade, political domination and economic exploitation (Moruku, 2012).

British colonialization was characterized by dismantling the traditional rulership institutions in Niger-Delta region but preserved those in Northern Nigeria. Nana Olomu of Itsekiri, Oba Oavouranwen Nogbaisi of Benin Kingdom, King Jaja of Opobo, and King William Dappa Pepple were humiliated, deposed and deported (Osha, 2006). This led to unhindered exploitation of the indigenous people of the Niger-Delta through the Royal Niger Company, the British economic arm. But the indigenous people resisted the colonial masters as seen in the attack of factories of Royal Niger Company in Brass, Akassa and Patani (all in Niger-Delta) in 1882. Also, British colonialism structured Nigeria in such a way that the people of the Niger-Delta were minority and subservient to the majority tribes.

Noteworthy, the people of the Niger-Deltans were sawn asunder and thrown into the Eastern and Western Regions as colonial subjects. The cry of the Niger-Deltans for fairness and justice led to the setting up of the Willinks Commission to look at the cry. Sadly, the recommendations of the Commission were not implemented (Moruku, 2012). Moruku further argues that the pain and hence the radicalization of the Ijaw ethnic group in particular, stems from the construction of a counter-factual history of untrammelled socio-political development, a sort of nostalgia, which throws into relive the gap between “what it is” and “what it could or would have been” in development trajectory of the oil-rich region. This radicalization was aggravated by the permanent presence of the British in various guises and colluding with the local ethnic hegemony in perpetrating further acts of marginalization. All of these set the tone for the other forms of colonialism. The British colonialists groomed technocrats from the dominant regions of the Nigeria emergent nation-state to hand over political and administrative power to.

The Nigerian power elites merely domesticated and perpetuated the administrative and industrial legacies from the British colonial masters (Ekuerhare, 1997; Aderinto, 1998). This is the Internal colonialism. Subsequently, post-colonial technocrats and political leaders became victims of what Derrida called the “logic of replacement” by transgressing classical colonialism in the form of anti-colonialism only to re-enact it by imposing on 'the people of the Niger-Delta, a variant of the British colonialism they vehemently opposed (Newman, 2001; Moruku, 2012). The Niger-Delta thus became an internal colonial territory, whose only interest was as a source of raw materials and wealth to the Nigerian State operated by the ethnic hegemony. The humiliation and dismantling of traditional rulership institutions by the British colonialists were replicated by the Nigeria internal colonialists in the Niger-Delta when the Joint Task Force (JTF), the military arm of the Nigerian internal colonialists, bombed the palace of the paramount ruler of Gbaramatu kingdom, Pere Bebemimibo, in Warri South-West Local Government Area of Delta State on May 13, 2009, on the guise that it is linked to a militant warlord, Government Ekpemupolo (Alias Tompolo) of Movement for Emancipation of the Niger-Delta (MEND).

Internal colonialism and the struggle against it is different from classical colonialism and the struggle against it. Whereas classical colonialism was imposed by foreigners and the struggle against it involved seeking political independence; internal colonialism was imposed by the dominant ethnic groups and the struggle against it in the Niger-Delta, involved demand for restructuring of the polity in the practice of true federalism (Oyefusi, 2008; Tuodolo and Ogoriba, 1998). The internal colonization of the Niger-Delta is the denial of land rights, environmental rights, spiritual rights, basic human rights and others to the people of the region.

Corporate colonialism, the last form of the colonialism theory, involves the roles of supranational oil companies (SNOCs) in the Niger-Delta. Ross (2001), cited in Moruku (2012) buttresses this colonialism by arguing that a large portion of the Foreign Direct Investments (FDIs) were devoted to the primary sector industry such as oil extraction or mining. Such investment is particularly troublesome with regards to human rights. Blanton and Blanton (2006) equally contend



that the end results of such investment is that the investors may find themselves committed to an unstable and repressive host country or community. Corporate colonialism is a good description of the new colonialism in the era of globalization (Moruku, 2012).

