

Gender Participation in Community Development Governance in the Niger Delta: A Case of the SPDC GMoU

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ABSTRACT

The quality of women participation in Community development governance systems is considered to impact the outcomes of such initiatives in addressing the needs of rural women. The objective of this investigation was to examine the extent to which gender is mainstreamed in the governance structure of Shell Petroleum Development Company's (SPDC) Global Memorandum of Understanding (GMoU) in Nigeria's Niger Delta region. The constraints and implications of women participation in the GMoU were analysed with a view of ascertaining not only the representation of women but their contribution to development outcomes. Previous analysis of the GMoU fell short by depending on secondary data obtained from SPDC's interval evaluation system or primary data that excluded perspectives of the rural women and men in the GMoU communities. The study adopted the purposive sampling technique while the population was selected using criterion sampling. Key Informant Interviews were conducted with 28 respondents selected in Seven active clusters while respondents from each cluster was selected based on their participation and experience with the GMoU. Focused group discussions were conducted with 37 participants drawn from communities in each cluster which brought the sample size of the study to 68. Data was analysed using thematic content analysis procedures using Sustainable Community Development Parameters (SCDP) as a guide. While the women appointed to executive positions enjoyed tokenism, the study found that gender representation in the GMoU policy was not significant to enhance community development. Priority needs of community women were also not being met due to the reluctance of Community Development Boards (CDB) to release funds earmarked for women and the inadequate GMoU funding to cater for community's priority needs. The mainstreaming of gender in the GMoU was also hampered by the lack of an intent on the part of SPDC to achieve gender equality and little or no enforcement by the monitoring NGO's. The study did not find significant evidence that showed women's participation in the GMoU led to improved project outcomes but it was established that potentials exists for greater contribution of women in local economic development. The study concludes that women's insights and values can enrich the community development decision making at the grassroots with the mainstreaming of gender at every stage of the GMoU process.

Key words: Women Participation, Gender mainstreaming, Community development, Niger Delta, GMoU.

INTRODUCTION

The Niger Delta region contributes significantly to Nigerian GDP and government revenue. Yet, the inhabitants of the resource-rich Niger Delta have not benefitted proportionately from these oil revenues. In an attempt to address these challenges in the region, diverse community development models have been deployed by MNC's operating in the region. PIND (2014) many top-down strategies for socio-economic development implemented in the region have been hampered by ongoing conflict and inconsistent support leaving many of community development projects incomplete or abandoned. The deepening socio-economic disruption, decline of local economies and neglect of the Niger Delta region have generated growing disenchantment with the multinational oil companies and the state. These have generated reactions in the formation of groups that have been intent on a challenge to the status quo.

The traditional governance systems in communities of the oil rich Niger Delta region comprise associations of chiefs, elders, age-grades and women groupings. Chiefs and Elders preside over decision making, while the age grades comprising the youth are the foot soldiers that are involved in execution of development actions and security. (Ikelegbe, 2005) analyse causes of conflicts and the nature of such agitations in the Niger Delta take cognizance of the role played by ethnic-based associations that relate to the social, cultural, economic and political interests and aspirations of the community. Ethnic groups in the region include among

others the Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP), Urhobo Political Stakeholders Forum, Egi Ethnic Coalition, Ijaw Elders Forum. Generally, youth restiveness and confrontation in the Niger Delta have been at the centre of communal, ethnic, civil and environmental rights struggle in the region. Ethnic youth groups such as the Movement for the Survival of Ijaw Ethnic Nationality (MOSIEND), Ijaw Youth Council (IYC), Niger Delta Volunteer Force and Egi Youth Federation (EYF), involved in local mass action against oil companies have been vociferous, militant and violent in their quest for dialogue and negotiations towards the fundamental resolution of the problems.

The place of women in the struggles with the oil companies did not receive significant scholarly attention until the late 1980s and 1990s. Ikelegbe (2005), Iyhere et al, (2014) and Turner T. & Brownhill S., (2009) chronicle periods that witnessed more gender-based protests by women across many oil communities in the Delta region. Notable among such protests were the Ogoni women struggles in the first half of the 1990s. In 1995, women seized the Odidi oil well owned by Shell in protest against the destruction of economic crops by oil spills and in September 1998, a large assemblage of Egi women marched on the Obite gas plant of Elf (Ukeje, 2004). After these incidents, there was a period of silence until 2002. Nigerian peasant women broke this silence as they shut down much of Nigeria's huge oil industry exposing them to U.S. military intervention. Between July 2002 and February 2003 women organizations

occupied Chevron/Texaco's export terminal and several flow-stations. Studies of Ikelegbe (2005) and Ihayere et al (2014) argued that conditions of marginality were the basis for women protests when community leadership and elites failed to attract appropriate benefits to the detriment of women.

Accounts of women protests in the Niger Delta revealed that their agitations differed from ethnic and youth protests in some ways (Olaniyi, R. O. & Nnabuishe, E. O., 2009; Adeleke J. O., 2014). Women did not seek to be heard by causing disruptions or vandalising installations of oil companies, rather their approach was geared more towards a peaceful resolution of the conflict in question. The most extreme form of their protests was that of partial or complete nudity which signified a complete exasperation at the failure of other efforts. Nudity, which was not a cultural norm for women in the region was employed as a statement of shame and a curse to society. Such protests brought the attention of not only the government and MNC's to their plight but also sparked media attention and public debate. According to Turner & Brownhill (2004), other naked protests of women multiplied around the world as they were inspired by the Nigerian example to 'bare all'.

