

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT: A PANACEA FOR PEACE IN EXTRACTIVE OPERATIONS

(A Communique)

Friday, 22 November 2019. An array of energy experts, government representatives, host community members, and other stakeholders, including celebrities from oil-producing communities gathered in Lagos to deliberate on pathways for more sustainable community engagement processes in Nigeria's extractive industries during the 8th Sustainability in the Extractive Industries (SITEI) Conference, with the theme, 'COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT: A PANACEA FOR PEACE IN EXTRACTIVE OPERATIONS'.

The extractive industries, which include the oil and gas and mining industries, have been plagued by challenges stemming from conflicts with host communities. It is believed that poor and unsustainable community engagement processes lie at the foundation of these conflicts that have led to loss of human lives, unprecedented degradation of land in the Niger Delta, and massive loss of revenue to the Nigerian State.

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During the conference, the Community Engagement Standards (CES) a framework for engaging host communities in a fair and sustainable manner, was unveiled. The CES was developed by CSR-in-Action, host of the SITEI Conference, after wide consultations with key stakeholders across host, access and impacted communities, government at local, state, federal, executive and parliamentary levels and businesses in exploration and services, in Nigeria's extractive industries. A critical focus of SITEI 2019 was to mainstream the discourse around community relations and to democratise the flow of information, and as such, had as ambassadors, celebrities from the Niger Delta, including songstress, Omawumi, ex-international footballer, High Chief Joseph Yobo,



crooner, Harry Songs and human and environmental activist, Comrade Celestine Akpobari.

At the 2019 SITEI Conference, Nigeria's maiden Community Engagement and Human Rights (CAHR) Awards, co-funded by Global Rights and Open Society Foundation, was launched to recognise and appreciate individuals and organisations that have made significant contributions in community engagement and the promotion of human rights in Nigeria. The awards were named after prominent Nigerians across our diverse cultures, including The MKO Abiola Community Engagement Award, The Hajiya Gambo Sawaba Community Impact Award, The Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti Human Rights Award, The Apostle Hayford Alile Humanitarian Award, The Josephine Nkemdilim Equal Rights Award and The Sir Ahmadu Bello Award for Leadership; and had as winners, Segun Awosanya [Segalink] (Human Rights – Individual), Yemisi Ransome-Kuti (Equal Rights), Aigboje Aig-Imoukhuede (Leadership), Alhaji Aliko Dangote (Humanitarian), Nigerian AGIP Oil Company Ltd (Community Engagement), Nigeria LNG (Community Impact) and Unilever (Human Rights – Business).

The challenges

Several critical issues raised for immediate attention through the course of deliberations were:

- the apparent lack of genuine concern for people and communities in extractive sector
- the degenerating relationship between the oil companies and their host communities
- how to ensure inclusion in Nigeria's extractive industries
- how to create jobs for host communities
- the issue of conflict entrepreneurs; those who make profit from stoking the conflict in the Niger Delta
- how to regulate local players without excluding them
- the oil pollution and other adverse effects of oil exploration in the Niger Delta
- tackling the current violence and agitation in the Niger Delta
- the need to achieve the ideal Niger Delta landscape through infrastructural development and sustainable livelihoods
- the disconnect between women, the industries and government
- the need for inclusive and consistent plans in engaging host communities.

SITEI 2019 recommendations

- Promote project ownership. Stakeholders need to help host communities see projects as their own and not just for the benefit of government or oil producing/mining companies
- Create jobs for the people. Business and government stakeholders need to get the people in the communities involved in the development and conclusion processes so that they can take up and understand their roles in the projects. Jobs are also created when the host communities have a stake in protecting the facilities in their environment
- Ensure local ownership without compromising standards. There needs to be proper training and technical assistance from the government to ensure the success of local players
- Facilitate continuous hand-holding and protection for businesses by government through project life cycle



- v. Speed up remediation of land in the Niger Delta. Although the government has commenced the Ogoni cleanup, the process is very slow as years of pollution has done catastrophic damage to the land. Government needs to fast track the process
- vi. Conduct robust and iterative needs assessment. When stakeholders plan projects for communities, it is better to do background research and check what the community really needs. This research is not static but an iterative process
- vii. Commence cultural and value-system re-orientation of youth. There is need for positive reorientation for Niger Deltan and other extractive communities' youth through qualitative education and dialogue
- viii. Push for women's rights and gender equality. Women are the biggest victims in the Niger Delta crisis because they are often voiceless and are particularly attacked. Alongside a change in community engagement processes, there should also be a push for women's rights and gender equality within host communities
- ix. Apply the CES and related humane standards and

- legal directives. In community engagement, it is critical to have a standard that evaluates the process. Also, roles should be spelt out for all the stakeholders in the chain and their performance measured and communicated for actioning. The CES framework is recommended to companies in the extractive industries in their planning
- x. Need for government's continuous oversight and presence in community-company relations. The legislative and executive arms have the most critical roles to play in community engagement by providing adequate oversight and handholding
- xi. Host community members and their leaders must be open and accountable to their partners. Agreements reached must be honored. Same expectation is so of businesses, their leaders and staff
- xii. Symbiosis amongst government agencies and parastatals. There needs to be symbiosis amongst government arms across local, state and federal levels, in order to facilitate better relations within communities and better performance of the sector
- xiii. Transparency and inclusive engagement. In community engagement strategy, there is the need

- for companies to have open town hall meetings with host communities to ensure that all community stakeholders are carried along and their distinct voices heard. The masses can also aid accountability amongst their leaders when agreements are reached
- xiv. Holistic sincerity and accountability. There is a need for more transparency in the entire value chain in extractive industries.

CSR-in-Action will, through the course of the year, work with interested entities to address some of the challenges highlighted. Part of what we aim to do is establish and commence running of the Multi-Stakeholder Implementing Committee for the oil and gas sector, a body made up of key government agencies responsible for local content and community relations. Even as we embark on this journey, we seek partnerships that can exponentially increase the impact of the work that we are doing and help us to achieve our collective mission; and can be reached through our website www.csr-in-action.org.

Signed:
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