



RESEARCH ARTICLE – 3

MULTINATIONAL CORPORATIONS AND THE PARADOX OF CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY IN NIGERIA'S NIGER DELTA

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ABSTRACT

The presence of multinational corporations (MNCs) in Nigeria's Niger Delta has long been justified through Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programmes that promise to support development and improve local welfare. Yet the everyday realities of the region tell a different story. Despite the heavy investment in CSR, the Niger Delta remains mired in environmental degradation, poverty, and recurring social unrest. This study explores the paradox of CSR in the region, questioning why initiatives that appear progressive on paper often yield minimal impact in practice. Guided by stakeholder theory and legitimacy theory, the paper examines how CSR has frequently been deployed less as a vehicle for genuine development than as a strategy for corporate image-building and conflict management. Methodologically, this study was guided by mixed-method data sources and collection, including primary (questionnaires and interviews) and secondary sources (scholarly articles in peer-reviewed journals). The questionnaire and interview instruments were distributed across four (4) selected oil communities with the presence of multinational oil corporations in Bayelsa and Akwa Ibom States. Data presentation and analysis were quantitatively and qualitatively implemented in the study. The findings of this study revealed that CSR projects have failed to effectively address local needs. Hence, poor CSR implementation fuels grievances, and the exclusion from CSR benefits drives youth militancy in the Niger Delta. Conclusively, this study postulates that in the planning, design, and implementation of CSR programmes and activities, there is a need to consider the needs of both parties for mutual benefit. This will enable oil MNCs to derive maximum benefits from their CSR initiatives, be less prone to community conflict, and gain legitimacy within their host communities.

Keywords: *Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), Multinational Corporations (MNCs), Niger Delta, Sustainable Development, and Militancy*

INTRODUCTION

In Nigeria's social, political, and economic life, the Niger Delta can be regarded as playing a crucial role. This explains why IDEA (2001 cited in Ibaba, 2017) claimed that the Niger Delta is essential to Nigeria's future. The Niger Delta region is, in fact, entangled in an

extremely paradoxical and contradictory structure. The region is Nigeria's primary source of foreign revenue and is often regarded as the eagle that lays the golden egg. However, the region and its residents are in a state of squalor (Nwaguru, 2023). Academics such as Victor and Akaneme (2021), Abraham and Zephaniah (2020), Akpan (2024), Tuodolo (2019) have argued that Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) interventions of Multinational Corporations (MNCs) in the Niger Delta are not far-reaching or deeply entrenched. Thus, it has been contended that some of these CSR programmes are not always sustained. Despite the plethora CSR programmes and projects by MNCs, Uduji and Okolo-Obasi (2018 cited in Akpan, 2024) submit that the oil-producing communities have not received a proportionate benefit compared to the environmental costs of extractive activities that have resulted in a significant decline in farming and fishing in the region, which are the traditional sources of livelihood of the people.

The socio-economic situation in the Niger Delta, which is due partly to oil activities, is worse than any parts of Nigeria. The World Bank reported that the unemployment rate in the Niger Delta is the highest in Nigeria, and the poverty level is lower than the country's average (World Bank, 2021 cited in Nwaguru, 2023). Basic and critical social amenities such as electricity, pipe-borne water, accessible roads, schools, and hospitals are largely absent in most rural communities in the oil-rich Niger Delta. Furthermore, the incessant occurrences of gas flare and oil spills have contributed significantly to the loss of traditional sources of revenue, thereby worsening the poverty level as well as the unemployment rate in the region.

Succinctly, the general expectations of the people of the Niger Delta region is seeking employment for the youths, reduction in environmental damage to their farmlands (livelihoods), economic and social development of the entire region. To the host communities, these expectations have not been met, which has resulted in a conflicting relationship with the MNCs. Put differently, while previous studies have attempted to link community developments in the Niger Delta to CSR programmes of MNCs, this study is a complete departure as there are bulk of evidentiary reported cases of stoppage of oil production, image damage, oil bunkering, vandalization of oil pipelines, kidnapping of oil workers, loss of lives and properties, attack on contractors and security personnel of oil companies. What is being witnessed is the neglect of the role of CSR in improving the living standards of the people and sustaining the livelihoods of the communities. It seems, therefore, that the CSR initiatives are in the interest of the MNCs, who are indirectly sourcing for a conducive environment to maximize their earnings and to be seen as being socially responsible (Ifedolapo, 2023).