The role of women in community development in Nigeria as with many patrilineal societies, is recognised particularly in the informal sector, market associations, cooperatives and informal credit systems (Trager & Osinulu 1991; Tripp 1994). In the Niger Delta, women constitute a large proportion of subsistence farmers, fisher-women and the informal

sector (NDRMP, 2004). Nationally, women constitute a significant part of the National Population but unfortunately this numerical strength has not found corresponding expression or representation in the governance of community development initiatives in Nigeria (Adeleke, 2014). Although women have been active in communities as part of communal and ethnic group associations, they are less prominent in community decision making. Uduji and Okolo-Obasi (2018) observed that women's limited access to agricultural land and participation in community development programmes through their husbands or adult sons makes them vulnerable to poverty. In recent times the actions of women in projecting the vulnerability of grassroots people and representing the marginalised has come to light. When women participate actively in public peace rallies, shutdowns of plants, they aim at eliciting dialogue that ultimately leads to peace and development. In a study by Etekpe (2012), the role of women in peace building and development was highlighted in the rural women revolt of May 2010 in the Gbarain-Ekpetiama clans of Bayelsa State. The revolt paralyzed the NLNG plant for three weeks until the state government and the management of SPDC responded to resolve the conflicts.

This paper examines community development participation and gender in six main sections. Following this introduction is a review of literature on SPDC GMoU as a community development model that aspires to attain inclusivity through gender representation in its governance structure. After that, we pay attention to the gender analysis and women participation gaps in community

development literature upon which the questions of this article and problem statement is premised. The third section is devoted to theories on gender and the concept of gender mainstreaming as a key part of feminist theory in the contemporary era. We highlight the methodology through which primary data was obtained in the section that follows. In the fifth section, we situate the mainstreaming of gender in the SPDC GMoU policy and discuss the empirical evidence of the constraints and implication of women participation in the GMoU process. The paper concludes with the findings and recommendations for further studies in the sixth section.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The conflict and social discontent of the era of community reactive militancy occasioned by heightened concerns for the environment in various Niger delta states, increased international awareness of the unsustainable environmental management of the region. It was during this period that the mention of sustainable development gained momentum in the Niger delta discourse. Leveraging on the international pressure upon MNCs in vigorous pursuit of ownership of their development process communities became more empowered to speak out, demanding greater environmental accountability and socio-economic initiatives. In managing this problem, MNCs turned to community development initiatives as a means of responding to community grievances as well as making them benefit from resource extraction (Egbonet al, 2018; Ite et al, 2015; Okodudu, 2008). They engaged in mere philanthropic gestures which involved

providing little expenditure on community assistance (Aaron, 2012). Community development models were adopted based on the MNC's need to secure the Social Licence to Operate (SLO) rather than a genuine need to foster sustainable development which the MNC's laid claim to. There were cases where an approach that recorded a level of success with one MNC inspired adoption by others. As a result, corporate social responsibility practices have evolved in strategy and approach over the years. Old models of corporate–community engagements that were widely criticized for their failure to deliver development in the region, have gradually been replaced with new models such as the Global Memorandum of Understanding (GMoU).

The case for a women participation in community development was necessitated by absence of success stories from development approaches that were gender-neutral. Hence, the significance of women's participation in the Nigeria was reviewed in the studies of Akinyoade (2015) and Olayode, K. O., (2016). Akinyoade (2015) examined women participation approaches of different firms but concluded with similar findings. In an assessment of Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) interventions, Akinyoade (2015) observed that like many interventions in the Niger Delta, the commission failed to recognise and include women group in its community engagement meetings. As more financial resources were allocated to males through income from wages as labourers in construction projects, women's needs were excluded from training programmes thereby discouraging women participation. In the paper's conclusion, the commission's lack of institutional capacity

for gender sensitivity resulted in her interventions being gender-blind.

Institutional capacity for integrating gender equity is not only lacking on the national level, but also at state and local government levels. In an empirical study of women's participation and gender issues in Amuwo Odofin local government area in Lagos state, Olayode, K. O., (2016), noted that the absence of a gender policy at the local government level is responsible for the lack of commitment to gender equity. To engender a developmental process at the local level, implantation of the national gender policy the Local Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (LEEDS) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG'S) are necessary to strengthen women's rights. The study revealed that despite increased awareness on gender issues at the grassroots and the increase of women participation in politics stemming from the 35% affirmative action, the Nigerian society, operating largely on patriarchal sentiments deliberately marginalizes women by allocating sensitive and powerful political positions to men.

On the part of SPDC, institutional capacity may not have been an issue as the company deploys its community development model through a governance structure and a mentoring NGO believed to be well-versed in development issues. The MNC recorded a marked improvement in women participation in her community development approach since the adoption of the GMoU model (Isike's, 2016). Chevron Nigeria Limited (CNL) pioneered the GMoU in 2005 as a better way of delivering sustainable development to host communities against the background of discontents thrown up by the old models of

CSR in the Niger Delta. Following the success recorded by CNL as a result of its implementation of the GMoU, SPDC adopted the GMoU model in 2006 as a new way of working with communities in its operational areas.

A GMoU is an agreement between SPDC and a cluster of several communities identified based on local government area, ethnicity and historical affinities. Under the terms of the agreement, SPDC provides funding for five years and the communities decide, plan and implement community development projects. In addition, SPDC facilitates the capacity building of the GMoUs by providing access to development experts usually their NGO partners to oversee project implementation. The Community Development Board (CDB) is the core governance institution of the GMoU, and it is supposedly embedded in the participating communities via the Community Trust (CT) (Egbon et al, 2018). The GMoU governing structures are well defined, with a ten (10) person CT at communities' level, a CDB at the cluster level and a steering committee chaired by the state government. The CBD functions as the main supervisory and administrative organ, ensuring the setting out and design of plans/programmes as well as actual implementation of projects. The GMoU brings communities together with representatives of state and local governments, SPDC and non-profit development organizations, in a decision-making and implementation structure and governance system through the CDB. SPDC's GMoU is entered into for a five-year term with a cluster of communities. After more than twelve years of implementation with the new model, there are contested views on whether the company has achieved the inclusiveness which it aspires to