No doubt, corporate colonialism entails what Harvey (2004) described as “accumulation by dispossession”. Corporate colonialism is the creation of Export Processing Zones (EPZs) and extracting attractive conditions for locating these facilities which include tax freedom, guaranteed supply of cheap labour, complete autonomy and provision of denationalized spaces, lax or paper environmental standards which are not enforced. Whereas classical colonialism was perpetrated by the nation state, the new or corporate colonialism was perpetrated by supranational oil corporations (SNOCs) with the intention of “accumulation by dispossession”. These SNOCs locate FDI facilities in the developing countries of the world and exploit these countries (Tausch, 1999), cited in Maruku, (2012).

### 2.1.3 Environmental Degradation

Ojatorotu and Gilbert (2010), cited in Nwankwo (2017) argue that while the Nigerian government and the oil companies make billions of dollars through oil exploration and exploitation in the Niger-Delta, the local people are at the receiving end through environmental despoliation and outright wretchedness occasioned by oil-induced environmental degradation and sabotage in the form of youth restiveness. Eyinla nd Ukpo (2006) gave statistics of the oil spillages: between 1976 – 1998, there was approximately 60,000 oil spillages within the Niger-Delta, with roughly 2,369,471 barrels of crude oil leaking into the ecosystem, with Shell Petroleum Development Company (SPDC) alone spilling 100,000 barrels from its Jones Creek Flow Station in 1997 and 1998. Ojatorota and Gilbert (2010) further contend that oil exploration and exploitation practice of oil companies in the Niger-Delta involves dumping of oil wastes into rivers, seas and all the surrounding areas in the guise of re-injecting them into old oil wells.

### 2.1.4 Legislative Disempowerment and Subjugation of the People of the Niger-Delta

Fidelis and Samuel (2011), cited in Nwankwo (2017) state that the Nigerian State's consciousness on the veritable nature of oil as a source of massive wealth alongside the realization that oil is only

concentrated in the areas of the Southern minority of the Niger-Delta prompted the Nigerian leaders who are from the majority ethnic groups into the promulgation of some questionable laws. These laws were unambiguously used to exploit and disempower the Niger-Delta minorities, although other authors blame the obnoxious laws that denied the people of the Niger-Delta of their natural inheritance on colonial laws (Akoand Okomah, 2009; Obi, 2010; Ako, 2013).

Below is a highlight of a few of those obnoxious and questionable laws:

v The Land Use Decree of 1978, which vested land ownership in Nigeria to the Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN) and its accredited agents, thereby dispossessing the people of the Niger-Delta of ownership and occupancy rights of theirlands.

v The Offshore Oil Revenue Act of 1971, which vested on the Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN) exclusive rights over the continental shelf of the coastal areas.

Ojatorotu and Gilbert (2010) further argue that these oppressive laws become effective whenever the Federal Government of Nigeria or oil companies want to take advantage of the host communities on their natural resources.

### 2.1.5 State-Imposed Poverty

Oviasuyi and Uwadia (2010) states that despite the huge amount of money generated from the Niger-Delta, through oil and gas, the local people live in abject poverty as the people have no access to basic social amenities such as drinkable water, good roads, electricity, etc. The people in their creeks watch daily how the oil companies make fortune from the petroleum deposits in their backyard. Ejibunu (2007, p. 10) in agreeing with Oviasuyi and Uwadia's view on the poverty of the region states thus: “the region tends to be a place where time seems to have stood still and where people live in poverty, leaving the residents of the region without any other option than to be bitter and angry over the neglect of the people by the Federal Government”. This stance was again corroborated by Mukagbo, the CNN reporter of Inside Africa who said: “In the Niger-Delta, a scene of abject poverty pervades the area, which is very similar to what one is likely to find in a refugee camp notwithstanding the fact that the region fetches the government the money for running the affairs of the state” (Ejibunu, 2007, p. 10). Oviasuyi and Uwadia (2010) further contend

that before the discovery of oil in 1956, agriculture was the mainstay of the people and major source of revenue for both state and federal governments.

The Western Regional Government used revenue from cocoa to develop the region. The Northern Regional Government used revenue from groundnut to develop the region. Paradoxically and sadly, in the case of the Niger-Delta, government failed to re-invest the revenue generated from the Niger-Delta into the region. This has resulted in unending conflicts in the region.