It becomes imperative that the continued violence in the region is an indication that there are policy gaps in CSR practices, community development, and other reasons for the crisis in the Niger Delta. Recognizing the prevalent antagonistic relationship between host communities and oil companies, and unraveling the paradox of the Multinational Corporations and the subsisting Corporate Social Responsibility prevalent in Nigeria's

Niger Delta, becomes the crux of this study. Therefore, this study was guided by the following objectives:

- i. Examine the extent multinational corporations have effectively implemented Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives in Nigeria's Niger Delta, and how these initiatives reflect the paradox between corporate commitments and community realities;
- ii. Interrogate ways the limited or failed implementation of CSR by multinational corporations has contributed to persistent grievances, social unrest, and militancy in the Niger Delta; and
- iii. Determine political, institutional, or governance frameworks that can provide sustainable solutions to the Niger Delta crisis while strengthening the accountability and effectiveness of CSR practices by multinational corporations.

To achieve the objective of this study, the work is organised into five sections. Section one is the introduction, giving general background information of the study and stating the problems. Section two focuses on the literature review of past and present scholarly discourse on the study issue and theoretical framework. Section three presents the methodology. The fourth section delves into the results and discussion with workable recommendation towards sustainable development in the Niger Delta region, Nigeria. Section five dwelt on the conclusion for the study.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)

According to Abefe-Balogun (2011 cited in Victor and Akaneme, 2021), Corporate Social Responsibility is a concept that has become quite familiar in the world of corporate and investment today. There are different perceptions of the concept among the private sector, government, and civil society organizations. Charles (2018) submits that the concept of corporate social responsibility has been developing since the early 1970s. There is no single commonly accepted definition of corporate social responsibility. Perspective on CSR in Charles' view may cover the following areas:

1. A company waning its business responsibly in relation to internal stakeholders (shareholders, employees, customers, suppliers, and community);
2. Business performance as a responsible member of the society in which it operates and the global community; and
3. The role of business in relation to the state, locally and nationally, as well as to interstate institutions or standards.

The first perspective includes corporate governance, product responsibility, employment conditions, workers' rights, training, and education. The second perspective is multilayered and may involve the company's relations with the people and environment in the communities in which it operates, and those to which it exports. The third includes

corporate compliance with relevant legislation, and the company's responsibility as a tax payer, ensuring that the state can function effectively.

Summarily, a key element of CSR is the drive that has given rise to the term “corporate environmental responsibility, a term which shows the rising importance of the environment not only in any CSR practice but even in security discourse. Ensuring environmental security is today at the heart of global protest in advanced economies.

An Insight into the Niger Delta Region

The Niger Delta region has attracted enormous multidisciplinary studies, and as a result, there is an avalanche of literature on the area of study. The Niger Delta is a region in southern Nigeria with a land mass of around 112,110 square kilometers. On the vast terrain of the region, there are five biological zones: the lowland rain forest zone, the montane zone, the derived savannah zone, the fresh water swamp zone, and the mangrove forest/vegetation zone (NDDC, 2006 cited in Ibaba, 2017). The geography of the Niger Delta is only two meters above sea level (Singh, Moffat, & Linden, 1995 cited in Iwebo, 2022). The region traverses nine out of the 36 states of the Federal Republic of Nigeria; these are Abia, Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo, Imo, Ondo, and Rivers States. The estimated population of the region is about 20 million, comprising over forty different ethnic groups speaking 250 different dialects across about 3,000 communities (Afinotan and Ojakorotu, 2020).

Since the discovery of oil more than five decades ago, the region has become the main source of foreign exchange earnings for the whole country. From 1975 till date, more than 90 percent of the nation's export earnings have, on average, been generated from the region's oil resources. Yet, in the argument of Tamuno (2022), the Niger Delta remains the least developed areas of the country in physical and social, and economic terms. While oil exploration and exploitation has brought wealth to the country as a whole, it has also brought untold hardship, conflict, wars, poverty, and insecurity to the Niger Delta region. Severe economic deprivation and social exclusion have stood in sharp contrast to the enormous oil wealth of the area, creating a paradox of poverty in the midst of plenty. The Niger Delta is perhaps the only oil region in the entire world where the inhabitants are compelled to cope with the spill after spill situation.