attain among other goals. The SPDC GMoU model has been acknowledged for integrating basic tenets of community driven development and democracy. Ite et al (2015) assert that the GMoU led to emergence of capable community development institutions and increased local capacity for long term planning, project management and implementation. In comparison with the previous approaches of the SPDC, notable the Project Advisory Committee (PAC), it is believed that the project ownership and participation have improved under the GMoU model (Okodudu, 2008) if participation is viewed as community people playing a part in the selection of development projects. Similarly, the GMoU has made a significant leap from less structured community development approaches employed by development agencies like the NDDC. Nevertheless, the GMoU has had its pitfalls when evaluated on the premise of Sustainable Community Development (SCD) outcomes. As it relates with the participation of women, it is the view of Aaron K. (2012), the gains of SPDC GMoU in its host communities in the Niger Delta are more apparent than real because community participation fails to ensure gender balance. Beih et al (2016) support this notion, arguing that the character of the GMoU relegates women to the background in processes that lead to project choice and implementation.

The GMoU policy stipulates a gender representation in its governance structure. The proportion of women to men and the nature of positions they occupy has been observed to favour the men. An apparent consequence of this is that women are

detached from the GMoU process especially in decision making. For instance, evidence from the study of Uduji et al (2019) which investigates the role of women in sustainable agriculture showed that 62% of the farmers could not access interventions from the MNCs, whereas 38% could access very little via the GMoU. Issues pertaining to land ownership are critical for women who live in the communities built over hydrocarbon reserves. The active involvement of women in any process to mitigate the destruction of their means of livelihood which is mainly fishing and farming is critical to the wellbeing of their families and the community at large. Regrettably, rural women are generally invisible in decision making. They are regarded as silent actors in the system of managing the natural resources of their communities. The relegation of women to the background of national development has been attributed to education, economic opportunities and the political power for women to actualize their innate potentials. Examining the role of women in national development, Asaju, K. (2013), noted that the high rate of gender disparity in the three tiers of educational institution is responsible for women not effectively participating and contributing to national development. The study therefore made a case for empowering women through education.

Relying on data generated by SPDC's internal evaluation tool_ SPDC Community Transformation and Development Index(SCOTDI) and primary data gathered from SPDC and NGO officials, the study of Isike (2016) measured performances of 19 active GMoU clusters in the Niger Delta (Ite et

al, 2015). In this case, women were included in governance structures but as tokens which resulted in a generally low quality of output. The study concluded that the inclusion of women in governance structures in the community clusters studied improved governance and was thus development based. Without prejudice to the foregoing, the methodology upon which the conclusions of the study was premised upon informs the point of departure of this research. First, data (FGD's and interviews) used in the study of Ite et al (2015) targeted SPDC and GMoU officials as respondents, excluding community women. Similarly, secondary data in the study of Isike (2016), which was a follow-up on the findings of Ite et al (2015), was obtained from an internal SPDC source. This raises questions on the reliability of the study outcome. In the search for empirical evidence on the quality of women's participation to cater for gender-specific needs, the researcher has so far found scanty literature necessitating a study of this kind.

In the context of the above, this article attempts to derive empirical explanations to the following questions. First, to what extent is gender mainstreamed in the governance structure of community development model of SPDC in the Niger Delta? Second, what is the quality of women participation in SPDC GMoU implementation process? Thirdly, what are the constraint and implications of women participation in the GMoU? We begin with a brief treatment of the theoretical framework within which we pose these questions.

SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES AND THEORIES ON GENDER

There are several theories that can be applied in the discourse of gender and development in the developing world. Sociological perspectives on gender stratification range from the functionalist perspective of gender roles, the postmodernist theory, Conflict theory, the symbolic interactionist perspective and the Feminist theory. Functionalists put forward a structuralist view of the family and within that context, how they understand conjugal roles in the 1940s and 1950s, and largely developed by Talcott Parsons' model of the nuclear family. Parson believed the gender division of labour was natural and desirable, suggesting that gender inequalities exist as an efficient way to create a division of labour, or as a social system in which particular segments are clearly responsible for certain, respective acts of labour. The division of labour in variable works to maximize resources and efficiency. A structural functionalist view of gender inequality applies division of labour to view predefined gender roles as complementary: women take care of the home while men provide for the family. Thus gender, like other social institutions, contributes to the stability of society as a whole. According to structural functionalists, gender serves to maintain social order by providing and ensuring the stability of such functional prerequisites. While gender roles, according to the functionalist perspective, are beneficial in that they contribute to stable social relations, it is argued that gender roles are discriminatory and should not be upheld.

According to conflict theory, society is defined by a struggle for dominance among social groups that compete for

scarce resources. In the context of gender, conflict theory argues that gender is best understood as men attempting to maintain power and privilege to the detriment of women. Therefore, men can be seen as the dominant group and women as the subordinate group. While certain gender roles may have been appropriate in a hunter-gatherer society, conflict theorists argue that the only reason these roles persist is because the dominant group naturally works to maintain their power and status. According to conflict theory, social problems are created when dominant groups exploit or oppress subordinate groups. Therefore, their approach is normative in that it prescribes changes to the power structure, advocating a balance of power between genders.

Ritzer G. & Stepnisky J. (2014) discuss the influence of Post-modernist theory on the feminist theory, beginning with the observation that people no longer live under conditions of modernity but now live in post modernity'. Post Modernists argue that the world is no longer predictable and as such families are much more diverse today. Michael Young and Peter Willmott in their book, *The symmetrical family* (1973) and others argue that while conjugal roles are not completely equal they have become more equal as a result, home life has become more desirable than it used to be. In today's society for instance, there are an increased number of appliances in the home, making more men are willing to stay at home and help with household duties and childcare. Some women are also content with staying at home, taking on parenting and housework duties. Critics of Young and Willmott however suggest there is insufficient sociological evidence to

clearly support their argument. Most evidence suggests considerable inequality, especially where women are in paid employment. Feminists have also criticised Parsons' image of society that too much emphasis is laid upon how social control within families can reduce the potential for underachievement and delinquency.