### **2.1.6 Failed Government Promises**

Nwankwo (2017) opines that the Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN) has ignored several public calls to compensate people of the Niger-Delta for the negative impacts of oil exploration on the environment in the forms of oil spillage, reduction of arable land, and destruction of wildlife and fish reserves. Rather than heed to the public calls, the FGN has made several unfulfilled promises, which probably has led to hostage-taking and kidnappings in the region. This has equally led to breaking of oil pipelines to siphon crude oil by the youths (Afinotan and Ojakorotu, 2009). The oil companies in the region seem to have abandoned the idea of genuine corporate social responsibility (CSR) and the basic concept of the stakeholder theory.

### **2.1.7 Resource Allocation and Resource Control**

Nwankwo (2017) contends that the revenue allocation formula being adopted by the Nigerian government has been criticized as not reflecting the interest of the people of the Niger-Delta who generate over 70% of the national resources. This skewed resource allocation has led to armed groups challenging the State and its policies. Affirming this position, Nna and Ibaba (2011), cited in Nwankwo (2017) are of the view that the Niger-Delta conflict is triggered by oil revenue allocation and oil related decrees that the restive Niger-Deltan youths believe must be abrogated as they do not represent their interests as the host communities.

## **2.2 Impact of the Recurring Conflicts on the People of Gbaramatu kingdom**

There is no doubt that the Niger-Delta conflicts have impacted negatively on the people of Gbaramatu kingdom. Here are some of the impacts of the recurring conflicts on the people of the Niger-

Delta:

### **2.2.1 Poverty**

Adeola (2001) is of the opinion that the Niger-Delta (oil resources) conflicts have adversely affect the region. The Niger-Delta conflicts have led to apparent ecological devastation of the environment which has relieved the natural fisherman and farmers of their occupations with its resultant effect of poverty and unemployment, among others (Nwankwo, 2017).

All-round poverty in the oil producing communities in Nigeria's delta is no longer news. This can be perceived in the manifested frustration and aggression of the local people. The oil producing communities in the Niger Delta perceive that oil exploration and exploitation have not contributed to their development when compared to the accruable revenue from oil. This argument does not mean that oil exploration and exploitation have generated poverty to all actors in the conflict: oil has given the Nigerian economy both huge revenue and popularity but has left the host communities poor in all areas. The host communities believe that this is ethnicism caused by the sudden shift in the derivation principle of allocation of revenue earlier practiced in the 1960s. Before the discovery of oil in the Niger-Delta, the derivation principle was 100% revenue to the region that generated such revenue. But with the discovery of oil, the principle suddenly changed to a paltry 1.5% from 100%. This has marginally been increased to 13% (Ikporukpo, 2001, cited in Nwankwo, 2017). The host communities consider it as injustice which has caused them real poverty.

**2.2.2 Suppression of the Host Communities using Brute Force:** Another impact of the Niger Delta crises on the people of the region is the suppression of the host communities using the instrumentality of force. The perceived injustice in derivation principle occasioned by sudden downward review of revenue allocation to the region that generates such revenues, led to agitation for justice which the local ethnic hegemony is suppressing with brute force. Below is a chronicle of the suppression of the Gbaramatu people for asking for justice for their oil wealth by the Nigerian state.

v In 2009, the palace of the paramount leader of the Gbaramatu kingdom was bombed in the guise of linking it to Government Ekpomapolo

(A.K.A. Tompolo) of movement for the emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND).

v In 2015, the Nigerian state through the military invaded Gbaramatu kingdom and attacked the people of Gbaramatu on the guise of fighting members of the militant group called Niger-Delta Avengers (NDA).

The agitations of the people of the Niger Delta forced the multinational oil companies (MNOCs) including Chevron Nigeria Limited (CNL) to kick-start corporate social responsibility (CSR) in the local communities. The first phase was called “community assistant project” (Ite, 2011 cited in Nwankwo, 2017). The oil companies gave the host communities, gifts which in their perception, constituted the needs to the communities. However, these corporate gifts to the host communities rather exacerbated the conflicts. Okoko (1996) argues that there is direct relationship between oil companies' provision of basic amenities and community conflicts, as the philanthropist system adopted by oil companies amplified corrupt practices and accentuated a higher level of intra-communal and inter-communal conflicts.