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and Nigeria's Niger Delta

In lieu of the CSR initiatives of the multinational corporations doing business in the Niger Delta, the region has encountered a plethora of problems. The incapacity of the government and oil communities in the Niger Delta to promote social and economic development in the region is the reason for their dependence on MNCs (Ite, 2020). In his submission, Tuodolo (2019) contends that Shell's contribution to the development of the Niger Delta has been impacted by the lack of an enabling environment for corporate social responsibility. This problem is directly tied to environmental policy that makes sure company operations minimise environmental and social costs and impacts while maintaining financial rewards.

The public sector roles imply that both MNCs and CSR require an enabling environment for their smooth operation. But the lack of this enabling environment for CSR in Nigeria is an indication of some level of ineffectiveness with a limited level of significance and political support.

The Niger Delta conflict is complex, and the realisation of the desired outcome is slim. Yet, the idea that CSR initiatives that support sustainable community development will resolve local grievances and enhance livelihood is the foundation of the conceptual connection to conflict reduction in the Niger Delta (Idemudia, 2009 cited in Ibaba, 2017). On the ground, the reverse is the case. It is clear that the Niger Delta has an alarmingly high incidence of violence, and that the main causes of conflict in the area are environmental deterioration and a lack of work opportunities for the local population. Government accountability is essential to the growth and development of CSR in Nigeria. Idemudia and Ite (2016) posit that CSR may help in shaping an institutional environment that foster sustainable economic growth.

However, the absence of an enabling environment is the crucial issue with CSR, regardless of the pursuit of an active distributional and social policy or the provision of motivation for ecological behaviour. This is because CSR initiatives have a tendency to be undermined, which lessens their beneficial effects. The fact is that, despite the enormous number of community expectations that are not fulfilled as a result of the government's inability to fulfill its fair share of responsibilities, business efforts are not utilised to meet community requests. As a result, this accurately depicts the circumstances in the Niger Delta. These could result from differences in expectations and interests related to CSR activity.

EMPIRICAL REVIEW

Abraham and Zephaniah (2020), in their study titled “Restructuring towards Sustainable Development: The Role Corporate Social Responsibility Should Play in the Development of the Niger Delta Region,” argue that the oil-rich Niger Delta region is host to several big corporations that are involved in the exploration and extraction of its oil. Right from 1958, when oil was first exported in commercial quantities, the region has continued to play a significant role in the budgetary calculation of Nigeria. However, despite its oil wealth, the Niger Delta is largely underdeveloped as its environment have been impacted negatively by the activities of oil multinationals and ignored by successive governments. This is in spite of oil companies' affirmed commitment to corporate social behaviour. Their paper attempts to look at how effective oil multinationals' CSR is in the region, in the wake of an increased spate of violence, social activism, and massive environmental degradation.

Victor and Akaneme (2021), in their study titled “*Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and Conflict in the Niger Delta of Nigeria*” submit that Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) “is the continuing commitment by business to behave ethically and contribute to economic development while improving the quality of life of the workforce and their families as well as the local communities and societies at large”. It was anticipated that the

adoption of CSR practice by the oil companies might be an effective panacea to the incessant conflict that has characterized the relationship between oil companies operating in the region and their host communities. However, regardless of such anticipation and oil companies' claims of adherence to the notion of CSR, conflict in the region has remained unabated. The study argued that to ensure a harmonious working relationship with stakeholders and to reduce the conflict in the region, oil companies should encourage host community participation in the design and implementation of CSR initiatives.

Joseph, Elda, and Simplice (2020), in their study titled "The Impact of Corporate Social Responsibility Interventions on Female Education Development in the Rural Niger Delta Region of Nigeria," assess the impact of multinational oil companies' (MOCs) corporate social responsibility (CSR) interventions in female education programmes in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. A total of 800 rural women were sampled across the region. The results from the logit model showed that rural women depended on CSR interventions of MOCs to address some of the logistical and cultural challenges associated with women's access to post-secondary education in local communities. However, despite the significant success in supporting education initiatives generally, none of the scholarships target females specifically, and compared to men, the low level of human capital in rural women has persisted.