Scholars of interactionism have also studied how individuals act within society and believe that meaning is produced through interactions. According to interactionists, gender stratification exists because people act toward each other on the basis of the meanings they have for each other, and that these meanings are derived from social interaction. The meanings attached to symbols are socially created and fluid, instead of natural and static. Interactionism criticise both functionalists and feminists because both assume that social structure determines gender roles. Functionalists believe that family meets the needs of the individual and the family and Feminists believe that family maintains patriarchy. Interactionism has a more micro theory focusing on relationships between individuals and outcomes rather than roles.

As the feminist movement which was on the rise at the same time that functionalism began to decline, it took the position that functionalism neglects the suppression of women within the family structure. Feminist theory as an extension of feminism aims to understand the nature of gender inequality and examines women's social roles, experiences, and interests. Historically women under patriarchy have been assigned to tasks of social reproduction (child bearing, child rearing, housekeeping etc.). Feminists

argue that the gender division of labour is culturally created and that there is insufficient evidence that conjugal roles have become more shared. They portray that the division of labour works to the advantage of men, leaving women in a position of inferiority in both power and work. Feminists believe the family is patriarchal because women must do housework without pay, which exploits and oppresses women because they are socialised to be dependent on men. According to Ann Oakley's research in the sociology of housework (1974), women still felt that housework and childcare was their responsibility, even when they are in paid employment they still take on the responsibility of childcare and housework, this is known as the 'triple shift'. Women's shared and historical circumstance of subordination forms the basis for the feminism claim of the standpoint of women giving rise to theories of gender inequality and gender difference. Theories of gender difference explain the ways in which men and women are or are not the same in behaviour and experience. Gender inequality theorizes that men and women are situated in society not only differently but also unequally. Women get less of the material resources, social status, power and opportunities for self-actualization than men who share the same social location_ be it a location based on race, class, ethnicity, religion or education.

Based on the above arguments and evidence, there remains considerable disagreement within Sociology over the dispute of conjugal roles. While Functionalists believe that roles are progressively equal in modern society, Feminists maintain that there is very little

empirical evidence to support this. For them, there remains considerable inequality. A re-invented and re-branded key part of feminism in the contemporary era found expression as gender mainstreaming. Gender mainstreaming is an international phenomenon originating in development policies, and adopted by the UN at the 1995 conference on women in Beijing, before being taken up by the European Union (EU) and then its Member States. According to Walby (2003) the most frequently cited definition of gender mainstreaming in the European literature is that devised by Mieke Verloo as Chair of the Council of Europe Group of Experts on Gender Mainstreaming:

Gender mainstreaming is the (re) organisation, improvement, development and evaluation of policy processes, so that a gender equality perspective is incorporated in all policies at all levels at all stages, by the actors normally involved in policy making (Council of Europe, 1998: 15).

In the 2002/2003 annual report of the United Nations Fund for Women (UNIFEM) themed 'Working for women's empowerment and gender equality', the Executive director of UNIFEM, Noeleen Heyzer, asserted that the process of gender mainstreaming, requires persistent effort, including regular monitoring, reporting, follow-up training, and evaluation of progress made and obstacles encountered, as well as systems for holding the operation/organisation accountable for achieving its goals. This requires resources and political will at all levels.' Therefore, gender equality and gender equity are two key goals of gender mainstreaming.

RESEARCH METHOD

The study was located in TWO Niger Delta states on Nigeria namely Bayelsa and Rivers states. The SPDC GMoU clusters selected for the study in Bayelsa were Gbaran/Ekpetiama, Okordia/Zarama, Oporoma and Kolo creek while in Rivers, the clusters are Engenni, Ekpeye and Greater Port Harcourt clusters. The territory is comprised of 204 and 104 oil-producing or impacted communities in Rivers and Bayelsa states respectively. The communities are spread widely throughout forest land, wetlands and barrier islands. The prevalence of scattered, remote settlements makes it difficult to provide social services and promote sustainable human development in the region. To answer the questions posed in second section, the study adopted the purposive sampling technique. It is deemed appropriate for the study because of the need to study not only the perspectives of men and women directly involved but also cultural domain with knowledgeable experts within. The study population was selected using criterion sampling. Seven active clusters in Rivers and Bayelsa states' were selected while respondents from each cluster was selected based on their participation and experience in the GMoU and thus were able to provide information that was detailed and generalizable.

The main sources of data collection in this study include in-depth interviews and Focus Group discussions (FGDs) with key informants, and this was supplemented with data from field observation and document analysis. Key Informant Interviews (KII) were conducted with twenty eight (28) respondents selected in

the 7 clusters. Focused group discussions were conducted with 37 participants drawn from communities in each cluster. The sample size of the study was 68 comprising 65 Community respondents and 3 respondents from SPDC. Interview sessions were held with participants comprising executives of the GMoU governance structure, SPDC officials and NGO staff using semi-structured guides. FGD's were conducted with community members. Data collected in this study was analysed using thematic content analysis procedures using a simple framework developed by the researcher_ the Sustainable Community Development Parameters (SCDP) as a guide.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents empirical evidence and discussion on the findings on the SPDC's efforts to mainstream gender, challenges and constraints of women participation, implications and recommendations for mainstreaming gender in the GMoU.