Furthermore, the dissatisfaction of the people against the oil companies necessitated a change in CSR from community assistance strategy to community development from 1998 – 2003, and sustainable community development in 2004. Many authors conclude that all three old CSRs strategies are dissatisfactory, adding that the oil companies, in their policies, express commitment to concrete environmental practices but in reality have failed the people of the Niger Delta (Ibeanu and Luckham, 2007; Human Rights Watch, 1999; Frynas, 2005).

It is obvious that assuaging the agitations of the people of the Niger Delta by the oil companies through various public relations strategies in the form of CSRs has not yielded the expected results of sustainable peace in the region. This is the crux of this paper which is towards proposing sustainable theoretical perspectives to conflict management between Chevron Nigeria Limited and Gbaramatu kingdom.

### **2.3 The Blame Game Theory of the Conflicts**

One attribute of the recurring conflicts between Chevron Nigeria Limited and the people of Gbaramatu kingdom is accusation and counter-accusation by each party against each other. This is called the blame-game theory. While Chevron

Nigeria Limited (CNL) claimed to have done enough for the people of Gbaramatu kingdom as part of its corporate social responsibility, the people of Gbaramatu kingdom claimed that CNL is not doing enough for them as host community. CNL, in justifying its claim has executed the following projects in Gbaramatu kingdom through the Egbema Gbaramatu Communities Development Foundation:

- (i) Building and equipping of cottage hospital.
- (ii) Construction of landing jetty.
- (iii) Building of two and three units of 3-bedrooms bungalows.
- (iv) Building and equipping of skill acquisition centres.
- (v) Distribution of COVID-19 palliatives to the people of Gbaramatu kingdom.
- (vi) Distribution of end-of-year packages/items to the people of Gbaramatu kingdom.

However, despite the claim of execution of projects and programmes in Gbaramatu kingdom as part of its CSR by Chevron Nigeria Limited, the people of Gbaramatu kingdom have continually accused CNL of neglecting its CSRs to its host communities. Here are few of the accusations:

In 2016, Benekrukru community, another host in Gbaramatu kingdom accused CNL of using “Divide and Rule” tactics to evade its CSRs in the community. Victor Eseimieghan, Chairman of Benekrukru community accused Chevron of using 'divide and rule' tactics to grind down their demands and cause disaffection among the people of Benekrukru community. Victor Eseimieghan accused CNL of using Michael Johnny and Jude Ukori, Chairman and Secretary of Egbema Gbaramatu Communities Development Foundation, to divide the people of Benekrukru community over their demands for development of their land by CNL. Victor Eseimieghan further accused CNL of using money to buy the Chairman and Secretary of Egbema Gbaramatu Development Foundation against the general interest of the people of Benekrukru community.

In 2017, the people of Kokodiagbene community in Gbaramatu kingdom accused CNL of poor corporate social responsibility. The people staged a protest march to the Otunana Flow Station with



different placards such as: “Pay our land royalty now”, “No light for Kokodiagbene, no oil for Chevron”; and “Don't intimidate us with security, all we want is electricity”. Mr. Sheilf Mulade, Chairman of Kokodiagbene community while addressing Chevron staff and security men at the Flow Station said “The oil company had agreed to supply electricity to the community about 19years ago. No concrete efforts have been made to provide electricity in the community despite several reminders and protest letters”. The protesters gave Chevron a-14-day ultimatum to supply electricity to Kokodiagbene community.

#### **2.4 An Overview of Gbaramatu Kingdom**

Gbaramatu kingdom is located in Warri South-West Local Government Area of Delta state. It is an Ijaw-speaking cluster of communities whose mainstay is fishing and farming. Gbaramatu is made up of the following communities: Oporoza which is the headquarters of the kingdom, Okerenkoko, Kunukunuma, Azama, Inikorogha, Kokodiagbene, and Benikrukru. Others are Opuwede, Kurutie, Igoba, Ikantu, and Tebujor. With the discovery of oil in commercial quantities, Gbaramatu kingdom became host to Chevron Nigeria Limited, operator of the NNPC/CNL Joint Venture in oil and gas exploration in the Niger-Delta region. Gbaramatu kingdom is host to over eleven onshore and offshore oil fields and flow stations, which include Abiteye, Otunana and Makaraba Oil Fields and Flow Stations operated by Chevron Nigeria Limited; Jones Creek, Egwa I &II and Odidi I & II Oil Fields and Flow Stations, operated by the SPDC. Oil and gas exploration and exploitation has caused environmental degradation to Gbaramatu kingdom that the people can no longer engage in their fishing and farming occupations. It operates a traditional rulership system led by the king known as the Pere of Gbaramatu kingdom.