Mamudu, Mamudu, Elehinafe, and Akinneye (2021), in their study titled "*Recent trends in corporate social responsibilities in Nigeria: a case study of major oil firms in the Niger Delta region,*" contribute to the lingering debate on the relationship between corporate social responsibility (CSR) and community development using the Nigerian oil industry as a case study. A better understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the different CSR initiatives undertaken by the various oil multinational companies (MNCs) operating in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria was closely examined. Their research also scrutinized why, despite considerable increases in the oil MNCs' CSR spending on community development, little or no growth has occurred. The role of the Nigerian Government in CSR was also examined, and the result was that the Nigerian government failed to create an enabling environment.

Charles (2018), in his work titled "*Corporate Social Responsibility and the Welfare of Nigerian Niger Delta Landowners,*" submits that the perception by any group of ineffectiveness in the dispensation of corporate social responsibility (CSR) to major stakeholders may result in friction, reduction in productivity, and an overall loss of social and economic capital. The problem addressed in this study, which represented the gap in knowledge and practice, was that CSR initiatives in the Niger Delta region lack a community-centric framework to ensure optimal and sustainable returns on CSR investments for multinational corporations and local Nigerian landowners. Data were obtained through interviews regarding the lived experiences of a sample of 15 participants selected through a purposeful non-random sampling from a variety of backgrounds. The data analysis using content and inductive techniques with NVivo illustrated the factors leading to a deeper understanding of what it means to experience CSR for landowners. The

results include expectations from operators, activities of the operators in the Niger Delta, operators' relationship with land owners, and operators' need to take environmental responsibility.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on the Stakeholder Theory and Legitimacy Theory, which provide critical lenses for examining the paradox of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in the Niger Delta.

Stakeholder Theory

Stakeholder theory was made popular by Freeman (1984). The theory postulates that obligations of corporations are multifaceted; not only to shareholders but also to a wider set of stakeholders, including employees, customers, host communities, and government institutions. In the Niger Delta, multinational corporations (MNCs) rely heavily on host communities for access to natural resources and for ensuring a peaceful operating environment. Accordingly, CSR initiatives are expected to address the social, economic, and environmental needs of these stakeholders. However, existing realities show a persistent mismatch between corporate CSR commitments and community expectations, particularly regarding employment creation, environmental protection, and infrastructural development (Victor and Akaneme, 2021).

Recent studies reinforce the centrality of stakeholder engagement in CSR effectiveness. For instance, Muhammad and Ogundele (2024) show that meaningful CSR outcomes in oil-producing communities depend on robust stakeholder engagement, trust-building, and inclusion of local needs. Similarly, Ebisi, Guo, and Soomro (2025) argue that CSR must prioritize environmental conservation measures, such as afforestation and remediation, to reflect the concerns of local stakeholders and ensure sustainability. When CSR interventions fail to incorporate such perspectives, they risk being viewed as cosmetic and deepen distrust, thereby intensifying conflict. Stakeholder theory, therefore, provides a useful framework for interrogating why CSR initiatives often fail in the Niger Delta: they neglect the voices of host communities and instead privilege corporate interests.

Legitimacy Theory

Legitimacy theory emphasizes that organizations seek to operate within the norms and expectations of the society in which they function, and survival depends on maintaining legitimacy (Suchman, 1995 cited in Iwebo, 2022). From this perspective, CSR initiatives can be interpreted as strategies deployed by corporations to secure their "social license to operate" in host communities. In the Niger Delta, MNCs frequently implement highly visible CSR projects, such as scholarships, healthcare facilities, and road construction, as evidence of social responsibility and goodwill. These projects, however, often serve more as image management tools than as genuine vehicles for structural transformation (Abraham and Zephaniah, 2020).

Evidence from recent research suggests that CSR is sometimes pursued more for reputational benefits than for community development. Nangih (2022), for example, found that CSR investments among Nigerian firms are often linked to maintaining legitimacy rather than delivering substantive socio-economic transformation. Similarly, Ebisi et al. (2025) contend that the legitimacy of CSR projects in oil communities is fragile when initiatives fail to resolve pressing environmental and livelihood concerns. This reinforces the argument that CSR is frequently used as a symbolic strategy to project corporate benevolence and secure community acceptance, while underlying grievances remain unresolved.