5.1 Mainstreaming Gender in the GMoU

Prior to the deployment of the GMoU as a community development model, gender participation during the SPDC's Project Advisory Committee (PAC) strategy was seen as marginal or irrelevant. Owing to the company's aspiration to deploy a more inclusive approach under the GMoU, gender relations became significant in facilitating the implementation of its community development efforts. For Shell, participation was viewed from the lens of

representation of every social strata, which includes sex and age in the governance team. This was reflected in a statement of an SPDC official of the GMoU Maturation team:

“We ensure that every social strata is carried along. In constituting the governance structure...30% must be women, representation of youth, chiefs in the 70%. We also ensure participation in the development plan. We do SLA’s to ensure that all persons make their input in the development plan of their communities. We incorporate the vulnerable groups. The GMoU 15% of fund is set aside for women. It was a deliberate efforts, when we first started we found that women were not carried along. There was even no woman in the governance structure. This is why we put that clause.”

In line with the principle of mainstreaming gender, setting a representative quota for both sexes to participate equally or equitably, the study examined the extent to which gender was mainstreamed in the governance structure of the SPDC’s GMoU. First, an analysis of the GMoU policy document shows an attempt to main stream gender in three areas:

- i. Cluster Development Board (CDB) membership: the CDB is where crucial development decisions are taken. The CDBs are composed of Chairpersons, Secretaries and Treasurers of the CTs with the Treasurer position reserved for the women. In practice, a woman is yet to hold the Chairman and Secretary positions in SPDC’s GMoU communities. Besides the composition of the executives, the GMoU document was silent about other gender roles in the committees through which the CDB operates. The committees include the Finance and Resource Management Committee, Partnership Communication and Capacity Building Committee, Peace and Conflict Management Committee, and Technical Committee.
- ii. The Community Trust members must include at least one woman who will represent the interests of their specific communities at the CDB with the Treasurer position specified for women. Among the 10-member Community Trust, the document is also clear that there should be at least 3 women appointed. In view of this, respondents of the study were asked how women in their communities were involved at the different stages of the GMoU. In most clusters the selection of CT and CDB representatives was usually done by nominating women already known in the community’s women forum. In a community like Ayama, women were selected randomly through a ballot system.
- iii. Funding of Social Investment Project is a third area, where women representation was explicitly mentioned in the GMoU document. It was

recommended that fifteen (15%) of the fund (also known as a mandate) is to be separated for women targeted projects and programmes which will be managed by women. It was observed that this ear-marked fund for women is well publicized in the GMoU process but adoption among the Clusters varies.

Another instance where women participation was observed but not stated in the policy document was in the negotiation team. A woman was considered to join two other community members (a lawyer and a community leader), in a team delegated to discuss the terms of the community's relationship with SPDC before this becomes an agreement. Some respondents also alluded to employing innovative and non-traditional means to mobilize and enrol women as a way of engaging of engaging women better in the GMoU process.

From the GMoU policy document it can be seen that the scanty provisions for the women roles reinforces the arguments of other scholars on the participation of women in community development governance. SPDC attempt in the provision of limited opportunities for women and youth participation is a demonstration of a will to include some minority groups, however, there remains an absence of intent for gender equality. The enforcement of the limited gender positions of the GMoU will further be analysed in the monitoring actions of NGO's in the subsequent section of this paper.

5.2 Challenges and Constraints of Women Participation in the GMoU

Variables which the study applied in the analysis of women participation in community development governance include their role in positions of leadership, participation in the selection of projects/programmes and supervision. The access to facilitate the release of GMoU funds was also a considered an indicator of women participation.

When respondents were asked what was responsible for more women not occupying GMoU positions different that were offered are discussed below. First, in examining the role of women in leadership revealed that the community power structure recognized the position of elders and the youth based on the power and influence they wield in producing development outcomes. For instance, the elders by virtue of their duty as adjudicators, mediators, and peacemakers can influence chief in political and administrative decision making. Respondents also acknowledged that the community gets its 'warriors' to defend the community against aggression from the youth. In some volatile Niger Delta communities, the youth take the prerogative of blocking SPDC facilities when grievances are not addressed by the MNC. A respondents' words below captured the power of the chiefs and youth in this regard:

“The elders have the power to drop the chief by our constitution so they give them to go and see what is happening so they don't come in to judge. The youths they can block so they give them opportunity to be part of the system so that they

don't come and block SPDC activities.”

From the above it can be inferred that women are perceived as a lesser threat to the peace and security of communities, hence the impact of their non-participation is being overlooked. At the inception of the GMoU women were not included in the governance until it became a demand of SPDC in the policy. There exists also, an imbalance in leadership opportunities available to women in the CTs and CDB's as noted in the earlier section reviewing the GMoU document. In most of the communities studied, executives of the CT were chosen based on family alliances or compounds that nominated representatives. In Agbobiri community of Bayelsa state for instance, families nominated the Treasurer. The Chairman, Secretary and the Treasurer were elected afterwards. At the Cluster level which is made of different communities which form the Cluster development board (CDB), one of three CT executives from various communities is entitled to vie for positions at the board. The rule permits only CT Chairmen to vie for Chairmanship positions at the board. The same applies for Secretary and Treasurer positions.

Ayamabele, is one of the few communities that exceeded the mandatory three women in the committee with four women in the executive. While the designation of the Treasurer position marks an improvement in the previous governance system which was male dominated, it doesn't meet the standards of gender equality. A system that recognises that women's role in community development is not limited to running a treasury or managing petty cash, gives women liberty

to aspire for various roles. The present way of participation restricts from seeking let alone holding Chairmanship and Secretary positions at the Board and CT. This clearly contradicts the GMoU policy and till date there is no CT or CDB that boasts of a woman as Chairperson or Secretary in the GMoU.