#### **2.5 A Periscope View of Chevron Nigeria Limited**

Chevron is one of the world's largest integrated energy companies. With headquarters in San Ramon, it conducts business in more than 100 countries. Originally known as Standard Oil of California, or SOCal, Chevron was formed in 1911 amid the antitrust break-up of John D. Rockefeller. Chevron began doing business in Nigeria in 1913 when Texaco products were first marketed in the country. In 1963 American Overseas Petroleum Ltd

– which later became Texaco Overseas (Nigeria) Petroleum, co-discovered oil at the Koluama Field, Offshore Nigeria. In that same year, Chevron Nigeria Limited (CNL) started drilling oil near the Escravos River and found the Okan Field. In 1996, CNL built its 103,000 barrel state-of-the-art storage terminal and loading gantry in Apapa, Lagos state. CNL operates mostly in the onshore and near-offshore areas of the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. The company also has extensive interest in deep-water offshore in Nigeria. Among them is the Agbami Field, the largest deep-water discovery offshore in Nigeria till date. The Agbami Field is estimated to hold potentially recoverable volumes of 900 million barrels of crude oil and natural gas liquids and is expected to reach a maximum of daily production rate of 250,000 barrels as at the end of 2009.

CNL is engaged in every aspect of the crude oil and natural gas industry which includes exploration and production, manufacturing, marketing and transportation, chemicals manufacturing and generation. It also invests in renewables and advanced technologies. CNL is the leading producer of quality lubricants, greases, petroleum jelly and plastic containers in Nigeria.

#### **2.6 Theoretical Framework**

This paper is anchored on the theory of Issues Management. The theory of issues management as cited by Ugwuonah and Okonkwo (2018) holds that every issue or problem gives some early-warning signals, before it snowballs into crisis or conflict. Nipping such issue or problem early in the bud will either prevent it from growing into crisis or drastically reduce the strength of the crisis (Black, 1989; Gonzalez – Herrero and Pratt, 1996). Issue management is a proactive and preventive public relations strategy for crisis prevention and management (Haastrup, 2007).

Gonzalez – Herrero and Pratt (1996) are of the view that although the onset of a crisis can be sudden, there are situations when organizations are aware of and ought to prepare for such an event. Similarly, Smith and Ezzat (2003) argue that preparation is one of the important steps, if not the most important step in preventing crisis, and that effective crisis management depends upon planning and the people. Penrose (2000) also argues that organizations that practice proactive and preventive crisis management will lessen the damage of the crisis.

The theory of crisis management is apt for this study as adherence to its tenets will prevent and manage the recurring conflicts between Chevron Nigeria Limited, which represents oil companies operating in the Niger-Delta region and Gbaramatu kingdom in Warri South-West Local Government Area of Delta State, which represents host communities of the oil companies.

### **3.0 Research Method**

The study employed qualitative research method. Wimmer and Dominick (2006) state that qualitative research method is a research method that involves gathering data from notes made while observing in the field, interview transcripts, documents, diaries, and journals. The study gathered secondary data as its instrument for data collection. The gathered secondary data were critically analysed from where sustainable public relations model was theorized for managing the conflict between Chevron Nigeria Limited and people of Gbaraamtu kingdom.

#### **3.1 Towards Theorizing Sustainable Public Relations Models for the Gbaramatu Case**

Various theoretical perspectives and models on using public relations to manage conflict have been developed. Grunig, cited in Kelleher (2003) proposed four theoretical models of public relations in resolving and managing conflict. These are press agency/publicity; public information; two-way asymmetrical public relations; and two-way symmetrical public relations. The first two models are considered as one-way approach to communication, because they do not take into consideration feedback from their publics. On the other hand, the last two are seen as two-way approach of communication because they is space for feedback from their publics. While two-way asymmetrical model uses scientific techniques of persuasion to serve the interest of an organization; the two-way symmetrical model entails a balanced process whereby publics have influence on an organisation and vice-versa.