Integrating the Theories

Stakeholder and legitimacy theories complement each other in explaining the paradox of CSR in the Niger Delta. While stakeholder theory highlights the diverse expectations and interests of local communities, legitimacy theory demonstrates how corporations selectively deploy CSR as a mechanism to gain societal approval. As recent scholarship shows, CSR initiatives that lack meaningful engagement (Muhammad and Ogundele, 2024) or fail to meet environmental and livelihood expectations may undermine rather than strengthen corporate legitimacy. Conversely, when CSR is designed to incorporate genuine stakeholder concerns, it can reduce conflict and foster sustainable development.

Thus, applying these theories together provides a holistic lens for understanding why CSR in the Niger Delta often produces minimal developmental impact despite substantial investments. They reveal how CSR is caught between the demands of legitimacy and the neglect of stakeholder priorities, explaining the persistent gap between corporate commitments and community realities.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design/Instrument of Data Collection

This study made use of a survey research technique targeted at obtaining information from a representative sample of rural men/women, youths/youth leaders, local chiefs, MNCs representatives, and other individuals across rural communities in Bayelsa and Akwa Ibom States in the Niger Delta region. Those recruited to participate in the study have privileged information due to either their position or they having been directly involved in negotiation with oil MNCs on behalf of the communities. The study combines the use of primary and secondary data; the primary data was obtained through in-depth structured interview and questionnaire instruments, while the secondary data was obtained through documentary evidence.

Sample Size and Sampling Procedure

The sample size for the study was two hundred (200) respondents, determined through a purposive and snowballing sampling strategy to identify and recruit participants for the study. The communities were selected based on their proximity to oil multinationals

operating in that region. These communities include Kolo 1 and 2 in Ogbia Local government area of Bayelsa State, Mkpanak in Ibeno local government area, and Atabong in Eket Local government area in Akwa Ibom States. The interviews and questionnaires were arranged and agreed upon by the identified participants across their communities. Data collection and collation timeframe across the sample area was four (4) weeks.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Data presentation and analysis were done both quantitatively and qualitatively. Quantitatively, data was analysed (using frequencies and simple percentage) and presented in tables. Qualitatively, data were presented and analysed through discourse analysis. Succinctly, ethical consideration in social science research was highly implemented.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section of the paper deals with the results and explanation of the findings from the data gathered from the field through questionnaire distribution and in-depth interviews which was corroborated with other scholarly works.

Table 1: Presentation of forms distribution

<i>S/N</i>	<i>Variables</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
1	Number Distributed	200	100
2	Number Returned/Collated	143	72
3	Number Unreturned	57	28

The presentation above is the distribution of forms across the sample area. The sample areas received a total of two hundred (200) questionnaires, which constituted one hundred percent (100%) from the researcher. One hundred and forty-three (143) questionnaire forms were returned, which constituted seventy-two percent (72%), while fifty-seven (57) questionnaire forms, which constituted twenty-eight percent (24%), were unreturned. It is therefore visible that over two-third of the questionnaire were retrieved and can be used to analyze the survey data.

Table 2: Presentation of respondents' demographic information

<i>S/N</i>	<i>Variables</i>	<i>Category</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
1	Gender	Male	84	59
		Female	59	41
2	Age	18-25	16	11
		26-35	29	20
		36-45	53	37
		46-Above	45	32
3	Educational Qualification	No Formal Education	30	21
		Primary School Certificate	27	19
		Secondary School Certificate	27	19
		Tertiary Certificate	59	41
4	Occupation	Fisherman/Farmer	59	41
		Civil Servant	38	27
		Businessman/woman	27	19
		MNC Staff	19	13
5	Community Status	Traditional Ruler/Chief/Village Head	17	12
		Politician	9	6
		Youth Leader	29	20
		CDC Chairman	23	16
		Security Personnel	17	12
		Others	48	34
6	Duration	0-5	12	8
		6-15	21	15
		16-25	49	34

		26-Above	61	43
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Following the analytical presentation in the table above (Table 2), 59% respondents were males, while 35% respondents were females. Furthermore, the age group of the respondents was captured thus: 18-25 (11%) respondents, 26-35 (20%) respondents, 36-45 (37%) respondents, while 46-above (32%) respondents. Hence, from the sequence, the majority of the respondents were between 36 and 45 years, followed by those within the age bracket of 46 and above.