Restricting women's role in the governance structure raises the question of their status to influence decisions. Evidence showed that women in the executive did not even share same status as their male counterparts. The poor monitoring on the part of the NGO is responsible for this disparity in gender status of GMoU officials. This could also be an indication of the low importance the SPDC and her monitoring NGO's accord to women contribution in the governance structure otherwise, a leader would not be at liberty to apply his discretion on issues of women rights. Under a democratic system, a Chairman's perception or value for women should not affect women's prominence or participation of women if there is an institution to monitor and sanction non-adherence. When men are not inclined to grant women equal status, it becomes necessary to enforce the rule to ensure the protection of women's interest. In this case, the body responsible for enforcing the rule on behalf of SPDC is the NGO, hence they are culpable in allowing this trend.

Despite that the terms of the GMoU policy applies to all Clusters, the mode of selecting leaders also varies in the communities. Some communities select by nomination, election and some use the balloting system. This was applied especially when choosing women

representatives. In such cases, the women were selected randomly in a ballot that does not take into cognizance of experience, skills, personality or the leadership capacity of the women brought forward. The statement below from a respondent supports this position:

“We have 30% of women and 70% comprises men, youth and average persons. What we do, you know in our area we have compound and families. The chiefs will now call the communities and say communities should bring one, compound should bring one, until they find the best men. For the three women, the communities and families, they now throw papers (ballot). Then the women council will bring one woman, making up three women.”

The quality of women participation is also hindered by their dependency on men. When asked about what feedback mechanisms that existed on GMoU activities, it was observed that women depended on community leaders to provide information on the GMoU more than they demanded it. When such information was not volunteered to them, no actions followed. Women appointed in the executives failed to close the leadership communication gap with their fellow women even when they received updates during their interactions at the CT or CBD. Some responses in this regard were: A- I have not seen them carry women along in all of these. B-In the CT formation we have about four women. She is not well grounded on the issue because she is not one of them. C-I don't think that women

are not carried along. There are special people that have the information.

Another factor that contributes to the present state of women participation in the GMoU as observed in the course of interaction with women during the interviews and FGD's, is their complacency. Women showed little or no keenness to take the lead on development matters. They were more disposed to support their compound/family's stand on the development issues being led by a male member of the compound/family. Even the women representatives in the CT and CDB's demonstrated a kind of blind subservience to the decisions of other members. Olayode (2016) explains this phenomenon thus: Through socialisation, women and men are allocated different and unequal roles in society. Women are assigned the private sphere, taking care of the home and family, while men are assigned the public sphere, running the affairs of society. The patriarchal structure of Niger Delta communities entrenched over time has permeated and replicated itself through a variety of social organizations and the GMoU is no exception. As a result the study found that women showed reluctance to assert themselves and their needs, even though they expressed their dissatisfaction with the GMoU status-quo. While SPDC may have made efforts to neutralize the impact of patriarchy in their community development initiatives through the GMoU, the eagerness of the community women to close the leadership gap with men is clearly lacking.

From the results of the in-depth interviews conducted, it was observed that leadership opportunities for women in the GMoU

takes the form of tokenism. Similar to the situation in the Nigerian political system (Adeleke, 2014). It is argued that the inclusion of a small number of women in the GMoU Governance is merely a symbolic effort that gives the appearance of gender inclusion. This practise bears no resemblance of gender equality. Gender equality means women and men should have equal value, enjoy the same status and conditions and should be accorded equal treatment. It refers to the full equality of men and women to enjoy the complete range of political, economic, civil, social and cultural rights, with no one being denied access to these rights, or deprived of them, because of their sex. It means they should benefit equally from the results of development (CEDAW, 1979). The selection method that uses ballots for the selection of women while a rigorous process which considers experience and skills is followed for the nomination of men, is polarised. It suggests that the quality of women representatives in the executive will have marginal or no impact on the GMoU governance.

A second factor in examining women participation in the GMoU governance has to do with the process of selecting projects and programmes. Women participate with the rest of the community to identify their developmental needs prioritizing them for implementation within the five year duration of the GMoU. Such development needs are recorded in the Community Development Plan (CDP). Gender participation at this stage begins with the town-hall meetings facilitated by an NGO. A Sustainable Livelihoods Assessment (SLA) helps the community adopt a list of community problems which

informs the projects they implement as fund is released by SPDC. Respondents attest that the attendance of women at such town hall meetings was not in doubt. In some occasions, the population of women attendees matched the men and youth and sometimes surpassed them. According to a respondent, women attended in such large numbers that the hall could not contain women who showed up. This level attendance however, did not reflect in the priority projects that made it to the final CDP. In the case of Oduawa community in Bayelsa state, the toilet project which was the preferred project of the women was substituted with a town hall. The reason given for this was the inadequacy of the fund to cover other projects the community had opted for. Such projects in most cases did not address the peculiar problems of women with hygiene and sanitation.

From the foregoing, the study shows that participation of women when examined by membership composition in the executive, does not amount to meaningful impact. This underscores the importance of the quality of participation of women which lends credence to the argument that representation in numbers that is not capable of influencing decisions and outcomes in the community development process is a waste of women's effort and resources.

As it pertains to women's access to the management and sharing of the GMoU fund, the study found that women remained at the mercy of the CDB's decision to adhere or deviate from the policy's specification. A comment from a respondent below shows that while some CDB's separate the women's assigned percentage of the fund from the whole mandate, others make deductions on the

mandate before allocating an amount for women. In the end, the fund left for women-assigned projects becomes depleted. A respondent provided a summary of this situation in the following words:

“Yes, It is the GMoU framework. 70/30. 30 for the women, which is the 15% during my turn I deduct it from source. I remove 15% and I share it according to your community facility. But when I left because there was no strong force again to oppose them, what they did they deduct it from communities directly, which means communities that does not have more facilities, have very small money.”