However, critics of Grunig's four models argue that the models fail to consider the different relationships that organizations have with different publics. Contingency theorists of public relations are of the view that an organization's larger strategic positions with different public should be based on a host of contingencies which are better described along a continuum ranging from pure accommodation to pure advocacy (Keller, 2003).

Murphy as cited in Keller (2003) proposed a public relations model similar to game theory proposed by game theorists, Schelling and Colman. Game theory is predicated on the assumption of establishing an equilibrium between the interests of two or more parties involved in some degree of conflict. It asserts that successful conflict resolution must involve dyadic communication and bargaining behaviour, rather than impositions of one side's beliefs on the other. Murphy then proposed a mixed-motive model which suggests that an organization may use asymmetrical tactics such as persuasion as part of a larger effort to balance the interest of an organization with that of its publics.

Plowman, Briggs and Huang (2001) developed a connection between conflict resolution and the mixed-motive model of public relations by identifying nine approaches ranging from asymmetric to symmetric models. These nine approaches may be used to describe how organizations balance their own needs with the needs of their publics by employing different strategies contingent upon specific scenarios. Five of these nine approaches were derived from a dual-concern model of conflict resolution developed by Thomas which are contention, collaboration, compromise, avoidance and accommodation (Keller, 2003). Thomas shed further light on the five approaches thus:

“Contending means 'I win, you lose' in game theory terms. Collaborating is a win/win for both parties. Compromising is a 50/50 split. Avoiding is an 'I lose, you lose' condition in which one or both parties have a better alternative than to deal with each other. Accommodating is an 'I lose, you win' type situation”.

Plowman et al. (2001) further described four more negotiation approaches that fit within the mixed-motive model. These are unconditionally constructive; win-win or no deal; third party mediation; and principled approach to negotiation. Unconditionally constructive tactics involves an organization's acts to reconcile differences regardless of whether the other party reciprocates. Win-win or no deal approach assumes that the parties involved will only consider two options: collaborating in a constructive manner or not making a deal at all. Third party mediation is where a party with little or no direct interest in the conflict is called upon to arbitrate. Principled approach is when one side's stance holds to a system of ethics,

perceived to be higher than the negotiations that will not be compromised.

As suggested by Plowman et al (2001), all nine approaches involved both parties and can be considered two-way. But on a mixed-motive continuum, contention, avoidance and principled approaches are closer to the one-way extreme in which the organization wins but its publics loose. Accommodation, compromise and mediated communication fall closer to the opposite end of the spectrum, where the interests of an organization's publics becomes more important than that of the organization.

From the myriad of public relations models theorized above, it is the suggestion of this paper that Chevron Nigeria Limited should adopt the two-way asymmetrical approach or the two-way symmetrical model or better still a hybrid model which is the combination of the two-way asymmetrical model and the two-way symmetrical model in their best forms. This hybrid model which could be termed the "asymmetrical-symmetrical" model or perspective will involve the use of scientific techniques of persuasion to serve the interest of an organization as well as a balanced process that will achieve positive and symbiotic influence between Chevron Nigeria Limited and people of Gbaramatu kingdom, and vice versa.

#### Conclusion

The paper examined the adopting sustainable public relations models can end the unending conflicts between Chevron Nigeria Limited and Gbaramatu kingdom. In the bid to proposing the sustainable public relations models, the study xrayed the causes of the recurring conflicts between CNL and Gbaramatu kingdom; the impacts of the unending conflicts on the Gbaramatu kingdom; and thereafter propose the 'asymmetrical-symmetrical model of communication in the management and prevention of crisis between CNL and people of Gbaramatu kingdom in Warri South-West Local Government Area of Delta state, Nigeria.

#### 4.0 Recommendations

Based on the outcomes of the paper, it is therefore recommended as follows:

(1). Chevron Nigeria Limited should adopt the recommended asymmetrical-symmetrical public relations model that is dyadic and leads to a

'win-win' situation.

(2). People of Gbaramatu kingdom adopt peaceful means of resolving their conflicts CNL, instead of adopting the violent approach.

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