Based on the respondent's educational qualification of respondents, 21% respondents have no formal education, 19% respondents have their elementary/primary school certificates or its equivalent, 19% respondents are holders of senior school certificates (WASSCE, NECO, NABTEB or GCE or its equivalent), while 41% respondents possesses tertiary education degrees (B.A/B.Sc/HND/M.Sc/PhD or its equivalent) from all academic fields. On respondents' occupational status, 41% respondents are into fishing/farming, 27% respondents are Civil Servants in the various states, 19% respondents are into different kinds of businesses, while 13% are staff of MNCs operating in the sample area.

In ensuring first-hand information for the study, the statuses of respondents across the sample area were presented thus: Traditional Ruler/Chief/Village Head (12%), Politician (6%), Youth Leaders (20%), CDC Chairmen (16%), security personnel (12%), while other statuses were 34%. On the duration of respondents in the sample area, the sequence was captured in the analysis in the table above.

Table 3: CSR Implementation & Effectiveness

S/N	Variables	SA (%)	A (%)	Neutral (%)	D (%)	SD (%)
1	MNCs in my community provide CSR projects that address local needs.	19 (13)	27 (19)	19 (13)	43 (30)	35 (25)
2	CSR projects are sustained over time rather than being one-off events.	27 (19)	21 (15)	31 (22)	39 (27)	25 (17)
3	Local community members are actively involved in CSR planning and execution.	10 (7)	29 (20)	26 (18)	30 (21)	48 (34)
4	CSR projects have led to visible improvements in infrastructure and social services.	27 (19)	19 (13)	22 (15)	31 (22)	44 (31)
5	CSR projects in my community are mostly for publicity and not for genuine development.	41 (29)	30 (21)	19 (13)	29 (20)	24 (17)

This table captures perceptions of how multinational corporations (MNCs) implement CSR projects in local communities. Flowing from the analysis, respondents express an overwhelming disagreement (D: 30%, SD: 25%, combined 55%) that CSR initiatives are perceived as misaligned with actual community priorities, possibly reflecting a disconnect between corporate agendas and local realities. Furthermore, disagreement dominates (D:

27%, SD: 17%, combined 44%) the assertion that CSR is viewed as short-term or superficial, lacking long-term commitment, which could erode trust and limit lasting benefits. Hence, this highlights a perceived exclusion of locals from decision-making, potentially fostering feelings of marginalization and reducing the relevance of projects.

Furthermore, respondents (D: 22%, SD: 31%, combined 53%) appear to doubt tangible outcomes, implying that CSR efforts may not translate into meaningful development, possibly due to poor execution or insufficient scale. This variable flips the narrative, revealing cynicism about motives that many see CSR as performative rather than developmental, which could undermine corporate legitimacy in the community.

Table 4: Grievances, Social Unrest & Militancy

S/N	Variables	SA (%)	A (%)	Neutral (%)	D (%)	SD (%)
1	Poor CSR implementation contributes to community grievances.	37 (26)	35 (25)	26 (18)	23 (16)	22 (15)
2	Environmental degradation from oil operations has increased local tensions.	29 (20)	44 (31)	19 (13)	28 (20)	23 (16)
3	Youths are more likely to engage in militancy when excluded from CSR benefits.	32 (22)	43 (30)	27 (19)	18 (13)	23 (16)
4	Inadequate CSR responses fuel distrust between corporations and communities.	40 (28)	37 (26)	29 (20)	26 (18)	11 (8)
5	Militancy in the Niger Delta is unrelated to CSR failures.	24 (17)	18 (13)	32 (22)	29 (20)	40 (28)

This table explores the links between poor CSR practices, environmental issues, and social conflicts in the Niger Delta, drawing from the same survey pool. The first analysis shows a robust agreement (SA: 26%, A: 25%, combined 51%) that CSR shortcomings are a direct driver of discontent, underscoring how unfulfilled expectations can breed resentment. Therefore, it becomes evident that prevalent strong agreement (SA: 20%, A: 31%, combined 51%) link oil-related pollution to social strain, highlighting environmental injustice as a catalyst for broader conflicts. From the perspective of youth restiveness, it becomes evident that dominating agreement (SA: 22%, A: 30%, combined 52%) suggests perceptions of exclusion fueling radicalization among youth, positioning CSR as a potential tool for conflict prevention if made inclusive.