Access to the mechanism for the release of GMoU funds is a critical empowering factor that excludes the women. Although, women hold position of Treasurer it was not reported during the course of the study whether the Treasurers actually took financial decisions or had access to the SPDC system through which funds are released. SPDC did not deny knowledge of this fact and invariably tolerates such diverse applications by the Cluster executives. In most instances, it was the CDB Chairman that liaised with SPDC officials to seek approval on project proposals and sign checks when they were approved. This is indicative of the unequal power relationship between SPDC and her host communities which gives room for the undue influence of SPDC over negotiated priorities of the communities in the GMoU as highlighted by Egbon et al (2018).

The SPDC objective of inclusiveness under the GMoU also faces the problem of

accountability and transparency. From the responses of participants to questions on how women engaged, the study found that CDB's do not feel accountable to the women for their proportion of the fund or on any other issues. Many communities have taken to the practise of utilizing the entire fund without separating 15% as stipulated in the policy for women. They believe that they owed their reporting and GMoU compliance to SPDC or through the mentoring NGO's. This is an indication that the decision to appropriate the women's 15% into other projects was not taken with the consent of women who own it. This raises concerns about the inclusion of women in the deployment of subsequent funds in the event that SPDC does not enforce or monitor compliance. To buttress this point, a respondent from Imiringi community averred thus:

“We accepted before shell people that we have not been giving preference to women. The advice was let us make sure that subsequent jobs we do that. That 15% if it may bring some problems in your job you may skip it, we have not really done that. The money has been built into other projects. ... We have not really done much for women.”

There are already indications that in clusters like Ekpeye cluster of Rivers state where the GMoU is still at project approval phase, it is not likely that the communities will adhere to the 15% women fund. The growing apathy towards the GMoU due to SPDC's delay in releasing their funds could impacts community members' trust in the CT's and CDB's to adhere to the GMoU standards.

Members of the executive interviewed from that area already expressed a lack of interest in the 15% fund to be separated for women projects. In communities like Gbundukwu, Otuasega, it was already clear that there was no intention to comply with 15% provision for women projects. The comment below summarises a respondent's justification for this.

“Since it is community something we don't separate men from women. So far as the project is in the community. Maybe if some other thing that will come up we will look at the women, but for now we are only concentrating on the main projects we need in the community.”

Apart from the common reason given as justification for the appropriation of women's 15% part of the fund, which is inadequacy of the fund to meet needs, the CDB Chairmen claimed the money was held in trust for the women. This can be likened to a parent keeping their child's inheritance until they come of age. It is a practise which gives men power to influence the women's decisions on how to utilise the funds before it is released to them. Stemming from this, communities that adhered to releasing 15% fund to the women, now feel short-changed when they learn about their counterparts that have not adhered. If this practise goes unabated, communities with lower mandate will be induced to disregard the 15% at the next opportunity to negotiate their mandate.

The inadequacy of GMoU funds in meeting the communities pressing developmental needs is also responsible for the difficulty to provide the women fund. Communities with relatively smaller

funds find it extremely difficult to release any amount when there is already a shortfall in what is required to accomplish one major project that served the need to the entire community. In Akinima for instance, it is considered that lock-up shops are a priority of the community which the funds allocated to the community can barely cover.

From the foregoing, the study observes that the principle of gender equality is greatly threatened by women's lack of access to the GMoU occasioned by the absence of a monitoring framework that enforces adherence to the GMoU policy and the limited funding SPDC provides for development needs in communities. In relation to the view of the WHO (2001) that gender equity is “fairness and justice in the distribution of benefits and responsibilities between women and men”, the GMoU fails in giving to the disadvantaged gender on the basis of needs. The role of the mentoring NGO's in taking steps to compensate for historical and social disadvantages that prevent women and men from operating on a level playing field has been undermined in the process. Since access to the GMoU funds and the power to decide how it is disbursed remained largely with the men, it can be concluded that women participation had no relationship with the GMoU outcomes.

5.3 Implications and Recommendations for Mainstreaming Gender in the GMoU

Having examined some constraints to women's participation in the GMoU, the paper delves into further implications of women's participation in community development. The wider benefits and

impact of women's participation in governance of the GMoU was highlighted by a significant number of respondents. When asked to describe the special skills of women to contribute to community development, answers obtained include: They are very effective. Women are resourceful. Women make good managers. The quote below suggests that cooperation was better achieved with women:

“Women are very wonderful, they are not like men. They give good result. You don't have headache when you are working with women compared to men”

Paramount among reasons for the inclusion of more women in the GMoU process was their ability to show initiative and resourcefulness. Respondents' account of women contributions in the town hall and SLA sessions showed that women were ingenious in identifying projects and programmes that addressed the community needs. Women generated project ideas that focused on income generation. It is believed that projects executed by women like the self-contained apartments became a source of income which enabled them maintain such facilities. A potential drawback of such an approach however, is that makes women neglect their own basic socio-economic needs. It can be argued that the approach is flawed if the money generated does not alleviate the hardship women experience in the communities. The women fund is also used for funding celebrations and group activities of the women such as the 'August meeting.'

Other project ideas that cater for health needs, water and other individual economic opportunities are also put forward by women in few communities. Markets are considered one of such community priorities. Women are usually seen as the direct beneficiaries of a market project even though it serves the community as a whole. Edagberi Better land community in Rivers state recently accepted the proposal of a cassava processing factory for women. Whether this is going to be implemented when the fund is finally released remains to be seen. In Oporoma, the women's part of the fund was utilized in constructing a two bedroom Doctors quarters. Although the facility serves doctors that work for the community, it is classified as a women project because it is deemed to be more beneficial to women. A justification for this was provided by a respondent, asserting thus:

“Women are always pregnant, children are always sick. It is not that other community members won't use it but women use it more for antenatal, post-natal. Children will fall sick and all that. ”

Respondents' believe that women are stronger than men in certain areas of community life that require self-help and indigenous coping strategies to solve a problem. Women's insights and values can enhance and enrich the overall decision-making process especially at the local level where women are believed to be more sensitive to community issues. Owing to the contribution of women in this regard, the prospect of including more women being in the executives is apparent in

communities whose value for such contribution was expressed thus:

“For now we have one woman but the next CT will have about three women because men can’t manage things like market. . . . Women are stronger than men as far as management is concerned.”

Generally, the community development plans (CDP’s) which communities submit to SPDC for approval have recorded more positive response for infrastructure projects than capacity building programmes. Whereas, from the interaction with women, capacity building programmes would be their priority need. SPDC, in its press releases through various media and on its website claim they are meeting building capacity through microcredit schemes targeted at women, who account for 70% of the beneficiaries. In the company’s statement, over 31,000 people in some 171 communities benefitted from a revolving programme in six years with over N740 million given out as seed fund. Respondents differed on these claims. The women lamented being marginalised in the GMoU because of SPDC preference for infrastructure. A few clusters and communities have however supported women with grants and micro-finance but the disbursement of such monies is marred by accusations of GMoU officials favouring their preferred persons thereby disenfranchising other community women.

“They should take note, so that if they are empowering women the community should be aware and not to be done by board and they

will write their beloved ones and keep people here suffering.”

When CDB members were asked reasons for not including micro-finance as priority for the women, it was revealed that the board agreed that micro-finance was a desirable form of empowerment for women. However, there was the uncertainty about the repayment of the loan due to the mind-set that they are entitlement to “Shell money”. The quote below from a CDB Chairman expressed this concern:

“We wanted to give women some money as empowerment let them not be idle so that they can trade. We wanted to give one woman so that when that one pays back another one takes it. But the NGO said those women don’t want to pay back and saying it is shell money they gave them. We decide to abandon it.”

In Oroije, the micro-credit scheme which was designed to be a revolving fund among the families succeeded in the first year of implementation. In Rumuodara it failed from inception because the loans were not paid back.

Another capacity building programme the women proposed is skills acquisition for vocational trades. With the exception of clusters like Okordia-Zarama in Bayelsa state, skills acquisition schemes have not received necessary consideration from CDB’s. In places where skills acquisition have been implemented, there are complaints about the conduct of women who benefit from the programme. It was reported that women sell the starter packs and many of them fail to practise the trade

for which they were trained. In Oroije community for instance, women who trained as hair dressers sold their starter packs and were unable to set up a hair dressing salon in the community. In this way, women jeopardise their own chances of contribution to the economic development of the community. The prevalence of this unsustainable practise makes skills acquisition as wasteful investment. As a result of this, investing the GMoU fund in scholarships for female students becomes an alternative which will eventually exclude the older uneducated women in the communities.

CONCLUSION

The central argument of this paper has been that women benefit not merely by gender representation but by the quality of their participation in the governance of the community development structures in oil producing communities of the Niger Delta. Although the SPDC was not explicit in stating that its goal was gender equality, the gender inclusiveness it aspires to achieve was examined from the lens of gender mainstreaming in the constitution of its governance structure, identification of needs, feedback mechanism in the implementation of the GMoU. From the experiences of women and the accounts of respondents which included officials of the GMoU at the CDB and CT's, it was affirmed that in order to achieve gender equity there must first be gender equality.

From the discussions presented in the sections above, the GMoU has attained to a large extent community participation if participation is understood merely as community people attending town hall meetings, participating in the voting of CT

Representatives and SLA sessions. The study however identifies a problem with what constitutes gender equity when it comes to genders participation in project decision-making and implementation. The community people who have a say are largely men, hence the value of women's contribution has no significant impact on the final development actions taken. Women identified their priority needs in SPDC GMoU communities as capacity building programmes such as micro-finance, skills acquisition schemes and opportunities for income generation. However, the reluctance of CDB's to release 15% funds earmarked for women and inadequate GMoU funding to cater for community development are key factors responsible for women's needs not being met. While the GMoU model has opened up space for popular participation at the grassroots level, the problem of voicelessness of marginalized groups, such as women, has not been adequately addressed or addressed at all. The study therefore suggests that the rationale for promoting women's participation in community development in models like the GMoU should be based on equity, quality and development. The study found that women are appointed into GMoU positions but are constrained to hold only the office of the Treasurer limiting their ability to influence community development decisions on a larger scale. When this happens, the community is denied the advantage of women's full potential as they are made to play a second fiddle to their male counterparts. The study concludes that leadership opportunities for women in the GMoU takes the form of tokenism whereby the clusters feel compelled by SPDC to include women in the executives,

not on the basis of women's contribution but to satisfy the GMoU policy requirement.

The poor gender mainstreaming in community development models in the Niger Delta is not peculiar with SPDC's GMoU. The GMoU model has made a deliberate effort towards the inclusion of marginalized groups in its governance structure. None the less, the gender bias in favour of men is an indicator that other community development models in the Niger Delta which do not enforce gender representation in the deployment of their strategy have a long way to go in achieving sustainability that is hinged on inclusiveness. The study did not find significant evidence that showed women's participation in the GMoU led to improved project outcomes but it was established that potentials exists for greater contribution of women in areas like local economic development. It is believed that women's insights and values can enhance and enrich the overall decision-making process especially at the grassroots where women are acknowledged as being more sensitive to community issues than their male counterparts. Women's participation in governance is of strategic importance, not only for women's empowerment, but because it has wider benefits and impact.

The study therefore re-emphasized the need to incorporate the native knowledge of indigenous rural women into the mechanics of economic development in Nigeria. The study suggests that women should be more empowered to participate at the local level to enhance their experience in taking up bigger roles in community development and other

opportunities of governance in Nigeria. Since equity is the means of achieving equality, the GMoU requires a revision in its gender inclusion strategy if it is to achieve equality.

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