Overwhelming agreement (SA: 28%, A: 26%, combined 54%) proves that distrust is a core outcome of CSR failures, potentially perpetuating a cycle of antagonism. Hence, the overwhelming disagreement is clear (D: 20%, SD: 28%, combined 48%), that the notion of militancy being detached from CSR, reinforcing the idea that corporate lapses contribute to unrest.

Table 5: Political & Governance Frameworks

S/N	Variables	SA (%)	A (%)	Neutral (%)	D (%)	SD (%)
1	Stronger government regulation would improve the effectiveness of CSR projects.	43 (30)	38 (27)	25 (17)	23 (16)	14 (10)
2	Transparent monitoring of CSR projects would reduce community–corporate conflicts.	29 (20)	51 (36)	17 (12)	24 (17)	22 (15)
3	Community representation in decision-making enhances CSR outcomes.	44 (31)	31 (22)	22 (15)	27 (19)	19 (13)
4	Public–Private Partnerships (PPP) can deliver more sustainable CSR projects.	47 (33)	35 (25)	19 (13)	17 (12)	25 (17)
5	Political or governance reforms have little influence on CSR effectiveness.	37 (26)	39 (27)	21 (15)	17 (12)	29 (20)

This table assesses the role of government, transparency, and partnerships in enhancing CSR effectiveness. It is therefore evident that strong agreement (SA: 30%, A: 27%, combined 57%) reflects a belief in regulatory oversight as essential for enforcing meaningful CSR, indicating current frameworks may be seen as weak. Also, agreement is pronounced (SA: 20%, A: 36%, combined 56%) that addressing the issue under discourse also entails transparency as a conflict reducer, suggesting that opacity in current practices fuels disputes. This underscores the value of participatory governance, aligning with earlier tables' critiques of exclusion.

Furthermore, it is evident that the majority of the respondents (SA: 33%, A: 25%, combined 58%) see PPPs as promising for sustainability, implying that collaborative models could overcome corporate limitations. This variable shows ambivalence; while many doubt reforms' impact, a significant portion disagrees, suggesting nuanced views on governance's role.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings of this study are in line with the stated objectives as stipulated in the introductory part of this paper. This discussion will integrate field interviews alongside scholarly postulations to provide a comprehensive analysis of the paradox of CSR in Nigeria's Niger Delta.

Objective 1: CSR Implementation and the Paradox of Commitments vs. Community Realities

The first finding of this study revealed that CSR initiatives/activities by MNCs in the Niger Delta do not align with the needs and aspirations of the community and although sighted

across communities, they are unsustainable. As revealed in Table 3, respondents submit that CSR projects have failed to effectively address local needs. This is a clear paradox in CSR practice. Put differently, while MNCs highlight their social commitments, communities perceive these projects as inadequate and disconnected from their realities.

Corroborating this position, a youth leader from Eket observed:

“It is evident that there are several MNCs in my community who engage in oil exploration, however, the acclaimed projects by these firms are just a charade, to fulfill obligations and not to solve our problems. They sunk a borehole today, and by tomorrow, it is abandoned.”

Evidently, this statement is a reflection of the absence/lack of sustainability and poor maintenance of CSR interventions. Another community development chairman emphasized the exclusionary practices of CSR implementation:

“The abandoned acclaimed CSR projects in my community are reflections of isolating inputs of the communities. In clear terms, we are not consulted before CSR projects are carried out. If we were, they would reflect our needs better.”

The interview responses confirm that communities perceive CSR less as development intervention and more as a corporate legitimacy tool. A civil servant in Akwa-Ibom noted:

“The oil companies in my community use CSR as a show to the world that they are responsible, but on the ground, people see little or no change in their lives. Hence, these corporations often deploy CSR as a strategy to maintain their social license to operate, rather than to pursue genuine community development”.

These experiences resonate with Abraham and Zephaniah (2020), who found that despite oil companies’ commitments to corporate social behavior, the Niger Delta remains underdeveloped. Victor and Akaneme (2021) similarly argue that CSR in the region is often tokenistic, serving more as a reputational exercise than as a transformative development mechanism. Put in clear terms, the paradox of “poverty amidst plenty.” Despite being Nigeria’s oil-rich region, the Niger Delta suffers from decaying infrastructure, widespread unemployment, and environmental degradation. While CSR projects are meant to alleviate these conditions, their inadequacy reinforces perceptions of neglect (Nwaguru, 2023).

Objective 2: CSR Failures, Grievances, Social Unrest, and Militancy

Another finding of this study examined how CSR failures contribute to grievances, unrest, and militancy. The evidential report in Table 4 proves that poor CSR implementation fuels grievances, and the exclusion from CSR benefits drives youth militancy in the Niger Delta. These highlight the intricate, significant role of CSR as a conflict resolution mechanism and the social dynamics of conflict in the Niger Delta. A traditional ruler in Bayelsa explained thus:

“Understanding the agitation and anger of youths in the community is explained from exclusion and annihilation by oil companies thereby rendering them jobless.”

Similarly, a fisherman lamented the loss of livelihood caused by oil spills and the lack of compensatory CSR by these oil firms. According to him:

“I am a fisherman, and I go to the river everyday to get my source of livelihood. Sadly, recently, there have several cases of polluted water which have destroyed our source of livelihood. To make matters worse, these companies refuse to help, hence, youths see militancy as the only way to get attention.”

These submissions corroborate the findings of Idemudia’s (2009 cited in Ibaba, 2017) proposition that CSR can be seen as a conflict resolution mechanism if designed to address community grievances and livelihood needs. However, when CSR is exclusionary and cosmetic, it instead fuels resentment and radicalization. Mamudu, et al. (2021) further reinforce this by showing that while there is an increase in financial allocation towards CSR across the Niger Delta, there are no commensurate community development due to poor inclusivity and lack of enabling governance.

A youth leader submits that CSR is supposed to bring peace, but because it excludes us, it brings anger and sometimes violence. This finding illustrates the paradoxical nature of CSR in the Niger Delta: instead of bridging the gap between corporations and host communities, ineffective CSR deepens grievances and fuels cycles of unrest.

Objective 3: Political, Institutional, and Governance Frameworks for Sustainable Solutions

The third objective focused on governance frameworks that could enhance CSR effectiveness. From the analysis in Table 5, there is a strong community support for stricter government regulation, transparent monitoring, and Public–Private Partnerships as critical mechanisms to improve CSR outcomes. These findings reveal that communities see weak governance and a lack of accountability as central barriers to meaningful CSR. In the argument of a civil servant in Akwa-Ibom State:

“If there is strict government (federal, state and local) regulation on CSR, multinational oil companies will not initiate and implement indiscriminate projects for the show of it.”

Similarly, a CDC chairman in Bayelsa State emphasized the intricate need for collaboration. He submits thus:

“Partnerships involving government, communities, and companies can deliver lasting projects, unlike when MNCs act alone.”

The above submissions resonates with the postulations of Felix (2020 cited in Ebisi, et al., 2025), who argues that government accountability is essential for fostering an enabling environment for CSR. Iwebo (2022) also submits that CSR is often pursued more for legitimacy than for development, suggesting the need for regulatory oversight to shift corporate behavior. However, it becomes imperative that governance changes may have little influence on CSR effectiveness. This reflects long-standing distrust of state institutions in the Niger Delta, where corruption and political capture have historically

undermined development efforts. Nonetheless, the overall sentiment remains that improved regulatory frameworks and inclusive partnerships are necessary for sustainable CSR outcomes.

This study, therefore, contributes to the broader understanding of CSR in conflict-prone contexts by demonstrating that without governance reform, participatory engagement, and genuine responsiveness to local needs, CSR risks becoming a driver of conflict rather than a vehicle for peace and development.

CONCLUSION

In the planning, design, and implementation of CSR programmes and activities, there is a need to consider the needs of both parties for mutual benefit. This will enable oil MNCs to derive maximum benefits from their CSR initiatives, be less prone to community conflict, and gain legitimacy within their host communities. Emphasis in CSR initiatives needs to shift from just infrastructural facilities to issues of capacity building and poverty reduction, which are the main concerns of host communities. Since the host communities are at the receiving end of the MNCs' CSR initiatives, it is logical that they should be allowed to give meaningful suggestions on what really meets their needs. As stakeholders in the affairs of the MNC, failure to seek their opinion may continually jeopardize oil exploration and exploitation activities in this region, and this may always result in a strained relationship between the host communities and the oil companies.

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